



**Considering Homeschooling:  
A Guidebook for Investigating an Alternative Path to Education**

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**Davidson Institute for Talent Development**  
9665 Gateway Drive, Suite B  
Reno, NV 89521

[www.DavidsonGifted.org](http://www.DavidsonGifted.org)

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## **Section One: Why Consider Homeschooling**

### **Is Homeschooling a Good Fit for Your Family?**

This guidebook outlines several factors to consider when deciding whether or not homeschooling would be a good choice for your family. The decision to homeschool should not be made without careful consideration. If implemented successfully, homeschooling can be a fantastic way for a child to flourish academically and personally. If unsuccessful, homeschooling can bring stress and frustration into the household.

The primary reason that parents choose to homeschool is to mold their child's education to meet specific academic needs. If a student lacks motivation in school and seems disinterested in the curriculum, homeschooling may revitalize their interest in education. By being able to tailor a student's academic instruction to their specific needs, a child may transition from merely "going through the motions" in a traditional school environment, to genuinely being engaged and interested in their education. However, homeschooling can be a fantastic choice for some children, but it not for others, depending on the child's unique needs.

If a school is unwilling or unable to accommodate the special needs of a gifted student, is behind the curve, or merely attempts to generate graduates by "teaching to the test", then homeschooling can be a viable alternative. For many high-ability students, traditional schools can fall short of satisfying their curiosity and need to learn.

Homeschooling can provide a safe, familiar, comforting environment in which to learn free from the negative social influences found in school environments, such as teasing, bullying, overcrowding and peer pressure. At home, a student can learn at their own pace devoid of the social pressures experienced at school.

### **Cost Considerations - Personal and Financial**

Examining the family structure with an objective look to anticipate the effects of introducing the homeschooling dynamic into the household is important. For some families, homeschooling may bring the family together, but for others it may cause conflict.

Although homeschooling can be a great source of pride for a parent, it can also generate a considerable amount of stress. In almost all cases, at least one parent must sacrifice a substantial portion of their time to offer a worthwhile homeschooling experience. If a parent is unable to devote significant time to homeschooling, it is probably not the best option for the family. In most cases, one parent becomes responsible for homeschooling while the other parent is employed. Thus, the family lives within a budget of one income. Fortunately, with a little research, homeschooling materials and activities can be found to meet any size budget. However, for the homeschooling parent, sacrificing

such a large portion of one's personal and professional life can lead to depression and malaise if homeschooling does not provide enough satisfaction.

Having a mother or father serving in the dual role of parent-educator can be stressful on their relationship with the child-student. Because homeschooling requires participation of both parent and the child, the lines that separate the two roles can be difficult to maintain. Having a parent as a teacher and a caregiver can be confusing for younger children, who often have problems thinking of their mother or father as someone other than their parent. For a child, being taught by a parent means spending a great deal of time with their mother or father. While this can be a good thing, it can also cause stress for the student, as well as the parent. Because their parent is also their teacher, the child cannot go to school to have time away from homes, nor can they go to their parents to seek advice regarding, or to complain about, their teacher.

The cost of homeschooling a student is different for each family. Some parents spend a great deal of money on materials including ready-made curricula, or may want to pay for private tutoring or instruction. However, according to Jacque Ensign, some parents are able to be quite thrifty while still providing a quality education. "Homeschooling parents use many resources and materials. These can become expensive, but there are ways to defray some of the costs. Homeschooling parents can borrow from each other, share resources, and make use of common items in the house and natural environments for curriculum material. The public library is a rich resource for books and videos."  
(<http://www.ericdigests.org/1998-2/gifted.htm>)

Per pupil spending in a homeschool setting can be a mere fraction of the cost to educate a child in the public school system. The obvious difference being that the expense to educate a child in a public school comes from taxes and the expense to homeschool a child comes directly from the parents. Parents who are considering private school, but are unable to afford the tuition may find homeschooling offers their children the personal attention and care that they need. In *Strengths of Their Own*, Brian Ray's 1997 study of 1,657 homeschooling families, "respondents said they spent an average of \$546 per child per year for home education. In contrast, the average per pupil expenditure in America's public schools is \$6,993."  
(<http://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/homeschooling-best-education-reform>)

Finally, homeschooling costs time and energy. As we know, there is a limited amount of time in each day. Far too often not enough of this time is set aside for parents to relax and recharge their batteries. In an article titled "[Homeschooling Moms](#)" by Dr. Nadia Webb, she states that "The isolation can be wearing; try to protect your recharging time, your own intellectual interests and social time. As moms, we put our kids' needs first. Prioritize your own needs more. Talk to other homeschooling parents often." It is

recommended that homeschooling parents schedule at least 30 minutes a day to themselves; having this alone time will help parents and students avoid burn out and keep frustration levels at bay.

Homeschooling can be a very worthwhile experience for both the student and the teacher. It is important to realize that homeschooling is not for everyone, and that each experience is entirely unique. There is potential for the costs of homeschooling to pile up and become a bit overwhelming. However, this does not need to be the case. Successful homeschooling can be accomplished by finding the right resources, including working with other parents who are homeschooling, and doing the proper research. For many, the cost of homeschooling is offset by the wonderful experience.

### **General Resources**

This list of websites and texts may be a helpful starting point as you continue to learn about the many different approaches to homeschooling and about the great benefits and important considerations to make before deciding whether learning at home is right for you and your child:

- [Creative Home Schooling: A Resource Guide for Smart Families](#)
- [Homeschooling Gifted and Advanced Learners](#)
- Gifted Homeschoolers Forum <http://www.giftedhomeschoolers.org/>
- Homeschool.com <http://www.homeschool.com/>

## Section Two: Getting Started with Homeschooling

### Knowing the Law

Before deciding to homeschool, research the homeschool laws in your state. While homeschooling often allows a parent the freedom to educate one's child however they choose, some states have specific laws outlining homeschooling regulations and guidelines.

The Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) is an excellent resource: <http://www.hslda.org>. The preschool through middle school section of the HSLDA website (<http://www.hslda.org/earlyyears/default.asp>) includes access to state homeschool laws and regulations, articles on learning styles, organization and curriculum. The HSLDA also provides a listing of home education state statutes (<http://www.hslda.org/laws/default.asp>).

