

Message from the Superintendent

Welcome to our school! We look forward to collaborating with you to create a personalized learning environment for your child. The 2008-2009 school year is Eleanor Roosevelt Community Learning Center's eighth year of operation. The school has undergone tremendous changes in the years since it opened its doors. To those of you who are new to the school, here is a recap of how we have gotten to where we are now.

Eleanor Roosevelt charter school began as a dream of five moms who were home schooling their own children on their own. These five women got together in my living room and brainstormed ideas for our dream school. After much hard work, the Tulare County Office of Education granted a charter to the founders in May 2001. The charter school opened in August of 2001 for students in grades K-8 in an old jewelry store in downtown Exeter. The school moved to its present site in 2002 and opened a small satellite campus in Porterville in 2006. In addition to the expansion of the physical facilities, the school has also faced tremendous growth in the number of students it served. The school began with 21 students and ended its first year with 50 students. The following year the school enrolled 100 students. The charter was amended in 2002 to add grades 9-12. This past year we served 275 students in grades K-12 and graduated our second class of seniors.

This incredible rate of growth has been a great challenge to the school's staff. In the seven years since the school's inception, the climate in the education community has changed to one of standards and accountability. The reality is that Eleanor Roosevelt is a public school that is funded with public money. The founders of Eleanor Roosevelt charter were dedicated homeschooling parents who very much understood the desire of parents to make decisions about their child's education. This philosophy has not changed within our school. But because we are a public school funded with public money, this philosophy has had to be balanced with the mandates of the California Department of Education.

Enrollment in Eleanor Roosevelt's educational program is voluntary; no parent is forced to join a charter school in order to legally homeschool in California. And the Supreme Court has upheld this right- no parent should be forced to send their child to a public school. But if a parent does voluntarily enroll their child in a public school program they are also agreeing that they will cooperate with the school's requirements. In order to receive public money we are required to follow the state grade level standards, participate in the STAR and CAHSEE testing programs, and show that the students enrolled in our school are scoring as well or better than students in the surrounding school districts.

In the years that Eleanor Roosevelt has been in operation our test scores have dropped and dropped again until we are now rated a "1" on a scale of 1-10 with "1" being the lowest rating. This has required that we make certain changes within our school to insure that all students are learning. We understand that not all parents are happy with the changes, however, if we do not institute these changes there is a very real possibility that when our charter comes up for renewal in 2010 it will not be renewed. We would rather ask parents to give up some freedom than to lose our school altogether. **The continued existence of the school requires everyone's cooperation.**

Enrollment

Enrollment in Eleanor Roosevelt Community Learning Center is **strictly voluntary**. You **cannot** be assigned to this school. Both the parent and student sign a semester-by-semester enrollment agreement that shows their voluntary enrollment and states the rights and responsibilities of the student, parent, and the charter teacher, hereafter called the "Education Coordinator". We want to emphasize that although a

parent is usually the primary teacher in most homeschooling situations, another responsible adult can be responsible for instruction. It's important to tell your Education Coordinator if another adult is your child's primary teacher so that person can be involved in planning the child's instruction.

Another option used by some of our parents is team teaching or cooperative teaching. This involves the combined efforts of two or more families. Sometimes they come together for one or two subject areas alternating locations once each week or every other week. Sometimes each parent covers a different subject area and the students go to different homes two or three days each week. Sometimes parents and students work together in one home. If you are going to use cooperative teaching, let us know.

Meetings with Your Education Coordinator

You are required to come to your scheduled Progress Meeting. Because of the number of families we serve we must adhere to a strict schedule. You and your Education Coordinator will agree upon a day and time for the Progress Meeting. **It is very important that you do not miss a scheduled meeting. Please call the school if you need to reschedule. The school's policy on missed meetings is as follows:**

“Parents will honor the appointment time with their Education Coordinator by arriving on time and with the appropriate materials. If an emergency arises and the parent is unable to attend the meeting, parents are to call at least an hour in advance of the meeting time to reschedule the appointment. Parents who arrive more than 10 minutes late for their appointment or have inadequate time available to carry out a full meeting risk having their appointment rescheduled. Meetings in which the parent does not submit an adequate amount of student work will be rescheduled. Parents are allowed no more than three (3) rescheduled appointments per semester. Parents who exceed the maximum number of rescheduled meetings will be referred to the Superintendent to evaluate the student's continued enrollment in the charter school.”

Progress Meeting Checklist

Please bring the following to your scheduled Progress Meeting:

- **The completed and signed Attendance Sheet.**
- **All work completed by your child during this Progress Meeting period.** All work samples should include the child's name, the date the work was completed, evidence that the work was corrected and evaluated by the parent/teacher.
- **Supplemental instruction log.** This could include a record of field trips, videos, computer instruction time, conversations about current events, etc.
- **Plans for the following progress period.**

Portfolios

In addition to the above requirements, we are requiring that parents submit four samples of student's work. This is valuable documentation for our school and an additional way to show that our students are learning.

Each Portfolio will include:

- Any benchmark assessments completed during the school year
- Four reflection packets:
Each packet should include:
 - 1 piece of student work (can be written, art, computer disk, picture, etc)
 - 1 student reflection
 - 1 parent reflection

K-8

Each of the core subjects (Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies) must be covered in a reflection. However, the student and parent together may choose in which order each subject will be addressed .

9-12

Each of the core subjects (Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies) must be covered in a reflection. However, if a High School student is not taking a particular core subject during the current school year (i.e. math) the student may work with the Education Coordinator to choose an alternative subject to cover in his/her reflection packet.

Portfolio submission due dates: October 10, 2008, December 19, 2008, March 13, 2009, May 22, 2009.

Legal Requirements

These are the legalities that we must require:

1. The Education Coordinator, parent and student must **sign a written agreement** when the student is initially enrolled and at the beginning of each semester.
2. The parent and student must meet with their Education Coordinator **at least once every four weeks**. More frequent meetings or mandatory class attendance may be required.
3. The State of California mandates that students Kindergarten should receive 15 hours of instruction weekly (3 hours daily); students in grades 1 through 8 should receive a minimum of 24 hours per week (4 hours daily) and grades 9 through 12 should receive a minimum of 35 hours per week for at least 175 days per school year.
4. Parents must bring all completed work to the progress meeting. The Education Coordinator will take samples from each of the curriculum areas to place in the student's work folder.
5. The parent must notify **the ERCLC or the Education Coordinator prior to the meeting** time (as much notice as possible) if they are unable to make the scheduled meeting.

6. The parent must sign to verify minimum daily attendance on the monthly attendance sheet. **This sheet must be returned to ERCLC when you meet with your Education Coordinator.**
7. The parent is responsible for all material checked out of ERCLC. Lost and damaged materials must be reimbursed.
8. The parent must return materials checked out from Educational Resource Services in a timely manner.
9. Students must participate in annual standardized testing.
10. Families who leave ERCLC prior to the end of the school year must schedule and participate in an **exit meeting** before withdrawing from the school. ***All books, materials, and equipment must be returned to ERCLC at that time or they will be referred to Collections.***

Parent Concerns

We want to hear from you. The staff tries very hard to create an environment that meets the need of a very diverse group of people. We have families in our school that range from liberal to conservative and from devout Christians to fervent atheists. It is as difficult a task to try to create an atmosphere where we can come together to create a unique learning environment for all of our children. It is impossible to please everyone all of the time. What we would like to ask of you is that if you have a concern that you come and talk to a staff member. Bringing your concerns directly to Anna and Klara will get you the fastest action but we recognize that this may not always feel comfortable. We would like to request, however, that you not stop and confront us in the hall. If you can, make an appointment to discuss your concern. At the least, ask for some time to discuss your concern. This will prevent the administrators from feeling like moving targets and will also increase the likelihood that your concern will receive the consideration it deserves. If you do not feel that you can bring your concern to Anna or Klara, talk with your Education Coordinator. We are all human and inevitably we will make mistakes. This is especially true when trying to please a diverse group of people. It is always more comfortable to be with people who are like-minded. At the same time, much personal growth can occur when one is open to hearing an opposing point of view. The action that is least likely to result in a positive outcome is to take your concern to other parents and for a group to confront a staff member in a way that creates defensiveness. It is one thing to get perspective on an issue by discussing it with another parent. It is damaging to our school culture, however, when parents allow a concern to fester and grow rather than bringing it out for discussion with staff. Sometimes the disagreement is a lack of perspective on the part of the parent or on the part of the staff. Healthy relationships form when we foster open communication and respect for each other. Remember, this school was not created to make money or to control people. It was formed out of a desire to create a school that supports and nourishes all of us. May we all work toward that end.

Board Meetings

One of the best ways to stay informed is to attend the meetings of our school board. The board of directors consists of seven members: three community members, three parents, and a member selected by the Tulare County Office of Education (currently a parent). Meetings are held at the school on the second Tuesday of the month, usually beginning at 3:00. An agenda is posted at the school and on our web site 72 hours prior to the board meeting. These meetings are open to the public and there is an opportunity to address the board at the beginning of each board meeting.

Safety

There has been some confusion in the past with some families about how much freedom they have when they come onto the school campus. Because Eleanor Roosevelt charter is part of the public school system, is a different environment that just having families get together at someone's house or at the park. When you bring your child onto the school campus, you must abide by the rules set down by the school. This may mean that a staff member might intervene and redirect your child if they are doing something inappropriate. For some homeschooling families, it may feel uncomfortable to have another adult speak to their child when they are with them. We will make every effort to be respectful of you as the parent but the bottom line is that because we are a public school there just isn't the same freedom as there is in your home. For example, we have certain areas of the school grounds that are "off limits". This is partly for supervision purposes and partly because there are still areas of the school grounds which have not been cleared of hazards.

We also want to remind all parents that, we make every effort to make our school a safe environment, do not assume that nothing can happen to your child. Supervision has been a big problem. We have students on campus ranging in age from 0-18 as well as parents and other adults. This is a unique situation. There are myriad benefits to having children interact with people of all ages. At the same time, it can also make them vulnerable. **Therefore, your children must be supervised by an adult at all times when they are on the school grounds. This includes times when you are meeting with your Education Coordinator.** We understand that it might be difficult for you to meet and supervise your children, especially families with many children. Many of our Ed Coordinators are willing to meet at the tables by the play structure or in the Parent Lounge. Another possibility is to bring another adult with you to campus. Please work with us on this. The last thing any of us want is to make the front page of the Times-Delta newspaper under the headline "Unsupervised Child at Charter School Injured"!

Accountability

One area that is different from homeschooling on one's own is in the area of accountability for learning. Giving parents and their children freedom to learn in their own way has been especially difficult as the climate of our society has moved to an "accountability" model. When the California legislature passed the Charter Schools Act in 1992, the intent was to allow schools to open that would be freed from the restrictions of the Education Code. The idea was to encourage schools to use innovative educational models to improve learning and teaching. Over the years, charter schools have come under increasing regulation. The challenge that continues for Eleanor Roosevelt is to operate as a public school receiving public money and, at the same time, preserve the innovative program that allows parents to tailor the instruction program to meet the individual needs of the child and his/her family. A further challenge is to preserve parental freedom while striving to structure a program that promotes academic excellence. The school's founders crafted the following vision statement which continues to serve as the cornerstone of the charter school's philosophy:

“Eleanor Roosevelt Community Learning Center is dedicated to supporting and empowering parents and students to take an active role in designing and implementing an educational program that ignites a passion for learning and stimulates the intellectual, emotional and physical health of the child.”

In practice, this means that the charter school's board and staff respect the individual preferences of each family while providing an overall structure for the school program. There are two main points to this statement:

- *active engagement of the parents and students, and,*

- *a passion for learning*

Let's examine each of these in turn. The underlying element that determines academic excellence is the active engagement of the parents and students. Simply having a child out of school at home is not homeschooling. A homeschooling parent that is so busy that they regularly leave their child to entertain his/her self in front of the T.V. or computer or sent him/her off to complete school assignments on their own does not create a quality environment for the child. Personal interaction is the key to any successful learning environment. This is true whether the parent is working through a textbook with their child, working together in the garden, or engaged in a meaningful conversation. This is also true whether the child is at home with a parent or sitting in a traditional classroom. Homeschooling differs from independent study programs in this respect. In an independent study program students are given their assignments by a teacher once a week and are sent off on their own to complete them. In a homeschooling program, parents take an "active role".

The second part of the vision statement involves the goal of creating "a passion for learning". We want to challenge you to think about "school" in a way that you may not have thought of it before. What images does the word "school" bring up for you? For most of us, "school" conjures up images of rows of desks with a teacher up in front of the class lecturing. Or perhaps its workbook pages or recess or Let those images fall away. Your new school is the world. There are no bells, no walls, no limits.

For some of you this may seem very exciting. And for others it may seem very frightening. All of a sudden your child is being given back to you and you get to make up the rules. We all have different comfort levels. Consider how this idea of "the world is my school" feels to you. If the traditional books and materials feel comforting to you, by all means use them. Just remember that there is also the world outside your door...!

Einstein said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge." Please do not think that simply getting all the way through a textbook and filling in all the blanks is a good education. Sometimes putting the book down and spending some time in the "real" world can give a young person better learning experiences than any textbook can. And the younger the child, the more important those experiences are. The following pages contain a story that has within a little of what sparks some of those passion for learning moments. Hopefully you will find the sparkle too as you read through it.

Grade Level Standards and What Do I Teach?

Now that you are all inspired, let's discuss the GRADE LEVEL STANDARDS. How does one look at the list of grade level standards and consider how to ignite a "passion for learning"? Here is where the real work begins.

The State of California Department of Education has identified specific knowledge and skills that they believe that each student should learn in each year of school. It is these Standards on which students are testing during the STAR testing period each spring.

Beginning in the 2007-08 school year, each Education Coordinator has been assigned specific areas of responsibility. Each of the single subject EC's is responsible for their subject area e.g., math, science, history or language arts. Each multiple subjects credentialed EC's is responsible for specific grade levels: K-2, 3-4, 5-6 and 7-8. The EC assigned to the specific subject or grade levels is responsible for knowing the Grade Level Standards for the subject or grade levels and identifying materials and activities that address each Standard. Although almost all of the textbooks that the school has available

to parents is aligned with the Grade Level Standards, we want to emphasize that it is vitally important that student experience concrete activities to which they can attach their “book learning”.

Although many parents find that the Grade Level Standards provide a welcome guide to their child’s learning program, other parents find that it inhibits their freedom for following their child’s interests. Our attitude is that we encourage parents to use the Standards as a roadmap while allowing the learning journey to unfold. Here is an example:

You notice that you’re the math Standards for your child who is in second grade list basic fractions as one of the skills to be covered. While cutting apples, you point out what a “half” is and maybe even show you child what that would look like if written in mathematical language ($\frac{1}{2}$). While cooking together, you point out the $\frac{1}{2}$ cup measurement and talk about how that is different from one whole cup or $\frac{1}{3}$ cup. When working in the math book, you relate back to the cooking experience, “remember when we were measuring”... In other words, use the Standards to highlight events in your child’s daily life and plan activities that expose them to concepts covered in the Standards. Be creative, have fun and your child will fly through those STAR tests.

Concerns of Others

If you are new to homeschooling you will be surprised at the number of people who will suddenly be concerned about your decision to educate your children at home. It’s an especially difficult situation if you are the parent of a child who is a late reader or in some other way takes their own unique path. The best advice for this is to surround yourself regularly with supportive people, talk about your concerns with others in similar situations, and look to others whose homeschooled children are grown and successful. The longer I have worked with homeschooled children, the more I believe that they come to us as little seeds, each different from the rest. Our job is to provide fertile ground, water and fertilize them and watch each unique flower unfold. When I first started homeschooling my own children, I thought that the Homeschool Association’s slogan was just a cute saying. Now I know it is based in truth-

Trust the Children.

Grade Level Expectations

What if my child is above or below grade level in one or more subject areas? Relax, you have a normal child! Every person has areas of strength and areas where the subject matter is more challenging. This is what makes us unique individuals. Consider this story from Chicken Soup for the Soul:

The Animal School

Once upon a time, the animals decided they must do something heroic to meet the problems of “a new world.” So they organized a school.

They adopted a curriculum consisting of running, climbing, swimming and flying. To make it easier to administer the curriculum, all the animals took all the subjects.

The duck was excellent in swimming, in fact better than his instructor, but he made only passing grades in flying and was very poor in running. Since he was slow in running, he had to stay after school and also drop swimming in order to practice running. This was kept up until his webbed feet were badly worn and he was only average in swimming. But average was acceptable in school, so nobody worried about that except the duck.

The rabbit started at the top of the class in running, but had a nervous breakdown because of so much make-up work in swimming.

The squirrel was excellent in climbing until he developed frustration in the flying class where his teacher had him start from the ground up instead of from the treetop down. He also developed a “Charlie horse” from overexertion and then got a C in climbing and a D in running.

The eagle was a problem child and was disciplined severely. In the climbing class he beat all the others to the top of the tree, but insisted on using his own way to get there.

At the end of the year, an abnormal eel that could swim exceedingly well, and also run, climb and fly a little, had the highest average and was elected valedictorian.

The prairie dogs stayed out of school and fought the tax levy because the administration would not add digging and burrowing to the curriculum. They apprenticed their children to a badger and later joined the groundhogs and gophers to start a successful private school.

Does this fable have a moral?

Individualized Instruction

As far as curriculum is concerned, one of the advantages of individualized education is that you can address your child’s *learning needs* not his/her *grade level*. If your student is “below grade level” in a subject, teach them the concepts they need to learn. Don’t try to teach them at grade level. It will only frustrate them and you. *Learning* doesn’t happen when students are frustrated.

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. This isn’t really learning.

This is why one-on-one education works so well. You don’t need a lot of review if your child understands the idea or concept. You can tell when you’ve reached this stage. It comes just after the child gets all spelling words correct, gets all answers in science correct, etc.- and it comes just before the phrase “I’m bored!” or “This is boring!”

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 did not 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 it takes 8 to 16 rehearsals for most people to learn a new idea or skill. Research 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 rehearsals will help them learn it. They are simply not ready. You’ll have to back up and prepare them by giving them what they are missing.

With both the standards and grade level expectations, remember to look at them as a guide, not a mandate. Each child is unique and that uniqueness needs to be respected. We wouldn’t line up all children in a grade level, measure their height and say “You’re the right height, you’re too short, or you’re too tall”. In the same respect we recognize that there is a wide variation in the growth of

children's cognitive abilities. This becomes more true the younger the child. For instance, we know that children learn to read sometime between the ages of four and ten. Once they learn to read, it is impossible to tell which child learned to read first. A child can be forced to learn to read before he/she is developmentally ready. But often the result of forcing reading or mathematical concepts too early can result in a child who never learns to find joy in the subject. Later is better, regardless of current popular trends.

How Do I Teach the Curriculum?

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, some from listening, some learn from seeing or watching.
2. What you feel comfortable with.

Curriculum Planning

If your child is just becoming school age, you've already been homeschooling since birth. You simply will carry on the games and activities you have been doing and pay close attention to those "teachable moments". Learning happens best when the concepts are part of your child's everyday life. Take advantage of those counting opportunities in the fruits and vegetable section of the grocery store. Read and enjoy books together. Model reading and writing for your child. Go places together. Play lots of games together. "School" at this age will look a lot like life.

It is also important to note that **you do not need to have all of the answers**. Not knowing everything is not a sign of weakness. You will be teaching your child one of the most important lessons he/she can learn when you model how an adult accesses information. Where do you go to get answers to questions? Who do you call? Homeschooling can become a most enjoyable journey when you become lifelong learners together.

If your child has been in formal school, expect that they will go through a decompression period as they adjust to the idea of homeschooling. The best way to start is little by little. Begin with one or two subjects a day, like reading and science. Get comfortable with these two subjects, and then think about what you will add.

Over the next month or more, gradually bring yourself up to as many subjects as you and your child feel comfortable. If you haven't offered all subject areas, consider teaching one or two one semester and a different one or two the following semester. You'll have lots of time to cover everything your child will learn this year. In fact, because you are teaching one-on-one, you'll go well beyond what is normally presented in a classroom setting. Remember if you ever have questions about what you should be teaching, ask your Education Coordinator.

Curriculum Planning: Three Popular Options

Here are three popular homeschool curriculum philosophies used by homeschooling families. The first is an open curriculum based on the student's needs, or themes, eclectic materials, activities and projects. The second is a version of a completely open 'non-curriculum' known as unschooling. And then there is the more traditional approach, a curriculum based on schedules, textbooks, workbooks and tests, what we call "school at home".

Open Curriculum

This 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 curriculum. It is, in fact, the foundation of the curriculum. This does not mean that the child will not learn what is expected for his/her grade level.

This type of curriculum 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 journals, oral reports, worksheets, or other completed work.

When some homeschoolers use open- or student led- curriculum neither the materials nor schedule are planned. When the child wants to learn about a subject the parent provides opportunities, materials and experiences to facilitate the learning. For instance, if a child is interested in learning about bears the parents 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 will be visited so that the child can see bears and compare them to other animals. The child will probably imitate bear walks and sounds. The child may make a life size poster of a bear. The child may write to individuals and organizations for more information on bears and laws which do or do not protect them. And so on...

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. Your Education Coordinator may use informal inventories to determine if your child is attaining minimum objectives for ability, age or grade level.

Unschooling

The use of the term “unschooling” is credited to John Holt, considered a leader in the “homeschooling movement”. Holt’s books that espouse his educational philosophy are widely read. His bimonthly magazine, *Growing Without Schooling*, the first publication for homeschooling families, is very popular. Because of this, there are many homeschooling families who “label” themselves as unschoolers. It would seem that one could look at how these families homeschool and give a definition of unschooling but it doesn’t work like that. There are numerous interpretations of the unschooling philosophy.

To some, unschooling means no formally imposed learning processes. It’s the totally natural learning of children in their environment. Children learn by their own experiences. When children ask questions, the questions are answered. If they seek further knowledge they are given opportunities to gain that knowledge. If they can be given the opportunity to gain knowledge through first-hand experiences, it is best- better than reading about it in a book or watching a documentary- but the most important aspect is to give the child the knowledge they seek. This does not mean that the child is left on their own and not expected to do anything. It is vitally important that there be significant adult mentors in the child’s life.

The other side of this coin in this interpretation is the most difficult for many “traditionally educated” persons to grasp. If the child is not interested in a topic or a subject don’t force it on them. Therefore, if the child is not interested in learning to read you don’t worry about it. You continue to provide reading experiences and encouragement. It’s the same with math, science, social studies, art, etc. All of these subjects seem to naturally be introduced to the child in daily routine. The parents model reading, mathematics, writing, etc. At some point in time the child may suddenly say, “I’d like to: know how to

read...know how to work with numbers...know how to write letters...know all about stars...know how to play baseball...know about different countries.” Unschoolers are betting that they will or that they just won’t need to.

Many families who consider themselves unschoolers usually are a combination of unschooler and open curriculum. These folks still feel the need to introduce the child to experiences which may or may not naturally occur in their environment. They may wait longer to teach the child to read but they will want them to read to become self-sufficient learners. They will probably introduce mathematics they give the child opportunities to use math in real-life experiences. When they teach the child to write it will be used for everyday tasks and meaningful writing- not book reports or creative stories. They will go to a lot of museums, galleries, shows, fairs, and other places and events that provide enrichment. There are countless other versions of “unschooler”. Some who use textbooks part of the time or for one or two subjects, some who use no textbooks, but countless forms of reference materials. Our charter school supports parents in the freedom to make these choices for their children (within the parameters of charter school law).

The Traditional Approach

Most parents just starting out in homeschooling tend to stick with what they know, that being the traditional education similar to what they themselves experienced as students.

They are familiar with the routine and the expected outcomes. If you plan on using this type of curriculum here are some suggested procedures for planning your school year:

1. Get familiar with the Grade Level Objectives, textbooks, teacher guides and additional materials (workbooks, reinforcement activities, test).
2. You will have school for 175 days or 35 weeks. Instead of planning on a daily or monthly basis, start on a much broader plan. One good way is to look at monthly goals.
3. Make yourself a chart similar to the one on the next page. Look at your calendar and 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.

Note: because of holidays and breaks, you will have to fudge a little on a couple of months.

Subject	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May
Language Arts										
Math										
Social Studies										
Science										

4. Look at the *flavor* of each month. For instance, the month of October includes Columbus Day, an ideal time to cover any material dealing with exploration, navigation, etc. Late October to

November is a good time to introduce material 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 or February when there will probably be rain and clouds.
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 do 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 that show recommended time slots for lesson 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 a month. You can go from the front of the book to the back or you can skip around. (Some people plan two units a week; that's not recommended since to learn the brain needs to *rehearse* or practice, usually eight to sixteen times. That means that spelling words should be rehearsed in various ways, not rushed.)
9. USING A PENCIL, write in the chapters and units you plan to cover each month. If there are 12 chapters in a book you can cover a chapter every three weeks. If there are 24 chapters in a book you can cover a chapter every week and a half.
10. Using what you have written, make your lesson plan for the first week. Here are the **RULES OF THUMB** for weekly lesson plans:

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/week

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

Science: K- 6th : One topic/month. 7th and 8th grades: One lesson /day (with study guide to apply knowledge)

Social Studies: K-3rd grades: One topic/month (use of literature books is recommended). 4th – 8th grades: One chapter every two weeks.

Remember these are suggestions, not rules. Better to go more slowly and enjoy the material rather than rushing through to get more done. Quality, not quantity.

So What Works Best?

What works best is what works for you and your child. Many parents use textbooks as a starting point for learning and then follow their child's natural interests. 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 slavery, American history in the mid-1800's, geography of the midwest, Samuel Clemens or any number of related topics. You can see that this topic can be used in the curriculum areas of language arts, social studies, science, and the fine arts.

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 other sources (such as textbooks or life events that arise).

An extensive study done in the early 20th century followed students that were matched for demographic characteristics (The Eight-Year Study). One group was encouraged to follow their interests while the second group received a traditional education. After eight years the students in the two groups were tested. The interest-led group scored better than the control groups in all measures.

Every Subject, Every Day?

Life is not perfect. Even in public school classrooms not all subject areas are taught every day. As a charter school, we do not even require that you teach each subject each day. We do want the basics of language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. We hope you will keep your children physically fit and introduce them to the fine arts.

Quite frankly, there are ways to cover all areas without actually *instructing* in them every day. Remember the idea of centers? For instance, a reading center is quite common, and we recommend it for children who do not *like* to read. In an area away from the television, provide several books and magazines, a comfortable chair or big pillow, good lighting, maybe a tape recorder to read aloud or listen to books-on-tape. If you have no problem with readers, but can't get your children to write, maybe a writing center with some colorful stationery or some plain paper bound in interesting book covers is in order.

When you are teaching new concepts to your students it is important to present them one-on-one. When you need your child to review or practice something, a center is a good way to provide for this type of learning.

Another way of instructing in all areas without working in each subject is to alternate subjects. The main idea is to provide the basic skills and to provide a well-rounded education for your children.

As part of your Language Arts instruction, make sure that your child learns about the different styles of writing and has an opportunity to practice each type. The different genres are: autobiographical, descriptive, narrative, informative, and persuasive.

Remember your Education Coordinator is always available to answer questions about your child's learning.