



NORTHWESTERN  
UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF  
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Resources & ideas for parents & educators of gifted children

# Talent

Center for  
Talent  
DEVELOPMENT®

## Homeschooling

### Is it the Right Choice for Your Family?

*Center for Talent Development staff members field a lot of questions about educating gifted young people. Homeschooling, in particular, elicits a lot of reactions – both positive and negative. The following article offers insights to families and educators who have questions about homeschooling as an educational option.*

**Center for Talent Development (CTD):** How do you know if homeschooling is a good option for your child and family?

**Lisa Limburg-Weber (LLW):** The first question parents need to ask themselves is, “Why am I considering homeschooling?” Some parents see it as an extension of other lifestyle choices; their children often have never been educated in an institutional setting. Others homeschool out of necessity. We met one family homeschooling their kids during a 6-month trip across North America, and another whose children, competitive downhill skiers, needed to divide their time between Chicago and Denver. Still others are reactive homeschoolers: they pull their children out of school because of problems that can range from bullying or poor instruction to religious or philosophical differences. Unfortunately, parents of gifted children sometimes find themselves in this group. Homeschooling can be the best option for gifted students whose educational placement in their local schools does not meet their needs for challenge, appropriate pacing, or healthy social interactions.

**CTD: Is homeschooling the “perfect” answer for parents of gifted kids? Why (or why not)?**

**LLW:** Imagine a school where your gifted child receives high quality, one-on-one instruction on a daily basis. No busywork, no waiting for peers to catch up, and no needless repetition of concepts already



learned: the instructor is able to pace the instruction perfectly to meet your child’s needs. Furthermore, assignments are flexibly designed around your child’s interests, helping him use his expert-level knowledge on classic cars or medieval bookmaking. Formal instruction is completed in just a few, well-used hours, allowing plenty of after-school time for lessons, practice, apprenticeships, research, competitions, or readings in her area of interest. Sounds good, doesn’t it? Homeschooling can provide wonderful educational environments that are tailor-made for gifted children. But no educational placement is perfect. Parents also need to assess whether their gifted child needs resources that might not be available to homeschoolers, such as collaborative work with other gifted peers, access to science labs or team sports, or higher level teaching in an area of academic strength (such as mathematics).

**CTD: From your perspective, what does high-quality homeschooling require?**

**LLW:** Homeschooling for academic excel-

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## DIRECTOR’S MESSAGE

### Educational Options

We hear in the news about the “best” way to educate children. From traditional public schools to charter schools, online schools to homeschooling, there are many choices – all with benefits and drawbacks. At Center for Talent Development we focus on educating gifted students, working with thousands of educators and families in a wide variety of educational settings. The most important question is what’s best for a particular child – and there is no simple answer.



Is homeschooling a good option for your gifted students? In this issue, we take two approaches to the challenge of answering that question. In “Homeschooling – Is it the Right Choice for Your Family?” Lisa Limburgh-Weber, PhD, provides an overview of homeschooling and discusses her experiences as a mother homeschooling three children. She draws on research and her personal experiences as well as those of other homeschooled families she knows. In the second article, “Gifts Given & Received,” Joanna Boutillier, takes a more personal approach, talking about how CTD courses – particularly Gifted LearningLinks, Summer and Saturday courses – have been integral to her family’s homeschooling program.

The number of homeschooled students enrolled in CTD classes has been increasing. CTD provides options to homeschoolers whether it be the chance to take an Advanced Placement course earlier than a traditional school would typically allow or to enrich a homeschool curriculum with a class in a subject that is beyond the expertise of a homeschooler’s circle of instructors.

I hope these articles enlarge your view of available education options for your gifted student. Whatever the educational path, CTD will be there to help develop children’s exceptional talent.

*Paula Aleszewski-Kubilus*

## WHO SAID THIS?

“I have never in my life learned anything from any man who agreed with me.”

Answer at <http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu/resources/newslettersolutions>

# Homeschooling: Is it the Right Choice

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lence doesn't require parents to be professional, certified educators.