Please know that when researching non-traditional education avenues, many in combination with homeschooling, such as early college at age 13 or dual enrollment options, state laws may exist that address your situation.

### Local Homeschooling Organizations

To find homeschooling groups in your area, visit the Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) state database (<http://www.hslda.org/laws/default.asp>), click on your state and then on the "Organizations" link at the top of the page. There are religious homeschool groups, nonreligious homeschool groups, homeschool co-ops and much more. These groups give homeschooling families opportunities to socialize with other parents and students in your vicinity.

### Homeschooling and Learning Disabilities

While homeschooling can be a challenging task all on its own, it can be more difficult if your child has a learning disability, behavioral issues or needs specific accommodations in order to help them learn. The following resources are for parents who are considering homeschooling a child with a learning disability:

- [Tips for Parents: Homeschooling Twice-Exceptional Children](#)
- [Twice-Exceptional Gifted Children: Understanding, Teaching, and Counseling Gifted Students](#)
- [Teaching Strategies for Twice-Exceptional Students](#)
- [2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter](#)
- LD Online <http://www.ldonline.org/>

## How to Choose a Curriculum

Many homeschooling curriculum options exist today. Parents can choose from packaged curriculums such as [K12](#), online schools (does your state have a Virtual Academy?), online courses such as [Center for Talent Development \(CTD\) at Northwestern](#) or [John Hopkins Center for Talented Youth \(CTY\)](#). Based on your budget, you can mix and match textbooks and courses from a variety of providers to help meet your student's academic needs and educational interests in, i.e. [Stanford Online High School](#) for literature; [Art of Problem Solving](#) for math; and, [Rosetta Stone](#) for foreign language.

To determine your child's academic level in various subjects, reference your state's academic benchmarks. These benchmarks can be found on state Department of Education websites. You can also have your child participate in a [Talent Search](#) and register your student for [ACT's EXPLORE](#) test for younger students, or an SAT, ACT or other achievement tests through a private tester. Free assessments are available online such as [Alpha Omega Publications Free Placement Tests](#) or [Internet4Classrooms - Printable Assessments for K-8](#). Parents may also want to consider pre-testing as way to know what level their child is working on.

With so many options available and the speed at which gifted students advance through material, parents may often question whether they are meeting their child's academic needs. One program may work for your child for a while, and next thing you realize he has outgrown it. Just remember this process may take time, and there may be some trial and error. Start by reviewing the homeschool policies for your state and department of education benchmarks. Hopefully with this information, you can begin to determine your child's academic level and choose a curriculum.

[Best Evidence Encyclopedia \(BEE\)](#) is a free database created by the Johns Hopkins University School of Education's Center for Data-Driven Reform in Education (CDDRE) that is full of curriculum choices for math and language arts that have been researched and tested.

Some other general places to view curriculum include the following:

- [Homeschool Buyers Co-Op](#)
- [The Critical Thinking Co.](#)
- [Rainbow Resource Center](#)
- [Open Courseware Consortium](#)
- [Well-Trained Mind](#)
- [Gifted Home School Ed Materials](#)
- [Curriculum Share](#)

Below are lists of curriculum resources by subject. Please keep in mind that there is no one curriculum that works for every family. Since every curriculum will work differently for every family and their child's needs, we are not endorsing any of the resources, rather passing along information that other families in the Young Scholar program have used and enjoyed.

### **Math Options**

For math, there are a variety of texts available for purchase. Students can also participate in online interactive classrooms and programs that allow them to work at their own pace.

#### ***Math Online Programs***

- [Online Math Program Comparison](#)
- APEX [http://www.apexlearning.com/Catalog.htm?id\\_catalog=10](http://www.apexlearning.com/Catalog.htm?id_catalog=10)
- Institute for Mathematics and Computer Science <http://www.eimacs.com>
- Art Of Problem Solving <http://www.artofproblemsolving.com/>

#### ***Math Texts***

- Art of Problem Solving <http://www.artofproblemsolving.com/>
- Ed Zaccaro math books <http://www.challengemath.com>
- The Life of Fred series  
<http://www.stanleyschmidt.com/FredGauss/11catofbooks.html>
- Saxon Math  
<http://saxonpublishers.harcourtachieve.com/en-US/saxonpublishers.htm>
- Singapore Math <http://www.singaporemath.com/Default.asp>

#### ***Math Articles and Tips***

- To help determine your child's level in math, the the University of Iowa's Belin-Blank Center for Gifted Education's Ideal Solutions may be an option  
<http://www.idealsolutionsmath.com/>
- [Tips for Parents: Parenting Math-Talented Students](#)
- [Tips for Parents: Developing Mathematical Talent](#)
- [Mathematically Gifted Students: How Can We Meet Their Needs?](#)
- [Tips for Parents: Parenting Mathematically Talented Students in 7th Grade and Younger](#)
- [Developing Mathematical Talent: A Guide to Challenging and Educating Gifted Students in Math](#)

#### ***Math Enrichment***

- Khan Academy <http://www.khanacademy.org/>
- Kumon <http://www.kumon.com/>
- National Association of Math Circles <http://www.mathcircles.org/>
- IXL <http://www.ixl.com/>



## **Language Art Options**

Language arts can be a difficult curriculum to compile because much depends on your student's interests and strengths. Once again, there are many options available that allow students to work at their own pace, or log into virtual classrooms where an instructor is present.

### ***Language Art Online Programs***

- Athena's Advanced Academy <http://www.athenasacademy.com>
- OnlineG3 <http://www.onlineg3.com/>
- Stanford Online High School <http://ohs.stanford.edu/>
- GiftedandTalented.com <https://giftedandtalented.com/>
- John Hopkins CTY [http://cty.jhu.edu/ctyonline/courses/arts\\_humanities/](http://cty.jhu.edu/ctyonline/courses/arts_humanities/)
- Write Guide <http://www.writeguide.com/>

### ***Language Art Texts***

- Michael Clay Thompson <http://www.rfwp.com/pages/michael-clay-thompson/>
- Great Books Academy <http://www.greatbooksacademy.org/>

### ***Reading Material Resources***

Parents of gifted students have difficulty finding reading material for their child due to how fast they read or the student is reading above their grade level. Many parents want their child to enjoy reading, but also want to avoid exposing them to material they may not be ready for. Here are some resources to help parents find appropriate reading material for their student:

- [Guiding the Gifted Reader](#)
- Appropriate Content for Gifted Readers <http://www.tip.duke.edu/node/714>
- [Some of My Best Friends Are Books: Guiding Gifted Readers from Pre-School to High School](#)
- [Tips for Parents: The Art of Academic Writing](#)

## **Science Options**

Many parents are looking for a science curriculum that provides their child with hands-on lab experience, which may or may not be an option. To get started, parents can read [Tips for Parents: Young Scientists in the Making](#).

