

**MOMMY IS MY TEACHER: QUALITATIVE CASE STUDIES OF THREE  
FAMILIES' HOMESCHOOLING EXPERIENCE**

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**(ABSTRACT)**

This dissertation is a qualitative case study of three homeschooling families. Because of the relative recentness of homeschooling as a widespread educational option for parents and because of the relatively few students participating in homeschooling, educators and others interested in this approach may benefit from the close qualitative consideration of homeschooling families of differing sizes, economic statuses, educational backgrounds, and other demographic differences. The primary research methodology for this dissertation is extensive and comprehensive interviews with three practicing homeschool families selected primarily because of their willingness to participate in the intensive interview process for this dissertation. The literature reviewed and the research questions considered include information about the estimated number of homeschooled students currently in the United States, the rationale behind parents' choice to homeschool, a review of the basic demographics of homeschoolers, the legal and professional educators' opinions about homeschooling, the instructional methods and curricular materials of homeschoolers, the academic achievement of homeschooled students, and the eventual college and career success of homeschooled students. The dissertation found that, while homeschooling parents would agree with much of the literature available to describe them, there were emphases and challenges to homeschooling that have not been fully studied and are applicable to individual families.

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The homeschool movement in the United States has been a rapidly growing alternative to public education in recent years. Each year, between one and two million school-aged American children receive their primary instruction in the home, often from untrained parents. As a result, even though educational research clearly supports this practice as effective and even though it is legal in every state of the union, significant distrust of homeschooling, which costs local districts millions of dollars in state support, often occurs on the part of public school administrators and teachers.

### **STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

Because of the relative recentness of homeschooling as a widespread educational option for parents and because of the relatively few students participating in homeschooling, educators and others interested in this approach do not understand what homeschoolers do and how they do it. This lack of understanding has led to several misconceptions that this study attempts to address.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to describe the development and execution of a qualitative case study of the operation and effectiveness of three family-based and operated home schools. Chapter 1 provides a general introduction to the topic of homeschooling and to several of the conflicts surrounding it. The literature review in Chapter 2 provides a wider context for the greater understanding of the families studied.

It answers the question, “How do the case study families compare to the findings of a summary of the numerous quantitative studies about homeschooling families?” Chapter 3 describes the design of the qualitative research being conducted. Case study research was selected for this dissertation because it could provide a deeper exploration of how individual homeschooling parents educate their children. Quantitative studies of the homeschooling phenomenon are extensive and effective at describing homeschoolers as a whole but provide little information about the attitudes, practices, and methodologies of the individual homeschooling family. Chapter 4 provides the results of the research, finding extensive similarities between the families studied and quantitative research results that describe homeschooling families. However, Chapter 4 also finds some unique qualities with the case study families and, as mentioned earlier, provides more extensive description of their rationale, effectiveness, and actual educational practices. Finally, Chapter 5 presents some recommendations based on the research results. These recommendations are in primarily two categories. First, there are suggestions for greater understanding and improved relationships between homeschool educators and their public school counterparts. Second, there are suggestions for additional research into this topic.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

While homeschool and public school contact may be rare, there are examples of public school officials who seek additional influence over home school operations. Baltimore County Public Schools homeschooling specialist Francine M. Schaffer stated, “I have had several families that we’ve had to take to court (“How to Reach

Homeschoolers,” 2008).” The Home School Legal Defense Association reported 98 public school to homeschool contacts in the United States in January of 2010 and 113 such contacts in February of 2010 (Home School Legal Defense Association, May/June 2010). Similar numbers of public school contacts of homeschools are reported each month by that advocacy organization.

Additional evidence of public school leaders’ occasional interest in providing greater educational oversight for homeschools can be found. According to 2005 Education Policy Brief from the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy entitled “Homeschooling in Indiana: A Closer Look,” the Indiana State Teachers Association (ISTA), which is the largest labor representative of Indiana’s public school teachers, advocates that the following regulations be considered for improved accountability of the homeschool movement. First, ISTA believes that all homeschool teachers meet the state requirements for licensing. Because some homeschooling parents lack a college degree and most do not possess a degree in education, the teachers’ organization is concerned that homeschooled students cannot receive the highest quality instruction. Second, ISTA states that homeschools should seek and receive annual permission to operate based on the approval of their curriculum. Third, ISTA recommends local school administrators should monitor homeschool programs. The contention is that without supervision some homeschools may not be providing adequate educational services for their students. Fourth, this professional organization for teachers recommends that all homeschooled students should participate in locally mandated testing. Similarly, a recent survey of Indiana superintendents indicated their desire for stronger control over homeschooling in

that state; 96% of them wanted increased regulations like those presented above (Kunzman).

Some educational research studies, however, seem to support the proposition that homeschooling may be a valid method for educating young people. In a fall 2004 article of the *Journal of College Admissions*, Dr. Brian D. Ray reported that “in study after study, the homeschooled scored, on average at the 65<sup>th</sup> to 80<sup>th</sup> percentile on standardized achievement tests in the United States and Canada, compared to the public school averages,” and he contends that this difference is not just caused by the higher economic and educational attainments of homeschooling parents. His research has found that “children in homeschool families with low income and in which the parents have little education are scoring, on average, above the state-school averages (Ray, “Research,” p. 6).”

Another primary argument often made by public school employees against the homeschool movement is that homeschooled students are not appropriately socialized. Because homeschooled students spend their days surrounded only by their parents and siblings, the concern is that these pupils may not ever learn how to interact appropriately with a wider cross-section of their community; they may lack, in other words, the ability to get along well with peers and others as adults. In response, a 2001 Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) digest effectively summarizes current educational research, simply stating, “There is no conclusive research suggesting that additional time with same-aged peers is preferable to more time with individuals of varying ages (Lines, 2001, p. 4).”

If there is mistrust or apprehension on the part of some public school educators toward the homeschool movement and if public school educators support effective educational approaches, then some school leaders clearly question the effectiveness of homeschools. They question the qualifications of homeschool teachers, wonder about the selection of homeschool curriculum, and, in the absence of consistent standardized measurements, are curious about the overall educational effectiveness of homeschooling. Proponents of this movement, however, refer to numerous research articles that can be used to defend homeschooling as a legitimate and successful educational alternative.

Another important aspect of this educational choice is its scope. How many homeschooled students are there in the United States? Researchers do not agree wholly on the answer to this question. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) puts the number at 1.1 million students in 2003, or 2.2% of all school-aged children in America (Bielick, 2006); however, others have estimated that the number is greater than 2 million homeschoolers (Ray, "Research," 2004). To put these figures into perspective, currently there are approximately 1,051,046 students in Indiana's public schools (<http://mustang.doe.state.in.us/TRENDS/trends1.cfm?var=enr>). In other words, there are more homeschooled students in America than there are public school students in the entire state of Indiana.

What is not in question, though, is the rapid growth of this educational movement. Robert Kunzman writes, "Even using the more conservative NCES figures, the number of homeschooled students nationally has increased at a rate 10 times that of public school students over the past four years (2005, p. 1)."

The number of homeschooled students, whether 1.1 or 2 million, and the incredibly rapid growth of this option account for the significance of this study in primarily two ways. First, if homeschooling is an ineffective means of educating young people either because it produces future citizens without necessary social skills or because it results in future citizens without a requisite academic foundation for adult life, arguments often made by public school proponents, then annually, thousands of homeschooled graduates enter an American society and economy already seemingly burdened by a significant population unable to participate fully or successfully in all possible benefits.

Second, these million or two students represent significant dollars lost to the public school environment. While no precise figure of the cost of missing homeschool students to the public school system can be determined, there are several ways to estimate this number and to put it into some perspective. According to the NCES, average cost to educate a public school student in the United States approximately \$9,000 ([http://www.pbs.org/newshour/backgrounders/school\\_funding.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/backgrounders/school_funding.html)). If there are approximately one million American homeschooled students (Bielick, 2006), then the estimated cost to public schools by not providing educational services to these unenrolled students is nine billion dollars. Because the average annual salary for a teacher in America is around \$45,000 ([http://www.pbs.org/newshour/backgrounders/school\\_funding.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/backgrounders/school_funding.html)), if these homeschooled students registered with their local public schools and if the entire amount of financial support was used to hire state licensed teachers, then an additional 200,000 teachers could be employed across the United States, increasing

revenues through association dues for professional teachers unions and providing additional skilled educators to meet the demanding requirements of No Child Left Behind. Clearly, there is a measurable economic and programmatic incentive for homeschooled students to return to the public school environment if their current educational situation is ultimately insufficient.

In summary, the large number of homeschooled students, the rapid growth of this educational option for parents, and the concomitant loss of supporting dollars and personnel to service these unenrolled students in the public school system augment the significance of this dissertation.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

1. Why do families who homeschool choose to participate in this educational option, and what factors weigh most heavily in making this decision?
2. How do homeschool families provide curriculum and instruction, and how do they determine what curriculum and instructional approaches should be used?
3. What is the overall effectiveness of homeschooling? How well do students perform academically? socially? athletically?
4. What are the apparent benefits and problems of homeschooling for students?
5. How do students feel about this arrangement? What do homeschooled students like and dislike about their educational program?
6. How well do students do upon graduating from their homeschool environment? Are colleges and careers accepting of homeschool diplomas?

These research questions were posed to the three case study families during extensive interviews and observations over a period of several weeks. Each family, both as a unit and individually, was asked these questions in repeated sessions. Observations and artifacts to verify respondent's answers were sought wherever possible. These responses were then compared and contrasted with the context of the literature review to follow.

### **DELIMITATIONS**

The sample population selected for this case study was three middle class households, varying in family income and number of children. As a result, the ability to generalize the findings to the entire homeschooling population is severely limited.

### **DEFINITIONS**

The *Children's Health Encyclopedia* effectively defines and introduces homeschooling in its entry on that topic:

Home schooling is the process of educating school-aged children at home rather than at a school. As of the early 2000s, it is perhaps one of the fastest growing trends in education in the United States. Since 1993, the practice has been legal in all 50 states. About 1.1 million students were being home-schooled in the spring of 2003, according to the National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES), which was conducted by the United States Department of Education. In addition, the percentage of the school-age population that was being home-schooled increased from



1.7 percent in 1999 to 2.2 percent in 2003. Parents choose to home-school their children for a variety of reasons, though certain factors appear to be more prevalent than others. Nearly two-thirds of the parents of home-schooled students reported that their primary reason for home schooling was either concern regarding the environment of schools or a wish to provide moral or religious instruction (“Homeschooling,” 2008).

### **SUMMARY**

Most Indiana superintendents and teachers’ association representatives seek greater influence over the operation of homeschools. These professional educators have requested increased governmental regulations requiring that homeschool teachers be appropriately certified, that homeschool curriculums be approved by educational experts, that homeschooled students be properly assessed with required standardized tests, and that school administrators be given some authority over the operation of the homeschools in their area. If these concerns are accurate, then approximately one million school-age children are being inadequately prepared for adulthood. Homeschool proponents respond that numerous academic research studies indicate the overall effectiveness of this educational choice. The three homeschooling families closely examined by this qualitative study provide additional insight into the questions raised by both sides of this educational approach.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### The Number of Homeschooled Students in the United States

As a sociological and educational phenomenon, homeschooling, its rapid growth and expansion throughout all socioeconomic strata, is nearly unparalleled by any other similar educational movement. In the 1960s, there were only ten or fifteen thousand homeschooled students in the entire United States, and while current numbers will be more closely analyzed below, conservative estimates indicate that today there are over one million homeschooled students in the United States (Lines, 2001). In other words, in approximately fifty years, an entirely new segment of the population has arisen from statistically nothing to numbers that rival the total numbers of publically educated students in the entire state of Indiana. What other demographic group has grown as dramatically? To put this into perspective, the rapid growth of America's Hispanic population has received a significant amount of press in recent years, and appropriately so; however, in the 1960s, the percentage of Latinos in the United States was approximately 4%; today, that number is approximately 15%, or growth of nearly 400% (Wright, 1995). Clearly, this is incredible growth, but while the overall numbers are larger, the growth of homeschooling over the same period was over 730%.

Not only has there been astounding historical growth, but the homeschooling movement in recent years has been experiencing impressive annual growth as well. The Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), the world's largest digital library of education literature, states that homeschooling is growing at a rate of 10-11% annually (Lines, 2001). The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), a division of the

federal government, also recognizes the unprecedented growth in the percentage of homeschooled students in America, reporting that there were 1.1 million homeschooled students in the United States in 2003; that number had grown from approximately 850 thousand in 1999, or an increase of 29.4% in 4 years (Bielick, 2006).

### The Reasons Parents Provide for Choosing to Homeschool Their Children

A large scale survey of homeschooling parents by the previously mentioned NCES yielded very interesting information about why they have taken on such a challenging responsibility, a responsibility that they already pay for through tax dollars to the local public school setting and that is then provided by trained educational experts at no immediate cost of additional dollars or time. Why would a parent choose to assume this often intimidating role? The chart below summarizes the primary reason cited by the surveyed parents for deciding to homeschool (Bielick, 2006).

Reason	Percent of Parents Reporting That Reason as Most Important
31%	Concern about environment of other schools.
30%	To provide religious or moral instruction.
16%	Dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools.
14%	Child has special needs.
9%	Other reasons.

*Table 2.1 • Primary Reasons Parents Report for Choosing to Homeschool*

Researchers Cheryl Lange and Kristen Liu strongly reflect but do not wholly echo these findings. Their summary of research into the reasons parents choose to homeschool

found that religion is the reason most often cited. Secondary reasons include the negative impact of public schooling through peer pressure, reduced stress and competition of the homeschool, the desire for parents to maintain primary control over their child's socialization, unique needs caused by the family's lifestyle, the excessive cost of private education, and the lack of quality and effectiveness of local public schools (1999).

As indicated above, one of the primary reasons for pulling one's children out of the nearby public school, the reason mentioned by nearly one in three of homeschooling parents, is a serious concern about the environment of other schools. The parents worry about several societal problems that are often evident in public schools. They worry that their children will be inappropriately influenced, for example, by drug use. They read all too frequently in the newspapers and hear all too frequently on the television news about violence in schools, fighting that disrupts the learning of others and shootings that can cause loss of life. They know that teen pregnancy and sexually-transmitted diseases are pernicious problems within the walls of America's public schools. By removing their children from this perceived dangerous and immoral environment, they hope to prevent their children from becoming involved, either as a participant or as a victim, in these admittedly frightening community evils.

The second most frequently identified primary reason that parents give for deciding to homeschool is to be able to provide their children direct religious or moral instruction. This reason is cited as the most important factor in choosing to homeschool by 30% of homeschooling parents. Because the public school is viewed as entirely and exclusively secular, that the often mentioned "separation of church and state" applies strongly to the public school classroom, many homeschooling parents think that their

family's religious beliefs are unwelcome there. Examples of the causes of this anti-religious perception would include the prohibition against school prayer and the avoidance on the part of many school systems to teaching intelligent design as equally valid to evolution as a scientific explanation for the origin of the universe and of humankind. These spiritually motivated homeschooling parents often believe that the Bible is foundational to all learning; when the Bible and its precepts are excluded from academic development, the student lacks a core of truth that should guide his thinking and decision-making about any newly learned content.

