

Developing and Planning a Texas Based Homeschool Curriculum

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Abstract

Texas has some of the lowest SAT scores in the nation. They are ranked 36th nationwide in graduation rates and teacher salaries rank at number 33. The public school system in Texas has problems with overcrowding, violence, and poor performance on standardized testing. Currently 300,000 families have opted out of the public school system in order to pursue the freedom of homeschooling. In June 1994, the Texas Supreme Court upheld the appeal of the *Leeper versus Arlington Independent School District*. The court held that if students participate in legitimate home schools they are exempt from attending public school. The only requirement for legitimacy is for the curriculum to be in writing and they must teach in a bona fide manner, good citizenship, reading, writing, mathematics and grammar. When families decide to homeschool they must develop a unique curriculum. This paper takes the reader through the five different development phases leading up to and including the basics of developing a homeschool curriculum designed for students in the state of Texas.

Developing and Planning a Texas Based Homeschool Curriculum

In 2009, the Texas Comptroller's office released some dismal statistics in regards to public education in a report entitled, *Where We Stand*. Texas ranks 49th in verbal SAT scores and 46th in math SAT scores nationwide. Graduation rates are 36th in the nation with only 78% of residents over the age of 25 possessing a high school diploma. Teacher salaries rank number 33. Because of budget cuts, expenditures for students are currently ranked number 40, up from number 25 in 1999. However, Texas is number 6 in nationwide student growth.

According to the Texas Homeschool Coalition in 2010, there were approximately 300,000 homeschooled children in the state of Texas. The primary reason families have chosen to homeschool is because they believe their children can receive a better education at home on an individual basis. This is something the public school system is not equipped to do. Perhaps the most daunting aspect of homeschooling is for the teacher to embark on the curriculum planning process. To be successful a homeschool teacher must plan and assemble a unique curriculum designed specifically for that individual student.

A good homeschool curriculum is developed by following a process and is refined over the years as the child advances through the different grade levels. This paper will examine the seven phases of the development process which include legal aspects, educational philosophy, Bloom's Taxonomy, learning theories, learning styles, values and discipline. Once these seven phases have been discussed the second half of this paper will focus on planning a curriculum that meets the requirements for homeschooling in the state of Texas.

Texas Laws and Regulations

The very first phase of the development process is for the parent to fully understand the state law as it pertains to homeschooling. Compulsory attendance laws were passed in Texas in 1915. All children between the ages of six and eighteen must attend school unless they have a general equivalency diploma. In Texas prekindergarten and kindergarten are not mandatory. In 1985 the Texas Education Agency sought to prosecute over 100 homeschooling families for truancy (Texas Homeschool Coalition, 2011).

These families responded by filing a class action lawsuit against all 1060 Texas school districts. The suit was filed by attorney Shelby Sharpe on behalf of homeschool families and curriculum suppliers. The case would be referred to *as Leeper versus the Arlington Independent School District*. In 1987 the 17th District Court made the decision that if homeschooling was conducted in a legitimate manner by teaching certain subjects they would be considered private schools and meets all compulsory state attendance requirements. In 1991 the Texas Court of Appeals upheld the lower court's ruling. On June 15th, 1994 the Texas Supreme Court made it illegal for the prosecution of legitimate homeschooling in the state of Texas. In order for homeschooling to be considered legitimate it must meet the following criteria:

1. Maintain a written curriculum.
2. Teach Grammar.
3. Teach Reading.
4. Teach Mathematics.
5. Teach Spelling.

6. Teach Civics
7. All five courses must be taught in a bona fide fashion.

If a student is currently enrolled in a public school and the parent decides to pursue homeschooling they must submit a letter of withdrawal to the school district. Parents do not have to appear before the districts officials or present them a written copy of their curriculum. However, the school district may request a letter of assurance that the student is being homeschooled in a legitimate manner. Since homeschools are considered private schools in Texas they are not subject to state mandated testing and teachers are not required to be certified by the state (Texas Education Agency, 2011).

It is recommended that homeschool parents become familiar with the Homeschool Legal Defense Association. They are a non-profit organization that promotes the legal rights of homeschoolers in the United States. They were also one of the plaintiffs in the *Leeper versus Arlington* case as well as a financial contributor in that class action law suit (Homeschool Legal Defense Agency, 2011). Now that the reader is familiar with the laws and regulations regarding home schooling in Texas it is time to advance to the next phase of the devolvement process which is writing out an educational philosophy

Philosophy

After the homeschool teacher has learned the Texas homeschooling laws and requirements he or she must develop their own unique educational philosophy. Homeschool teachers should not be confused by the term philosophy, in simple terms a philosophy is a set of beliefs. In this instance it is a set of beliefs concerning homeschool learning. The homeschool teacher's philosophy may change as the years go by which is all a part of the planning process.

