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ABSTRACT

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of children being home schooled during the past decade. The history of home schooling and its increasing interrelationship with public schooling are detailed. Demographic information on the home school population, a definition of home schooling, reasons to home school, and beliefs surrounding this practice are offered. A brief history of home schooling going back to the Colonial period of the United States is then provided, including the evolution of compulsory attendance laws, problems for home schooling, and the legality of home schooling. Legal issues are explored at length, with a focus on Supreme Court decisions that have affected home schooling, the role of private education, and the academic achievement of home schoolers. An analysis of public-school cooperation with home schoolers features examples such as dual enrollment, eligibility requirements for sports, and academic achievement. Some of the advantages and disadvantages are discussed, along with the internal problems that home schooling can engender. The paper closes with a profile of home schooling, outlining ideas to benefit public schools and the role of parents in such endeavors. Contains 67 references. (RJM)

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THE EVOLVING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HOME SCHOOLERS AND THEIR LOCAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by

Kristine L. Angelis

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THE EVOLVING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HOME SCHOOLERS AND THEIR LOCAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By
Kristine L. Angelis

During the past decade there has been a dramatic increase in the number of children being home schooled, and as home schooling is now a popular choice for a diverse number of families, it has become a more acceptable method of education in our society. Originally, parents rejected public education as the agency to teach their children primarily because of religious reasons; however, more families are now selecting home schooling for ideological reasons. Home schooling families have also begun to forge partnerships with their local schools in order for their children to utilize the services and assistance of the public school systems. Such school districts and administrations do not view this as a culture war between themselves and home schooling families, but one in which these school systems are supporting quality education for all of their community's children. While such partnerships have raised questions in the home schooling community, education reformers see benefits for both entities. Further research concerning home schoolers use of technology, a more personal approach to schooling, and engaging children in out-of-school learning experiences could help foster future social changes within the public schools.

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HOME SCHOOLERS AND THEIR
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During the past decade there has been a dramatic increase in the number of children who do not routinely spend their time in a public or private school classroom but are being home schooled. Home schooling has become a popular choice for a diverse number of families across the country, and it has gone from what was considered a somewhat subversive activity by society in the 1970's and early 1980's to a more acceptable alternative method of educating children. Home schooling is also being practiced in other Western countries, and indications are that a growth trend is emerging in those countries as well.

In the 1980's approximately 15,000 students were home schooled nationally, and today according to recent U.S. Department of Education estimates, there are at least 350,000 students being home schooled. Government officials, however, believe that the number is actually approaching close to one-half million students. This is roughly one percent of the total kindergarten to twelfth grade school population, or about ten percent of those currently enrolled in private education. In contrast the Home School Legal Defense Association, a home schooling advocate group, projects the present home schooling population to be between 1 and 1.3 million students, and the number is growing by almost 20% a year.

Accurate figures in regard to the number of home schooled students are somewhat difficult to ascertain, because many states define and track home schoolers differently. Some parents simply choose not to comply with state laws requiring them to register home schooled students with their local school board, or families do not join local, state or national home-schooling groups. For certain, though, the number of home schooled students according to home school expert Patricia Lines, a senior research analyst with the U.S. Department of Education's office of educational research and improvements, is steadily increasing. This increase is due in

part to better state reporting and data collection; more importantly however, home schooling has gained a high profile and the rest is "real growth."¹

What is home schooling? Why are parents choosing to educate their child in this manner rather than in conventional public or private schools, and who are these home schooling families? Home schooling has been defined as a learning situation wherein children spend the majority of the traditional school day in their home, in lieu of attending a conventional institution of education.² In this educational alternative parents/guardians assume the primary responsibility for the education of their children.³ Generally, children are taught by their parents although teaching responsibilities can be shared among two or more home schooling families.

Home schooling families represent a broad cross-section of the population. Originally, when the home schooling movement began in the early 1970's, it was seen as practiced by "Woodstock Generation" hippies, radical fundamentalists, and other fringe groups. They represented the stereotypical ideal of an isolated family, who was following a philosophy of child-led learning espoused by such educators as John Holt, who originally authored books on educational reform but in the mid-1970's became an advocate for home schooling. He founded the bimonthly newsletter "Growing Without Schooling," which provides support, legal information, ideas and resources to the home school population. Many families with strong religious convictions also turned to home schooling including not only religious conservatives

¹Lynn, Schnaiberg, "Staying Home," Education Week, June 12, 1996: 24.

²"What is Home Schooling?," Ohio State Legislative Office of Education Oversight, January 1995: 2.

³Nola Kortner Aiey, "Home Schooling and Socialization, ERIC Digest, 1994: 1.

but also agnostics, Jews, Catholics and a myriad of other religiously oriented groups. Thus, the stereotypical ideal of the isolated family of the 1970's and early 1980's no longer applies today.

