

The Definitive Guide to Online Programs for Homeschoolers



[MICHIGANVIRTUAL.ORG](https://michiganvirtual.org)



This guide has been specially prepared for parents who may want to supplement their homeschool curriculum with online courses. It answers common questions and is designed to help parents decide if online courses are a good option for their child.

In the following pages, you will find information on:

- The basics of online learning
- How to prepare for online courses
- Questions to ask your online program provider
- Options for covering the cost of online courses

Michigan Virtual's 200+ homeschool online programs can open a whole wonderful world of learning for your child that goes far beyond the basics. In each online course, your homeschool student will receive guidance and feedback from a highly qualified instructor who is an expert in their subject area. Our student pass rate is significantly higher – more than 25 percentage points higher – than the statewide average for virtual learning. In part, this is due to our quality curriculum and emphasis on supports for online learners.

Table of Contents

- The Facts: Myths vs. Reality 5**
 - Homeschool Myth #1: Homeschoolers don't get socialized because they're only around their family. 5
 - Homeschool Myth #2: Parents aren't trained to be teachers. 6
 - Homeschool Myth #3: Only a stay-at-home parent can homeschool their child. 7
 - Homeschool Myth #4: Homeschoolers don't learn the right subjects and have a hard time getting into college. 8
 - Homeschool Myth #5: Kids in homeschool don't get to participate in extracurricular activities. 9
 - Homeschool Myth #6: Very few people are homeschooled. 10
 - Homeschool Myth #6: It's cheating to use online homeschool programs. . . 10
- The Basics 11**
 - Finding the right online homeschool program for your child's unique interests. 12
 - Steps for getting ready for 'virtual school'. 12
 - Enjoy the experience of alternative schooling 14
- Why Online Courses? 16**
 - Online courses cover subjects from advanced programming to world literature 17
 - Online schooling eases the workload for busy parents of homeschoolers . . 17
 - Prepping for college with a homeschooling online program 19
- Student Perspective. 20**
 - Top 8 reasons homeschool students like online programs. 21
- The Challenges 25**
 - Challenge #1: Self-Motivation 25
 - Challenge #2: Tech Abilities 26
 - Challenge #3: Social Interaction. 27
 - Challenge #4: Teacher Interaction. 27
 - Challenge #5: Technical Difficulties 28

The Right Fit 29
The Facts About eLearning & What They Mean for Your Child30

Getting Started 33
Step 1: Have all the supplies you need33
Step 2: Create a space that’s good for learning.35
Step 3: Know where to find help35
Step 4: Take a big, deep breath36

Parental Support. 37
Tip #1: Tech (and Not-So-Tech) Prep37
Tip #2: Give Your Student Space39
Tip #3: Be Both a Parent and a Mentor39
Tip #4: Know Where to Get Help41

Finding the Right Online Program.41
Technology42
Courses43
Instructors44
Additional Questions45

Programs for Free 46
Several options for obtaining free online homeschool courses.46
Homeschool Partnerships47
Seat-Time Waivers48
Non-Core Electives.49

Michigan’s Seat-Time Waivers 50
A seeming contradiction?50
Seat-time waivers & online courses.51
Contacting your local school district.51

Success Stories 53
Famous Homeschool Students Who Made it Big54

Notes 57



The Facts: Myths vs. Reality

Do homeschoolers get enough socialization? Are parents qualified to teach? Can my homeschooled child get into college? These rank among some of the top questions surrounding homeschoolers.

Let's take a look at some of the most popular myths so you and your family can make the education choices that are right for you.

Homeschool Myth #1: Homeschoolers don't get socialized because they're only around their family.

This mainstream misconception just doesn't match reality on several levels.

First, children who are homeschooled in Michigan often have more opportunities to build relationships and engage in their communities because they aren't confined to one classroom or building.

Hands-on learning, educational trips, extracurricular activities, and volunteerism provide a homeschool advantage to learners at every level.

Think about it this way:

A homeschooler learning about modern art can bring a lesson

to life with a trip to the city museum, joining a drop-in art group, or talking with a local muralist. These activities not only provide subject knowledge but opportunities to speak with others from diverse backgrounds.

If you're still not convinced, two studies conducted by researchers found that homeschooled children are [equally “well-adjusted” and show fewer behavioral problems](#) than their peers.

Homeschool Myth #2: Parents aren't trained to be teachers.

The same people who taught their children to walk and talk are actually very well equipped to adopt a homeschool program for their children.

Who knows their child better than a parent?

Parents who homeschool their children already have taken the role of mentor by deciding that this is the best education option.

[Online courses complement the homeschool curriculum](#), providing additional opportunities for parents to mentor and support their child in a one-on-one learning environment.

Still not convinced?

A quick Google search turns up literally hundreds of resources, including homeschool curriculum, online school programs, and more.

Of course, just like anything you may find on the internet, it's important for parents to carefully review this information.

When it comes to online homeschool programs, Michigan Virtual offers a [Parent Guide](#) that answers many of the questions related to online learning.

Here are a few key items to consider when choosing the best online homeschool program for your child:

- Certified [online learning programs](#)
- Access to [highly qualified, Michigan-certified teachers](#) who provide guidance and feedback
- Variety of courses, including [Advanced Placement](#)
- Customized to your child's learning style

Equipped with this knowledge, the parent-as-teacher role gets a boost with trusted support, valuable resources, and engaging education programs.

Homeschool Myth #3: Only a stay-at-home parent can homeschool their child.

Parents who select homeschooling for their children represent a cross-section of the U.S. population.

[Homeschooling in the United States](#), a comprehensive study by the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, reveals diversity of race, income, and reasons for selecting a homeschool education.

This research also found that homeschool households include two-parent, one-parent, and non-parental guardians.

Equipped with excellent learning programs and reliable resources, families of all different makeups can successfully have their children learn at home.

Common traits shared among these families, however, are patience, self-discipline, and carefully selected courses that fit their child.

With some diligence and the right support, today's families can enjoy the experience of the homeschool advantage.

Homeschool Myth #4: Homeschoolers don't learn the right subjects and have a hard time getting into college.

The state of Michigan has basic requirements that all students, including homeschoolers, must satisfy in order to graduate. A parent considering homeschooling should familiarize themselves with the law, so they can choose the best option for their family.

