2008

A Descriptive Case Study of Homeschooling and Implications For The Future of Public Schools

Jean W. Scheriff

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarship.shu.edu/dissertations

Part of the Educational Sociology Commons

Recommended Citation
Scheriff, Jean W., "A Descriptive Case Study of Homeschooling and Implications For The Future of Public Schools" (2008). Seton Hall University Dissertations and Theses (ETDs). 79.
https://scholarship.shu.edu/dissertations/79
A Descriptive Case Study of Homeschooling and
Implications for the Future of
Public Schools

Jean W. Scheriff
Seton Hall University
Abstract

A descriptive case study of homeschooling was conducted in one upstate New York school district for the purpose of investigating demographic characteristics of homeschoolers, why families homeschool rather than use public schools, how parents form their opinions of public schools and what vision parents hold of homeschooling. Eleven homeschooling families were interviewed. The study found that homeschooling is an expression of core values of freedom, personal liberty and respect for education. Generally, homeschoolers are well-educated parents who believe they are removing their children from a bureaucratic process that does not serve their children well. The study raised questions of possible changes in both state policy and local practices that could enhance the attractiveness of public schools to current or potential homeschoolers.
Chapter 1

Introduction of the study

Homeschooling is one of the oldest types of school choice available to parents and their children, and it is becoming more common and more socially accepted. Homeschooling enrollments in the United States have increased 1500 percent over the past 15 years (Lubeke, 1999). As the population of homeschoolers grows so too does social acceptance of the practice. In 1985, the Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll asked about homeschooling for the first time. At that time, only 16% of poll respondents approved of the practice of homeschooling. By 2001, the same poll recorded a 41% approval rate (Lyons & Gordon, 2002). Homeschooling is only one of a growing number of school choice options and it behooves school officials to inquire as to motivations and characteristics of homeschoolers and to consider what that information means to the ability of public schools to maintain their student population in the face of increasing school choice. The intended use of this research is to inform school leaders about what goes into a family’s choice to homeschool and what, if anything, that choice suggests about the future of public education.

Homeschooling involves a large number of people. The size of the homeschool population continues to grow but the exact number of students involved is a matter of some dispute; estimates on the size of this practice vary widely. Tracking of homeschoolers is very challenging due to the self-reporting nature of the practice and the variations among states in reporting requirements. In 1999, the US Department of Education began using the National Household Education Surveys Program to collect nationally representative data that facilitates an estimate of the
number of homeschoolers in the United States. The latest figures estimate that 1.1 million students (1,096,000) were being homeschooled in 2003, about 2 percent of the school-aged population (NCES, 2004, Hadderman, 2002). Other sources give higher or lower estimates of the homeschool population. The National Household Education Survey was scheduled to be repeated in 2007 but updated information has not yet been made available. Despite the lack of consensus about the actual number of homeschoolers in the United States, clearly homeschooling has demonstrated striking growth at the same time it has shown growing social acceptability.

Only 25 years ago, home education was seen by many people as a “deviant practice” (Stevens, 2003, p.90), but, in a relatively short period of time, the practice has come to be normalized and to enjoy legal protection, popular acceptance and an increasing amount of public support. In the early 1960s, social standards expected students to be sent to public or private schools or families risked criticism or even legal sanctions (Stevens, 2003). The turbulent 1960s and 1970s eras in American society encouraged new levels of individuality and non-conformity, as well as respect for those living apart from mainstream culture. In the cultural context of the 1970s, parents became more concerned with children’s individual needs and more critical of enforced enculturation (Stevens, 2003). It is of no surprise that homeschooling grew more common during the same period that Waldorf and Montessori schools became popular; these are both very individualized and non-conformist systems. Homeschooling, certainly the most individualized educational program, began to flourish in the 1960s and 1970s “question authority” decades. What was once a counterculture movement has now become an acceptable educational choice.
Information on demographic characteristics of homeschoolers, motivation of homeschool families, factors influencing the decision to homeschool and the vision of a desired education program, may direct future policy and practice decision of public school leaders. If school districts want to keep their students, for funding or any other reasons, it would be helpful to learn how they could better meet the needs of families and students who have selected not to attend.

Statement of the problem

The school district studied in this research project is a small rural school district with a school population that is diminishing. Classroom sections have been eliminated in each of the past three years due to dwindling public school population. The birth rate for the local county and for the studied school district has shown steady decline since 1982 (Seversky, 2006). From 2000 to 2005, public school kindergarten enrollment dropped by 16% (Seversky, 2006). Although the district is attracting some new young families with preschoolers not born in the district, the rate of this migration is not high enough to offset the decreasing birth rate of the local population (Seversky, 2006).

The locale studied is in a rural area that has restricted school choice to-date. There is one, forty-two student, religious school in the area but other private schools are too far away to qualify for school bus transportation. There is no public transportation. This makes private schools a very difficult educational option for families to access, although there are students who attend private schools as both day and residential students. There are no charter schools or alternate school programs, nor is there even high-speed cable internet that could encourage online education. Right
now, public schools in the study area have a near monopoly on education. The option to homeschool is a popular alternative to public schools. As yet, the phenomenon has not been examined by school officials to mine insight into what public schools might do to appeal to this segment of the population.

The studied district has a homeschool rate of about 4%, roughly double that expected according to published research (NCES, 2004). Homeschoolers are the only sub-set of the school-aged population that is on the rise. Since 2002, the percentage of homeschoolers has increased slightly each year while the district has experienced a continued decrease in enrollment (Seversky, 2006). Although the public school population has continued to decrease, enrollment in homeschooling has increased and the percentage of students enrolled in non-public schools has remained fairly steady (Seversky, 2006). Public schools are losing students to homeschooling at higher than typical numbers at the same time they are experiencing a dwindling public school population. Enrollment projections estimate a significant drop in public school population from an enrollment of 1521 students in 2000 to an estimated enrollment of 936 students in 2016. Students who presently are opting out of public education are a potential source of future district enrollment. Therefore, understanding the phenomenon of homeschooling will help district leaders to plan for future educational needs for all students.

Homeschooling is a school choice option that is attracting potential students away from the public school system and the reasons for that exodus should be reviewed, especially in light of a problematic population decrease that continues to reduce school enrollment for the district being studied. Not only does homeschooling
drain students and funds from public schools, it expresses some level of
dissatisfaction with the public school experience. Throughout the country,
homeschooling is quickly being joined by other school choices such as online
education. Vouchers, homeschooling and charter schools are creating new
competition that will require school leaders of the future to compete for dollars and
for customers. Future school leaders must have an understanding of their competition
for students in order to manage and to lead in the coming era of increased school
choice.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to describe, in a real-life context, how families
make the decision to homeschool, who the homeschool population is and how their
desired educational program differs from what they perceive the public school offers.
The exploration of these factors will provide insight into the strengths of
homeschooling and/or the weaknesses in public schooling that school leaders could
consider as they strive to survive in an arena of increasing competition for students.

