

MERIDIAN MAGAZINE

Education Series, Part Eight

Creative Combining of Options: Could Dual Enrollment Be Your Solution?

Click here for [Part 1](#) [Part 2](#) [Part 3](#) [Part 4](#) [Part 5](#) [Part 6](#) [Part 7](#)

By Darla Isackson

Note: I have received no responses from parents whose children attend LDS academies, only from a few administrators of those academies. Consequently, that article is being postponed. Parents, let me hear from you! We want your perspective.

This article is comprised mostly of parental responses concerning dual enrollment.

Varied Needs, Varied Solutions

In regard to education, one size does NOT fit all. I have been intrigued with the variety of solutions parents are finding to fill the unique needs of individual children. Several e-mails have described combinations of options that are working well for their families. Informed parents are attempting to combine “the best of both worlds” in regard to programs offered by public schools, private academies, online and special curriculum help. All of the combinations mentioned in the parent responses begin with 6th grade and up. For younger ages, the supplementation spoken of refers to “joining forces” in co-ops with other home-school parents, enriching the program by combining parental expertise and offering more social experiences for the children. The co-op ideas will appear in a separate article.

Dual enrollment responses:

Parents have told me they pulled their children out of full-time public school for a variety of reasons--they are ahead or behind, they need more individualized help and encouragement, they need more freedom of choice, they need more family time, they need less negative influence. They take them back part-time for as many different reasons. Some of them are:

Rosanne Patterson "Our son Stephen, 13, is an 8th grader who is homeschooled, but has been enrolled at our Middle School for the past 2 years (and this will be his 3rd year) for the orchestra class . . . He has really enjoyed it and orchestra is not something we can give him at home, so it's been good."

Leslie Boyce: The biggest challenge with [my children's] dual enrollment is that it cuts into the day and is sometimes hard to keep the continuity of school work the children are doing at home. [It also makes] field trips and other activities which are the icing on the cake for homeschooling families [more difficult to plan]. Homeschooling families also have to make a conscious effort to connect with others and develop friendships since they are not automatically thrown together with a bunch of kids. Sometimes my kids felt like they were "out of the loop" attending school for just one class. The upside was that they did feel like they knew some kids and were involved with something they enjoyed. They also had opportunities to participate in All state Honors orchestra and school plays, which was fun for them. This made the transition back to school easier when

they went.

Darla Evanson: “We have tried several options in education and are at a point where dual enrollment is working very well for us. We are doing what we are doing because after much thought and prayer and time in the temple, this is what we feel like we should be doing and it works for us. My 15-year-old and 12-year-old do their academics on the computer with a Christian online private academy where they have teacher help and all the support they need. I do not personally teach them. It is an accredited school and it is more challenging than Utah public school curriculum. It is called Alpha Omega Academy--out of Arizona. [Internet address is welcometoclass.com] The children are enjoying it and their SAT scores, while great before, are improving. They are each almost a grade level ahead because they can work at their own pace. (We take the SAT tests with the public school in the fall to reconfirm that they are learning the basics.) In the afternoon they [attend two] public school [classes]. My daughter takes Seminary and an elective--last year it was ceramics one semester and choir the next semester. My son . . . took keyboarding and art just so he could still be connected with his friends. His friends are great kids who have high standards and I don't have a problem with him keeping up those friendships; in fact I think it is very healthy. I just don't want him in the public school environment all day because of the negative influences that are there and I also have a problem with the substandard level of education. Having him be challenged in his education has been a huge benefit for my son. He is now excited about learning instead of coming home from school saying that the teacher told him to go read a book for half the class time because he finished the material. The public school system is not set up to deal with different levels of ability within a classroom. They usually have just one teacher who can't possibly meet the needs of the different learning abilities of thirty students. The average learners do okay, and those that lag behind generally get the teacher's attention next and rightly so. If your child learns quickly and is bored, that is just not a priority for teachers because they have their hands full with those students who just don't get the basics.