Several studies in the 1990's indicate that home schoolers usually come from a two-parent, middle-class household, although the movement is beginning to attract more single mothers, including some on public assistance. Generally, however, the parents have greater formal education with a higher income than the norm. Characteristics of a typical home schooled family as identified in a 1990 survey of home school families include: 1) children ranging in age from 4 to 17 years of age, and approximately 50% male and 50% female, 2) both parents are actively involved in the home school with the mother being the primary teacher, 3) the average parents have attended or graduated from college, with the average education level of the father being three years of college and the mother two years of college, 4) total household income of \$20,000 - \$40,000 per year with the occupation of the main wage earner ranging from professional to blue-collar, with the most occupations being engineer, business manager, salesperson, and minister, 5) there are usually three children in the family, 6) over 70% regularly attend religious services, with a variety of religious backgrounds represented, 7) formal instruction begins at an average age of 5.5 years, 8) students study a wide range of conventional subjects, with an emphasis on mathematics, reading, and science, 9) children are usually home schooled at least three years, and 10) the program is flexible and highly individualized involving both purchased materials and materials prepared by the parents.⁴ Home schooling families report the average amount spent to home school one child per year is approximately \$500 as compared to the average public school cost of \$4,000.

⁴"What is Home Schooling?," Ohio State Legislative Office of Education Oversight, January 1995: 4.

Certainly, no one characteristic precisely defines all home schoolers. While families may look to each other for support, no two families resemble one another exactly. One family may begin the day with prayer, and a flag salute followed by a traditional, scheduled curriculum while another family may opt for a less structured approach to learning. Parents believe home schooling allows children the freedom to pursue their natural desires, and that living and learning are not two separate entities, but involves everyone at all times; therefore, learning is not just contained in a time and place. The home environment affords students the opportunity to have the love and support of their families, and it provides a more flexible daily schedule with greater varieties of learning situations which may include field trips, community service, volunteer activities, interaction with a multi-age population, and the opportunity to develop an appreciation for learning as modeled by their parents.

As their approaches to education vary from highly structured to the unstructured so does their instructional materials, and home schooling has emerged as a new industry complete with mail-order curricula and computer learning programs. It is estimated that approximately 50-75% of families use home prepared materials and plans, while the remaining families may spend hundreds of dollars yearly on commercial curriculum materials purchased from such organizations as The Calvert School, Baltimore, Maryland, Home Study International, Takoma Park, Maryland, or the Christian Liberty Academy, Arlington Heights, Illinois. Whatever the educational approach, home schooling is seen as a choice that focuses on the important question of who should control the education of America's children, and how the delicate balance between the rights of parents and the state can best be maintained.⁵

⁵William M. Gordon, & others, "The Law of Home Schooling," NOLPE Monograph Series No. 52, (National Organization on Legal

Reasons for choosing home schooling are as diverse as each participating family; however, two of the main reasons indicated are ideological and pedagogical. Other reasons which may influence this decision are: 1) some families choose home schooling because their occupation involves international business and frequent travel, 2) families live in rural areas where schools are not readily available, 3) in some instances the parents' own educational experience influenced their decision to educate their children at home, 4) families choose home schooling for political and religious beliefs, 5) they just enjoy their children very much and do not want to send them away on a school bus every morning, or 6) they do not subscribe to the one-size-fits-all model used in public schools.

The most vocal and best politically organized home schooling families tend to be the religiously motivated, conservative Christians. This group comprises approximately 65% of all home schoolers, and it is their belief that our society is experiencing a moral decay. They are very concerned with the family right to take control of their children's education, rather than following the common law doctrine of *parens patriae*, in which the state maintains the sovereign power of guardianship over all persons as is indicated in the ninth and tenth amendments to the U.S. Constitution. They oppose secular humanism, the teaching of evolution, and the perceived anti-religious environment in the public schools. Their educational focus is on the Bible and the teaching of religious history, and they believe it is their duty to instill their religious beliefs and values in their children.

Notwithstanding the above, home schooling, however, is beginning to move more toward the mainstream of our society in which the emerging home schooling family is not motivated by

Problems of Education, 1994) 2.

religious doctrine, but more practical concerns about the academic achievement and traditional education being offered in the public schools. Their concerns include violence in schools, poor academic quality, overzealous peer pressure, the teaching of conflicting values, financial constraints within the school system, and exposure of students to certain health risks. These parents believe home schooling provides more rigorous standards and one-on-one teaching conditions which generally motivate children to learn better; therefore, ensuring academic achievement. In addition parents of students with special needs, including not only handicapped and learning disabled, but gifted children as well, also believe home schooling provides a more appropriate program for their children than public schools concerned with dwindling financial and personnel resources.

It is the home schooling family's belief that they can provide a better academic foundation and learning experience for their children than the public school system. They see the family as superior to any other institution in society, and by choosing home schooling they are exercising a political response to the educational institutions of society and are expressing their disillusionment with the contemporary social order. Home schooling is viewed as an activity that allows families to reproduce their culture or way-of-life by controlling the content of their children's education. Noted author and educator Dr. Thomas Armstrong commented in a recent interview that "Some people home school because they want to keep things just the way things are. Without making any value judgments, they have a tradition that they pretty much want their child to have. It may be political, religious, social or intellectual, and they look out at the world, which is quite diverse, and they say, Well, you know, my kid goes out there and he or she's going to be taken away from this tradition. So, they keep their children at home to keep them

within that framework - which is not change. ... I think to some extent home schooling may be a reaction, for some people, against the great changes that exist."⁶

Another home schooling family stated, "Like parents everywhere, we would like our children to have our world view. We do not ask a preacher or politician or teacher who does not know us or our children as well as we do to take on that responsibility. Our values - though they may differ somewhat from those of our neighbors, professional colleagues, or fellow church members - are important to us, and we wish to maximize the chances of our children embracing those values."⁷

Home schooling parents see themselves as the primary role models for their children, and they want to pass on their desires for knowledge. Many home schooling families have expressed their desire to guide their children's thinking about modern culture. They do not envision home schooling as an escape from the present culture, but they also do not believe that they have to embrace uncritically every aspect of American culture.