Duffy (1995) recommends that parents consider what they would want their children to know if they had no legal boundaries to follow. From this point she advises the homeschool teacher to write them down. After this is accomplished the teacher must decide exactly how learning will take place and the way in which the teacher will present the materials.

Henderson (1995) also has some excellent insights into establishing a homeschool educational philosophy. He believes the teacher must take into consideration learning attitude, lifestyle, values, learning style, teaching style and lifelong learning goals when articulating an educational philosophy. This is only a starting point, but when the homeschooling teacher begins to answer in writing the questions posed by Duffy and Henderson he or she will be well on their way to establishing their own personal education philosophy. In order for a homeschool teacher to reach their full potential and implement their educational philosophy successfully they should understand Bloom's Taxonomy.

Bloom's Taxonomy

Bloom's taxonomy is a classification system that consists of six levels:

1. Knowledge
2. Comprehension
3. Application
4. Analysis
5. Synthesis
6. Evaluation

Each of the six levels requires a more complex thought process and is very valuable for the homeschool teacher in the curriculum planning process. The goal of the teacher should be to

eventually move the student from beyond the knowledge level and achieve what is referred to as high order thinking. In order to understand this concept the Civil War can be used as an example.

When did the Civil War begin? Who was involved? These questions are on the knowledge level. Compare both sides' political strategies during the Civil War. This would be a comprehension level question. Identify the North's strategy in the Battle of Atlanta. This is an application question. What were the psychological effects on the Southern Army by burning Atlanta? This would fall under the analysis level. Predict what might have happened had Lincoln not been assassinated. This is a synthesis question. Do you believe the Civil War was avoidable or unavoidable? This is an evaluation question and falls under level six.

As evident by this Civil War example as the level increases the thought process changes and answers become more complex. One very important aspect of teaching is to encourage students to achieve high order thinking and this can be accomplished by understanding and utilizing Blooms Taxonomy (Fielstein & Phelps, 2001). One key element that sets homeschooling apart from public schooling is the opportunity for individualized learning. In order to take full advantage of individualized learning the teacher must be familiar with basic educational theories and the different learning styles.

Educational Theories & Learning Styles

Education theories can be time consuming and overwhelming, but it is important to understand how the child thinks and learns. An excellent starting point is to study the theories of Jean Piaget, Maria Montessori and Howard Gardner. There is a great deal of information about these individuals available and their ideas are very fascinating (Griffith, 1999). Students can normally be placed into one of three categories and they are visual, auditory and tactile learners.

It is very important for the homeschool teacher to discover their student's unique style. Visual learners learn by reading; they need charts, flashcards, workbooks and text books. Auditory learners learn by hearing, books should be read aloud while video and audio recordings are of the most value. Tactile learners learn by exploration and experimentation, they need lab equipment, games and computer equipment to excel (Lisenbach, 2006). No matter what style the learner is he or she will not succeed in school or in life without values and discipline.

Values

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report some shocking statistics concerning negative underage behavior. Individuals between the ages of 12 and 20 make up 11% of all the alcohol consumed in the United States. The *Monitoring the Future Survey* conducted by the National Institute on Drug Abuse estimated that 72% of high school seniors had tried alcohol and 21% had experimented with marijuana. The United States Departments of Education and Justice reported in 2003 that between the years 1998 to 2002, teachers were victims of 234,000 nonfatal crimes at school.

A very strong argument can be made that these statistics can be attributed to a lack of values and discipline among today's youth. Before a homeschool teacher can begin curriculum planning they must accept the fact that teaching values and discipline is as important as learning to read and write. By instilling values and discipline parents can help their children make wise decisions when it comes to the temptations of alcohol, drugs and sex. The second most popular reason families choose homeschooling is to teach their children moral values in a safe environment.

Eyre and Eyre (1993) have written extensively about how to teach children values and responsibility. Their theories are an excellent starting point for homeschool teachers. The authors believe that values are the most important factor in a child's happiness. By trial and error children will learn that immoral behavior leads to sadness.

The authors refer to the fall of the Roman Empire as a classic example of the lasting impact of immorality and a loss of values. For young children it is best to focus on 12 different values to include honesty, courage, peaceability, self-reliance, moderation, fidelity, loyalty, respect, love, unselfishness, kindness and justice. One value can be focused on each month and all values can be taught in one year. This is accomplished by the parent serving as a role model, using games, reading and telling stories. Values and discipline go hand and hand.