She continues, “Those who have home schooled since their children were young generally have friends that also home school so they might not have the need to go to the public school for the social aspect, but when the kids are used to going to public school and that is where all their friends are, it is difficult for them to lose those associations. Our first year of online school did not include time at the public schools and my kids became a little withdrawn because they weren't getting enough social time. Even though they had young womens and scouts, their friends quit calling on weekends because they didn't see them at school to plan things. Having them be at the school for only brief times has made all the difference. They keep the connection with their great friends and still don't have to be at public school all day.

“I have another son who took his last year of high school online with BYU courses, most of which gave him college credit. A few were high school level. He liked starting his freshman year of college at BYU with some credit. Instead of taking seminary that year, he took BYU religion courses online and that counted for seminary so he was able to still graduate from seminary. I think being in a seminary classroom where you can feel the spirit is optimal, but this is an option.

“There is one more advantage to doing the core courses at home--when opportunities come up for things you want to do with your kids . . . you can do them and it doesn't affect grades. My daughter is extremely interested in marine life and scuba diving. My husband took her and my son on a 10-day scuba trip to Palau in November. It was a trip of a lifetime and she learned so much about different cultures and her field of interest that she would have never learned from a textbook. [During the school year] we also took a trip with our kids to Ecuador to work in orphanages. What a wonderful eye opener that was for our kids. With dual enrollment . . . They could easily make up 10 days of art or seminary.”

Karen Morgan told of a time they were spending a lot of time in prayer trying to decide what to do with a bright ADD daughter who was not doing well in 8th grade and a bright 2nd grade son who was not learning to read in public school.

They decided to home school for a time. Some of their best friends in the community were also home schooling, and had group classes for some subjects (history, biology) using Christian based texts. The Morgans negotiated a deal with the local high school so the oldest two daughters could take agriculture and band. It meant a lot of driving for Karen, but the combination worked for the children.

The first year Karen home schooled all four of their children. Halfway through year two one daughter chose to go back full time into sixth grade and transitioned well, and in year four Karen went back to work and could no longer home school. However, all the children did well when they went back into public school. Karen said, "As I have looked at the in-and-out patterns of our educational process (and as I am pursuing a master's degree program in educational technology and adult education), one of the things I want to study is the feasibility of turning our high schools into more of a community school where they provide courses (such as the agriculture, art and music) to anyone who wants to enroll for those courses, and let parents have more choice as to where their children learn English, Math, and Science. I envision it creating additional educational opportunities on the same level as community colleges, which have evolved in the last couple decades to meet the increasing requirements for non-traditional students.

I think that if enough people got behind this idea, it would make a huge impact on the quality of education at present. Schools would have to become more responsive to the community because parents could pick and choose what classes their children took at the school, or at home. I look at the things my children are learning and compare it to what I learned when I was in public school, and I know the educational process is in trouble." [Karen M. Morgan is a Training Associate for Computer Horizons Corporation]

One mother wrote from the Los Angeles area: "Most community colleges accept high school-aged kids. Many classes [offer] the option to audit or work for credit. If you go for the credits, you can get concurrent credit, meaning a semester of community college equals a year of high school." [she explained that she is home schooling her children, ages 11, 16, and 18--with the help of the community college and a home schooling organization they joined.] [The year] my daughter was 14/15, she was averaging around a B in those [community college] classes. My son commented that if it wasn't for a B he received in digital photography, he would have had a perfect 4.0.

"We organized ourselves with families of Catholics, Jews, B'hai, Mormon. There are about 20 high school kids that get together every week. They do toastmasters (public speaking) and world history/discussion groups. Some of the kids have been with scouts, music, sports and they feel very free to share these talents with each other. My kids friends are the homeschool kids. Their standards conform more to our church standards. This is not what happens at church. Many of the kids [in the ward] do not dress church standards, nor act it. It seems apathy is in vogue, even to the fun stuff."

