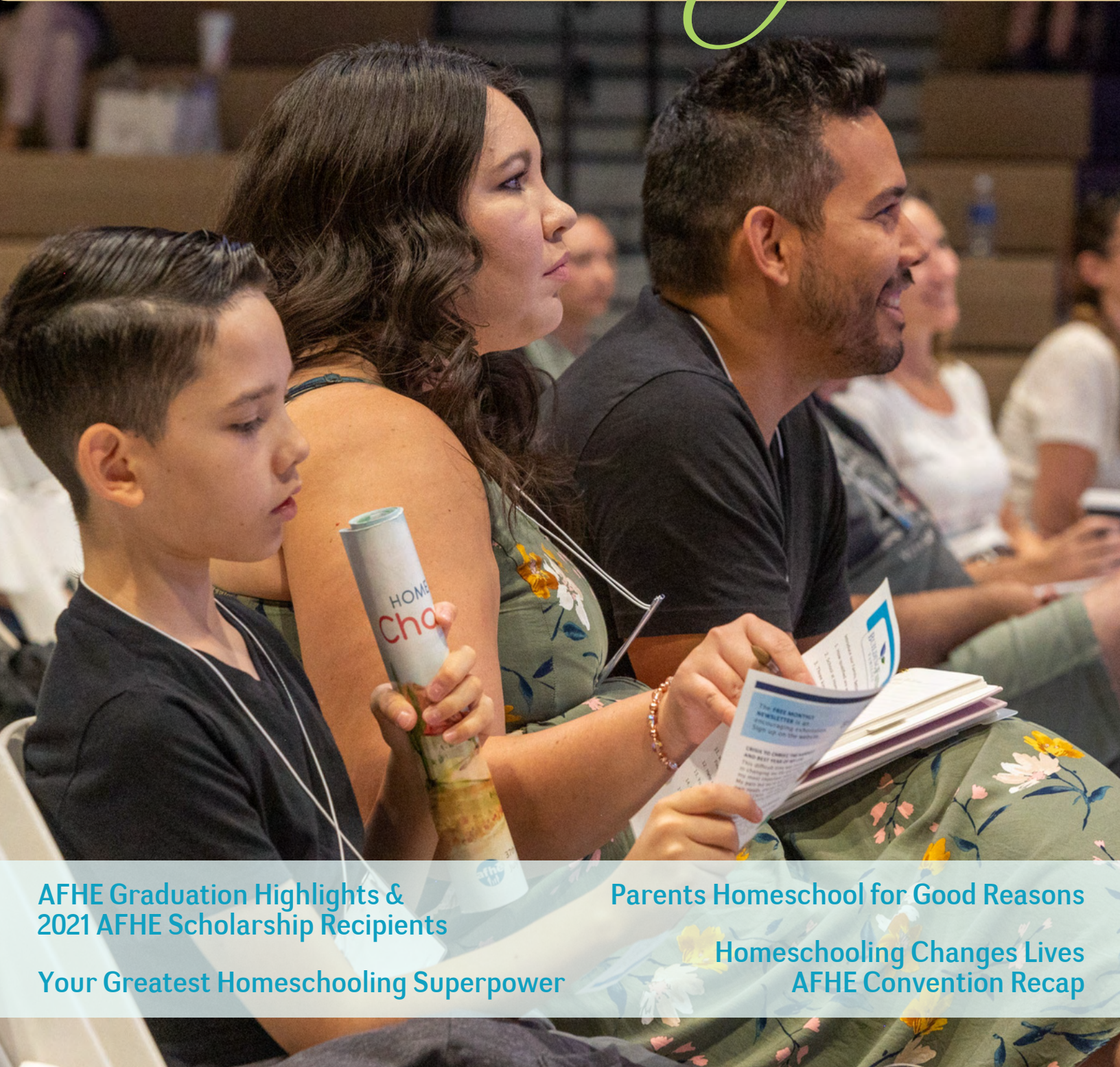


# HOMESCHOOL *Arizona*

Fall 2021



AFHE Graduation Highlights &  
2021 AFHE Scholarship Recipients

Your Greatest Homeschooling Superpower

Parents Homeschool for Good Reasons

Homeschooling Changes Lives  
AFHE Convention Recap



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# Featured Articles

## 4 Your Greatest Homeschooling Superpower

Peggy Ployhar

## 6 Lessons Learned from a Veteran Homeschooling Mom

Durenda Wilson

## 14 Parents Homeschool for Good Reasons

Tj Schmidt

## 24 Five Reasons Homeschool Families Love Read-Alouds

Antoinette LaGrossa

# In This Issue

- 8 Days to Remember
- 9 National Homeschool Day of Prayer
- 10 AFHE Graduation Review
- 12 2021 AFHE Scholarship Recipients
- 18 *Homeschooling Changes Lives* Convention Recap
- 26 AFHE Membership Has Its Benefits

# Advertisers

- 2 BJU Press
- 13 Arizona Homeschool Scholarship Fund
- 27 Classical Conversations
- 28 Grand Canyon University

## ABOUT AFHE

Arizona Families for Home Education (AFHE) is the statewide organization that has been serving the needs and protecting the rights of Arizona's homeschooling families since 1983. AFHE is a 501(c)(3) non-profit educational, religious, and charitable corporation directed by a Christian board. AFHE membership is available to all Arizona homeschool parents.

## OUR MISSION

AFHE exists to **INSPIRE** parents to home educate their children; **PROMOTE** parent-directed home-based education; **PRESERVE** the freedom to homeschool; and **SUPPORT** parents who choose a home-based education option for their children.

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# ***YOUR GREATEST HOMESCHOOL*** ***SUPERPOWER***

by Peggy Ployhar

One of the greatest misconceptions about teaching is that the power of education lies in the training of the individual or in the quality of the material used to teach a child.

