

# **The INSIDER'S GUIDE to MK EDUCATION:**



Get the Scoop on  
Homeschooling,  
Boarding School and  
Everything in Between

**G**oing to the mission field with children is a wonderful adventure. It's a chance expand their worldviews, teach them independence and involve them in ministry! But before you explore those deeper benefits, you may get stuck on something a little more basic: How will you give your kids an academic education?

Of course, every child has different learning needs. But as a missionary, you have other considerations, too.

What schooling options will give you time for the work God called you to? Does your host culture have certain expectations? Are you in a remote area where resources are few? Which schooling options will help your child adapt quickly — or make them long for home?

It may feel overwhelming, but you're in good company. These are questions every missionary parent has to answer. And at TEAM, we help parents walk through this process every year!

That's why we've created this guide — to present you with your options and equip you to make the right decision!

We've done the research and talked with missionary parents around the world. We've asked them how they dealt with difficult situations, and we've gathered information on each course of action.

And now, we've brought it all together in this helpful packet, just for you.





# HOMESCHOOLING



**H**omeschooling is exactly what it sounds like: Children being educated at home, by one or both parents. While it may seem intimidating — especially if you're not a trained teacher — many families find that the right curriculum makes homeschooling straightforward, even simple. It's a great way to spend time with your children during their developmental years, and it allows you to tweak your schedule to fit the demands of ministry.

If you go this route, check the laws of the state you where you hold permanent residency. You'll want to research the laws in your host country, too. Find out if you need to homeschool under an umbrella organization, such as a private school. You'll also need to buy curriculums — and make sure you cover all subjects required for graduation. In the day to day, you and your spouse will need to decide whether one of you will be the full-time teacher or if you'll split the teaching load.

*"[Homeschooling] has been a huge blessing in spite of it being a lot of work at times. One huge benefit related to ministry is that we can create our own schedule to suit the needs of our ministry and our family. ... We've also been able to weave our faith into our studies, making school a valuable discipleship tool as well."*

*—Pattie and Phil Eager, TEAM missionaries in Mexico*



## PROS:

- Flexible schedules
- Ability to incorporate faith into learning
- Builds strong family bonds

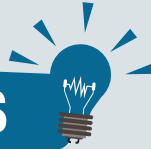


## CONS:

- Can be challenging to find social interaction for your child outside the family
- Takes a lot of time and energy
- Finding the right curriculum can be daunting



## HELPFUL TIPS



- **Start homeschooling before you move overseas.**

Although homeschooling provides lots of great benefits, it's not for everyone. The last thing you want is to get to the field and realize it doesn't work for your family — and then have to scramble to find a new education route. It also allows homeschooling to feel familiar instead of yet another change for your child to go through.

- **Research curriculum options before picking one.**

There are tons of different homeschooling curriculums out there! Some are specifically Christian, and some are not. Some are very heavily focused on literature, and some focus more on math and science. Do your due diligence before choosing one, because no one knows your child's learning needs like you do.

- **Set up a space and time for school each day, and be consistent.**

One of the hardest parts of homeschooling is getting your child — and yourself — motivated to get out of bed and start school every morning. It's easy to want to just hang out in your PJs instead. But a good way to combat this temptation is by setting up a specific room (or part of a room) for school — complete with chairs, desks, books and whatever your child might need. Also, do your best to start and end school at the same time every day. Consistent routines are good habit formers.





# PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Attending public school is a great way to integrate your family into the new culture. It will naturally improve your child's proficiency in the native language and give them daily interaction with peers. And through school activities, such as events and fundraisers, you can also meet other parents in the community.

Public schools in other countries might look a little bit different than American schools, though. They often run on a different seasonal schedule. And depending on the country, schools may start kids a year earlier or later than in your home country. There might also be a difference in the level of discipline or which subjects are prioritized. So, in a very basic sense, it could be similar to American public schools. But do your research so you know what to expect!

