



# Home School Program Handbook

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## **Congratulations on your child(ren)'s enrollment in Sierra Foothill Charter School's Home School Program!**

The Sierra Foothill Charter School (SFCS) Home School Program is different from others in the area. Our home school students are part of a vibrant and dynamic regular school environment. We celebrate families who intend to home school their children for the long term and those who are considering putting their child(ren) in our individualized learning "in-seat" classroom program. Alternatively, some of our families have children in both the in-seat classroom program and the home school program. SFCS is able to provide both options and our team wants to help you shape the best educational experience for your child(ren).

If you are new to homeschooling, prepare yourself and family for outstanding learning and growing. Teaching your children in your home requires a significant commitment from the whole family. In fact, schooling in the home becomes a defining element of what the family is and does. It sets new time priorities and schedules. It dominates at least one of the parent's daily life. It requires a certain financial commitment too. It necessitates an ongoing dedication to and involvement with learning new things, and this is not merely for the home-schooled student.

It is equally true that home based, personalized learning is not only very effective, but also tremendously rewarding for the entire family. Students gain a first rate education tailor made to their strengths and weaknesses. They may push ahead where they are able and slow down when there is need. Parents gain a growing awareness of their special privilege in knowing and teaching their child(ren).

Our job at Sierra Foothill Charter School is to provide you with the resources you need to accomplish the job you desire to do with excellence. Your family is given **guidance** from a professional, credentialed and experienced teacher. We also offer **enrichment activities** several times throughout the month in the school environment in which homeschooled students are welcome to participate, including, but not limited to band, the learning garden, art offerings, yoga, field trips and other special activities. In addition, we supply you with access to a wide variety of **curriculum and learning materials**.

This handbook is intended to give you an overview of how SFCS's home school program works. We hope you will find it useful. For questions left unanswered, please contact the SFCS Office or Home School Program Teacher, Andrea Contreras. Other homeschool parents can also be a great resource.

Please take some time to familiarize yourself with the contents of this handbook and keep it handy for future reference.

Welcome to Sierra Foothill Charter School! We look forward to working with your family.

# Home School Program Handbook

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# Part I

## Homeschooling with SFCS: Logistics

### Available Resources

Our school is located in Catheys Valley. We are a nonprofit public charter school in Mariposa County, but independent from Mariposa County Unified School District. All resources, including the charter school staff, are available in this central location.

#### **Resource List:**

##### **Codes:**

- \* Can be checked out or copied for home use.
- + Must stay on site, but can be used while at SFCS

##### **Equipment:**

- + copy machine.
- + binding machine
- + paper cutter

##### **Books:**

Many of the following items are available to loan out to you or copies can also be made. If we do not have what you need, we can often order requested items or provide digital copies as needed. Please make recommendations as to what would be helpful to you.

- \* textbooks and teacher's guides in all subject areas and grade levels
- \* computers and tablets
- \* supplementary materials (such as study guides and test books)
- \* special workbooks (such as handwriting and vocabulary)
- \* library books
- \* resource books (atlas, dictionary, etc.)
- \* homeschooling books and copies of articles about homeschooling
- \* curriculum resource books (literature units, science ideas, math drills, seasonal units, thematic units, black-line masters of maps, etc.)

##### **Learning Aids:**

- \* math manipulatives (clock face, base ten blocks, tangrams, attribute blocks, counters, Cuisineaire Rods, geometric solids, etc.)
- \* math equipment (digitor, meter sticks, measuring jars, balance, compasses, protractors, calculators, abacus, meter/yard wheel, etc.)
- \* science equipment (microscopes, dissection kits, scales, thermometers, etc.)

\* science supplies (litmus paper, microscope slides and coverslips, flasks, petri dishes, owl pellets, dissection animals, filter paper, and a few chemicals)

\* learning "games" and activities (puzzles, phonics games, flash cards, etc.)

### **Non consumable Items:**

You may take these home to assist with your instruction but these items must be returned when you are finished. You are responsible for the replacement costs of these items if lost or destroyed.