### ***Chemistry Resources***

- Thinkwell <http://www.thinkwellhomeschool.com/>
- Bryn Mawr's Serendip Interactive Chemistry [http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/sci\\_edu/chemsites.html](http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/sci_edu/chemsites.html)
- Home Chem Lab <http://www.homechemlab.com/sources.html>
- Sample of homeschool chemistry course <http://quarksandquirks.wordpress.com/chemistry-hs-level/>

- Middle School Chemistry curriculum from American Chemical Society  
<http://www.middleschoolchemistry.com/>

### ***Physics Resources***

- The Physics Classroom <http://www.physicsclassroom.com/>
- Light and Matter <http://www.lightandmatter.com/>
- Physics Books Online free online textbooks  
<http://www.sciencebooksonline.info/physics.html>
- Physics: Free Courses Open Culture  
[http://www.openculture.com/physics\\_free\\_courses](http://www.openculture.com/physics_free_courses)
- Interactive Physics  
<http://interactivephysics.design-simulation.com/IP/curriculum.php>
- Math & Physics for homeschooled students  
<http://www.derekowens.com/1112/index.php>
- HippoCampus free online physics courses (includes AP)  
<http://www.hippocampus.org/Physics;jsessionid=7A7D5820EF11002694787DD511515011>
- Kinetic Books virtual physics labs <http://www.kineticbooks.com/>
- The Rainbow <http://www.beginningspublishing.com/>

### ***Biology Resources***

- Biology labs online <http://www.sciencecourseware.com/BLOL/>
- Home Science Tools <http://www.hometrainingtools.com/default.asp>
- Homeschool Biology <http://quarksandquirks.wordpress.com/biology-hs-level/>
- Serendip (Bryn Mawr) Interactive Biology  
[http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/sci\\_edu/biosites.html](http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/sci_edu/biosites.html)
- Discovery Channel's Discovery Education <http://www.discoveryeducation.com/>

### **History Options**

For history, many parents tend to spend a longer amount of time on certain eras depending on the child's interests and parent's knowledge.

### ***History Enrichment***

- U.S. History Scene <http://ushistoryscene.com/>
- World History for Us All <http://worldhistoryforusall.sdsu.edu/>
- National Archives <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/index.html>
- The Teachers Guide <http://www.theteachersguide.com/virtualtours.html>
- PBS <http://www.pbslearningmedia.org/>
- PBS Freedom: A History of U.S. <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/historyofus/menu.html>
- The best history websites <http://www.besthistorysites.net/>
- Mr. Donn – history resources for homeschooling <http://www.mrdonn.org/>
- Google Historical Voyages & Events by Carol LaRow  
<http://larow2.carollarow.com/Voyages/index.html>

### ***History Online Courses***

- Stanford Online High School <http://ohs.stanford.edu/>
- GiftedandTalented.com <https://giftedandtalented.com/>
- John Hopkins CTY <http://cty.jhu.edu/ctyonline/courses/index.html>
- Center for Talent Development  
[http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu/program\\_type/online-programs](http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu/program_type/online-programs)
- Open Culture <http://www.openculture.com/>
- iTunes University <http://www.apple.com/education/itunes-u/>

### **Foreign Language Options**

As one can imagine, foreign language choices are vast and driven by the child's interest in one or more languages, as well as the culture and history of particular geographic regions and ethnicities.

### ***Foreign Language Online Courses***

- Independent Study H.S. – University of Nebraska <http://highschool.nebraska.edu/>
- Laurel Springs School <http://www.laurelsprings.com/home>
- Brigham Young University Independent Study <http://is.byu.edu/site/>
- Missouri K-12 Online <http://mizzouk12online.missouri.edu/>

### ***Foreign Language Enrichment***

- Live Mocha <http://livemocha.com/> (Free online courses - 30 languages)
- Transparent Language <http://www.transparent.com/>
- Open Culture <http://www.openculture.com/>
- Rosetta Stone <http://www.rosettastone.com/homeschool>

## Section Three: Being the Parent and the Teacher

### The Joys and Struggles

As a homeschooling parent, you are you will be in the unique position of witnessing and cultivating your child's education. Having the opportunity to watch your student learn and absorb new concepts is described by many parents as a primary reward of homeschooling. However, children may not always be interested and ready to learn. It can be disheartening when your child's enthusiasm does not match yours, and you may feel guilty when they do not understand a concept or when you are not as prepared as you would like to be. At the same time, however, time spent learning with your child allows you to see new talents or interests as your child develops. Likewise, it also offers quick insight into any new learning differences that may emerge as your child experiences intellectual challenge, possibly for the first time.

Whether you choose homeschooling as a rescue from an unacceptable learning environment or simply because you believe a home education is the best fit for your student, as a parent you have to *want* to homeschool. Teaching will inevitably be smoothest when you maintain a positive attitude and sense of adventure as you optimize your child's education. While maintaining general guidelines, parents can teach a broad set of topics, especially those that interest and engage their children. Because homeschooling offers a one-on-one relationship between the teacher and the student, there is little wasted time.

### Things to Expect and Common Concerns

When deciding whether homeschooling is right for you and your student, it is normal to experience some anxiety. You may wonder if you could really teach your child and if you can provide a good education for them. If this sounds familiar, just remember: as a parent you are *already* your child's primary teacher; the content you will be teaching is just different from what you already teach them.

Particularly if your child is profoundly gifted, you may already feel that they will move faster than you. Equally intimidating, may be the reality that your child is relying on you to guide their learning by introduce new information that simultaneously satisfies not only legal requirements but also the student's learning style and interests.

To understand what to teach your child from year to year, collaborate with others in a homeschooling network, conduct online research and follow your child's interests. Knowing exactly how to introduce and then assess for understanding of new content poses a challenge for many homeschooling parents. Many utilize flexibility and resourcefulness to provide appropriate content, such as creating new approaches to introduce concepts in

unconventional settings and ways. Learning about and ultimately incorporating unconventional resources can make challenging topics fun.