Michigan's homeschool law includes the following provisions:

- Parents have the right to educate a child at home in an organized educational program
- Parents assign homework, gives tests and grades these tests as well as issue report cards, transcripts and diplomas
- Instruction must include math, science, reading, English, and social studies in all grades

Since homeschoolers develop exceptional self-discipline and considerable online skills, some of the nation's top colleges seek them out.

Just like other students, their grades, the curriculum they pursued, and SAT/ACT test scores all play a factor in college admissions.

Some additional suggestions for homeschool students include providing details on extracurricular activities, earning college credits while in high school, and the reasoning for selecting homeschool.

Homeschool Myth #5: Kids in homeschool don't get to participate in extracurricular activities.

Opportunities to participate in numerous events abound for all children, including homeschoolers.

From youth leagues, camps, local theater groups, scouting, and church functions, the sky's the limit for young people.

The real challenge is for modern parents who must orchestrate all the comings and goings of their children.

Homeschoolers can pursue their interests and learn new things just like everyone else.

A more flexible schedule coupled with not being confined to a school building offer these students the chance to embark on all kinds of activities.

Plus, many public and nonpublic schools welcome homeschoolers to join their peers on the field, in the music hall and clubs. Check with your local school to find out more.

In Michigan, the [Gull Lake Virtual Partnership](#) serves as an excellent example of a public school's use of online courses to enhance the education experience.

The partnership “strives to offer meaningful and personalized learning opportunities for students to grow and thrive as they discover their own unique talents.” Fully online classes, blended learning, and early college are opportunities offered to all students, including homeschoolers.

If you still have doubts about extracurricular participation, a look at some famous homeschoolers should put your mind at ease.

Actresses Whoopi Goldberg and Jennifer Love Hewitt, former

national security advisor Condoleeza Rice and football great Tim Tebow all got their education starts through homeschool. Look at them now!

Homeschool Myth #6: Very few people are homeschooled.

While “big” is subjective, let’s just say that there are enough homeschoolers to fill the University of Michigan’s “Big House” over 15 times, Ford Field more than 26 times, and DTE Energy Music Theater 111 times.

At 1.7 million and climbing, homeschooling has taken hold in the U.S.

Parents report several important reasons for this increase. According to the [National Center for Educational Statistics](#), they include:

- Concern about the school environment, such as safety, drugs, or negative peer pressure
- Dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools
- Desire to provide religious instruction

Homeschool Myth #6: It’s cheating to use online homeschool programs.

There is no shame in adding online courses to your homeschool curriculum.

In fact, parents should relish in the fact that they have made a thoughtful investment in their children’s education.

Plus, they’ve opened up a whole new world of opportunities for advanced coursework, a variety of electives, and honing tech and time management skills.

The right online program for your homeschool student will allow him or her to explore interests while also covering required coursework.

Best of all, parents can further personalize learning for individual students' needs.

Whatever the reason, the decision to homeschool is unique to each Michigan family. Just as each child learns and discovers differently so, too, is the journey for homeschoolers.

Equipped with the facts, resources, and support, parents can make an informed choice that best prepares their child for the future.

The Basics

With significant growth in both computer-based learning and homeschooling, it's no surprise that the number of online homeschool programs have exploded as well.

As you explore the idea of virtual courses, keep in mind your child's learning habits so you can choose the best homeschool curriculum for education success.



In Michigan, alternative schooling such as homeschool comes with a variety of resources and curriculums.

Some public school districts even offer free online courses to homeschool students. Check with your local school to find out more.

Finding the right online homeschool program for your child's unique interests

Flexibility, along with developing a curriculum that aligns with your child's unique interests, are among the best aspects of a homeschool education.

If you choose to enhance your child's learning experience, online courses offer the basics as well as those that capitalize on interests and learning styles.

In Michigan, [state law](#) requires instruction in [math](#), [science](#), reading, [English](#), and [social studies](#) in all grades.

Additionally, for grades 10 through 12, homeschoolers also must learn about the U.S. Constitution, the Michigan Constitution, [U.S. history](#) and [present form of government](#) in the state of Michigan and political subdivisions and municipalities.

Outside of the required instruction, a whole world of education awaits your child through online learning.

Here at *Michigan Virtual*, for example, we offer 40 courses specifically designed for [middle school students](#) and over 200 for [high schoolers](#).

Add in [23 AP courses](#), [seven world languages](#), [electives](#), and more for an exciting and robust homeschool curriculum that best prepares your child for the future.

Steps for getting ready for 'virtual school'

You've made the decision to incorporate an online homeschool program into your child's learning experience

Now, what are your next steps?

Let's start with technology and a few questions to consider:

- Are there technical requirements for the courses your child would like to take?
- Can you provide the technology needed?
- Are there well-defined steps for getting tech support?

Next, you'll want to create a learning environment that best supports your child, by answering questions like:

- Does the online program offer an orientation that walks you through the basics, including technology needs, uploading homework, and taking exams?
- Is there an instructor who will provide feedback and support?
- How quickly will your student receive feedback and grading from their instructor?

Finally, you and your child will want to select the [online homeschool courses](#) that provide standard disciplines and those that make the most of your child's interests.

You'll want to determine the following:

- Are there prerequisites for the online course?
- Can my child take the course without being enrolled in a local school?
- What is the time commitment?
- Can my child drop the course if it is too difficult?
- Does the course meet quality standards?
- Are the instructors certified to teach?

As your child embarks on an online learning adventure, you're likely to have more questions along the way.

Picking the best homeschool curriculum will give you access to educators and representatives who can effectively address your inquiries.

Enjoy the experience of alternative schooling

You've already made the important decision to homeschool.

That's a major investment of your time and energy so that your child can have the best education in the right environment.

Adding an online component can enhance and broaden the education journey.

To support your decision for online courses, national experts have published 10 attributes to describe Next Generation Learning models, which include:

#1. Personalized to child's needs and learning goals.

When learners pick their courses, they take greater ownership.

#2. Flexible so the child can try different ways to learn.

Online learning allows scheduling to accommodate health, athletic, job and family circumstances.

#3. Interactive and engaging to draw the child in.

Homeschoolers meet people outside their community in a safe environment. Multimedia used for online learning provides different ways of learning.

#4. Relevant to life the child wants to lead.

The child gains more experience learning on modern technology tools that are also used in college and the workplace.

#5. Paced by the child's progress measured against goals he or she understands.

Homeschoolers can move faster or slower through assignments and track their progress toward their goal.