Kristen Jensen said, "I started homeschooling my two daughters two years ago (They were then ages 10 and 13), mostly for academic reasons. The schools were not teaching them to write (or think!) and my youngest was reading Star Trek novels a good part of the day because she finished her work so quickly. I was not impressed with the gifted program teachers, so my options were either to go back to work so I could put them in private schools or stay home and homeschool. I chose the latter. I found that our district allowed the girls to take up to two classes

at the public school. Also, our school district has a Homeschool Networks program which provides some classes for the homeschool students as well as consultants. Last year my older daughter was in 9th grade and attended orchestra class at our local Jr. High and a Homeschool Networks state history class. We also signed up for a consultant so that she could get public school credit (and a transcript), even though I'm doing most of the teaching. So technically, she is not homeschooled—she is just in an alternative high school program. Many school districts are catching on that they can re-coup the lost federal education dollars by catering to the homeschoolers a bit.

“This year my oldest daughter is taking orchestra at the high school. She loves it because that period includes lunch and she gets to spend extra time with a few of her orchestra and band buddies. This is truly the best of both worlds for her. It takes a chunk out of her day, but it was our compromise and she is working hard to keep up with her academic work. I can tell that she is quite happy with the mix we've come up with. (She is now considering enrolling in the Running Start program where she will be able to start college classes next year and graduate concurrently with an A.A. and a high school diploma.) I still use a consultant to help me enforce deadlines and to get the “official” credit. (The consultant] has been very impressed with the rigor of our academic program and so she pretty much goes along with everything we do.) We are planning some Friday Fun afternoons with other homeschooled kids in our area, and they'll be taking a logic class with other homeschooled kids which my husband will be teaching once a week.

“I have come to see that as a parent I am responsible for my children's education. Public school is one tool I can use, and there are many other options as well. My oldest daughter has taken 3 BYU high school classes in history and science. This year they will both be taking science classes through an online school (The Potter's School) that provides virtual classrooms through video conferencing software. She will attend class sitting in front of her computer once a week with 14 other students in other locations. The teacher will lecture, ask questions, etc., and they'll have homework assignments and labs to complete.

“I started homeschooling for academic reasons, but I am happy not to have to fight the daily public school grind. I don't think all parents should homeschool their children, but if and when a time comes that [more LDS] parents feel they must, there will be a few of us with several years' supply of curriculum and experience to share.”

Lynette W. Wade expressed many concerns about the curriculum in public schools, which she feels she has solved by dual enrollment. She said, “As a mother of seven who has been alternative schooling for at least 12 years now I have some strong feelings about the public schools and education for Latter-day-Saints in general.

“I have tried almost all of your options with different kids and at different times with the same child. There are strengths and weaknesses to most except a solid Latter-day-Saint private school, which I could not afford, but the worst alternative is a steady diet of what is not really public, but “government schools.” [I don't believe that] a good experience [with a good teacher and a good principal] in a government school means the child is getting a “good education.” At one time that was so, but the schools today have been taken over by a religious and political ideology that is completely opposite of everything that Latter-day-Saints believe and are taught in the scriptures. There is plenty of information out there for anyone interested in educating themselves about the federal curriculum. A good book to start with is *Fed Ed, the New Federal Curriculum and How It's Enforced* by Allen Quist. (www.edwatch.org)

“The [book explains that the public school] curriculum is based, not on Christianity but on Humanism. It is based not on patriotism, but on a worldwide, socialist system called the New

World Order. False teachings which sound OK but don't really mean what they say, such as Self-Esteem, Environmentalism, Multiculturalism and Life Skills, are woven into the curriculum from K-12. Our students [can easily] grow up with no real knowledge of or respect for the Founding Fathers, no respect for the inspired Constitution, and a belief that more and bigger government will solve all of our social problems. Too many of them also lose their testimonies after being taught a steady diet of Humanism. The very fact that our public education system is controlled by people back in Washington, D.C., instead of in our own neighborhoods, school districts, and state is unconstitutional. The founders intended that the public schools would be run by communities, and the 10th amendment clarifies that because the federal government is not authorized to operate the schools that right is reserved to the states, or the people. “

Lynnette Explains the Strengths of Dual Enrollment

“Dual-enrollment gives the parent the marvelous opportunity to examine the options for each and every child every year and choose exactly what would be best for them. Some years when the children were young, I hand-picked

their curriculum from all of the wonderful choices available to home schooling families with little or no classes from the local school, but as they got older we generally increased the number of classes they were allowed to take [at the school]. Of course, Seminary was first on the list, and that was followed by Music, both vocal groups and Orchestra. Other classes our children have chosen to take are higher level Math classes, Theater, Art, Drafting, Woodworking, Computers, Word Processing, Driver's Education, Clothing, Child Care, P.E. . . the list goes on and on.