As the parent and educator, you are filling two important roles and in all likelihood may need some support, even just someone to act as a sounding board for ideas and dilemmas. Many homeschooling families find support by networking through homeschooling cooperatives. Larger homeschool gatherings such as conventions and seminars offer a chance to not only connect with other homeschooling families, but also learn from experts in the field of home education and find new resources.

Many times, people have strong opinions about homeschooling. You may have already experienced some of the strong responses that the idea of teaching a child at home can elicit. Some may even challenge your decision to educate your child at home. In such situations, just remember that the amount of information you share with others about your child's education is your choice. Depending on the circumstances, you may find that a simple response, such as "Learning at home is simply the best fit for my child at this time" is an effective, non-reactionary reply. In the case of the dubious critic, it may be more helpful for you to concisely speak to why homeschooling works well for your family, rather than attempt to change their opinion. In whichever way you choose to address such situations, confidence in your curriculum and the benefits to your student will prepare you.

### **Organization is Key**

Chief among characteristics of successful and happy homeschooling families may be organization. Not only will a sense of organization help your child learn effectively and efficiently, but having a framework in place smooths transitions should you encounter periodic diversions. Bear in mind that even if your approach to homeschooling does not entail you doing any actual teaching or transportation of your student, provisions must still be made for supervision of your student as well as any documentation or assessment that may be required by your school district or state Department of Education. It is a fact that time management and simple planning have much to do with being an organized parent-educator.

A common concern among new homeschooling families is that it will be too time consuming. With some advanced planning, however, many families find that educating their children at home offers more flexibility, free time and satisfaction than anticipated. Veteran homeschoolers advise reserving time in your day and week to structure your schedule.

Planning family activities is one thing and planning for learning is another. Reserve time daily and weekly to look ahead to the upcoming content and determine how you will introduce new concepts or schedule other schoolwork. This preparation will give you the

confidence that you will be ready to teach when the time comes. Having a game plan in place allows the flexibility in pace, rigor, and structure that many families appreciate about homeschooling, and allows for a smoother teaching and learning experience.

In thinking about your approach, do not overlook some important non-academic considerations. In your weekly schedule, remember to reserve time for administrative tasks such as recording grades, photocopying or locating resources. While a disorganized home may be the reality of many families, even reserving a day each week for deep-cleaning and some daily time for a quick pick-up around the house can help ensure an environment that is consistently conducive to learning.

Another organizational facet to keep in mind is the importance of recordkeeping. The sooner you begin tracking and filing your student's records, the better. This tracking includes any transcripts that your student may have from college or high school courses they have taken, and keeping a detailed log of home coursework (i.e. curricula, books used, work samples) for ease in preparing your own course descriptions and transcripts. (See *Section Four, Good Recordkeeping is Crucial* for details).

Finally, schedule some independent work and alone time for yourself and your student. Not only does this allow your child to develop necessary independence, it also offers a welcome break. As a homeschooling parent, your relationship with your child is one of the many things you must balance; the parent and child relationship must come first. Many families find that some time away from each other during the day allows both student and teacher time to refresh and refocus during the school day, provides a much-needed mental break, and reinvigorates the learning relationship. Likewise, teaching and learning at home should not come at the expense of pursuing personal interests and hobbies. By building time into the learning schedule many homeschooling families easily accommodate both.

## **Homeschooling Myths**

As your homeschooling journey continues, you will likely encounter some popular homeschooling myths. Some of the common myths about homeschooling are discussed in the following bullets:

- **Homeschooling is a last resort** – Instead of homeschooling being viewed as a solution to an unpleasant dilemma, in reality most families choose homeschooling for the flexibility, pace and quality of instruction. In the event that homeschooling is something of a last resort, the parent's attitude regarding their role has an impact on the student. Home educators who show their frustration with and distaste for their role as a teacher can cause their homeschooled student to feel as though their unique talents or abilities are more of a burden than a gift. Young people who feel

their family has resorted to homeschooling out of desperation may start to feel guilty about the additional time and expense their education demands of the family.

- **My child will become socially awkward** – Homeschooling is socially more similar to “real life” than traditional school settings. After all, not all homeschoolers of the same age are at the same place academically. Allowing your student to interact with those of different ages and backgrounds offers opportunities to learn about the world around them. Homeschooling educators should not confine school hours to home. Provide opportunities to delve into various interests while interacting in a constructive way, including formative activities such as community service, attending homeschool groups or co-ops, community extra-curricular activities such as club sports or scouting, or even allowing your homeschooled student to tutor others. Homeschooling does not have to equate to not socializing, but it may mean not socializing exclusively with same-age peers.
- **Homeschooling is too expensive** – As in many cases, cost is relative. Clearly, there will be some costs associated with teaching a child at home. Does homeschooling cost more or less than the true cost of the next-best alternative available to you? Cost will have much to do with how you choose to meet your child’s specific needs and interests, and will likely be affected by available community and homeschooling resources. Some state that homeschooling may be effectively accomplished for a few hundred dollars per year. Also, keep in mind economies of scale meaning if you are homeschooling more than one child, as each child uses a piece of equipment or text, the cost per child decreases. Some additional cost-saving strategies include:
  1. Teach or volunteer at a homeschool co-op in exchange for reduced tuition/fees.
  2. Avail yourself of public libraries.
  3. Talk with area homeschool families to offer academic and non-academic content, and to plan group field trips.
  4. Research free content online, from instructional websites such as Khan Academy, Open Courseware from major universities, to full online curricula offered by public school districts or online private school providers.
  5. Draw on community organizations such as 4-H, Scouts, youth sports and churches for extra-curricular and fitness activities.
- **I have to do it by myself** – No amount of training would prepare you to teach your child in every subject at every level. It is normal to incorporate outside resources into your curriculum when homeschooling. Video courses, online content providers, universities’ Open Courseware and co-ops are all options for complementing your instruction. While homeschool groups may have an academic focus, the variety of activities homeschool groups sponsor is limitless, ranging from cake decorating to mystery writing and entrepreneurship. It is important to find such an organization

that shares your values, facilitates connections with others and offers opportunities to learn new things. To understand how to pace your instruction, lists of what students should be accomplishing year-by-year or level-by-level are available online. Likewise, the HSLDA offers free information on their website about your rights as a homeschooling family as well as resources and ideas related to the logistics and record-keeping aspects of teaching at home.