Guiding Questions

This study will be guided by the following questions:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of homeschool families?
2. What is the vision of education that homeschool parents wish to provide?
3. How do parents form their opinion of public schools when making the
decision to homeschool?
4. Why do families opt to homeschool rather than to enroll their children in a
   public school?
Significance/Rationale

Homeschooling is just one option on a growing menu of school choice. As technology provides additional options such as online education and distance learning, as charter schools abound and as independent and parochial schools continue to compete for students, the public school system will need to examine the competition and to prepare to make offerings that will attract a diverse group of students and families. Examination of the factors influencing the choice to homeschool will contribute to the base of knowledge for public school leaders and will better enable them to construct educational programs that are attractive to the residents, even when other options are available. The age of public school monopoly is over and school leaders must have adequate intelligence on what parents want or do not want from schools. School leaders must have the knowledge to consider how current and potential customers gather information to determine the relative value of the public school system; they must ask why families choose not to send children to public schools. This is not to say that no one should homeschool or that everyone should have the same model of education.

In the recent past, the primary motivation to homeschool was often associated with strongly held religious beliefs (Nemer, 2002). The most prominent and politically active homeschool advocacy group, the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) describes itself as a Christian group and is a strong public and political presence, one which has influenced the notion that homeschooling is an outcome of conservative Christian beliefs. The HSLDA estimates that Christians comprise as much as 70 percent of the homeschool population, but another
homeschool group, the National Home Education Network, believes the number is much lower (Kunzman, 2005). The belief that homeschooling is primarily motivated by religion has allowed school officials to relinquish responsibility for parental dissatisfaction or non-selection of the public school option. If, however, leaders viewed homeschooling as an informed choice with multiple motivations they might examine the trend in order to meet more fully the needs of all their constituents. School leaders must know why families choose not to attend public schools if they hope ever to attract those families back to public schools or if they wish to refine the product offered to make it desirable across a wide range of residents. As a service financially supported by, and designed to serve, local residents, public schools should be attuned and responsive to the desires of the local school-community.

Limitations/delimitations

This study is limited in reliability due to the self-identified nature of the homeschool population but reliability is enhanced by the use of multiple cases. The only way homeschool families are currently identified in New York State is by fulfilling their obligation to register as homeschoolers with their local public school system. It is possible, and probable, that there are families educating their children at home who have failed to register with the public school system (Stewart & Neeley, 2005). Only the self-identified homeschooled families are possible participants in this study. The research is also limited by the voluntary nature of participation of homeschooled families. While some information is publicly available about homeschooling through homeschool documents filed with the school district of location that data may not be accurate. Information on family motivation,
demographics, decision making and educational vision is only available from voluntary participants in the study.

Case study research, such as this project, has additional limitations. One concern about the case study model is the ability to generalize results. This study will use multiple data sets from multiple cases to allow for a replication of patterns across different cases. Case study models are often limited in validity but an interview protocol and a database for information organization were used to mitigate that limitation.

Delimitations of the project include limiting exploration to one school district. The research was intentionally focused on one locale that has a compelling reason to review the impact of homeschooling on the district. Although a delimiting factor is the exploration of cases in one geographic area of New York State, the reasons to use these cases are more than merely researcher convenience. The researcher had an opportunity for access to a relatively wide-range of homeschool families, a population that is often reticent to participate with mainstream educators and which has been described as “reluctant to share information with official organizations” (Lange & Liu, 1999, p. 5). This project had ample opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of families’ vision of education, decision making and demographics to enable a richly descriptive portrait of homeschoolers within their natural context. Although the project is delimited by the researcher’s decision to contribute problem solving ideas to one specific school district, validity was maintained by the use of multiple data sources, triangulation between researchers and replication of multiple cases, as recommended by Yin (2003).
Definition of terms

Homeschooling families, for the purpose of this study, are defined as parents who assume primary responsibility for their children’s education and self-report themselves to be homeschoolers due to spending a majority of the traditional school day learning outside conventional public or private schools. The definition used by the National Center for Education Statistics is that children are considered to be homeschooled if their parents report them being schooled at home instead of at a public or private school, if they do not attend a public or private school for more than twenty-five hours per week, and if the homeschooling is not temporary due to illness (NCES, 2001, 2004).

Public schooling families, for the purpose of this study, are defined as parents who voluntarily enroll their child in the public school district in which they reside.

Assumptions

This study assumes that interviewees who self-identify as homeschoolers are actually engaged in the practice of homeschooling. It is further assumed that interviewees will answer questions posed fully and truthfully. The researcher assumes that research proxies will follow the interview protocol and will be attentive and observant during interviews and that the proxies will communicate empathetic neutrality through their verbal and non-verbal communication with the interviewees.

Outline of the study

This study utilized school records, district census data, and personal interviews for data collection. Chapter one of this report provides the introduction, purpose, significance and background to the project. Chapter two examines previous
research on homeschooling and some of the challenges for prior researchers that impact the quality of information available. Chapter three discusses the research design, methodology, data collection and data analysis. Chapter four details the information collected, information patterns detected, and themes. Chapter five identifies key findings and links them to the future direction of school leadership, management and policy. Appendix A contains the interview protocol used by research proxies when interviewing homeschoolers. Appendix B contains transcripts of interviews and Appendix C presents demographic data in table format.

Chapter summary

In this era of demanding accountability and close scrutiny of public school systems, homeschooling is a popular option on a quickly expanding menu of educational alternatives. Public schools used to have a near monopoly on students, especially in rural areas that had no private schools, but homeschooling has challenged that monopoly. New options are quickly emerging that will continue to tempt students to leave, or never enter, the public school system. To be competitive, to attract a voluntary constituency and to offer programs that engender continued public support public schools must be informed about the competition and must understand the decision-making process of families in making school choices. This study will provide public school leaders with information to help them interpret the implications of the choice to homeschool and what, if anything, that choice suggests about the long-term viability of current public schools.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

History of homeschooling

Historically, homeschooling is not a new concept since it was the only education available to most pioneer and American colonial children in the 17th and 18th centuries (Angelis, 1998). Our forbears were educated at home due to lack of availability of schools; parents educated their children at home out of necessity. Many famous Americans such as George Washington, John Madison, John Adams and John Quincy Adams were homeschooled for at least part of their education, due to few public schools being available (Angelis, 1998, Grubb, 1998). Compulsory attendance laws did not start emerging until after the Civil War; the first fledgling compulsory attendance laws were enacted in the 1640s in Massachusetts (Fowler, 2004). By the beginning of the 20th century, all northern states had such regulations (Angelis, 1998). While the original town-schools appears to have been religious in nature (Angelis, 1998), they, in fact, ushered in the development of public schools.

The first modern compulsory attendance law was introduced in 1852 in Massachusetts (Nemer, 2002). At that time, objectives for schooling were to teach basic reading, writing and computation skills. The goals were to create a population of citizens who could participate in democracy, to enculturate immigrants, and to provide an able work force. Another reason for compulsory attendance was to prevent parents from entering their children in the child labor force (Grubb, 1998). Public education became prominent in the mid to late 19th century when Horace Mann
conceived of Common Schools as a way to build fraternity and to reduce crime (Fowler, 2004). School attendance became the norm, rather than the exception.

In the 1970s, homeschooling began to reemerge and most homeschoolers were “Woodstock generation” hippies, or other non-mainstream families (Angelis, 1998). They often followed the philosophy of John Holt, a strong advocate of homeschooling. Holt espoused a liberal view that children could learn best through unstructured, real-world experiences, a model he called “unschooling” (Grubb, 1998). He contended that schools had become too bureaucratic and needed to be more personalized and more holistic (Luebke, 1999). He advised parents to take control of their children’s education. Holt began a newsletter Growing Without Schools that advocated allowing children to follow their natural curiosity to learn and avoiding the bureaucracy of schools that he felt were not reformable (Grubb, 1998). He promoted a constructivist form of education, which was often called the “free school movement” (Luebke, 1999, p6). Holt criticized the education system for relying on behaviorism to force students to comply with adult goals (Kozlowski, 1999). He described schools as a form of incarceration where children were taught only to follow orders, not to think or to solve problems. He viewed traditional education as beating children into subservience to authority. Holt popularized the unschooling message and created supports, which encouraged families to withdraw from traditional schools.