Even though both of these things would rank as highly important factors, the single *most* important has nothing to do with what our educational system has trained us to value. Instead, it has to do with a very humble and natural homeschooling superpower any parent can draw from:

## ***THE ABILITY TO CARE AND TO SHOW THOSE YOU ARE TEACHING YOU ARE COMMITTED TO THEIR LEARNING PROCESS.***

Over the years of consulting with homeschooling parents, I have found that when a parent has struggled most with teaching their student it has been because they needed to work less on the child's education and more on the parent-child relationship.

Take it from someone who knows. Because I started our homeschooling journey with parenting anger struggles, my homeschooling superpower was deeply buried. I was not set up for my optimal teaching effectiveness, so the ideas I have to share below are from my attempts to connect with my children.

Here are five ways you can strengthen your parent-child relationship, or homeschooling superpower, to increase your teaching effectiveness:

***LISTENING***  
***PLAY***  
***READING***  
***SHARED ACTIVITIES***  
***TRAVEL***

## ***LISTENING TIME***

As a parent we often do most of the talking, but how much do we seek to actively listen to what our children want to say? Do we dig deep enough to learn what they are thinking about and why? Set aside regular time to just listen to your children's ideas and thoughts with probing questions that not only show you are listening but that you want to invest time into learning about the things that matter most to them.

If your child seems hesitant to answer your questions, one idea I found very helpful was to use puppets. My son responded well to puppets, and of all the puppets we had on hand, his favorite was Lamb Chop (made famous by Shari Lewis). For some reason, he opened up and shared his heart with this little lamb and this back-and-forth conversation became a regular part of our evening schedule.

## ***PLAY TIME***

Playing with your children may come easily, or it may be an excruciating experience for you to even think about, but if you put your best foot forward to delve into one of your child's favorite playtime activities the reward will be great.

Putting on those superhero costumes, playing hide-n-seek, taking time to build a fort and then spend the afternoon in it, or assembling Legos into engineering marvels speaks volumes to your child about the worthiness of their favorite activities as well as your approval of him and what he values.



## READING TIME

While you may already read out loud with your children, you may not go any further than the text, or if you do then you may only ask your child about the story itself. I would suggest you go a step further and ask your child which character in the book she relates with the most and why. Ask her if she feels the character was treated as she thinks the character should have been treated and what led her to that conclusion.

As our family was preparing to move to a farm and was living for the summer in our travel trailer, we read the book *Farmer Boy* as a family in the evening. While the book itself was very intriguing for all of us to read together, it was the questions and discussions we shared after each chapter that drew us all closer together, as we shared our thoughts and dreams about the new life we were all about to embark on.

## SHARED ACTIVITIES

Sharing a common activity with your child creates an unbelievably tight bond. I have seen parents join martial arts classes, art classes, and computer classes with their children. The beauty of sharing an activity with your child is that these types of experiences have open ends for



both of you. It allows not only the opportunity to achieve new goals together but also to commiserate about shared failures.

I started doing aerial silks with my daughter last year and will attest that a shared activity has greatly increased the bond between us. Our shared activity provides the two of us not only an activity we can do together but also a new topic to add to our day that allows us to connect at a different level than the typical parent-child conversation.

## TRAVEL TIME

Time in the car, camper, plane, hotel, and rental house puts your child in a place that is out of his comfort zone, in a more confined space, and usually further away from his typical digital input than his normal. These times lend themselves to deep conversations, curated experiences, and building long-lasting memories.

A few years ago, I took a three and a half week trip cross-country with my daughter. We drove from Texas to Colorado, then to North Dakota, next to Minnesota, and from there we took a plane trip with my mother (all three Margarets – Margie, Maggie, and Peggy) to NYC to see the sights and a Broadway show, and finally drove back to Texas. That trip was a turning point in my relationship with my daughter.

Any of these suggestions is a great place to start building your relationship with your child. Start with the one that would work best with your schedule right now, and then over time slowly add others as opportunity allows. Most of all, enjoy the extra time you have been given to spend with your child. It is an incredible gift that will stretch you as well as bless you both!



**PEGGY PLOYHAR**, founder and CEO of SPED Homeschool, is the former THSC (Texas Home School Coalition) Special Needs Team Lead and the MACHE (Minnesota Association of Christian Home Educators) Special Needs Coordinator. Peggy's homeschool journey started 19 years ago when her oldest child was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome. She thanks God for the experiences He has given her that enable her to encourage other special needs homeschooling parents. Peggy Ployhar was a featured speaker at the AFHE 2021 Homeschool Convention.

SPEDHOMESCHOOL.COM

# Lessons Learned

## Advice from a Veteran Homeschool Mom



by Durenda Wilson

It's been 26 years since I embarked on this homeschool journey. Since we had eight kids, I'm still homeschooling the youngest, but there are three things I've learned that I think every homeschool mom should know, regardless of where she is on this pilgrimage.

### **Our two biggest enemies are comparison and distraction**

We can be humming along nicely in that homeschooling groove when out of the blue, comparison strikes like a night raid. Few things are as debilitating as seeing another mom ROCK at something that you stink at OR worse, had never even thought of doing. But I can tell you this: comparisons are futile. They never lead any place good and most of all they can suck the life out of something beautiful that God is doing.

Moms, God has made us for our kids and our kids for us. We know them better and love them more than anyone could. If God is going to talk to anyone about what's best for our kids, it will be US. When He gives you a plan and it's even MOSTLY working, REJOICE! Be content, be thankful! Grab your kids' sweet little faces and smother them with kisses!

For many of our family's early homeschooling years there was no internet, no cell phones, no social media. I can tell you that both comparisons and distractions were still a temptation, but nothing compared to what moms deal with now.

We have to be ruthless when it comes to these enemies; we must put the phone on "silent" and commit ourselves to engaging with those kids.

Watch the wonder in their eyes as they ride on the merry-go-round, chase frogs, and watch the stars at night.

Make hot chocolate and sit in their blanket forts with them.

Read a book and ask lots of questions.

Bake cookies together.

Take a nap together.

Work alongside of each other.

BE in that moment.

