

ED414683 1997-12-00 Homeschooling Gifted Students: An Introductory Guide for Parents. ERIC Digest #543.

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During the last 20 years, increasing numbers of families in the United States have chosen to educate their children at home or outside the conventional school environment. Current estimates range from 500,000 to 1.2 million students (Lines, 1991, 1995; Ray, 1996). Of that number, a significant percentage of families have chosen homeschooling as the educational option for their gifted children.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

When families consider homeschooling, there are many issues to explore.

Time commitment. Homeschooling requires an enormous time commitment by at least one parent. However, many parents of highly gifted children are already actively committed to their children's education. Parents find themselves trying to squeeze in extra hours for music, dance, and art. Frequently, their evenings are spent enriching the classroom curriculum so their children will continue to be academically challenged. These parents claim that homeschooling is a way to tailor their children's education to specific needs and interests at the appropriate academic challenge level, and to create an integrated educational environment that includes a wide range of activities.

Talk together as a family to decide if this is the appropriate choice for you. As with any educational option, homeschooling works better for some students and parents than for others. Some find the demands and intensity of homeschooling to be too stressful; others love the freedom and challenge.

Resources and financial considerations. 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. Many libraries offer interlibrary loans and vacation-loan extensions to the public. The Internet offers a wealth of highly sophisticated information, especially in the academic subject areas. A computer in the house is an advantage, but there are other ways to gain access to the Internet; for example, some public libraries and schools offer access. When considering homeschooling, explore resources and materials in advance. At all levels, verify the type of support schools will provide. If they have a gifted program, they may provide curriculum suggestions and guidelines. Contact others who are homeschooling through your state's homeschooling network.

Academic considerations. Homeschooling can offer increased flexibility and academic challenge. Flexibility is particularly important since many gifted students are uneven in their abilities. For example, a child may be several years ahead in math, but struggling with reading or writing.

Some children excel in all areas and require academic challenges to remain motivated in school. Many of these students sit idly, waiting for the class to catch up (U.S. Department of Education, 1994b). A rigorous, academically challenging curriculum offers the opportunity to insert depth and breadth. For example, the use of primary or original sources and advanced reading material may lead the gifted learner into critical thinking about an academic subject area or an interdisciplinary approach to subject matter. Projects, hands-on learning, and problem-based learning may provide interesting approaches to academic content.

Gifted homeschoolers enjoy opportunities to develop in multifaceted ways and pursue interests without time and curriculum constraints. Individual learning, tutorials, and small group classes are some of the options.

Social considerations. Many people have expressed concern about the social life and potential isolation of homeschooled children. Studies of social adjustment and self-esteem indicate that home-educated students are likely to be socially and psychologically healthy (Montgomery, 1989; Shyers, 1992; Taylor, 1986). Homeschooled students tend to have a broader age-range of friends than their schooled peers, which may encourage maturity and leadership skills (Montgomery, 1989). Homeschoolers are not necessarily isolated from others of their age; they meet and socialize with peers in their neighborhood and at community classes and activities.

With concerted effort by families, most homeschoolers can find avenues for social and intellectual interaction. When a student is interested in a topic, efforts can be made to ensure that the student talks with people of various backgrounds and viewpoints. A mentor working individually with the student may add stimulation and challenge. Professional societies and community organizations are a good place to start looking for people interested in sciences such as astronomy, visual and performing arts, and music. Libraries, museums, parks departments, historical sites, scout and sport programs, local businesses, religious groups, and theater groups expand homeschooling programs. Some homeschool groups have formed their own sports teams, and participate in community leagues. Homeschoolers benefit from volunteering in agencies such as hospitals, nature centers, museums, parks, libraries, and businesses. **Legal considerations.** Homeschooling is legal in all 50 states, Canada, and many other countries. Some states require that parents notify the local school district of their intent to homeschool; others require parents to register with the state department of education. Some permit a homeschool to register as a private school. Many states require yearly proof of student progress. Some states have additional requirements, such as the submission of a curriculum plan or education requirements for parents. Except for yearly standardized testing as an assessment of student achievement, services for homeschoolers have not been routinely available from the states. A few states permit homeschooled students to participate in public school classes or activities. Many state education agencies have a homeschooling liaison to help families understand state requirements. Federally mandated special education services may be

available to homeschooled students through the public schools.

Since states vary in their specific requirements, obtain a copy of your state's homeschool law from your state department of education or your state legislator's office. Local homeschool support groups are good sources of information on complying with the local laws and regulations.

WAYS TO HOMESCHOOL

There are many methods of homeschooling; no single method is best. Success often comes through experience, confidence, and willingness to experiment. Many parents prefer the structure and security of a correspondence or purchased curriculum in the first year, switching to their own tailored program once they have developed experience and feel more confident. Some parents prefer to use textbooks and commercial curricula; others prefer to use a variety of resources.

