

# Homeschooling 101: What Is Homeschooling?

More parents are now choosing to homeschool instead of sending their children to public or private schools. Learn more about the homeschooling movement and what's involved when parents educate their kids at home.

By Jamie Martin

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## What Is Homeschooling?



### Why do parents choose to homeschool? In what regions are homeschools most popular?

Homeschooling is a progressive movement around the country and the world, in which parents choose to educate their children at home instead of sending them to a traditional public or private [school](#). Families choose to homeschool for a variety of reasons, including dissatisfaction with the educational options available, different religious beliefs or educational philosophies, and the belief that children are not progressing within the traditional school structure.

The homeschooling movement began growing in the 1970s, when some popular authors and researchers, such as John Holt and Dorothy and Raymond Moore, started writing about educational reform. They suggested homeschooling as an alternative educational option. According to the National Home Education Research Institute, there are now more than two million children being homeschooled in the U.S., with the

percentage rapidly increasing by 7 percent to 15 percent each year. Homeschooling is legal in all 50 states and in many foreign countries.

## **What are the requirements?**

Legal requirements for homeschooling in the U.S. vary from place to place. Some states have few or no requirements; others ask for portfolio reviews or standardized testing at certain intervals.

According to Holt, author of the best-selling book *Teach Your Own*, the most important thing parents need to homeschool their children is "to *like* them, enjoy their company, their physical presence, their energy, foolishness, and passion. They have to enjoy all their talk and questions, and enjoy equally trying to answer those questions." For the majority of parents who homeschool, the only prerequisite is the desire to do so, along with a dedication to the educational process.

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## **How Do Parents Get Started in Homeschooling?**

### **Do parents need an education degree or educational background?**

In almost all areas of the country, parents do not need an [education](#) degree to homeschool. Those with young children who have never attended a traditional classroom can begin a home education program when their child turns school age. At that time they will start adhering to the requirements in their particular state.

The process is slightly different for parents who have kids in school already and then decide to homeschool. They must first write a letter of withdrawal to the school principal or local superintendent. The letter should describe the parents' intent to remove a child from school to begin homeschooling. After the notification, parents continue to follow their district's specific guidelines.

### **Does the state fund any homeschool programs?**

Government-funded programs vary widely from state to state, but the majority of homeschooling families fund their children's studies themselves. In certain areas,

enrollment in a state-based program is optional. In that case, the state pays for specific resources in exchange for the homeschool meeting certain requirements to remain in the program.

### **Is there a network of parents who homeschool?**

Homeschoolers in most states and regions have access to an array of resources and social networks. In addition to forming co-ops, in which families group together to have classes, there are social events such as lectures, field trips, art classes, music instruction, sports, and playdates.

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## **What Are the Ways Parents Homeschool Kids?**

### **How are kids of different ages homeschooled together?**

Families that homeschool often combine certain subjects that are not necessarily grade- or age-specific, such as history, literature, and the arts. For example, children of various ages might study the same historical time period together, and then be given assignments that reflect specific age and ability. For studies in other subjects, such as math and reading, a homeschooling parent might tutor each child one-on-one to meet the student's individual needs. Meanwhile, depending on each child's age, the other students may be working on solo assignments or playing in another room.

### **What happens if the parent is sick?**

One of homeschooling's biggest advantages is the flexibility it offers. A sick parent can still ensure that the most essential aspects of the day's work get accomplished, providing instruction from bed if necessary. Group work that requires the sick parent's direct involvement may be cancelled for the day, but the parent could still supervise any individual work the child needs to do -- like penmanship or reading beside Mom in bed. In two-parent families, both parents can contribute according to their schedules.

### **What resources and curriculum do homeschooled kids use or follow? What kinds of subjects are taught?**

The rapid increase in the number of homeschoolers has resulted in a wide variety of available curricula and resources. Catalogs are filled with a plethora of options based on different educational philosophies, learning approaches, the amount of time a homeschool teacher should devote to daily instruction, and so on.

Subjects typically taught include the standard disciplines followed in a traditional school program as well as those that capitalize on the child's interests. In his best-selling book *The Element*, Ken Robinson writes that "the key to [educational] transformation is not to standardize education, but to personalize it, to build achievement on discovering the individual talents of each child, to put students in an environment where they want to learn and where they can naturally discover their true passions." A homeschooling atmosphere provides a natural setting in which parents can deliver an individualized method of instruction that matches the child's unique interests, ability, and learning style.