#6. Constantly informed by different ways of demonstrating and measuring progress.

Educational technology can measure and share progress quickly.

#7. Collaborative with educators, peers, and others while not limited by proximity.

Children can access learning materials and resources using online communication tools.

#8. Responsive and supportive when the homeschooler needs extra help.

Communicating outside the typical school day is supported by the online learning culture. Many learners – and teachers – report they spend more time interacting online than in the typical school classroom.

#9. Challenging but achievable with opportunities to become an expert in an area of interest.

Online learning reinforces lifelong learning skills and promotes information literacy and communication skills as well as thinking and problem-solving skills.

#10. Available to the child as much as it is to every other learner.

Online learning can direct the talents of some of the most skilled educators to the most underserved populations. A zipcode does not have to determine learning options.



Why Online Courses?

Homeschooling opens the door to so many wonderful educational opportunities.

Not bound by classroom walls, textbooks, and a rigid schedule, the homeschooler can explore subject areas using a variety of approaches.

Even better, hands-on learning, field trips, and community engagement bring to life the study of math, science, English, and social studies.

That same flexibility can mean supplementing a homeschool curriculum with an online program.

While Michigan law requires the study of core subjects noted above, online schooling provides avenues for a child to explore their unique interests and learn at their own pace.

Online schooling offered by trusted educational resources, such as [those we offer here at Michigan Virtual](#), are led by trained online instructors who are available to provide guidance and answer questions.

Online courses cover subjects from advanced programming to world literature

Has your child always loved animals? They may be able to take an online course on [veterinary science](#) and the care of animals.

Or, does your teen enjoy crunching numbers and exploring data? Probability and [statistics](#) will engage his or her mind with conducting studies, anticipating patterns and employing statistical inference to draw conclusions.

If the fine arts capture your learner's attention, there's a broad palette of online programs worth exploring, including [art appreciation](#), [history](#), [digital photography](#) and [guitar](#). There are even [music appreciation](#) electives that open the mind to new ways of thinking about music.

So, whether it's studying traditional coursework or exploring new interests, homeschool online programs provide options that enhance and engage the education experience.

Online schooling eases the workload for busy parents of homeschoolers

A trusted education resource is like having the best educators right in your home.

Parents are the first, and often the best teachers of their children. Yet, it's difficult to be an expert in every subject.

Some excel in mathematics and can discern geometry,

trigonometry, and calculus without batting an eye. Others can quote the world's literary geniuses and speak several languages.

When, however, a subject arises that is unfamiliar or not considered since high school, parents can have confidence in supplementing their homeschool curriculum with an online program.

With many to choose from, here a few helpful tips on selecting the best for you and your homeschooler:

Tip #1

Pick a program with highly qualified instructors who are experts in their subject matter

Tip #2

Make sure this program offers ongoing support when your child has questions or needs support.

Tip #3

Find out if your local school district offers free online courses for homeschool students.

Tip #4

Study the list of courses to make sure Michigan-required courses are offered as well as Advanced Placement classes and career-oriented electives.

Tip #5

Know what grade levels the courses are designed for so you can determine if it's a K-12 online school or for specific grade levels only.

Tip #6

Ask if the program offers summer enrichment programs so learning doesn't cool down when the weather heats up.

Tip #7

Check to see if the program has a quality curriculum that has been evaluated by a third-party vendor.

With the right online partner, homeschool students can enjoy a variety of learning opportunities, explore interests, and know that the curriculum will enrich their minds.

Parents have the comfort of knowing they are doing the best for their child by offering them a robust educational experience.

Prepping for college with a homeschooling online program

In addition to offering variety and self-paced learning, online courses help prepare young people for their next steps in life.

Myths regarding the readiness of homeschoolers to enter college just don't hold up when you consider their experiences and outcomes.

Here are just a few of the advantages of virtual education when it comes to preparing students for college and beyond:

- **Computer skills** learned early in life that will be beneficial in the post-secondary environment. Taking online computer courses on topics like programming, cybersecurity, and social media can provide students with a functional knowledge of computers and technology that will benefit them in the future.
- **Time management** experienced with self-paced online classes. Homeschoolers are not restricted to one classroom or building,

so they learn how to manage their studies, community events, and extracurricular activities.

- **Study skills** are as instrumental to homeschoolers as they are to their peers in other education settings. You may choose to seek out online courses specifically designed to strengthen study skills and strategies to increase students' performance.
- **Openness** to new ideas is developed through engagement in a variety of interdisciplinary subjects, such as psychology, hospitality and tourism, and world languages. This is critical to the college-bound teen as they embark on careers, meet new people, and prepare for the modern workforce.

Homeschooling is an investment in a child's education and future. Complementing a homeschool curriculum with online courses can generate new interests and ideas.



Student Perspective

With more than 1.7 million homeschoolers in the U.S., it comes as no surprise that both children and their parents are enjoying the benefits of homeschooling as compared to the traditional classroom.

As a parent, you've already made a significant investment in your child by choosing to educate him or her at home.

The reason for your decision is as unique as your children. Or, perhaps, your older learner presented the idea to you as an alternative or better way for them to earn their high school diploma.

Whatever the motive, many have found that online programs can help them complete their coursework, pursue academic interests and earn credits toward college.

Find out more about how students can succeed with online learning in our downloadable [student](#) and [parent](#) guides.

Top 8 reasons homeschool students like online programs

Getting any student, especially a teenager, to share what they like about education may seem a daunting task. There are, however, many resources, vlogs, and blogs — [some from students themselves](#) — on the benefits of online learning.

While learning in your PJs is a pretty decent perk, there are other attributes that contribute to an excellent, well-rounded education.

Here, the [Virtual Learning Leadership Alliance](#) notes the top eight to help you decide if online courses will complement your homeschool program:

#1 Flexible

While a typical public school day begins with the early morning bell and ends later in the afternoon, online learners can start and stop their classwork when they choose.

Yes, some parents set up a schedule for their homeschooler.

Others, especially those with older students, may provide them with the flexibility to do their studies when they want... as long as they are showing progress.

And, the ability to work outside a rigid schedule opens the door to extracurricular activities, field trips, and hands-on learning outside of the home.

#2 Accessible

Whether in Marquette or Monroe, all homeschoolers can have the same access to high-quality online courses and electives. All that's needed is a computer, wi-fi, and a commitment to virtual learning.

