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## Programs and Options in Homeschooling

Homeschooling parents have a wide array of programmatic options to choose from. Quite often, the family will participate in a variety of learning opportunities over the course of their homeschool career. As the children grow and change, their interests and needs change as well. Part of the homeschooling challenge is continually finding the right mix of educational experiences to create the optimal homeschool environment.

Parents and professionals must carefully examine each possible option. They will be looking at many factors to help them choose the best course of action:

- compatibility with the child's interests, skills and abilities
- compatibility with the parent's philosophy of education and child rearing
- compatibility with the child's other activities and commitments
- the variety of choices within that resource
- accessibility
- cost

## Public School or Charter School Programs

Independent Study Programs (ISPs) exist in many regular public schools and public charter schools in California. They vary widely in their quality, philosophy, logistics, requirements and the population served. These programs provide credentialed teachers to assist and support homeschooling families. Some programs require a set curriculum, while others allow more flexibility in a family's approach to learning. Some programs provide funds to families that offset the cost of homeschooling. Others offer classes, social opportunities or field trips. Some have on-site activities, and others send their teachers into the home.

The county office of education or the school district may have a listing of available programs. Local homeschooling leaders, who make it their business to know what is available to homeschoolers in their area, may be more knowledgeable about these programs. This option is very

appealing to some families who may be looking for assistance, support, or social opportunities. For others it is an unnecessary intrusion into family life, and a family may want to avoid such interference with homeschooling that is going well.

## Private Satellite Programs

Private homeschooling programs, known as private satellite programs or PSPs, offer a variety of services for a fee. These businesses may be conducted as a form of distance education, with a set curriculum and teacher available to give assignments and/or feedback on finished work. Or, a program may sell a complete or partial curriculum that families use independently. A program may take the form of giving minimal advice and support for a small fee, or offer documentation services (helping families create a transcript and diploma based on a body of knowledge and study). As businesses, these programs often advertise in homeschooling literature, websites, and at homeschooling fairs and conferences. They are often reviewed there, or discussed in on-line homeschooling forums to help consumers decide whether or not a private program is suitable for their family.

## Community Colleges

Homeschoolers of all ages enroll in community colleges. Each college has its own requirements as to who may enroll, at what age, cost, maximum number of units, etc. High school students usually do not have to pay for units, though there are registration fees. College classes may count as high school credit as well as college credit. Some homeschoolers transfer to universities based on their transcripts and credits at the community college, obviating the need for a high school diploma, or as an addition to homeschool records.

Some four-year universities offer similar opportunities for high school aged students through their regular program or extension classes. College can be used as enrichment or for basic subject matter. Some homeschoolers participate in study abroad programs, lab sciences, languages, basic core studies, arts and sports. There are as many ways to use the community college system as there are homeschoolers!

# On-line Learning

On-line learning is available to homeschoolers, just as it is to the general public. Many universities, as well as other kinds of private institutions (museums, private schools, institutes), offer on-line opportunities to learn new things, or study a subject in-depth. Often there are no age requirements or prerequisites. Levels of challenge vary from institution to institution. They offer classes, assignments, and instructor feedback. Universities such as U. of Nebraska at Lincoln, and U. of Arizona reach out to homeschoolers, advertising elementary, middle, high school and university programs.

# Community Resources

Adult Education, museums, clubs, municipal programs, scouts, 4-H, etc. can be a great resource for homeschoolers, offering a wide variety of courses and opportunities to choose from, as well as providing a place for children to socialize.

Homeschoolers may also find learning opportunities in foreign languages, writing, music, sciences, sports, auto mechanics, and so on. Homeschoolers are often able to bypass age regulations if they can prove they are capable of doing the work.

# Eclectic Homeschooling

Quite often, homeschoolers will pick and choose from a variety of resources available to them, putting together a combination of offerings tailored to the child's needs and interests. They might enjoy science at the Museum of Natural History, play water polo with a local club, hire a tutor for math, and take Sign Language at the community college. This may change from year to year as the child's interests mature and shift.

# No Program

There will be times in a child's educational career when no program at all is the best. Family resources, personal contacts and relationships, and community resources may satisfy the child's need to learn and grow. The parents usually know when it is necessary to look outside of the familiar by the child's dissatisfaction with the status quo.

It is essential that the choices made are ones that work for the whole family. A professional can be helpful in giving guidance, discovering available resources, providing unbiased external evaluations, and making recommendations that help a family to make connections, but the final choices are best left up to the parent and child.

**Author's Biography:** Nancy Friedland created and directed a charter school independent study program for 8 years, helping parents to homeschool and creating an educational program for children ages 5-14. She has a teaching credential and a degree in Psychology. Nancy is a mother to two children and homeschooled for 13 years.