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## **What Is a Typical Homeschool Schedule?**

### **Do homeschoolers follow traditional school hours or do they structure days differently?**

Homeschoolers organize their days in whatever way works best for them. Many begin their schooling early in the morning, as in a traditional school, but some opt to make less distinction between "school" and "home." If a child gets excited about a science experiment before bed, some parents follow the child's enthusiasm to see where it leads -- this becomes part of the school day as well.

The educational philosophy a homeschooling family chooses will significantly influence the structure of their days. Most of us are familiar with only one style of education -- the traditional system of textbooks, desks in rows, and standardized testing -- but a wide array of educational philosophies exists. These methods include Waldorf, Montessori, Charlotte Mason, classical, leadership education, interest-led learning, unit study, and more. Homeschoolers have the freedom to blend ideas that best meet their children's needs.

## **Do homeschoolers follow the public school calendar year? Are homeschooled kids more behind or ahead than public school kids?**

Homeschoolers have complete freedom over the structure of their school year. Many follow the traditional school calendar, some school year-round, and others take off during specific weeks when they need breaks.

One of the advantages of homeschooling is that students can progress according to their own temperament and timetable. In a study done by the National Home Education Research Institute, homeschoolers had an average standardized test score in the 87th percentile, compared to the average score in the 50th percentile by children in public schools. They could, though, be several grades ahead in certain subjects but behind in others.

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## **How Do Homeschool Kids Move Ahead?**

### **Do homeschooled kids receive homework? How do they receive objective grades?**

In many ways homeschooling lessens the need for traditional [homework](#) often required by schools, particularly for elementary school-age kids. Without 20 or more children in one class, schoolwork can often be completed in a shorter time frame during the school day, eliminating the need for extra work afterward.

Acting as a one-on-one tutor, the parent-teacher constantly observes the children as they learn. This direct observation allows a parent to keep track of a child's proficiency in or struggles. Assignments are then tailored accordingly.

Homeschooled children, especially as they grow older, often attend more traditional classes, giving them experience in completing more typical homework assignments. Some public schools allow homeschoolers to attend certain classes that they choose. As they get older, homeschooled kids may enroll in community college classes and begin their college studies early.

Although grades in certain subjects are not always needed, many families do administer graded tests, some through computer programs. The homeschooling

environment allows children to progress at their own pace until they have mastered the necessary materials.

## **Do homeschooled kids need to take standardized or state-mandated tests in order to move to the next grade or to "graduate"? How long does homeschooling last?**

A number of states require standardized testing at specific intervals; others don't. Some families prefer to have their kids tested to ensure that the children are progressing academically. Other homeschoolers believe there is no need for such testing until a child reaches [high school](#).

Homeschooling can continue until a student graduates and enters college. Families may choose to homeschool throughout their children's [education](#), or they may do so for only a few years before transferring their kids back into a mainstream school system. Most colleges are beginning to take note of homeschooling's popularity. Even Ivy League universities have recruited and accepted homeschooled graduates.

*Jamie Martin homeschools her three children in the New England countryside and blogs at [SteadyMom.com](#) and [SimpleHomeschool.net](#). She is the author of *Steady Days: A Journey Toward Intentional, Professional Motherhood*.*

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**Rebecca Smith**

67 days ago

What organisations can support us in homeschooling? I have heard and read about the National Home Education Network ([www.nhen.org](http://www.nhen.org)) and others, but which one can be recommended?

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**Chris James**

115 days ago

Great article!! this article serves as a guideline for homeschooling parents and children. For homeschooling beginners this article serves a great set of information about homeschooling, how to start homeschooling and planning for the successful homeschooling, Great idea. As a homeschooling family from Ogburn Online School this is really useful for us.

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**Kathryn Dillow**

125 days ago

"Graduation" is determined by the parent. As a homeschooling parent, with children who are pursuing higher education, I look to the entrance requirements for the colleges and universities that they are interested in attending. Don't neglect the scholarship requirements either (2 vs 3 yrs of foreign language can make a difference). I also take a look at local state graduation requirements and decide if my children need the same subject areas or number of credits...I strongly encourage all homeschooling parents to do the same as they work with their high school student on a high school plan that will propel them forward in attaining life goals. Keep in mind each state does have compulsory attendance requirements...follow the state laws on how early they can complete school.

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**Bee AMóm**

177 days ago

Jamie,

What a great article you have here! You have captured and answered my questions in the order that I had them. Just one question, what marks the graduation from 'high school'? Is there a test? Meaning, when my girl enters college, how would I go about proving that she has received her unconventional schooling? Loved, loved, loved the info here. Thanks again lady!

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