The third most prominent reason given by parents who homeschool their children, one mentioned by 16% of them, is dissatisfaction with the academic instruction at other schools. These parents are well aware of the academic failure found in many public school settings. They have an understanding, for example, that only 51% of students at Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) pass basic standardized tests in reading and language use and only 55% pass basic mathematics assessments across all grade levels. Similarly, these parents know that only 46% of IPS students actually graduate (<http://www.doe.state.in.us>).

While these most important and other less mentioned reasons, like the need of parents to provide a more individualized educational program for their special needs child(ren), seem convincing on the surface, some educational researchers have argued against this rationale, presenting reasons of their own to defend public education. One such writer, Dr. Welner, sees inconsistencies in homeschooling parents' rationales. For example, they decry the indoctrination evident in public schools but then indoctrinate their own children. Homeschooling parents often so strongly embrace creationism that

they neglect to teach evolution as an alternative origins explanation to their children at all. Similarly, writes Dr. Welner, these parents want strong moral education for their homeschooled students, but they want this character development to be their singular version of morality. Gay marriage might be an anathema in those homes to the extent that homeschooled students might later become homophobic or, worse, vitriolic against any kind of human rights for homosexuals (2002).

Finally, in a fascinating study, Eric Isenberg of Washington University speculated that parents' reasons for homeschooling are far more practical and case-dependent than parents themselves might admit. Isenberg connected the decision to homeschool to four factors. First, he determined that 55% of homeschool families with multiple children send at least one child to a private or public school; the implication would be that the supposed philosophical or religious underpinnings for homeschooling did not always apply. Second, he argued that the quality of surrounding schools had a tremendous impact on parents' school placement decisions for their children. For example, families moving from Minnesota to Mississippi, school systems at opposite ends of the academic achievement spectrum as measured by average student standardized test scores, were 300% more likely to begin homeschooling. Third, Isenberg showed that household financial factors played a major role in a family's decision to homeschool. Households where the father's income was large and the mother's education was above average were likely to select the homeschool option. Fourth, the researcher found that homeschool regulation has no impact on parents' propensity to homeschool. To reiterate, Isenberg's position is that the decision to homeschool is not always made on the basis of lofty

spiritual or educational ideals but is often the effect of common financial or surrounding school quality constraints (2002, pp. 22-23).

Apparently, these reasons given for choosing to homeschool are very compelling for parents. A 1997 study of nineteen Pennsylvania homeschool parents found that 75% simply answered, “No,” when asked whether or not they would even consider returning their children to public schools, and the negative responses to this question were unequivocal and emphatic. These parents stated that they would only re-enroll their children in the local public schools if there had been some catastrophic event in the family (e.g., the severe illness or death of a spouse) or if the law somehow required it. The primary cause of this apparent animosity, according to the researchers, was religious in nature; parents who choose to homeschool for faith-based reasons simply will not consider public education as a reasonable option unless some calamitous event befalls their family (Marshall, 1996).

#### Basic Demographic Information about Generalized Homeschool Families

The bulleted information below, taken from a 2003 NCES statistical analysis report, summarizes basic demographic data about current homeschooling families.

- *Students' Grade* – There were no differences between the percentage distributions of homeschooled and public schooled students across grade levels.
- *Students' Race* – Homeschooled students were more likely to be white and less likely to be African-American or Hispanic than were public school students.

White students account for 77% of homeschooled students but only 61% of public school students. Black homeschooled students are 9% of the homeschool

population but 16% of the public school population. Hispanics make up 5% of homeschooled students but 17% of public school students.

- *Gender* – As expected, there was no significant difference between the percentages of homeschooled males and females and the percentages of public schooled males and females.
- *Number of Children Living in the Household* – Homeschooled students were more likely than public schooled children (62% to 44%) to live in families with three or more children; however, they were less likely to be an only child or to have just one sibling.
- *Number of Parents Living in the Household* – Homeschooling families are more likely than public school families to be two-parent households (81% to 69%).
- *Parents Labor Force Participation* – 54% of homeschooled students who lived in two parent households had only one parent in the workforce; for public schooled students, that number is 20%.
- *Household Income* - There was no significant difference between household incomes of homeschooling families and public school households.
- *Parents' Highest Educational Attainment* – In 2003, 25% of homeschooling parents possessed at least a bachelor's degree; 18% of public school parents did.
- *Urbanicity* – There were no differences in the urbanicity (residing in a place with at least 50,000 people) between homeschooled and public schooled students.
- *Region of the United States* – Homeschooled students were distributed across the United States much like public schooled student were (Bielick, 2006).



Other demographic researchers have reported that homeschool parents are more religious, more politically conservative, better educated, and remain married more than the average American family. Finally, homeschooling parents voted regularly, contributed to political causes, contacted public officials, attended rallies, and joined associations (Lines, 2001).

In 2007, the Home School Legal Defense Association commissioned a large scale study to confirm and to update the demographic information above. Dr. Brian Ray of the National Home Education Research Institute completed the study and published his findings in 2009. This study included 11,739 participants from all fifty states, Guam, and Puerto Rico.

Perhaps the most startling statistic in Dr. Ray's report is that 97.9% of homeschooling parents are married.

Dr. Ray found that homeschooling parents are considerably well-educated, with 66.3% of fathers and 62.5% of mothers possessing a Bachelor's, Master's, and/or Doctoral degree. More specific information about the educational attainment of homeschooling parents is presented in Table 2.2, The Education Level of Homeschooling Parents, below.

<b>Fathers</b>	<b>Highest Educational Level Attained</b>	<b>Mothers</b>
1.4%	Did not finish high school	0.5%
8.4%	Graduated high school	7.5%
15.4%	Some college	18.7%
8.6%	Associate's degree	10.8%
37.6%	Bachelor's degree	48.4%

20.0%	Master's degree	11.6%
8.7%	Doctorate	2.5%

*Table 2.2 • The Education Level of Homeschooling Parents*

By way of comparison, in 2007, 29.5% of all adult males and 28.0% of all adult females nationwide 25 and older possessed a college degree (Ray, 2009).

While homeschooling parents are more highly educated, this additional education does not seem to be a factor in total household income. The median income for home-educating families falls between \$75,000 and \$79,999; the median income for all married-couple families with one or more children under 18 nationwide was \$74,049 in 2006. However, the family income of homeschooling families seems to have little impact on student achievement in core subjects on standardized tests. Interestingly, homeschooling families with the lowest levels of household income still outperformed all their public school counterparts, 85<sup>th</sup> to 50<sup>th</sup> percentile. Table 2.3, Homeschool Percentile Scores Based on Family Income, briefly summarizes this information.

<b>Income Range of Homeschooling Families</b>	<b>Students' Average National Percentile Score in Core Subjects</b>
\$34,999 or less	85
\$35,000 — \$49,999	86
\$50,000 — \$69,999	86
\$70,000 or more	89

*Table 2.3 • Homeschool Percentile Scores Based on Family Income*

Finally, related to family income, approximately 19% of homeschool mothers work; of these, 84.8% work part-time.

One interesting feature of the educational attainment of homeschooling parents is that, according to Dr. Ray's recent study, it makes only a limited difference in the academic achievement of their children as Table 2.4, Student National Percentile Results and Parents' Education demonstrates.

<b>Parents' Level of Education</b>	<b>Students' National Percentile Score in Core Subjects</b>
0 parents with college degree	83
1 parent with college degree	86
2 parents with college degree	90

*Table 2.4 • Homeschooling Parents' Education & Students' Test Scores*

In addition to the educational attainment of the parents, homeschooling families are also remarkable because of their size. Homeschooling families average 3.5 children in the household. The national average for children per family is two. Table 2.5 specifies the number of children in homeschooling families (Ray, 2009).

<b>Number of Children per Family</b>	<b>Percent</b>
1	6.6%
2	25.3%
3	26.0%
4-6	35.9%
7+	6.3%

*Table 2.5 • Number of Children per Family in Homeschooling Families*

Dr. Ray also reported on the religious affiliations of homeschooling families, finding that the vast majority of participants identified themselves as Protestant; however, several other faiths were also represented in the sample, as summarized by Table 2.6, Religious Affiliations of Homeschooling Parents.

<b>Homeschooling Parents' Religious Affiliation</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Protestant	82.4%
Roman Catholic	12.4%
Eastern Orthodox	0.2%
Atheist/Agnostic	1.1%
Jewish	0.4%
Mormon	0.8%
Muslim	0.1%
Other	2.5%

*Table 2.6 • Religious Affiliations of Homeschooling Parents*

As a response to critics' concerns that homeschooling parents should possess teacher certification through their state of residency, Dr. Ray reported that teacher-certification had little or no impact on student achievement. Homeschooled children who had one or both parents with official state licensure to teach scored on average at the 87<sup>th</sup> percentile on standardized assessments in core subjects; students whose parents were not certified scored at the 88<sup>th</sup> percentile.

Finally, Ray reported on the race of homeschooled students, finding that 91.7% are white/non-Hispanic. This demographic feature is disproportionately high compared to public school students nationwide (2009).

### Legal and Professional Educators' Opinions about Homeschooling

Homeschooling is legal in all states, but the state law usually requires the filing of some basic information. Over half of the states require some kind of evaluation. Currently, there is conflict about whether homeschooling children can participate in extracurricular activities in their local public school system (Lines, 2001).

While homeschooling may be legal in all states, tension remains throughout the country about precisely where a parents' rights end and a state's obligation begins related to this educational choice. California, for example, recently experienced tremendous controversy over this matter. In 2005, Rachel L., a homeschooled adolescent, ran away from home, and after being placed in foster care, she charged her parents with abuse and neglect. In 2006, during the investigation into Rachel's allegations against her parents, siblings who remained in the home were ordered to attend a school outside their home to further protect their well-being. The family fought this decision in court. In February of 2008, in response to an earlier decision by a lower court against the family, the court of Appeal for California's Second Appellate District handed down a certified ruling effectively stating that homeschooling is illegal in California. Then, in August of 2008, after extensive argumentation and legal wrangling on both sides of the issue, the California Court of Appeal for the Second Appellate District reversed its decision and ruled that homeschooling in California is legal as a "species" of private school ("Miraculous Turn of Events in California," 2008). While this is the most recent example of the severe legal tensions that exist between the homeschooling movement and

opponents in the social services and public education arenas, it is by no means the only or final example of that on-going conflict.

### Support and Assistance for Homeschoolers

Mothers usually take the lead; only one in ten fathers is the lead educator in a homeschool. Local and state groups offer support through advice and assistance. Other resources include libraries, museums, colleges, parks, and churches. Public school assistance groups are growing (Lines, 2001).

Even a conventional publication like *USA Today* recently explored this matter of how homeschooling families can seek and find support and assistance for their efforts. Editorialist Laura Vanderkam, a blogger for *The Huffington Post*, explored creative solutions to the problem with homeschooling for the 35 million corporate employees in America whose careers do not allow them to stay exclusively at home with their school age children. Ms. Vanderkam sees outsourcing as a vital answer to this concern. Many parents, for example, are worried that they lack the aptitude and ability to teach upper level high school math courses like trigonometry and calculus. As a result, places like the Center for Talented Youth of John Hopkins University offer online classes that provide the e-mail and phone support of qualified tutors. Similarly, some urban, highly compensated professionals like New York City's Melissa Meyer, seeing the effectiveness of the almost individualized instruction homeschoolers receive and being concerned about the claimed ineffectiveness of New York City's public schools for many students, have been retaining the services of teachers to come into their homes and to instruct their

children. Ms. Meyer's experience with private tutors has been very positive; her homeschooled children were later admitted to exclusive private high schools (2008).

### The Instructional Methods and Curricular Materials of Homeschoolers

In families where expensive educational outsourcing is not feasible, what do parents do to provide quality educational materials for their children, and what methodologies do these parents prefer? In a case study of three families, East Tennessee State University's Andrea Clements found that homeschooling teachers used direct instruction and self-study as dominant forms of delivery. In home schools, the parent-teacher directly explains or demonstrates the material to the child. S/he may be going over workbook pages, examples on a chalkboard or whiteboard in the family's usual school space, or working side-by-side with the child as s/he completes assignments. Parents provide four primary reasons for selecting this form of instruction. First, they state a preference for being intimately involved with their child's education. Second, they indicate that they have very young children who need close educational supervision. Third, some homeschooling parents are concerned that their children have difficulty learning the material or staying on task without close parental monitoring. Fourth and finally, some parents communicate that they choose direct instruction simply because they enjoy teaching their children and working closely with them. Clements's research, though only including three case study families, is a valuable, practical reflection of the findings of larger, more objective studies (2002). Finally, because of the similarities between Clements's research and this dissertation, her work will be referenced again in Chapter 4, the results of this study.

Clements found that the materials preferred by homeschoolers to form the foundation of their curricula can be placed into five primary categories, which are presented in summary below.

- Textbook-based curriculum, which is often very similar to traditional public education practices, relies upon the material and organization of well-known educational publishers. Textbooks and workbooks assist the parent's instructional planning and allow for self-study if the child-student is a strong enough reader. *Saxon Mathematics* is a very popular textbook choice for homeschooling families.
- Literature-based curriculum teaches the child with biographies and historical novels. This approach requires more teacher preparation and more teacher knowledge of the content. A literature-based method is often chosen because it provides students with better examples of writing and should, it is hoped, inspire a greater interest in reading and the personal pursuit of information and because it allows the parent-teacher to synthesize subjects (history with English or Bible with government, for examples) more naturally.
- Computer-based curriculum teaches subjects through the use of software. Educational software may contain reading material, short instructional or tutoring videos or mini-lectures, learning exercises and assignments, and assessments of varying lengths. In a computer education model, the parent may not actually participate in the instruction. The most popular example of computer-based curriculum for the American homeschooling movement is *Switched-On Schoolhouse* by Alpha-Omega Publications (Clements, 2002). Almost all (98.3%) of homeschooled students used a computer at home; in 2007, 91% of



non-Native American 8<sup>th</sup> graders in the United States reported access to a computer for use at home (Ray, 2009).

- Many homeschooling parents rely on video and satellite programs to provide their curriculum. In these homeschools, students watch a teacher teaching in front of an actual class. Usually, textbooks are assigned, and students receive traditional direct instruction from the distance teacher. Researchers found that parents in a video or satellite homeschool did not usually watch the class sessions with their children but were required to complete periodic assessments with their children.
- Finally, some homeschooling parents choose “un-schooling,” the most controversial type of homeschooling currently prevalent. According to this educational philosophy, students do not read textbooks or take tests; they simply learn from real-life experiences that allow them to accumulate an understanding of the world. In this paradigm, there is no boundary between learning and any other childhood experience (Clements, 2002).

The 2003 NCES Statistical Analysis Report on homeschooling in the United States also reviews and summarizes the sources of curriculum and the use of distance learning among the American homeschooling movement. The chart below, taken from a survey of over 850 thousand homeschool parents and summarized from the NCES report, provides information about where homeschooling parents sought sources for their curriculum.