Historically, home schooling is not an entirely recent concept in the realm of American education. Although some common schools were organized, home-based learning was often the only education available to colonial children and the early pioneers of the 17th and 18th centuries. With the expansion of our country into new and unpopulated areas, parents had to assume the primary responsibility of educating their children, a condition which existed well into the 19th century. Families who could afford to either hired tutors to teach their children at home

⁶Janie Bowman, "An Interview with Dr. Thomas Armstrong," 1997, Available: America On Line.

⁷Stephen D. Holtrop, "Individualism Starts at Home," Educational Leadership, October 1966:75.

or sent them to private schools or boarding schools. While some public schools did exist during the colonial period, they were basically established for children of the less affluent class and were meant to save these children's souls and teach them a profitable trade enabling them to achieve a greater economic status than their parents.

Following the Civil War states began to preempt what had traditionally been viewed a parental discretion or prerogative to educate their children. States enacted compulsory attendance laws which were far reaching forms of state regulation that required all children who were of age to attend either a public school or an approved non-public school. By the beginning of the 20th century all Northern states had adopted statutes for compulsory school attendance, while Southern states followed this trend more slowly until eventually every state in the Union adopted some form of compulsory attendance laws.

Thus, most people were home schooled through the mid-19th century when public schools first became prominent. With the establishment of public schools, the public's perception about informal and home-based education began to change, and by the early 20th century school education was not only compulsory, but popular, and provided greater status. The central objective of compulsory education was the concept of Americanization. This was a reaction to certain immigrant families by attempting to not only remove individual and ethnic orientations from the immigrant, family-related, learning environments, but a desire to expunge the undesirable characteristics from these families and remedy the ills of the lower class.⁸

Home schooling today and home schooling of colonial times hardly resemble one another.

⁸Gary J. Knowles, "The Context of Home Schooling in the United States," Education and Urban Society, November 1988: 6.

Since public education did not exist during the early history of our country, parents educated their children at home out of necessity not because their interests were motivated by religious reasons or disillusionment with a then nonexistent public school system. While present day home schoolers like to contend that seven presidents and other notable Americans were home schooled, the circumstances under which these people received their education were very different than today. For example George Washington, John Madison, John Adams, and John Quincy Adams received part of their schooling at home during the 17th century because few local schools were available.

The current reemergence of home schools in the last twenty years has launched an assault on the revered position which compulsory formal education attained. The presence of home schools is a reflection of economic, political, and cultural developments and conflicts that have occurred over the last two decades. Historical phases of the home school movement reflect conflicts with institutions of the state and include, as previously mentioned, parents' contentions about public schools, home school parents' confrontations with schools and the courts, cooperation between public schools and home schools, and consolidation of home schools. The phases are not definitive or complete, for contentions still exist, as the courts still deal with confrontations, and cooperation will continue to parallel consolidation.⁹

In the early years of home schooling, public school boards did not know how to react to such a revolutionary and reactionary new concept and the idea that parents believed they could educate their children better at home than the public schools. Questioning public schools as home schooling families did was viewed by society and school officials as questioning the very

⁹Knowles, page 6.

fabric of society. It was interpreted by society as ignoring the established social order which resulted when families turned their back on the larger society. The withdrawal of their children from public schools was the ultimate reproach, and some home schooling parents who defied what they viewed as outmoded state laws circumvented the public school system to educate their children. School administrators, teachers, and teachers unions objected to home schooling for academic, socialization, and financial reasons since reduced attendance meant less state aid to school districts.

Court litigation on the legality of home schooling began in the early 1970's and focused on the states' authority to regulate private alternatives to public education. Such cases raised sensitive issues about the appropriate balance between parental interests in directing the upbringing of children and governmental interests in ensuring an educated citizenry.¹⁰ While the right of the state to require education under the federal Constitution is well accepted as a societal norm, the extent to which that right may be exercised is limited.