Examples of non-consumables items: Textbooks, electronic devices, rulers, yardsticks, meter sticks, scissors, individual chalkboards, protractors, compasses

### **Consumable Supplies:**

You are **not** responsible for the replacement cost of these items.

Examples of consumable supplies: Pencils, paper, workbooks, paint, glue, crayons, construction paper, lined paper, drawing paper

### **Available Services**

The regular services available from a traditional public school are available through Sierra Foothill Charter School, including:

- Health screening/scoliosis screening (7th & 8th Grade)
- Vision/hearing screening
- School pictures
- State mandated testing
- Special Education – referral, assessment, and services for eligible students

## What Requirements Do I Have to Fulfill?

1. You are responsible for the supervision of your student during normal school hours (8:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. on weekdays). If you are not available to supervise your child at that time, the person who is responsible for supervision of your student must sign the Charter Agreement.
2. You are responsible for the transportation of your student to Progress Meetings, special classes, and other activities unless otherwise arranged. You must have appropriate insurance coverage on your vehicle to transport students, even your own.
3. Students in grades 1 through 8 should be instructed for a **minimum** of *20 hours* per week (four hours daily). Kindergarten students should be instructed for *15 hours* weekly (three hours daily). All students should receive a minimum of *178 days* of instruction per school year that matches our school calendar. Unusually high absence rates are not acceptable.
4. Students should receive instruction in *all* the following subject areas (not required to cover all subject areas on a daily basis):
  - a. Language Arts (Reading, English Grammar, Writing, Spelling)
  - b. Mathematics
  - c. Science
  - d. Social Studies (Geography, History)
  - e. Fine Arts (Art, Drama, Dance, Music)
  - f. Physical Education (**at least 20 minutes daily is required**)
5. All students in 3rd through 8th grades are required to participate in annual computerized standardized test (Smarter Balanced Assessment).
6. All students TK through 8th grade are required to take school based assessments at the beginning and end of the school year (and upon parental request). These assessments help to set goals and demonstrate progress.
7. The Home School Coordinator, parent, home teacher and student must sign a written agreement at the beginning of enrollment.
8. The Home School Coordinator, home teacher, and student will work together to plan annual and interim goals.
9. The home teacher and student **must formally meet** with the Home School Coordinator **at least once every 20 teaching days**. This Progress Meeting will be scheduled by the home teacher and the Home School Coordinator.
10. **The home teacher must notify the school or Home School Coordinator prior to the meeting time if unable to make the scheduled Progress Meeting.** If there is no

contact, the missed meeting will be considered noncompliance. (See "Termination of Enrollment.")

11. Students are required to sign in at the front office when they come for any activity at school. This helps us to know who is on campus at any given time.
12. The home teacher must keep a file of all student work to share with the Home School Coordinator at the scheduled Progress Meeting. The Home School Coordinator will regularly review and maintain an assessment portfolio with work samples from all subject areas.
13. The home teacher must sign to verify minimum daily attendance on the Daily Attendance Sheet. **This sheet must be returned to the school at the end of each school month. Failure to return attendance sheets in a timely fashion is considered noncompliance.** (See "Termination of Enrollment.")
14. Parent will supply immunization and health reports (or waivers) upon request for student's cumulative file in a timely manner.
15. Sierra Foothill Charter School must be informed if your student has an active Individual Educational Program (IEP) from any other school prior to enrollment.
16. Families who leave Sierra Foothill Charter School prior to the end of the school year must schedule and participate in an Exit Evaluation before withdrawing from the school. **All books, materials, and equipment must be returned to the school at that time. Also, any lost or damaged items must be paid for at that time.**

### **How Do I Know What Is Happening and When?**

The Home School Coordinator sends out a weekly schedule, usually on Fridays, that outlines all of the events and activities that your child(ren) are welcome to attend for the following week.

Home School students who are not fully immunized in accordance with California State law may enroll in the SFCS program and work with the Home School Coordinator, but are not permitted to attend classroom-based instruction or school-based activities on campus. Home School students who are not fully immunized may participate in off-campus Home School Program activities. If you have questions about this policy, please contact the Home School Coordinator.

