

Homeschooling: Getting Started Part 1

By Melody Sheppard

Deciding to home school is a major decision for a family to make. Although the practice has been around for many years now, it is still not a familiar trend in our society. “Going to school” is the norm for American families, not schooling at home. Families who are contemplating home schooling can experience much apprehension about this decision. Questions arise from doubts within and from individuals without. *What about socialization? Will the child learn everything he needs to know? Am I qualified to do this? Is it legal? How do I begin?* These are just a sampling of questions that arise. This article is designed to answer some of these questions and give the parent confidence and encouragement to train their children at home.

What about socialization?

The word socialization has its roots in the word social. It is commonly understood that to be social one has the ability to relate to others of varying ages and interests in an amiable manner. When children are placed in a public school setting they relate to only a fraction of the population, their peer age group. Exposure to varying age groups is quite limited and thus socialization is narrow. We have all seen examples of children who cannot answer a simple question from an adult or do not know how to enjoy and play with a younger individual. However, children who are at home are not bound by rooms and peer age groups. These children are able to experience life outside the confines of age and interact with all ages. Their awareness of others and others’ needs is awakened. The mail carrier, who would normally go unnoticed becomes a person to whom one says a friendly word. The clerk at the store becomes someone to greet as the child enters. Not only does research show that home schooled children are often more appropriately socialized than their public school counterparts, but generally people who know home school families can attest that these children interact very well with others.

Will my child learn everything he/she needs to know?

Today, there is a multitude of curriculum choices available for home schooling families to choose from. This, coupled with the parents’ desire and commitment to provide a quality education, adds up to a successful formula. Guidelines are available from the WV State Education website to inform the parents of what is generally taught at each grade level. There are also excellent books such as Robin Scarlata’s books entitled, “What Your Child Needs to Know When” for each grade level.

Am I qualified to do this?

According to the 2003 changes in the WV State law, anyone with a high school diploma or equivalent may legally teach their children at home. There is research indicating the parent's level of education does not affect the learning of the child in home

education. God can accomplish wonderful things through dedicated and committed parents who are set on having their child succeed.

Is it legal?

CHEWV encourages you to know and understand the WV State law. Please visit the “WV Law” at our web site to see a full text of the law. Home schooling has been legal in WV since 1987. WV has progressed from a very restrictive state to one that has a law comparable to other states. Home schooling has become a viable option for many and one with many successes.

How do I do begin?

To help those who are investigating home schooling for the first time or those who are wanting to home school but are not sure how to get started, CHEWV has developed the following steps to getting started in home schooling. These steps are not necessarily meant to be sequential, but there are some steps you may want to accomplish before others. CHEWV also provides a workshop each year at our annual conference in May on “Getting Started in Home Schooling”. Please check our website for the dates and location.

1. Investigate the legality

- Know the requirements of the state law
- Deadline for submitting the annual Notice of Intent to your local county board office – prior to the beginning of the school year OR two weeks notice before removing a child from the public school
- Deadline for annual assessment report to the county school board – June 30

*It is recommended that all notices and reports be sent via registered/certified mail to alleviate any question as to when documentation arrived.

2. Prepare your child to learn

How does your child learn most easily?

Just as we all have individual personalities, we also have different learning styles. There are 3 basic learning styles.

1. Auditory – by hearing
2. Visual – by seeing
3. Kinesthetic – by doing

While each person may have a bent, that does not mean all learning should be focused toward this bent. Learning should come from all areas, so each area is developed fully within the child.

It is helpful to know your child’s learning style in choosing what kind of curriculum to use in your home school. If you have a kinesthetic learner, he will become frustrated with a curriculum that is primarily workbooks (visual).

- Teach Obedience – A child needs to understand that he/she must carry out mom’s instructions. Obtain child training books if help is needed.
- Develop Listening Skills – Teach the child to be attentive and listen completely to all instructions given before acting upon them.
- Develop an excitement for learning – Be enthusiastic, not apprehensive about learning together. Ask questions; pique interest; read extensively.

3. Set Priorities and Goals – Goals give you a road map, so you know where you are headed and don’t get side-tracked. With the added responsibility of schooling at home, it can be stressful to add or continue with some outside activities. Choose your priorities and schedule your day to meet those priorities.

- What goals do you want to accomplish by the end of the year?
 - a. subjects to cover
 - b. character issue to address
 - c. mastery of subjects to achieve

CHEWV believes parents are given a mandate by God to nurture, train and instruct their children. Since this is difficult to accomplish when children are absent from home the majority of the day, the logical place for this training is at home with parents. Our conviction to home school is derived from God. Our commitment to home school is grounded in His word. Our confidence is based on His promises.

July / Aug. 2004

Homeschooling: Getting Started Part II

By Melody Sheppard

A family’s decision to implement the biblical mandate to nurture, train and instruct their children at home must be based solidly on personal conviction and commitment, coupled with confidence in God’s wisdom and faithful provision. As noted in Part I, the first step for parents is to investigate the requirements of the state law. Then, as you lay some groundwork with regard to learning styles and training strategies, begin to set goals and priorities designed to meet your family’s needs.

STEP 4 - Read a Few Good Books

You can benefit tremendously by reading a few good books authored by other veteran home educators. These cover subjects such as encouragement in making the home schooling decision, child training and strengthening relationships with your child, record-keeping, what your child is expected to know at each grade level, and practical how-to books. CHEWV has put together a recommended book list of some of the best selections on these topics. We will soon be adding a section on our web site detailing these resources. Be sure to see the book review in this issue of the Banner on one of these books: The Heart of Homeschooling.