### **Education often doesn't look like what most people think it does**

These are the things that can really trip us up when it comes to education, that in the big scheme of things end up being no big deal:

» It doesn't matter if you finish the curriculum by the end of the year.

» It doesn't matter if they are reading by age 5...or 6...or 7...or 8. (Hint: each child has a different timetable for learning, but typically they all get where they need to be eventually and stressing about it does NOT speed up the process).

» Overloading our kids with information doesn't make them smarter; it overwhelms them and eventually teaches them to hate learning.



» Character REALLY is more important than curriculum. I heard this many times along the way and it was a little hard to wrap my head around, but now that most of our kids are adults, I wholeheartedly agree. It's their character that has made the difference far more often than their knowledge or skill, but their character also helped them acquire the knowledge and skills they needed.

» If you think kids are only learning when the books are open, you couldn't possibly be more wrong. We put education in a box when the reality is that learning is fluid. Kids are curious by nature and have an instinct to learn. Our job is just not to burn them out by insisting that they always conform to our "adult" version of education. Learning can be hard work, but mostly it should be fun and enjoyable and be whetting their appetites for more.

» The simple basics (3 R's) ultimately serve a higher purpose: to help our kids learn what they want and need to learn to do what they were made to do, but not everyone needs to learn to diagram a sentence. Our kids' educational experience can be vast and varied and they will still be just fine.

» The need for our kids to not be overcommitted or overscheduled cannot be overstated. Kids NEED to be kids. It IS what prepares them for real life and higher learning.

» Kids are often smarter than we are. We get caught up in checking things off the infamous "list" while our kids are drawn to the things that they really want to learn about. When that happens, real learning is alive and well and we simply need to get out of the way.

» Although our kids' attending college can be an earmark of success, it does NOT define the success of our homeschool career. What defines success is actually pretty broad and diverse. I can also tell you that hard-working problem solvers with people skills are a dying breed and in HUGE demand in the job market.

» Your inadequacies as a mom are not THAT big of a deal. You heard me right. We moms tend to focus on what we CAN'T do, instead of all that we DO have to offer our kids. I stink at math, but I am pretty good at

encouraging my kids and (like you) would move heaven and earth to make sure they have whatever they need to keep moving forward in their education (or any other area, for that matter).

God made women strong and resourceful. Most importantly, as believing moms, we have the God of the universe, the One who created our children and us and brought us together, who promises to give us wisdom (James 1). He said He would NEVER leave us or forsake us and our inadequacies are NO obstacle to Him!

## You have to be tough

People say things to homeschoolers they would never say to the parents of kids in traditional school. Sometimes it feels like we are walking around with a target on our backs for rude, cutting, heartless comments and questions. The worst part is that it often happens in front of our kids.

So we have to make a choice. We can show our kids that we are not sure about our decision to homeschool or that what other people think determines our steps (instead of the Lord) OR we can respond with as much grace and humor as we can while holding a firm and positive position on our decision. The longer we homeschool, the easier this becomes because we begin to see the undeniable good fruit in our kids that makes other people's opinions matter less and less.

Homeschooling is not for the fainthearted. Becoming more confident is a process. It begins by learning to embrace the fact that each journey is unique and remembering that homeschooling isn't about doing everything "right." It's about enjoying your kids while raising lifelong learners through the freedom that homeschooling offers.



DURENDA WILSON is a homeschooling mom of eight, seven of whom have graduated. She has been married to Darryl for 30 years and they have six grandkids. She firmly believes that children are naturally curious and if parents keep things simple and unhurried, their kids will become lifelong learners. Durenda has written *The Unhurried Homeschooler* (a simple, mercifully short book on homeschooling), *Unhurried Grace for a Mom's Heart*, and *The Four-Hour School Day*. Durenda's blog and podcast can be found at her website. Durenda was a featured speaker at the AFHE 2021 Homeschool Convention.

DURENDAWILSON.COM



# DAYS TO REMEMBER

## First Inhabited Space Capsule 1957

November  
3

Soviet Russia launched the world's first inhabited space capsule, Sputnik II, which carried a dog named Laika. This was only the second spacecraft ever launched into Earth's orbit.

- Learn about how dogs and other animals have been trained to assist humans.
- What kind of job could your pet do well or be trained to do? Can you draw a picture of that idea?

## Rosa Parks is Arrested 1955

December  
1

Rosa Parks, an African-American woman, was arrested in Alabama for refusing to give up her seat on the city bus for a white man. Her calm civil disobedience sparked a year-long bus boycott which ushered in the modern civil rights movement.

- Rosa Parks was prepared to calmly resist an unjust rule that day, but it was still a hard thing to do. How can you prepare to do what is right before you are in a difficult situation?
  - Make a list of brave people you admire – people from history or from your everyday life.

## Discovery of Jupiter's Moons 1610

January  
7

Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei pointed his telescope at Jupiter and observed tiny lights surrounding the planet. He later concluded these were moons orbiting Jupiter, which challenged long-held beliefs about the solar system.

- Learn about the NASA spacecraft called Galileo which orbited Jupiter for almost eight years making scientific observations.
  - Find an image you like from the pictures taken of Jupiter (or its moons) by the Galileo spacecraft and create your own version.

November  
19

## 1863 Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

President Abraham Lincoln delivered these famous remarks during ceremonies dedicating the National Cemetery at the site of the Gettysburg Battlefield. Lincoln's brief address has become one of the most revered (and most memorized) speeches in history.

- Read the Gettysburg Address aloud. What would you say to an audience to honor soldiers who had died in a battle?
- The Gettysburg Address is inscribed in stone at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. Spend some time learning about this beloved landmark.

December  
7

## 1941 Japan Attacks U.S. Naval Base

Nearly 200 Japanese aircraft attacked U.S. naval forces anchored at Pearl Harbor in Hawai'i, killing many servicemen, destroying hundreds of military aircraft and ships, and drawing the U.S. into World War II.