During the 1970s, Raymond Moore also came into prominence as a leader of homeschooling. His work was Christian-oriented and based on the theory that children are not ready for formal schools until later than current compulsory
attendance ages (Luebke, 1999). He theorized that dyslexia, nearsightedness and attention disorders were results of forcing children to engage in academic tasks that were developmentally premature (Luebke, 1999; Lyman, 1998). Moore became a leader for the sector of homeschoolers who value religious and ethical values (Grubb, 1998). He wrote *Home Grown Kids* and *Home Spun Schools*, both published in the 1980s, advocating a firm, gentle, Christian approach to homeschooling which included study, home-keeping duties, and work outside of the home (Luebke, 1999).

Studies in the 1990s indicated that homeschoolers usually came from fairly typical families with two married parents, and with higher than average income and parental education (Lyman, 1998). Mothers were usually identified as the primary teacher (Angelis, 1998). While Holt and Moore, each with very different perspectives, fueled homeschooling interest in the 1970s and 1980s, a newer wave of homeschooling interest has since been energized by concerns about academics and school culture (Luebke, 1999). This has changed the demographics of homeschool families to be more mainstream.

During the 1920s a number of court decisions concerned education, non-public schools and parental rights. Decisions by the courts required compulsory attendance laws to accommodate public and non-public schools (LaMorte, 2005). Court challenges to homeschooling began in the early 1970s and the balance between parental interests in directing their children’s upbringing and governmental interests in ensuring the education of citizens was directed by court decisions. While the right of the state to require education was a societal norm, the extent that parents could limit that right needed to be balanced. Neither the United States Constitution nor the
Bill of Rights mentions education, leaving educational decisions to individual states (Grubb, 1998). Litigation since the 1970s has further established limits to state rights to compulsory attendance and parental rights to govern the education of their own children (Stevens, 2003).

In the early 1980s states began crafting legislation that specifically recognized homeschooling. Today there is a wide variety of systems of accountability and regulations that differ significantly between states. Some states require parents to have specific qualifications to homeschool while others merely state that there should be thorough instruction by competent instructors (LaMorte, 2005). Most relevant case law on homeschooling is determined at the state level and most states have relaxed regulations or crafted rules that are not very stringent. Ray (1997) used data collected in his examination of student achievement to support the position of his organization, the National Homeschool Educational Research Institution (NHERI), that degrees of state regulation have no bearing on student achievement; therefore, state regulation is unnecessary. Since student test scores in Ray's (1997) study did not differ significantly between states with high or low degrees of regulation, Ray questioned the legitimacy of state control regulations.

The 1997 National Spelling Bee victory of homeschooler Rebecca Sealfon brought new attention to the phenomenon of homeschooling (Lyman, 1998). Over the last several years, homeschoolers have gained more public recognition for their achievements. For instance, homeschool student Jason Taylor received a football scholarship to the University of Akron and then went on to play for the Miami Dolphins (Lyman, 1998). Other homeschoolers have had moments of fame as
Jeopardy contestants, performing artists, Rhodes Scholars and very young college graduates (Romanowski, 2002). The spotlight focusing on success stories such as these contributes to the positive media image of homeschoolers. Public perception of homeschooling has moved from 73% disapproval in 1985 to 54% disapproval in 2001, according to the Phi Delta Kappa Gallup Poll (Hadderman, 2002). Apple (2000) stated that "if one of the marks of the growing acceptance of ideological changes is their positive presentation in the popular media, then homeschooling has clearly found a place in our consciousness" (p. 256).

Homeschooling has spawned the emergence of a whole industry that markets and supplies educational materials for use at home (Angelis, 1998). This industry promotes the practice of homeschooling and associated material products by using some of the research, such as Ray (1997), which is interpreted to demonstrate that homeschooling produces high-achieving students. Major curriculum distributors such as Calvert, A Beka and Konos package and supply homeschool curricula and materials to families. Publications such as Practical Homeschooling Magazine, The Big Book of Home Learning and Homeschooling Today are widely marketed and distributed.

Two major political forces of the homeschool movement are the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), and National Home Education Research Institute, (NHERI). HSLDA commissioned the work of Rudner (1999) which is referenced in nearly all discussions of homeschooling and which is used to imply that homeschooling produces high academic performance. If homeschooling continues to grow, demand for these organizations, services and merchants will also grow. This
creates a business interest in some sectors to protect and promote homeschooling. Since states such as Florida, Alaska and Illinois, provide services through public schools, the growth of homeschooling will make increased demands on the public school system to devise new methods of collaboration with homeschooling residents (Kozlowski, 1999).

Demographic characteristics of homeschoolers

While much is known about homeschooling, one of the least consistent statistics available is the actual number of students involved. Accurately estimating the number of students being homeschooled in the United States is difficult due to differences between states in the definition of “homeschooled” and the variety of systems to track the process (Angelis, 1998). Some estimates put the number of homeschooled American children in 2000 as high as 2 million, with growth rates estimated to be between 15 and 20 percent per year (Lines, 2001, Bauman, 2001). The difficulty identifying a clear population has resulted in most research on the topic using case studies, surveys and self-reporting. Since no one is sure of the actual number of students being homeschooled, it is not possible to ensure representative samples for study (Burns, 1999).

The National Center for Education Statistics first began collecting information on homeschooling in 1999 and continues to do so on a four-year cycle. Using the National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES) information is collected that may improve the accuracy of estimates of the number and characteristics of homeschoolers. The survey is a random-digit-dialing, computer assisted telephone interview that contacts large numbers of households and has a 65-74 percent response
rate. Sampling errors may result from contacting only households that have a telephone. Still, the information collected may be superior to the other surveys referenced in most homeschooling writings since Rudner (1999) and Ray (1997) used convenience samples from homeschool associations and Lines (1999, 2001) was limited to governmental records from homeschoolers who registered with public agencies.

Data from the NHES estimated 1.1 million homeschoolers in the United States in 2003. This is an increase from the 850,000 homeschoolers estimated in 1999, 1.7 percent of the school-aged population (Belfield, 2002, NCES, 2004). Based on the Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of 2003, conducted by NHES, however, the number of estimated students being homeschooled varies widely by the source. State Education agencies collect some data on the practice but this represents only the children in families that have filed papers indicating that they are homeschooling. Although required in many states, many families still do not file such paperwork (Lines, 1999). Bauman’s (2001) work, based on Census Bureau data illustrates the growth of homeschooling but finds it unlikely to be as high as the 15 percent growth rate reported by others. Additionally, Bauman (2001) found the total number of students involved in homeschooling to be undetermined but well under the one million as reported by some homeschool advocacy groups. There appears to be a consensus among those studying homeschooling that the size of the homeschool population can not yet be accurately estimated.

The Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) supports Christian homeschooling by collecting an annual membership fee to allow access to legal
services if the family faces problems with homeschooling. It is a powerful political force in the homeschool world. The organization does not accept members who participate in public school programs to any degree (Lines, 1999). HSLDA estimates the number of homeschoolers exceeds 1.2 million students. Ray's (1995) survey of Home School Legal Defense Association families found that 63% of the respondents reported having filed paperwork with state or local districts. Therefore, estimating the number of homeschoolers involves including estimates for numbers on non-filers. That, plus the variety of methodologies used to estimate the total of homeschoolers, causes widely disparate estimates of the homeschool population, depending on the source.

Lines (1999), in work for the National Institute on Student Achievement, Curriculum and Assessment, examined data from state agencies to estimate the size of the homeschool population and the extent of growth of the practice. The data suggests that homeschooling is a major sector of the non-public school sector, comprising approximately 10-20% of that sector. Growth of homeschooling has definitely persisted over three decades even though the actual number of students involved is difficult to determine with certainty. Lines reported that a retroactive estimate done in 1988 estimates that there were 10,000-15,000 homeschoolers in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Furthermore, Lines contends that “it is possible to identify three states where both homeschoolers and the State Education Agency believe that filing rates approached 100 percent” (1999, p2). Those states are Maine, New Mexico and Wisconsin. If data from those states were extrapolated to the country, 750,000
homeschoolers would be estimated in the 1995-6 school year. New York’s filing rate
is estimated to be low because New York requires annual testing, which may dissuade
many homeschoolers from self-identifying.

Rudners’ (1999) work for HSLDA developed a picture of homeschoolers that
showed common characteristics: higher than average family incomes, well-educated,
marrried parents, mothers who did not work for pay, mothers responsible for most
home instruction, and primarily white families who did not watch much television.
Because Rudner contacted study participants through the Bob Jones University Press
Testing and Evaluation Service, and because students’ parents administered much of
his academic testing, albeit as certified test administrators, Rudner does not
generalize report findings.

The United States Census and the United States Department of Education’s
NCES ask questions about homeschooling during the course of their data collection.
The picture drawn by census data aligns with most other reports on the demographics
of homeschoolers (Bauman, 2001, Belfield, 2002, NCES, 2001). Sixty percent of
homeschooled children live with a non-working adult in the home whereas 30% of
the general population has a parent not employed outside of the home. There is a
portion of homeschooled families who report two adults working full time at the same
time children are being homeschooled (Bauman, 2001). Hadderman (2002) expanded
the description of typical homeschoolers to add that homeschooling parents are more
likely to vote regularly, contribute to political causes, correspond with elected
officials, attend public meetings and join volunteer organizations. Jaycox (2001)
expounded further, reporting that homeschooled students were more likely to
volunteer time and money for social causes, participate in community events and express tolerant attitudes compared to peers from large, diverse public high schools.

Geographically, residents of the North East and urban areas are least likely to homeschool. These are areas where private schooling options are most common (Belfield, 2002). The most popular homeschooling states appear to be South Dakota and Montana (Lines, 1999). About one-third of identified homeschoolers live in rural areas (Jaycox, 2001). The percentage of homeschoolers living in urban settings was found to be lower (NCES, 2001). This may suggest that homeschooling is selected when public schools are found to be lacking in quality and there are few other affordable options. Probably another reflection of economics entering schooling decisions is that increased family size disposes families away from private schools and toward homeschooling (Belfield, 2002).

Kunzman (2005) studied homeschooling in Indiana and contributed information to the plethora of estimates of numbers of homeschoolers. He acknowledged that while the total number of homeschooled students is an issue of much debate, it is clearly a rapidly increasing number. Kunzman also investigated parental motivation for homeschooling and found that nearly two-thirds of parents were concerned about the environment in established schools, while 30% wished to provide religious or moral instruction to their children. Those findings coincided with NHES findings that 30% of parents reported homeschooling for religious reasons while 31% of parents expressed concern about the environment in other schools (NCES, 2001).
Kunzman (2005) noted that the difficulty with most homeschool research is associated with the empirical uncertainty of homeschool data. In most states homeschoolers are required to self-identify and that leads to non-representative samples without controlled variables in many research projects. Additionally, much of the published research is sponsored by homeschool advocacy groups, which may predispose bias. Demographics reported by Kunzman (2005) appear to be increasingly diverse, with the largest subset being conservative Christians.

Grubb (1998) surveyed homeschool parents in Kentucky and determined that their reasons for homeschooling were based on religion, social factors and a desire for high achievement. Parents reported many objections to ongoing public education reform. Grubb (1998) found that, in order to attract the homeschool sector back into public schools, religious practices and teaching would need to be incorporated into public education.

Lange and Liu (1999) studied school choice options in Minnesota where homeschooling is just one of a number of alternatives. They found that most homeschool families had three or fewer children and most families had entered at least the eldest in a public or private school at some point in their education career. Nearly 40% of families responding to the survey reported that the children had some learning or behavior difficulties while in the public or private school setting, including 30% who received special education services. The survey found the homeschooling families were almost exclusively European American (93%), with high rates of college graduate mothers (49%) and fathers (57%), and a greater proportion of higher income families (Lange & Liu, 1999).
Luebke (1999) found that the Wisconsin homeschool population was proportionally higher in rural and suburban areas. That may be due to homeschooling being consistent with the values of rural areas or may demonstrate the lack of educational options in rural areas. Wisconsin urban areas demonstrated increasing rates of homeschooling but proximity to private and parochial schools, school choice options often absent in rural or suburban areas, may limit urban homeschool enrolments (Luebke, 1999). In Wisconsin, 71% of homeschoolers came from medium- or small-size districts. 51% of homeschoolers were found in clearly rural areas (Luebke, 1999). The Wisconsin study found average income levels and a range of income distribution that approximates the state population. This may indicate good sampling. Most homeschool families were white, married couples, with 3.6 children and above average education levels. The mothers were reported to be the primary or exclusive instructor (Luebke, 1999).

Apple (2000), a University of Wisconsin professor who studies homeschooling, stated that while the number of black families homeschooling is still very small, it is increasing, especially in cities with racial tensions. Apple cited parental wishes to teach religious and racial heritage as a main reason for homeschooling. If urban racial unrest does impact homeschooling rates, there may be an upswing in urban homeschool rates in the future if racial tensions create violence in urban areas and urban schools.

Divorce has been correlated with negative impact on academic performance and children in homeschool environments rarely suffer this negative impact. According to Burns (1999), less than 2% of homeschool students face the family
challenges of separation and divorce. Most homeschool families have two, married parents, although as homeschooling continues to expand as an educational choice, it could be expected that the demographic makeup of the homeschool population will modify to more closely approximate the total school-aged population; thereby regress toward the population mean demographic descriptors. Because the demographics of homeschool families are different from national norms of family composition and living environment, the differences flaw the validity and reliability of the consistent reports of above average test scores for homeschoolers, at least when comparing results to national norms (Burns, 1999).

Homeschooling is one of the school choice options now available for American families. Public schools, charter schools, private schools and parochial schools are all options, depending of location and family resources. Research by Belfield (2002) found that generally the family characteristics of all groups are quite similar with the exception of mothers' employment status. Many studies have found differences between homeschool and traditional school families and students, but in general, the differences were not large or illogical.

