

Horizon High School Frequently Asked Questions

(This is a **DRAFT** version, in process of revision
by HHS Board of Directors and Advisors - 12/29/04)

What is Horizon High School?

Horizon High School is a private, not-for-profit, student-centered, Sober High School. It is dedicated to helping two kinds of students succeed in an educational environment fostering emotional, social and academic growth: those recovering from alcohol- and/or drug-abuse, and those who require a smaller, intimate learning environment.

What is a Sober High School?

Sober, or recovery, schools have been in existence for only 15-20 years. They offer supportive learning environments to youth who have successfully completed AODA treatment programs.

Aren't all schools in Madison/Dane County alcohol and drug-free?

Talk with any high school student for an answer to this question.

Are Sober Schools really necessary?

Experience has shown that students who have successfully completed AODA treatment programs and the return to the schools where they were involved with drugs and/or alcohol almost inevitably relapse and suffer further difficulties. We want to provide students with an opportunity to build on their successes as they re-engage in academic learning.

What do you mean when you say that HHS will provide an intimate learning environment?

It will be small, with a student to teacher ratio of ~5:1. Many sober schools only accept students struggling with AODA issues. It is our belief however that any student should be offered the opportunities to benefit from the small and supportive environment of HHS.

The curriculum will be student-centered, meaning that the context of the required educational material will be determined, insofar as possible, by the interests of the students. "Interest groups" are an important part of that structure.

What are Interest Groups?

Interest groups are interdisciplinary, thematic units that allow students to investigate, in depth, topics of interest to them. Students and staff collaborate on ideas for possible interest groups. Interest groups typically last 4-6 weeks and academic content is aligned with Wisconsin model academic standards. Possible IGs could be "Iraq and Vietnam" (history), "Escher Geometry" (math), "Do animals see in color?" (science), "Caucasia" (reading/language arts), etc.

Are you incorporated?

Yes. Horizon High School is operated by Horizon High School of Madison, Inc. We incorporated with the WI Dept of Financial Institutions on December 13, 2004. Our board of directors has 6 members, who themselves have strong backgrounds in counseling, education, and the experience of parenting challenging youth.

Are you accredited by the state or MMSD?

School accreditation is a widely misunderstood process. The State of Wisconsin does not officially accredit any private high school. Accreditation is a voluntary process that some, not all, private high schools go through. Once we have graduated several classes of students, we will apply for accreditation through the Independent Schools Association of Central States.

Doesn't Wisconsin have rules for private schools?

The WI Department of Public Instruction has a set of published administrative rules for private schools in the Wisconsin Administrative Code. There are 6 minimal requirements of private schools, and a school that fulfills these requirements can request "approval" of its educational program. Horizon High School will request such approval at an appropriate point in our development.

What are the 6 criteria for Wisconsin's definition of private school?

1. its primary purpose is private or religious-based education,
2. it is privately controlled,
3. it provides at least 875 hours instruction/year, in
4. a sequentially progressive curriculum of fundamental instruction in reading, language arts, math, social studies, science and health,
5. the school's purpose is not to circumvent compulsory school attendance, and
6. pupils return home annually for not less than 2 months of summer vacation.

Beyond that, the rules only require that attendance records be kept, that the US flag be displayed, that there be monthly fire drills, and that school buses have insurance.

You mean that WI doesn't require private school teachers to be certified?

That is correct. The only requirement WI makes of teachers is that they have a chest x-ray or TB test prior to employment. We will, however, require that our teachers be certified.

How can a small school with 10 students and 2 teachers provide a quality education -- without, say, the modern science labs in local public high schools?

Our large public high schools no doubt serve as efficient educational settings for many students, with many in-house teaching and learning resources. At the same time, many teachers believe they could be more effective -- make more of a difference in a student's life, provide more interaction and feedback -- if they had only 5 students versus the 20-30 in today's schools.

We believe that HHS can provide an excellent education, utilizing the many rich resources in our community. Our curriculum will emphasize experiential education, with students involved in activities such as prairie restoration, service learning, and collaboration with artists working in a variety of media. Most importantly, without a school like HHS, some of our students would likely never graduate from high school at all.

You may start in January with only 3 or 4 students. Isn't that a lot like a home school?