- Make a drawing or model of the ships that were in Pearl Harbor that morning. (Use the ships from a "Battleship" game!) How many kinds of ships were there?
- This year marks the 80th anniversary of this sad day. Find a remembrance event that you can attend or watch a news broadcast. (Hints: The University of Arizona Student Union has an extensive permanent display of items related to the U.S.S. Arizona. Also, a special observance is planned for December 7 at the U.S.S. Arizona Memorial Gardens at Salt River.)

January  
21

## 1954 First Nuclear-Powered Submarine

The USS Nautilus, the world's first nuclear powered submarine, was launched at Groton, Connecticut. It became the first submarine to cross the North Pole under the Arctic polar ice pack.

- Research how nuclear power is generated. Did you know there is a nuclear power plant near Phoenix?
- How is it possible to travel under the North Pole? Can a submarine travel under the South Pole?



# National HOMESCHOOL Day of PRAYER

## Friday, November 5th, 2021

Check out these ways that you can actively support homeschool families!

(Activities and prayer prompts for the National Homeschool Day of Prayer will be shared the first week of November.)

## 5 WAYS TO GIVE ON GIVING TUESDAY

### 1 Give By Donating Online

Your donations aid AFHE as we support the homeschool community and preserve homeschool freedom in AZ.

[afhe.org/donate](https://afhe.org/donate)

### 2 Give While You Shop

You can support AFHE while doing your regular shopping on Amazon.

[smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com)

Select Arizona Families for Home Education

### 3 Give Your Time or Skills

Volunteer with AFHE. Contact [homeschool@afhe.org](mailto:homeschool@afhe.org) for more info.

### 4 Give By Sharing

Share our mission on your social networks.

#AFHEconnect #HomeschoolArizona #GivingTuesday

### 5 Give By Joining

Become an AFHE member and join us in our mission to preserve homeschool freedom in Arizona.

[afhe.org/join](https://afhe.org/join)

Nov 30, 2021



# A Celebration of Our Graduates

## 2021 AFHE SENIOR HIGH GRADUATION

### CEREMONY REVIEW



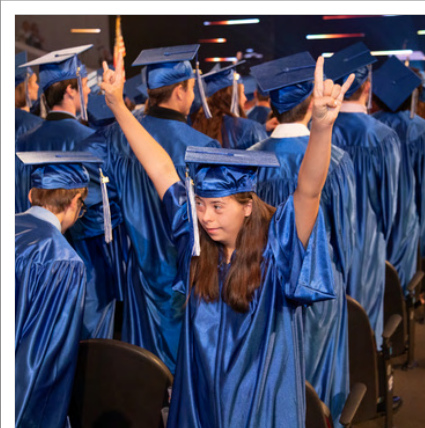
After a year that saw the cancellation of AFHE's 2020 graduation ceremony due to the pandemic, nearly 2,500 attendees came out to celebrate with the class of 2021 on Friday, May 27 at Dream City Church in Phoenix. This beautiful cap and gown ceremony recognized our 2020 graduates and honored 174 exceptional 2021 graduates from across the state. It was a wonderful demonstration of the extraordinary education that parents are providing their children.

As in previous years, graduates were invited to audition to perform a musical piece during the ceremony. Our music committee selected performances from three graduates. Caden Potter delighted us with his mastery of the piano, we were wowed by Benjamin Cook's trumpet piece, and Isabella Brown received a standing ovation for her vocal rendition of "How Great Thou Art."

Joanna Duka, an Arizona homeschool alumna, small business owner, and political consultant, gave the Commencement Address, exhorting the graduates to stand strong in their faith in the face of adversity as they take their next steps into the world. In the Senior Address, Kendall Tuten encouraged her classmates to recognize that life is a journey of constant learning, to not be afraid of failure, and to persevere.

Attendees enjoyed a video montage of the graduates' baby and senior photos—always a favorite part of the evening. The graduates then crossed the stage and received their diplomas! This year's ceremony featured a livestream component so that friends and family across the country could watch from home. This also allowed us to honor six additional graduates who participated virtually.

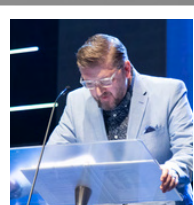
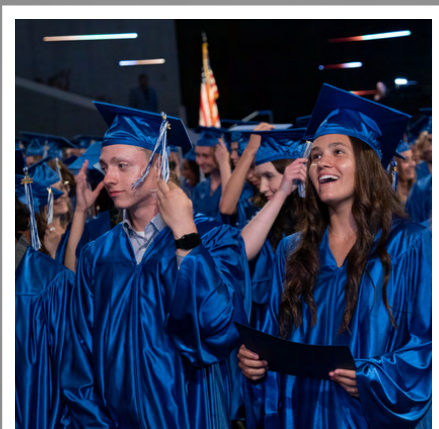
The event concluded with the presentation of the graduates, the turning of the tassels, and a closing prayer. We then enjoyed fellowship, refreshments, and the blessing of being together in person after the tumultuous year of 2020. We are especially thankful to the Graduation Committee for their hard work in preparing this beautiful ceremony and for the many volunteers who made this evening a great success!





# SAVE THE DATE for next year! May 27, 2022

Registration will open in November 2021  
[afhe.org/graduation](https://afhe.org/graduation)





# ARIZONA FAMILIES FOR HOME EDUCATION

# 2021 Scholarship Recipients

The Arizona Homeschool Scholarship Fund (AHSF) administers an annual scholarship opportunity, through which eligible Arizona homeschooled students may be awarded financial assistance to help them in pursuing post-secondary education from a college, university, or trade school. The AHSF was established to recognize the achievements of outstanding Arizona homeschool graduates, assist in their post-secondary education, and honor the sacrifice made by their parents.



**Edward Wang**

*\$1500 AFHE General Scholarship*



**Rachel Hintze**

*\$1500 Lewis Scholarship*



**Jeremy Graunke**

*AFHE \$1000 General Scholarship*



**Alyssa Gregory**

*AFHE \$1000 General Scholarship*



# Arizona Homeschool Scholarship Fund

AFHE awards scholarships to Arizona homeschool graduates to assist with post-secondary education expenses.