STEP 5 - Choose Your Curriculum

- What is easy to begin with? For the first year, a package curriculum may be the best choice. Usually obtained from one company or source, this type of curriculum provides all the subjects for each grade, together with printed teaching guidelines and prepared assignments. As confidence is gained, it is easy to add and replace curriculum by individual subject as you find things you like.
- How do I want my child to learn? Learning is broadly achieved through two different channels: rote or memory, and independent or guided exploration. While some curricula offer exposure to both approaches, there are those which specialize in just one. Carefully reading descriptions and/or reviews will help determine how the curriculum teaches.
- What does my child need to learn? There are several resources available to answer this question. . 1) Specialized books such as Robin Scarlata's "What to Teach your Child When" series. 2) Scope and Sequence materials from curriculum publishers. If you choose to purchase a package curriculum, the publisher has already done the work for you. 3) The WV Dept. of Education website contains a link to the WV Learning Objectives for each grade level.
- Where do I get curriculum? There are a variety of resources available for the purchase of curriculum. An Internet search is a quick and easy way to find catalogs from the companies which interest you. Wholesale house distributors such as Christian Book Distributors or Elijah Company offer a wide variety of curriculum. Curriculum can also be obtained at the library. If you have decided what subjects/areas you want to cover for the year, it is an easy matter to use resources at the library. This would especially work well with Science and History. Curriculum is also available at conferences, such as CHEWV's annual conference in May. With very accessible vendors and a wide variety of used curriculum, the conference is a great place to get ideas for curriculum from people who have been home schooling for a while.

STEP 6 – Schedule and Plan

- What books/ how many chapters/lessons do you plan to cover per month?

- When do you need special items such as library books, field trips, videos, etc., for projects and experiments?
- How many or what days will you teach?
 Examples: 9 month school year @ 180 days
 4 days a week, 1 free for errands/housework
 3 months school, 1 month off year-round

STEP 7 – Gather Supplies & Create a Home Learning Environment

- Everything from pens and pencils to papers to maps to books
- Organize in one area using cabinets, boxes, containers, shelves

STEP 8 – Record-keeping

While not as essential in the earlier grades, some kind of structured record-keeping becomes crucial in the high school years, unless you plan to evaluate your child's yearly progress with a portfolio (see next point). Maintaining clear, consistent records will help you evaluate what you've accomplished, where you've been, and what options to pursue. Records such as the following can prove helpful:

- Grades, or some system to assure mastery/progress of a subject/task/skill
- Books read
- Subjects/topics studied
- Extra-curricular activities/church responsibilities/community service, with awards or written assessments from leaders/instructors/facilitators

STEP 9 – Choose your method of annual assessment

Under West Virginia law, an annual assessment must be provided to your county school board by June 30th of each year. This can be accomplished through one of four different means.

- Standardized Testing
- Portfolio
- A form of evaluation agreed upon by the parent and county superintendent.
- Participate in the Public School Testing Program

Following is a brief description of the standardized testing and portfolio options.

1. Standardized Testing

Standardized tests may be obtained through a state group such as CHEWV or through a party authorized by the test publisher. They must be administered by properly qualified individuals either at locally-formed test centers or else privately. Costs include the price of the test, scoring and postage, plus any additional payment to a private tester or, in the case of a testing center, a facility fee. Every test administrator must meet the qualifications established by the publisher of the test. Standardized tests, according to the WV Code, may not be administered by a parent or guardian.

2. Portfolio Option

To be done right and to serve the purpose for which they are created, portfolios should ideally be compiled throughout the school year. Samples of the student's work in the subject areas of math, English, reading, science and social studies should be selected in order to clearly demonstrate the child's progress during the course of the year. From the outset, the portfolio reviewer, who must be a certified teacher, should be consulted as to:

- a. What he or she would like to see included in the portfolio
- b. The cost to review the portfolio
- c. The time needed to review the portfolio
- d. Any preferred format

3. A Form of Evaluation agreed upon by the parent and county superintendent

This option would certainly require advance contact with the county superintendent, preferably at the beginning of the school year. Any agreed form of evaluation should be in writing, like a contract, so no misunderstandings can occur at the end of the year.

4. Participate in the Public School Testing Program

The public school testing program in West Virginia is currently a mastery-based test developed specifically for the state, rather than a nationally normed achievement test that gives national percentile rankings. This test is also given in only three grades over the course of a student's school experience, which is problematic for homeschooling families who need to provide an annual assessment. Therefore, CHEWV does not recommend this assessment option.

STEP 10 – Seek out support and encouragement

Finding like-minded people with whom to share questions, challenges and progress can make all the difference in our willingness and even ability to stay the home schooling course. Beyond the affirmation of a spouse and/or extended family, networking with other home educators at the local, state and national level offers unique opportunities for friendship, fellowship, and information exchange.

Local Support Group

1. Regular contact with parents and families in your area
2. Personal sharing of experiences and creative ideas
3. Exposure to a greater variety of curriculum and other resources
4. Group activities, learning opportunities, positive social interaction

State Home Educators Organization

1. Essential to be kept informed of state legislative actions
2. Broader networking opportunities with focus on current issues
3. Conferences provided with practical helps and nationally-known speakers

4. Power in numbers

Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA)

1. Inexpensive legal help concerning home school issues
2. Ministry to others who require legal help
3. Expertise of trained professionals who are diligent to guard our freedoms

(Note: After a contact has been made by a public school entity, it's too late to join.)

In summary, while teaching your children at home can seem like an overwhelming endeavor, plenty of resources and support networks are available to help you carry out this commitment to the plan of God for your family. Even with these, it's important to always remember that any good thing accomplished is due to the grace and faithfulness of our Lord.

Sept./ Oct. 2004