Sources of Curriculum	Percent of Parents
<i>Public Library</i>	77.9%

<i>Homeschooling Catalog</i>	76.9%
<i>Retail Bookseller</i>	68.7%
<i>Public Education Publisher</i>	59.6%
<i>Homeschooling Organization</i>	49.2%
<i>Religious Organization</i>	36.5%
<i>Other Sources</i>	26.0%
<i>Local Public Schools</i>	22.6%
<i>Private School</i>	16.8%

*Table 2.7 • Sources of Curriculum Reported by Homeschooling Parents*

This extensive government report on homeschooling also reviewed data about the use of distance learning by homeschools. Again, the chart below indicates the percent of surveyed homeschooled K-12 students who received some type of technologically delivered curriculum and instruction.

<b>Distance Learning Type</b>	<b>Percent of Students</b>
<i>Distance Learning</i>	41%
<i>Correspondence (Mail) Learning</i>	15%
<i>Internet/E-mail Learning</i>	19%
<i>TV/Video/Radio Learning</i>	20%

*Table 2.8 • Percentage of Technologically Educated Homeschooled Students K-12*

It is interesting to note that 59% of homeschooled students did not use any type of distance learning technique. Finally, it also should be pointed out that the data above was taken from national surveys in 2003, the latest such data is available; it can be reasonably

assumed that Internet delivery of instruction has exploded within the homeschool community just as it has in other areas of education in recent years (Bielick, 2006).

### The Academic Achievement of Homeschooled Students

While there is no way of knowing if homeschooled students would do as well or better if they were enrolled in public schools, the research is clear; homeschooled students seem to perform well on standardized tests. The largest study to date, commissioned by the admittedly partisan Home School Legal Defense Association, tested 12,000 students through Bob Jones University testing services; they placed between the 62<sup>nd</sup> and 91<sup>st</sup> percentile on national norms. Interestingly, this achievement, unlike that of public school students, seems unrelated to the educational degrees held by homeschooling parents (Rudner, 1999).

A 2009 study of 11,739 homeschooled students echoed these very positive results. Table 2.9, National Percentile Average of Homeschooled Students, Grades K to 12, summarizes the findings of this more recent study. Again, the national average for public schooled students on these same assessments is, by definition, at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile.

<b>Subject Area</b>	<b>National Percentile Average of Homeschooled Students</b>
Reading	89
Language Arts	84
Mathematics	84
Science	86
Social Studies	84

Composite	86
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*Table 2.9 • National Percentile Average of Homeschooled Students, Grades K-12*

According to this research report, homeschooled students, on average, outscore their public school counterparts by, at the least, 34 percentile points on language arts, mathematics, and social studies, and by, at the most, 39 percentile points in reading. As mentioned previously, these high results are not influenced significantly by parent education, household income, or by the official teacher certification of a parent. Similarly, student gender or the money spent on homeschooling does not impact student achievement in home schools dramatically as Table 2.10, Homeschool Percentile Scores Based on Gender, and Table 2.11, Percentile Scores Based on Money Spent per Homeschooled Child indicate.

<b>Gender</b>	<b>National Percentile Average of Homeschooled Students</b>
Female	88
Male	87

*Table 2.10 • Homeschool Percentile Scores Based on Gender*

<b>Spending on Education</b>	<b>National Percentile Average</b>
\$600 or more ( <i>for homeschooled student</i> )	89
Under \$600 ( <i>for homeschooled student</i> )	86
\$9,963 ( <i>public school student average</i> )	50

*Table 2.11 • Percentile Scores Based on Money Spent per Homeschooled Child (Ray, 2009)*

Indiana University Education Professor Robert Kunzman also recognizes the existence of some empirical evidence suggesting that a segment of homeschooled students scored two to four grades levels and 20 percentage points higher on a nationally recognized achievement test – the Iowa Test of Basis Skills or the Tests of Achievement and Proficiency. In addition to this data, Kunzman mentions the prevalence of homeschooled students attaining noticeable success at national spelling and geographic competitions, often winning these events. Kunzman, however, is quick to point out that in both of these instances, high standardized test performance and national academic competition success, the sample is unrepresentative and are not, therefore, controlled experiments that allow “reliable extrapolations to the general homeschooling population (2005, p. 4).”

Johnna Burns, a researcher with Northeastern State University, echoes Kunzman’s qualifications regarding homeschooling’s apparent success. Burns perceives that there is an inherent systematic upward bias in homeschooling standardized test results because of the demographic qualities of the majority of people who choose to homeschool. She indicates that students’ successes are patently a result of the unique demographic characteristics of the homeschooling movement. For example, homeschooled students watch less television, and their parents remain married more than public school parents. Also, homeschooling parents are, on average, more highly educated and have significantly greater household incomes. A summary of Burns’s statistics related to these assertions is charted below (2000).

Comparison Category	Homechooled Student Population	Nationwide Schooled Children Population
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<i>Married-Couple Families</i>	97%	72%
<i>Parental Education Beyond High School</i>	88%	50%
<i>Family Median Income</i>	\$52,000	\$36,000
<i>One Hour or Less of Leisure Television Watched Daily</i>	65%	25%

*Table 2.12 • Important Demographic Information Comparison Between Homeschooled Students' Families and Habits and All Students' Families and Habits Nationwide*

Burns refers to well-known and respected research that states unequivocally that children from intact homes perform better academically than students of divorced parents. While she provides no data to support her belief that family income or parental education positively impact student learning, she argues that the expectancy theory — a theory stating that children who are expected to excel surpass those who do not experience such expectations — is a “causal factor in the homeschoolers’ above average test scores (p. 7).” Finally, referring to a 1986 University of Iowa study that found a small but decidedly negative impact of leisure television on academics, Burns concludes that these negative effects are reduced in homeschooling environments where less television is watched. Finally, Burns argues against any supposed advantage of homeschooling as an educational method since there is no hard data on exactly who is homeschooled. Because many states do not require homeschoolers to register with any centralized governmental agency, she believes that there are possibly 500,000 students underrepresented in any testing sample. These “underground,” as she calls them, homeschooled students cause all test data to be doubtful since the sample is so

dramatically skewed because “only the parents who know that they have homeschooled faithfully and effectively would be willing to test their students (p. 8).”

### Future College and Career Success of Homeschooled Students

Recent research clearly demonstrates that homeschooled students are finding increasing welcome at colleges and universities. Homeschoolers have been accepted to over 1000 different colleges and universities (Lines, 2001). In 1986, 65.5% of college admissions officers surveyed encouraged homeschooled students to attend a junior or community college before applying to a four-year institution. In a report published in 2004, that percentage had fallen to 16.4%. In fact, some college admissions officials now expect homeschooled students to exceed the accomplishments of public school enrollees; 18% stated that homeschooled students would be more successful in the categories often used by college admissions offices to gauge overall college freshmen success: first-year grade point average, retention rate, credit hours earned, and social coping.

Approximately 55% of surveyed admission officers expected equal performance between public high school students and their homeschooled counterparts. Another study found that 31% of Ohio college admissions officers rated home schooled students as either “far more academically advanced” or “somewhat more academically advanced.” In this same study, 44% stated that homeschooled students were at least as socially well adjusted as public schooled students. Other studies have found similar information, specifically about similar academic achievement for homeschooled students in college English or about slightly higher critical thinking skills for homeschooled students now in college. One researcher summarized effectively, writing, “The academic performance analyses

indicate that home school graduates are as ready for college as traditional high school graduates and that they perform as well on national college assessment tests as traditional high school graduates (Ray, “Perceptions,” 2004, p. 14-20).”

What becomes of homeschooled students as adults? Again, research results are generally positive. The earliest surveys of homeschooled adults, completed in the early 1990s, found that they were, on average, involved in entrepreneurial endeavors, were fiercely independent, and very family oriented. Additionally, they were pleased to have been home educated, recommended homeschooling to others, and “had no grossly negative perceptions of living in a pluralistic society (Ray, “Research,” 2004, p. 7).” A more recent study, summarized on the chart below, found similar results about adults who had been home educated.

<b>Comparison Category</b>	<b>Home Schooled Adult Population</b>	<b>Public Schooled Adult Population</b>
<i>Read a Book in Past Six Months</i>	98%	69%
<i>Read Magazines on a Regular Basis</i>	100%	89%
<i>Participate in Ongoing Community Service</i>	71%	37%
<i>Agreed that Politics and Government are Too Complicated to Understand</i>	4%	35%
<i>Voted in the Past Five Years</i>	76%	29%



<i>Participated in Protest or Boycott in Past 12 Months</i>	14%	7%
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*Table 2.13 • Comparison of Homeschooled Adults with Public Schooled Adults*

The information above, taken from a 2004 survey of over 7,000 homeschooled adults, suggests that they are more well-read, more active in the community, and more aware of current politics than their public educated counterparts (Ray, “Research,” 2004).

### Responses to Perceived Negatives of Homeschooling

One of the primary arguments against homeschooling, if not the primary objection, is that homeschooled children, because of their apparent separation from same age peers, are not adequately socialized. Some have suggested that homeschooled children will struggle as adults because they have not learned how to work well with or to simply get along with others. Since homeschools do not offer extracurricular activities like varsity football or marching band, students denied these opportunities cannot learn important life skills like teamwork or cooperation. Connected to this argument is the belief that homeschools have no diversity, so homeschooled students will lack the skills to function successfully in an increasingly pluralistic American society.

Proponents of homeschooling respond to these objections in a number of ways. First, they will answer that the nuclear and extended family, the most natural environment for raising a child, provides for a greater ratio of adults to children than schools can provide and is made up of individuals of widely varying ages. Children might be prepubescent or adolescent; adults might be middle aged parents or octogenarian grandparents. In a public education classroom, the ratio of identically aged

children to adults might be 30:1. Homeschoolers also question that the socialization that occurs in schools is positive. For example, peer pressure to use drugs or to commit acts of violence is virtually non-existent in the homeschool. Finally, since many homeschooled students are active in scouting, church youth groups, and community little league baseball, for examples, the matter of their lack of socialization is not as severe as public educators might think (Lines, 2001). Paula Rothermal, in an extensive study on the matter of the socialization of homeschooled children determined that the students were socially adept, lacked behavior problems, experienced high levels of academic attainment, and demonstrated good social skills (2002). In answer to the question of homeschoolers' socialization, Richard Medlin, summarizing his own research into this contentious problem, writes:

Although there are still far too many unanswered questions about home schooling and socialization, some preliminary conclusions can be stated. Home-schooled students are taking part in the daily routines of their communities. They are certainly not isolated; in fact, they associate with – and feel close to – all sorts of people. Homeschooling parents can take much of the credit for this. For, with their children's long-term social development in mind, they actively encourage their children to take advantage of social opportunities outside the family.... They have good self-esteem and are likely to display fewer behavior problems than do other children. They may be more socially mature and have better leadership skills than other children as well. And they appear to be functioning effectively as members of adult society (2000, p. 121).

Experts and research simply do not conclusively provide an answer to this concern, and there remains significant disagreement about whether or not homeschooled students are helped or hindered socially by this educational choice. As a result, public opinion on homeschooling remains mixed. Respondents to an annual Gallup poll who regard homeschooling as a “bad thing” dropped from 73% in 1985 to 57% in 1997. In 1988, 57% of survey respondents stated a belief that parents should have a right to choose homeschooling (Lines, 2001).

Because of this disagreement about the appropriateness of homeschooling, states have widely divergent levels of regulation to govern it. According to the Homeschool Legal Defense Association, one of the nation’s premier homeschool advocacy groups, there are 10 states (including Indiana) that have “no” regulation, 13 that have “little” regulation, 16 that have “moderate” regulation, and 11 that have “high” regulation.

Low regulation simply involves parental notification of the intent to homeschool. Moderately regulated states require test scores or professional evaluation of students to determine academic growth. High regulation is defined as requiring parental notification to the state or local public education providers, evidence of individual academic achievement, and various additional requirements like approval of the curriculum and teaching qualifications for parents.

In states with little or no governmental intrusion into the rights of parents to homeschool, three primary objections are raised. First, some educators and policymakers worry that the homeschool environment allows child abusers an additional means to hide their heinous acts of violence against children. In traditional school settings, teachers and others have frequent opportunities to observe signs of abuse. Unfortunately, the only

correction to this concern, regular and face-to face interaction with a government representative, is precisely the excessive interference that homeschool proponents vehemently decry.

Second, many public school superintendents and their subordinates are demanding greater academic accountability for homeschooled students. While there can be no disputing the fact that many homeschooling operations are incredibly successful, there is a perception that many other parents choose this option solely to avoid truancy charges or to avoid possible disciplinary concerns. Again, suggested solutions to these concerns are problematic at best. Increased teacher qualifications does not necessarily cause greater instruction. Similarly, a submitted curriculum plan does not equate to student achievement, and public schools do not have the resources to complete meaningful student portfolio reviews annually. As a result, lawmakers are left with the imposition of “high stakes” testing on homeschooled students. Since many in the education field object to this practice, why should homeschooling be subjected to something many professional educators oppose?

Third, opponents of homeschooling are concerned that this educational approach does not promote autonomy in children, allowing them to become their own person, to think independently from their parents, and to lead lives of their own choosing. Correspondingly, since the educational content of homeschooling is not adequately supervised, respect for pluralism is often omitted from the homeschool program. Some experts believe that the state has an obligation to be involved in the development of independent thinkers who value America’s diversity. Again, however, no palatable solution exists to alleviate this concern, a concern that would be questioned by

homeschool advocates anyway. Since no assessment can exist that measures civic virtue, parents would be forced to submit documentation of their intention to teach such topics. In all practicality, these intentions might never be implemented or they might be implemented poorly.

What is the overall effectiveness of increasing state regulation of and interference with homeschooling? One recent study attempted to answer that question by comparing the SAT scores of 6,170 homeschooled students from states with little, moderate, or high regulation. Again, low regulation states are those that have no requirement for homeschooling parents to initiate any contact with the state, moderate regulation states were defined as those that required homeschooled parents to either provide standardized test results for their children annually or to have their children's learning evaluated annually by a licensed professional educator, and high regulation states are those that mandate the requirements of the moderate regulation states and insist upon other requirements like teacher certification for parents or home visits by state officials.

The results of this study did not find any significant difference between the SAT scores of students from minimally, moderately, or highly regulated states and, for states where regulations have not changed in the previous ten years, are summarized on the tables below (Ray, 2008).

<b>Level of State Regulation</b>	<b>Mean Verbal SAT Score</b>	<b>Mean Mathematics SAT Score</b>	<b>Mean Total SAT Score</b>
<i>Low</i>	586	546	1132
<i>Moderate</i>	584	542	1126

<i>High</i>	577	529	1106
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*Table 2.14 • Comparison of the SAT Scores of Homeschooled Students from Low, Moderate, and High Regulation States*

Recently another argument against homeschooling has become prominent. Some experts believe that homeschooling negatively affects the eventual citizenship of homeschooled students. By removing themselves from public schools, homeschoolers do not interact in a meaningful way with the issues and conflicts caused by America's increasingly pluralistic society. A. Bruce Arai summarizes this objection concisely, writing:

Homeschooling parents and their children must recognize that they are not just keeping their kids at home and that they are not just making a statement about parental rights in education. Rather, they are also helping to define and shape what it means to be a citizen of their country. They must be prepared to think in these broader terms .... In other words, homeschooling is not just about where kids will learn their ABCs, it affects the very definition of what it means to be a member of society (1999, p. 8).