- **Homeschoolers hold values I do not agree with** – One of the primary advantages to homeschooling for many families is the ability to limit their student’s exposure to culturally popular, religious or philosophical ideas with which they do not agree. Everyone has different values and there is no one right way to homeschool. However, given the growing popularity of homeschooling, it is likely that you might find like-minded homeschoolers locally. If you are considering partnering with other homeschool families or joining a homeschool co-op, attend the meetings of a few different organizations prior to joining so you can determine the best fit.
- **Homeschooling will not work with my schedule** – One of the great advantages of educating a child at home is the flexibility it offers. Considering the infinite possible combinations of online options, prepared curricula, outside activities (such as youth league sports, robotics clubs, community theater, etc.) and the fact that there are few restrictions as to when course content must be delivered, many families find that homeschooling quickly becomes a natural fit with their routine. However, limiting students to a certain number of outside activities can protect instruction time. Ultimately, your student’s learning schedule depends on your preferences and the resources you choose to use.
- **I cannot handle being with my child for eight hours every day** – For some families, spending so much time together may be neither attractive nor feasible, but there will likely be opportunities for breaks. Allowing your child to work independently for periods of time helps them develop individual interests, discover personal strengths, and learn what their weaknesses might be. Time alone can be time well spent. Follow your child’s lead to balance independent work with assessment and discussion while gauging their comprehension. As a parent you likely already appreciate that gifted young people can sometimes push the limits, so patience is key. Reminding yourself and teaching your children about humility, kindness and patience will go a long way towards helping everyone understand each other’s quirks and accepting their idiosyncrasies.



## Section Four: Transitions

Making the transition to and from the traditional school system can be challenging if a parent and student lack the appropriate information and guidance. Even parents who choose to homeschool for the majority, or entirety, of their child's education will face transitions, such as high school graduation and college admissions, when recordkeeping and paperwork become important. This section gives a general overview of the major factors to consider during such periods.

### From Traditional Schooling to Home and Back Again

Many families choose to homeschool after their student has already spent some time in the traditional school system. Similarly, families can decide to return their student to a traditional school after a period of homeschooling. Both of these scenarios mark significant transitions in a student's life and will require some preparation, including open communication with the school district.

No matter which way you are transitioning, one of the first steps should be to inform your school district of your decision and ensure that you are following state and local protocols. There may be necessary paperwork to complete or other steps to be taken in accordance with district policies. When enrolling a formerly home-educated child into public school, be aware that disagreements can arise between parents and school officials regarding grade level placement and/or the evaluation of which credits should be accepted. Be prepared to offer documentation demonstrating what your child has learned while homeschooling and at which grade level he or she is working (See the *Graduating from High School* section for information on creating transcripts and course descriptions). Schools will often require testing to determine placement and "credit by examination."

It is also important to consider how to prepare your child socially, emotionally and academically for such transitions. Schehl (2009) reported in a small 2007 study that found when it comes to entering traditional school after a period of homeschooling, "Homeschooling families can better prepare for the transition by helping their children understand the organizational structure of public education, by keeping their child up to speed academically, and by providing social experiences for the child with other children outside of the family unit." If your child has never been in a traditional school setting, it may also be a good idea to review the general expectations, such as putting your name on your paper and raising your hand for speaking. The article "The Transition from Homeschooling to the Regular Public School System: How to Make the Move Easier" includes other items to consider.

When transitioning your child the other direction, it may be helpful to take a short break between the last day of traditional school and the first day of homeschooling. Speak

openly with your student and make decisions together as to how you want a typical homeschool day to look. Be sure to plan some social activities, such as weekly interactions with friends to make the transition easier. For further tips, see the article “Helping Your Child Cope with School Transitions” (<http://www.kellybear.com/ParentTips/ParentTip8.html>) and “Reentry: When Homeschool Students Enroll in Traditional Schools” on the PBS Parents website (<http://www.pbs.org/parents/education/homeschooling/reentry-when-homeschool-students-enroll-in-traditional-schools/>).

## **Graduating from High School**

If homeschooling through high school, some basic information about graduation you should know includes how to determine readiness to graduate, obtain a diploma, hold a commencement ceremony and create transcripts.

When determining academic readiness to graduate from high school, at least two major factors should be considered. One is your state’s graduation requirements and/or content standards. You can typically find this information via your state Department of Education and/or a state homeschooling association. Some states do not have any regulations for homeschooled students. In that case, you might only need to consider the next factor: the requirements of certain colleges. A recommended course of study outlined in *College Admission* includes four years of English, three or four years of mathematics and foreign language, two to four years of science, two to three years of history, and at least two semesters of arts (Mamlet & VanDeVelde, 2011, p. 374). Similar guidelines can be found on HSLDA’s website on the following pages: <http://www.hslda.org/highschool/college.asp> and <http://www.hslda.org/docs/nche/000000/00000019.asp>. Requirements and expectations vary by college and specialty (i.e. students wishing to study engineering at a competitive school must have taken Calculus, Physics, etc.), so be sure to check the specific websites of the colleges and programs in which your student is interested.

If you find that your student has completed a satisfactory high school program at a young age, there are additional options to consider, including a gap year or early college entrance. See the following guidebooks for further information:

- **Considering the Options: A Guidebook for Investigating Early College Entrance**
  - [For Parents - \(PDF version\)](#)
  - [For Students - \(PDF version\)](#)
- [Considering Your Options: A Guidebook for Investigating Gap Year Opportunities \(PDF version\)](#)

You may have concerns about obtaining a high school diploma. A blank diploma can be purchased from several organizations, or you can create your own. Some general guidelines, such as including a signature and date of issue, are listed on HSLDA’s High School FAQ page, <http://www.hslda.org/highschool/faq.asp#D9>. Depending on which

college your student wishes to attend, you may forego a high school diploma. According to an interview with educational author Cafi Cohen, who wrote *Homeschooling: The Teen Years: Your Complete Guide to Successfully Homeschooling the 13- to 18- Year-Old*, “Contrary to popular belief, most colleges and universities do not require a diploma for admission. Harvard’s catalog specifically states that they do not require a high school diploma” (Meet Homeschool.com’s High School and College Advisor Cafi Cohen, <http://www.homeschool.com/articles/HighSchool/default.asp#1>). Once again, check with the specific colleges/programs in which your student is interested. If he or she needs an accredited diploma, he or she may have to consider taking the GED.