Some parents opt to teach all subject areas to their children; others seek out classes or tutorials for some or all of the subjects, especially for homeschooled high school students. Approaches may vary with individual children and change over time as demands and experiences alter their lives. Reading accounts of other homeschool experiences and getting to know other homeschoolers offers perspective, ideas, and appreciation for the many ways of homeschooling.

WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO DEVELOP OR ASSESS THE

QUALITY OF A HOMESCHOOL CURRICULUM? Testing and evaluations of subject area competencies can be useful in planning an educational program and assessing its outcomes. A combination of assessments normally provides the most complete picture of a child's progress. Off-grade standardized testing and portfolio evaluations may also be appropriate. Standardized grade-level achievement tests may be available from your local school district or state department of education. These tests can be used to ensure that students are keeping up with local school district grade level competencies.

Homeschooling families should plan for objective assessment as part of the curriculum. Not only does objective assessment document achievement, but the results should inform program planning. To investigate the topic of assessment, contact the ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation (1-800-GO4-ERIC).

Model content and performance standards are available in many of the subject areas. Content standards define what students should know and be able to do. They describe the knowledge, skills, and understanding that students should have in order to attain high levels of competency in challenging subject matter (U.S. Department of Education, 1994a). Performance standards identify the levels of achievement in the subject matter set out in the content standards and state how well students demonstrate their

competency in a subject (U.S. Department of Education, 1994a). By following the basic academic standards set by the states or the national subject area standards, parents have a rich framework from which to develop challenging curriculum. Homeschooling resources and information on obtaining standards is provided in ERICEC Minibibliography EB18, which is part 2 of this digest.

International, national, and regional competitions may be valuable assessments of and incentives for achievement. Further, competitions may provide feedback as to how the student compares with others who are interested in the same area. Regional and national competitions can be found in most fields, including math, science, computer programming, writing, engineering, geography, environmental, art, music, and dance. Specific examples are included in Homeschooling Resources (EB18). A selected list of competitions and activities can be obtained for a fee from the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP).

HOW WELL DO HOMESCHOOLERS PERFORM?

One way to compare homeschooled students with peers who attend public schools is to use standardized achievement test scores. A study of homeschooled student scores on standardized achievement tests shows higher scores than the general population (National Home Education Research Institute, 1997). Galloway (1995) investigated homeschooled graduates' potential for success in college by comparing their performance with students from conventional schools and found insignificant differences, except in the ACT English subtest scores. Homeschooled students earned higher scores in that subtest.

WHAT ABOUT COLLEGE?

The later high school years should be structured with college applications in mind. These years may be managed in a variety of ways. Some students remain in homeschooling and receive no diploma. Others choose to reenter public school during high school to align themselves with peers and obtain a standard diploma. Others select a combination that will take advantage of Advanced Placement courses or other academic and extracurricular offerings.

Limited research suggests that the home educated do well in college (Sutton & de Oliveira, 1995; Galloway, & Sutton, 1995). Furthermore, homeschoolers may find the unique experiences and abilities gained through homeschooling make them attractive to competitive colleges. Check with the colleges of interest to determine if they have specific application requirements for homeschoolers. When standard high school student transcripts are not available, colleges may need other information to make an informed decision. SAT scores may be given more weight, since they are a way of comparing a homeschooler to the general college-bound population. Transcripts from community college courses taken during high school years can be useful. Letters of recommendation from persons who have worked with the homeschooler in tutorials,

apprenticeships, community service, and social activities may prove very valuable. A detailed description of unique homeschool courses, in-depth independent projects, competitions, publications, and community service activities will help a college understand the quality of an applicant's homeschool education and recognize the student as a competitive applicant. An interview, when offered by a college or university, is particularly important for homeschool applicants.

WHERE CAN FAMILIES GET INFORMATION?

This digest has an accompanying bibliography (EB18) that provides a wide variety of resources. The following resources and others cited in their bibliographies are another place to start. There are many parent discussion groups on the Internet that discuss homeschooling issues. Groups such as TAGFAM and TAG-L are listed on the ERIC EC website <http://www.cec.sped.org/gifted/gt-menu.htm>. Or, seek out a local homeschool support group. You can find one by checking with state organizations listed in some of the magazines and through some of the Internet sites listed in EB 18. Other sources include libraries; state and local boards of education, especially state or local gifted advocacy groups; La Leche League; and religious organizations. Be sure to look for groups that match the underlying philosophy that attracted you to homeschooling.

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Note. The Home School Researcher is published by the National Home Education Research Institute, P.O. Box 13939, Salem OR 97309. 513-772-9580.
URL:<<http://www.nheri.org>>.

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