Discipline

Sears and Sears (1993), explain that discipline is not a reaction to bad behavior, but the encouragement of good behavior. The authors do not believe a parent can form a child's personality, but they can guide their child's personality development. There are seven principles which the homeschooling teacher can become familiar with as a starting point for managing discipline.

First, build a strong bond by connecting with the child early on in life. The foundation of good discipline is to connect to the child as early as possible. Second, study the child, know his or her needs and capabilities. Third, teach the child to respect authority, this is accomplished by nurturing and developing trust, not by using fear. Fourth, establish rules, create boundaries and maintain a sound structure. Fifth, children want limits, so obedience should be expected, tell the child what behaviors are unacceptable. This teaches the child self-control.

Sixth, be a role model in your child's life, children imitate what they see the most. Their attitude will depend a great deal on the attitude you display towards them. Seventh, cultivate a positive self-image and build your child's confidence. Once values are instilled and discipline is utilized to promote good behavior it will be time to prepare a homeschool curriculum.

Reading, Grammar, Spelling & Mathematics

Rupp (2000), has set the standard for subject matter and content for all grade levels in homeschooling. The information in this section is the basis for the preparation of a homeschool curriculum. Each individual grade will be given a short order critique .This is meant to be a basic fundamental overview. As stated earlier prekindergarten and kindergarten are not mandatory in the state of Texas, but this is an excellent time to bond with the child, instill values, promote discipline and give them an academic edge over their public school peers.

Prekindergarten

No written curriculum is necessary for this age group. Most learning will take place during the activities of the day. At this time in a child's life the teacher should read picture books, use play dough, finger paint, color with crayons and sidewalk chalk. By age four children should know the alphabet and be able to put most clothing on by themselves (Rupp, 2000).

Kindergarten

Children in this grade should learn the letters of the alphabet, the sounds of the letters and begin to translate them into simple spoken words. Rupp (2000), believes once children learn the alphabet and become familiar with picture books along with daily reading aloud from the parents the child will begin to develop reading skills. Children should be able to put pictures in proper

sequence. They should be able to properly hold a pencil and learn to write the alphabet. Children should recite poems and rhymes. For math they should be able to count to 31 and group objects into sets. They should be able to add and subtract number from one to 10. Identify the different types of money, and be able to say the days of the week and the months of the year. Identify squares, rectangles, triangles and circles.

Grade One

First graders should know consonants and vowel sounds. They should be able to identify root words and sound out one syllable words. Students should begin to read aloud reasonably well at this point. They should also be able to answer who, what, when, where and why after reading stories. They should understand what a table of contents is. First graders should be able to write the alphabet in both upper and lower case letters as well as correctly spell three and four letter words. They should be able to write the numbers one to 100 forward and backward. Be able to count to 100 using 2, 5 and 10. Know place values for 1, 10 and 100. Begin to solve basic addition problems and learn to tell time (Rupp, 2000).

Grade Two

Second graders should understand the rules of syllabication and know the most common abbreviations. Students at this age should understand plot, character and setting. They should be able to follow two step directions and be able to read silently and aloud. Students should practice writing letters and learn to keep a journal. They should also be able to identify nouns, verbs and adjectives. They should be able to write from 1 to 1000, round numbers to the nearest ten, and be introduced to multiplication (Rupp, 2000).

Grade Three

Third graders should be able to identify antonyms, synonyms and homophones. They should be able to locate specific information utilizing the table of contents, glossary and index. Students should know the difference between fiction, nonfiction, biography and autobiography as well as follow multistep instructions. At this grade the student should be exposed to cursive writing. Writing should be structured in logical paragraphs and they should be able to write a proper letter to include heading, salutation, body and closing. Mathematically third graders should learn times tables and be introduced to division (Rupp, 2000).

Grade Four

Fourth graders should master cursive hand writing and be introduced to the computer keyboard. They should be able to identify and explain story plots as well as comprehend figurative language. Students should be introduced to reference books, periodicals and the internet. They should be able to recognize nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and conjunctions. Mathematically students should know numbers up to millions, be able to round off to the nearest 10, 100, and 1000. They should also be introduced to Roman numerals as well as decimals and fractions (Rupp, 2000).

Grade Five

By the fifth grade students should be encouraged to read by themselves 30 minutes each day. They should be able to discuss the main ideas from stories and draw conclusions. It is recommended to introduce Shakespeare at this grade level. Students should be able to correct incomplete and run-on sentences and understand the proper use of prefixes and suffixes. They should know their numbers through the billions and be able to round off to the nearest 10, 100,

1000, and 10,000. They should be introduced to exponents as well as prime and composite numbers (Rupp, 2003).