When it comes to celebrating a commencement ceremony, check with your local and/or state homeschooling organizations and support groups, some of which may hold homeschool graduation ceremonies similar to traditional commencement ceremonies. Another option is hosting your own graduation party among family and friends. See the article “Planning a Homeschool Graduation” (<http://suite101.com/article/planning-a-homeschool-graduation-a38887>) for further ideas.

Another part of the graduation process is creating transcripts. A good transcript is well organized, whether chronologically, by subject, or in some other easy-to-understand format. Educator Wes Beach advises that although there is no universally accepted way to write a transcript, you should consider inputting some of the following information: “Along with the course titles you devise for learning experiences, write course descriptions; assign grades, credits (<http://www.hslda.org/highschool/docs/EvaluatingCredits.asp>) and a grade point average; include test scores; create reading lists and lists of resources; use narratives to describe any aspects of your student’s experiences; and include or attach recommendations and evaluations from anyone who has expertise and a relationship with your student. The fewer recognized outside resources you’ve used--college classes, standardized tests, etc.--the more detail you should include.”

When preparing transcripts for college admissions, Mr. Beach has advised that the course descriptions provide ample details. He notes that “without detailed course descriptions, an admissions officer will have no idea, for example, how rigorous [YS’s] ‘Literature Analysis’ course was or what readings his ‘Ancient and Medieval History’ course consisted of . . . Don’t overwhelm with erroneous information, but provide enough detail so the admissions department isn’t sitting around after reading through his or her transcript and thinking to themselves that they still don’t know what your student has done.”

For additional tips from Mr. Beach, visit his website at <http://www2.cruzio.com/~beachhi/guidance.html> and read this article “[Tips for Parents: Creating Effective Transcripts](#).” Programs exist to help homeschooling parents with recordkeeping tasks, such as My School Year: Homeschool Record-Keeping Made Easy at <https://myschoolyear.com/>.

Further information on creating transcripts can be found in these resources:

- [Forging Paths: Beyond Traditional Schooling](#) by Wes Beach
- [Setting the Record Straight: How to Craft Homeschool Transcripts and Course Descriptions for College Admissions and Scholarships](#) by Lee Binz
- [Transcripts Made Easy: The Homeschooler's Guide to High School Paperwork](#) by Janice Campbell
- [A to Z Home's Cool Homeschooling](#) – Transcripts page  
<http://homeschooling.gomilpitas.com/olderkids/Transcripts.htm>

## The College Application Process as a Homeschool Student

According to California Homeschool Network's FAQ (2009), "A growing number of colleges and universities around the United States are admitting homeschoolers, including prestigious universities like Harvard and Yale. Some, like UC Riverside, actively recruit homeschoolers . . . The bottom line is that, if a homeschooler wants to pursue post-secondary education, they can certainly do so and do so within some of the finest universities." Many colleges even have specific guidelines prepared for homeschooled applicants. [A to Z Home's Cool Homeschooling](#) website has a list of examples (<http://homeschooling.gomilpitas.com/olderkids/CollegeHSpages.htm>) and these three are particularly well-developed pages for homeschool admissions:

- Princeton  
[http://www.princeton.edu/admission/applyingforadmission/tips\\_for\\_home\\_schooled/](http://www.princeton.edu/admission/applyingforadmission/tips_for_home_schooled/)
- Stanford [http://admission.stanford.edu/application/freshman/home\\_school.html](http://admission.stanford.edu/application/freshman/home_school.html)
- Caltech  
<http://www.admissions.caltech.edu/content/how-apply-first-year-applicant>  
(scroll down to find this link: <https://s3-us-west-1.amazonaws.com/admissions-prod-storage.cloud.caltech.edu/Homeschooled%20Applicant%20Info.pdf> )

If a college of interest does not offer specific guidelines, call the admissions office.

## Good Recordkeeping is Crucial

If a homeschool student decides to attend college, their college application journey will, in fact, be very similar to that of a traditional student: selecting schools of interest, filling out applications, applying for financial aid, etc. The only major difference for homeschooled students is that of documentation. Any college your student applies to will generally look at the same five elements:

1. High School Transcripts  
See the *Graduating from High School* section for tips on creating homeschool transcripts. You can also prepare a brief portfolio of work samples and other evidence of academic achievement.

## 2. SAT/ACT Scores

Be sure to check the specific testing requirements at colleges your student is interested in attending. Some may require more testing for homeschooled students, such as additional SAT subject tests (Mamlet & VanDeVelde, 2011, p. 339). You can register for these tests at these websites: CollegeBoard (SAT) (<http://www.collegeboard.com>) and ACT, Inc. (<http://www.act.org>)

## 3. Extracurricular Activities

*College Admission* (p. 339) lists the following ideas of extracurricular options for homeschoolers:

- Activities at the local high school, such as band or debate
- Part-time employment
- Volunteer work at a church or in politics
- Community organizations, such as Scouting
- The arts, including community theater or orchestra
- Sports via club teams or through organizations such as the YMCA

## 4. Recommendation Letters

It is strongly advised for homeschooled students to have at least one recommendation from someone other than a parent, such as an outside instructor or volunteer coordinator, who can offer specific, relevant information.

## 5. Essay or Self-Presentation

An application essay is a great avenue for students to offer the admissions committee further insight into their unique experience with homeschooling.