### **Field Trips**

Field trips are considered highly beneficial to the instructional program at Sierra Foothill Charter School whether they are organized officially by a classroom teacher or unofficially by the Home School Coordinator or home school families. Home School students are welcome and encouraged to participate in SFCS field trips identified for their grade level. When home school families or the Home School Coordinator organize their own field trips, other family members or friends are welcome to participate. If you want help with organizing a field trip, please let the Home School Coordinator know.

In all instances, the Home School Coordinator, the classroom teacher, or the office staff will give as much notice as possible about upcoming field trips and how home school families can participate. In return, home school families are expected to meet all deadlines so that appropriate information can be collected for planning purposes.

## **Meetings with the Home School Coordinator**

The reason for regular meetings with the Home School Coordinator is school accountability.

Initially, frequent visits (once a week) can help new homeschooling families adjust to the teaching and learning process. By meeting more often, the parent gets more support during what could be a difficult transition period. Once a family has established a regular routine and is more confident with homeschooling, official visits can be scheduled less frequently.

Attending a Progress Meeting a minimum of once every 20 school days is required. Parents and the Home School Coordinator can agree upon a date and time for each scheduled Progress Meeting. It is important that scheduled meetings are not missed.

Please have the following ready for each Progress Meeting:

1. Record of studies accomplished: This could be in the form of lesson plans, monthly journal, written list, or other records showing work completed.
2. All school work, tests, art projects, photos of projects or student activity, completed since the last meeting.
3. Plans for the near future: These can be written down or be ready to discuss them.
4. You and your student(s): We regularly discuss learning with the students and use informal questioning to assess student progress.

Also, Progress Meetings are a time to share any questions you may have, equipment or materials you need, and any news regarding your student.

## **What work samples should I bring?**

What the Home School Coordinator primarily needs to see is ***proof of progress***.

You should bring in all work from each subject area to the scheduled meeting with your Home School Coordinator. Together you can decide which samples will be kept for the student's portfolio.

Below are some *suggested* work samples from each subject which would be appropriate for the student portfolio.

### **Reading:**

A complete/corrected page from a reading workbook.

A complete/corrected test.

A book report.

Primary: A picture about something from the story (may include a sentence).

Middle: A short book report.

Intermediate: A short or long report, focusing on the entire story or book, or on a single element, such as plot, characters, setting, etc.

Other written or "artistic" response to a poem, short story, or book.



**Language Arts:**

A complete/corrected page from an English workbook/Language exercise book.

A written page of English work.

A complete/corrected test.

A sample of good writing, corrected.

Primary: A picture with a sentence explaining it.

Middle: Spelling or English sentences, a paragraph, a short letter, a story, or a short report.

Intermediate: A story, poem, report, letter, essay, etc., from any subject area.

**Social Studies:**

A complete/corrected page from a social studies/geography/history workbook, study guide, or map activities packet.

A complete/corrected test.

A labeled map.

A report, model, collection of pictures, chart, poster or other artistic response to a topic in social studies.

A written response to current events or activities.

**Mathematics:**

A complete/corrected page from a mathematics textbook or workbook.

A complete/corrected test.

A handwritten page of problems complete/corrected.

A paragraph which explains how to solve a specific mathematics problem.

**Science:**

A complete/corrected page from a science workbook or study guide.

A complete/corrected test.

A written description of an experiment.

A labeled picture or diagram of some aspect studied in science (e.g. plant or animal cell, parts of plant or flower, parts of an atom, types of levers, internal organs of humans or animals, growth chart, weather chart, ecosystem, water cycle, etc.)

A report, model, collection, or artistic response to a topic in science.

**Daily Attendance Accounting**

Attendance accounting is critical to the existence of our school. SFCS operating funds come from the attendance of children. We receive revenue based strictly on enrollment and days of attendance for each student.

Being a charter school where some students stay home to accomplish their education raises questions about actual attendance. How do we count attendance for children who do not physically attend a classroom? Our attendance for homeschooling students is based on two things: parental accounting of the required time spent in home instruction and the judgment of the Home School Coordinator.