Prior to 1982 only two states, Nevada (1965) and Utah (1957), had laws which recognized home schooling as an option available to parents, and it was not until 1986 that all states had adopted some form of legislation recognizing home schooling. Today only ten states require parents to have specific qualifications to home school their children and these include a high school diploma, GED, or some college. Fifteen states including Maryland require simply that home schooling parents be "competent" and instruction be "thorough." Thirty states require

¹⁰Martha McCarthy, "Home Schooling and the Law," Policy Bulletin No PB-B15, (Indiana Education Policy Center, September 1992) 3.

standardized testing or other evaluations of home schooled students.¹¹

Parents who disagreed with public schooling for whatever reason and chose to educate their children at home had to obtain exemptions from compulsory attendance laws that had been in existence in all states since the early 20th century. Such compulsory attendance laws were first instituted in Massachusetts in the 1640's. In 1647 the Massachusetts court enacted the "Old Deluder Satan Act" that established the development of town schools. The law espoused that Satan was a master of deception who kept people from learning the true knowledge of the Scriptures. Since a fear existed that the learning of the church and local elders would not survive, the law required towns with fifty or more families to establish schools to teach writing, reading, and Bible study in order to prevent Satan from succeeding in the battle for the souls of men, women, and children. By 1671 all New England colonies had adopted such laws except for Rhode Island. These laws were purely motivated by religious reasons and not for educational aims; however, this set the stage for further development of public schools.¹²

In 1852 the first "modern" compulsory attendance law was again instituted in Massachusetts, and was based on educational aims which were rooted in a variety of state concerns. Children were to be taught to read, write, compute, and be a productive member of society.¹³ This shift in the law was social rather than religious and took education of children from the home to public schools. It was also designed to enculturate European immigrants,

¹¹Naomi Gittins, "Religion, Education and the U.S. Constitution," 1990, 42-45.

¹²William M. Gordon, and others, "The Law of Home Schooling," NOLPE Monograph Series, No. 52, (National Organization on Legal Problems of Education, 1994) 6.

¹³Gordon, 7.

eliminate truancy, and obliterate abuses of child labor. Failure to comply with compulsory attendance laws could result in criminal penalties. These laws survived legal challenges in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, thus confirming the states' legitimate authority.

Several serious challenges to these laws in the 1920's were reviewed by the United States Supreme Court. Although the Supreme Court never explicitly ruled on home schooling, these cases set the stage for the type of issues considered in subsequent legal actions involving home schoolers. In each case, however, the Court did balance the power of the state and parental interests by protecting parental rights to determine the nature of education for their children while preserving the authority of the state to require, regulate and control the education of its youth.

In *Meyer v. Nebraska* (1923) and *Farrington v. Tokushige* (1927) the Court ruled in favor of the rights of parents to retain control over the nature of the education their children received. In *Pierce v. the Society of Sisters* (1925), the Court examined compulsory attendance within the framework of state regulation of non-public schools, and the state right under *parens patriae* to compel children to attend some school. The Court ruled that compulsory attendance laws violated a parent's right to choose a particular school, a Roman Catholic school in this case, where children received an appropriate education and religious training. Thus, compulsory attendance laws now had to accommodate both public and non-public schools.¹⁴

The fourth case, *Wisconsin v. Yoder* (1972), examined the right of members of the Amish Mennonite Church to refuse to send their children to public or non-public schools beyond the eighth grade. It was their contention that this practice endangered the religious salvation of themselves and their children. By working on the family farm, the child received the necessary

¹⁴Gordon, 9.

skills to function within the Amish society. The Court narrowly defined the scope of its ruling by insisting that in order to trigger constitutional protection, the parental interest must be religious in nature rather than philosophical or personal. This interest must pose a real, rather than perceived, threat to the religious interests involved, and the disruption to the child's education should not seriously impair the child's future nor should it threaten the public order in any significant way.¹⁵

Thus, the Supreme Court found an interdependence between Amish fundamental religious tenets and the self-sufficient Amish way of life, that had been practiced for over three centuries, was clearly threatened by continued attendance in secular schools. Other religious groups attempted to capitalize by using the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment to challenge compulsory attendance laws. However, federal and state courts rejected their arguments since these families lived in ordinary residential neighborhoods interacting with others not of their faith unlike the Amish in the Yoder case. Certainly, these four cases have provided home schooling parents, who are challenging state compulsory attendance laws on constitutional grounds, a window of opportunity in which to attempt to expand the narrow boundaries of these four court cases.

When challenged, state policy has consistently moved in the direction of more relaxed regulation toward home schooling, and since 1982 twenty-nine states have amended their school attendance laws to accommodate specifically parents who want to teach their children at home. In addition federal and state courts have upheld the modest demands states have placed on home schoolers, ruling in favor of the states' right to regulate education within its borders by imposing reasonable regulations for the control and duration of children's education. For example, such

¹⁵Peggy Zirkel, David B. Rubin, "Home Schooling," Religion, Education and the U.S. Constitution, 1995:60.

criteria could include: qualifications for the home instructor, the curriculum or course of study to be taught, the amount of time to be spent in instruction each day, the number of days instructed per year, the standardized tests the child must take to determine progress, and reports the parents must periodically submit to school officials to verify compliance with the law.

When state statutes were not clear or were too restrictive, the courts have ruled in favor of home schoolers citing such statutes as unconstitutional. Therefore, the law of home schooling is dependent upon state statutes, and relevant case law is comprised of state court decisions interpreting compulsory attendance laws. The majority of such cases have been in favor of home instruction making it an explicit exception to compulsory education under specific circumstances. In some instances state courts have struck down compulsory education laws because they were considered too vague and failed to define the terms "school" and "equivalent instruction."