Reasons to homeschool

While many people believe the primary motivation of homeschooling families is religious, some researchers contend that motivation can more accurately be described as ideological and/or pedagogical (Nemer, 2002). While it is now difficult to characterize homeschoolers simplistically because they are an increasingly diverse group (Grubb, 1998) early analysis of homeschool demographics by Van Galen and Pittman neatly categorized homeschoolers as “religous conservatives" or
"educational pedagogues" (Nemer, 2002). The later group was described as those who teach their children themselves primarily because they dislike the bureaucracy of traditional schools (Lyman, 1998). While explanatory at the time, that simplified bifurcation no longer encompasses the variety and interconnectedness of homeschoolers' motivations. Nemer (2002) expanded VanGalen's binary framework to incorporate the multidimensional motivations found in more recent research. Using an expanded scale intersecting continuums of "ideological motivation" and "pedagogical motivations." Nemer allowed a representation of various motivations without drawing a clear line between them. Tator (2001), in a Seton Hall University doctoral dissertation, categorized parental motivation to homeschool into three categories: ideological, pedagogical and sociological. Tator's (2001) findings were significant for the impact of one-on-one tutorial instruction and parental involvement as keys to excellence in homeschooling. Motivation of Tator's (2001) subjects was strongly religious and family-centered.

A large number of homeschool families reported that their decision is motivated by concerns about school violence and unhealthy cultures within schools (Angelis, 1998). Recent research indicates that thirty-one percent of homeschooling families reported that the primary reason for their decision to homeschool was the environment of traditional schools (Kunzman, 2005; Leubke, 1999; Lyman, 1998). Parents who chose homeschooling reported fears about crime, drugs, and student safety in schools (Grubb, 1998).

Many homeschool families see the family unit as superior to other social structures and use education as a way to strengthen the family and to communicate
family-centered values. These parents often value their traditions and want their children to have the political, religious, social or intellectual outlook that they have (Angelis, 1998). Home school parents see themselves as the role models to mold and guide their children and value the opportunity to transmit their values through home education (Angelis, 1998).

In comparing students who are homeschooled to those in private-religious, private-independent and public schools, Belfield (2002) found that families reporting themselves as Catholic were less likely to homeschool, but practitioners of other religions were more disposed to homeschooling. Overall, religion was correlated with non-public school choice options between “2 and 10 times that of other factors” (Belfield, 2002, p10). This research was impacted by the self-reporting of respondents and by the interpretation of categories by the respondents.

Kozlowski’s (1999) research in Alabama found that the most frequently reported reason for parents to opt for homeschooling centered on the desire to protect children from negative social influences and explicitly to teach values and morals. Parents evaluated the quality of education, socialization and lifestyle in public and private schools to be lacking. Parents opting to homeschool cited their desire to transmit values and morals, as well as their wish to give individual attention, as important factors in deciding to homeschool (Kozlowski, 1999).

In a study of Minnesota homeschool parents’ motivation, Lange and Liu (1999) found that parental motivation could be grouped into five categories: educational philosophy, special needs of the child, school climate, family lifestyle or philosophy and religion. The researchers found that special education or a child’s
unique needs weighed into the family’s decision to homeschool. Most parents cited multiple reasons for their decision. Many report that homeschooling is used to address unmet needs in traditional schools (Lange & Liu, 1999). If this is true, then public schools have reason to investigate what homeschoolers find lacking. Minnesota parents reported much dissatisfaction with educational quality and academic standards of their public schools. Although there were options for school choice available to most parents, the apparent loss of faith in the public system, by and large, contributed to the decision to homeschool.

Luebke (1999) was selected by the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute to head an investigation into homeschooling in that state. The study found that the rise in homeschooling demonstrated parental dissatisfaction with the public education system. While involving less than 2% of the state school-aged population, if all Wisconsin homeschoolers were placed in one school district, it would be the sixth largest district in the State (Luebke, 1999). The motivation of homeschool families has changed over recent years. Where once the primary motivation was religious, it is now more concern for academics (Luebke, 1999). This assessment was also confirmed by US Census surveys, as reported by Bauman (2001), who found that a large share of homeschool parents voiced concerns about the shortcoming of traditional schools, poor learning environments, weak curricular objectives and lack of academic rigor as their motivations for educating their children at home. Wisconsin parents have been successful in creating an influential lobby and helping to defeat legislative attempts to increase state regulation of homeschooling (Luebke, 1999). Parents have particularly opposed attempts to mandate state testing
requirements. Homeschool families were found to be skeptical of school reform efforts and "distrustful of the intentions of the educational establishment" (Lueckke, 1999, p 3).

In Florida, a Department of Education survey conducted in 1996, found that 42 percent of the respondents cited dissatisfaction with the public school environment as their reason for homeschooling (Lyman, 1998). That researcher, although possibly influenced by personal experience as a homeschooling parent, summarized motivation to homeschool as "dissatisfaction with the performance of government-run schools" (Lyman, 1998, p 2). Lyman voiced concern that teacher unions, school administrators and politicians have vested interests in maintaining the status quo even though public schools produce "a poor product" and "have become crime scenes" (Lyman, 1998, p 2).

Motivation for families to engage in homeschooling has been the subject of a number of studies. There appears to have been a shift from reporting simple reasons, such as religion as the primary motivation, to more complex explanations involving a number of factors including dissatisfaction with public schools.

Achievement of homeschoolers

Reports on homeschool achievement are consistently excellent. While research supports the contention that homeschooled children achieve at levels equal to, or superior to, their public school counterparts, the research is generally not considered definitive since it is limited in scope and has compromised validity (Kozlowski, 1999). It is not possible to know how homeschool students would have achieved if they had attended public or private schools. Lines notes that "virtually all
the available data shows that the group of homeschooled children who are tested is above average" (Lines as reported by Lyman, 1998, p13). It is interesting to notice that Lines was specific about the sample from which that conclusion is derived.

Ray (1997), in the most often cited study on home school demographics and achievement, found that homeschooled students excelled on nationally-normed achievement tests, outperforming public schoolers by 30 to 37 percentile points in all subjects examined. Ray (1997) found correlations between higher homeschooled student achievement and higher parent education levels but not to parental certification for teaching. The data seems to indicate that even students homeschooled by parents with the lowest level of personal education were still successful. Ray (1997) also found no correlation between states with higher levels of home school regulation and improved student achievement. Lower levels of gender and racial disparity were found in the homeschoolers studied compared to the achievement gaps found in public school students (Ray, 1997).

Rudner (1999), in the largest survey of homeschoolers to date, compiled achievement test data on 20,760 homeschoolers using the Iowa Test of Basic Skills for students in kindergarten through grade eight, and the Test of Achievement and Proficiency for students in grades nine through twelve. Rudner (1999) found that homeschoolers exceeded national averages in every subject at every grade level. Rudner's work is the most often cited evidence that at least some homeschoolers perform at high academic levels. The author, however, acknowledged that the participants were an unrepresentative sample and the study was not experimental.
Results of Rudner’s study found students in grades one through four averaged one grade level above the mean and students in upper grades exceeded national averages by up to four grade levels. Homeschoolers had median scores between the 70th and 80th percentile on administered tests that were normed to national means at the 50th percentile. Rudner’s (1999) work may have been impacted by non-random sampling but demonstrated that homeschooling appears to be effective for those who choose to do it.