## Keeping Attendance Records

Our attendance accounting system begins with the parent. You must keep track of how many regular school days per the school calendar you instructed your child for the minimum amount of time required or more (see "What Requirements Must I Fulfill?"). You will likely teach more than the required 178 school days. Many families teach on weekends and during holiday and summer breaks. However, **we can only count the days listed on the calendar as regular days of instruction for the school .**

SFCS does not receive revenue for days when a child has an "excused absence," such as an illness, a doctor's appointment, or funeral. If you do not teach your child because he/she is ill, you cannot count this as a day of instruction. If you take a regular school day off and do not accomplish the minimum instruction time for the day, you cannot count this as a day of instruction. The time when the instruction takes place does not have to be during the traditional time period. However, consistency is important, particularly with small children, when it comes to learning. So, adhering to a schedule will benefit participating children.

SFCS uses the Daily Attendance forms for attendance accounting. You will receive a packet of forms for each month of the school year. Procedures for completion include:

- 1. Mark for each day the child was instructed for at least the minimum amount of time in black or blue ink, then print and sign.**
- 2. Sign and mark absent if a student was not instructed on a regular school day.**
- 3. Return the attendance form to the school by the due date at the bottom of the form.**

If you forget to mail your form, the Home School Coordinator or the Office Manager will call with a reminder. If the form is lost, the Home School Coordinator will ask you to come in to fill out a duplicate form.

## **Termination of Enrollment**

Sierra Foothill Charter School has specific policies concerning student suspension and expulsion. These are outlined in the SFCS Parent/Guardian/Student Handbook. In addition, SFCS Home School Program will terminate a student's enrollment for the following reasons:

### **Non-compliance**

If the parent, home teacher, or student is not fulfilling the requirements of the written agreement.

Example – Does not provide necessary work samples.

Example - Missing scheduled meetings.

Example - Student not accomplishing reasonable amount of work.

Example - Attendance Sheet not returned by the due date.

**NOTE:** You will be given reasonable opportunities to correct any non-compliance issues.

### **Process for Termination of Agreement:**

1. The Sierra Foothill Charter School Administrator is empowered to terminate the enrollment of a student for the following reasons:
  - a. Non-compliance with the requirements stipulated in the written agreement.
  - b. Lack of success in the Home School Program.
  - c. Inappropriate placement due to special needs or other conditions.
2. The process leading to termination shall include:
  - a. Stage One:
    - (1) Notification, in writing, of non compliance status or concern sent by the charter teacher.
    - (2) Suggestions to rectify the situation are stated in the notification.
    - (3) Student is allowed to continue on probationary status.
    - (4) Administrator is apprised of the concerns and plans to rectify.
  - b. Stage Two
    - (1) If the non-compliance status or concern continues, a second written notice is sent, signed by the Home School Coordinator and the Principal/Superintendent.
    - (2) Requirements to rectify the situation are stated in the notification.
    - (3) Student is allowed to continue on probationary status.
    - (4) Notification of impending termination is given.
  - c. Stage Three
    - (1) Parent and student are notified of the student's termination of enrollment in Sierra Foothill Charter School.
    - (2) The student's school district of residence is notified of the student's non-enrolled status.
    - (3) Immediate return of materials to Sierra Foothill Charter school is required.
  - d. Parents may appeal decisions according to charter school procedures.

Other reasons for *voluntarily* termination of your student's enrollment in the home school program are:

**Inappropriate Placement:**

Example - Student is unhappy/unsuccessful in this educational structure. Although this condition can often be improved by working closely with the Home School Coordinator, the initial excitement of homeschooling sometimes wanes for a child who is lonely, works better with groups than as an individual, or cannot accept a parent as a teacher. This is more likely to occur with a child who has been happy in a traditional classroom.

Example - Parent does not have time to spend schooling one-on-one. Often the economic situation in the home requires that both parents work. Some self-motivated students can be successful in this situation, but most students are not. Also, a child cannot be left unattended during school time even if they are doing school work.

**Lack of Success:**

Although many people try homeschooling, not all are successful at it. Many people feel they are not doing a good job of homeschooling initially but they usually catch on in a few months. The Home School Coordinator will assist parents and allow time to adjust to the new role. If, after a reasonable time, the Home School Coordinator does not see success, he/she will recommend another educational option.

