



JOHNS HOPKINS
SCHOOL of EDUCATION

Institute for Education Policy



Parent Resource

Suddenly Homeschooling?

A Parent's Survival Guide to
Schooling During COVID-19

April 2020

The Coronavirus crisis has up-ended the norms of daily life for adults and children alike. Do you suddenly find yourself schooling children from home and wondering how to make this work in the coming weeks? Two mothers, who are also certified teachers and current education researchers, weigh in with personal tips and curated resources to make this time count for the education of your children (and maintain your sanity!).

Drs. Alanna Bjorklund-Young and Angela R. Watson are researchers at the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy. Alanna is the mother of two early-learners (ages 2.5 and 5), and Angela has children in elementary and middle school. Below, Alanna and Angela share tips based on what they are doing in their own homes to supplement school-provided materials, as well as a list of high-quality resources to streamline your search for educational materials.

Start with a schedule and routines

Developing a daily schedule helps both you and your child(ren). For children, schedules provide clear and consistent expectations, support in becoming more independent, and structure and security during uncertainty. For parents, schedules can help structure time spent on academic subjects, breaks, parent/child time, independent work, and how to divide parental responsibilities for learning.

If your children are spending five or six hours a day on academic learning at home, that is fine. However, the school experience is about much more than academics. It is important to include time for exercise, socialization, and play. Remember that “home” school usually tends to be an intense, small-group setting. At school, where children are in larger classrooms, they have time to take natural breaks. At home, your children may feel like they are “under the microscope.”



As a result, smaller goals might be more realistic and healthier for your household and will be helpful if the time learning is spent with high-quality materials. Homeschooling-parents frequently note that their kids work 2-3 hours a day. This is a reasonable goal if properly structured; sufficient quality learning can occur within this timeframe.

Your schedule will need to be adjusted based on your child’s age, personality, and learning style. As you structure each day, think about incorporating your child’s interests too. You also will want to think about how much time your child can work independently. What is the process they should use while you’re working and they have a question (How many of us have had to apologize for “Mommy, Mommy” or “Daddy, Daddy” in the background of a Zoom call!)?

Middle- and high-school-aged kids should be able to complete most work independently. Parents can serve as a resource to help their children plan and structure longer projects and can provide check-ins for feedback. In contrast, young children will need much more guidance and support. However, this does not mean that younger children need your support all of the time. Once a routine is established (e.g., it is time to play with blocks and these are the expectations), even very young children should be able to work independently for 15 minutes.



For example, here is Alanna’s home schedule for her young children:

9am-10am	<p><u>Literacy</u>¹</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -<u>Phonemic Awareness/Phonics Instruction</u> [e.g. <u>practice letter sounds/blends/digraphs</u>] (10 minutes) -Practice <u>sight words</u> (5 minutes) -<u>Independent reading</u> (20 minutes) -Writing [<u>letters, stories, books, etc.</u>] (20 minutes) - <u>Check-in/discuss learning</u> (5 minutes)
10-10:15	Movement (e.g. online yoga, <u>dancing</u>)
10:15-11:15	<p><u>Math</u>²</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Daily routines [e.g. <u>counting practice, fact fluency, 100s charts, calendar, telling time, counting money</u>] (25 minutes) -<u>Math games</u>/independent practice (25 minutes) -Check-in/<u>discuss learning</u> (10 minutes)
11:15-11:30	Break/Movement/Snack
11:30-12:00	<u>Story Time/Read Aloud</u>
Afternoon	Family time: <u>walks, gardening, cooking, art projects, playtime, games</u>

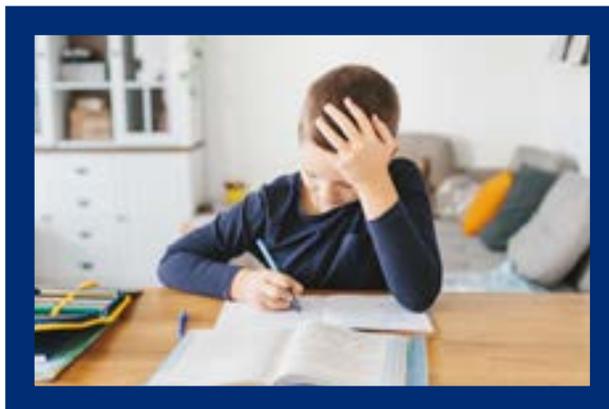
For Alanna’s 2.5-year-old, “reading” is looking at books and reading them to her baby doll or talking; “writing” is usually drawing; and most math involves counting a few objects/puzzles/shape blocks/colors. Alternatively, Angela’s older children fill out a check list of daily goals with minimal supervision.