Some other of Rudner’s (1999) findings were notable: respondents watched much less television than other students, homeschooling families were larger than average, most homeschoolers were from families with two married parents, and homeschooling parents had more formal education than average. Home school families are clearly a select group that differs from national norms in family composition and environment.

While Ray (1997) and Rudner (1999) both found higher than average academic achievement in the home school population samples, neither author claims to have had a representative sample nor to have demonstrated a causal effect. Burns (1999) concurs by asserting that the reports of high test scores of homeschoolers is not conclusive evidence about the efficacy of homeschool education since those high scores may be impacted by non-representative research samples and non-typical demographic characteristics of homeschooling families.

Jones and Gloeckner (2004), reported on the problematic issues involved with admission of homeschooled students to colleges. They studied the differences in first-year college performance between homeschooled and traditionally schooled graduates.
as measured by grade point average (GPA), credit accumulation, and ACT test scores. They found that homeschooled students accumulated more credits, held higher GPAs and stayed in college at higher rates than traditionally educated peers, but the differences were not significant between groups. ACT scores for homeschoolers were higher on average than traditional schoolers, but, again, not significantly so.

Modern homeschooling has now existed long enough that the maturation of participants has allowed longitudinal studies. Knowles (1991) studied 53 adults who had been educated at home and found that there was no evidence to indicate any post-school disadvantage. Two-thirds of the previously-homeschooled adults studied were married, the norm for their age, and none were unemployed or on any form of government income. Most felt that their home education had helped them interact with the diversity they encounter in society.

Regulations and legal issues

The best politically organized of all sectors of home schoolers are conservative Christians (Angelis, 1998). These families are very concerned with the personal right to make educational decisions for their children, rather than to follow the doctrine of public education of the masses. While there are specific topics of controversy, such as evolution and sex education, the general differences include emphasis on teaching the Bible and the belief in instilling specific beliefs and values (Angelis, 1998).

Homeschool parents have had good success in court cases arguing parental rights to control children's education over the interest of the state, partially due to the strong efforts of the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA). It has been
difficult for states to demonstrate than any harm is being done to children who are homeschooled (Grugg, 1999). The HSLDA separates homeschool regulations into four levels of rigor from low to high. In Indiana, a low regulation state, homeschoolers can participate in extracurricular activities at the discretion of the public school, except in high school athletics where participants must be enrolled in public schools. HSLDA has argued for homeschool access to public education resources, although it agrees that most of the group’s constituents do not wish to accept services from public schools.

Kozlowski (1999) found that Alabama superintendents indicated that public schools do not want to be a resource for homeschoolers. However, there are school officials who posit the public responsibility to contribute to the education of all students, regardless of venue. One respondent in Kozlowski’s survey expressed this well by writing, “If we believe that the future of our society depends on educated citizens, then when homeschooling becomes a choice, it is in all of our best interests to ensure that the child is successful” (1999, p 15). Still, the level of interdependence between homeschoolers and public schools varies significantly between states.

Many from the mainstream education venue advocate for stricter regulation of homeschooling and surveys of administrators reveal concerns about academic opportunities to learn and socialization opportunities provided to homeschoolers (Kunzman, 2005). Reich (2002) advocated for stronger homeschool regulation and argued that the state has compelling interests in developing citizens who participate in the democracy. Reich also contended that the normal separation of parent-child that occurs during the process of maturation may be interrupted by the excessively close
parent-child relationship developed during homeschooling. Some educators and legislators express concern over the possibility that homeschooling protects child abusers from usual public scrutiny. No data is available to indicate greater or lesser frequency of abuse of children in homeschools versus institutional settings. Social skills and opportunities for social interaction have been studied in the homeschool population, and, generally no concerns have been demonstrated. In terms of the present study, issues of socialization have been excluded from the research.

While homeschoolers have concerns about the quality of public schools, public school administrators also express concern about homeschooling. Questions about the quality of parental instruction, the ability to instruct low achievers, the adequacy of resources, the time spent in educational pursuit and the possibility of abuse and neglect have all been cited as concerns by groups such as the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Parent-Teacher Association, both of which have openly opposed home schooling (Kozlowski, 1999). This is an unfortunate example of antagonism that exists in some places between public schools and homeschoolers.

Kozlowski’s (1999) survey of superintendents in Alabama, illustrated that some school officials indicated respect for the rights of parents to leave public schools, to protect children against perceived negative influence of public schools and to promote religious beliefs; however, other officials questioned whether parents have the best interests of the child at heart. Superintendents cited concern about parental qualifications, about the quality of the home curriculum, about social isolation and
about the public school’s ability to manage students who reenter below grade level after homeschooling (Kozlowski, 1999).

Increased governmental oversight of homeschooling is sometimes proposed in response to the concerns mentioned above. Two methods of legislating increased oversight of homeschooling are the monitoring of inputs and the monitoring of outputs. Input monitoring typically takes the form of requiring state approval of home curricula, instructor credentials, or monitoring attendance or the duration of instruction. Output monitoring may include standardized testing, progress reporting or home visitations. While input monitoring is easier to legislate, it does not directly result in improved education. A well-developed system of output evaluation, while more difficult to construct and maintain, is probably a better system of ensuring educational progress. Homeschool associations, such as HSLDA, vigorously reject the need for increased homeschool monitoring.

The U.S. Supreme Court has never ruled directly on a homeschooling case. A 1972 case, Wisconsin v. Yoder, which exempted Amish children from compulsory high school attendance, and a 1925 case, Pierce v. Society of Sisters which upheld parental rights to choose private Catholic schools, are two of the more well-known court decisions that have guided state regulation of homeschooling (LaMorte, 2005). Most of the cases brought in recent decades have been adjudicated in favor of parental rights (Kozlowski, 1999). Most lawsuits to secure homeschool access to public-school services, such as extracurricular activities, have been unsuccessful since courts have consistently ruled that there is not a constitutionally protected right to a limited relationship with public schools (Hadderman, 2002). Homeschool
advocates have been more successful campaigning for state level legislation to secure those types of services (LaMorte, 2005).

While litigation is a symptom of poor cooperation between home and public school participants, there are many examples of substantial cooperation. The National Center for Education Statistics report that 18% of homeschoolers attend public schools at least part-time. Some states, such as Iowa, allow part-time school attendance and participation in extra-curricular activities. Alaska has been a leader in home-public school partnerships with courses of study created, directed and monitored by public school teachers and independently pursued by students, usually in remote areas (Hadderman, 2002). While the situation in Alaska is not the only example of home-public school partnerships, it is the oldest. California considers homeschooling to be an independent study program and families are assigned a resource teacher (Angelis, 1998; Lines, 2001). Washington and Iowa laws require public schools to admit homeschoolers as part-time students (Lines, 2001). The inclusion of homeschoolers in extra-curriculars, however, particularly in interscholastic athletics, continues to be a very controversial area (Kozlowski, 1999).

Bauman (2001) predicted that public schools will be asked to provide a growing number of services to homeschool families as the homeschool population continues to grow. Advanced courses, technology and extracurricular activities, which are difficult to replicate in homeschool settings, may be areas that public schools are asked to provide to supplement homeschooling. Many indicators of this movement are currently in place across the country. A Gallup survey in 1999 questioned respondents on their opinion about homeschoolers accessing public school
services. At that time, 92% of respondents favored access to special education courses, 80% agreed that homeschool instructors should be able to participate in teacher development activities, 74% agreed that homeschoolers should be able to participate in extra-curriculars and 53% favored provision of transportation services (Lines, 2001). Clearly, public opinion favors a cooperative relationship between public and home school systems.