Homeschoolers also don't need a big budget; many creative families educate their kids inexpensively by relying on the Internet plus the resources of their local library. However, no matter the curriculum or approach they choose, parents need to carve out space and time—considerable time—if they want to give their children a high-quality education at home. In addition to the time it takes to teach lessons, it takes a lot of time to get to know the children's learning needs, write goals for the school year, educate yourself about different subjects and teaching options, select curriculum and other resources, and help the children make social connections. It's a job that needs to be taken seriously by at least one parent. I've seen homeschoolers flounder (or give up) when work, volunteer, or family commitments eat up too much of the teaching parent's time.

**CTD: Where do you get curriculum and information on how to homeschool?**

**LLW:** While homeschooling is legal in every state, parents need to make sure they are familiar with their state's regulations concerning homeschooling. Beyond that,

beginning homeschoolers will find a wealth of information on homeschooling in books and web sites. Networking with experienced homeschoolers can be very helpful, as can attending your state's homeschool convention and browsing in the vendor hall. Some homeschooling families buy a complete "school in a box" from a single organization or sign up with an all-in-one distance-learning provider. After doing some research, many families find they resonate strongly with an articulated homeschool philosophy—such as traditional, classical, unschooling, Charlotte Mason, Waldorf, or Montessori—that helps them narrow down their curriculum choices. There is even a name for a homeschooler like me: "eclectic." I purchase some curriculum from homeschool suppliers and other materials from mainstream school vendors. In addition, I develop some of my own materials, I use selected online resources, and I make extensive use of my local library.

**CTD: How do you provide your kids with group experiences?**

**LLW:** The "socialization question" is one that I am often asked. My homeschooling friends field it regularly, too. I think that the question reveals a real anxiety that children could be disadvantaged by the isolation of a homeschool setting. Occasionally, home-

schooling truly does not meet a child's social needs. But most homeschooling families find many opportunities to interact with people outside their families, including their peers. My own children participate in extracurricular activities such as dance, music, soccer, swimming, museum and library programs, and park district classes. We deliberately chose a church whose children's programs include a mid-week kids' club. I also helped start a co-operative homeschool learning group that meets weekly to extend our kids' history curriculum with readings, crafts, games, and activities. My children are young and still need me to facilitate social connections, but the homeschooled teens I know are all happily and independently immersed in a number of social activities: theater groups, music, sports, volunteer activities, work.

**CTD: Do the kids think it's weird that their friends go to a brick-and-mortar school and they don't?**

**LLW:** We started homeschooling when my oldest was kindergarten age. Since they've never been



## Gifts Given & Received

by Joanna Boutillier

Upon moving to Evanston with my husband and two children, thanks to the recommendations of families in the local homeschooling network, I quickly discovered that we now had the good fortune to reside just a few blocks from the Center for Talent Development.

My children were early voracious readers with exceptional curiosity and a thirst for learning. They needed an education which was flexible, creative, rigorous, and accelerated, and when we were not able to find this within traditional school settings, we decided to continue their education at home. This decision not only allowed us to provide our children with an excellent education customized to their needs, but also allowed our family to continue to travel frequently, and to take advantage of educational programs from a variety of sources.

In combination with their education at home, as well as extracurricular activities including music, sports, art, and drama, the Center for Talent Development quickly

became an important partner in our children's education. Indeed, CTD has helped to provide what traditional school systems were not well-equipped to offer our children – testing to demonstrate ability and readiness for advanced work, unique enrichment courses, rigorous and innovative honors high school credit courses available when kids are ready for them, inspiring teachers committed to gifted education, and flexible course offerings to meet a variety of needs.

Over the years, my children have participated in many of the programs offered by CTD, and each of these programs has offered unique opportunities for growth. They began with the Midwest Academic Talent Search (now NUMATS). Writing the EXPLORE test while only in grade 4 was a valuable experience as it gave them a clear sense of their areas of strength and weakness. It also boosted our confidence as parent-educators: seeing the kids perform far above grade level provided additional con-

firmation to us that our children were receiving an excellent education at home and also assisted us in making more informed choices about their future courses of study.

When my sons began taking enrichment and honors high school credit courses through the Saturday, Summer, and Learning Links programs (now called Gifted LearningLinks), we discovered that one of CTD's greatest strengths is its teachers. My younger son Sasha particularly loved the Veterinary Science courses offered through the Saturday program and taught by a congenial local veterinarian who loves his work and presents veterinary science as a dynamic hands-on adventure.