Randall Balmer expanded extensively on this argument in his book *Thy Kingdom Come: How the Religious Right Distorts the Faith and Threatens America*. He argued that public schools were very instrumental in unifying the disparate elements of American society; students' daily interactions with each other caused increased understanding and tolerance of each other and the unique cultures each represents. He

wrote that “homeschooling ... diminish(es) the possibilities for such understanding” and “strike(s) at the heart of the formative mechanism essential for the function of citizenship.” Dr. Balmer continued this thread of thought, commenting:

It also contributes to a ghetto mentality—socially, intellectually, and culturally. The creation of religious schools leads to heightened segregation of different racial and socioeconomic groups. The so-called “school choice” initiative is both a civil rights and a social justice issue (p. 93).

Dr. Balmer saw the American public schools as a place where students learned the “rudiments of democracy (p. 107).” According to him, schools “took as their task the education of the public and the creation of an informed and responsible citizenry,” becoming a “powerful engine for social change, where students “learn from their differences, celebrate their similarities, and find a way to live with one another in at least a measure of comity (p. 107).” In his view, the homeschool movement “give(s) up on the noble enterprise of public education (p. 108).”

### **SUMMARY**

What, in summary, then does the current educational literature say about the major issues related to homeschooling? First, all experts agree that homeschooling is a very large movement that continues to grow rapidly. Currently, there are over one million homeschooled students in the United States. Second, while parents may have a myriad of reasons for homeschooling, the two most dominant reasons for choosing this educational option are parental concerns about the moral environment of public schools

and the wish of parents to provide unrestricted religious instruction to their children as part of their school day. Third, while there is significant diversity in the demographics of the homeschool community, in general, homeschooling parents tend to be white and married more than parents of the publically educated. Fourth, homeschooling is a fully legal option for parents in every American state. Fifth, homeschooling parents avail themselves of numerous support services and resources. The local library, for example, is a tremendous tool for homeschooling parents to provide additional educational materials for their children. Sixth, there appears to be little significant difference between the instructional methodologies that dominate the homeschool community and those that are prevalent in public schools, and excluding the frequent inclusion of religious content, there is similarly little difference between homeschool curricular materials and public school curricular materials. Seventh, homeschooled students achieve academically at a higher rate than their public schooled peers. Eighth, homeschooled students are entering colleges and universities without difficulty, are being at least as successful there as their public school counterparts, and, according to the limited research into the matter, are becoming well-adjusted, community-involved adults. Finally, the arguments against homeschooling (students' lack of socialization, overall lack of accountability, and de-emphasis of societal democraticization) remain contentious and unresolved.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

Homeschooling, once considered a fringe educational practice, has grown in recent years to involve over one million school-aged children in the United States. Because of these large numbers and because of the loss of revenue to local public school districts, this topic is deserving of closer study and analysis. While there is copious quantitative research into homeschooling, much of which was referenced in the previous chapter, there appears to be a need for greater qualitative inspection of who homeschoolers are and what they do educationally for their children.

This study will, therefore, address the following research questions:

1. Why do families who homeschool choose to participate in this educational option, and what factors weigh most heavily in making this decision?
2. How do homeschool families provide curriculum and instruction, and how do they determine what curriculum and instructional approaches should be used?
3. What is the overall effectiveness of homeschooling? How well do students perform academically? socially? athletically?
4. What are the apparent benefits and problems of homeschooling for students?
5. How do students feel about this arrangement? What do homeschooled students like and dislike about their educational program?
6. How well do students do upon graduating from their homeschool environment? Are colleges and careers accepting of homeschool diplomas?

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The qualitative case study, as a format for dissertation consideration, has undergone a very cyclical history; in some years, favored, but in others, academically disrespected. Winston Tellis summarizes the dispute effectively when he writes:

A frequent criticism of case study methodology is that its dependence on a single case renders it incapable of providing a generalizing conclusion. Yin presented Giddens' view that considered case methodology "microscopic" because it "lacked a sufficient number" of cases.... Yin stated that general applicability results from the set of methodological qualities of the case, and the rigor with which the case is constructed. He detailed the procedures that would satisfy the required methodological rigor. Case study can be seen to satisfy the three tenets of the qualitative method: describing, understanding, and explaining (1997).

The specific design of this case study follows the approach implied above by identifying five key components of a successful case study: (1) questions, (2) propositions, (3) analysis, (4) logical linking of the data to the propositions, and (5) interpretation and findings. In this manner, patterns can be identified, and conclusions can be drawn.

This overall framework applies to this study according to the information charted below:

Yin Component	Study Application
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<b>1</b>	Questions	<i>Research questions have been developed that will be asked of subjects and reviewed in current literature.</i>
<b>2</b>	Propositions	<i>Generalized statements will be generated according to interview information and literature review.</i>
<b>3</b>	Analysis	<i>Subject responses to questions will be compared to research literature summaries to determine compatibility.</i>
<b>4</b>	Logical Linking	<i>Propositions and generalizations will be compared to the completed analysis.</i>
<b>5</b>	Interpretations	<i>Final interpretations will be made based on interview and other field data, literature review findings, and verified propositions.</i>

*Table 3.1 • Components of a Successful Case Study*

This study introduced the expected questions in Chapter 1. Propositions form the foundations of the analysis found in Chapter 4. Finally, interpretations of the completed analysis and the thinking behind it will be presented in Chapter 5.

### **DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE**

The sample for this qualitative case study of homeschooling was three homeschooling families of differing sizes, economic statuses, educational backgrounds, and other demographic differences. These families were selected for closer consideration both for their similarities to the research foundation describing the demographic characteristics of homeschooling families and for their differences from each other. For examples, the families studied include white, Protestant, married parents with varying degrees of education and family income. One of the families is large, with six children, the second family has three children, and the third family has only one child. One of the

families includes a state-licensed teacher with extensive experience in private Christian school teaching; the other families include no trained educators although in both of those families the father has done adjunct teaching at local colleges. These linkages to expected, research-derived features and variances from them provide an interesting balance of both verifying the extant studies and reviewing their overall accuracy.

While more specific introductions will occur later in this study, a brief summary of the case study participants is beneficial here.

In Family A, the family's father is in his forties, works as a skilled laborer in a manufacturing plant, and is himself very well-educated, holding a post-graduate degree in political science from a major university. He has been married to the mother in the family since his graduation from college, or a period of over 20 years. She works exclusively as homemaker and teacher to their sons, all of which who have been homeschooled but one of which has since graduated from the homeschool environment. She possesses training and certification as a dental hygienist. Information about their children is charted briefly below.

Child	Gender	Age	Current Educational Status
1	Male	19	Homeschool graduate, grocery store frozen foods and dairy manager, starting college in the upcoming semester
2	Male	15	Homeschooled 10 <sup>th</sup> grade student
3	Male	11	Homeschooled 6 <sup>th</sup> grade student

*Table 3.2 • Gender and Ages of the Sample Homeschooled Children – Family A*

Family B is parented by a college educated father in his fifties who possesses a Master's degree in counseling from a major university in California and who works for a

major pharmaceutical corporation in a large Midwestern city and by a college educated mother who works exclusively as the homemaker and teacher to their children. She also possesses a Master's degree in counseling from the same California university. They have been married for over 20 years. Information about their children is charted next.

<b>Child</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Current Educational Status</b>
<b>1</b>	Female	21	Homeschool graduate, Christian liberal arts college junior in nursing
<b>2</b>	Male	18	Homeschooled 12 <sup>th</sup> grade student
<b>3</b>	Male	16	Homeschooled 11 <sup>th</sup> grade student
<b>4</b>	Female	13	Homeschooled 8 <sup>th</sup> grade student
<b>5</b>	Female	10	Homeschooled 5 <sup>th</sup> grade student
<b>6</b>	Male	6	Homeschooled 1 <sup>st</sup> grade student

*Table 3.3 • Gender and Ages of the Sample Homeschooled Children – Family B*

The parents of Family C include the father who works as a network specialist for a large suburban hospital. He possesses a bachelor's degree in pastoral studies from a conservative Christian college in the South, a master's degree in theology from that same university, and, of course, extensive training in computer networks. His wife is, once again, a homemaker and primary homeschool teacher. She is the holder of a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in education from a Southern Christian liberal arts college. Both are in their early fifties. Their homeschooled child is presented in summary in the chart below.

<b>Child</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Current Educational Status</b>
<b>1</b>	Male	14	Homeschooled 9 <sup>th</sup> grade student

*Table 3.4 • Gender and Age of the Sample Homeschooled Child – Family C*

While several differences can be identified in the families presented above, some commonalities should be mentioned here. First, all of the families can be described as white, Midwestern, middle class families. Second, all of the families would identify themselves as very conservative fundamentalists and members of the often identified Christian right. They were selected for this study for primarily two reasons: their obvious connection to the overall theme of this report and their willingness to be observed and studied closely.

## **INSTRUMENT**

The instrument for this qualitative case study is a list of interview questions developed by the author. These interview questions were developed after the completion of the literature review; however, throughout the design of this instrument, the author attempted to be open to creating new propositions, prompted by the review but not necessarily reflecting it. The questions were generated, therefore, before data collection commenced. The answers to these questions by the case study families then formed the basis for the propositions and conclusions to follow. Those questions are bulleted below.

### Questions with Measurable Variables

- What is the socioeconomic and other demographic make-up of the family?
- What is the cost to the family for doing this?
- What are the required qualifications of homeschool teachers?
- What is the effectiveness of this homeschool environment according to student academic achievement results?

### Questions Based on Personal Experience or Opinion

- Why did the family choose homeschooling?
- What factors weigh most heavily in making this decision?
- How does the family provide curriculum and instruction?
- How does the family determine what curriculum and instructional approaches should be used?
- How well do students perform socially? athletically?
- What are the apparent benefits of homeschooling for the children?
- What are the apparent problems with this educational approach for the children?
- Has the family ever experienced any negativity because of this decision?
- How do the students feel about this arrangement?
- What do the homeschooled students like about their educational program?
- What do they dislike?
- How does the mother keep up adequately with all her responsibilities?
- What is the father's role?
- What would cause the family to reconsider the decision to homeschool?
- How does the family provide extracurricular activities?
- How does the family respond to perceived governmental intrusion?
- What does the law seem to state about homeschooling?
- How well do students upon graduating from their homeschool environment? Are colleges and careers accepting of homeschool diplomas?

These and questions prompted by the answers to these questions were asked of the family in group and individual settings in multiple hour sessions over the course of several weeks.

### **RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY**

The definition of reliability in qualitative research differs from the definition of reliability in quantitative research. In qualitative research – like this case study, the purpose of the study is to generate understanding; in quantitative research, the purpose is to explain. While a precise statistical definition of reliability is possible in a quantitative study, because of the subtle shift of purposes in a qualitative study, reliability may be better presented as “credibility, neutrality, confirmability, consistency, dependability, applicability, and transferability.” To be more specific, many respected researchers use “dependability” in qualitative research to closely correspond to the notion of “reliability” in quantitative research. This dependability is achieved when the research process is verified through close examination of the researcher’s collection and analysis of raw data, the reduction of that data correctly, and the review and verification of any process notes. To ensure reliability in qualitative research, experts agree that the examination of “trustworthiness” is crucial. Seale states that the “trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability.” Finally, some qualitative researchers have speculated that since there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of validity in a case study is sufficient to establish the study’s reliability. Another way of stating this position is that the level of reliability is a consequence of the level of validity in a qualitative study (Golafshani, 2003).



Similarly, the concept of validity is described by a wide range of terms in qualitative studies. Apparently, in a case study, validity is not a single, fixed or universal idea, but “rather a contingent construct, inescapably grounded in the processes and intentions of particular research methodologies and projects.” Again, while some researchers have argued that validity is not applicable to qualitative research, others have realized the need for some kind of external measure of quality of their research. This desire for excellence but distrust of the applicability of validity in qualitative research sometimes caused the substitution of new words like quality or rigor for validity in an effort to reflect qualitative conceptions. Nevertheless, the issue of validity has not been wholly disregarded by qualitative researchers. Many skilled qualitative researchers define validity as generalizability. Therefore, the quality of a research project is related to its generalizability. Others, however, state generalizability depends on the case selected and studied and, more importantly, on the research design of the case study. In this sense, validity in quantitative research is very specific to the study being evaluated.

Case study validity, then, becomes a necessary by-product of research design. Triangulation in data gathering, or the effort to confirm or repeat data through a variety of sources, is the most essential component in this process. In naturalistic and qualitative approaches to research study evaluation, triangulation is an important methodological issue; it assists in the control of bias and in the establishment of valid propositions because traditional scientific techniques are incompatible with this alternate epistemology.

Once more though, definitions in qualitative research are modified slightly from their quantitative counterparts. In quantitative research, exceptions that occur in the

triangulation of several data sources may lead to a disconfirmation of the hypothesis. In qualitative research, exceptions result in the beneficial modification and specification of previously suggested theories. This is often referred to as the realism paradigm, which states that the single reality of any study is actually the synthesis of multiple perceptions about it (Golafshani, 2003).

Another competing paradigm within the consideration of triangulation in qualitative research is constructivism, the belief that knowledge is socially constructed and changes depending on the circumstances. A more precise definition of constructivism in social sciences research states that knowledge is dependent upon human behavior; it is constructed through the interaction between human beings and their world and developed and communicated wholly within a social context. Since constructivism values multiple realities that people have in their minds of a topic or of an event, to acquire a valid or generalizable understanding in a case study requires multiple methods of searching or gathering data, or, more simply, triangulation. Employing multiple qualitative research methods like data gathering, observation, interviewing, and recording will lead to more a valid, generalizable, and diverse construction of the case study's reality. Once more, however, it should be pointed out that the methods chosen in triangulation to test the validity of a study depend entirely on the criterion of the research.

In conclusion, validity and reliability according to the quantitative research paradigm are differently defined under the qualitative research paradigm. The case study researcher conceptualizes reliability and validity as trustworthiness, rigor, generalizability, and overall quality. Additionally, the validity and reliability of a qualitative study are ultimately affected by the researchers' perspectives and ability to

eliminate inherent bias, increasing the researcher's truthfulness of a proposition about some social phenomenon through triangulation. Finally, triangulation is defined as a procedure to cause greater validity through a researcher's investigation for convergence among multiple sources of information to mold categories in a study (Golafshani, 2003).

In conclusion, generalizability, when referred to in this study, simply means that similar families should produce similar results from home schooling their children.

### **DATA COLLECTION**

The primary instrumentation for this qualitative case study was, of course, interviews with the subject homeschooling families. These interviews were conducted over a period of several weeks, involving just the parents, both together, and at times, individually. The interviews were lengthy, some lasting as long as two hours. The questions asked included the following:

- Why did you choose homeschooling? What factors weigh most heavily in making this decision?
- What is the cost to the family for doing this? How does the family provide curriculum and instruction? How does the family determine what curriculum and instructional approaches should be used?
- What is the overall effectiveness of this homeschool environment? How well do students perform academically, socially, and athletically? What are the apparent benefits of homeschooling for the children? What are the apparent problems with this educational approach for the children?

- How do the students feel about this arrangement? What do the homeschooled students like about their educational program? What do they dislike?
- How does the family respond to governmental intrusion?
- How well do students upon graduating from their homeschool environment? Are colleges and careers accepting of homeschool diplomas?