Chapter summary

In the early days of the United States, families taught young people what they needed to know to survive and to manage their own affairs. Wealthy families provided instruction by tutors in their own home before, and even after, the introduction of common schools. Once compulsory attendance regulations were introduced, school attendance became the norm, although public schools still had competition from private institutions. More recently, the cultural climate of the 1970s bred increasing respect for non-conformity and individuality and this, along with the prominence of John Holt and Raymond Moore, influenced a rise in homeschooling. Homeschooling began as a necessity in an age when public schooling was not available, waned during the onset of public education and resurfaced during a period of cultural unrest, dissent with cultural norms and increased respect for individuality. In recent years, the homeschooling population has changed from one that is strongly associated with religiousness to a more diverse and representative group. Home schooling is now accepted and socially normalized in the United States.

Parents' motivation to homeschool has also changed as the population of homeschoolers has changed. Fewer homeschool families are now primarily motivated
by religious beliefs and more families are concerned about the culture and atmosphere within the public school. The question of why families are willing to assume the burden of home education is important in predicting future trends in public school enrollment since educational options continue to abound.

Research on homeschool student achievement demonstrates strong performance and homeschoolers attending colleges have been successful. However, there are research problems with most available information on homeschool student achievement that makes the available evidence on achievement questionable. Parent involvement, an accepted variable impacting academic success, is necessarily high for homeschooling families and the difference of parent involvement of homeschoolers and public schoolers is large. However, most homeschooled students for whom achievement information is readily available demonstrate strong academic skills on norm-referenced tests.

Demographic information on homeschool families is confounded by the problematic issue of accurately determining the number of people involved in homeschooling. Widely discrepant estimates of numbers of homeschoolers are shown in research. Recent initiatives to collect homeschool population numbers via the United States Census is producing more reliable information and new numbers will be forthcoming from the 2007 census. The homeschool population continues to increase and the number of people involved in homeschool is large.

Homeschoolers have some very sophisticated, well-organized and generously funded legal organizations such as the HSDL. The HSLDA leads the way in political activism to protect against any increases in governmental oversight or
regulation of homeschoolers. The group also leads the movement to allow homeschoolers access to public education resources even though it contends that most homeschool families desire to keep the two systems separated. The exception to this separation appears to be a desire to allow homeschoolers to participate in public school athletic activities. This may be due to the inability of homeschoolers, even in local associations, to approximate an experience like a public high school sports team. While there appears to be a desire of homeschool families to access sports opportunities for their children, there is a generalized resistant attitude from public educators, including school leaders and professional associations, toward homeschoolers and any official cooperation with them. There are exceptions, however, where public education supports and cooperates with homeschoolers, the most notable state being Alaska, but this continues to be the exception rather than the rule. Public acceptance of homeschoolers has become more mainstream and public sentiment allowing home educators to access public school resources appears to be growing, as is the demand for such services but homeschool-public school cooperation is variable among states.

Traditional public schools are under tremendous pressure to improve the quality of their product. Criticism of the ability of American students to compete in a global economy combined with ethnic, gender and economic achievement gaps fuel increasing fears that public education is not able to serve the needs of children. Well-publicized incidents of school violence fuels fears that public school are increasingly dangerous places. Concurrently, the positive media portrayal of homeschool success stories has contributed to increased social normalization of homeschooling. Home
instruction is a very real competitive option to public schools and in some places, such as the district studied in this research project, is a strong competitor for students. Public school officials must extend themselves to explore and understand the characteristics and motivation of homeschoolers in order to understand what moves families away from participation in public schools. At present, the commitment to homeschool is a time-intensive, consuming family decision. While minimal legal oversight does make it possible for families to assert that they are homeschooling when in actuality children are being educationally neglected, for families that truly engage in the homeschooling process, it is a formidable commitment. The enormity of the decision to homeschool demonstrates some degree of dissatisfaction with public schools. As computer assisted instruction continues to develop, and as other options of school choice increase, the process of homeschooling will only get easier and therefore more attractive to families disenchanted with public schools. Public school leaders must recognize the implications of swelling numbers of homeschoolers and must learn what is driving families away from public schools and what, if anything, could make public schools more attractive educational options.
Chapter 3
Methodology

Overview

This research project collected and analyzed information relating to homeschooling. The qualitative, case study design used multiple cases to produce stronger findings than a single case study would produce. Multiple cases were viewed as multiple experiments, and pattern matching of results supports the power of the findings shared between multiple cases to act as replication studies (Yin, 2003).

This project is a descriptive case study because it describes the practices and the decision-making process of homeschoolers within the real life context in which they occur (Yin, 2003). The upstate New York public school district in which the study participants reside has a relatively high percentage of homeschoolers as well as a decreasing public school population. A picture of the homeschool population has been formed by examining demographic characteristics of homeschool families, the desired vision of education that homeschooling families are seeking, the process parents undergo in forming their opinion of public schools when making the decision to homeschool, and the reasons families report as their motivation to homeschool. The demographic picture of homeschool families is contrasted with data defining the public school population to identify areas of similarities and differences. Information sources that influence parents’ decision to homeschool are investigated through information gathered in parent interviews. Public school administrators can use the information in this study to gain a clearer picture of who homeschools and why, and, possibly, what public schools might do to become a more attractive option to current or potential homeschoolers.
Research Design

When describing something as complex as a parent’s decision to homeschool a child, it is necessary to adopt discovery techniques that open up the parent’s thinking, values, opinions and experiences to the researcher. The methods employed must allow the researcher not only to describe the phenomenon but also to analyze the data in such a way that patterns can be observed. To that end, this project employed a qualitative design. The qualitative paradigm allows for collection and description in an authentic and contextual manner to allow for accurate interpretation. Homeschooling could not be studied in an experimental context since there is no legal or ethical avenue for randomly assigning students to various educational placements such as public schools, homeschools, private schools or other options. Even if an experimental design were possible, such a process would not allow for an examination of authentic, contextual features that are involved in parent selection of schooling options. Additionally, the qualitative design employed allowed researchers to investigate the guiding questions without interfering with the actual behaviors of participants, therefore allowing data collection to have minimal impact on the results. While the qualitative methodology facilitates an in-depth examination of a complex situation, it reduces generalizability that may be present in quantitative research since that design limits questions and standardizes responses in order to facilitate comparison and broad generalizability. A qualitative methodology allows for collection of information within the authentic context, without artificial controls of participants, to gain insight into relatively complex human interactions. This research focused on relatively few
homeschool families but looked at the phenomenon closely and without conscious predetermined constraints to the analysis.

In addition to being descriptive and qualitative, this research is a case study design. The case study research design is not as codified as other research methods but this project is strongly guided by the research and design methods recommended by Hancock and Algozzine (2006) and Yin (2003). The case study is applicable to the problem of this study because it allows for an intensive description and analysis of a single unit, homeschoolers in one district, in a specific time and place. The design of this project connects the guiding questions to data collection, interpretation, and ultimately to conclusions. The design strategy is naturalistic in that it studies homeschooling in a non-manipulative and non-controlling manner.

The unit of analysis for this project is the population of homeschoolers in the studied school district. Eleven homeschooling families were interviewed for study. The families are composed of 21 adults and 29 students. There were approximately 52 homeschoolers registered in the studied district during the 2007-8 school years, though the number fluctuated slightly during the course of the study.

