



Homeschooling: the World is Your Classroom

By Judy Arnall

Congratulations! You are thinking about home educating one or more of your children. According to Alex Roslin, author of "The New Homeschooling" article in a recent issue of Today's Parent magazine, the number of homeschooled children in Canada is around 70,000 children or about 2% of the school-aged population. With the prevalence and tremendous growth of the popularity of online courses, which are not included in the statistics for home education, the trend of "home" education is growing exponentially.

Now that you have made a decision, the first step is to register with a school board for help, guidance and supervision. If you register before Sept 30, you will be eligible for funding, which is reimbursement for supplies, facility passes and lesson receipts. If you register after Sept 30th, you will have to either stay with your current school board and hopefully sign out their resources or switch boards and ask if they would supervise your home education program. You do not have to stay with your local school board and you can register with any of the other 20 school boards in the province that is willing to accept home education students. Private, public and non-resident boards all accept home education students and most offer Traditional and Blended/Aligned programs.

Step two is to decide what program the board offers that fits with your goals and education philosophy. If you are confident and want to do your own thing with minimal interference, you are best to register with a Traditional program. You will have full power to choose your resources, philosophy, and if/what curriculum you may want to use. You will plan, deliver and evaluate the program. You are fully accountable to Alberta Education. You must meet with your school board twice per year, once in the Fall to plan the year, and once in the Spring to self evaluate the year. Many self-directed students use this program because of its flexibility. The school board will not give marks or credits and will sign the certificate assuring that the child has met the Schedule of Learning Outcomes for Students Receiving Home Education Programs That Do Not Follow the Alberta Program of Study. The resource funding for this program is around \$750.00 per child per year.

If you want to recreate school-in-the-home and follow the Alberta Program of Studies pretty well as they do in school, using school curriculum, you might wish to consider online, face-to-face or correspondence courses on an Blended/Aligned program. A Blended program is anywhere from 50% - 100% school delivered with the remaining portion being parent delivered. If the Blended program is 100% school delivered, it is called Aligned. The parent is not responsible to the government or the school board on an Aligned program. The school is totally responsible for

planning, delivery and evaluation and therefore must follow the Alberta Program of Studies. A high school Blended program must be at least 20% parent delivered. Because the school boards receive close to full student funding for teaching the Blended/Aligned program, they tend to give higher resource funds to the parent which range anywhere from \$960.00 to \$1500.00 per child.

Once you have chosen a school board, you need to choose resources. I would suggest that for the first year, while you are discovering what works for you and your child, you buy only a library card and an internet connection. There are many good websites that offers free printable worksheets, videos and games for every grade, interest and topic. The library also offers textbooks for parents to try and if they don't work for your family, you have spent no money.

Lastly, seek support. No one goes it alone and everyone needs an informal mentor or group to ask questions and seek support. Take it a year at a time and remember that the first year is mostly to discover who your children are as learners and how best to live and learn together as a family. As a homeschooling (unschooling) parent of five children (two of whom have graduated) for the past 11 years, I can't begin to regale the tales of unfettered curiosity, learning, initiative, maturity, confidence and opportunities that homeschooling has created. I have not yet met even one parent who has regretted their decision. Happy Homeschooling!

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