The most frequent source of civil and criminal litigation in the past regarding compulsory attendance has concerned parental qualifications as home school instructors. This precipitated state legislatures to relax such regulations, and parental qualifications as prerequisite to home schooling is generally not very stringent. Only six states require teaching certification or at least a baccalaureate degree, while the State of Michigan is the only state to require teaching certification as a prerequisite for home schooling instruction.¹⁶

Other litigation has occurred because of state requirements relating to the adequate academic progress of home schooled students. To ensure children are being taught the skills necessary to qualify them for employment or further education, states have incorporated into

¹⁶Donald H. Henderson, Eugene L. Golanda, and Robert E. Lee, "Legal Conflicts Involving Home Instruction of School-Aged Children," West's Educational Law Reporter, 1991:1002.

compulsory attendance laws mandatory standardized testing and courses of study to follow. Nine states require that children not taught in public schools must receive instruction that is equivalent or comparable to public education. This has given rise to conflict between home schooling parents and the state in regard to whether or not home schoolers are meeting such requirements. This is difficult to resolve; however, courts have ruled in favor of home schooling families when their children show comparable proficiency through standardized testing with public school children in similar grade levels. Courts have ruled against parents in these cases if parents did not adhere to state law requiring periodic testing of home schooled children.¹⁷

In court cases arising over the course of study prescribed by the state, courts have customarily ruled on whether home schooling parents made a bona fide attempt to comply with the law. This relief has also been granted to parents who home school for religious reasons. While reluctant to rule on religious claims, courts have relied mainly on the state interest of providing children with an appropriate education. Personal safety is another issue over which litigation has resulted, and courts have ruled in favor of parents only if they can prove the school campus is a present danger to the welfare and safety of their children.¹⁸

In states where home schooling has been considered private education, state courts have split about equally on the issue of whether home instruction does qualify as a private school. When broadly interpreted, the courts have included attendance in home instruction as equivalent to private school attendance provided it was equivalent to that offered in public schools with the burden of proof for equivalency depending on state statutes. Due to the diversity of state statutes,

¹⁷Henderson, 1003.

¹⁸Henderson, 1004-1005.

in some instances when a home school setting claims to be a private school, courts have ruled against this setting because as a private school, they were not providing the socialization that children would have in a group learning experience outside the home.

In states which specifically allocate the burden of proof to the public school system, courts have followed the state statute; however, in cases where states do not assign burden of proof, rulings vary. Courts have overturned criminal convictions of parents, charged with violating compulsory attendance laws, when states failed to prove that the parents were not complying with state requirements. In other cases public schools were told to exhibit a more cooperative attitude when parents were trying to comply with home schooling requirements.¹⁹

One public school in Barnstable, Massachusetts, helped pioneer the concept of assistance to home school families as early as 1978. The school not only allowed families to home school but invited them to use school resources such as school equipment and staff members as part of their learning resources. This enabled the child to come to school as a part-time volunteer to use the library, take part in activities, or go on field trips. The Cupertino Union School District in California, also offered home schooling families the option of open enrollment/alternative education programs as early as 1975. Since the State of California considers home schooling an independent study program, parents are allowed to either establish their home as a private school or affiliate with a school district as an independent study program. Home schoolers are then assigned a resource teacher whose responsibilities include monthly conferencing with students and parents, setting expectations and goals for the student, and assisting parents in evaluating student progress. In addition at the beginning of each year, parents receive a full set of grade

¹⁹Henderson, 1009-1010.

level curricula, free textbooks, materials from the used textbook depository, and are encouraged to check out new textbooks and materials in the teachers' resource center. Home school parents can enroll in professional development workshops given by the school district, have access to the library of home-schooling materials, including science kits and math manipulatives, use resources to prepare instructional materials, and can enroll children in the school district's extended-day classes. The Cupertino Union School District has continued to develop additional programs and services for home schooling families which coincides with their philosophy that students achieve to their potential when placed in an educational environment that best suits their needs and those of the family. The school district is attempting to assist in providing an intellectually challenging and developmentally appropriate instructional program for each child.²⁰

In Iowa, legislation passed in 1991 allowed home schoolers dual enrollment, which granted them the opportunity to enroll in their local school district for academic and instructional programs, participate in extracurricular activities, and use the services and assistance of the appropriate educational agencies. This team effort has benefits to both the Iowa public school systems and the home schooling families. The school districts can continue to receive state aid for home schooled children, who participate in the schools' programs, and home school families can receive support by having the ability to enroll children in particular classes, participate in sports activities, have access to textbooks and resources, participate in free standardized testing, and avail themselves of enrichment programs. As in the Cupertino Union School District, the State of Iowa believes that working with home school families demonstrates the schools' goal of helping each child reach his or her maximum educational goals.

²⁰Lamson, Patricia, "Home Schooling, A Choice the Cupertino District Supports," The School Administrator, January 1992: 27.

Many professional educators, however, still remain wary of home schooling, and in 1993 the National Association of Elementary School Principals adopted a resolution declaring that education is "most effectively done through cohesive organizations in formal settings" and specifically criticized home schooling. Even the National Parent-Teachers Association has passed a resolution opposing home schooling.²¹ These educators continue to believe that there is no uniformity of practice for home schooling and little oversight by outside agencies. They also contend that it is much more costly for a public school to allow a home schooled student to attend only one or two classes daily, especially if those classes are science labs requiring more equipment and supplies than a regular lecture class. They do not believe home schooling families should have the opportunity to pick and choose those classes they feel attract a desirable student population.