*"[The public school system] has been a huge benefit to us in helping us integrate more fully into our Spanish community. It has helped us not feel like we live in an American bubble, ... given us opportunities to really get to know the local people, given us a 'natural' connection, ... helped us feel like Spain is our home and helped to keep us from always having 'one foot over in North America,' as both our feet are pretty firmly planted here."*

—Elizabeth and Jerry Dirks, TEAM missionaries in Spain



## PROS:

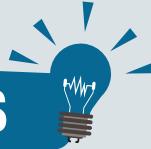
- Helps children assimilate to new culture
- Helps parents make local friends
- Gives children plenty of opportunity to develop social skills



## CONS:

- Might take a while to adjust to a new system
- There will potentially be a lack of faith (or the influence of another religion) in the classroom
- Can be challenging to find an adequate amount of family time

## HELPFUL TIPS



- **Make sure you and your child have a basic understanding of the native language before school starts.**

The last thing you want is to be in a parent-teacher meeting and not understand a word of what's being said. In order to stay involved in your child's education, it's important that you know basic communication skills in the native language of your host country. And while your child certainly doesn't have to be fluent by the time school starts (that will come with time), they should at least have some key phrases memorized and be able to understand the context of any given discussion.

- **Find a trusted expatriate or fellow missionary to help you pick a school.**

No matter where you go, public schools will all vary a little bit. Some have a great academic record but don't offer the sport your child wants to play. Some are smaller than others. Some might offer extracurricular clubs and activities that others don't. Find an expatriate or missionary who knows the area, and ask them about the different schools available to you.

- **Research the public school system in your host country before moving there.**

Almost every country's public school system is slightly different. Some are year-round, and some have long summer breaks built into the schedule. Some school systems only require children to attend classes for half the day, others require your child to be at the school from morning until evening. Before you enroll your child in your host country's system, do your research and be prepared.





# INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS



**I**nternational Christian schools are similar to private Christian schools in the States. They are privately owned and run, with an emphasis on developing students' faith. Your child will be surrounded by Christian influences and get interaction with other international children on a daily basis. These schools are also often known for their high academic quality!

They are often a little on the pricey side, so you'll want to keep your budget in mind. However, many offer special pricing or scholarships for missionary kids. They are also open to children from all over the globe and cater especially to expats, though there will probably be a few local children attending as well.

*"You will have teachers [at international Christian schools] who are great in discipleship and influence your kids in the right way and really make a difference and are on your side in their spiritual life. My son had these kinds of teachers and I am thankful for that. [And] socially they are very good for relationships."*

*—Kennedy (and Wendy) Paizs, TEAM missionary in Thailand*



## PROS:

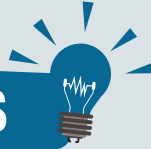
- Interaction with international students teaches kids how to build cross-cultural relationships at a young age
- Christian focus in the classroom
- Generally offers high academic quality



## CONS:

- Can be tempting for parents to sit back and let the school raise their children spiritually
- May carry heavy workload and pressure on the kids' academic performance
- Could prevent your children from learning how to interact with people outside of a Christian environment

## HELPFUL TIPS



- **Be involved in school activities.**

At international Christian schools, it's easy to drop off your child every morning and feel confident in the care and influence they're surrounded by. And that's great! But don't let that keep you from getting involved in school activities and parent groups. Know what's going on at the school. Ask your child about what they're learning, and stay interested in their academic life.

- **Speak into your child's spiritual life.**

Don't fall into the trap of letting Christian teachers be the sole shapers of your child's faith. It might be tempting to let this slide off your long list of parental duties. But there is no replacement for your role in your child's spiritual life. They are already watching how you live your faith. Don't miss the chance to actively guide them.

- **Don't put too much pressure on your child.**

Typically, private schools have great academic records. In an effort to keep these good records, they might be a bit challenging scholastically. Remember that your child is probably feeling enough pressure to perform well in the classroom. Try not to pile it on at home too. Set reasonable goals and expectations together — and make sure they have some down time to relax between school and homework hours.







# BOARDING SCHOOLS



**B**oarding schools are a good option if you want your child to attend a private Christian school but there aren't any near you. They also often offer daily socialization and highly trained teachers. Counseling and other such services are also often available to your child more hours each day than they would be at a traditional school.