For more information on the transition college, please review the following resources:

- HSLDA's College pages <http://www.hslda.org/highschool/college.asp>
- College Board's Big Future website <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/>
- Homeschool to College Yahoo Group <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/homeschool2college/info>

## Section Five: Up Close and Personal Quotes from Homeschool Families

About one third of the families involved in the [Davidson Young Scholars](#) program are homeschooling at any given time. The following reflections detail some homeschooling experiences:

### **Why did you choose to homeschool?**

“My husband and I attended public and private schools as children and always planned to have our children attend the public schools in our top-rated district. I began to realize that my oldest daughter, Ashley, might need something outside the norm when she learned to read at 3 years old. In an attempt to provide her with an appropriate education I put her in a private preschool whose classes were taught at one grade advanced. She was bored to the point of being a discipline problem and I realized that she needed an even more stimulating learning environment. Searching for an alternative to the traditional educational path I found a Spanish immersion program offered by our school district. Being immersed in a new language provided the necessary intellectual stimulation for kindergarten through second grade as well as introducing Ashley to a love of languages. At the end of third grade Ashley took her state standardized test in Spanish and made the highest grade in her school even surpassing the gifted native Spanish speakers. At the beginning of fourth grade, her teacher gave her the math benchmark for the standardized test and explained that she had nothing to teach Ashley because she already knew all the grade-level material. Meanwhile Ashley was becoming more and more disenchanted with school. With mounting evidence that a change needed to be made, we decided to homeschool for fifth grade. Though we considered acceleration, Ashley was not comfortable with the idea of moving to junior high school early; she was already young for her grade with a July birthday.”

“When our son was getting to kindergarten age he was very ‘busy.’ I dreaded having the kindergarten teacher calling me every day complaining about his behavior. A chance encounter gave me the idea to look into homeschooling. My husband's first response was ‘NO.’ His mom was a public school teacher and principal. But he did his research as I was doing mine and we agreed to give it a try - hey, it was just kindergarten. What a difference! Once we began ‘school’ our son was a different child; I think he just needed a challenge. Now our son is getting ready to graduate high school!”

“It was clear that preschool was a gross mismatch for our son. We had a qualitative assessment done and the assessor told us that homeschooling was the only thing that would work for him given where he is on the giftedness spectrum.”

“We had done full day kindergarten at a private school for our Young Scholar daughter, but they were too expensive and they still weren’t keeping up with her abilities. We then started her in a pilot program for a gifted first grade classroom, but it was a horrendous failure. The teacher was inexperienced & overwhelmed. The classroom was chaotic and there was no actual ‘teaching’ occurring. We pulled her out after seven weeks and began homeschooling.”

### **How did you get started?**

“We pulled him early from preschool and homeschooled for six months. We still felt we had to try public kindergarten, but it was a big mistake. The school would not accept our advocacy in any way, and would not even provide challenging materials, much less accelerate him. We saw that he was miserable and pulled him out to homeschool permanently, and never looked back. At that point it was clear that our daughter was at least as gifted as our son, so we planned from then to always homeschool her, as well.”

“I turned to the Young Scholar homeschooling eList and asked for advice from the homeschooling families. I purchased some well-regarded curriculum pieces and started the journey into homeschooling. The eList was invaluable during those early years as some materials worked well with my child and others didn’t. When something wasn’t working for us, it was great to have input from other parents who have homeschooled gifted children and who were sympathetic to the diverse needs of individuals. I was also lucky to have found a one day/week program for homeschoolers through our local school district. It provided the ‘special’ classes, such as art, music and PE, but no real academics since we were doing those at home. It also gave my social daughter the class full of friends with whom to share lunch and recess. I also got some time to myself to run errands, clean my house, visit with an adult friend, or simply sit with a cup of coffee and read a good book. When we started homeschooling, I had additionally researched local homeschool support groups. Though many in our area were religiously-based (something we were not interested in), we were able to find and join some secular groups.”

### **What major struggles have you had to overcome?**

“Bridget would describe our first year of homeschool as a dismal failure, though slightly better than attending public school. Our main problem was that my daughter and I were approaching homeschooling from completely different perspectives. I had researched homeschooling and learned about many interesting homeschooling philosophies. I thought the concept of child-lead learning sounded fantastic and intended to implement that concept. The problem was that Bridget had been in a structured setting so long that she felt unsettled by the freedom and flexibility that I found so attractive. Another problem was that as we entered into homeschooling, I still retained many outside volunteer activities that vied for my time. In hindsight I think we would have worked through some of the

problems faster if I had reduced my volunteer responsibilities and dedicated more time to homeschooling.

During our fourth semester of homeschooling we finally settled on an eclectic style that works for our family. Part of the solution came when we identified Bridget's level of aptitude in each subject. Once we accelerated her to high school and college level materials she was much more motivated. It was also important to identify her preferred learning style, which was not necessarily the same for each subject. In language arts she thrives in the OnlineG3 classes and enjoys having discussions with her Young Scholar friends who share those classes. For science she prefers to study her college level texts independently, unfettered by the constraints of an organized class. To further her language learning Bridget takes high school level online Spanish courses through Oklahoma State University and receives private instruction in Arabic, German and French. One of the added benefits of homeschooling is that Bridget is able to study multiple languages at a young age, which was difficult to do with the time constraints of public school. In the few areas in which I feel I have the appropriate level of passion and expertise such as math and social studies, I provide one-on-one instruction for Bridget."

"The worst problem was when we spent a couple of years living in south Florida and couldn't find a homeschool group or other homeschoolers we had anything in common with. We moved back to Illinois and got back into our homeschool community there. One challenge parents of profoundly gifted (PG) kids sometimes find is that when homeschooling, kids can go through curriculum very fast. Another drawback is that at times I, as the main adult keeping homeschooling going, had little time to follow my own independent interests. I had to work at carving time out for myself. No regrets! I will never have the regret that I didn't spend enough time with my kids when they were young. The benefits far outweigh the drawbacks!"

"It's always a struggle to keep up with our kids' needs, because they are so intense. We have limited resources, and can't just purchase everything they need; we have a wonderful homeschool group that helps by lending us materials, and we make deep use of the public library system. I've designed and taught classes for my kids and their friends, although by the time I started doing that, my son probably could have taught most of what I was teaching (he loved it anyway, thankfully). Those same kids' parents have taught classes in exchange, for the same group of kids.

We also have struggled to identify twice exceptional issues of theirs, and obtain treatment (and pay for it). They both have sensory processing disorder, plus some vision challenges, and my son also has a hearing challenge. We've had all but the latter treated with therapies, and will add therapy to address that when we can do so financially.



Another major challenge is finding any time for myself. My kids do read voraciously, and that lets me have enough time to work part-time from home, sporadically, or go for a run or other outing while my husband is with them. But their extraordinary intensity means we can't just get a sitter and go out for a date. Our parents periodically come to visit and let us go out, and our daughter is finally ready to periodically have a friend and her mother come stay during the day for a bit so we can go out together, but this happens only a couple of times per year."

