

## Is Homeschool Right For Your Child? (4/10/09)

If you read my first two articles and determined that homeschooling is a good fit for you, congratulations! Not many people can relate to the significance of making the decision to homeschool, except for other homeschoolers and coming from one, you just took two huge steps into our journey. Before you take the final plunge on the go/no-go homeschool decision, you need to consider one last critical question: is homeschool right for your child?

### Top Factors To Determine Whether Homeschool Is Right For Your Child

There are 4 factors to consider when answering this question:

One-on-One Lessons. The first factor is to determine how much your child will benefit from one-on-one lessons. If you think your child will benefit most from learning one-on-one vs. 10-to-1 in private schools or 20-to-1 in public schools, then homeschooling may be a good fit for your child. Now, you may ask, "Isn't it obvious that all kids will most likely do better one-on-one?" True, and maybe I'm starting off with a loaded one here. But I want to especially note the importance of the one-on-one factor as it relates to children who would benefit *the most* from one-on-one lessons. I'm talking about children with special needs and/or especially gifted kids. You can see how these children, if placed in a typical 10-to-1 or 20-to-1 classroom setting, will have the greatest potential to slip through the cracks of the education system and end up in a program that would be suboptimal at best and wholly destructive at worst.

A good rule of thumb to assess how this factor measures up in your child is:

- 1) Identify the educational goals for your child (i.e., 4-year university, Ivy-league for you high achievers),
- 2) Assess how different the outcomes of those goals will be if you taught your child on your own vs. letting the schools teach your child, and
- 3) If both outcomes (one-on-one vs. school-taught) meet the educational goals you've set up for child, then this factor shouldn't weigh too heavily to determine whether homeschool is right for your child.

If, on the other hand, you think that the only way your child has an opportunity at meeting the educational goals is to teach one-on-one and that the typical public school may actually harm your child's chances of meeting those goals, then you have a strong case that teaching one-on-one via homeschool is the right thing for your child.

Learning Method. Since there are 10-20 kids in a typical classroom, it's completely understandable that children need to learn by sitting in a desk at 8:15AM for lessons given that there is one teacher and potentially, an additional teacher's aide to keep order. Most kids learn to behave and get used to this routine throughout their academic years. However, if your child *loves* to learn but just *inherently hates* to sit in one place for lessons everyday, then homeschool may fit your child's needs (personally, we think it's a tragedy if a child's desire for learning is smothered by forcing institutional standards, such as start times - a classic waste of immeasurable valuable).

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The way I see it, the child's motivation for learning is the most precious thing to cultivate in the early years, which must be protected and reinforced. Well, getting comments from the teacher stating that Johnny can't sit still in class is more a reflection of the problems that the teacher is having in teaching Johnny within the educational framework established by the school district rather than suggesting that Johnny is somehow having learning issues.

Bottom line: if you can see your child more excited and asking more questions about lessons outside the classroom than within it, there is a good chance that homeschool is right for your child.

Curriculum. This one is related to "Learning Method" above. Unfortunately for kids, the reality is that each class learns not only the same subject, but also through the same method of teaching the lessons. The school district will choose the best curriculum it feels best to teach and prescribe it to its students. Again, to be fair to the school districts, they are really trying to optimize their time and resources to deliver a set of educational standards established by the state.

Now, for some kids, this standard curriculum may actually be the best fit for them since there may be traits within the curriculum that match those kids' learning styles to a T. But if the standard curriculum taught at your neighborhood elementary school is something that you don't feel best fits into your family's value and belief systems (i.e., for religious or other lifestyle reasons), then homeschool may again be a good fit for your child. In fact, one of the larger reasons for homeschooling today is for religious or other beliefs.

Socialization. The "s" word is a topic that comes up in just about every discussion about homeschool. For now, you should know that there will be plenty of opportunities for your child to socialize with kids her own age - we will write more details in our article that addresses socialization. What we want to point out here though is that your child will typically gain more exposure to her community through her homeschool lessons than the typical public school-taught kid.

Think about this: your child's lesson will start in the day time either at home or a library. Either way, the lesson will then proceed outside the house and from then on, the child will be, with parent supervision, seeing/meeting with normal everyday folks whether the lesson is, say, learning about money and making a trip to the grocery market to complete a purchase with the cashier, or visiting the local bagel store to learn how bagels are made. Afternoons will then be reserved for social time with peers, whether that means Boys Scouts or soccer practice.

So, when you think about socialization as a factor to consider in determining whether homeschool is a good fit for your child, you should consider it with a perspective of how well the child will receive and interact with people of all ages, not just her peers. If the child is comfortable meeting and talking to people significantly older (and younger) than her, then homeschooling may be the right fit for your child.

So is homeschooling right for your child? We hope the discussion above will help you with your decision.

**Assessment of Our Own Children**

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For us, given Ryan's eyesight condition, above-peer intellect (we're not saying this just as a proud parents - there are some standard tests Ryan took that placed him above intellectually) and his intense curiosity to learn all things about what he is interested in (currently, Ryan's top interests are: 1) pirates, 2) haunted mansions, and 3) Star Wars), homeschool was an easy choice for us. Ryan also likes to wake up in the morning later than his twin sister, Lauren, and so homeschool lets him get his sleep and charge ahead with his lessons when he is ready to learn.

We had a different assessment of fit of homeschooling for Lauren. Lauren does not have any serious eyesight issues and she especially does her best when learning with her peers (I'm not sure whether this is a competitive streak or something Lauren really enjoys - more on this when as we find out!). Also, Lauren is much more independent than Ryan is in terms of parental involvement and is conscious about waking up in time for school by herself. We also thought that Lauren will be able to meet her educational goals whether we teach her or a public school teacher does the teaching. And therefore, although we accepted homeschooling as a valid method of teaching, we decided that homeschool would not fit best into Lauren's learning style at this time, and so we decided to enroll Lauren in public school.

At this time, we see no issues with leaving Lauren in public school, but that doesn't mean that we won't pull her out in the future if we decide her needs are not being met.

And so, there you have it - 2 twins in the same family with different decisions on the way we approached homeschooling.

In my next article, we'll discuss homeschool rules and regulations and why you should be informed about any developments in this arena as they occur across the nation.

See you next time!

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