

January 2011

# metro family

## The BIG Education Guide

Over 55  
private schools,  
enrichment  
programs &  
field trips

10 Important  
College  
Financing  
Tips

The state of  
Oklahoma  
schools

Q+A with  
Superintendent-elect  
Janet Barresi

central oklahoma's parenting connection  
[metrofamilymagazine.com](http://metrofamilymagazine.com)



# family shorts

## A Retreat for Homeschool Moms

Homeschooling mothers seeking support are invited to the **Homeschool Mom's Winter Summit**, planned for **January 28-29** at Crossings Community Church (14600 N. Portland, OKC).

This two-day event features workshops and sessions that will provide information, encouragement and inspiration.

"Homeschooling is certainly a challenge for every family that enlists in this vocation," said Laurie Ballweber, Promotion Coordinator for the event. "The difficult and sometimes lonely journey is plagued with uncertainties, multitudes of pressure from

family and friends, countless decisions for each child and their unique learning styles and a lifestyle that can leave a mom drained mentally, physically and spiritually."

Planned workshop topics include: reflections from home schooling moms, meal planning, integrating religious ideals into your coursework, help for struggling students, college considerations for teens—and so many more. A full listing of scheduled events may be found at the Summit website, [homeschoolwintersummit.com](http://homeschoolwintersummit.com).

Registration is \$79 before January 14, \$89 after, or \$99 at the door on the day of the event. This price includes all conference sessions and workshops, the conference packet, a banquet dinner on Friday night and a luncheon on Saturday.

To learn more, contact Laurie at 405-819-5551 or visit [homeschoolwintersummit.com](http://homeschoolwintersummit.com).

## Free and Unique Date Night Ideas

by Julie Steed

We all know that it's a lot easier to talk about having a date than it is to actually schedule and take one—especially if you're trying to stick to a budget, you crave spontaneity or you simply don't want to leave your kids with a sitter.

Luckily, free and spontaneous opportunities to connect (or reconnect) with your spouse are all around. You simply have to slow down enough to find them. Check out this list to find an idea that works for you! Then go have some fun.

- **Go play.** Take a look around your own yard. Do you have a fire pit (make s'mores), a hot tub (ahhh, relax), a swing or trampoline (find your inner child)? After the kids are in tucked into bed, step out back and enjoy some adults-only alone time in your very own yard. Then pull out a blanket, cozy up together and take a look up at the night sky.
- **Grown-up meal.** When was the last time you sat down at your table and enjoyed a relaxing meal? No peas and carrots flying through the air, no kids complaining about the food you prepared, no talk about school and homework. A calm meal shared only with your spouse is no small accomplishment, but it can be done. Put the kids to bed or sit them in front of the television (just this once) and enjoy a meal together. Adult conversation only, please.
- **Bedtime snack.** Put together a snack tray to share with your spouse in front of the TV or fireplace. It doesn't need to be complicated; choose wine and cheese, tea and cookies, veggies and dip, chips and salsa, pizza rolls. It doesn't matter what you eat, as long as you are sharing a moment alone together.
- **Rock out.** Do your children reign supreme in Rock Band or Guitar Hero? It's time for mom and dad to get in on the action. Ban the kids, pick up a guitar or some drum sticks and have fun with your spouse. Download or purchase songs that take you back to the early days of your relationship, or jam to childhood favorites. Remember, this activity requires lots of smiles and laughter.
- **Big turn off.** Often the most effective way to connect is also the easiest. Make the decision to turn off every distracting piece of electronic equipment in the house. You choose what works for you (once a week, one hour a night, all the time). No kids, no television, no cell phones and no computers are allowed. Now that you have each other's undivided attention, there's no telling what opportunities might arise.

## Smart and Fun

Parents, it can be difficult to engage our children in learning at nearly every stage of the game. One of the most frequent complaints is that learning isn't fun. "Games encourage thoughtful dialogue that can result in many educational benefits through accidental learning," said Julie Dill, National Board Certified Teacher and regular MetroFamily contributor. The following are games and toys that make learning fun.

- **Wonderella Game** ([wonderellagame.com](http://wonderellagame.com), \$20) a versatile memory game for ages three and up.
- **Blinky Bugs kit** ([chroniclekids.com](http://chroniclekids.com), \$20) hands-on activity will introduce kids eight and up to electronics concepts while they craft a creature.
- **Haikubes** ([chroniclebooks.com](http://chroniclebooks.com), \$25) make writing poetry as simple as a roll of the word dice.
- **Think Smart! Games** ([thingsmartgames.com](http://thingsmartgames.com), \$20+) for the Nintendo DS or Wii will entertain and challenge both kids and adults with math and word puzzles.
- **Scruble** ([scrubcube.com](http://scrubcube.com), \$25) a 3-D cube version of your favorite spelling word game, twist the rows and columns for endless spelling challenges.
- **Twisterz word games** ([twisterztoys.com](http://twisterztoys.com), \$13+) consists of twistable tubes to help young kids learn letters, spelling and sentence structure.
- **Cookie's Counting Carnival & Elmo's A-to-Zoo Adventure** ([sesamestreetvideogames.com](http://sesamestreetvideogames.com), \$30 each) Nintendo DS games engage kids three and up with math and reading using a customized character stylus.
- **The Secret Science Team: Assignment 1003** ([secretscienceteam.com](http://secretscienceteam.com), \$28) challenges kids eight and up to use scientific and deductive skills to solve a whodunit mystery.
- **Wild Creations Natural History Museum** ([wildcreations.com](http://wildcreations.com), \$8 and up) kits feature hands-on science activities, like growing crystals and tools such as a pocket-sized microscope.
- **Potato Chip Science** ([workman.com](http://workman.com), \$18) presents science projects in a fun package for kids eight and up.

So the next time your child waves the boredom flag, break out a game that will both entertain and educate them.