In addition to interviews, data collection occurred through documentation review. The families under consideration provided numerous examples of curriculum used, books studied, standardized tests taken, and student products created. For example, as evidence of their overall effectiveness as educators, the parents provided copies of their children's results on Iowa Basic Skills tests and other standardized assessments; however, not all artifacts were standardized. The parents also provided numerous examples of their children's work; these included lengthy academic compositions, extensive laboratory reports from science projects, highly detailed artworks, and other school-related projects.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

Data analysis for this case study of selected homeschool families was completed according to a modification of the recommendations of Allan Glathorn and Randy Joyner in their well-known book, *Writing the Winning Thesis or Dissertation*. Glathorn and Joyner recommend a four-step process for analyzing the data gathered during interviews for qualitative research. The first step was to transcribe the interviews. While, technically, this step was not wholly completed, the researcher's copious notes of his

visits with the families amounted to a near transcription of his interviews and observations to the extent that conversations could be recreated accurately from them. The next suggested step of the data analysis process in a case study is to categorize responses. In this instance, the researcher extensively reviewed his very thorough notes, looking for general categories of responses like reasons for homeschooling, methods of homeschooling, and results of homeschooling. The third step is to test this tentative classification model by re-interviewing subjects, evaluating whether their responses fit the initially selected categories. For this report, several of the categories required adaptation and correction. Finally, the researcher tallied responses in the revised categories to determine their relative merit to the study (2005).

### **LIMITATIONS**

As most individuals familiar with research know, the most damaging limitation of qualitative research is that the findings cannot be generalized to a larger population. However, a benefit of this study, then, may be to shed new light on past large scale quantitative studies, hinting at their overall accuracy and providing general insight into their eventual improvement.

The reasons for the primary limitation of a lack of generalizability are easily presented. First, participants in qualitative research are not chosen randomly but are often selected by the researcher because of some interesting or compelling feature, making the subjects interesting for consideration but inappropriate for generalization. Second, the number of participants in a typical case study is simply too small to be representative of any larger population. Interviews, as conducted for this report, in no

way can meet the statistical assumptions to project the results accurately or reliably to the total audience. Third, qualitative research does not collect numeric data from a representative sample of the target audience. As a result, this type of research cannot be subjected to statistical analysis to estimate to what extent opinions expressed by participants reflect the opinions of the population studied. The most important implication of this limitation is that researchers should refrain from drawing any conclusions about the actual prevalence of specific concerns, attitudes, or beliefs among the target audience. Fourth, some participants tend to express views that are consistent with social standards and try not to present themselves negatively. This social desirability bias may lead respondents to self-censor their actual views, especially when they are in a group setting. Fifth, the quality of the data collection and the results are highly dependent on the skills of the interviewer and on the rigor of the analysis. Because all of these methods are dependent on interpersonal exchanges with respondents, any number of variables, including the dress, demeanor, and language used by the interviewer may influence the quantity and quality of information given by respondents. The skill and experience of the researcher also influences how well the data are summarized into themes and insights that are useful for subsequent research ([http://health.gov/communication/primer/aud\\_res\\_prim.asp](http://health.gov/communication/primer/aud_res_prim.asp)).

## **SUMMARY**

In summary, this dissertation is a “classic” qualitative case study. The sample is three selected homeschooling families, and the primary research instrument is interviewing with a pre-defined script based on the study’s fundamental research

questions. However, numerous other information gathering techniques were implemented throughout the study like artifact review and interviewee answer verification. The reliability of this document is better described as its credibility, neutrality, confirmability, consistency, dependability, applicability, and transferability. Its validity, verified through data triangulation, leads to its partial generalizability. The data collection of this case study, in addition to extensive interview notes, included standardized test results and other student academic performance documents. Data analysis included the four primary steps preferred by research experts Glathorn and Joyner: (1) interview transcription, (2) response categorization, (3) category evaluation, and (4) category prioritization. Finally, the limitations of this case study are shared by most case studies; specifically, because of the selection of the sample, the narrowness of the sample, and the responses of the sample during interviews, the study's results cannot be considered wholly representative of all homeschooling families (2005).

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### Placing the Case Study Families in Context: Comparison of the Families Against Researched Demographics

According to recent research, over 60% of homeschooling parents possess a college degree (Ray, 2009). Of the six adult participants in this report, five have at least a Bachelor's degree. Nationwide, 19% of all homeschooling mothers work for pay outside the home. None of the mothers in this study do so. Homeschooling families are much larger than average. In America, the average family has two children. The average homeschooling family has 3.5. In the case study families, one family had six children, one family had three children, and one family had one child. Homeschooling parents are usually married; nationally, almost 98% of homeschooling parents are married. All of the parents in this study are married. Over 82% of homeschool households report themselves as being Protestant; all of the case study families are religiously conservative, fundamentalist Protestants. American homeschoolers are disproportionately white; 97.1% of homeschooled students in the United States are white/non-Hispanic. All of the case study parents are white as are all of the children. Finally, research states that 98.3% of homeschooled students use a computer at home as part of their educational program (Ray, 2009); all of the households in this report have a home computer for student and family use.

Does the educational effectiveness of the selected homeschooling families reflect the educational effectiveness of homeschooling nationally? Table 4.1, A Comparison



Between National Test Results and Case Study Results, summarizes this comparison below.

<b>Subject Area</b>	<b>National Percentile Average of Homeschooled Students (Ray, 2009)</b>	<b>Case Study Families' Average Standardized Test Results</b>
Reading	89	80
Language Arts	84	71
Mathematics	84	82

*Table 4.1 • A Comparison Between National Test Results and Case Study Results*

The case study families' sample for averaging, however, is only four students. Nevertheless, the data above indicates that the case study homeschool environments' effectiveness is relatively consistent with national research reports. A more detailed review of this and related data is later in this report.

### Rationale for Homeschooling

Recent educational research based on large scale surveying identified four primary reasons why parents choose to homeschool: concern about the environment of other schools, the need to provide religious or moral instruction, dissatisfaction with the academic instruction at others schools, and the need to provide more individualized instruction to a special needs child (Bielick, 2006). Were these reasons reflected by the individual homeschooling families selected for this case study?

The parents of Family A articulated very precisely why they have chosen homeschooling, and their answers to this question echo what the research on this topic summarized earlier indicated. The primary reason for their decision was religious. They

believe that the foundational source for all learning is the Bible, and they perceive that the public school, because of, in their words, “the supposed separation of church and state” is not a Bible-friendly place. At best, they say the public school is indifferent to scripture; at worst, they believe the public school system opposes the Bible. When asked for substantiation of this strongly stated opinion, they replied with several examples. First, they mentioned homosexuality, which they believe the Bible strongly forbids as immoral. Public schools, in their opinion, promote this alternative lifestyle and discredit those who question it as close-minded or bigoted.

They also stated their belief that public schools minimize the Christian foundation of the American system. In their view, most of the founding fathers were conservative Christians who embraced the Bible. Because this perspective, though true in their opinion, is not “politically correct,” it is ignored by public school social studies curricula. They, in fact, believe that it is argued against by many history teachers. Another issue of contention between this family and public schools is the area of sexual education. First, they do not believe that it is the role of the public school to provide moral instruction in this area. They prefer that this sensitive topic be left to parents to introduce and to explain to their adolescent children. At this point, they stated that they did not desire to force their opinion on this matter on other parents; they simply wanted to maintain the freedom to raise their own children as they see fit in this regard. Second, they did not agree with many schools’ position on the matter of sexual education. Because they see sexual relations as being exclusively confined to married couples, for them, there can be no other acceptable foundation for sexual education than abstinence. Any public school

that would teacher their children otherwise would be both overstepping its bounds and providing incorrect information.

Finally, in defense of their opinion that public schools are, in their words, “anti-Bible,” they argued against the teaching of evolution as scientific fact and the exclusion of intelligent design as scientific at all. They stated a belief that creationism has the support of numerous scientists and also has the support of often ignored observable data. They also question evolution because of its moral implications. If humankind did indeed descend from animals, they ask, then ultimately what motivation do people have to behave in any other manner than their base original nature would permit? They contend that even science has a spiritual element, showing man the orderliness and incontrovertibility of God’s nature and teaching man that violations of God’s moral law carry sure consequences, just like violations of his natural laws. Again, without these spiritual emphases in learning, they believe that education, though it may result in a better job or higher salary, is ultimately empty and meaningless.

In addition to their religious objections to placing their children into the public school setting, the parents in Family A also worry about the effect of negative peer pressure on their children. This peer pressure, they believed, could take many forms. First, they were concerned about egregiously unpleasant acts that their sons could be exposed to like drug use and premarital sex. Even in their own neighborhood, they were familiar with children in apparently strong homes with involved and caring parents who had been expelled from school for marijuana possession or use. This was not behavior that they wanted their sons to be exposed to at such an early age. Second, they were concerned about less shocking but distasteful adolescent activities like poor language or

violent video games. Because their sons were athletes, often playing basketball games at local outdoor courts, they were aware of the language often used by middle and high school students, language that was very concerning to such devout Christians. Having been informed by their sons public school peers that such talk was rampant at the local high school, the parents were reluctant to send their children into that environment. Third, these parents were concerned about a lack of interest, or worse, a total dislike of academics on the part of the public school students their sons encountered. Often, these young people expressed a hatred of reading and a lack of curiosity about academic matters, seeming more concerned, according to these parents, with shoe styles and sagging shorts. Conversely, these parents argued their sons loved reading and often spent entire evenings caught up in reading a currently favorite book.

Responses from the parents of Family B about their rationale for homeschooling included many of the statements above; however, the parents in this family also added additional reasons for their decision. One concern raised by these parents was the perceived lack of academic rigor and commitment evident in many public schools. After commenting briefly on the high failure rates of students on high school graduation tests as reported by the local press, the parents commented that they simply had higher expectations than mere mastery of basic skills for their own children.

Family B also argued for homeschooling with pedagogical support. The mother stated that she is able to spend time with her children individually each day, discussing with them their progress and reviewing their academic work with them. She commented that this one-on-one tutoring was very effective, both for her as she was able to immediately and accurately assess her children's progress but also for her children to

receive immediate feedback and constant support. She said that she often wondered how the public school teacher could possibly be expected to provide that kind of individualized and effective instruction in a classroom of perhaps as many as 30 students with wildly different ability levels. Along these lines, she commented that most of her effectiveness came from her relationship with her children, that she could both accurately assess their needs and appropriately influence their development because of her intimate knowledge of who they were, their strengths and weaknesses, and their personalities. She again asked how a high school teacher, for example, who might have over one hundred students during the day, could possibly “know, let alone meet, all their students’ individual needs.”

Family B’s mother also provided a rationale for homeschooling by referring to family togetherness. She commented that she often sees public school buses, presumably loaded with sports teams, traveling through her community late in the evening and throughout the weekend. She is saddened that these students will not be as close to their parents and siblings as her family is.

The father in Family B nodded as his wife spoke, but he added that he and his wife’s greatest responsibility was to raise strong Christians; no other priority, in his mind, was as vital as that. While he said he personally had no animosity toward the public school system, he did not believe that it could provide the kind of religious instruction that was required to produce “young men and woman who are totally sold out for God, who really want to give their all for Him.” He concluded by saying that, while he was concerned that his children be able to read, write, and do math, those skills were not nearly as important as being a strong Christian.

Family C's parents would agree with what has been written previously, but, of course, added their own individual emphases. They referred to an argument commonly used by homeschoolers to defend their decision. They stated that the natural state for a child's upbringing (as designed by God) is the family – a mother, a father, and their children. Even in large families, the ratio of children to adults may only be 2:1 or 3:1. For the modern American nuclear family with married parents and two children, the ratio is only 1:1. The involvement of grandparents and other adult relatives like aunts and uncles may actually reverse this ratio so that adults outnumber children in a natural family arrangement. They believe that this information is very telling. By their way of thinking, God designed the family so that children would receive the impact and direct engagement throughout their developmental years of more adults than peers. They want their children to be more influenced by adults than by peers, and they especially want their children to be influenced by strong Christians.

The mother in this family, who had experience as an elementary classroom teacher in a private Christian school, also believed that homeschooling was simply the most natural and best educational system for young people. She stated that, although she cared about her students and tried to work with them as individuals, she was never able to provide each student the time and attention he or she deserved to reach his or her individual potential. In her homeschool, her son gets all of her planning, instructional, and assessment time. As a result, she argues that he is getting the best possible educational program, one that is designed for him according to his individual needs and propensities.

Her husband, the father of this family, was equally excited about homeschooling but for slightly different reasons. If his son were a student in the local public schools, the father commented, then he and his wife would trust those educators to the extent that they simply would not be as engaged in their son's learning. The father believes that, because he and his wife have taken full responsibility for their son's education, they must be fully engaged and committed to the process. When his wife comments at dinner, for example, that their son is not mastering Algebra 1, they cannot simply assume that an external school or teacher will devise a solution; instead, he and his wife must struggle through the problem for their own son, coming up with a pedagogical approach tailored specifically for him.

Finally, both parents spoke at length about what they perceived to be a moral "swamp" in America's popular culture. This cultural decline was, of course, evident in the broadcast media, in popular music, at the cinema, and in the video games embraced by young people as a whole. Their concern was that the moral deficiencies they perceived were assuredly brought into the local public school without inhibition. They were certain that their son's public school peers, though probably well-meaning, would influence their son to accept and then to pursue a value system that their family wholly rejected. This sociological information, while not the most important reason for their decision to homeschool, certainly reinforced their rationale.

All three families embraced this educational option very strongly. When asked what might influence them to reconsider this approach, their answers were unambiguous. All the parents stated that they simply would not stop homeschooling their children unless they were simply unable to continue doing so. One mother commented that when

she thinks about the possible need to place her children in a school, perhaps because of an illness or because of a change in the law, she becomes sad, thinking of the turmoil it would cause her children. One father, when asked what he would do to prevent placing his children in a public school, stated boldly that he would move to another state or country and quit educating them at all to avoid the perceived negative influences of the public school system. None of the parents were able to suggest a scenario where it would be acceptable to them to enroll their children in the public schools of their community.

### Curricular and Instructional Decision-Making

Several features of the homeschooling families' curricular and instructional decisions deserve highlighting here. First, the conservative nature of the parents, as most reflected by their religious and political proclivities, are also noticeable here. The mother in Family C stated, for example, that she provided what she referred to as a "classical education." She stated that she was strongly influenced by Jessie Wise and Susan Wise-Bauer's book, *The Well-Trained Mind: A Guide to Classical Education at Home*, a book that was popular and frequently recommended by the mothers in her local homeschooling group. The information of this book is summarized by the chart below (1999).