A 1984 ruling by the Michigan Supreme Court mandated that Michigan school districts open "nonessential elective courses" to nonpublic school students. However, a 1995 survey published in the book, "Home Schooling: Parents as Educators," indicated that many parents choose not to avail themselves of school programs. As Brian Ray of the National Home Educational Research Institute explained, "The thought is, we want legal access because we are taxpayers, but most of us don't use it."²²

However, state legislatures and school districts are continuing their efforts in determining how to make available the resources of the public school system to home schoolers. Presently,

²¹Lines, Patricia M., "Home Schooling Comes of Age," Educational Leadership, October 1996: 65.

²²Jacobson, Linda, "States Adjust to Growing Home School Ranks," Education Week, September 17, 1997: 18.

approximately one-third of the states allow home schoolers to participate in curricular and extracurricular activities, although there is great reluctance on the part of schools to allow these children to participate in sports activities. Much of the controversy has to do with sports eligibility requirements, and in states such as Florida, home school parents were reluctant to agree to meet the same eligibility standards required of public school students. A compromise is in effect in Florida in which the state home schooling association has agreed to the requirement that home schooled students must pass five subjects per grade period and maintain a 1.5 grade-point average.²³ Thus, home school parents have retained the responsibility of determining whether the student meets the standards not the school system.

A similar situation occurred in Idaho, and in 1995 Idaho legislation allowed for dual enrollment which gave home schooled students the right to participate in extracurricular activities such as sports. Again, the concern arose as to home schoolers' eligibility especially since Idaho does not monitor home schoolers' progress, and the question was resolved by requiring home schooled students to score in the fifth stanine on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. The argument has been raised that this is not a fair solution since Idaho public school students must pass five courses to be eligible for sports regardless of their standardized test scores.

Another controversy is brewing in the Connecticut school district of Milford. Laura Robertson, who has been home schooled since the age of six, now wants to tryout for the Jonathan Law High School girls basketball team. However, a ruling by the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC) allows only students to participate in public school sports if they are "bona fide" members of the school in question. Again, CIAC members feel

²³Viadero, Debra, "Home-Schooled Pupils Outscore Counterparts," Education Week, March 19, 1997: 7.

it unfair to require Connecticut public school students to abide by specified academic and behavior standards when they have no control over what home schooled students are taught. The superintendent of schools denied Ms. Robertson part-time or any special enrollment status to conform to CIAC regulations.

Certainly, academic achievement of home schooled students has been and is an important concern raised by educators, and a recent study by the National Home Education Research Institute, a home schooling advocacy group based in Salem, Oregon, found that home schooled students outscored their public school counterparts on most standardized tests achieving at least the 80th percentile in all subject areas. Results further indicated that home schoolers scored an average of 37 percentile points higher than public school children on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, 30 percentile points higher on the Stanford Achievement Test, and outscored public school students on the California Test of Basic Skills and the California Achievement Test. The study's findings also indicated that the high test scores achieved by this group had little to do with whether or not parents were certified teachers.²⁴

Home schooling has not seemed to place this group of students at a disadvantage for college admission. With the increase in home schooling students in the last several years, there will be a larger number of home schoolers applying for college admission than ever before. Reports by the Home School Defense Association indicate that over 150 colleges and universities in the United States have been actively recruiting home schooled students. The National Home School Defense Association reports that colleges are seeking home schooled students because they read with comprehension, have a wealth of different educational experience, know how to

²⁴Viadero, Debra, "Home-Schooled Pupils Outscore Counterparts," Education Week, March 19, 1997: 7.

access and use information, and have an enthusiasm for learning. Another study done by the National Home Education Research Institute indicated that 33% of home schoolers attend a four-year college while 17% go on to a two-year college. An additional 17% went on to college after waiting a year, and 12% were engaged in full-time employment.²⁵

Critics of home schooling have focused on what they perceive as a lack of socialization for these students. They allege that home schoolers' self-concept suffers due to a lack of exposure to a more conventional environment and that students learn to work, play, and resolve differences better in school. Some critics also contend that home school families overprotect these students from the real world; however, socialization testing done over the last several years reveals that these students have above-average social and psychological development. While home schooled students do spend less time with same-aged individuals as compared to public school, no conclusive research suggests that additional time with same-aged peers is preferable to more time with individuals of varying ages.

From all indications, home school parents make every effort to provide their students with enriching activities. A recent National Home Education Research Institute study revealed that home schoolers lead very active lives, participating in approximately 5.2 activities outside their home,²⁶ such as community volunteer work, home school support and networking groups, churches, scouting, tutoring, and running their own businesses.

Many educators are quick to point out the disadvantages of home schooling such as 1)

²⁵"What Is Home Schooling?", Ohio State Legislative Office of Education Oversight, January 1995: 7.