A more apt comparison would be SOAR High in Colorado (www.soarhigh.org), a Sober High School that started in 1999 with 4 students in parent's basement, has grown to a student body of >40, and is now adding a second location to provide space for more students. Unlike a home school, HHS will be overseen by a Board of Directors, and courses will be taught by a state-certified teacher. (Statistics show that home schooled students have excellent records of acceptance and success in college.)

Can my student graduate with a high school diploma from Horizon HS?

Yes. Students can expect to graduate at the same time their original class graduates from high school, provided they have the requisite credits required by the state of Wisconsin.

Will any college or university recognize a diploma from Horizon High School?

College applications typically require students to submit a high school transcript, standardized test scores, letters of reference, and a personal statement from the student.

We expect our students to be exceptionally strong applicants in competitive college admissions. Their applications will be enhanced by a narrative transcript from Horizon High School, portfolios that attest to their strengths and accomplishments, as well as letters of recommendation from teachers and mentors who know them well. We will assist students with all the nuts and bolts of college applications, including such things as ACT and SAT test preparation.

What is a narrative transcript?

A narrative transcript consists of written evaluations of a student's work in each course he or she has taken.

What is a portfolio?

A portfolio is an alternative form of assessment. It is a collection of artifacts, and reflections on those artifacts, which document a student's learning and development. A portfolio may include, but is not limited to, samples of a student's work such as papers and artwork, photographic records of projects in which a student has been involved, electronic data, and video or audio recordings.

Portfolios are valued as an assessment tool because they can be fully integrated into the curriculum; they inform, rather than compete with, instruction; and they are an authentic reflection of significant aspects of a student's development over time.

What are the AODA criteria for admission to HHS?

1. Students must want to be part of Horizon High School. No student will be accepted if he/she is being coerced (by parents, court, etc).
2. We expect that students will have completed AODA treatment and can be assessed as in a process of change, or is currently in AODA treatment. They must have been alcohol and drug-free for at least 30 days.
3. Students must sign a pledge to remain alcohol and drug-free 24/7, and to be honest about it.
4. The student and parent/s or guardians must agree to drug testing if there is warranted suspicion of use.

Each applicant will be assessed as an individual with individual needs. If he/she appears to meet the mission of HHS, he/she will be considered for admission.

Will there be any kids at HHS who do not have AODA issues?

There may well be students who feel they would benefit from the alcohol and drug-free environment, who are not thriving in their regular schools for reasons other than alcohol- and/or drug abuse. We welcome inquiries and applications from all interested students.

What is the history behind Horizon High School?

One of us, Shelly Dutch, has been working with youth with AODA issues for over 20 years, and has seen the problems encountered by youth returning from treatment with

some commitment to being alcohol and drug-free, only to return to their old schools and relapse. Sober Schools exist elsewhere - why not here?

In March 2004, Shelly and several parents of youth in recovery began to talk about creating a Sober School here. We began to do research, contacting individuals involved in founding and running Sober Schools elsewhere, as well as learning some of the negative lessons of two failed Sober Schools (evaluations of those schools in AZ and IL were done by a UW-Madison faculty member, who is advising us). Two of our 6 founding members also are educators with over 44 combined years experience.

Are there other schools like yours?

There are over 2 dozen Sober High Schools around the country -- many are in Minnesota, and one started in Waukesha in 2003. Some are public, and some are private. There is also an Association of Recovery Schools (www.recoveryschools.org). If you'd like to read student testimonials from one school, Sobriety High in St. Paul, point your internet browser to www.sobrietyhigh.org/students/success.html

Why didn't you form a charter school?

We considered this. However, it became apparent that given the process of chartering in Wisconsin and economic realities, we would be unlikely to succeed in creating such a school in a timely fashion. This effort could easily take several years, and we have young people who need the school today.

What is the tuition?

Based upon our expenses (primarily teacher salaries + benefits, insurance, rent, computers for students, books, internet access), we have developed a budget that requires \$5000 in tuition a semester. We have received a small amount of grants and loans and hope to be able to offer minimal financial aid for those with need.

Your school meets in a church basement. Is Horizon High School a religious school?

No.

Can I make tax-deductible contributions?

Yes. We are incorporated as a non-profit corporation in Wisconsin, and will be applying for 501(c)(3) charitable status with IRS in the immediate future. If you would like to make tax-deductible contributions for 2004, contact us for details. We hope to develop an endowment so that youth who need our school and who want to attend, will not be hindered by financial need.