Part	General Topics Covered
1 • The Grammar Stage: Grades K-4	Preschool, kindergarten, numbers, words, world history, Latin, religion, art music
2 • The Logic Stage: Grades 5-8	Argumentation, logic, fallacies, mathematics, history and geography, spelling, grammar, reading, writing, deductive thinking (science), Latin and other languages, history of creativity (art & music)



<b>3</b> • The Rhetoric Stage: Grades 9-12	Rhetoric, grammar & writing, great books for history and reading, mathematical sequences, Advanced Placement, laws of science, foreign languages, religious apologetics
<b>4</b> • Coming Home: How to Educate Your Child at Home	Rationale for home education, socialization, character development, time management, grades & record keeping, standardized testing, athletic opportunities, public school relationship, external support, college entrance

*Table 4.2 – The Well-Trained Mind, A Summary*

When asked for additional clarification about how this philosophy impacted her curriculum and instructional decision-making, the mother replied that she would simply look for books in the homeschool curriculum catalogs that reflected the recommendations of *The Well-Trained Mind: A Guide to Classical Education at Home*. She also commented that she relied on her previous experience as a Christian school teacher. Of all the mothers, only the mother in Family C expressed any interest in creative or progressive teaching techniques or approaches. She commented that her son needed opportunities to learn in fun and interesting ways. She saw her son as being “all boy,” and she stated that he had to be able to move and be active, to be loud, and to work with his hands to really get excited about a learning activity. She asked what students like her son do all day in a confining public school where quiet seatwork is the usual instructional approach. When she teaches science to her son, for example, they will often go to the water retention pond in their neighborhood, gathering water samples for observation under the family’s microscope or watching closely as the pond animals interact or as the plant life develops. She is also fond of allowing her son to explore his own interests. Because he is an avid reader of Greek mythology, she will often allow his writing assignments to explore some specific topic within that subject matter.

This information reflects very closely the findings of Andrea Clements's study entitled, "Variety of Teaching Methodologies Used by Homeschoolers: Case Studies of Three Homeschooling Families." Clements found that literature-based curriculum, like that described in Bauer's book, was one of the five primary categories of curricula preferred by homeschooling families (2002).

As a foundation for discussion about practical decision-making related to all the case study families were first asked about the philosophies and objectives that formed the foundation about the homeschools they were endeavoring to establish. In other words, what were they trying to accomplish for their children by providing an education for them at home. While all three sets of parents commented that they had never actually given that question specific thought or had participated in extensive discussions with their spouse about that issue, all six were able to provide quickly and concisely their goals for their children's homeschool experiences.

Family A stated that their primary goal was spiritual formation. They wanted their sons to become "committed Christians who are sold out for God." This, they stated unequivocally, was every parent's most important goal. Since they saw the Bible as the exclusive "source for the solution to life's problems," they wanted all learning in their home to start with that source. As a result, curriculum materials were selected that had strong Biblical support. For example, in science these parents used a textbook series with titles like *Exploring Creation with Chemistry* and *The Human Body: Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*. Almost no subject in their homeschool was outside this Biblical frame of reference. Even mathematics, though taught with very traditional Saxon textbooks, had a spiritual element to Family A's parents. The Saxon approach relies on

spiraled and frequent review; once a topic is covered and learned by the pupil, it is at first frequently and then sporadically included in future lessons and assignments. The Saxon math books used by Family A are very plain black and white only texts with page after page of explanation followed by numerous problems to be solved. For all its apparent effectiveness in teaching mathematics to her sons from the elementary level through high school, when asked if her sons enjoyed math, the mother responded that they often find it “boring” and do not “list math among their favorite subjects.” Nevertheless, the parents argued that mathematics was a wonderful way to remind students about the order of God’s creation. Furthermore, the father commented that the discipline required for learning math well would also serve his sons as they strove to “discipline themselves in their Christian walk.”

Family B’s parents also spoke at length about the emphasis on Biblical growth being one of their core objectives for their children, but they also mentioned the need for their children to become independent thinkers who understand their faith and “can defend what they believe” if questioned. As a result of this emphasis, Family B, in addition to more traditional subjects found in any school system, also included the formal study of logic and rhetoric in their homeschool curriculum. In fact, one of the daily activities that was assigned to the children of Family B, from elementary through high school, was the completion of the formal logic problem. By the time her children had reached their junior and senior years, they were working through advanced syllogisms and identifying logical flaws in the argumentation of others.

The parents of Family C, again after stating that the primary goal of their homeschool was to assist their son’s Christian development, emphasized another goal

that was important to them in the operation of their homeschool. Specifically, they wanted their son to have, in addition the necessary basic academic skills or reading and computing, practical skills that would serve him well in whatever career choice he eventually selected. While both parents strongly agreed with this goal, the father especially felt that this was his area of responsibility in the functioning of the homeschool. As a result, he strove to diligently provide for his son training, usually on the weekends, in basic carpentry, automobile maintenance, home repair, and other basic life skills.

The choice of instructional methods among these families appeared to be very traditional. The instructional methodology for most subjects studied, as reported by the mothers interviewed, was very simple. Each and every school day, in each of the families studied, the child simply read the next ensuing chapter or section of the textbook, studied and reviewed it until it was understood, and then answered all of the questions or assignments in that section. Upon completion, the mother-teacher would receive the problems from her child and compare those answers to the key provided by the publishers. Any wrong answers were then re-done by the child and re-checked by the mother until correct. If the mother recognized any repeated errors or any frequently challenging types of questions or problems, she would work individually with that child until that learning concern was eliminated. When asked about the extensive tests often given by public school teachers, the mothers universally commented that, while they will give traditional assessments to prepare their children for that academic activity later in life, they do not need to formally assess frequently because they have such an intimate

knowledge of their students abilities from such close daily and individual interaction with them.

Once again, Clements study echoes these findings. Clements also found that homeschooling teachers used direct instruction and student study as the primary pedagogical approaches (2002).

The oldest child in Family B was a recent high school graduate. The official high school transcripts submitted by her parents and accepted by the student's college, a private, accredited four-year liberal arts conservative Christian university in the Midwest, follow a traditional and expected track for college bound students and are summarized on the chart below.

<u>Grade Level</u>	<u>Course Title</u>
High School Credit Course in Middle School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Algebra I</li> </ul>
9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical Education, English 9, Biblical Studies, Geometry, Biology, Spanish I</li> </ul>
10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>English 10, Algebra 2, Physical Science, Spanish II, Biblical Studies, Animal Husbandry</li> </ul>
11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>English 11, Theology, American History, Pre-Calculus &amp; Trigonometry, Spanish 3, Foods &amp; Sewing, Anatomy &amp; Physiology</li> </ul>
12 <sup>th</sup> Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>English 12, American Government, Consumer Mathematics &amp; Economics, Spanish 4, Music Theory</li> </ul>

*Table 4.3 –Homeschool High School Transcript Summarized*

While the transcript, which reported a total of 44 credits completed, is understandable, a couple explanatory comments should be provided. The mother in this

family stated that the seat time for each credit earned was approximately 90 hours. The physical education course was completed individually each day for an hour one semester through an aerobics DVD. The Animal Husbandry course was completed through the student's paid work at a nearby horse barn, where she cleaned stalls, fed and groomed horses, and occasionally went on rides with the horses as well. The foods and sewing class was, in part, completed by assisting the mother in domestic chores, cooking meals and sewing a Civil War-era ball gown, for example. The Music Theory class culminated in a lengthy recital conducted as a final senior project before formal graduation.

Interestingly, the Consumer Mathematics course was taught not by the mother, but by the father, who has an interest in financial planning, management, and investment. The goal for this class was to prepare the daughter more fully for independent living and personal budgeting prior to her graduation from high school. This transcript, though seemingly informal in many respects, was sufficient, along with the student's Scholastic Achievement Test scores, for acceptance into the private liberal arts Christian college of her choice, where she is currently a junior nursing major on course for graduation and certification as a registered nurse at the end of next school year.

### Overall Effectiveness of Homeschooling

Obviously, all three studied families stated that their homeschooling efforts were effective and successful. All three families provided both anecdotal and vague support for this assertion, as well as more concrete information to substantiate this claim. All three families use the Iowa Test of Basic Skills through the assistance of Bob Jones University to formally assess the academic progress of their children. Because of the cost

involved, the families do not always test their children every year, nor, in the larger families, do they test every child, often preferring to assess only the older children to gain information about preparation for the required college-entrance examinations. The information below summarizes the test scores provided by the sample families about their recently tested students.

The 10<sup>th</sup> grade student in Family A took the Iowa Test of Basic Skills through assistance from Bob Jones University in the spring of his 9<sup>th</sup> grade year. Those results are charted below.

<b>Test Subsection</b>	<b>National Percentile Rank</b>
Vocabulary	64
Reading Comprehension	54
Reading Total	60
Spelling	52
Capitalization	47
Punctuation	43
Usage & Expression	56
Language Total	51
Math Concepts & Estimation	87
Problems & Data Interpretation	78
Math Computation	67
Math Total	78

*Table 4.4 • Iowa Tests of Basic Skills Results • Family A, 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Student*

When asked to explain the numbers provided above, Family A's mother expressed both satisfaction and concern. First, she commented that her own part-time work schedule often prevented her from completing the planning that she would prefer. Second, she stated that her older son also exhibited some of the weaknesses that her

second was now exhibiting but that her older son eventually became more serious about his learning and was later accepted into college. She expected her middle son to become more engaged in the next couple of years as well. Third, she stated that her sons were all very energetic and high-spirited, having little patience of passivity of reading. Again, she suspected that her son was not actually expressing his true abilities but was, in fact, a much better reader. Finally, she was excited about his math scores, stating that they had risen since previous years and seemed to indicate improved potential in that area. When asked how the test scores would impact her teaching or whether she planned any adaptations to her instruction on the basis of this assessment information, she seemed perplexed and then replied, “No, I don’t really think so.”

The 12<sup>th</sup> grade student in Family B took the Iowa Test of Basic Skills with the support of Bob Jones University two years previously during the spring of his sophomore year, and those results are charted below.

<b>Test Subsection</b>	<b>Percentile</b>
Vocabulary	83
Reading Comprehension	97
Reading Total	90
Spelling	81
Capitalization	81
Punctuation	78
Usage & Expression	90
Language Total	91
Math Concepts & Estimation	78
Problems & Data Interpretation	74
Math Computation	89
Math Total	80

*Table 4.5 • Iowa Tests of Basic Skills Results • Family B, 10<sup>th</sup> Grade Student*



The 11<sup>th</sup> grade student in Family B also took the Iowa Test of Basic Skills with the support of Bob Jones University two years previously during the spring of his freshman year, and those results are charted on the chart below.

Test Subsection	Percentile
Vocabulary	78
Reading Comprehension	95
Reading Total	86
Spelling	87
Capitalization	84
Punctuation	82
Usage & Expression	64
Language Total	88
Math Concepts & Estimation	92
Problems & Data Interpretation	94
Math Computation	99
Math Total	97

*Table 4.6 • Iowa Tests of Basic Skills Results • Family B, 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Student*

When asked to explain the numbers provided above, Family Bs mother had little to say. She was pleased overall with her sons' performances on the standardized tests, but she was neither surprised in the results nor in any way concerned about them. She mentioned that her older son loved to read and seemed to retain an impressive amount of what he read, but she was concerned that he was often lazy about writing and did not strive to do his best with grammar or spelling. She then said that her younger son

probably lacked the natural skill of his older brother but was willing to compensate for that with very diligent effort. She was excited for him to have scored so high on the mathematics portion of the test. She knew that he was interested in architecture, so he seemed to be exhibiting the necessary skills for that career. She also did not expect any changes to her teaching because of the results of her sons' Iowa tests.

The 9<sup>th</sup> grade student in Family C took the Iowa Test of Basic Skills with the assistance of Bob Jones University during the spring of his 8<sup>th</sup> grade year, and those results are charted below.

<b>Test Subsection</b>	<b>Percentile</b>
Vocabulary	82
Reading Comprehension	78
Reading Total	82
Spelling	43
Capitalization	68
Punctuation	56
Usage & Expression	49
Language Total	54
Math Concepts & Estimation	72
Problems & Data Interpretation	63
Math Computation	67
Math Total	71

*Table 4.7 • Iowa Tests of Basic Skills Results • Family C, 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Student*

When asked to explain the numbers provided above, Family C's mother proudly described her son as a "voracious reader," and since she saw reading as the foundational skill, she thought her son would always be a "good student." She was not at all concerned by the lower test results in language arts and, to a lesser extent, in mathematics. She stated that she had not "covered all that punctuation stuff yet," preferring to allow her son to enjoy the writing process for as long as possible before she, in her words, "ruined it for him by marking everything in red." She said that her plan was to emphasize the mechanics of writing when her son was a junior and senior in high school.

Finally, it should be pointed out that there was no verification that the conditions for testing or the directions for the correct administration of these standardized tests were followed appropriately. Because the design of standardized tests presupposes that students will complete the assessment under certain precise conditions, if those conditions are not diligently adhered to, all results from the assessment are invalidated and cannot be considered reliable information to act upon.

Although the college entrance examination scores themselves were not provided, both high school graduates included within this study had earned scores high enough for them both to be accepted by the private liberal arts Christian colleges of their choosing. One of these homeschooled students was now a college junior majoring in nursing and on track to graduate next spring as a registered nurse. The other had just graduated last June but had chosen to remain at home for one year, working as a grocery store assistant manager and earning enough money to attend college in the fall. He had not yet decided upon on a major but was very interested in becoming a coach or church youth pastor.

The sample families also provided less objective, more anecdotal evidence of the effectiveness of their respective homeschools.

For example, Family A's mother assessed her family's educational efforts as very effective. When asked how she knew, she replied that her sons are wonderfully pleasant young men who are respected and liked by those they encounter. She mentioned that "they are good Christians" who try to take their faith seriously by serving others. When asked about their academic development, she simply stated that her sons complete all academic tasks capably and appear to have equal or greater abilities than their public schooled peers at church and in their neighborhood. She also mentioned that the oldest son, a recent college graduate, was accepted into the college of his choice without difficulty.

Family B's mother and father defended the success of their homeschool more fully, speaking about the individual abilities and interests. They mentioned their oldest daughter's countywide 4-H victories and her statewide competitions; they referred to their two oldest sons recent success in statewide speech competitions. They talked about their middle daughters' varied interests; one enjoyed raising pets and was interested in becoming a veterinarian, and the other, only an elementary student, was a voracious reader, working through lengthy and complex works of literature including recently *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Of course, their assessments were subjective, but both parents believed that their children were receiving better educations than they both received and enjoyed the school experience far more than they ever did.

Additional subjective information, however, was provided to support the assertion of an effective homeschooling environment. For example, in all three families, grades

were usually reported as A's. When pressed for information about how the grades were determined, the mother in Family C simply stated that her son completed each assignment in all of the selected textbooks. When asked how the level of success on those assignments was determined, she added that there were never any uncorrected wrong answers. When her son seemed to be struggling with a concept, the mother-teacher would intervene and provide additional support (in the form of side-by-side tutoring) until the material was wholly mastered. When further questioned about assessing the student's progress, her answer was simple. Because she was so involved in her son's learning, she knew exactly what her son's abilities were. Along these lines, Family A's mother explained, because of the spiraling nature of the Saxon materials, for example, and because of her close proximity to her students, she knew precisely where they were academically at any given time. If a particular child did not know a necessary concept, she explained, that deficiency would become very evident as she worked side-by-side with them on their next assignments.