There is also an advantage to claiming your child is a non-matriculated student because the parent remains in the driver's seat. You do not have to allow your children to remain in any class where the environment is unsafe, unhealthy to them either physically or emotionally, or where the teacher is so poor that the time they would spend in that class is not worthwhile. School personnel are generally very willing to help parents enroll their children in classes that are pleasing to them because any enrollment will access state funds for the school.

“High quality curriculum is available to home schooling families choosing dual enrollment that is both accredited and unaccredited. While accreditation is not important at all in the early grades clear up to eight, and is not necessary for college entrance as long as an ACT Test Score is adequate, it is sometimes an advantage during the high school years.”

Correspondence and Online Courses

BYU has offered high-school-level correspondence classes for years, and they offer diplomas. The courses are intended for those who cannot get to a classroom or to supplement the curriculum of the public schools for students who are short of credits; consequently the courses are strictly secular in nature (and quite expensive). Of course BYU's college-level classes are also available online and by correspondence, and these include all their religion courses. Another company whose secular curriculum is accredited and offers diplomas used by many home-schooling families is called American High School. There are also many non-denominational Christian-based online or correspondence courses available, many of which are accredited. Some of these credits may be transferred directly to your local high school or vice versa. Diplomas are not as essential, however, as many parents think. As Lynnette, mentioned, a high school diploma is not required for college entrance. Students may be accepted based on ACT scores, a GED, partial transcript, or other evidence of ability.

Lynnette Sums it Up, and Robb Holmstead Gives Guidelines

Lynnette said, "It behooves us as parents to prayerfully consider each child's strengths and weaknesses, the strengths and weaknesses of both public education in general and also our local schools. [We can] prayerfully choose an educational program which will reinforce our beliefs as Latter-day-Saints and our beliefs as American citizens who have been blessed with unprecedented freedom and prosperity because we have lived under a divinely inspired Constitution. I am looking forward to the Millennial day when all of the schools available to our descendants reinforce such beliefs, but for now I am grateful that we do have choices as parents."

Robb Holmstead sent a thought-provoking response indicating that he felt parental responses would be more beneficial if they could be assessed in the framework of governing principles and the application of those principles within the circumstances of one's means and talents. He sent a chart that identifies educational issues. My version of the chart is:

1. Stewardship: who has the primary duty and fundamental right to educate children? The Lord tells us it is the parents--not the Church or the government (City, county, state or federal).

2. Are agency and Individuality honored in our children's present school setting? Are our children being encouraged to develop solid character and individual gifts?

3. What qualifications should we require in teachers of our children?

(Are academic certifications enough? What about moral example, love of children, and the Spirit's companionship?)

4. Curriculum concerns: Should general school curriculum be religion-less? Are our children being taught in the school setting we've chosen for them the Humanistic idea that man is the highest source of truth [or even, as Elder Packer suggests, the "religion" of atheism]?

Does their current curriculum promote faith in God? If not in school, how and when are our children being taught all things spiritual from the Standard Works? Are they being taught absolute moral standards or "relative morals"?

5. Funding: if we attempt to do more than tax-funded public school how much will it cost and how will we work those costs into our current budget?

I suggest we discuss the above issues in our homes, determine our governing principles, and prayerfully make our decisions according to those principles. My intention in this series has not been to play "ain't it awful" in regard to the prevailing education systems in our country, but to encourage mutual support in the quest to discover our options and to find positive solutions. I hope in future articles to offer many uplifting ideas for parents, and to focus on ways to be more personally involved in our children's education and in bringing the light of Christ more brightly into our children's lives.

Note: For more work by Darla Isackson, go to: www.rosehavenpublishing.com

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