Both sons studied Honors English Vocabulary through the Learning Links program with Michael Clay Thompson, whose

**Teaching should be such that what is offered is perceived as a valuable gift and not as a hard duty.**

— Albert Einstein

to school, my children actually found it a little strange that some of their friends were *not* homeschooled. We've been careful to explain that homeschooling, private school, and public school are all good choices that parents can make, based on what works best for that family and that child. Since we've had the "families are all different" discussion many times with our children, it's not hard for them to understand that families make different educational choices, too.

**CTD: If parents want to get involved with a homeschool group, how do they do so? What are the benefits? What are the challenges?**

**LLW:** Homeschooling can feel very lonely at times, but connecting with other homeschooling families is a huge help. Many homeschoolers find connection and information through online communities; others depend on informal networks of friends and acquaintances; and some join or start local groups. A good place to start is your state homeschool organization, which may maintain lists of local homeschool groups. But local groups vary widely. Some are primarily for parents; others have classes and events for children. Some groups exist to support members in a particular homeschooling style; others set up a wider umbrella of support. Knowing what you want from

a group can help you determine whether it's a good fit for you and your family. Being willing to get involved by volunteering for group jobs (such as scheduling trips, setting up for meetings, etc.) is the best way to develop relationships and have a say in the direction of the group.

**CTD: People talk about the sacrifices that must be made (since one parent must be home and, therefore, can't work). What adjustments do families have to consider in terms of their lifestyle?**

**LLW:** Parents certainly need to count the cost of homeschooling before jumping in. Homeschooling doesn't, of course, absolutely preclude both parents' working. Some of my homeschooling acquaintances offset income losses by seeking part-time employment. Many simply make choices that allow their family to live on one income—less house, older cars, fewer vacations, smaller retirement accounts. There are also less obvious costs to be considered—for instance, fewer hours of leisure or "adult time" for the teaching parent and more wear-and-tear on a house that has children

in it for most of the day.

**CTD: If homeschooling is not an option for families, what are some of the resources from within the homeschooling network that might be helpful to families or educators looking to support gifted learners?**

**LLW:** In general, I think that parents of gifted students can learn from homeschoolers' emphasis on taking responsibility for their children's education, no matter what the setting. No one at your child's school, no matter how professionally qualified, will ever be as invested in that child's education and future as you are. Some parents leave their gifted children in school but choose resources (books, online programs, or classes) to supplement their child's education in certain areas. This is called "after-schooling" by some, but essentially it is part-time homeschooling. Parents with gifted learners may need to research a variety of supplementary curriculum options and perhaps try a few before finding the best fit for their child and their family.

**CTD: Do you have some great web sites/books/magazine articles that you would recommend to other parents?**

**LLW:** For a recent, large-scale study of homeschoolers' academic achievement, visit the Homeschool Legal Defense Association at [www.hslda.org](http://www.hslda.org). Among many fine books, Linda Dobson's *The First Year of Homeschooling Your Child* is a good pick for a first read on the subject. For online resources, I like *Home Education Magazine's* balanced advice at [www.homeedmag.com/gettingstarted.html](http://www.homeedmag.com/gettingstarted.html). Another helpful jumping-off point (though the site has advertising and is harder to navigate) is A to Z Home's Cool's <http://homeschooling.gomilpitas.com>. My favorite site for detailed curriculum reviews is [www.cathyduffyreviews.com](http://www.cathyduffyreviews.com). ●

infectious love of language and genuine delight in dialogue with students made these courses intellectually exciting adventures

Both sons also thrived in the excellent lab science courses offered through the three-week intensive Summer Program, such as Honors Biology and Chemistry. These courses provide a very focused learning experience in which kids work with excellent teachers and other highly motivated students in state-of-the-art university laboratories.

My older son has a passion for history and in grade 8 took AP World History through the Learning Links program. The workload was bracing, but my son thoroughly enjoyed the course, wrote the exam in May of 2007, and scored very well. He has since completed seven additional AP courses, written the associated exams, and achieved the highest possible score on each one. As a result of his achievement, last year he received the AP Scholar with Distinction Award by the College Board

and this year will receive the National AP Scholar Award.

