

Curriculum Recommendations

Understanding the terminology:

The Texas Supreme Court case, *Leeper vs. Arlington ISD* is the measuring stick for homeschooling in Texas. In it, the court ruled that home schools are private schools, totally independent of regulation by any governing authority in the state. However, the court also defined what must be taught in home schools – reading, writing, spelling, math, and a course in good citizenship.

Texas' Special Kids also has terminology that we use to define different types of subjects. The subjects defined by the court, with the exception of Good Citizenship, are what TSK refers to as "Skills". Everything else that students learn in school constitutes what we refer to as the "Information Subjects". A student uses Skills to acquire and/or demonstrate understanding of Information. Since there is no way a child can possibly learn all of the information that exists in our world in the short years that he is in school, acquiring Skills is essential for his ability to continue learning throughout his lifetime.

For our purposes here, we will use the term Skills to define the court-ordered subjects that must be covered, and the term Information to define the other subjects that most parents consider important to cover in school. Good Citizenship, while listed with Skills, is really also Information and will be addressed more thoroughly there.

Skills

Reading

Beginners (little to no reading ability) – Stevenson Reading, www.stevensonlearning.com. If a child is struggling with reading, even if he can already read some words, use Stevenson and start at the beginning. It is difficult to jump into the middle of this program because it uses a different sequence and its own unique terminology.

Traditional (both non-alpha; short vowel taught first)

1) Primary Phonics, Web:

<http://www.epsbooks.com/dynamic/catalog/series.asp?seriesonly=357M>

Intermediates (able to read small words and short sentences) – Scaredy Cat Reading, www.joyceherzog.com. Read their descriptions to find where your child fits in their sequence.

Advanced (reads with some fluency, can comprehend most of what is read) – incorporate reading with other subjects.

Writing

Beginner (learning the basics of handwriting and/or struggles with handwriting) – Handwriting without Tears, www.hwt.com.

Intermediates (can distinguish between upper and lower case letters, can fit letters inside the line, but neatness is an issue) – [A Reason for Writing](#), available through most general homeschool supply stores and web sites (or use a search engine).

Advanced (mechanics of handwriting no longer an issue, ready for Composition) – [Institute for Excellence in Writing](#) or [The Write Stuff Adventure](#) (use a search engine for either).

Spelling

Spelling is a function of reading. Therefore, if you use a reading program that includes a spelling component, then use the spelling that goes with your reading program. Otherwise, consider:

Spelling Power
AVKO Spelling

Math

Beginners (very little to no math skills, or struggling with other curriculum) – Semple Math, www.semplemath.com

Intermediates/Advanced (has some math skills and does not need the very beginning of math reinforced) – Moving with Math, www.movingwithmath.com or Math-U-See, www.mathusee.com.

There is another math program that uses manipulatives and multisensory teaching methods, Shiller Math (use a search engine). Shiller is really good for addressing the various ways that children learn. Our reluctance to recommend it unconditionally comes from the fact that it only goes through the middle elementary grades. That means that a family would have to decide after a couple of years what other program to change to. Since children tend to adapt to a program's patterns, this means learning a new system somewhere in the elementary years. If a family successfully uses either of the other two programs, then the decision about math is made for years.

Semple Math also would require a change somewhere in the elementary years. The reason we recommend it with less reservation is that it is written for students with lower math skills than Shiller, which was designed for use with any child – Semple is for the struggling student.

Good Citizenship

Homeschoolers vary in their interpretation of this term. To some, it simply means a Civics course in high school. To others, it means character training from birth, including Bible. To others, it means Social Studies. Regardless of how you interpret this term you need to use a curriculum and make a good-faith effort to teach it. Since this is a highly personal decision, it is difficult for us to make a recommendation on this topic. However,

if you interpret this to mean Social Studies, then see our recommendations below regarding that subject.

Information

The age and functioning level of the child will determine which type of curriculum is best suited to his learning. Generally speaking, Texas' Special Kids does not recommend the traditional textbook/workbook approach, except in the case of junior high and senior high students who are so accustomed to it that they cannot adapt to doing something different in their home schooling.

Elementary-age children:

We strongly encourage you to consider using a Unit Study approach with younger children. Unit Studies blend the information subjects together meaningfully, so that the child is able to connect information together, rather than memorizing distinct pieces of unrelated information. Our favorites for this purpose are

Five in a Row, www.fiveinarow.com (based on good children's literature)

Konos, www.konos.com (character and Bible training blended with many hands-on activities)

Weaver, www.aop.com (information taught from a Bible history point of view).

Older students:

Depending on the academic ability of the child, the elementary curricula may continue to be appropriate. Also, all three of the above curricula have components that go past the elementary years.

If a student needs a more traditional approach, yet struggles with the reading levels in most textbooks written for his age mates, then we suggest looking at the publishers listed below. They sell materials that are interesting to older students, yet they are written on lower grade levels to make the reading easier.

Remedia Publications, Web: <http://www.rempub.com/>

PCI Educational, Web: <http://www.pcieducation.com/>, 1.800.594.4263

Lakeshore Education, Web: <http://www.lakeshorelearning.com/>, 1.800.778.4456

Saddleback Educational Publishing, Web: www.sdlback.com, 1.888.735.2225