

More Than Academics

Erin Scherger, Herndon

Homeschooling is still new and unusual enough that the majority of homeschooling parents were likely not homeschooled themselves. Indeed, if they are like me, they had never even heard of homeschooling until they started searching for alternatives for their children's educations.

It follows, then, that even taking this very first step is an immense act of courage for many. And as the first tentative steps are taken, it is not unusual to be besieged by doubts, anxiety, or even fear: fear of a school year gone badly, fear of messing up our children's futures, fear of harming the parent-child relationship.

Each new school year can bring new doubts, too. New ages, stages, family members, homes, interests, and/or challenges—any combination of these can cause you to feel as if you must learn how to homeschool all over again! One of my other volunteer jobs is to answer the questions, posed by homeschoolers and potential homeschoolers, usually fueled by these concerns. Fundamentally, most (even those with years of homeschooling experience) just want reassurance that they are doing it right and some kind of guarantee that their children will succeed.

Of course, this kind of concern is simply a sign of involved and invested parents. But, with only traditional educational experiences in our own backgrounds, we often end up reverting to the safe and the familiar—that is, we focus primarily on the academics: what classes to take, what curricula to buy, and what programs have turned out successful students. That's what we know, that's how we learned; and while we know we want something different for our children, we don't always have the tools to break free from this deep-seated template.

By their nature, school classes provide a general educational experience to children. But homeschooling can be so much more: more personalized... individualized... significant. Lessons don't have to come out of a box and learning doesn't have to look like anyone else's experience. Everyone has different strengths and passions; everyone (including our children) learns more when interested and invested.

"Why settle for average when amazing is attainable?"
—Anonymous

So, as you get ready to head back to school, I'd like to offer this suggestion: take advantage of this opportunity to approach schooling in new and wonderful ways—ways that are more meaningful to you and to your family.

Uncertain of how to proceed? Allow *VaHomeschoolers Voice* to help! Grab your favorite fall beverage and immerse yourself in these articles that feature homeschool priorities beyond the academics!

Laura Sowdon, an occupational therapist, shares her advice on starting kindergarten off right, before worrying about teaching your children to read or write. Rena Corey shares her perspective from 20 years of homeschooling experiences and her proposal for homeschoolers to begin a new homeschooling movement. Tabitha Stacy and Sarah Zmick share how they incorporate social issues that are important to themselves and their families into their academics. And Sarah Blunkosky shares her perspectives on how and why homeschooling can best support your children's physical and emotional health.

So, let me be the first to say, "Welcome *not* back to school!" I hope that your school year and your homeschooling experience are more than average, more than academic, more than just working to pass an end-of-year assessment.

After 16 years of homeschooling, Erin Scherger has moved on from her jobs of teacher, principal, cafeteria monitor, taxi driver, and guidance counselor. Her two previously unsocialized homeschooled kids are now spreading their wings at four-year universities.

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Exploring the ecosystem of Bull Run, a tributary of the Occoquan River, at Hemlock Overlook Regional Park.

Photo by Windy Aziz



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