

# Homeschool Expedition offers a unique learning opportunity

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For the past two decades, on average, 3.3% of families homeschooled their children. However, following the COVID-19 pandemic, that rate has more than tripled, [with 11% of households with school-age children opting to homeschool.](#)

While homeschooling is on the rise, the Zoo is no stranger to offering enriching education opportunities for homeschool curriculums.

Homeschool Expedition is a monthly program that allows homeschool families the opportunity to explore the Zoo and learn something new. Each course has a different topic in the area of animal science, life science, or physical science.

"We do experiments, we learn about different topics, get hands-on," Elementary Education Specialist Bailey Thomas said. "We get to do a lot of fun stuff."

For more than 15 years, Sedgwick County Zoo has offered homeschool programs.

"When I started at the Zoo, we offered a program called Homeschoolers in the Zoo. It was a drop off program for homeschool kids," Interpretive Manager Kara King said.

King says the curriculum of HITS was looser and she felt it could benefit from more structure. In 2006 the Zoo began offering Homeschool Expedition, which was initially structured as a family learning adventure.

"The family would check in, get clipboards, pencils and a worksheet to be done in the Zoo and when they completed it, they would bring the supplies back to the Cargill Learning Center and get a punch on their 'Passport for Ed-venture,'" King said. "At the end of the season we'd have a special tour, or activity. We did that for a couple of years but it was so hard to create new worksheets each month and provide information on additional learning opportunities on the topic."

Once again, King felt the Zoo's homeschool curriculum could be improved. The class changed to be targeted at first through fifth graders and now the whole family was invited to come learn at the Zoo.



*Bailey Thomas shows an antler and skull to the classroom*

"We made the move back to a more traditional classroom setting so that we could really open up the world of learning to all things earth sciences, environmental and conservation education," King said. "We didn't necessarily move back to traditional classroom teaching though."

Today, every Homeschool Expedition starts with a discussion of the topic of the class. Usually, there's a hands-on activity, followed by a walk through the Zoo or a visit from an animal ambassador. The class ends with a review of what everyone's learned.

"I love all the questions they bring. The students who come are very engaged and very knowledgeable," Thomas said. "It's a lot of fun for me to answer their questions and also help pair their ideas with new terms and vocabulary."

Homeschool Expedition isn't just an opportunity to learn more about the natural world, it's also an opportunity to socialize and connect.

"We do get lots of repeaters," Thomas said. "They tend to make friendships with those people that they see every month."



*The Homeschool Expedition class poses with their "antlers"*

Homeschool Expedition isn't just available to individual households. Homeschool Co-ops or groups can book private courses.

"Homeschool families have the unique opportunity to really dive into their children's interests. So, offering them a place to talk to an expert in the field and to get those hands-on experiences and knowledge is a very unique opportunity that we are able to offer," Thomas said. "Additionally, we're teaching students about the love of nature and the love of animals, because ultimately, they're going to be the next generation of conservationists."

Homeschool Expedition instills not only a love of science, but a love of nature. When we understand the world around us, we can appreciate it more. The homeschool curriculum offered provides a unique and fun learning opportunity to all students.

[Check out upcoming Homeschool Expedition classes](#)