**Withdrawing Your Student: The Exit Evaluation**

Whether we are terminating your student's enrollment at SFCS or you are withdrawing your student from the home schooling program and placing him/her in the traditional classroom program, you must attend an exit evaluation. At the meeting your student will complete a final assessment. This allows the Home School Coordinator to complete all paperwork on the student before sending records to the classroom teacher or another school. All books, materials, and equipment must be turned in at the exit evaluation.

## Part II

# Teaching at Home: Guidelines

### What Do I Teach?

In response to this question another question needs to be added - *What Do You Want Your Child to Learn?* One of the features of a charter school is allowance for personalized learning. The home teacher, the student, and the Home School Coordinator can work together to determine annual goals. Knowing where you are going is the starting point. The home teacher and Home School Coordinator can then work together to formulate a basic plan to guide the student toward his/her annual goals.

### Writing Student Goals

When you first meet with the Home School Coordinator you will be writing semester goals for your student – what you want your student to accomplish by the end of the school year. These can be simple or detailed depending on the types of goals you want to set for your student.

#### **Some rules you should consider about annual goal writing:**

1. Make each goal measurable. Once you set a goal, think about how it can be measured. For example, a goal that requires a "Yes" or "No" when determining progress is not appropriate. This type of goal cannot be met unless it is done perfectly or completely. A measurable goal gives the student something to shoot for without dismissing the effort needed to get there. Real learning generally takes place on the way to obtaining goals.
2. Make goals obtainable for your child. Be realistic. Don't make goals too easy to obtain, but also don't put them so far above the student's ability that he/she becomes frustrated in attempting them. You should be flexible and the goals should be flexible too.
3. Academic goals aren't the only goals to consider. For instance, you may want your child to become more helpful in the home, more active in the community, more confident in public, etc. These are all good measurable goals that help to make a well-rounded individual. They are also describing skills that are learned and they can be part of your student's annual goals.

### Curriculum Philosophy and Instructional Planning:

Educational Philosophy of Sierra Foothill Charter School:

*"We believe that every child has an inquiring mind and an innate love of learning. Thus, the job of the school community, composed of teachers, staff, parents and guardians, is to facilitate and enable the learning process for each individual child, recognizing and respecting differences in learning styles and interests, while assuring that she or he is working towards meeting or exceeding the educational benchmarks set in currently adopted California standards."*

You are encouraged to follow the curriculum that is being taught in the SFCS classroom program in order to get ideas and inspiration from teachers. We also encourage you to come and participate regularly in the enrichment activities that we offer - Service Learning

Projects, Learning Garden, Technology Class, Field Trips, special events, guest speakers, etc.

The SFCS philosophy and curriculum focus on hands-on, inquiry based, individualized, place-based learning with emphasis on sustainable science, technology, engineering, arts and math. At SFCS, we would like to help you to homeschool your child(ren) so they have a lifelong love of learning. Understanding the academic needs of your child (ren) will help them reach their goals. For more information on planning, please see examples of three curriculum philosophies starting on page 13.

## **Grade Level Expectations**

Families new to homeschooling may have no idea where to begin. The Home School Coordinator can help. You will be provided with grade level objectives that are tied to California State Standards. The standards provide a starting place for recommended learning. However, if you wish to emphasize different learning objectives, that is your prerogative. The Home School Coordinator can help you go further in the curriculum or to slow down depending on the learning needs of your child.

You can view the California State Standards for all grade levels and subjects at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cc/>

***What if my child is above or below grade level in one or more subject areas?*** Many children are not exactly on grade level in all academic areas. That's one of the advantages of personalized education. You can address your student's *learning needs* not his/her *grade level*.

If your student is below grade level in a subject area, teach them the concepts that they need to learn. Teaching them at grade level may frustrate them and you. Learning doesn't happen when students are overly frustrated.

**There are three main levels in learning.**

1. **Review** takes place when a student understands the concept completely. A student must have some practice and rehearsal to learn a concept. However, by going over and over what they already know, they only get review, not new learning.

This is why one-on-one education works so well. You don't need to do a lot of review if your student understands the idea or concept. You can tell when you have reached this stage. It comes just after the student gets all or nearly all problems correct, gets all or nearly all spelling words correct, gets all or nearly all answers in science correct, etc. Moving forward with new learning helps to prevent the "I'm *bored!*" or "This is *boring!*" phase.

2. **Learning** takes place when a student encounters an idea or concept that they can begin to understand by using past experience, stored knowledge, or newly developed skills. Learning takes place in the student and you sometimes don't see it happen. That's why we have students perform things like practice and rehearsal. These elements of learning show that the learning is understood and can be applied. If the student does not get correct answers in practice and rehearsal, learning (or enough learning) didn't take place. When this occurs, it's time to back up and try the idea from a different approach.

We don't learn something by doing it once. Most of us need to practice new ideas and concepts and skills. Learning research says that it takes 8 to 16 rehearsals for most people to learn a new idea or skill. Research also shows that if you learn to do something incorrectly, it will take many more rehearsals of the correct learning to replace the incorrect learning. That is why it is so difficult to change a habit.

3. **Frustration** happens when a student is not ready to learn a new concept or idea because they do not have the background knowledge or skills to attempt it. No amount of rehearsal will help them learn it. They are simply not ready. You'll have to back up and prepare them by giving them the learning steps they are missing.

## How do I teach? - Three Different Approaches

Actually, how you teach is dependent upon at least two factors:

1. *How your child learns.* Each child has strengths and weaknesses with different styles of teaching. Some learn best from hands-on learning, some from listening, some from seeing or watching, and most learn from a combination of these approaches.
2. *What you feel comfortable with.* If you are not comfortable with active hands-on presentations, you probably won't offer them to your child. On the other hand, you may really love using videos, interesting illustrated books, or talking/interviewing people with knowledge.

The following are curriculum planning options that follow different philosophical approaches to teaching. There are three popular homeschool curriculum philosophies which many of our families espouse and which SFCS supports.

- A **traditional approach** is based on schedules, textbooks, workbooks, and tests.
- An **open curriculum approach** is based on the student needs or themes, eclectic materials, activities, and projects.
- A **classical approach** teaches the tools of learning to study any subject.

## Curriculum Philosophy 1: The Traditional Approach

Most home teachers just starting out in homeschooling tend to stick with what they know, similar to what they experienced as students themselves. They are familiar with the routine and the expected outcomes. This is typically a Traditional Approach. If you plan on using this type of curriculum here are some suggested procedures for planning your school year:

1. Get familiar with the California State Standards, textbooks, teacher guides, and additional materials.
2. You will have school for 180 days or 36 weeks. Instead of planning on a daily or weekly basis, start on a much broader plan. One good way to start is to look at monthly goals.
3. Make yourself a chart similar to the one below. Look at your calendar and on the first line under **Month #1** write in the dates for the first four complete weeks of school. Under **Month #2** write the dates for the next four complete weeks, etc.

Subject	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6	Month 7	Month 8	Month 9	Month 10
Reading										
Language Spelling										
Math										
Science										
Social Studies										
Fine Arts										
Physical Education										

4. Look at the *content* of each month. For instance, late October to early November is a good time to introduce materials concerning government and elections, or autumn and deciduous trees, or migration of animals and insects, etc.
5. Look at the seasons/weather for each month. For instance, it is easier to teach about plants in the early fall or late spring when there are lots of plants alive. It is difficult to study weather when we are having our normal sunshine. So, study weather in January and February when there will probably be clouds, rain or snow.
6. Eliminate. Many students are already familiar with some of the material in their textbooks. Some books have several chapters of review material. Decide what material you do *not* need to cover.
7. Decide what material you plan to study: the areas you *need* to cover and the areas you *want* to cover. If you want a rigid schedule, you should look for planning charts in teacher editions which show recommended time allotments for lessons and chapters. Always allow for some flexibility in your planning.
8. Some material lends itself to easy planning. Spelling, for instance, can be done a unit each week. That's four units each month. You can go from the front of the book to the back; you can skip around. Since the brain needs to rehearse or practice typically 8 to 16 times for learning to occur, spelling words should be rehearsed in various ways including writing them in the context of sentences.