Unless the school is outside of driving distance, you should expect your child home on the weekends and definitely for holidays and summer break. Just keep in mind that you'll have to pay a little extra for the school to house and feed your child each semester, so budget appropriately!

*"The boarding school was a good option for our high school kids to give them the American culture and friendships, preparing them better to return to the USA. The main thing ... was to have the kids assured of our love for them and that we were looking for the best thing for them. Also, before we sent them off to high school for boarding, we really wanted them to have their own habit of quiet time, and that would give them consistency and guidance even when they were away from us."*

*—David and Kathy North, TEAM missionaries in the Philippines*



## PROS:

- Good preparation for college/dorm life
- Frees up more of your time to focus on ministry
- Your child will receive daily social interaction



## CONS:

- The amount of time spent away from parents is not always ideal
- The school's rules for your child may be different than your rules
- Easily one of the most expensive education options

## HELPFUL TIPS



- **Try to wait until your child is at least in fifth grade before sending them to boarding school.**

Studies show that peer interaction becomes really important to children around middle school. Until then, parental and family interaction is what's more important. It's also healthy for parents to have the younger years to bond with their kids. So, waiting until middle school to send your child to boarding is the healthiest option, for both you and your child!

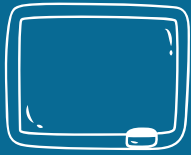
- **Visit as often as you can — and send care packages when you can't.**

If there's a school event, or if your child has a big game or debate tournament coming up, try not to miss those special occasions. But also, don't beat yourself up if an emergency or the cost of a plane ticket makes attending impossible. If that happens, be sure to let your child know you're thinking of them by sending a special note or care package.

- **Teach your child good personal habits.**

Before your child leaves for boarding school, try to instill healthy personal habits in their daily routines. This will help keep them grounded and give them the confidence they need to thrive without constant parental presence. While they're still young, teach them emotional habits, like the importance of alone time, as well as physical habits, like regular exercise.





# ONLINE SCHOOLS



If your child is fairly driven and a self-starter, online schooling may be for them. Online schooling can be great because it gives your family some flexibility when it comes to school schedules. It also frees up more of your time for ministry because you won't be your child's primary teacher.

Online schooling is a lot like homeschooling, in that the child can do everything from home. But instead of the parents being the primary teachers, they have access to certified teachers via the internet. Of course, you'll have to stay involved to make sure your child is on the right track and keeping up with their courses. But, generally, your time will be much less tied up than it would be if you were doing all the teaching.

*"Online schools can be a wonderful resource for families. ... As a general rule, online school is best for students in grade four and above. In early elementary years, most students need the parent to help with learning to read and basic math skills, and [they need to] have face-to-face interaction with very limited screen time."*

—Valerie Williams, Global TCK Coordinator for TEAM



## PROS:

- Lesson planning, grading and record keeping is done by certified teachers
- Extra services are provided, such as a chaplain, chat rooms and student clubs
- Students can complete courses from home



## CONS:

- Lack of face-to-face social interactions
- Requires the child to be somewhat self-motivated
- Requires parents to stay fairly involved and make sure their child is completing the coursework



## HELPFUL TIPS



- **Research which online schools cater to missionary families.**

Several online schools cater especially to missionaries, including [The Potter's School](#), [Northstar Academy](#), [Sevenstar Academy](#), [Liberty Online Academy](#), [Western Christian Academy](#) and [Southeast Academy](#). Do some research and find out which online school will work best for your family!

- **Create a daily schedule for your child, and stay consistent.**

Just like with homeschooling, one of the hardest parts of online schooling is staying motivated from home. Creating a daily schedule and routine for your child that includes school time will help keep you *and* them motivated! The key is staying consistent.

- **Find extracurricular activities outside the home.**

It's healthy for everyone to get outside the house every now and then! Look around in your area for sports teams, choirs, art classes or other activities for your child to take part in. What are their interests or hobbies? Look for peers to connect them with that share their enthusiasm. Developing face-to-face friendships is important for your child's emotional wellbeing.



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