

Article written by Jeannette Webb a homeschool counselor, now retired.

Homeschoolers can face unique challenges when it comes to finding a place to sit for standardized tests such as the ACT, PSAT, or SAT. Some school districts are hostile to homeschoolers and will not allow them to participate with their own students. Others do not offer AP classes and thus do not have exams slated. Either way, it is best to start looking for locations early in the year for those tests that will be coming up in the spring. Here are some things I've learned over the years that might be useful:

Seek out advice from older homeschoolers in your area. Find out their experiences with various test location options such as public, private, international, or charter schools. If you live overseas, you might have to travel some distance or even go to another country.

Go in person to request a spot for your child. It is harder to turn down someone face to face than it is in an email. In most cases, the principle is the person to talk with first, but you might already have a relationship with the AP teacher themselves or another administrator.

Explain that, as a homeschooler, your child's score is recorded under a separate homeschool code and will not impact the score statistics of the school in any way. This is a common argument for excluding homeschoolers.

Offer to pay the proctor yourself. This is a bit irritating when the teacher is already being compensated, but I was happy to do so in order for my child to have a seat with the public school class on test day.

Make sure the infrastructure works. I made a huge mistake on my son's first SAT test and did not visit the school ahead of time. My 6'2" left-handed son was crammed into a very small right-handed desk. Needless to say, he did not perform well. Afterward we had a long talk about advocating for his own needs and I did a better job in the future of checking out the test location.

I found one local public school that was very flexible and ordered an AP exam especially for my daughter. One of the administrative secretaries proctored the exam in her office. Natalie went into a side room by herself for the exam. It wasn't the quietest environment, but she made it work. This is probably not the best option but is worth asking about if there appear to be no other choices.

Check magnet schools. After several less than satisfactory test experiences, we found the best spot for my students at a magnet school in our capital city. Even though we had to drive 1 ½ hours to get to the Oklahoma School of Math and Science, this taxpayer-funded institution was heavily vested in their students performing well, so they made sure that testing conditions were optimized. They provided huge lab tables where students had plenty of space, well-trained proctors, and total quiet on exam day.

Always be unfailingly polite and follow up multiple times even after the school has agreed to host your student. Then when it is over, send a thank you card and small gift to the AP coordinator or whoever facilitated hosting your child. They will have a positive memory of you and will go out of their way to accommodate the next time around. One school ordered AP tests for one of my clients even when they did not offer those subjects, not just once, but three times!

Finding a good test site can be a daunting thing. It may require diligence and persistence as you advocate for your child.