Parents are well aware that providing an excellent education for their children is a significant challenge, especially when these children have special needs of any sort; CTD has helped our family to meet this challenge.

When we come together to nurture and develop the gifts and talents of our youth, we are united in important work, both giving and receiving gifts of great worth. Gratitude for this gift and privilege remains our best foundation as parents, students, educators, and society as a whole. ●

*Joanna Boutilier is an Evanston, Illinois parent homeschooling her two sons who also works part-time from home as a writer and editor. She is familiar with many homeschooling groups and resources that would be helpful to people and is happy to share them. You can contact her directly at: [jb822@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jb822@sbcglobal.net).*

*Lisa Limburg-Weber, Ph.D., worked for over 14 years at the Center for Talent Development of Northwestern University. During her tenure at CTD, she designed and implemented many different types of educational programs for varying groups of gifted learners including under-served students. Lisa is also the co-editor, with Paula Olszewski-Kubilius and Steven Pfeiffer, of *Early Gifts: Recognizing and Nurturing Children's Talents*. She now homeschools her three children.*



Northwestern University  
 School of Education & Social Policy  
 617 Dartmouth Place  
 Evanston, Illinois 60208

**NEWS, DATES & OTHER IMPORTANT CTD INFORMATION**

**Great Programs at CTD**

**Northwestern University's Midwest Academic Talent Search (NUMATS)**

offers students in grades 3 through 9 above-grade-level tests – EXPLORE, ACT and SAT – years ahead of schedule. Want an “up-close-and-personal” look at NUMATS? Our DVD explains the entire NUMATS process and its benefits. All your questions will be answered in 15 minutes via interviews with parents, students, gifted coordinators and program administrators. To request a copy send your contact information to [ctd@northwestern.edu](mailto:ctd@northwestern.edu), write NUMATS DVD in the subject line and we'll put one in the mail to you – free of charge. Online registration for NUMATS testing is now available.

**Gifted LearningLinks nine-week enrichment courses for students in grades 3 through 8**

start again on January 15, 2010 as do 14-week honors electives for students in grades 6 through 12. Honors and AP courses start on the 15th of every month. “Live” teachers and an interactive format encourage lively and meaningful discussions.

**Saturday Enrichment Program** Winter session starts on January 9, 2010 in Evanston, Naperville and Palatine, Illinois, USA. Accelerated Weekend Experiences held on November 13 & 14, 2009, February 13 & 14 and March 6 & 7, 2010.

**CivicWeek**, service-learning field studies for outstanding high school students are offered by CTD each spring. Dates, locations and application material will be available December 1.

**Have fun next summer!** And learn a lot, too! Three-week Session 1 starts on June 27, 2010. Session 2 begins on July 18, 2010. Specifics including course descriptions, dates for all Summer Programs, and online registration will be available in January.

*For more information on any of these programs or offerings, go to the CTD web site, [www.ctd.northwestern.edu](http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu), write us an e-mail at [ctd@northwestern.edu](mailto:ctd@northwestern.edu) or call us at 847/491-3782. ●*



Northwestern University  
 617 Dartmouth Place  
 Evanston, IL 60208  
 phone: 847/491-3782  
 fax: 847/467-4283

e-mail: [ctd@northwestern.edu](mailto:ctd@northwestern.edu)  
 web site: [www.ctd.northwestern.edu](http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu)

Center for Talent Development at Northwestern University is an accredited learning center and research facility serving the gifted community. Through Northwestern University's Midwest Academic Talent Search and other programs, CTD has assisted more than 500,000 families. Offering a variety of learning alternatives for the gifted student, CTD provides school-year programs such as Saturday Enrichment Program, Gifted LearningLinks online learning, Project BLAST, Civic Education Project, and Project EXCITE, as well as summer academic programs (Leapfrog, Apogee, Spectrum, and Equinox), informational conferences for families and educators, scholarships, and graduate courses on gifted education. Led by nationally recognized scholar Paula Olszewski-Kubilius, PhD, the Center also conducts and publishes academic research on gifted students, particularly in the areas of accelerated learning and special populations of gifted learners. Center for Talent Development has been accredited as a Nonpublic-Supplementary school by the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) since April 1, 1994. NCA CASI is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and has more than 100 years of experience in improving educational quality.



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