Plus, some of the most skilled educators are available to teach those who may reside in the most underserved populations.

This means that no matter where a child lives, they can get a high-quality education and embark on their future from a level playing field with their peers.

#3 Relevant

Today, the world moves at lightning speed. Equipping homeschool students with the tools they'll need for success is essential to a K-12 education.

An online program with a robust, modern curriculum is key to success after high school.

In addition to Michigan's required courses, a student will benefit from courses that are relevant to their interests as well as a future career.

Explore programs that offer a variety of subjects that not only cover the basics but offer AP coursework and an array of electives as well.

Plus, homeschoolers who enroll in online classes gain the 21st-century technology skills used in college and the workplace.

#4 Personalized

One of the best parts of homeschooling is the ability for a child to learn at his or her own pace and in a manner that delivers positive outcomes.

Some students master specific subjects easier than others. Others excel at diligently reviewing lessons and notes before moving on.

Virtual school allows each style of learner to enjoy success and at their own pace.

They are not bound to move ahead when their classmates do.

#5 Interactive

The multimedia used in online programs engage and encourage the student to learn subject material in a variety of ways. They do so in a safe setting and meet people outside their own community.

The best online courses also provide ongoing access to educators, tech support, and a convenient help desk.

Teacher-led courses provide an interactive environment that stimulates learning and offers homeschoolers assistance as they need it to complete coursework.

#6 Collaborative

Parents, students, and educators come together for the good of the student. After all, it's successful learners who support online programs, recommending them to their peers and others.

The very nature of virtual learning expands beyond geographic boundaries and socioeconomic characteristics.

This broadens a student's mind and removes barriers to education.

#7 Self-paced

Similar to the flexibility noted earlier, a child can learn at his or her own pace without feeling the constraints of a typical classroom setting.

Thus, online homeschooling removes peer stigmas and permits a faster learner to move ahead at a rate that meets their learning style.

With this, however, comes the discipline of completing the coursework or seeking help from the online educator.

Setting individual goals and recording progress are useful in a student's individual journey.

#8 Challenging

While online courses require certain learning skills, they also offer many opportunities to become a subject expert, explore topics of interest, and take advanced coursework.

These challenges, once achieved, position students for lifelong learning and information literacy.

The thirst for knowledge carries them throughout life.

In addition, homeschoolers develop study habits, communication skills, and problem-solving abilities that will serve them well in college, the workplace and beyond.



The Challenges

As a parent of a homeschooled child, you've likely already considered the pros and cons of your child's educational path.

The choice to homeschool, of course, also comes with many other issues as you embark on this educational journey.

Will my child enjoy e-learning? What if help is needed while taking an online class?

These are all valid questions that deserve thoughtful consideration. That's why we do our best to provide you with answers on [how eLearning works](#) so that you and your child can effectively address challenges head-on for a robust educational experience.

Here are some of the top challenges presented by online classes and helpful tips for tackling them head-on:

Challenge #1: Self-Motivation

One of the many benefits of homeschooling is the flexibility it allows for a child to learn at his or her own pace.

This flexibility, however, can quickly become a challenge if a student is not committed to putting in the required time to complete online courses and textbook work in a timely manner.

While the same is true of traditional classroom learning, self-motivation is especially key for homeschoolers who supplement their curriculum with eLearning.

It can be tempting to become lax when it comes to consistent, daily instruction from an online resource.

The good news is that online classes can help a homeschooler develop skills that will successfully serve them throughout their lives.

Time management, independent motivation, and adopting new methods for learning are essential competencies for college, the workplace, and beyond.

Challenge #2: Tech Abilities

Yes, today's young people are typically ahead of the curve when it comes to technology. There are, however, some homeschoolers who may struggle with the ins and outs of eLearning.

Getting set up, logging in, selecting the correct online courses, submitting homework, and asking questions can seem daunting tasks in themselves.

Picking the best online program can help navigate these potential pitfalls so the student can focus on subject matter.

To anticipate possible technical challenges associated with e-courses, it's important to pick an online provider that offers a strong support system for students, including a toll-free phone line, an online troubleshooter, and easy-to-follow FAQs.

Other resources are the knowledge base, customer care, or

submitting a ticket to the provider's website. Instructors also will often help a student with technology issues within their course through avenues such as a voicethread.

Often, homeschoolers enrolled in online classes adapt very quickly to eLearning. Plus, they get the added advantage of honing their computer skills as they prepare for college and careers.

Challenge #3: Social Interaction

It's a common misconception that homeschoolers don't receive any social interaction outside of their families.

In fact, homeschoolers already have a leg up when it comes to the need for daily, face-to-face interaction with teachers and peers.

While each student's curriculum is unique to them, textbooks, hands-on experiences, and community engagement are some of the more common learning tools used for educating a child at home.

Still, some parents may have concerns over the amount of screen time their child experiences in a day.

It's important to know that online classes are given by an instructor. During this time, however, the homeschooler has the opportunity to pause the course, get up and stretch, or even take a walk to process the information.

As far as peer interaction, homeschoolers participate in all kinds of extracurricular activities to keep them in touch with other young people. There also are groups organized just for Michigan students who learn at home.

Challenge #4: Teacher Interaction

Many online providers do not have teacher-led courses. This does often provide a significant challenge to learning since there's no

one for students to connect with to make lessons meaningful and provide them with feedback.

Due to the virtual nature inherent of eLearning, it is so important to make sure that the online course you select is taught by highly qualified teachers.

That's why we ensure that every single one of our instructors has these credentials and interacts frequently with their students to answer questions, clarify lessons, and provide guidance.

It's important you select a program that has teachers who are a) highly qualified in their subject area and b) receiving ongoing and continuous training in best practices for online teaching.

Challenge #5: Technical Difficulties

The power goes out and with it goes your online session. The reality is that network connections, browser capabilities and other technical issues do arise from time to time with eLearning.

Unfortunately, these problems are not often preventable and are a fact of life in a tech-driven world. Traditional classrooms often face similar struggles with technology.

However, the flexibility of homeschooling means technical disruptions like these can provide the time to continue learning through other means.

Studying art history when the network goes down? A trip to the local art museum can equate to a hands-on (or rather eyes-on) education complemented by a conversation with a knowledgeable docent.

Or, if the dreaded black screen appears on the computer in the middle of a Spanish lesson, a surprise visit to a bilingual grandmother will help the student practice conversational Spanish.