¹ [This is the National Reading Council’s report on which early literacy practices are researched based. It is a great reference to skim through.](#)

² This is a lot of information, but the “Overview of Recommendations” on pages 1 and 2, and all of the game examples (e.g. pages 16, 18, 22, 29, 31, 34, 39, 40, 49, 50, and 54) are great resources.

Give learning a place in the home

Your child should know where they are working and how to independently get the materials they need, just like in their classrooms! For example, Angela has a learning area on a kitchen counter with necessary materials, a shoebox filled with books and flashcards, and repurposed binders for each child to collect their work. A timer is helpful so your child can manage their time independently. It may also be helpful for parents to ensure that everyone is following the schedule.



Make plans

Meet your child where they are in their learning and think about what is manageable for both of you.

Make sure that you are asking your child to do work that is appropriate for them. When a child comes into a new school or classroom, teachers spend the first few weeks of school assessing what they know. To some degree, you may need to do this too. You do not want to have your child reading a book that is too difficult (e.g., they cannot read more than 2-5 words out of 100), but you want to provide a challenge. Many books have grade levels written on the bottom back corner that can guide you. In addition, looking at [grade-level standards](#) gives you an idea of what your child should know, and asking your child to perform grade-level tasks or read grade-level texts is a good place to start. You can also work with your child to set reasonable goals. Start modestly, check in with the goals throughout the week, and praise your child when their goals are met. For example, Alanna's two-year-old spent last week working on cleaning up after herself. Her five-year-old worked on reading several books independently, writing two postcards to family members, and adding groups of ten.



At the same time, you need to be realistic with yourself. If you can't spend a block of time working with your child, try to set up a schedule where many parts can be completed independently (e.g., independent reading, sustained writing projects, and familiar math games). If you spend time creating a structure, developing some long-term projects, and gathering materials now, this will save time moving forward.

You can also rely more heavily on technology; there are high-quality materials available for free as a result of COVID-19! We offer suggestions below, by age and subject. The lightest blue suggestions require the least amount of support and planning from you. The darkest blue are essentially teachers’ lesson plans, and therefore will require more planning and direct teaching from you.³

Finally, consider your child’s interests. If they love art or gorillas, try to incorporate these interests into their day. This is also an opportunity to teach your children about other important skills that they may not learn in school. For example, cook with your child. If you have an old instrument around the house, teach them to use it (or find instructional videos on You Tube for them to watch). Learn a foreign language with easy free apps like

	Early Elementary (Pre-K to 2 nd)	Upper Elemen- tary (3 rd – 5 th grades)	Middle School (6 th – 8 th grades)	High School (9 th – 12 th grades)
Reading and Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wit & Wisdom (K-2) • Time for Kids (reading only) • Books Read Aloud • Books Read Aloud (with activities) • Early-Reader books 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wit & Wisdom • Time for Kids (reading only) • Books Read Aloud • Books Read Aloud (with activities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wit & Wisdom • Time for Kids (reading only) • Books Read Aloud 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Books Read Aloud
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core Knowledge • EL Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WriteAlong (writing only) • Core Knowledge • EL Education • ELA Guide-books • The NYTimes Writing Curriculum (writing only) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WriteAlong (writing only) • Core Knowledge • ELA Guide-books • The NYTimes Writing Curriculum (writing only) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ELA Guide-books • The NYTimes Writing Curriculum (writing only)

³ Disclosure – The Institute at various times works with Great Minds (publishers of Eureka and Wit and Wisdom) and Amplify (partners with Core Knowledge). All the materials listed here are available for free.