#### Reported Costs to Homeschool

The self-reported cost to these families to provide necessary educational materials is surprisingly low, especially considering the results summarized above. Family A reported that their annual cost to provide curricular and instructional materials is about \$1,500 per year for their three sons. Family B reported an annual cost of nearly \$5,000 for their currently homeschooled five homeschooled children; however this figure includes their participation fees in speech competitions and their provision of piano lessons for four children. Family C indicated that they pay approximately \$1,000 per

year to homeschool their one high school-aged child. The costs, except where indicated, were for textbooks and materials like science laboratory equipment and materials. The books vary significantly in cost, of course, but an individual textbook, like *Saxon Algebra I*, usually costs between \$50 and \$70. In the case study families with more than one child, books are handed down from older siblings to younger ones or are shared among homeschool families. The Internet is another helpful resource for cost-conscious homeschooling mothers who will often research good prices through Google or another search engine. Students with special interests, however, like a child with an interest in engineering, might receive an expensive construction kit that cost over \$70.

These amounts, which, obviously, do not include any salary, facility, utility, or transportation costs, are less than national average cost to educate a public school student in the United States of approximately \$9,000 annually ([http://www.pbs.org/newshour/backgrounders/school\\_funding.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/backgrounders/school_funding.html)).

### Socialization Efforts of Homeschooling Families

Regardless of the furor surrounding this topic in much of the educational literature, the topic of the socialization of their children was not one that the parents of the studied families were at all concerned about. All of the case study families believed that their children functioned very well in social settings. Usually, the parents commented that they perceived that their children were even better socialized than their public school enrolled friends because their homeschooled children were comfortable interacting with all age-groups while their public schooled peers were often exclusively

comfortable with those in their own age group. The parents in the largest case study family commented that their children were well socialized by the process of living in a home with numerous other people of varying ages and genders. Two of the case study parents mentioned the importance of extended family. Their children interacted regularly with aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents.

The parents of Family B were amused by this line of questioning. Because their family has eight members, they cannot see how any child could live in their home and not develop necessary social skills. Most members of the family have a roommate. All of the children were assigned chores to complete around the house, and often these chores, laundry or yardwork, for examples, were completed with a partner. The children spent all day, every day, together conversing and negotiating with family members of varying ages. The parents explained that they had seen how this living arrangement had caused all of their children to have superior social skills, evidenced by comfortability and confidence in almost all social settings, a willingness to interact meaningfully with peers and adults of all ages.

All of the families interviewed mentioned church attendance and participation as a socializing factor. In one of the families, the children frequently play in the church orchestras and bands, surrounded by and frequently interacting musicians of all age groups. In two of the families, the homeschooled children are also active members of their church's youth groups, participating with publicly and privately schooled peers on church mission activities and other planned events for young people.

In two of the families, participation in organized athletic activities was prominently mentioned as evidence of the adequate socialization of their homeschooled

children or child. The oldest son in Family A hit over .700 on his local public high school's baseball team, developed close relationships with his teammates, and hoped to translate his athletic success into financial assistance at college. His younger brother was a prominent substitute on the same high school's varsity basketball team as a sophomore. He also enjoyed good friendships with his teammates and was well-liked by his coaches. When asked if there was ever any friction between the family and the local public school about the issue of playing on these teams, the family commented that there was not. They made the request, fully expecting to be rebuffed, and were surprised to receive a warm welcome from the local public school officials. When asked how they justified placing their sons on teams with peers they did not want their sons to attend school with, they replied that sports have no disagreeable curriculum content to avoid. They added that the practices are well-managed by conscientious adults who are able to prevent offensive behaviors like foul language.

The son in Family C was a skilled soccer player on a local community team. His parents believed that this experience, as well as his membership on the local Boy Scout troupe where he was earning a the title of Eagle scout, added to his socialization development.

Finally, two of the families' parents discounted the importance of this question, commenting that attendance at public schools surrounded by one's peers did not fully or appropriately socialize all students there. One father went so far as to say that the socialization at public schools was often negative. He referred to the recent phenomena of school shootings as another reason to keep their children in a home education environment. In addition to the obvious concern about physical safety, he wondered if



the dominant culture of some public schools is one of violence and aggression. Instead, he was pleased, as were the other parents, that their children interacted well with all age groups. One mother said, “You should see my children at church. One minute, they’re playing tag in the parking lot with the toddlers and the next they’re talking to an elderly woman about gardening. There are many public school children who cannot do that.”

### Family Responses to Homeschooling

While each of the families was very pleased with their decision to homeschool, all recognized that there were problems that required additional deliberation. The mother of the only child, Family C, saw this as her greatest concern. His isolation from peers throughout the day bothered her. Because of this perceived problem, she and her husband strove to provide their son with numerous extra-curricular activities. Their son participated in the local Boy Scout troupe, nearly completing the Eagle scout requirements at the time of this writing, he played soccer on a local team, and he was taking guitar lessons, so he could participate with the band at their church. Another concern stated by this mother centered around her worries that she would not be able to teach her son’s more challenging high school courses in his junior and senior years of high school. She was especially worried about her ability to teach advanced years of Spanish and about her ability to teach calculus in any meaningful way. She assumed that she would address these concerns through developing partnerships with her homeschool organization in a suburban area of a major Midwestern city.

While these concerns remain problematic, this homeschooling mother perceived that these issues were balanced by several benefits. She loved the closeness she and her

husband experienced with their son, commenting that many of her peers with teenagers in the public school had lost that closeness when their children became more active in the activities of their schools. She was also pleased that her husband was very engaged in his son's education, working together, as mentioned before, on developing practical skills around the house and with the car. Finally, she stated that her son usually enjoyed homeschooling and rarely complained that he was "missing out on sports" or other activities usually valued by high school students. She stated that he was very fond of the flexibility of his homeschooling schedule. Because of the instructional approach used by this mother, the son could often complete his required work early in the day and then spend time in the afternoon working on his own personally selected projects like working on becoming an Eagle scout. She stated he was most happy with his homeschooling when he was able to spend individual time with his father, completing an outdoor task like putting in the garden or building a dog kennel.

Family B's mother recognized two primary concerns. First, because of the tremendous requirements for her and her children's time, she struggled completing all of the duties that her role required. She complained that, even though homeschooling had to be her highest priority, she was still required to complete all the tasks associated with being a homemaker and mother. Required domestic tasks like completing the laundry and making and cleaning up meals were burdensome to her. As a result, she emphasized the importance of a strict schedule that includes even housework and the importance of involving "everyone" in the process of completing necessary household tasks. She stated that she is very strict about everyone's bedtime and breakfast time. The day, for her, must follow a set pattern of necessary tasks will not be completed. She also said that

every child, from youngest to oldest, must be involved in the process of maintaining the household. Older children did more challenging tasks like maintaining the yard and landscaping, and younger children cleaned up meals and washed dishes. The mother's final complaint about homeschooling was that it eliminated any "me time." Her husband's role in this process was limited. He said that he would ask his wife each day how things went and would speak with a child who was not performing well. He also stated that as the "sole breadwinner" his primary task was "to fund the whole operation."

Even though there were obvious challenges inherent with homeschooling, this mother more easily identified the benefits. She mentioned that she really enjoys teaching her children and watching them learn. She was especially excited to have taught all six of her children how to read. She saw that as one of her proudest achievements. According to their parents, the children in this family were equally positive about their homeschooling experience. For example, apparently the girls in this household were pleased that they never had to face the challenges of cliques and popularity. At their church, some of the girls felt pressured to look or to act a certain way at school and often had to wonder who their friends were on any given day. The children in this family, obviously, never had those peer-related stresses.

Family A's mother reiterated many of the statements above, commenting that she often feels inadequate to complete "perfectly" all of the responsibilities she is given. While she stated clearly that no one ever complains about the cleanliness of the house or the deliciousness of the meals, she always wishes she could do better and believes that if she had more time or more assistance, she certainly could do better. She faced an especially challenging situation because, unlike the other case study mothers, she had a

part-time job at a local grocery store, and while she liked her work and her co-workers, she would gladly give up that position if her family's finances would allow it. She stated that, while the homeschooling was her most important role, it would often not be planned for perfectly. In addition to the grocery store job, other priorities also prevented her from being as effective as she would prefer. Her sons, as mentioned earlier, are athletes, so in the spring and winter, they are often away both individually and as a family at sports practices and games. Unlike the previous mother who demanded assistance from her children in the completion of household tasks, this mother did all cooking, cleaning, and laundry on her own. Neither her sons nor her husband provided assistance in domestic areas. Again, the father in the family completed little actual work to assist the family's home-schooling efforts. By his own admission, his role was to support the wife in disciplinary and educational matters and to provide the schooling environment and educational materials through his work.

Again, though, like the other mothers, she was certain that the benefits outweighed the concerns. She was very "proud of the men" her sons were becoming. She saw them as respectful and intelligent young men. They were, apparently, popular at their church, often called upon to provide some service for a widow or to lead the youth group in some way. Like the mother in Family C, she was very pleased with the closeness within her family. The boys, according to her, loved their parents and each other. She was aware of children who seemed to dislike their siblings and disrespect their parents, but her family has not experienced that. In fact, she commented that it was not uncommon for an older son to serve as informal coach for a younger son, teaching each other how to hit a baseball more effectively or to shoot a basketball more accurately.

According to her, her sons were very positive about their homeschooling experience; however, it should be pointed out that they knew of no other arrangement from experience, like the children in the other case study families, having been homeschooled since kindergarten. According to their mother, the boys enjoyed homeschooling because they liked working at subjects according to their own pace. One son, for example, was a strong reader but a weak math student, and his brother was the opposite. As a result, both still finished their required work at approximately the same time — the better reader taking a little longer with his math assignment and the better mathematician taking a little longer with his English assignment. This mother also stated that her sons were appreciative that their teacher was so close and so available. When they struggled with a topic, she was immediately beside them, leading them toward improved understanding of the challenging subject matter. This both reduced their frustration and expedited the school day, so they could move on to their other interests, specifically sport practice and participation.

Another topic of discussion concerned the negativity or opposition the homeschooling families experienced. Family A had experienced some general negativity related to their decision to home-school. Some parents on her sons' sports teams thought it was unfair that their sons had to demonstrate a minimum academic competence before earning eligibility, but her sons were held to a different standard. She also had complaints from relatives who did not think it possible for her, without a college degree, to be teaching her sons. These relatives also complained that it was not possible for her to provide an appropriate homeschool program and hold a part-time job outside the home. Family B stated that they received complaints from grandparents early in their

homeschooling experience (They started homeschooling their oldest daughter over 15 years before.). These parents thought this initial reluctance occurred mostly because homeschooling was such a new concept at the time. Now these same grandparents are very supportive of this educational decision, seeing tremendous benefits for their grandchildren. This family reported that they also had a relative who was a lifelong certified teacher in a public school system. Again, initially, this relative argued passionately against the children being homeschooled. However, as she faced increasing challenges in her own career and as she saw the operation and the benefits of the homeschooling program of Family B, she changed her opinion of this decision and now supports it fully. Finally, Family C stated that they have never experienced any negativity because of their decision to homeschool their son. According to the father, occasionally, a co-worker might “raise an eyebrow” or ask a question, but then, they become comfortable with the idea once they know more about it.

Finally, each of the parents in the families interviewed was asked about governmental regulation of home schooling. This regulation takes many forms in many states. Ten states, referred to as “no regulation” states, place no restrictions on homeschooling. Thirteen “low regulation” states simply require parental notification of the intent to homeschool. Sixteen “moderate regulation” states require test scores or professional evaluation of students to determine academic growth. Eleven “high regulation” states require parental notification to the state or local public education providers, evidence of individual academic achievement, and various additional requirements like approval of the curriculum and teaching qualifications for parents.

The parents in Family A were very concerned about governmental interference in their homeschool. They were angered that public schools would seek higher control, stating that until all students in the public school are fully educated, public educators should devote their time and energy toward the students they currently serve without looking for additional students. They perceived this intrusion as part of a total loss of freedom in America that should be resisted. Finally, they perceived that any effort toward restricting homeschooling was probably simply religious bigotry since most homeschoolers are conservative and fundamental Protestants.

The parents in Family B were less passionate about this issue. As informal leaders in their local homeschool cooperative, with knowledge of the immense lobbying done on their behalf with the state legislature, they were confident that their state of Indiana would not, any time soon, be reducing the ample rights homeschoolers in that state enjoy. However, when pressed for an answer, they simply stated that even in the “worst” states committed home educators were able to practice their parental and religious rights without excessive interference. While they thought it probably did not serve any real purpose for anyone involved to have to complete bureaucratic forms or to submit student assessment results, they would comply with whatever legal restrictions were placed upon them because they believe that the Bible demands compliance with the state as long as that compliance does not violate Biblical mandates.

Family C’s parents were also bothered by the suggestion that the government should provide additional monitoring for their homeschool operation. The father stated that he paid his taxes to the local school, even though he saw no personal benefit from these not insignificant dollars. He thought the least the public school and legislature

could do was to take his money and let him lead his family as he believed right. His wife saw only arrogance in any legislature that would hamper homeschooling. In the local school district where she lives, she reported that only 70% of students are successful on tests that measure basic grade level content. If she is successful with 100% of her student population, shouldn't she have the authority to question their practices and not the other way around, she asked rhetorically.

### Conclusion

While the reasons provided by the studied homeschooling families were varied, their answers can be synthesized into primarily two general statements of rationale. First, these families were interested in faith-based instruction for their children, and second, they believe that an individualized approach to education both makes more logical sense and is more effective. The curricular and instructional decisions based on this foundational rationale could also be summarized into two comprehensive categories. First, one of the case study families was influenced by the classical education of grammar, logic, and rhetoric. Second, all three families were, for the most part, very traditional in their curricular selections and instructional approaches. Their children spent most of their school time reading text and completing assignments. The overall effectiveness of these curricular and instructional efforts is noticeably high. Standardized test scores were provided for four of the ten students included within this study. Overall, the national percentile rank of these four students was 77.3. In reading, three of the four earned an average national percentile rank of over 85. In mathematics, the four students averaged greater than the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile. In addition to the results on standardized tests,



two of the students in the case study families had already graduated from high school. One was a college student who will graduate as a registered nurse after one additional year of college, and the other had taken a year off after graduation to earn money for college but had been accepted at the university of his choice and was anticipating enrolling there as a freshman in the fall. This student had been promoted to assistant manager at the grocery store where he worked.

These apparently successful results are not expensive; the average annual educational cost for the students in these families is slightly over \$500. Effective socialization is not so easily quantified; however, all of the studied families report that their children are involved in activities outside the home that require interaction with others, like sports teams, church musical groups, or community volunteering. Finally, all of the case study families reported satisfaction with their education choice. The mothers stated that, while they were often stressed by the excessive numbers of demands placed upon their time as primary homemakers and teachers to their children, they felt incredible satisfaction as providing for their children in this way and their children experienced numerous meaningful benefits as a result. They reported that their children reported similar contentment with their educational status.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

#### Rationale for Choosing to Homeschool

Formal academic research into the subject of why parents choose to homeschool their children even though they have access to public education provided by their tax dollars is surprisingly consistent in its findings. In summary, this research identifies primarily four fundamental reasons for homeschooling. First, many parents are concerned about the environment of other schools. Second, many parents desire to provide religious or moral instruction to their children, instruction that is denied in a secular public school that resides in a very pluralistic society. Some researchers conclude that this is the most prevalent or most important reason that some parents homeschool. Third, many parents believe that the academic instruction at other schools is substandard. Fourth, some parents choose to homeschool because their child or children have special needs that cannot be adequately or properly met in a public school system. While these reasons are the most commonly identified by research, other reasons have also been determined. For example, some parents hope that by homeschooling they can help their children resist the deleterious effects of peer pressure to use drugs or to engage in premarital sexual relations. Other parents simply state that they cannot afford private, parochial, or Christian education and see homeschooling as their next best option.