²⁶Viadero, Debra, "Home-Schooled Pupils Outscore Counterparts," Education Week, March 19, 1997: 7.

the lack of a qualified instructor to present instruction in a coherent and skillful manner, 2) the lack of resources to deliver a well-rounded curriculum such as enrichment activities, 3) the inability to teach certain aspects of the curriculum such as foreign languages, science, and multicultural awareness, 4) the amount of actual student instruction time, and 5) student assessment and evaluation. In contrast, home schooling parents view their choice as a way of taking control of their children's education, and giving parents an opportunity to be intensely involved in their child's daily life, and exerting more influence over their children rather than other students. These parents have the freedom to teach their children morals and values, the ability to instruct children in the right conduct and responsible living, greater flexibility over curriculum and scheduling for the student's advantage as opposed to apportioned time in traditional schools, continuous and different assessment options available such as portfolios, standardized testing, and dialogue, the ability to provide individual attention to a student with one-on-one teaching, and cross-age tutoring.²⁷

Home schooling has also been able to provide students with special needs such as gifted/talented and learning disabled students more flexibility. For example, the needs of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) can be difficult to meet in regular classroom settings; however, in a home school situation the instructional periods can be adjusted to match shorter attention spans, and these students do not have to be constantly reminded by a teacher to pay attention or sit still which may adversely affect their self-esteem. Children with other special needs can learn at their own level without being labeled or embarrassed by being compared to other students. Gifted students are given the opportunity to explore their academic

²⁷Simmons, Betty Jo, "Classroom At Home," The American School Board Journal, February 1994: 48-49.

interests and talents without the constraints of allotted class periods in public schools,²⁸ and gifted students explain that home schooling gives them the opportunity to manage their own schedules, work at their own pace, and have bigger blocks of time to work on projects.

Home schooling faces yet another test, and this is an internal one. While schools continue to walk a fine line in dealing with home schooling families so as not to infringe on parental rights to home school, home schoolers are having some difficulty supporting one another politically and pedagogically. These two adversaries are the unschoolers or secular home schoolers versus the fundamentalist Christians, and many home schooling families find themselves caught in the middle, not feeling comfortable aligned with either group.

One home schooler reported when trying to join her local support group, she was asked to sign a full page doctrinal statement that said she believed in the inerrancy of the Bible, and other fundamentalist tenets of Christianity.²⁹ Although a Christian, she did not share in these fundamentalist beliefs, but only wanted to find a home schooling support group to provide instructional support.

Within such groups there are individuals who take less of a dogmatic approach and share common ground with middle of the roaders and unschoolers. However, many leaders in the Christian home school movement consider other home schoolers who do not share their beliefs as unclean and unacceptable.³⁰ Unschoolers and middle-of-the road home schoolers, while having

²⁸Dahm, Leslie, "Education at Home, With Help from School," Educational Leadership, October 1996: 69.

²⁹Challinor, Lori, "Finding Common Ground," Home Schooling Magazine, November/December 1995.

³⁰Challinor, page 2.

their own rhetoric, view Christian fundamentalists as intolerant and abusive in rejecting other's points-of-view. One interesting aspect of this is that no research has been done to assess the outcomes related to this group's primary, self-selected objective, which is religious education of the home schooled child.

There is, however, a common thread among all home schoolers which is their constitutional right to home school with a minimum of state interference, and it is the daily decisions made in each home school that affect the direction of home schooling both inside and outside the home schooling community. Since the consensus among home schoolers is that each family should make its own decisions about their approach to education, religion, and lifestyle, it is imperative everyone work together without compromising personal beliefs and commitment. Home schoolers do not have to agree on all aspects of home schooling, but they need to work together for their common goal of ensuring the freedom to decide their approaches to education as a respected alternative to institutional instruction.

Home school families are joining together to form home school academies and resource centers, and in Virginia a group is planning a two-year college. For example, in two Maryland counties, parents have joined together to form a lower school academy and a high school for home schoolers. In Anne Arundel County the Anne Arundel Home Schoolers Support Group established a home schooling high school consisting of approximately 250 families. Since parents felt uneasy about teaching certain high school subjects, the families hired teachers with expertise in algebra, biology, Spanish, and Latin to serve as resources for parents.

African American families in Prince George's County, Maryland, united to form the Shabach Home School Academy. The academy is based at the First Baptist Church of Glenarden

and serves as a resource for parents home schooling their children. Tuition of \$60 per month allows parents to obtain such services as standardized testing, counseling, curricula, centralized record keeping, field trips, and other activities. Shabach leaders are hoping to unite additional churches to form a mini-school system serving children in grades kindergarten through twelfth grades. Maryland is one state that allows home schooling as part of an education ministry association with bona fide churches. Such groups are viewed as independent study groups preparing students for college and careers. To date Maryland has designated 189 churches as state approved.

A center for home schoolers recently opened in Amherst, Massachusetts. The center guides students through academic projects, has them participate in current event discussions, and assists them with internships and study groups.

The Home School Legal Defense Association in conjunction with a closely associated foundation recently purchased a 29-acre parcel of land in Purcelville, Virginia, to establish the first two-year institution for high learning aimed at home school students. The school is hoping to open its doors to approximately 25 students in 1999, and will be non-denominational but have a Christian orientation reflecting a conservative ideology. It will be patterned after some European schools who focus on giving students on-the-job training, with students spending most of their time in internships rather than a strictly academic program. The first programs to be offered will be in public policy areas such as government, politics, and journalism.