"Through elementary and middle school, we went through bouts every couple years where her homeschool work was dragging and she would ask to go back to brick-and-mortar school. We attempted this in third grade (she was bullied and again had a teacher who couldn't handle the class) and then in sixth grade (she spent all free time on busy-work-type homework and then had teachers use the class time reviewing the homework). She has now matured to the point that she sees traditional schooling as a waste of time and prefers to work at her own pace. She also has many friends and social outlets, which help my very social child."

### **What benefits and successes have you experienced?**

"One thing we have learned on this journey is that you can never be entirely sure where it will take you. There have been many ups and down, but I feel it is all worthwhile when Rebecca tells me that she loves homeschooling."

"We've been able to provide our kids with a superior education, very much suited to them and their talents, interests and abilities, rather than educating them based on their age. They have had opportunities to make friends with like-minded kids (and people of all ages!) and push the envelope academically. Our kids are globally aware, empathetic, and give of their time to others less fortunate than themselves. We've also traveled all over the country, and the kids have been nationally competitive in their sports. Between them they've even had the opportunity to travel to Guatemala, Honduras, Spain and Morocco."

"Our kids are mostly thriving. Having more resources would remedy some of the serious challenges we still face in providing materials, classes and opportunities for them, but there's no question that this is the right setting for them to be in. They have both thanked us, spontaneously, for understanding them and making sure their needs are met, instead of keeping them in mismatched educational situations. Seeing them grow and progress and be happy is worth it all."

"My daughter really likes working at her own pace so I see it as a benefit to allow her this luxury. My mantra has been that I never want her 'pushed ahead,' but that I always want her challenged and learning new things. I think a bright child who is not challenged becomes bored and disenchanted with learning. As there are many poor curriculum

materials in the world, I see it as one success that I am happy with the materials I use with my daughter. I also see it as a success that she is well adjusted and has many friends.”

### **How have you dealt with milestones like transitioning to/from public school, graduating from high school, and applying to college?**

“When we took our son out of public kindergarten, it was like the weight of the world had been lifted from his shoulders. It took him years of ‘deschooling’ to return to himself, really, and he's still doing so in some ways, because the situation had been so bad. So the transition was a wonderful thing for him. He was doubly thrilled because when we took him out, he was able to add an astronomy class for gifted children, a class he had been wanting to take. We all found it easier to not have to follow the school's schedule, manage his stress that the school situation generated, and spend time researching and advocating for him.

Both our kids are asynchronous enough to be using college-level materials from very young ages, but struggle with the physical act of writing or typing. They both recently told me that they probably will homeschool through college (meaning, UnCollege, Free University, or some similar approach), although I would expect that eventually they will want to take some college-level classes instead of teaching themselves, and that perhaps one day they'll want to obtain degrees by attending an institution full-time.”

“We have dealt with the transitions to and from traditional schooling. When entering a new schooling environment, we really threw ourselves into that school. We volunteered to help with school projects, we attended school sporting events, and we even bought and wore school clothing. As far as graduations, there are homeschool organizations here in Arizona that put on graduations for homeschooling students. I intend to use them when the time comes.”

“Our son is graduating high school a year early. He's been accepted to three colleges already and we'll hear from more in the spring. He intends to take a gap year and volunteer with the humanitarian program he's involved with by teaching English in Cambodia, Brazil and/or Guatemala. Applying to college was no problem as colleges are accustomed to homeschoolers. In fact, Princeton mentions on their website that a recent valedictorian had been homeschooled. There have been homeschooled Young Scholars accepted at all kinds of colleges, including the most selective schools in the country. So far, our son has been accepted to a large university honors program, has been offered a large merit scholarship at another selective university, and was accepted early to a very selective college that doesn't offer merit aid. In other words, he's already been accepted to a wide variety of colleges.”

## **What tips would you like to share with families who are considering homeschooling or are new to homeschooling?**

“One of the fun things we have done, that has brought and kept my son, now 16, emotionally close with mom, is watch Teaching Company lectures together (or History Channel documentaries). Every day, we'd sit on the couch, sip hot cocoa and watch a 30 minute lecture, then discuss the program. Also, since my son is now dual enrolled at the local University and we spend 40 minutes per day driving, we listen to lectures or classic books on cd in the car. The drive passes quickly, and we have some wonderful shared memories. Of course we document all lectures and documentaries and include them in our course descriptions for whatever subject we are studying. Lastly, keep a reading list of titles and authors of all 'good' literature your student is reading over the years and include this with any transcripts when applying to colleges. This should include books on tape and lectures as well.”

“If you're considering homeschooling my best advice is to join the Young Scholar homeschooling eList! There you will see all kinds of ideas to look into and you can ask all kinds of questions and expect to hear numerous thoughtful responses in return. Also, follow your child's interests and talents. Look for a homeschool group for support and maybe even co-op classes. For example, our daughter is in the choir and teaches Spanish at our co-op. If your child is interested, finding a sport and/or volunteer experience is also helpful. Many homeschooled kids take dual-enrolled courses at their local college or community college as they get older. Now it's time to go plan our son's graduation party! Good luck to you. You can do it!”

“Trust your child, and trust your instincts about what your child needs. Allow for a long period of 'deschooling' to allow your child to return to him/herself. Strongly consider child-led learning; it works for nearly everyone. Adults function as facilitators, obtaining materials, books, classes, outings, etc. Expect to spend lots of time *not* at home; many people call it 'car-schooling' for a reason! But 'custom education' is perhaps even a better name. And expect that even though you may have to give up some things - part or all of one adult's career, for example - you'll have many benefits to compensate: lower child stress, a more flexible schedule, more time seeing your child thrive firsthand, and a vast, wonderful online (and in some areas, in person) community of others doing the same thing.”

“My philosophy is that there is no 'right or wrong' homeschooling path. You must find what works for your family and your child. Do your research, talk to other homeschooling parents, and don't be discouraged if curriculum pieces (no matter how highly recommended) don't work for you and your child. Home schooling is a unique journey and you may – at some point – get a bit lost. Don't panic. Just reassess what is working and what isn't and, if needed, try something new. Follow the path that feels right for your family and everything will be fine.”

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