Since the Scholarship Fund was started in 2001, AFHE has awarded over \$125,000 to 113 outstanding applicants.

Support these outstanding students and invest in the future by making a tax-deductible donation.

Awards comprise 100% of funds donated.

**AFHE.ORG/DONATE**

2022 application opens November 2021



**AFHE.ORG/SCHOLARSHIP-FUND**

Each year the scholarship selection committee has the difficult yet rewarding task of selecting recipients from applications submitted by students from all over Arizona, each of whom demonstrates the great potential of homeschooling through high school. These applicants consistently express their gratitude for the efforts of their parents and the opportunity to excel in their personal and educational pursuits through home education.

**IT IS OUR GREAT PLEASURE TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND CELEBRATE THIS YEAR'S SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS.**



**Hannah Gross**

*AFHE \$1000 General Scholarship*



**Madelynn Rathier**

*AFHE \$1000 General Scholarship*

# PARENTS HOMESCHOOL for Good Reasons



..... by Tj Schmidt

My parents raised my siblings and me in a conservative Christian home. I grew up attending church regularly, participating in family devotions, and being taught basic Christian beliefs at home. But those activities were not the primary reason we began homeschooling.

When I was 5 years old, our family moved from New Hampshire to rural Vermont, primarily to work toward getting out of debt. My parents bought approximately 30 acres, and my dad started building a house so we could move out of the small RV trailer we had parked on the property. My father built that first house in just six weeks, motivated by the anticipated arrival of my third sister and my mom's desire to be settled in our new home. I remember really enjoying that summer, "helping" my dad with house building, exploring the new property, and even watching a team of four utility workers pull in electric and telephone lines to our home, about a quarter of a mile in from the main road.

Mom had already taught me to read and do basic math. As someone who loved to teach and had studied teaching in college, she was delighted to learn about homeschooling during an interview between the late Dr. Raymond Moore and Dr. James Dobson on the Focus on the Family radio program.

However, in 1981, homeschooling required the approval of the Vermont Agency of Education. Originally, home study programs were only for students who had an illness or disability. When more parents began looking for alternatives to their local public school in the early 1980s, some government officials were unwilling to approve home study applications. In many situations, the agencies simply rejected any first-time application. I believe that's what happened in 1981 when my parents' home study application was denied and I ended up entering kindergarten at the local public school.

But my parents, especially my mom, were unwilling to give up. Finally, after submitting their home study

application every year for three years straight, our family received approval to homeschool. This happened after the school year had already started, but my parents were eager to begin and immediately pulled my next-youngest sister and me out of public school.

## Why My Parents Chose to Homeschool

We began homeschooling in the same year that HSLDA was founded by Mike Farris and Mike Smith: 1983. But, at that time, both Mikes were living on the West Coast—a world away from us in northern Vermont. Our family wouldn't hear of HSLDA for several years. While the modern homeschool movement was still very new, it appealed to my parents for several reasons.

First, my mother had a real interest in teaching. She had nearly obtained her teaching degree before realizing that teaching in a public school classroom full-time was not for her. But my mom knew that she enjoyed teaching my younger siblings and me.

Like most parents, ours taught us many things from the time we were infants. Learning occurs continually, and as many parents realize, it can be naturally encouraged in children on an individualized level before formal "schooling" begins. Thanks to my mother, I was almost a year ahead by the time I entered kindergarten at the local public school.

Because my mom and dad knew my siblings and me better than anyone else and could provide one-on-one instruction, they also had the audacity to think that they could do as well as local school officials in educating us. This belief did not belittle the Barton Elementary School officials—it was just a recognition that, just as in many other schools, one teacher was trying to teach 20-30 kids of varying levels in several different subjects.

The second reason my parents were interested in homeschooling us was because we were living in the



Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. It's a very beautiful area, but not very densely populated. Where we lived, the next house with any kids was about a mile down the road. I was the second person on the school bus and had more than a 45-minute ride one-way to school. My mom and dad were concerned about their five-year-old spending an hour and a half every day riding back and forth to school.

Finally, my parents were interested in teaching my siblings and me more than just academics. They wanted us to be educated, to be successful, and to be able to pursue anything we were interested in. My mom and dad were growing in their Christian faith and wanted to be able to use Christian material as part of our educational program. Interestingly, their decision to use Abeka® curriculum—a program that was used primarily by Christian schools across the country—was what finally convinced Vermont officials to approve their educational program.

### Religious Reasons to Homeschool are Just as Important as Other Reasons

Some homeschool opponents have singled out parents who desire to pass on their beliefs to their children—those who homeschool because of their religious faith—as suspect. Some even propose banning these parents from homeschooling. But those who are homeschooling primarily because of their religious faith should not be marginalized or treated with suspicion.

It appears that these critics have forgotten the integral role of religious freedom in the United States' founding and the core protection the US has given this freedom throughout our history. The earliest European settlers in North America came because of a desire to freely practice their religious faith. And the First Amendment of our Constitution guarantees our right to the free exercise of religion—or no religion at all; this includes

freedom from being forced by the government to follow organized religion or from being told how to think.

The policy of the National Educational Alliance (NEA) states that “schools should teach the rights and responsibility associated with the freedom of religion, the religious heritage and diversity of the United States, respect for the beliefs of others, and the historical and cultural influences of various world religions.” And Calvin Coolidge, our 30th President, said, “the strength of a country is the strength of its religious convictions.”

### Common Reasons for Homeschooling

The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), the main federal entity that collects and analyzes data related to education in the US, first included questions about homeschooling in 1994, the year after I graduated from my family's homeschool program. The NCES has conducted additional surveys approximately every four years since, asking respondents to list the reasons that they were homeschooling. Respondents could give more than one reason for homeschooling.