This study found, consistent with the work of Lange and Liu, that religious reasons dominate the decision-making process of the parents interviewed. In all three cases, parents were devoutly religious conservative Protestant fundamentalists whose faith in God and literal interpretation of the Bible influence all aspects of their lives.

Their desire to shield their children from what they perceive to be evil influences in the public school and their concomitant desire to teach their children religious content require them, in their estimation, to separate their children from the public school system. Since these parents perceive that public schools cannot teach the Bible as a source of guidance for life and practice but only as a respected work of literature, they feel compelled to keep their children home to teach them this central content of their lives.

Some areas for additional research are prompted by this apparent conflict between passionately religious homeschoolers and the public school sector. First, why do these parents interpret the neutrality of the public school toward religion as animosity? Many public educators would identify themselves as Christian or as religious, but homeschooling parents perceive the environment of the public school as hostile to people of strong faith. Is there a common ground that can be found to open dialogue between homeschooling fundamentalists and their local public educators? Second, what avenues are open to public schools seeking to provide services to people of faith in an effort to welcome homeschoolers back to the public school environment? Faith-based extra-curricular activities have been allowed as legal; can these religious clubs and groups, if promoted and increased in number, cause homeschoolers to rethink their opinion of the public school as antithetical to their faith? Similarly, religious and Biblical content can be taught within the public school curriculum if presented as intellectual material and not as proselytizing efforts. Many schools, however, avoid these topics because of concern about controversy and conflict. Finally, some public schools refuse to allow homeschooled students to participate in extra-curricular activities or to attend the local

public school for just portions of the day. This restriction often increases the negativity between advocates of homeschooling and advocates of public education.

### Homeschoolers Selection of Curricular Materials and Instructional Approaches

While the research into the topic of homeschooling pedagogical practices is limited, this study reflected the general findings that homeschool parents teach in a very traditional manner. Similarly, other than the religious material referenced in the previous section, the selection of content to be taught is often no different from that found in public schools. For example, the Saxon mathematics textbooks used by one of the case study families can be found in many public schools throughout the United States, and this particular example of what homeschoolers prefer in their pedagogy is especially instructive. The Saxon philosophy is a very traditional approach to teaching mathematics, emphasizing spiraled review and constant practice which is presented in a very plain, straightforward format.

While creative pedagogical approaches can be found randomly and isolated throughout the educational programs provided by the studied families, this statement would also apply to most traditional public school environments. There was no overwhelmingly unique instructional approach that dominated the teaching or learning in the homeschools studied. In fact, it appeared that the opposite was the case. Many public schools would reject rote learning, extensive memorization, and worksheet practice as outdated instructional techniques or at least as unreflective of current research-based best educational practice. Yet, these apparently were the primary methods used by the interviewed homeschooling mothers.

One area where the homeschool environment, by necessity, required greater creativity in pedagogical approach was the use of looping and multi-grade groupings. In the larger case study family, young elementary students might participate in a lesson with their high school siblings in history or in Bible. The mothers in these families used journal writing or project creation as ways to differentiate expectations among students of varying ages. Two siblings might hear the same lesson, which usually consisted of the mother reading aloud a chapter from a children's history text, about World War II, for example. Thereafter, the older sibling might write an extensive comparison between two historians' consideration of the same events; the younger student might simply write an illustrated summary of what was read. Similarly, in the studied families, there was an interesting dynamic between older and younger siblings. Younger children in a family had observed for a couple of years the work being completed by their older siblings and were often very eager to accomplish the same tasks. If an older sibling was reading an especially exciting or interesting book, *Lord of the Rings*, for example, his or her younger brothers or sisters would often want to read the same book thereafter, even if their personal reading abilities were not fully up to the challenge. In one of the families, one of the projects was for the older children to assist in the building of a large chicken coop. During its construction, all of the children became interested and wanted to become involved in small aspects of the project.

The analysis above refers primarily to the required student work, but contrasts in curricular choices between these homeschools and generic public schools were more easily identifiable. The homeschooling families were more interested in classical approaches to education. Topics like logic and Latin, which are not often currently

included as separate courses in most schools, were taught comprehensively in the homeschools studied. Similarly, while there remain many public schools that embrace a “great books curriculum,” these schools are now in the minority; however, historically respected works of literature from the so-called canon form the very basis of literacy instruction in the homeschooling families considered herein. For example, the children of the case study families would, in general, have a greater than average knowledge of the works of Charles Dickens than would their same age peers in public schools.

Of course, this research finding would seem to support the contentions of Arai and Balmer that homeschoolers do not participate fully in the pluralistic society that surrounds them. Because the canon relies heavily, almost exclusively, on the dominant culture that these studied children are a part of, they miss learning opportunities to be exposed to the often vital contributions of diversity to modern American society.

Finally, in the case study families, there were occasional educational activities discussed that could only be provided by the family unit. For example, all of the families interviewed saw spring or summer vacations as being both an educational and a recreational activity. The children of Family A spoke both earnestly and intelligently about their recent visits to area museums. They related their memories of favorite dinosaur exhibits or Western sculptures. Similarly, all of the case study families emphasized the importance of their family’s meals as a time to process some of the learning of the day. Apparently, discussions would frequently occur about key concepts of the day’s educational program, often with the younger children asking their older siblings or parents for clarification about something they overheard from an older child’s lessons. In one of the families, this conversation, which had the effect of reinforcing the

social studies lesson, often centered around political or economic matters of current importance.

The curricular plan and instructional approaches are the areas most in need of greater, more formal study on the part of educators. There is, at this point, ample and abundant description information about homeschoolers, their demographics and their achievement. What is lacking is greater insight into how they accomplish as successfully as they do. Clearly, home education is an effective approach; some researchers simply want to attribute this effectiveness to the overall beneficial demographics of homeschoolers, and while there is much to this theory, Ray's research indicates the effectiveness of homeschooling across income levels, parent education, and other vital factors. In other words, regardless of a family's wealth or predisposition to formal education, homeschooling works and works well. Across all subjects and grade levels, homeschooled students achieve at higher than the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile, a full 30 percentile points higher than their publicly schooled peers, and home educators do this on budgets of less than one tenth what it costs to educate a public school student annually. How do parents, most of whom do not have any formal training in teaching, very few of whom possess a teaching license, accomplish this? What is the secret of their effectiveness? There is a need for additional research into the curriculum and instructional decision-making and implementation of homeschooling parents, specifically mothers.

Of course, even without this research, one of the most obvious strengths of homeschooling is the strong relationship between teachers and their students in this educational arrangement. Public school teachers and leaders may benefit from additional consideration of this feature of learning. Certainly, teachers already care about their

students, but that concern is often general in nature. The affection between a mother and her child, however, is of a different kind and quality altogether. Mothers know their children deeply. Would teachers benefit from greater awareness of this bond? Would students respond more fully to the superior instructional approaches of their college-trained and state-certified teachers if the relationship was of a different quality?

### Overall Effectiveness of Homeschooling in Academics and Other Areas

Current educational research supports the position that homeschoolers perform at least as well as their public schooled counterparts and probably better. The largest study of this type, which included 12,000 homeschooled students, found percentile scores between the 62<sup>nd</sup> and 91<sup>st</sup> percentiles. Another study determined that homechooled students score two to four grade levels and 20 percentile points above their public schooled chronological peers on the nationally normed and generally respected Iowa Test of Basic Skills. This study echoes those findings. Standardized test results were provided for four of the ten students within the scope of the study. Objective information of this type was not provided for the other six students considered by this study either because they had already graduated from high school or because the families had not yet had them tested in this format. All four students for whom standardized test data was provided scored at or above the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile in overall reading achievement, and three of the four scored above the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile. Reading comprehension was a clear strength of three of these students. Each of these strong readers scored at or above the 82<sup>nd</sup> percentile. Similarly, all four scored above the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile in mathematics achievement, and three of the four scored at or above the 78<sup>th</sup> percentile. It cannot be



determined how these students would have scored if they had been products of the public school system; however, if the test were administered according to prescribed directions, then the students' noticeable and measurable success in their own homeschools must be recognized. If the assessments were not administered according to the precise directions provided, then the tests are invalidated. Finally, this information is based on the averages of the small sample of scores provided. Not all scores were high. One of the students was below the national average in his language arts abilities, scoring at the 47<sup>th</sup> percentile in capitalization and the 43<sup>rd</sup> percentile in punctuation.

Of course, the caveats suggested by researcher Johnna Burns of Northeastern State University also apply to this study. The parents interviewed for this report are all married. Five of the six possess college degrees, and five of the six possess master's degrees. Her contention that supportive demographics are the cause or foundation of homeschooled students success certainly seem applicable to this study's participants.

This concern provides one of the greatest needs in continuing homeschool research. A study of public school students and home schooled students with very similar demographics would be instructive. All standardized test comparisons are made with the average student (at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile) in mind; however, because of the very positive demographic background of homeschooled students, a better comparison would be between homeschooled students' test results and those of a very similar demographic background.

### Homeschoolers Responses to Their Educational Choice

The answer to this research question is really two-fold. First, how do homeschool parents respond to this choice, and second, how do homeschooled students themselves respond to this decision made by their parents?

The parents interviewed were very passionate about this decision. They saw homeschooling both as required by their faith and as very effective as an educational option. Their comments about their decision to homeschool were unambiguous; all of the parents interviewed would not consider enrolling their children in a public school unless some tremendous debilitating tragedy intervened, and even then, they would seek out all other options first. Because, as discussed earlier, their primary reasons for homeschooling were religious and because their religion was so powerfully vital to them, they saw this choice as mandated by God and, therefore, inviolable. Their attitude toward the public school was generally indifferent; they did not care what happened at public schools as long as their perceived right to raise and to educate their children as they saw fit was undisturbed.

Quite frankly, their opinions in this regard are worth deeper consideration. It is the nature of governments to expand their control, to increase their regulations, and to be sure, there are abuses in society that deserve greater governmental scrutiny. Given that, how can public educators and elected officials consider raising the regulatory standard for homeschooling when the research so clearly establishes that this approach is an effective one? When many public schools struggle to assist all their pupils adequately, how can parents whose educational provision for their own children is successful reasonably be

asked to come under the greater influence of a system that may not be experiencing success as satisfactorily?

Another area for greater study would be research into what homeschooled students themselves think and feel about this educational choice made by their parents. Do they enjoy this educational approach? Do they miss the opportunities often denied them, like greater interaction with peers or participation on sports teams? What aspects of this learning environment are most appealing to them? Do they like, for example, the greater flexibility that homeschooling affords them? Do these students have any explanation for their overall success? Is it because of the relationship they have with their parent-teacher, or are there curricular and instructional techniques that promote their achievement that they can identify?

The answers to these questions and others like them would be of significant interest to public school educators. For example, if homeschooled students identify the relational factor as being preeminent in their success, then surely, professional educators would be interested in methods of increasing the connectedness between teachers and their students. Similarly, if homeschooled students were aware that the flexibility of the individualization of their educational program benefited them greatly, then it would be hoped that educators would renew their efforts to design school programs less dependent on student's chronological age and more concerned with matriculation after mastery of a required content. Finally, if homeschooled students identify the cause of their success simply as the emphasis their parents place on their education, then once again, public school educators should redouble their efforts to partner with parents in more meaningful ways in the education of children.

### Homeschoolers Eventual Achievements as Adults

No qualitative case study of three homeschooling families could adequately answer this question; however, some observations about these families can be identified. First, the children who successfully completed high school were at no noticeable disadvantage either for acceptance into college or for achieving success while at college. All of the students who wanted to attend college were accepted into accredited institutions of their choosing. One will soon graduate as a registered nurse. The other has been accepted into the college of his choice and will pursue the career that currently interests him. Again, the sample is excessively small to make any meaningful applications to those outside the study; however, for these two students, no long-term impediments to achieving stability as adults seems evident.

Another recommendation for additional research and consideration is prompted by this information. Some of the homeschooling parents studied in this report stated a preference that their children develop positive attitudes toward learning and a belief that those positive attitudes are often constrained by frequent contact in an educational setting with same age peers. They thought that their children, by nature of constantly being surrounded by parents who embraced reading and learning, would develop lifelong positive attitudes toward reading and learning. The parents reported that their children reflected this value. The parents could speak passionately about their children's embrace of learning, certainly not in all areas, as some of the homeschooled students studied, according to their parents, apparently disliked mathematics or extensive writing assignments, for example. What this researcher did not hear from these parents,

however, was that their children perceived reading or learning was bad or distasteful, and there was evidence that these children were passionate about some aspects of their learning. Of course, many public school children are as well, but what made these discussions of the merits of learning unique was, according to the parents, that the homeschooled students' interests were all almost entirely self-directed. The children were selecting books from the library on an area of interest and reading dozens, perhaps hundreds of pages on that topic. One child was fascinated by Greek mythology, another by the biographies of famous athletes. The question for the researcher would be whether or not this attitude toward lifelong learning, a common phrase found in the mission statements of many public schools, is greater than same age peers in the public school setting and is maintained throughout adult life.

### Final Comments

A focus on the commonalities between home and public educators and a sharing of expertise between both groups would assuredly benefit both the students in their homes and the students in their schools. Both homeschooling parents and professional public educators are committed to the same ultimate goal of increasing student academic achievement. In an era of fiscal reduction, homeschoolers have much to offer public educators about their accomplishments and how those accomplishments are achieved with significantly smaller funding. The public school certainly could teach homeschooling mothers much about current best educational practices, a concept virtually unseen in during the research for this report. Teaching techniques in differentiated and cooperative learning or comprehensive instructional and assessment

strategies like project-based learning, for example, could serve homeschool mothers well, but they are, seemingly, unaware of this knowledge base. While currently no mechanism exists for the exchange of information between the homeschool community and the public school community, a partnership between both groups would ultimately strengthen both groups.

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## Appendix – IRB Approval Letter



## Institutional Review Board

DATE: March 25, 2010  
TO: Dan Shepherd  
FROM: Ball State University IRB  
RE: IRB protocol # 151152-3  
TITLE: Homeschool Parent Interviews  
SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision  
ACTION: APPROVED  
DECISION DATE: March 24, 2010  
EXPIRATION DATE: March 23, 2011  
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

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The Institutional Review Board has approved your Revision for the above protocol, effective March 24, 2010 through March 23, 2011. All research under this protocol must be conducted in accordance with the approved submission.

**As a reminder, it is the responsibility of the P.I. and/or faculty sponsor to inform the IRB in a timely manner:**

- when the project is completed,
- if the project is to be continued beyond the approved end date,
- if the project is to be modified,
- if the project encounters problems, or
- if the project is discontinued.

Any of the above notifications should be addressed in writing and submitted electronically to the IRB (<http://www.bsu.edu/irb>). Please reference the IRB protocol number given above in any communication to the IRB regarding this project. Be sure to allow sufficient time for review and approval of requests for modification or continuation. If you have questions, please contact Amy Boos at (765) 285-5034 or [akboos@bsu.edu](mailto:akboos@bsu.edu).