Short of having a generator and 100% reliable wi-fi, the best bet for handling technical problems is to have a backup plan.

Here are a few ideas so that learning can continue:

- Check the local library for free wi-fi and computer use.
- Pair online lessons with hands-on activities throughout the community.
- Keep the Help Desk phone number handy for the online program.

With a bit of preparation and self-motivation, homeschool students can enjoy learning about an array of subjects through online courses. At the same time, they will develop critical skills to position them for future success.

The Right Fit

No one knows your child better than you do.

Is your young learner self-motivated and enjoy independent exploration? Does your teen like the challenge of advanced placement classes or learning a world language?



These are just some of the types of questions parents will want to consider when deciding if an online course is right for their child.

Armed with the knowledge of your child's learning style and research on the many online learning options available today, you can have confidence in your educational choices.

*Fill out our research institute's **Online Learner Readiness Rubric** to see if your child is ready to take an online course.*

The Facts About eLearning & What They Mean for Your Child

There are many **misconceptions** that persist about homeschooling.

With the rapid growth of online courses available today, it can create confusion on which program is right for your student.

Again, asking plenty of questions and doing your homework will help you select not only the best eCourses but the program that will help your homeschooler excel.

While online courses can appear similar on the surface, it's important to get as much information as you can on these particular items:

Pace of learning

The beauty of both homeschooling and online school is that a student can work at his or her own rate.

Do know that while there may not be deadlines for assignments, there can be firm start and end dates for courses.

Also, if a student is taking an AP class, there are deadlines in those.

Support for Online Learners

Due to the nature of online courses, it's important to have technical support and help available when your student needs it.

Does the program have a devoted helpline, pacing guides, resources on how to succeed, and other assets designed for student success?

Instructors

Some online providers do not offer an instructor. If that's important to you or your student, make sure to ask.

Some programs, like Michigan Virtual, provide highly qualified instructors who are experts in their subject matter and able to provide individual feedback on assignments

Social Interaction

As the parent of a homeschooler, you already know how to keep your child connected with others and the community.

Often cited among common homeschool pros and cons, social development also can present similar concerns, though it is generally seen as more of a misconception than reality.

Does the eLearning program include a safe community where students can connect with the instructor and peers? Are teachers available in a variety of ways, including chat and text?

These questions and others will help you better understand – and select – the best curriculum for you and your student.

Types of Online Courses

There's much more to a K-12 education than the core curriculum.

While Michigan law requires homeschoolers to receive instruction in math, science, reading, English, and social studies, in all grades, eLearning can open a whole world of learning opportunities.

Does your child love computers and technology? The arts?

Or does taking AP courses and earning college credits drive your child?

See which online program offers a variety of subjects and electives to explore.

Flexibility

Homeschooling, as well as online study, means your child is not bound to a brick-and-mortar classroom.

Family trips, sports schedules, and extracurricular activities don't have to be sacrificed in order to learn.

In fact, incorporating these activities into your child's education enhances education and social interactions.

Make sure the online program you're considering supports the flexibility that fits your family's lifestyle.

Qualifications, Accreditations, and Certifications

Not all online programs are created equal.

To guarantee the best educational outcomes for your student, check to see if the program has earned any endorsements or qualifications from reputable, third-party sources.

Ask if the instructors are highly qualified in their subject area and if the program is accredited by a regional or national accrediting body.

With the growth of both public and private programs, this information can often reveal the best choice for your homeschooler.

As you learn more about online classes, you will discover whether they are a good fit for your child. Some may want to start slowly, trying out one course that seems right for him or her.

You can always add additional courses if your student has enjoyed it and wants to complement their homeschool curriculum.

Find out if online programs are right for your homeschooler with over 200 parent and student resources from Michigan Virtual.

Getting Started

As a homeschooler, you may not need the latest fall fashions or brand name backpack, but you'll definitely want to make sure you have everything in order to avoid any unanticipated pitfalls.

Follow the easy steps provided below, and you can confidently begin your online school journey.

If at any point along the way, you want to learn more about these skills, check out our Online Learning Orientation Tool, which will walk you through the process of preparing for an online course.

For more information, check out the free guides to online learning for parents and students created by researchers at the Michigan Virtual Learning Research Institute.



Step 1: Have all the supplies you need

Computer. Check.

Software. Check.

Environment. Check.

Yes, it really is that easy if the online course you selected provides this information as part of its welcome process.

With technology changing so quickly, it's important to double-check the computer requirements since it's your main connection for eLearning.

The type of computer – PC or Apple – often depends on your area of study.

While both can do similar things, PCs and tablets are most often preferred by those who don't need the Mac attachments for design and art.

Most important is that your computer is reliable, fits your personal needs, and has the basics you'll need (e.g., monitor, keyboard, mouse, updated operating system, and adequate RAM).

Today's online courses typically require a high-speed internet connection. Some rural areas may have difficulty acquiring this service.

So, it's important to make sure your home or local library has internet that's available and reliable.

In addition, you may need some other equipment to enhance your learning experience. Possible items include a webcam, noise-canceling headphones, a microphone, and speakers.

What software will you need?

Again, online course requirements may vary depending on the program and subject matter.

Basic software, such as Microsoft Office, Adobe Reader, and security, are often a good place to start in addition to any specialized software you may need for your online course.

Other low-tech items you will want to have in hand are pens,

pencils, paper, and even an old school personal planner to keep you on track with coursework, deadlines, and tests.

Step 2: Create a space that's good for learning

So, this step is as unique as you are.

Do you enjoy being in the center of activity and are you able to block out background noise?

Or, do you prefer absolute quiet, soft music, and comfy chairs for studying?

By taking a really good look at yourself and how you learn best, you can make your online school space exactly as you like it.

A couple of things to keep in mind as you create your work area:

- Make sure it's a personal space that matches your study habits.
- While “homeschool” may include the word “home,” you may want to consider a library, coffee shop, or a public building as your perfect learning space.
- Make sure that there is at least one place that you can always count on for optimal learning and completing course work.

Step 3: Know where to find help

Your tech is ready and your personalized space is enticing you to learn.

Now, you just need to make sure you have the resources at your fingertips should a problem arise.

