

Welcome to the wonderful world of homeschooling! With homeschooling notching scorching trends in enrollment and results, I'm thrilled that you have started to seek out answers on your own to see what all the hoopla is all about.

For those who don't know our story, please read my article, "How We Got Started in Homeschooling". For others who want to go straight to the information, here we go.

Very Brief History of Homeschooling

From the beginning of the 1600's to the 1850's, virtually all education taught was done with family resources, a tough proposition given the difficult lifestyle faced by the all but the wealthiest families. So for more than 150 years, schooling actually was homeschooling, available mainly to the privileged.

In the late 1700's, as the forefathers of the United States determined that education was a key factor to the long term success of the country, the idea of providing free public education was born. This idea evolved to the modern state-driven compulsory education system we know today as the public school system.

After the states instituted compulsory education systems starting in the mid 19th century, it took about 120 years for people to come back to homeschooling as a viable method for educating their children. And although homeschooling was always (and still is) protected by the U.S. constitution (remember, that there was no compulsory school system before the states imposed such standards), the legal protections of this "new" form of education wasn't on the forefront of the minds of the states or the public educators. Therefore, in the late 1970's to early 80's, parents had to literally hide their children from the law, if at least to avoid unnecessary harassment and threats by state child custody agencies and local school officials who didn't know any better.

Since the "hide-your-kid" homeschool approach in the late 70's, there are more than 2 million children being homeschooled today which supports a multi-billion dollar industry to supply homeschool families with curriculum and materials for their education. In short, thanks to the courageous actions of a few in the 70's, you couldn't have picked a better time to consider homeschooling as a method to educate your children.

Reasons for Embracing Homeschool

So why did the homeschool pioneers go through all this fuss just to provide their own education for their children?

The dissatisfaction with public schools came from 3 primary reasons: 1) Some parents had serious issues regarding what was being taught in their local schools versus their own beliefs (i.e., evolution vs. creationism), 2) Other parents didn't care for the teaching quality in their kids' classrooms, knowing that their children would not reach their full academic potential if left at the mercy of the public system, and 3) Parents thought that the social environment surrounding public schools was harming their children (read: sex, drugs, gangs, bullying, etc.) .

If you share one or more of these concerns above for your children, then you have taken the right step to explore homeschooling as another option for educating your kids.

Definition of Homeschooling

At its simplest, homeschooling is nothing more than the parent's attempt to provide a custom-fitted academic curriculum around the needs of the child. In the public school system (or even private school system), this curriculum-child fit is reversed – the parents (and local/state officials) are attempting to fit the child into the mold of the school curriculum. And I think we're all old enough to know that, done right, anything customized is better than trying to fit into anything pre-made. A simple analogy I like to draw between homeschool and the public school curriculum is the same difference in fit between a custom-tailored suit versus one purchased off-the-rack.

In homeschooling though, not only is the curriculum customized (at minimum, the topics you want to teach are bounded by your state rules and regulations on homeschooling, at a maximum, however, the topics are only bounded by your imagination), so is *every aspect of your child's education* – and it is this flexibility that is both the blessing and the curse (yes, there are negatives to homeschooling, which I discuss below) of homeschooling. It is up to you as the parent to take full advantage of the blessings and manage the curses to the best of your ability.

The Blessings

Curriculum

As mentioned above, the homeschool teacher can select from a variety of topics, as long as they meet the minimum standards enforced by your state (see my article, "Homeschooling Regulations", for more detail). However, you can choose topics that the public schools just can't come near due to state funding rules or just an inability to provide teaching on your desired topic – the world is your classroom.

For example, here's a short sample of courses and activities that wouldn't be available at typical public schools:

- 1) Foreign language courses taught from Kindergarten – this is one that floors me. The early years are the best to teach foreign language since the ability to learn languages is highly correlated with the age at which you begin lessons (earlier the better), but the public schools don't start until junior high, when the child needs to work that much harder to learn another language.
- 2) Field trips your child is actually interested in - if your child is interested in plants, plan your entire day lesson at your local arboretum or if the age of sail excites your child, spend a night of learning in an actual wooden sail ship. For you big spenders, ANY vacation trip can be a great "field" trip for your child to learn about the region, people, culture, food, etc.
- 3) Competition into academic events – this is a great experience for children since it gives them a chance to shine. A popular example is the National Spelling Bee, but there are so many others that your child may be interested in (i.e., state or national level Latin competitions, science fair competitions sponsored by corporations such as the Intel Science Talent Search, and many others).