Math	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eureka Math 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eureka Math • DreamBox 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eureka Math • DreamBox middle school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eureka Math
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LearnZillion Videos (2nd Grade) • YouCubed Tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LearnZillion Videos • YouCubed Tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LearnZillion Videos • YouCubed Tasks • Khan Academy middle school math 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LearnZillion Videos • YouCubed Tasks • Khan Academy high school math
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources from NAEYC • The Math Learning Center • Zearn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Math Learning Center • Zearn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illustrative Mathematics • The Math Learning Center • Zearn • Open-Up Resources Mathematics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illustrative Mathematics • The Math Learning Center
Science		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PhD Science • National Geographic Kids science videos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Geographic Kids science videos 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mass Department of Education /PBS/ WBGH • MysteryScience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mass Department of Education /PBS/WBGH • Mystery-Science • NewsELA science • Core Knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mass Department of Education /PBS/WBGH • NewsELA science 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mass Department of Education /PBS/ WBGH

Social Studies/ History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mass Department of Education / PBS/WBGH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Geographic Kids US videos • Mass Department of Education / PBS/WBGH • NewsELA social studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Geographic Kids US videos • Mass Department of Education / PBS/WBGH • NewsELA social studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mass Department of Education / PBS/WBGH
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core Knowledge • Smithsonian Learning Lab • EDSITEment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core Knowledge • Smithsonian Learning Lab • EDSITEment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core Knowledge • Smithsonian Learning Lab • EDSITEment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smithsonian Learning Lab • EDSITEment
Art/Music/ Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PAMM virtual tours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PBS Fit Kids • PBS Crafts for Kids • #metkids 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BBC Arts • #metkids • Crystal Bridges VR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BBC Arts • Music Theory • Crystal Bridges VR
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Kennedy Center • BBC Arts • Smithsonian Learning Lab 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Kennedy Center • BBC Arts • Smithsonian Learning Lab • Perez Art Museum Miami 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Kennedy Center • Smithsonian Learning Lab • Perez Art Museum Miami • Philadelphia Museum of Art 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Kennedy Center • Smithsonian Learning Lab • Philadelphia Museum of Art

Duolingo. Angela is learning Spanish and Latin with her children. They have set a realistic goal to learn two words a day. Learning to play chess or card games is interesting and supports math skills and social interaction. Also, consider supplementing whatever topic you are studying with educational shows available on platforms like [PBS KIDS](#), Amazon

Prime, and Netflix. This is a great way to sneak in a little extra learning each day.

This is also an opportunity to connect with family and friends; have your child write emails, post cards, or letters to family members. See if any family members want to teach your child something new. Alanna's five-year old spends an hour a day on facetime with her grandmother, reading and discussing stories.

Learning survival kit

Learning does not have to be costly or fancy! A simple deck of cards or pair of dice can be used for a multitude of purposes (e.g., war or war with addition/subtraction/multiplication). Use blank note cards or scraps of paper to make flashcards. Consider setting up a book share group where you live - possibly quarantining borrowed books for a few days before use. Involve older siblings in helping teach or quiz their younger brothers or sisters. It can be a great bonding experience. No internet access at home? Get free internet [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).



Support

There are going to be days that are challenging. Be gentle with yourself, be gentle with your kids, and find the support you need. Reach out to friends or family by phone or a neighborhood support group (virtually, of course). It is possible that someone in the group has an expertise that he or she would be willing to share with a young audience, appropriate in age. This could be facilitated with a platform like Zoom. Other support resources are available [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).



Authors

Alanna Bjorklund-Young is a Senior Research and Policy Analyst at the Institute. She previously served as a Research Fellow and recently completed her Ph.D. in economics at Johns Hopkins with a dissertation examining the teaching skills and practices associated with more effective teachers. Dr. Bjorklund specializes in the economics of education and has prior experience as a classroom instructor with membership in NYCDOE's Office of Teacher Effectiveness. She holds an M.A. in economics from Johns Hopkins University, an M.S. from City College of New York, and a B.A. in international studies from the University of Washington/Seattle.

Angela R. Watson is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute. She earned her doctorate in education policy from the University of Arkansas Department Education Reform in May 2019. Her dissertation examined the value of arts field trips on student social-emotional skill acquisition as well as the relationship between policy and access. She is a co-researcher at the National Endowment for the Arts Research Lab, also at the University of Arkansas. Angela also holds an MAT from Harding University and a B.A. in elementary education and a graduate certificate in STEM education from the University of Arkansas. Angela's other research interests include gender gaps and school choice with a focus on homeschooling.

The Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy is dedicated to integrating research, policy, and practice to achieve educational excellence for all of America's students. Specifically, we connect research to the policies and practices that will ensure all children have access to intellectually challenging curricula, highly-effective educators, and school models that meet students' diverse needs. By delivering the strongest evidence to the policymakers who set the course and the practitioners who teach and lead, we hope to serve the American children who enter our classrooms every day. Learn more at <http://edpolicy.education.jhu.edu>