Online programs, such as *Michigan Virtual*, provide several ways to contact them for help. They include:

- **Course instructor**, who may teach the virtual course, is a great resource to help support you and provide feedback as you navigate the course.
- **Mentor**, who for homeschoolers is often your parent or guardian.
- **Help Desk**, that you can contact either through email or by phone for issues that your parent or instructor cannot resolve.
- **Parent**, who may have access to your course and can check-in to see if you're keeping up.
- **Peers**, who are familiar with eLearning, can encourage you and help in troubleshooting. Others in your online course also can tell you about course features and assignments.

As you can see, there are many who are available to assist when you may need it.

Knowing that you have supports in place gives you the confidence to achieve great results in your online classes.

Step 4: Take a big, deep breath

You've got this! Not only should you enjoy online learning but know that you are embarking on a path that will lead you well through life.

Computer skills, coupled with self-motivation and time management, are secondary experiences gained through your coursework.

These capabilities better prepare eLearners for college coursework as compared to traditional classroom learners.

Now, that's something to smile about.



Parental Support

As the parent of a homeschool student, you already have made an important decision in your child's education.

In doing so, you provide endless support and serve as both parent and mentor to your child.

While considering the many learning approaches available to today's students, you know that online courses may be an effective way to supplement your child's homeschool education.

If you have opted to incorporate eLearning, you, too, have done your homework on the best programs and their fit with your homeschooler's learning style.

Now, both you and your child are excited to get started. Equipped with the following helpful tips, parents of homeschool students can help them enjoy a great education experience.

Tip #1: Tech (and Not-So-Tech) Prep

While it may be a no-brainer that a computer is necessary for online classes, the type, speed, memory, software, and techno-gadgets may not be so easy to pick.

While different programs require various tech components, here are some homeschool basics:

- **Computer:** The type of computer – PC or Apple – often depends on your student’s area of study. While both can do similar things, PCs and tablets are most often preferred by those who don’t need the Mac attachments for design and art. Most important is that the computer is reliable, fits your homeschooler’s personal needs, and has the basics (e.g., monitor, keyboard, mouse, updated operating system, and adequate RAM).
- **Internet:** Today’s online courses typically require a high-speed internet connection. Some rural areas may have difficulty acquiring this service. So, it’s important to make sure your home or local library has internet that’s available and reliable.
- **Software:** Online course requirements may vary depending on the program and subject matter. Basic software, such as Microsoft Office, Adobe Reader, and security, are often a good place to start in addition to any specialized software needed for your learner’s online course.
- **Tech gadgets:** Your homeschooler may need some additional equipment to enhance his or her online learning experience. These include a webcam, noise-canceling headphones, a microphone, and speakers.
- **Old school supplies:** Yes, you read that right. Pens, pencils, and paper are standbys for taking notes and a personal planner helps keep your student on track with deadlines, assignments, and tests.

With these items readily available, you will help prepare your student for the excitement of online learning and all the possibilities it offers to enrich their education.

Tip #2: Give Your Student Space

We knew that headline would get your attention.

By space, we're referring to [creating the right learning environment for your homeschooler](#), especially if they are enrolled in an online school.

Knowing your child gives you an advantage in helping create a unique space that's right for him or her.

If she prefers a quiet, isolated nook in the house, designate that area especially for her.

On the other hand, if you have a child who loves being in the center of everything and can still focus, just about any place in your home can work.

The goal is to have somewhere your student can jump on the computer, engage in their lessons, complete assignments, and take tests.

This doesn't have to mean an expensive new addition to your home, but a place that's dedicated and customized to your child's learning style.

Tip #3: Be Both a Parent and a Mentor

You already have a handle on parenting. So, let's turn our attention to mentoring your homeschool student who has supplemented a homeschool education with online classes.

Here at *Michigan Virtual*, we define a mentor as the liaison between the student and online instructor.

Many people have the misconception that online learners don't have the benefit of the traditional human relationships established in the face-to-face classroom.

In fact, the mentor provides that [personal connection for students learning virtually](#).

In the case of homeschool students, the parent serves in the role of mentor, working with the students every day, support them and build trusting relationships.

Ways you can serve as a mentor to your child include:

- **Helping your homeschool student select technology** that will serve him or her today and into tomorrow. Technology does get outdated quickly, so select equipment that has the capacity to add memory and software that comes with online updates.
- **Talking to your homeschool student about his or her perfect [space for online learning](#).** Together, you can create an environment that encourages learning both on- and offline.
- **Sharing life and work experiences that relate to the topic your child is studying online.** This helps bring online lessons alive and keeps them memorable.
- **Helping your homeschool learner stay on track** with online classes, reading assignments, and tests.
- **Discussing progress and goals**, perhaps at the end of each day or week. Writing them down is a great way to keep them in focus.

As a homeschool parent, you may benefit from checking out both our [free parent guide to online learning](#) and our [free mentor guide to online learning](#).

Tip #4: Know Where to Get Help

Unless you're a computer technician or a certified teacher, there will come a time when your homeschool student needs some help or additional resources for an online program.

Don't feel bad if you don't have all the answers because assistance is just a phone call, chat or email away.

Online programs, such as *Michigan Virtual*, provide several ways to contact them for help.

This includes the course instructor teaching the virtual course. The teacher is typically the first one to go to when your child has questions about assignments or resources.

Is your student unable to upload an assignment or download a lesson? The Help Desk can serve as a great resource either through email or by phone for issues that you cannot resolve.

And, let's not forget your child's peers, who are familiar with eLearning.

They can provide encouragement and help in troubleshooting. Other students in your child's online course may also share information about course features and assignments.

With these helpful tips in hand, you can help make your student's online classes a welcome addition to your homeschool curriculum.

Finding the Right Online Program

You've decided to supplement your homeschool program with online learning. That's fantastic!



Now, make the most out of your decision by asking the right questions to your online homeschool program provider.

The provider's answer to these questions will help you decide if the program is the best one for you and your student.

Their responses will provide important insights on levels of support, curriculum, testing, instructors, and more.

Sound good? Let's get started!

Technology

What tech equipment is needed for the online class my homeschooler wants to take?

- PC or Apple?
- Operating system?
- Memory (RAM)?
- Internet speed?
- Peripheral equipment (e.g., webcam, headphones, microphone, speakers, printer, flash drive, etc.)

How do I get tech support when needed?

- Is there a help desk I can call?
- Are there well-defined steps for getting support?
- Chat, email, or phone number?
- How long will I wait for assistance?

