

Checklist for Starting a School Year

by Cindy Short and Sue Welch, editors

Prayer. Pray for wisdom, guidance, and strength (Prov. 3:5-6). Make a daily quiet time with God top priority.

Communication. Maintain good communication with your spouse at each step in the process. One parent may do most of the research, planning, or teaching, but the other should be informed and involved in decision-making, especially setting goals.

Goals. Write out, or review, your long-range goals and philosophy (fundamental convictions) for your children's education and training. Include Bible verses and plan for both academic subjects and nonacademic areas such as character and life skills.

Make changes or additions as you gain insight and experience.

Inventory. Take inventory of each child's knowledge, skills, and character. You may use standardized tests, publishers' diagnostics, or homemade oral or written tests in addition to your everyday observations.

Objectives. Set objectives for each child that will move him toward your long-range goals. (Several children can share similar objectives in subjects like history or science. They would usually be at different levels in math and have different needs in character development.)

You may find a publisher's scope and sequence or a list of concepts usually taught at each level helpful for ideas or a guide in choosing materials to fit your objectives.

Discuss these objectives with each child privately, and explain how they fit into the big picture of his future.

Methods. Consider various teaching methods, curriculum, and other available resources. Basic differences involve the degree of structure or flexibility you wish to use at each stage of your child's development.

If possible, visit a curriculum fair.

Budget. Rework your budget, allocating funds for educational materials. You may be able to spend less on "school" clothes or transportation and emphasize learning tools, books, and games for gifts. Less expensive foods that require more

preparation cut costs and also provide life skills education.

Reference Library. Add to your family's library of reference books, quality literature, and educational audio-visual and software aids that will help meet your objectives.

Libraries. Learn how to use your local library system and how to reserve books or order them through interlibrary loans. Explore the reference section. Also browse through your church library.

Materials. Choose and list the methods and materials that you will use to meet your objectives for each child this year. Then, ideally, order or collect materials early!

Textbooks or workbooks can be supplemented with unit studies, games, projects, etc., to cover all objectives.

You may select only parts of some books if the other material will be (or was) covered at another time.

Decide which of your children could be taught some material together for most efficient use of time and effort.

For example, you could read a Christian history text at an intermediate-level to all your children, assigning age-appropriate projects such as oral discussion or a play for young children, extra reading or research for older children.

Legal Arrangements. To comply with your state laws as fully as possible, contact your state organization and consider joining Home School Legal Defense Association.

Household Organization. Do a thorough cleaning of your house. Get rid of unused items and store little-used ones out of the way. Designate a place for everything, including space for books and school supplies.

Family Schedule. Reorganize your family's schedule and chore assignments to fit your educational activities. Train children to do household tasks and establish regular meal and bed times.

Discipline. Deal consistently with behavior or attitude problems.

Commitment. Be prepared to handle opposition or lack of immediate success through prayer, adjustment, and perseverance.

Head Start. Establish nonacademic (e.g., Bible, life skills) portions of your program several weeks before other studies begin.

Teacher Review. Study basics of math, phonics, and spelling to prepare for presenting them to your children. Look through an English handbook that you will use for reference. You can learn or review other material with your children as they study it.

Calendar. Plan your year's calendar, marking school days, test days, vacations, and special events.

Preparation. Familiarize yourself with your curriculum, noting unit divisions, and collect any needed supplementary materials.

Planning. Decide and list which topics, units, or subjects you will cover during which weeks or months to make an overall year's plan.

For example, you could plan a certain number of pages per day in math and language, a chapter every two weeks in history and science, or a history chapter each week in the first semester and a science chapter each week in the second. Units can also be shifted to coincide with related events or seasons.

School Schedule. Use your plan to develop your daily and weekly schedule of studies.

Record Keeping. Decide how you will record planned and actual activities.

Supplies. Gather record-keeping and filing supplies, general school supplies, and special project supplies.

First Week. Plan your first week or unit, referring to your overall plan.

Celebrations. Plan special celebrations for the first day of school and for the completion of the first week or unit of study as well as for the mastery of significant skills.

Explanations. Carefully explain your expectations and procedures to your children.

Beginning. Get started and keep going. Make adjustments as needed. Enjoy this privilege of investing your life moment-by-moment in the lives of your children!