Grade Six

By the sixth grade students should be able to discuss, debate and critique literature. They should expand their knowledge of the classics. Students should be introduced to a wide range of poetic forms. At this grade students should be able to write multiparagraph essays. Students should be able to translate fractions, decimals and percents. They should be able to add, subtract, and divide decimals. Sixth graders should be introduced to the metric system (Rupp, 2000).

Grade Seven

Students should continue to expand their knowledge of the classics to include the writings of Charles Dickens. They should be able to respond to ballads, sonnets, narrative poems and haiku. They should also be able to write their own short stories and poems. Prealgebra begins in the seventh grade (Rupp, 2000).

Grade Eight

By the eighth grade students should take field trips and be exposed to both audio and video recording of literacy materials. Students at this age should be introduced to research. They should also be able to identify and analyze all parts of a sentence . Eighth graders should be introduced to geometry (Rupp, 2000).

High School

The minimum graduation requirements for Texas public school students are as follows:

1. Four credits of language arts
2. Three credits of mathematics to include algebra one and geometry
3. Two credits of science
4. Two and one half credits of social studies
5. One half credit economics
6. One credit elective from history or geography
7. One and one half credit of physical education, band or athletic activity
8. One half credit health education
9. One credit technology
10. One credit fine arts
11. One half credit speech
12. Four and one half credits from electives

This information can be used as a guideline for developing your own personal homeschool graduation requirements (Texas Education Agency, 2011). Obviously, the biggest weakness in the public school curriculum is arts and foreign languages. In order to fill the required legal mandates, Texas homeschoolers should consider algebra in grade nine, geometry in grade ten, advanced algebra and trigonometry in grade eleven and calculus for grade twelve.

During the four years of high school students should write reports, term papers, projects and speeches. They should also be introduced to the different writing styles to include MLA and

APA. It is strongly recommended that high school students participate in the Great Books Program throughout high school(Ruff, 2000).

Civics

Homeschooling students in Texas must also learn civics. In order to learn about civics students should participate in civic responsibility. Homeschoolers should be actively involved in their community. This could range from breast cancer awareness to environmental cleanups such as the Texas adopts a highway program. A good civics course should answer seven questions. (A) Where are we headed as a society? (B) What kind of society do we want? (C) What does civil society mean to me? (D) What are democratic values? (E) What makes a citizen effective? (F) What are citizenship skills and competencies? (G) What can I do to be a better citizen (Gottfried & Robinson, 2002)? Now the homeschool teacher has a fundamental understanding of what the curriculum should consist of the next step is to discuss the actual record keeping.

Documenting the Curriculum

Once the courses are chosen for the specific grade levels, the teacher must choose their learning materials these may include textbooks, work books, computer programs or even packaged curricula. The items purchased should be tailored to the student's unique learning style which will normally be visual, auditory or tactile. In order to implement a curriculum, lesson plans need to be written and should consist of seven parts:

1. Subject area
2. Grade level
3. Description of the lesson
4. Objectives

5. Procedures for presenting the lesson
6. Materials utilized
7. Type of student assessments and evaluations

Lesson plans should be written at least one week in advance. The homeschool teacher should keep a daily log. They should also keep a yearly evaluation to include everything the student did for the academic year to go along with a traditional report card (Henderson, 1995).

Conclusion

The main reason parents choose to homeschool their children is because they believe they can give them a better quality education at home. Public schools are not designed to teach individuals. The public school system is designed to teach a mass number of students. Public school students are evaluated by a standardized testing system. It is obvious by examining the statistics from the Texas Comptroller's office this system is failing. Homeschooling accounts for 300,000 students in the state of Texas.

Homeschools are considered private schools and students do not have to take the Texas Assessment and Knowledge tests given in the public school system. Homeschoolers are not mandated by a specific set of graduation requirements or a mandatory 170 days of school attendance. However, they must study reading, writing, grammar mathematics and civics. It is safe to say even if these fundamental courses were not required by law most homeschooling students would learn them anyway.

Homeschooling offers families the flexibility to discover their student's specific learning style . From there, they can instill values, encourage positive discipline and tailor a curriculum specifically for that individual student. By doing this from prekindergarten through the 12th

grade homeschoolers should have an academic advantage over their public school peers. In the end, that is what homeschooling is all about, parents doing what they believe is best for their children so they can grow up to become well educated, productive members of adult society.

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