



Family Liaison Office

Direct Communication Project

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The Home Study Option

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In the Marshall Islands, Pat home schooled their sons, Matthew, Patrick, and David, teaching them grades 7 and 8, 4 and 5, and 2 and 3, respectively.

In the Foreign Service, the option of a home study program for dependent children at post has long been mentioned in connection with small, isolated posts that offer only limited educational opportunities. Although missionary communities overseas have a successful history of home schooling their children, relatively few Foreign Service families have chosen this option. Home schooling, however, has become a more familiar concept through its current popularity in the U.S. Now, Foreign Service families are taking another look at the home school option when a post lacks educational facilities or because of personal or religious preferences. According to the 1995 Boarding School Survey, there are 90 Foreign Service children who are being home schooled. The following are some thoughts, based on our family's experience, to help you evaluate the option of a home study program for your family.

Making the Decision

Families should discuss why a home study program is under consideration and what options are available. If you are looking at a post without schools, this discussion should be held before bidding on that post. After doing the research on educational options at post, you may find that a partial supplemental education program for your child may be all that is needed. Tutoring in a subject or enrichment opportunities at home guided by your local U.S. curriculum can fill in gaps. The adventure you are planning may offer a child such unusual opportunities for out-of-classroom learning that you are willing to accept a school with different standards in order to enjoy the other opportunities available with the assignment.

Home schooling, through a complete home study program, is a real alternative where appropriate schooling is inadequate or non-existent. Following the curriculum of a good home study program, students will progress and learn at a rate comparable to their stateside peers and be able to return to a

conventional school system at grade level. Both students and teacher will work hard and will be well rewarded. Be aware that a home study program is not a self-teaching program. A successful school year requires a teaching adult available at all times to work with the students as they progress together through each subject in the daily lesson.

Home study is most common at the elementary level. The needs of a high school student, both socially and academically, are typically better met in a regular situation, supplemented as necessary. It can be very difficult for an older student to consider a home study option. S/he may be reluctant to give up the social opportunities of a conventional school, and, in general, has more of an awareness of what s/he wants from the school experience.

When considering a home study program because of an inadequate school situation, look carefully at all aspects of removing a child from his school environment - the known losses and the hoped for gains. A great deal of a child's learning takes place outside of textbooks and pure subject matter. Realistically, home schooling can not provide as rich an environment as does a good school.

In making the decision to home study, it is important that the whole family be united behind the idea because a home study program will be a family undertaking. A resentful child or an unhappy parent is not a good start to a productive home school environment.

Know Your Student

A student who is eager to learn and typically does well in school will be a good candidate for a home study program. A motivated student can overcome the lack of both peer interaction and incentives for quality work that are elements of a typical classroom. The child should have a good working

relationship with the teacher and a desire to succeed in a home study program. The student should be encouraged to develop a variety of interests to supplement the home study program: social interaction, athletics and outdoor activities, interests in art, music, or drama. It is important in any school program to develop a well-rounded person.

A student who requires a specialized learning approach should have a teacher with the necessary skills and background to address those needs. Two or more students, even when siblings, will provide companionship and motivation to successfully pursue a home study program. Remember that every year of a child's life is irreplaceable in his/her development, so whatever method of schooling is chosen, it should allow the child the best possible overall experience.

Know Your Teacher

The teacher should be someone appropriately qualified to teach the chosen program, which generally means at least a high school education to teach a course for lower elementary children. Upper elementary math and science topics can present a challenge to a parent-teacher and may require additional day-to-day preparation. The teacher should be motivated to teach the students, whether the teacher is a parent or another adult. Home schooling will be a lot of work with its own special rewards; it is, nevertheless, a job, although an unpaid one for a parent. The teacher must be available for each school day, without other tasks and distractions, be dependable and be committed to following the program through to completion. The teacher makes the program work and will create the experience that each home study student will remember.

Selection of a Home Study Program

Consult your library and the Department of State's Office of Overseas Schools for programs and recommendations. Find out what each home school program offers. Ask the following questions:

- What does the curriculum cover?
- What textbooks are provided?
- How are the lesson plans set up?
- How do programs compare?
- Is assistance available for the teacher?
- How is the student's progress assessed?
- Are records kept for the student?
- What supplies are suggested?
- Are they supplied?

Confer with your local public school if you have questions about a program's curriculum. Talk or write to other parents who have used a program and solicit their opinions. The Education and Youth Officer in the Family Liaison Office may be able to help you find home schooling families.

Be sure to check with the administrative officer at your post or intended post for schooling and school costs and refer to Standardized Regulation 270 to calculate the education allowances available to you if you choose a home study program. Allowance information is available in Washington from the Office of Allowances, Office of Overseas Schools, and the Family Liaison Office. If you think you might want to change to a home study program at some point in your tour, do your research ahead of time. Note that if you withdraw children from a school at post and begin a home study program mid-year, you may not be eligible for the home study allowance. Check with your post or the Office of Allowances and try to plan ahead.

One home study program frequently used by Foreign Service families is the Calvert Home School Program, in use for over 100 years, through the Calvert School in Baltimore, Maryland. The Calvert Home

Instruction Department will mail a box containing all the textbooks for a grade level, a student manual with the daily lesson schedule and a series of tests throughout the year, a detailed teacher's manual with the daily lesson assignments and teacher helps for each subject each day, and pencils, paper, and a ruler.

Calvert also offers the Advisory Service option which assigns a Calvert teacher to the student as host advisory teacher for the school year. This teacher will grade the student's tests, comment on his work and be available to the home study teacher and student for questions or assistance. The student receives a grade report at the end of each test session and a grade completion certificate at the end of the year. Transcripts are available from the Calvert School when applying for entry into another school if the student has been enrolled in the Advisory Program. The Home Study Program and Advisory Program costs are covered by the Department of State's educational allowance for home study.

Children who return to schools after a period of home study will need records of achievement or other proof of academic progress, such as standardized test scores, to help determine their grade placement. Schools that offer testing to prospective students or parents could arrange for private testing. For assistance, contact the Education and Youth Officer in the Family Liaison Office.

Choose the program that is most suitable for your students and your teacher. Consider asking your local school to give you a list of learning goals for the grades you plan to home school, to give a sense of what the children stateside will be learning and accomplishing.

Plan What Your Student Needs

- Each student needs a quiet study area with few distractions or intrusions. Students in the same house should be in separate rooms so the teacher can fully interact with

one student without distracting others. Younger students will feel most comfortable within the sight of the teacher.

- A teacher who is present and focused on the child and his learning is essential. The child needs to know that the teacher is dedicated and enjoying the classroom and not irritable or frustrated because of the lack of opportunity to pursue his/her own activities during the school day.
- The teacher should be able to reward and motivate, creating a positive emotional and educational experience.
- School should operate on a regular schedule, with starting and ending times to each day, weekends, and vacations.
- You should have basic school supplies - textbooks, dictionary, globe, and encyclopedia as a minimum. Since the local library, if there is one, may be limited in scope or in a language other than English, the family library may be your only source of reference and reading material at post. Consider the resources a computer can provide as a supplement to a home study program as on-line information possibilities continue to expand.
- Plan for social outlets after school and opportunities for exercise, outdoor play and hobbies - an afternoon change of pace.
- Stock up on games, reading books, and art supplies. After-school hours and evenings will typically be without homework, allowing free time for games, crafts, and independent reading. A good supply of reading books at and above the child's level should be kept on hand. Ask a stateside school for a list of suggested books for your child's reading level.

Tips on Making Home Study Work

Children who have already been in school have a sense of what school is all about; use that knowledge in a home school to improve the student's learning and keep him/her ready

to fit into the next school. Younger children will need to be taught the skills and behaviors that are a part of school beyond the academics - following directions, focusing efforts, taking turns, patience, and perseverance.

A useful rule for a smoothly functioning home school is the 5-day school week with weekends and holidays free. Routine is very important. Not unalleviated routine, but routine as a way for the child to settle in and focus on the tasks ahead. Setting the morning aside for studies also helps the teacher focus and lets friends know when not to drop by.

The teacher who limits the hours in the school day encourages students to stay on task and use school time productively. Students who procrastinate will learn that one day's unfinished work will be waiting the next. The teacher need not be available to the student at any after-school hour the student chooses. The teacher also needs personal time and time for other obligations.

The teacher who has spent a lot of energy on a productive school day will find it daunting to face an afternoon of chores. Household help is a real boon if the teacher is also responsible for maintaining the house.

Offer incentives to motivate the students and enliven the days. Each day can seem like the next, especially in countries with minimal seasonal changes. Plan a system that offers a small reward after a few days of good work, a larger reward after a series of tests. Going out to lunch together works well as a special reward for both student and teacher.

While some Foreign Service families remain home study enthusiasts, most families will probably consider 2 school years the maximum length of time for a home study program. After 2 years, the enthusiasm of both teacher and students may wane. As the children grow older, they greatly benefit from participation in a regular school with their

peers and being part of an overall environment that provides much more than classroom learning. With a good home study experience behind him, a child can return to the regular classroom with little adjustment and can expect to be at grade level in all subjects, and

probably ahead in his stronger ones. In addition, s/he will have developed good independent study skills and have an unusual experience as his story to tell.

Resources

Contact these Department of State offices for guidance:

Family Liaison Office (M/DGHR/FLO)

Room 1239
Department of State
Washington, DC 20520-7512
Tele: 202-647-1076
Fax: 202-647-1670

Office of Allowances (A/OPR/ALS)

Room H426, SA-1
Department of State
Washington, DC 20522-2902
Tele: 202-261-8700
Fax: 202-261-8707

Office of Overseas Schools (A/OS)

Room H-328, SA-1
Department of State
Washington, DC 20522-2902
Tele: 202-261-8200
Fax: 202-261-8224

Contact these schools for information about independent study programs:

Calvert School

105 Tuscany Road
Baltimore, MD 21210
Tele: 410-243-6030
Fax: 410-366-0674

University of Nebraska

Center for Continuing Education

33rd and Holdrege Streets

USDA Graduate Correspondence Program

Room 1112, South Agriculture Building
14th Street and Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

Tele: 202-720-7123

Fax: 202-720-3603

Online:

grad.usda.gov/corres/corpro.html or
correspond@grad.usda.gov

Useful books:

Education Options for Foreign Service Family Members

This book puts education questions into the Foreign Service context. It covers issues from birth to adulthood, in the United States and overseas. It is available at no charge from the Family Liaison Office.

The Independent Study Catalog

This guide to over 10,000 correspondence courses, including high school, college, and graduate programs, plus external degree and certificate programs is available from:

Peterson's Guides

P.O. Box 2123

Princeton, NJ 08543-2123

Tele: 609-243-9111
Online: www.petersons.com
Lincoln, NE 68583-9800

Information on the Internet

Homeschooling families with access to the Internet can control costs by subscribing to electronic mailing lists or listservers. This is an excellent way to get in touch with others who are homeschooling and to get good information on resources. To subscribe, send an email, leaving the subject line blank, to:

LISTSERV@vm1.nodak.edu.

In the body of the message, type:

list global/homeschooling.

That should get you a list of some lists matching your request. A more comprehensive list is available on the Web at:

<<http://www.neosoft.com/internet/paml/>>

or download a list at:

<ftp://rtfm.mit.edu/pub/usenet/news.answers/mail/maillinglists/>.