The research design for this study originally intended to use two sets of qualitative data, interviews and documents. Interviews with homeschooling parents were the primary intended data source but permission was obtained from interviewees to access the homeschooling records they file with the public school district. Originally, it was expected that such documents could be used to triangulate information on the parent’s vision of homeschooling and the operation of the homeschooling program. Through interviews, however, it was learned that the
documents are not accurate representations of the homeschool programs but rather are filed by parents in response to state requirements. Some homeschool documents were examined but it was determined that such documents were neither valid nor useful data sources and no information from those documents was used in the analysis.

As a case study of one small school district this project is an in-depth look at the phenomena of homeschooling involving a limited scope. The study of this district was selected because the reductions in the public school population predisposed district leaders to be interested in educational choices that further reduce the public school attendance. The research is meaningful within this district, due to the diminishing public school population, in ways that might be less important to an overcrowded or growing district. However, this research is potentially useful to other school districts in that homeschooling is such a fast growing school choice alternative. Not only are the findings about the demographic description of the homeschool population and their reasons for opting to homeschool important, but it is also possible that the findings of this study may be applicable to explain the attractiveness of homeschooling in other districts and, possibly the attractiveness of other school choice options.

Case Selection

Case selection was prefaced by obtaining permission from the Superintendent of Schools to contact homeschool families to solicit their participation in the study. All families that met the definition of "homeschooler" in Chapter one were contacted by mail to request their participation. Homeschool research recommends over-sampling to get adequate responses. Since the population of homeschoolers within the study area
is relatively limited, all families were contacted in an attempt to gain an adequate response. In the solicitation that was mailed to homeschoolers, families were asked to call a secure phone line, used only for the research project. The phone line was answered with a recording asking parents to leave a first name and phone number if they were volunteering for the project. Research assistants then called parents back and scheduled interviews. Before interviews were conducted, parents were asked to sign the informed consent agreement that was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Seton Hall University. Participants who requested telephone interviews, rather than in-person interviews, received the informed consent by mail, signed and returned it. Verbal confirmation of informed consent was repeated on the recordings for telephone interviews. One parent, after volunteering for the study, refused to sign the informed consent and therefore was not interviewed. Another parent volunteered and repeatedly was unable to schedule an interview; ultimately, that volunteer was not used in the study. At the conclusion of interviews, participants were asked to recommend participation in the study to other homeschoolers who the interviewee might know. Solicitation flyers were given to interviewees who said they would recommend study participation to other homeschools. Snowballing was encouraged by this strategy.

*Instrumentation, validity and reliability*

Collection of descriptive data was the objective of the data collection procedures and it was guided by the use of an interview protocol. A semi-structured interview format was used to permit interviewees to respond in various directions. Interviewee responses emerged from their thinking and their beliefs, rather than solely
from the questions posed. Researchers allowed interviewees to follow any line of thinking in response to questions; there were no standardized measures or categories for responses. There was no time limit set for the interviews and interviewers did not redirect interviewee responses when they strayed from the questions asked. Prompts were used as needed to request more specific information after interviewees completed their responses. This flexibility of the semi-structured interviews required the researchers to examine the information provided by the interviewees rather than to look for the interviewees to provide requested information. The rewards of the semi-structured protocol are rich and detailed data based on what the interviewees found to be significant. The interview protocol used by the research proxies during interviews is located in Appendix A.

Due to requirements of the Institutional Review Board, research proxies were used to conduct the personal interviews with homeschoolers. Proxies were trained by role play and demonstration. Construct validity was supported by using multiple researchers during the interviews. Although interviews were recorded to ensure accuracy, research proxies were debriefed by the lead researcher for validation, clarification, and to solicit their interpretation of non-verbal communication. The two proxies generally agreed on their opinions of interviewee demeanor, credibility and non-verbal expression which triangulated results. Since the credibility of qualitative research hinges on the researcher, utilizing multiple researchers increased the likelihood that what was supposed to be measured was actually measured.

Pattern matching was used to develop themes found among responses. This supports internal validity. External validity is demonstrated by replication of findings
in the multiple cases used. Reliability of data is ensured by using an interview protocol to assure that all data is collected in the same manner for all cases. Data collected was recorded, transcribed and coded into a database using NVivo 7 software. Demographic information was analyzed separately using SPSS software.

Data Collection

Proxies scheduled interviews by phone and met most homeschool families in the public library for interviews. The public library offered a quiet, private setting for the interviews and was a convenient location for the interviewees. Two interviews were conducted by telephone, rather than in person, at the request of the homeschoolers. Parents were required to sign the informed consent document prior to interviews; the phone interview parents received informed consent by mail prior to their interview. All interviews were audio-taped.

Data Analysis

Pattern matching was used to link data to themes and patterns of responses. The pattern matching technique allows for interpretation of qualitative data when no statistical test is possible. According to Yin, “there is no precise way of setting the criteria for interpreting these types of findings” (2003, p. 27.) One guiding question aimed to generate a profile of homeschoolers based on demographic qualities. These data were more quantitative in nature and lent themselves to analysis using SPSS software. However, the small number of responses (n=11) limited the importance of such treatment.

Grounded theory is a method by which theory emerges from the researchers’ observations and interviews in the field. The inductive technique of grounded theory
was utilized in this project to make an understanding of the phenomenon of homeschooling. Hancock & Algozzine (2006) state that

In grounded theory qualitative research, a researcher seeks to create a theory that explains some action, interaction or process. The investigator is the primary instrument of data collection and attempts to inductively derive meaning from the data. The product of this type of qualitative research is a substantive theory that is ‘grounded’ in the data. Substantive theories tend to explain more specific, everyday situations than do more formal, all-encompassing theories. (p. 9)

The ultimate goal of this project is a well-developed and meaningful research study that contributes to improvement of educational opportunities for all residents of the studied district. The district leaders are interested to learn about residents who select non-public school education options. Improving school leaders’ understanding of reasons why homeschoolers opt out of public schools may alert education leaders to perceived weaknesses of current programs and perhaps open avenues to create a public school program that provides for the needs and wants of a wider variety of district residents. In addition, this research may be applicable to educators in other locations who wish to consider reasons that families select homeschooling or, perhaps, why families select other educational options that compete with public schools for students.
Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

The researchers working on this project conducted eleven interviews with homeschooling families. Interviews ranged from 35 to 75 minutes in length. The interviewees represented the views of 22 parents and 27 homeschooled students, equal to 52% of the homeschool population in the target district. The interviews were comprised of a minimum of thirteen basic questions, some requiring supplemental prompts, plus a section of eighteen demographic questions. A complete list of interview questions is provided in Appendix A. All interview questions elicited information pertaining to the following research questions:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of homeschool families?

2. What is the vision of education that the homeschooling family wishes to provide?

3. How do parents form their opinion of public schools when making the decision to homeschool?

4. Why do families choose to homeschool rather than to attend public schools?

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed and are presented in Appendix B. Demographic questions and responses were removed from the interview transcripts and were analyzed separately using SPSS software. The demographic questions asked for specific pieces of data and, although responses were open-ended,
the homeschoolers tended to answer briefly and factually. Responses to questions in
the demographic series were brief compared to responses given to other questions.
Demographic data are presented in Appendix C, