



Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

Planning Guide

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The Journey Begins

Homeschooling is a journey. As Proverbs 16:9 says, “A man’s heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps.” And that is the situation many of us find ourselves in as home educators. Not necessarily planning on it, we find our steps directed toward this journey. This direction, we believe, is from the LORD. For one reason or another, we have come to understand that homeschooling is a good work that we are being called to walk in (Ephesians 2). And now we need a plan of attack. How will we prepare for this long journey?

We are blessed to live in a time where there are seemingly unlimited resources available to homeschoolers. But that benefit comes with a cost. The cost is that there is so much material, it is overwhelming. There are so many different ideas that it is confusing. It is hard to tell what is good and what is not. What should you buy, and what do you need to pass up? What will work for your child? Understanding a little background will prepare you to evaluate the various recommendations you will encounter as you begin your homeschooling journey.

1) Planning is Indispensable

Homeschool can be frustrating for someone who likes to plan because it is obvious from the start that we will never get everything right. That’s OK! The Lord will direct your steps as you pursue your plan. General Dwight D. Eisenhower once said “In preparing for battle, I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable.” And so it is with homeschooling. Those who plan will always do better than those who do not, even if we rarely end up sticking to the original plan.

The best place to start a plan is the wise counsel of others. In this guide, we draw on an accumulation of advice from many who have been where we are going. Proverbs 15:22 says “Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established.” Proverbs 1:5 says “A wise man will hear and will increase learning. And a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels.” Not all questions of homeschooling methods are a matter of right and wrong, but careful plans established by understanding the issues and applying good advice are the safest bet.

All of us are fallible, and not all the advice you will read or hear on homeschooling will be good counsel. 1 Thessalonians 5:21 says “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” We must be especially wary to avoid attractive philosophies and approaches that conflict with the standard of excellence God has called us to. Scripture is our ultimate guide to evaluating the advice of others so that, in the end, we can say to the LORD, “Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counselors,” Psalms 119:24. Homeschooling is an exciting journey, a long journey. You need a plan. You need God’s wisdom.



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2) Legal Matters

First, make sure you are following the letter of the law. Home School Legal Defense maintains a site on the laws and rules in all states with templates and advice for HSLDA members.

<http://www.hslda.org/laws/default.asp> In addition, state and local homeschool advocacy and support groups may also maintain lists of rules. For example, Texas Homeschool Coalition (THSC) makes a withdrawal letter template available for free (step 6 of their “Seven Easy Steps to Begin” list. <http://www.thsc.org/getting-started/> Texas requires that the school district must be notified if your child is moving in or out of their system, but if you wish to homeschool a child not in their records (kindergartener or new resident), you are free to do so, just as you are free to send them to a private school without notifying the public school district. Although there is no formal oversight of homeschools, Texas like most other jurisdictions, requires that certain subjects be taught.

Although homeschooling is an increasingly accepted and legal practice, we recommend that you join a homeschool legal defense association – either a state-specific organization such as THSC (for Texas only) or HSLDA, a national organization. There are still cases of bureaucrats overstepping their bounds, especially overzealous new administrators. Sometimes they are not fully aware of the laws in place that protect homeschoolers and other times they are prejudiced against homeschooling in general. You may never need legal services; but if you do, you will be glad to have a homeschooling advocate ready and waiting.

The Yearly Planning Process

In this section, we will walk through the process of planning an entire year of homeschooling. To start with, don't be anxious. You've taught your child many things, and a love for learning is just one more.

Throughout the planning steps, we refer to various Elijah Academy [Planning Forms](#). Rather than linking to them individually, the forms page is linked here for reference. These are just formats for organizing information that might be helpful to your planning process. They were designed by experienced homeschoolers to avoid problems and assist parents with communication as they start the year.

1) Family Mission

An important, and often neglected part of school planning is goal setting. This can be a time for serious reflection and prayerful consideration of each child. Elijah Academy forms invite parents to set a **Family Mission Statement** for their homeschool and also to write down specific, measurable **Goal Sheet** for each student in various domains of learning.

As a fun exercise, we suggest that you and your spouse work through the **Tasks of Homeschool** form



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at the start of each school year to consider what the division of duties should look like for your family at that time. Amos 3:3 says “Can two walk together unless they be agreed?”

It is in that spirit that the Elijah Academy “Tasks of Homeschooling” form was built. This form is designed to outline the division of homeschool duties. Consider whether you and your spouse are on the same page in all areas, and what you might need to do differently to be obedient to God’s instructions for husbands and wives in your homeschooling family. The bulk of the homeschooling work may typically fall on the wife; but there are many ways in which a husband can help ease this burden and, in so doing, fulfill this command from God to honor your wife. (1 Peter 3:7)

2) Academic Calendar

Before getting into the detailed planning, the first thing to do is plan the **School Year Calendar**. Be sure you build in some flexibility. The normal school year is four nine-week quarters – 36 weeks in all. Many curricula are organized around this time period, for example, many textbooks have exactly 18 or 36 chapters. You will probably fall into these time blocks for one thing or another. The 36 week school year can be a core organizing backbone whether or not some subjects and educational activities continue through the summer.

Plan a week of free time in between each quarter, and schedule out what breaks you will take for holidays. Also, if you are going to check in with nationally normed standardized tests to see how your results compare to the norm, that will need a week of time. See the **Testing and Grading** section of our [Homeschool Handbook](#).

3) Yearly Curriculum Plan

The yearly **Curriculum Plan** is so important we have an entire **Curriculum Guide** dedicated to the topic with specific recommendations for sources of quality curriculum materials in each subject (Section 2 of our [Homeschool Handbook](#)). It is one of the required [K-8 Recordkeeping Forms](#). The curriculum plan takes on a 4-year format for a [High School Program](#). In K-8th grade a broad range of subjects is necessary, but in High School a credit-based approach is necessary. The normal high school program only requires one credit of Physical Education, for example. So sticking with the normal K-8th grade routine with PE as a yearly subject is not necessary.

Our Curriculum Guide is intended to be a reference for this. The **Curriculum Plan** form leads toward a broad course of education - an essentialist philosophy of introducing the student to the accumulated body of knowledge in each traditional academic subject. The suggestion is to diligently design a course plan by comparing curriculum options and referencing standard educational milestones for appropriate sequence, pace, and intensity.



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Equally important is that the approach is implemented correctly. Not every curriculum design fits into every homeschool dynamic. If you choose a curriculum that requires more time to implement than the time you have available, it will fail. It may even be the best curriculum scope and sequence, but it will fail at implementation if you do not have the time to teach it as it was intended. Abeka Mathematics, for example, has a very rigorous scope and sequence in early elementary school; however, the teacher's manual includes instructions such as "Write on the chalkboard while your students are working on..." This has to be translated to work in homeschool. If you have the patience and time, this can work for you; but you should understand what you are getting into. For phonics instruction we highly recommend the "Ordinary Parent's Guide to Teaching Reading" partly because the scope is complete and the method is phonics-based, but also because the scripted approach (something the parent reads, then something the student reads), fits well in the typical homeschool.

Lastly, plan for the possibility of change. As you go along, pay close attention to how your child works with the curriculum, and be prepared to supplement standard curriculum to challenge your child and complement inadequate curriculum scopes. Be ready to scrap ideas and change to methods that work better to meet your educational objectives.

4) Recordkeeping Plan

Your homeschool records should easily prove that an adequate education is being given to each child. These records may be asked for when applying for scholarships, colleges, employment, in the case of legal allegations, when moving children back into a school system, or moving from one state to another. As in any school system, these records should include backup for all grades and for attendance. Attendance is the easy part. It is important to maintain records as you go along. You will never remember the dates of attendance otherwise.

As our Testing and Grading Guide points out, clear course goals should naturally translate into measureable progress against course goals (i.e. grades). A record required by Elijah Academy is the top-level metric of course grades. But these grades will be supported by specific documentation of the graded components. A homeschool course will generate content that is back-up to those top-level averages in each subject. This may be

- List of books and topics covered for each subject
- Written work (reports, essays, answers to study questions)
- Workbooks, Lap Books, Map Work
- Tests / Quizzes
- Rubrics
- Corrected Assignments
- Data from computerized courses



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- List of Field Trips
- List of participation, performances, projects
- List of activities and interests

For all of this content, it is helpful to put an overall organizational system in place for student records. This could include hanging file folders, binders, and accordion file boxes in which to save course records that back up your grade average calculations and provide demonstrable evidence for work completed. And don't forget pictures of school days and other memorabilia!

Elijah Academy Recordkeeping forms and a binder of backup records are sufficient for keeping track of the above items. Another option is homeschool planning software. This category of software has the additional benefit of assisting with planning and automatically generating daily and weekly work lists for students based on inputs of the curriculum into the planning side of the system. Some Homeschool Tracking Software solutions are:

- Homeschool Tracker,
- EduTrack,
- Homeschool Easy Records,
- Homeschool Helper App,
- Homeschool Skedtrack (online subscription)
- Scholaric (online subscription),and
- Homeschool Planet (online subscription)

The value of these software packages is that lesson plans are converted into records as the work is marked complete, and the remaining lessons can be rescheduled if the need arises. Assignment sheets can be automatically printed. The drawback to using these systems is that they take some time to set up, and the value may not offset that time.

5) Semester/Quarter Planning

The **Curriculum Plan** is a good first step toward academic excellence, but it needs to be implemented well. The detailed curriculum planning can start with time set aside each day throughout the summer months, but should also continue with some float and flexibility built in throughout the school year. Some curriculums, especially reading-intensive approaches are best planned quarterly. Take a week off between each period. Take time each Saturday morning or Sunday afternoon to organize your thoughts for the week. The important part is to build flexibility into your calendar, and then set simple and consistent systems and routines that are conducive to homeschool success. There are 36 weeks in a normal school year (four, nine-week quarters). There's plenty of time to fit that in plus a little flexibility and extra fun into a 52 week year.

You don't have to start and stop with the public school system. In fact, you could even start the new



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school year a week later than the public school does just for fun.

6) Weekly and Daily Lesson Plans

Weekly and daily lesson plans are of paramount importance in a homeschool. Our [Planning Forms](#) page has many time-tested formats for Weekly Lesson Plan and Daily Assignment Sheet. You might like one or the other. If you invested time setting up a Homeschool Tracking Software system, this is where it can pay dividends printing out lesson plans. The Weekly Activity Plan and Daily Activity Plan formats can help with scheduling and logistics.

Use technology to your advantage in communicating and coordinating with your spouse on your weekly routine. The Department of Defense has done research called “power to the edge” on the use of collaborative platforms for frontline operations. The results illustrate how technology can be used to create agile, self-synchronizing frontline operations sharing data on collaborative platforms.

You might be saying “what does THAT have to with homeschool?” Well, God’s got an army and a strategic plan. You and your spouse are tactical units with commands to work together and advance the kingdom. God cares about your homeschool. To assist each other, it will be helpful to set up consistent weekly routines and systems. Digital calendars shared between you and your spouse might enable more efficient communications. Home calendars can be loaded merged onto the same devices with your spouse’s calendar from work. Google Drive, Drop Box and other cloud computing services give you ample free storage so that even large amounts of data files and records can sync to multiple devices and used to collaborate and share information.

7) Daily Diligence

The last key to success in homeschool planning is daily diligence to implement routines that protect the learning environment and assist the students in becoming independent learners. If you can give each student a desk, that is best. Homeschooling can be done at the kitchen table, but a dedicated place for work to be accomplished is a good habit. Another good habit is clearing off the school desks each evening so that, in the morning, work can be started fresh without clutter. This is what is required in a classroom setting, and it works.

Giving each child a task list may take some time if you aren’t using a homeschool planning software, but it can really pay dividends with older children working independently through their assignments. It may be simplifying to think in terms of the 3 R’s - reading writing and arithmetic. Perhaps the school day is 2 hours for reading (Bible, Literature, History, Science, etc.), 2 hours for math, and 1 hour for writing (reports, essays, spelling, vocabulary, grammar, penmanship, keyboarding)... and then some art and music.



Other Preparations

Other helpful preparations include gaining background knowledge on the philosophies of education and curriculum approaches. Other sections of this “Getting Started” guide address these topics. In addition, we highly recommend that homeschool parents attend a homeschool fair for a time of encouragement and also to consider what materials and resources are out there. Last, but not least, the impact of homeschooling on your family logistics is astonishing. Homeschooling is truly a lifestyle. Considering how to simplify your lifestyle and habits may be of significant value on your homeschooling journey.

1) Attend a Homeschool Fairs

Those newly considering homeschooling, may be asking: "What is a homeschool fair?" Well, a homeschool fair is a local event that various local organizations put on in convention centers and other venues throughout the nation. No matter where you live, there is probably a homeschool fair that comes to a city close to you. These events are put on by various homeschool advocacy groups and/or homeschool associations. Typically, these are non-profit organizations that coordinate a venue supported by volunteers for the benefit of homeschoolers. They are usually two different events sharing the same venue:

First, you need to know that a homeschool fair is a trade show. There's a giant "exhibit hall" of vendors hawking their wares. Now, most of these vendors do what they do out of love as well as for a living. So there are no high-pressure salesmen to avoid. However, if you don't already have a plan, the exhibit hall can be overwhelming. Everybody has a great product to sell, and they would love to explain why theirs is the best! I've seen many an overwhelmed homeschool mom with too much new information to sort through crying in the hallway outside these exhibit halls. Often, there are vendor discounts for those buying at the fair, so that and the cost of materials itself is enough to overwhelm the unprepared. But we've found that vendor discounts can well-offset the price of admission. The fairs usually go two or three days around a weekend. We like to "scope things out" the first day of a fair, and make all our purchases on a second trip.

The exhibit hall is a great opportunity to talk to vendors in person about their curriculums, look at their materials for future years, and also make those final decisions on which vendor best fits your philosophy of education and homeschool dynamic. Some parents select from a single source of material for all subjects, but most parents pick and choose from multiple vendors to put together a program with curriculum materials from various sources for different subjects. In either case, it is good to see what is out there and available, and to help you select the best materials for your homeschool. Not all of the vendors are curriculum publishers - there are also opportunities to buy various supplies, new and used books of various kinds, and other educational materials.



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But there is more to a homeschool fair than just the "exhibit hall." These events typically have a lineup of conference speakers selected to serve and encourage the local homeschool community. There will be sessions by veteran homeschoolers for those new to homeschooling, or for those with new high school students, and for many other topics of interest. Other sessions are led by exhibit hall vendors, and they may present general topics that serve the purpose of promoting their philosophy and explaining their materials in more depth than they can do in the exhibit hall.

At the Dallas Homeschool Fair, there are 240 vendors, and over 80 conference sessions. Of course, you can't see them all. You will have to review the program and exhibitors and make a plan in advance! This fair has been coordinated since 1985 by an organization called Hearth and Home Ministries, and has a distinctly Christian atmosphere. The website is www.homeschoolbookfair.com. The price is \$20 per adult and \$5 per child, but if you sign up online before the April 15th deadline there is an opportunity to buy adult tickets at a reduced price or to volunteer two hours of time in lieu of the admissions fee.

2) Consider Family Logistics

One aspect of homeschooling that many are not prepared for is the impact on family life and free time to accomplish things that used to get done. That's right, when homeschooling is in full swing, not everything will get done when you want it to get done. The impact to time is twofold: (1) General reduction in amount of overall time available for necessary tasks, and (2) an element of unpredictability with the schedule.

The first problem, that of general time constraints, has to be solved with better, more efficient systems if it is to be solved at all. First of all, many successful homeschools have gotten rid of programmed media and all distractions to learning. That's a no-brainer time savings there. It may be hard to swallow the next one, but disposable plates and cups are about the cheapest way to buy a half hour of time after dinner each day. Online ordering of products is another method. Services such as Amazon Prime come with free delivery and you may find that helpful for emergency books, furnace filters, toothpicks – you might be surprised where e-commerce will take you. Produce co-ops and warehouse stores become standard protocol. You just might not have time to shop around for deals, so finding simple solutions that work is a good practice.

Another way to reduce the time strain is to simplify systems. Morning chores for the kids can be put on a chart, index cards, or simply memorized (the "morning five" are: brush hair, brush teeth, make bed, get dressed, and clean room). Even a five year old can remember that. So if you find yourselves constantly saying the same thing over and over – that's a bad process ripe for improvement. Every process is perfectly designed for the results it produces. So if you don't like the results, you have to change the process! Dads, this is where you can really help. Sometimes it's hard for a homeschool Mom who is engulfed in the details of the process to see just how much she is being taken advantage



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of and run ragged. Your kids should not be running your wife ragged. Rather, you should set in place some systems that make it easy for her to wear them out each and every day.

Lastly, there is the unpredictability of homeschool. Academic learning might run long one day, and things that were planned to get done can't get done. The only way to prepare for unpredictability is to build in some flexibility to your schedule. That includes your daily schedule, weekly routine, and monthly activities.

Solutions to unpredictability include advanced meal preparations (frozen meals). A package of ground beef, sautéed with some onions can be a base for any number of recipes. There's no reason you can't make that ahead of time and put it in freezer bags. Convenience foods and take-out are an expense, but they can buy you out of an inflexible situation.

The only other logistical advice we can think of is to have grace, humility, and forgiveness. Your spouse may not always have time or energy to meet your expectations. Do not let Satan use homeschooling to drive a wedge between husband and wife! Consider the division of labor in the household objectively, and ask God to help you come up with systems and solutions that work.