



Taking Fifth Grade On The Road

How a lucky fifth grader is using the balanced, flexible, tuition-free education K¹² offers to travel the country with her family for a year—without missing a day of school.

Three years ago, Becky and Dan Hirn from Delphos, Ohio hatched an ambitious plan—to take a year and travel cross country in a motor home with their daughter Abby and son Carter, and spend a week in each of the lower 48 states. The trip would give the whole family a chance to see America together, would be a once in a lifetime opportunity, and would be something they could always look back on as a great adventure.

There was just one catch. By the time they would have everything in place for the journey (it would take two years of intense planning), Abby would be starting fifth grade. How could they take this grand trip without removing Abby from school for an entire year?

The answer was K¹². K¹² is the country's leading provider of online education for grades K through 12, and offers tuition-free, online public school options in 25 states and the District of Columbia. A private online school option, the K¹² International Academy, is available worldwide.

"When we began planning this trip," says Becky, "we didn't know about K¹², but we had a notion that something like this—an online schooling option—existed." Becky did extensive research, and came across K¹². "I loved what I saw. I loved the curriculum's flexibility. The more I looked, the more I liked it." And when she found the Ohio Virtual Academy—K¹²'s tuition-free, teacher-supported, online public school option in Ohio—she had the answer she'd been looking for. So in June of 2009, the Hirns packed up their motor home and began their year-long journey of learning.



According to Abby, a typical day on the road goes something like this: "We get up, have breakfast, wash up, brush our teeth, goof around a bit, and then it's time for school." They access the online portion of the curriculum with a laptop, connected to the Internet via a cellular provider. "The service has been very good," says Dan. "There are very few places we haven't had service."

With the K¹² curriculum, not everything is online. Far from it, in fact. Students still learn, especially at the younger ages, very much in the classic manner—reading printed books and working hands-on with tools like microscopes and test tubes. "K¹² delivered all of the curriculum materials at the beginning of the school year," says Becky, "which we pull out as needed."



And if traveling cross country in a motor home while not missing a day of school isn't demonstration enough of K¹²'s flexibility, Dan and Becky were able to take it even further, and make an already individualized curriculum even more so. "We switched Abby's schooling schedule from five days a week to seven," says Dan. "So we have school every day, but fewer hours, maybe three or four. This gives us much more flexibility. We can do school in the morning, in the evening, or whenever we need to—even while we drive."

And the Hirns have nothing but kudos for the K¹² curriculum itself. "We noticed almost right away that the curriculum is very interconnected across subjects," says Becky. "A word or phrase or concept will come up in one subject and then another. This is a great way to teach a child. It really reinforces things."

As this article goes to press, the Hirns are reaching the halfway point of their year on the road. After starting out from Ohio, they headed first to New England and then south along the eastern seaboard. In each state, they try to visit as many national monuments, museums, and state and national parks as possible. They're now in Georgia, plan to spend two weeks at home for the holidays, and will then head to the great American southwest.

At this point, the inevitable thought has crossed Dan and Becky's minds: what will they do for Abby's sixth grade education? Will they keep her in the Ohio Virtual Academy? They haven't answered the question yet, and they're okay with that. "One of the best things about this online learning experience with K¹² is that Abby hasn't lost continuity with the Ohio public school system," says Becky. "Right now, Abby is getting a great education, and we have no worries if she has to go back to regular school. So we're not worried, one way or another. We have options."

K¹² gets kids—even kids who wake up in a different city each day—into learning, so learning gets into them. To learn more about K¹², go to K12.com/ourtrip. Or call 866.968.7512 for more information.