9. Write in the chapters and units you plan to cover each month. For example, if there are twelve chapters in a book you can cover a chapter every three weeks. You do not need to complete all textbooks in order, from cover to cover. You can skip around unless concepts need to build on each other. Some exceptions are *history*, which often should be chronologically presented, *mathematics*, and *skills* like handwriting. Use a pencil when creating your plan because you will probably make changes to this plan as you get more familiar with your child's abilities, the material, and your new role.
10. Using what you have written make your lesson plan for the first week. See guidance below.

**RULES OF THUMB** for weekly lessons:

**Math:** 2 pages/day (with workbook, if more practice is needed)

**English:** One lesson/day (with workbook if more practice is needed); a minimum of one writing activity per week

**Spelling:** One unit per week with additional activities to practice words (such as sentence writing)

**Science:** 7th- 8th grades: One lesson/day (with study guide to apply knowledge); TK-6th grades: One topic/month

**Social Studies:** TK-3rd grades: One topic/month (use of literature books is recommended, see the Social Studies Literature Guide); 4th-8th grades: One chapter every two weeks (with study guide and map activities)

**Physical Education:** A minimum of 20 minutes per day is required. P.E. is more than just play. Large and small muscle activities, sport skills and rules, movement and exercise are all part of P.E. Topics in Health are also part of P.E.

**Fine Arts:** Plan for variety. Don't forget to include "art appreciation" in your curriculum. Try to schedule a minimum of one fine art activity or experience and one art appreciation lesson/week.

**Reading:** This is a very individual. How fast you move through a textbook will depend on the student's ability and stamina. Recommendation is that all children read both fiction and non fiction literature books, as many as possible. No less than one/week in 1st - 3rd grades, no less than two/month in 4th - 8th grades.

***Remember that these are all suggestions not written rules.***

## **Curriculum Philosophy 2: Open Curriculum**

The Open Curriculum approach is based on the philosophy that children are active learners – given the opportunity to learn, they will learn. What a child *wants* to learn about is very important in this approach. It is, in fact, the foundation of the curriculum. This does not mean that the child won't learn what is expected for his/her grade level.

This type of approach demands a flexible schedule and a wide variety of resources. When used in classrooms it is often presented in *centers*, areas dedicated to subjects (a math center, a language center, an art center, etc.). In each center items, books and worksheets are made available to students. The contents of the centers are changed at regular intervals. Students spend some time in each center and show that the time was spent productively through products: journals, oral reports, worksheets or other completed work.

When some home school families use open – or student led – curriculum neither the materials nor schedule are highly planned. When the child wants to learn about a topic, the parent provides opportunities, materials and experiences to facilitate the learning. For instance, if a child is interested in learning about bears, the parent will provide the child with books about bears (at all levels). The parent will guide the child into learning where bears live and what they eat. The child may see movies that include bears. The child will be encouraged to do art activities with a bear theme. A zoo may be visited so that the child can see bears and compare them to other animals. The child may imitate bear walks and sounds. The child may make a poster or illustration of a bear. The child may write to individuals or organizations for more information on bears and laws which do or do not protect them.

There are activities in every area of the curriculum included above. Parents who choose this type of curriculum can be accountable by keeping a journal or a list and samples of work. The Home School Coordinator may use informal inventories to determine if your student is attaining minimum objectives for ability, age, or grade level.

### **Curriculum Philosophy 3: Classical Approach**

This approach originated in Ancient Greece and has survived to modern times. It focuses on teaching the tools of learning to study any subject. These tools are known as the *Trivium* (*grammar, logic, and rhetoric* [the creative use of language]), followed by the study of the *Quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music). This approach was modernized by the English writer Dorothy Sayers, who modified it into a system which teaches these subjects concurrently, but divided into phases that correspond to the three stages of the *Trivium* begun at strategic points in the mental development of the child. Thus the child's elementary years are considered the *grammar* stage in which the rules of language are emphasized. The child's middle school years are considered the *logic* stage in which the formal rules of logic are emphasized. In other words the student is taught how to think logically and critically. The high school years are considered the *rhetoric* stage in which the emphasis is placed on persuasive communication, both oral and written.