In the very first report by the NCES on this issue, titled *Homeschooling in the United States: 1999*, the most common reason that parents homeschooled was to give their children a better education. The next-highest reason had to do with religious motivations; several other reasons included concerns about poor learning environments at traditional schools, a need to provide more academic challenge, and even the students' own desires to be homeschooled!

Comparing this first survey with the most recent NCES survey from 2016 provides some interesting correlations and contrasts. The first thing to note is that the NCES estimated the number of homeschooled children approximately doubled between 1999 to 2016, from 850,000 children to 1.69 million children.

.....

### Professor's Attack Evokes Homeschool Memories of Family, Faith - and Beautiful Surprises

In an April 2020 law review article, Harvard professor Elizabeth Bartholet declared that homeschooling as currently practiced hurts children and must stop. "The new legal regime," she proposed, "should impose a presumptive ban on homeschooling." Attorney Tj Schmidt, along with his HSLDA colleagues, responded with essays that exposed Bartholet's criticism as prejudiced and ill-informed. In this article, excerpted from the original, Schmidt recounts how his own parents chose homeschooling for a variety of well-considered reasons.

It suited their close-knit lifestyle in rural Vermont and offered an efficient way to tailor educational programs to meet each child's needs. Homeschooling also helped them explore the Christian faith together. This process eventually led them all to minister in Haiti and the Dominican Republic—during which their family grew in ways they had never imagined.

- The Editors

The next important aspect of the 2016 survey has to do with the reasons that parents homeschool: in 2016, the most frequently identified reason had to do with concerns over school environments, “such as safety, drugs, or negative peer pressure.” The second-most common reason given was dissatisfaction with traditional schools’ academic instruction, and the third reason was a desire to provide religious education.

### Main Reasons Black Families Homeschool

By all accounts, homeschooling has been increasing across racial lines. The *PhillyVoice* reported in 2015 that Black families make up approximately 10 percent of the homeschool community. At the time of the publication of the article, it was estimated that 220,000 Black children were being homeschooled. Similar to the general increase in homeschooling, it is estimated that the number of Black homeschooled children has increased at least 60 percent to as much as 90 percent from 1999 to 2016.

In a nationwide survey in 2015, Dr. Brian D. Ray surveyed African American homeschool parents about their motivations for homeschooling. The most popular reason why respondents chose to homeschool was that they preferred to teach their child at home to provide religious or moral instruction. Close behind was a desire to be able to transmit values, beliefs, and worldview to their child. A desire to develop strong family relationships was the third-most popular reason, followed by the ability to customize or individualize the education of each child. These were followed by concerns surrounding academic rigor, school environment, racism, and education about Black culture.

Another study, “Resisting the Status Quo: The Narratives of Black Homeschoolers in Metro-Atlanta and Metro-DC,” found that there were five key motivations of those surveyed. The negative experiences in schools regarding a “culture of low expectations,” the “plight of Black boys,” and the “psychology of safety” made up three of the reasons. In contrast, respondents were attracted to homeschooling because of the “positive opportunities in home education,” which included

“imparting Black/African American culture” and “seeking a global perspective.” In their study, the authors summarized that “Black home education represents a vehicle of resistance to institutionalized racism and ideological mismatches between black families and their children’s education needs.”

Ama Mazama, a professor and the director of graduate studies within the Department of Africology and African American Studies at Temple University, is one of the preeminent researchers on Black homeschoolers. One of her more recent studies is titled “African American Homeschooling Practices: Empirical Evidence,” first published in *Theory and Research in Education* in 2015.

This study examined the various reasons and daily instructional practices of Black homeschoolers.

Of the families surveyed, nearly 73 percent used co-ops in the instruction of their children; 92 percent of the families used museums as a homeschool resource, and 86 percent took their children to parks on a regular basis. These Black

homeschooling families were clearly very active and integrated in their community.

The stated desire of those participating in these studies by Professor Mazama was to help their children grow in self-confidence and develop emotional, social, physical, artistic, creative, and spiritual potential. Black homeschoolers also wanted to cultivate a positive and in-depth look at Black culture, more so than that typically provided in public schools.

The growth in homeschooling within the Black community and the reason behind these decisions is very close to my heart, as three of my siblings are Black. And my siblings are part of my life primarily because of homeschooling. But more on that later.

Clearly, most homeschooling parents have several reasons for choosing to homeschool their children. However, a similar overall theme runs throughout the data: parents desire to educate their children in a way and with a program that meets the needs of their children, family, and community.

A theme runs through the data: parents desire to educate their children in a way and with a program that meets the needs of their children, family, and community.



## Homeschooling Provides Quality Education for Children with Special Education Needs

The families that I talk to nearly every day want what is best for their children and truly believe that homeschooling is the best option for them. I have assisted families who, after years of frustratingly little progress for their children with special educational needs, decided to homeschool. Many of these families have followed up with me years later to share the progress their child has made.

One family I remember talking to in New York many years ago shared how they had recently had their special needs child evaluated by a school psychologist. With tears in her voice, the mom related how the psychologist was amazed at the progress her son had demonstrated while homeschooling. The psychologist commented that if the child had remained in school, he likely would not have made nearly as much progress.

While the 2016 NCES report on homeschooling only reported that 6 percent of parents homeschooled primarily to meet their child's special educational needs, 20 percent of respondents indicated that this was at least one of the reasons they were homeschooling. The ability of homeschool parents to develop individualized home instruction programs and spend more one-on-one time with a child with special needs is often what parents report has resulted in the most progress.

While my parents were homeschooling me and my biological siblings, we moved to Haiti and the Dominican Republic—for much of the time between the age of 10 and 20, this was my home. While in Haiti, they felt the call of adoption and the desire to welcome several young children who needed a family into ours. While they already had six biological children, my parents decided that we all needed to expand our capacity to love—so they adopted my three younger siblings. And none of us children would change anything.



Even though our skin color is different, my adopted sister and two brothers are as much a part of our family as any of my other siblings. Even though we are all now adults out on our own and we haven't lived together in our parents' home for over sixteen years, we all enjoy getting together—as crazy as it may be at times. I love hearing how my siblings are doing and would do anything for them, just as I know they would do for me.