Does the provider offer free resources designed to support students and help them succeed in their online course?

The right technology is one of the first steps to [getting your homeschool student prepared](#) for eLearning.

Keep the information you learn, from asking the questions above, when shopping for tech gear so that you can easily find the right equipment.

Also, keep in mind that many computer dealers will help you with set up and offer tech support.

Courses

Yes, there are many questions when it comes to coursework since it's really the most important aspect of online programs for your homeschooler.

You want to make sure you and your student are confident in the program and that it provides the best educational opportunities.

Here are a few questions you might consider asking about an online homeschool program's courses:

- Does the course my student wishes to take fulfill your state's required courses of study?
- Does the online homeschool course(s) my student wishes to take require prerequisites?
- Can my homeschooler take courses without being enrolled in a local school?
- How rigorous are the courses? Will they challenge my student to master concepts before moving onto subsequent lessons?
- How strict are the course assignment due dates?
- Are test dates rigid or does the program offer some flexibility?
- What is the approximate daily time commitment my student should expect?
- How long should it take my student to complete the course?
- Does the course require textbooks or e-texts?

- How and when will my homeschooler receive a final grade?
- What is the process (and getting reimbursement) for dropping an online course?
- Does the program offer Advanced Placement courses and elective classes?
- Has the course been reviewed against national quality standards for online learning? If so, does it meet your needs and expectations?

Instructors

One of the many positives of online learning is the one-on-one time a student can have with the instructor.

Your homeschooler may already be accustomed to not having to vie for a teacher's attention, but it can be helpful for them to receive individualized feedback from instructors who are experts in the subject area they are studying in their course.

The following questions will provide important information on how communication will take place with an online instructor:

- Is there an instructor in the course who will provide my student with feedback and guidance?
- Are instructors highly qualified in their subject area?
- Are instructors trained in best practices for teaching online students?
- Is the instructor available to answer questions and provide support?
- How long can I expect to wait for an instructor to reply to my questions?

To learn more about the training we offer our highly qualified online instructors, check out “Our Course Difference.”

Additional Questions

A few additional questions you may consider asking include:

- Is the program accredited by a recognized regional or national accrediting body?
- Does the program follow national online teaching standards or guidelines?
- Is there data available from the provider on course completion rates?

The list of questions can go on but using the information provided here will get you started on your way to selecting the best online courses for your homeschool student.

Even after enrollment, you should continue to ask questions as they arise to ensure complete satisfaction and, most importantly, the best education for your child.

Getting answers to all your questions regarding online learning can provide peace of mind for you and great opportunities for your homeschooler. Michigan Virtual provides a wealth of trusted resources to assist you in this journey.



Programs for Free

You made the choice to homeschool, but that doesn't mean you're not entitled to have some of your tax dollars benefit your child's education if this choice aligns with your needs and values.

Opting out of public school doesn't automatically exclude you from state-funded programs available through your local school district.

In fact, Michigan law allows students to attend a full-time online school or participate in a [seat-time waiver program](#) approved by the Michigan Department of Education.

In these cases, the school also is required to provide them with a computer and Internet access.

We'll examine these options a bit further so you can: 1) decide if you can take advantage of free online learning and 2) take steps toward getting free online classes for your homeschool student.

Several options for obtaining free online homeschool courses

If you're a homeschool parent looking to [supplement your child's education with online courses](#), it may be worth talking to the principal or superintendent of your local public school district to ask whether they offer any of the following:

- A homeschool partnership program
- Seat-time waivers for homeschool students
- Opportunities for homeschool students to take non-core electives on a part-time basis

Homeschool Partnerships

Some public schools offer homeschool partnerships that allow homeschool students to enroll in online classes and even participate in extracurricular activities.

Some schools are more familiar with homeschool partnerships than others, but it never hurts to ask!

Contact your local public school district or principal to see if they have online study available for your homeschool student.

In Michigan, the [Gull Lake Virtual Partnership](#) serves as an excellent example of a public school's use of online courses to enhance the education experience.

The partnership “strives to offer meaningful and personalized learning opportunities for students to grow and thrive as they discover their own unique talents.”

Fully online classes, blended learning, and early college are opportunities offered to all students, including homeschoolers.

Remember, however:

For your child to keep his or her status as a homeschooler, a parent or guardian must provide [51% of his or her total education](#).

including all core subjects, according to the Homeschool Legal Defense Association.

In addition to core subjects, however, quality online programs also offer an array of electives that can open your learner's mind up to a world of possibilities.

Seat-Time Waivers

In an effort to encourage alternative learning options, the state of Michigan allows seat-time waivers (STWs) that removes the days, hours, and physical attendance requirements for students.

For homeschool students, this means enrolling in the participating district without being required to physically attend the school as they work toward a high school diploma or grade progression.

The benefit of STWs may permit your child to participate in all the district's fine arts, clubs, programs, and athletics as well as have access to a computer, internet service, and a designated mentor.

Just like homeschooling, STWs offers the following advantages:

- Flexibility to study at home, travel, and participate in non-academic activities
- High-quality online courses
- Accelerated learning, including Advanced Placement online classes
- Access to an array of electives

To learn more about Seat-Time Waivers, check out our article exploring how they can help homeschoolers in Michigan.

Non-Core Electives

If your homeschool student has developed an interest in learning a world language or just loves the early Impressionists in art, an elective online course may be the perfect option.

While it may not fall into the category of a core subject, these types of classes are often fun and highly engaging for a student, allowing them to explore their unique interests and passions.

Since electives enhance the educational curriculum, homeschool students can enjoy enhancing their “transcripts” with online learning.

Again, some Michigan school districts welcome homeschool students to take free elective courses. Some may place a limit on the number allowed, so you’ll want to find out directly from the school.

With the options outlined above, parents may jump at the chance to supplement their children’s homeschool curriculum with FREE online classes.

A quick online search and a phone call to your local school district may open the doors to an array of subjects that ignites your learner’s thirst for knowledge.

Many area school districts rely on Michigan Virtual for providing high-quality online classes and certified instructors for both traditional and homeschool students.



Michigan's Seat-Time Waivers

If you're the parent of a homeschool student, understanding [Seat-Time Waivers \(STW\)](#) and how they work in Michigan can help enhance your child's homeschool curriculum.

To encourage [flexible learning options](#), the state of Michigan allows Seat Time Waivers (STWs) that remove the days, hours, and physical attendance requirements for students.