Such higher education apprenticeships may be appealing to some home school parents whose belief is that traditional higher education isolates students from the adult world and teach liberal values which are opposed by some home schooled families. However, according to David

Merkowitz of the Washington based American Council on Education, this idea may not appeal to many home school parents who want their children to obtain a marketable degree.

Certainly, home schooling offers the potential for a very different educational environment for children and could possibly be viewed as a laboratory for studying various long-range aspects of home schooling such as how children learn, whether and when formal or informal learning environments are superior, the opportunity to study the effects of one-on-one tutoring, child-led learning, and distance learning.³¹ To date no one has undertaken research involving controls that indicate whether the same children would do better or worse in a home school than in a public or private classroom, and more research on home schooling is needed. However, access to this population has been somewhat limited not only by different state reporting requirements, but because of the lack of trust on both sides. Thus, actual research on home schooling has been limited to case studies of particular families, surveys, and self-reports.

The question then is how can public schools take advantage of different techniques of home schools, and what implication does that have for public education in the future. For example, studies have shown that if children who can read a little are given access to a wide and varied selection of books, have the opportunity to read what they choose, have plenty of uninterrupted time, and are not continuously tested or checked, their reading skills improve. The Institute for Academic Excellence (Madison, Wisconsin) examined the importance of in-school reading practice time for the development of reading and problem solving skills using literature-based reading. The study highlighted the huge differences in reading practices between high-performing students and low-performing students. This study showed the lack of reading practice

³¹Lines, Patricia, "Home School Comes of Age," Educational Leadership, October 1996: 69.

in schools is a major cause of low reading standards. It also indicated that the amount of reading practice in schools declines after the fifth grade.

The study recommends sixty minutes of daily reading time in public classrooms. This time can contribute to improved problem-solving and critical thinking skills, better discipline and self-esteem, and students enjoying reading and school more. Although some schools have successfully tried such a program on a small scale, they have rarely applied it more widely believing it takes time away from reading instruction and other subjects.

Home schoolers, on the other hand, are given the opportunity for uninterrupted reading of their choice, which has shown to not only improve reading skills, but assist in developing a love for reading. Thus, home schooling schedules can be modified to allow the flexibility to explore a subject without time constraints. If public schools implemented at least an hour of reading time each day, a shared schooling model could be developed whereby teachers and parents would work together to share actively the educational responsibilities. When a student's interest is sparked at school through such reading, teachers and parents could work together to aid the student in pursuing that subject more in-depth at home. This practice emphasizes one home schooling strength which supports educational reformers cases of greater parental involvement.

Home schooling parents are usually highly motivated and interested in the education of their child. They know their child better than a teacher, and therefore, receive a greater amount of intensity and feedback from their children than teachers do since children often tend to ask more questions at home than in school. Thus, parents know better if certain strategies they are using are succeeding. If schools decreased classes sizes, it would give teachers the opportunity

to know their students more intimately as learners. Teachers could then motivate students to ask more questions rather than having a student just answer questions. Classroom direction would then move away from a teacher directing the lessons and lecturing to students.

Home schooling parents have also moved to a more engaging, integrated curriculum that in many homes is more child-led and often takes advantage of new computer technology. Recent research on intelligence and the brain indicate that by providing a stimulating and cognitively challenging environment that gives young children more guidance and direction, children will develop skills that are transferable especially in today's ever changing world. As children master more skills instructional direction is progressively reduced, and as adolescence ends, students will have taken full responsibility for directing their own learning. Many home schooling parents have been educating in this matter. Human beings learn best when they are following their interests and learning is a natural activity that is not dependent on teaching. Learning is an activity that takes place in the world thus, involving family and the community as well as the individual.³² This would indicate that schools should be helping students become less dependent on teachers by giving them the confidence to manage their own learning. As Brian Ray, president of the Oregon based National Home Education Research Institute, indicated by the time a home school student is 12 they have learned to get along on their own and learn on their own.

Home schooling families admit that home schooling is not for everyone. It requires major lifestyle changes that many families are unable or unwilling to do, and this usually means one parent, typically the mother, giving up a job and an income to stay home and instruct the children. It may also require additional costs for the family beyond curriculum materials such

³²Mankins, David, "Homeschooling FAQ, General Questions About Home Schooling," December 19, 1994: 8.

as hiring tutors for subjects the parents do not understand, paying for private music, dance, and art lessons, money for field trips, and memberships at local zoos or museums.

In spite of all this, home schooling parents typically worry about the education they are providing their children, but feel strongly about their involvement with their children's education. Research supports the role of parental involvement in achieving optimum learning, and teachers everywhere are decrying the decreased role of parental involvement with their children's education; therefore, educators should view home schooling as a support to their belief, and an affirmation that parents are responsible for their own children. Rather than becoming alarmed when families choose to home school, educators should cooperate and help parents since both are attempting to maximize the potential of children.

As technological advances continue to influence and reshape our educational systems, and schools continue efforts to foster diverse and personalized approaches to learning, public schools in the future may begin to resemble home schools. As to whether or not this will have a positive impact on education, only additional time and research will tell.

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