But if my parents hadn't followed through with their desire to homeschool me and my younger sister all those years ago in northern Vermont, I likely wouldn't have the same relationships with my youngest three siblings. It was because we were homeschooling that my parents felt like they could move our entire family to Haiti. While in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, we experienced two different cultures and made countless friends. We worked with feeding programs, schools, churches, medical teams and clinics, orphanages, and even children with severe special needs. And I got three more siblings!

While my mom and dad were not perfect, they tried to make every decision with the best interests of their children in mind, especially the decision to homeschool. While I don't agree with every decision they made, I am so thankful that they made so many right decisions. They taught us all the things that we needed to know or pointed us in the right direction to discover the answers, nurturing curiosity, love of learning, and initiative. Ultimately, my parents prepared us well for adulthood and then let each of us go, trusting that God would help us continue learning, growing, and making our own unique contributions to the world.

Thousands of families across the country have made a similar decision to homeschool their children. They have done so for a variety of reasons. These reasons may be tied to some religious faith or not. The reasons may have changed over time and may be different for each child. But no one makes this decision lightly.



*TJ SCHMIDT was homeschooled starting in the 2nd grade for nearly every year through high school graduation. For much of that time, his family served as missionaries in Haiti. He earned his juris doctor from Oak Brook College of Law and began working as a legal assistant at HSLDA. Now, having served as an HSLDA Staff Attorney for over 17 years, TJ assists members across the country with legal questions and challenges to their homeschool freedom. TJ and his wife, Susan, homeschool their seven children: Josiah, Suzanna, Ella, Makenna, Jonah, Annika, and Ezra.*

HSLDA.ORG

# HOMESCHOOLING Changes Lives



37th Annual AFHE Homeschool Convention  
Grand Canyon University



Following a year like no other, when the doors remained closed at the venue where our convention has been held for over 25 years, the Arizona homeschool community was still able to come together for an informative and encouraging event in 2021!

Motivated by knowing that *Homeschooling Changes Lives*, the AFHE Convention team and AFHE Board were thrilled and honored to welcome nearly 2,500 people to our 2021 Convention, held July 16-17 at Grand Canyon University, with even more attending virtually - a first for the AFHE Convention! Attendees gained confidence, received helpful instruction and insights, and embraced powerful motivation and inspiration. This event which unites thousands of parents, teens, and kids from around the state is always an amazing opportunity to reflect on our freedom and dedicate special time to get better equipped for wherever we find ourselves on the homeschool journey.



This year we hosted 115+ workshops presented by more than two dozen featured speakers, plus many exhibitors and sponsors. Several featured speakers were brand new to the AFHE Convention, bringing fresh ideas and important new content to enrich our community! Parents were able to select sessions that resonated with their specific needs and concerns. Our Christian teen program provided over 200 young people with focused time to dig into some key areas of life, with plenty of fun activities and interaction throughout the weekend.



And although our exhibit hall space was less expansive this year, the many vendors who were able to come provided a wide selection of curriculum options and other resources for attendees to peruse and compare. These exhibitors were glad to be at our in-person gathering after a year when nearly all such events had been cancelled, and we couldn't have been happier to welcome them back! The opportunity to engage with knowledgeable exhibitors and enjoy this special homeschool shopping experience is a huge part of what makes the AFHE Convention so valuable for homeschool families. To our vendors, we thank you for being there for us and with us this year. We appreciate you!



Our hosts were endlessly supportive, professional, and generous. AFHE will always be grateful that GCU invited our community to their campus to make the 2021 Convention possible. Despite the different venue, our goals for the AFHE Convention remained the same: refreshing you in your role as homeschool parents, providing a chance for you to get together with thousands of others on the homeschool path, and supporting your efforts with resources, training, and ideas from reliable sources.

Planning for the 2022 Convention is already underway, and we can't wait to have you (and many, many others) join us again next July! Until then, remember that AFHE serves Arizona homeschool families all year long. We are here for you!





"We weren't sure what to expect as this is our very first year homeschooling ... but we walked away encouraged, excited, and grateful."



"Thank you for creating this opportunity! The encouragement was much needed!"



"We needed this after our year of uncertainty."







"I absolutely loved my first time at convention!  
[I found] every workshop and keynote helpful  
and encouraging! Thank you!"



"I came to support my wife. I believe in  
what she does but left with a much greater  
understanding of homeschooling and  
passion for what we already believe in."



"Thanks for finding a way to have the  
convention this year!"





"We were blown away by this event. I came home and told my friends who are thinking of homeschooling that they HAVE to go next year! Well done!"



"So grateful for all the veterans who have gone before us and fought to make this possible."



"Thank you. Honestly, what a privilege to attend."

"I watched the livestream and was very grateful."





"The convention was so worthwhile and helpful to me, and in turn to my family."



"I know so much prayer and planning happens behind the scenes, and your team are amazing, dedicated people that have blessed our community!"



"The new app was wonderful and so helpful!"



"Thank you! Enjoyed it and enjoyed being at GCU."





# CONVENTION SPONSORS

We are grateful to our sponsors, whose involvement at the convention enhances the experience for our attendees and continues to assist AFHE in serving Arizona homeschool families throughout the year. Please thank them when you get a chance!



"The program magazine was excellent. I was glad for the map, planning section, shopping list and notes section."



*We are deeply thankful for all the volunteers who served in so many ways! Thank YOU for playing a vital part in making the AFHE Convention a reality this year.*

*- AFHE Board of Directors*





# *Five Reasons Families Love Read-Alouds*

by Antoinette LaGrossa

I can still see my dad sitting on the side of my bed reading from the hardback Reader's Digest collection of fairy tales, one of my favorite Christmas gifts. At other cherished moments, my mom read with me at the kitchen table or in the rocking chair wrapped in the afghan crocheted by my grandmother and Aunt Alice. Decades later, those read-alouds are some of my favorite childhood memories.