For homeschool students, this means enrolling in a participating district without being required to physically attend the school as they work toward a high school diploma or grade progression.

A seeming contradiction?

"Wait a minute," you say. "Doesn't this go against the principles of homeschooling?"

Not necessarily. It all depends on the reason a parent chooses to homeschool.

Homeschool parents, just like everyone else, pay taxes for public education yet may not be reaping any of the benefits from doing so. State law allows homeschool learners to enroll part-time in elective studies.

Adding an online program to your homeschool curriculum can complement what you are already doing and even enhance the educational experience for your middle or high school student.

Seat-time waivers & online courses

Now, let's take a brief look at how a STW can give you and your homeschool student additional access to free online courses.

First, know that [Michigan law](#) allows students to attend a full-time online school or participate in a seat time waiver program approved by the Michigan Department of Education.

In these cases, the school also is required to provide them with a computer and Internet access.

A homeschool student may be enrolled on a part-time basis in elective courses provided by a public school district.

This type of enrollment is referred to as shared-time enrollment because the student is enrolled in the public district and the homeschool on a part-time basis.

School districts benefit, too, from STWs and shared-time enrollment because they can count the student as part of their overall enrollment. By doing so, they receive additional state funding based on the per pupil count.

Contacting your local school district

Participating public school districts often require the homeschool parent to complete a [STW application](#).

Once completed, the district will review the application for consideration into the program.

The Michigan Department of Education provides a list of [STW-approved districts](#) with program details for each.

A STW often permits your child to participate in all of the district's fine arts, clubs, programs, and athletics as well as have access to a computer, internet service, and a designated mentor if desired.

STWs can offer flexibility, [Advanced Placement courses](#), and access to an array of [electives](#) for homeschoolers.

The first step to getting additional information on STWs available in your community is to contact the principal or superintendent at your local school district.

These administrators are the ones most likely to know whether or not they'll be able to work with you to provide a STW for your child.

Some school districts are more knowledgeable than others about partnering with homeschoolers, so it may take a little research (and persistence) on your part.

The end result, though, can mean free homeschool online courses, access to extracurricular activities, and more for your child.

Seat-Time Waivers are one of several [flexible education options](#) available for homeschoolers in Michigan. With 200+ online homeschool programs, [Michigan Virtual](#) can help you connect to online learning that's right for your middle and high school student.



Success Stories

The A-list of those who got their educational start through homeschool is a testament to this approach of learning.

Many of these successes credit the out-of-classroom opportunities – those that brought lessons to life in a very hands-on way.

Add in the almost limitless number of [homeschool online classes](#) as well as schedules that allow children to excel in athletics and the arts, it soon becomes easy to see how these homeschool attributes can lead a young person to future success.

It's also important to note that these success stories debunk [many of the myths surrounding homeschool](#), including limited socialization, challenges beyond primary school, and lack of involvement in extracurricular activities.

Ready to take a peek at some famous homeschoolers from across history and careers? Let's check them out!

Famous Homeschool Students Who Made it Big

#1 George Washington & U.S. Presidents

Going back quite a bit in history, we find that our first U.S. President, George Washington, was among many distinguished politicians, including 14 presidents, who got a great start with homeschool.

While eLearning wasn't to come onto the scene for another couple of centuries, our early founders likely enjoyed self-paced education and relied on their motivation to excel.

#2 Whoopi Goldberg & The Stars

One of two children of a single, working mother, Whoopi Goldberg began acting at the tender age of 8 with the Hudson Guild Theater.

An advocate for dyslexia, she was not diagnosed with the condition until later in life. She was homeschooled during her youth before struggling in high school, eventually dropping out at 17 due to her condition.

Despite these challenges, Goldberg has gone on to win numerous acting awards and has a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

Numerous thespians and musicians join Goldberg on the list of famous homeschoolers, including Dakota Fanning, Ryan Gosling, Justin Timberlake, Emma Watson, Jena Malone, and Hilary Duff.

#3 Olympians & Elite Athletes

The time and dedication required to become an amazing sports figure make homeschooling a great choice for young athletes and their parents.

Heisman Trophy winner Tim Tebow, gymnast Simone Biles, and tennis greats Venus and Serena Williams are among the many homeschooled athletes who've gone on to become some of the best in the world.

#4 The Artists

You can count renowned artists Leonardo da Vinci, Claude Monet, and Jamie Wyeth among those who rose to success through homeschool programs.

With them are composers John Philip Sousa, Irving Berlin, and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Pretty impressive, right?

Not to be forgotten are the literary geniuses, including George Bernard Shaw, C.S. Lewis, Walt Whitman, and Laura Ingalls Wilder.

Just imagine the essays they handed in while being homeschooled.

A little too old school for you?

While quite a different genre, modern homeschooled artists include Taylor Swift, Selena Gomez, Christina Aguilera, Justin Bieber, and the Jonas Brothers.

#5 Business Entrepreneurs

Perhaps all that good homeschooling meant breaks with fast, delicious snacks.

The likes of Colonel Harland Sanders (KFC), Ray Kroc (McDonald's), and Dave Thomas (Wendy's) would lead one to believe so since they were all homeschooled.

The same skills needed for nontraditional learning also fuel the entrepreneurial spirit. Self-motivation and a zeal for learning are common traits also needed for business success.

Inventors Orville and Wilbur Wright, Thomas Edison, Benjamin Franklin, and Alexander Graham Bell likely got the spark for ingenuity at an early age through their homeschool explorations.

The list of famous, smart, and super talented people who enjoyed the educational perks of homeschooling goes on and on.

It is a veritable collection of who's who, representing acclaimed scientists, statespeople, legal minds, educators, and others whose early years were obviously shaped by their individual homeschool experiences.

And, a special note on homeschool parents: they, too, are accounted among the many success stories.

Not to be outdone by their offspring, many have achieved their own great acknowledgments.

Well-known parents include Will Smith, Robert Frost, Kelly Preston, and John Travolta as well as all whose children have contributed their talents back to society.

While all of us may not achieve this level of stardom, it's important to remember that homeschoolers – just like any child – have the ability to do great things given the right educational jump start on life.

Michigan Virtual can help open the door to your child's own success story by supplementing a homeschool education with high-quality online courses.

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]



MICHIGAN**VIRTUAL**TM

MICHIGANVIRTUAL.ORG