So putting this all together, it works something like this. As young children, students are taught the formal rules of language using much memorization at a time when memorization is easy for them. In the middle years the student takes the formal structure that they have already learned and now begin to apply rules of logic so that they may connect and reason with what they know. This stage is intentionally placed during the young teenage years because it fits well with the adolescent's desire to question and argue. During the final stage, the high school age student pulls all that has been gained from the grammar and rhetoric stages and now practices and perfects the ability to communicate one's excellent thinking.

Throughout the student's classical education, a special emphasis is placed upon the study of history and upon the reading, questioning and responding to classical literature. Mrs. Sayers wrote, "...that although we often succeed in teaching our pupils 'subjects,' we fail lamentably on the whole in teaching them how to think: they learn everything, except the art of learning... For the sole true end of education is simply this: to teach men how to learn for themselves; and whatever instruction fails to do this is effort spent in vain."

## **So What Works Best?**

What works best is what works for you and your child. Most often, some combination of the three approaches are used.

Some homeschool parents choose to use textbooks. Quite often the textbooks become the starting point for learning. When the information in the book stops, other types of learning can be pursued. Most parents combine textbook curriculum with thematic teaching. Although this is similar to what is described in *Open Curriculum*, it is not always student initiated. Parents often have some topics that they would like to teach that may not be covered in the textbooks or may not be covered sufficiently in the textbooks.

Much thematic learning is done on a family basis, not just for individual students. Home teachers find out some of the topics their students are interested in studying, think of topics they would like to teach, and find other areas of interest in textbooks by looking through the school's available resources and on the internet. It is usually best to plan ahead when considering teaching a theme. It often takes time to find all the resources you may need to make this type of teaching successful.

Sometimes themes are based on literature. For instance, reading *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* may lead to studying about Missouri, the Mississippi River, floods, levies, caves, superstitions, early medicine, house paint/white wash, slavery, American history in the mid-1800s, geography of the Midwest, Samuel Clemens, or any number of other related topics. You can see that this topic can be used in the curriculum areas of language arts (English, writing, reading, spelling), social studies (history, geography, current events), science (biology, physical science, earth science), and the fine arts (music, art, drama, dance). With a little stretch, you could also incorporate math (measurement, problem solving) and physical education.

Instead of stretching to make your themes fit each curriculum area, enjoy it in all the areas where it fits easily and plan lessons from textbooks in the other curriculum areas. Quite often it is difficult to make math a part of a theme. You can bring in some activities that use math, but don't get frustrated trying to make your curriculum match a theme perfectly.

## **Every Subject Every Day?**

Life is not perfect. You are not expected to devise a plan that allows you to cover all curriculum areas every day. It is required that your student is instructed in the basics of reading, writing,

and mathematics. We want your child(ren) to stay physically fit. We hope that you will regularly introduce your child(ren) to science, social studies, and the arts. Your personal requirements are based on the annual goals you will help to write for your child(ren).

There are creative ways to cover all curricular areas. For instance, learning centers can be used effectively in the home instruction environment. Usually, the centers are limited to two or three areas of the curriculum. Sometimes the "subject" of the center changes to meet new needs. For instance, a reading center is quite common, and we recommend it when you have children who do not like to read. In an area away from the television, you might provide several books and magazines, a comfortable chair or big pillow, good lighting, maybe a tape recorder or cd player to read aloud into or for listening to books on tape. If you have no problem with reading, but can't get a child to write, maybe a writing center with some colorful stationary or some plain paper bound in interesting book covers may spark interest.

When you are teaching new concepts to your students it is very important to present them one-on-one. When you need your student to review or practice something (like writing, spelling words, or math facts) or when you would like them to experiment (like in art and science), a center is a good way to provide for this type of learning.

Another way of instructing in all areas without working in every subject every day is to alternate subjects. Many families will work on the three Rs daily, while focusing on science one week and social studies the next. Some use Fridays as fine arts and physical education day. The main idea is to provide a well-rounded education for your children.

For further questions and ideas, please consult with the Home School Teacher.