Naturally, homeschooling offers the perfect opportunity to read together! Read-alouds make for memorable family time while building reading skills and a love for literature all at the same time. If you are new to homeschooling, read-alouds are a great way to get started.

Here are five benefits of read-alouds that will have you including this powerful activity in your homeschool:

## *1. Literacy Skills*

Read-alouds are one of the most effective ways to advance your child's literacy skills. The best time to start reading to your child is from the very beginning when he or she is a baby, but it's never too late to start.

Creating a daily family reading habit gives your child a boost over his or her peers. If you start at about six months (or even earlier than that!) and read just one book per day to your child, he or she will have been exposed to about 1,600 books by kindergarten.

Start with cloth books for babies—they hold up to chewing, board books and picture books for toddlers, then the library is your oyster! As little hands are ready, involve them in page-turning. Once your child is a toddler, move your finger along underneath the words as you read. This can help to train the eye-tracking to be from left to right. Both help the physical mechanics of reading to become second nature by the time your child is ready to learn to read.

## *2. Extended-Family Relationships & Reading Comprehension*

Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins can be included in the actual sit-down-to-snuggle family reading time—what a special way to nurture familial bonds. Family reading time becomes associated with special relationships.



An extended family member can help make the reading selections. This can be an avenue for loved ones to share interests, history, and even family stories. The love of both literacy and family will blossom.

Maybe grandpop can send a favorite book to the family from across the country and discuss the story via phone or Zoom. Or grandmom can take the kids to the library to choose books, then the kids can share about the story on their next visit. In addition to the usual type of conversation natural to read-alouds, these extended family discussions will help refine reading comprehension and story-telling skills.

### *3. Closure & Organic Recognition of Words*

You may have seen some of the writing or workshops that Larry Shiller has done on "Competency and Closure." If not, you'll want to add that to your read/watch list. Closure is when your child is ready to move on from something. Shiller recommends allowing your child to repeat an activity over and over until they have closure on their own terms. Kids are always happy to let us know when they are ready to move onto the next thing.

It's not just for activities and lessons; the same is true for books! If your child would like you to read the same book to them 300 out of 365 days this year, that's great!

Many years ago as a first-time mom, I thought my child was reading by age one. He could recite entire books word for word, page by page. Turns out he wasn't reading, but he had developed a love for reading. Not every child is going to memorize entire books, but in rereading, they will memorize favorite passages.

Eventually rereading leads to recognizing words, often without even consciously trying. It contributes to an understanding of what fluent reading should sound like. Add phonics to that and watch them take off.

### *4. Greater Vocabulary Comprehension*

Time spent reading together as a family is a long-term investment in vocabulary exposure. Family reading time gives children the chance to ask questions about words they don't understand, which leads to more effective reading. This is important for both beginners and experienced readers.

Vocabulary is an important (sometimes overlooked) pre-reading skill. Children with limited vocabulary have more challenges learning to read. Children need to understand

most of the words they are trying to decode in order to comprehend the story. You can see how having been exposed to about 1,600 books before kindergarten comes in handy when developing a rich vocabulary!

Get excited when your child discovers an unknown word. Pause in the reading to see if the meaning can be discerned from context clues. If you have several children and one knows the definition, encourage them to share their understanding of the term. Then, either during or after reading time, look it up in the dictionary. You may wish to keep a list of new words and their definitions for each book.

Engaging with literature is one of the best ways for your child to build vocabulary and become proficient in using a broad vocabulary in both speaking and writing.

### *5. Enjoyment and Enrichment for All Ages*

Family reading time does not have to stop once your child is an independent reader or even becomes a teenager! Homeschool parents want to help their children develop a lifelong love of learning and reading. Continuing to read aloud with your children furthers that goal.

As your child moves into middle and high school, family reading selections could be on lifestyle, faith, or travel. You will find reading topics that the family can still enjoy reading and discussing together. You can also move into a book club model as the family ages. Pick a book to read independently and meet to read aloud favorite passages, discuss, or do book-related activities.

Family read-aloud times may shorten or become less frequent as children come of age, but don't completely toss it out. You may find it a lifelong way of promoting the love of literacy and family.

We are homeschooling in a fabulous time. We have endless options for curriculum, conventions, co-ops, and classes galore – gym, art, fencing, robotics, science, cooking, ceramics, contortionist (we were just about to join one when COVID-19 hit), golf, writing, woodworking, falconry, archery, and list goes on. In the whirlwind of possible activities in your homeschool schedule, don't neglect to carve out time for reading together!



ANTOINETTE LAGROSSA is a veteran homeschool mom who knows the struggle that can come with teaching math, having experienced her son's frustration with multiple math programs. Amazed by the success that Montessori-based, multi-sensory teaching brings to students of all abilities, Antoinette joined the ShillerLearning team. She is passionate about helping home educators, sharing encouragement and hands-on learning tips gained through practical experience with her five very different children. Antoinette is the host of ShillerLearning's Tuesdays@2.

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# MEMBERSHIP HAS ITS BENEFITS

What's the best way to access helpful resources, help other homeschool families, and stay informed?

## BECOME AN AFHE MEMBER!

### Your annual membership helps AFHE to:

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- provide information about homeschooling for county superintendents
- present the annual convention and other events throughout the year
- maintain our website as the state's go-to information hub regarding homeschooling
- provide practical assistance and leadership development for support groups statewide
- maintain a searchable support groups directory
- represent the homeschool community to the public at events and to various media outlets
- address emerging cultural and social trends

### And through these membership benefits and more, **AFHE helps you by:**

- supplying an AFHE membership card which gives you access to educator discounts with many retailers
- mailing *Homeschool Arizona* magazine to current members
- curating a variety of discounts and offers
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- providing a membership discount from HSLDA
- sponsoring graduation, scholarships, contests, and classes for AFHE members
- offering free or discounted downloads on the AFHE website



**AFHE membership is an essential  
part of your homeschooling journey!**





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