Schedule

Let's face it; the only reason why a child needs to wake up at 7AM (or earlier) is to make it to her classroom by 8:15AM so she won't be tardy - tardy for lessons which will end up dingging the school's statistics which may put the school district budget at risk next fiscal year.

No such concerns for homeschooling! The child can get up at a reasonable hour and lessons will begin when the child is ready (not when the school is ready as is the case of the public school).

Also, every once in a while, do you ever wonder why you hear about some super-achieving homeschool kid that is 3-4 years beyond their grade level and plans to graduate with multiple majors, all the while spending much less time homeschooling compared to that of the public schools? At first this may seem like the parents are super-pushy and driving the kid to nothing more than absolute academic domination – but there’s a perfectly reasonable explanation for this and a lot has to do with the schedule.

In a typical public school, there are about 20 kids in a classroom for 6 hours of instruction (it’s actually less than 6 hours due to lunch, recess, etc., but let’s give the public school some leeway here because the results of my analysis are still the same). This averages out to the teacher giving about 18 minutes of individualized attention to each kid. In private school, where the classroom size is usually half of that of the public school, this equates to 36 minutes of individualized attention for each kid. In homeschooling, spending just one hour with your child is almost double the individualized time spent compared to private school and more than 3 times the amount compared to public school – and remember, that’s assuming that you spend *only 1 hour of one-on-one time with your child*.

For Kindergarten, we spend about 2 hours each day with Ryan – which equates to 6 times the amount of individualized attention that he would receive compared to a public school. More attention usually results in more courses covered, and therefore, it’s perfectly natural to assume then, that homeschool kids should out-achieve their public and private school peers. The frosting on the cake is that you can achieve these results in significantly less time than the 6 hours of classroom time required in public schools. Bottom line: you can cover so much more topics in significantly less time with your homeschooled child compared to typical public and private schools, resulting in “overachievement”.

Finally, what if your child is not feeling well that day? Recommended more as an exception than the rule, just move her lesson to the evening. Or arrange for this missed lesson on the weekend. No way can public schools compete with that type of flexibility.

Famous People Who Were Homeschooled

To feed your homeschool high (and just for fun), here’s a sample list of famous people who were homeschooled:

Artists, Actors, Musicians

1. Dakota Fanning
2. Jennifer Love Hewitt
3. Jonas Brothers
4. Elijah Wood
5. Leann Rimes
6. Ashlee Simpson
7. Leonardo Da Vinci
8. Claude Monet
9. Felix Mendelssohn

10. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Military

1. Stonewall Jackson
2. Robert E. Lee
3. Douglas MacArthur
4. George Patton

Inventors

1. Alexander Graham Bell
2. Thomas Edison
3. Orville and William Wright

U.S. Presidents

1. 10 of the U.S. Presidents – that’s almost 25% of the total number of U.S. Presidents, including Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Scientists

1. Albert Einstein
2. Blaise Pascal

Statesman and Legal

1. Winston Churchill
2. Benjamin Franklin
3. 3 US Supreme Judges, including John Marshall and Sandra Day O’Connor

Authors

1. Agatha Christie
2. Mark Twain
3. C.S. Lewis
4. Leo Tolstoy
5. Daniel Webster
6. Charles Dickens

Other

1. Florence Nightingale
2. Sally Ride
3. Venus and Serena Williams

This list can go on for pages, but you get the idea that there are probably more famous people than you thought that were homeschooled and that these people span across many professions.

The Curses

OK – hope you feel great about homeschool now because it’s time to deflate you down to reality of what it really takes to get these results. These stellar results above just don’t happen if you homeschool – you need to homeschool right. And what is “right”?

First, you need to spend significant time not only with your child during lessons, but also need to spend time preparing for lessons. Also, you need to keep records, follow your state regulations and keep current with homeschooling laws across *all states*, not just your state (click here for more information). Obviously, this means you will need to pull away from things that you want to do.

Second, there will most likely be financial impacts to your family since the time commitment typically does not allow for a full time job. For first time homeschoolers, not working altogether for one spouse is a more likely scenario. So you need to do without some of the material things that make life convenient for you.

Third, flexibility is also a negative. Because you have control over every single aspect of your child's education, you need to also define each of those aspects to customize your child's academic experience to best fit her learning style. Have you ever considered what kind of curriculum you will choose that will set the tone for your child's homeschool experience? Do you even know what kinds of curriculums are out there? These are all things that you as a parent will need time to explore and decide as you are honing in on the best fit for your child.

Is There A Homeschool Curriculum For My Child?

And speaking of curriculums, the good news is that homeschooling has blossomed into multi-billion dollar industry and there are plenty of curriculum materials to choose from. In fact, you may even get frustrated at the myriad of materials there are for your child, but it's better than not having enough materials at all. I'm going to write a separate article on this in the future, but rest assured, as long as you invest enough time to research, you will find the right curriculum for your child. I'd like to throw in a shameless plug at this time for our own materials on this site. Meant to be taught one lesson per week, we have a 37-week homeschool curriculum about the ethnic origins of each major group of Americans living in the U.S. today...I think that's a great start in forming your curriculum!

Socialization

Ah, the "S" word - no worthy article about homeschooling would be complete without a comment on this topic. I would venture that there was a time in the early homeschooling era when socialization was an issue. But this issue is one that is part of the past, thanks to the Internet and other advances in communication that allow like-minded communities such as homeschoolers to get together during the week to do activities together. For further insight, see my article, "Will My Child Turn Antisocial Because of Homeschool?".

One aspect I would like to highlight that most non-homeschoolers don't realize is that homeschooling offers *more* socialization in regards to exposing your children (with your supervision) to people from a wider range of ages than their public school peers. It's kind of ironic that public school officials would even bring up socialization today as a critique on homeschooling when in fact, during all of the public school years, the public school students are mostly confined to their peers with ages ranging within a narrow 3-4 years of each other, throughout 12 years of their lives. It is only in college when the exposure to wider range of ages is experienced. In fact, I would argue that homeschool prepares the students to interact in college significantly better than what public schools offer since homeschool kids are already used to interacting with people in a wider age range years before they enroll in college.

Certification Concerns

You may have encountered rebuttals from school officials stating that parents who don't have proper certification shouldn't teach their children. To these officials, I ask, "how good have your "certifications" helped you to resolve the poor quality teaching, drugs, and other social problems that started in school in the first place?"

For those seriously concerned about certification issues, let me put it this way - no one said you had to be certified to have your children, which is one of the most important choices you can make. Just the fact that you are a parent of your child puts you in the best position to teach since you know your child the best and therefore you know how your child learns the best (if you don't know, you have the ability to invest time to learn your child's learning style better than any certified-wielding teacher can - why? Because YOU are the parent who has your child's best interests at heart while the typical teacher literally doesn't have time of day to identify this, much less create a curriculum to best fit your child - that last part would fly straight against the public school curriculum).

For those who want more, here are some facts/statistics:

- 1) There is no statistical difference between the outcomes of homeschooled kids by parents with certification vs. those who do not have certification,
- 2) Homeschoolers outperformed their public school peers by 30% - 37% across all academic subjects based on standard academic achievement tests,
- 3) On average, homeschool students in grades 1-4 perform one grade level above their public and private school peers,
- 4) By 8th grade, the average homeschool student performs at 4 grades above their public and private school peers,
- 5) Students homeschooled their entire lives have the highest scholastic achievement with most of the gains seen during the higher grades (i.e., high school), and
- 6) 98% of homeschooled students are involved in at least 2 activities outside the "classroom". In fact, the average number of activities is 5.2 per student (I threw this last one in for those concerned about socialization).

These statistics were gathered from "The Scholastic Achievement and Demographic Characteristics of Home School Students in 1998", Lawrence A. Rudner, PH.D., Director of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation, and from Strengths of Their Own - Home Schoolers Across America: Academic Achievement, Family Characteristics, and Longitudinal Traits, Brian D. Ray, 1997.

Now Ask Yourself These Questions

You now know more about homeschooling than most people in this country.

I hope I have given you enough to think about to answer the question, "Do I accept the concept of homeschooling?" I recommend answering this question first before going any further. Other than

What is Homeschooling? (4/29/09)

reading this article, I recommend going on the Internet and researching local homeschooling groups and attending information sessions to help you find your answer (crossing my fingers for you that it's "yes").

For those who accept the homeschooling concept, you need to drill down further and make some additional decisions before embarking on your homeschool journey, namely:

- 1) Is homeschooling right for me?
- 2) Is homeschooling right for my child?
- 3) What are the rules and regulations of my state that govern homeschooling? and
- 4) How much does homeschooling cost?

Don't worry - I have written articles to address each question above to help you in your homeschool journey. For those who have made it this far, thanks for reading - I hope you will continue your homeschool journey with us.

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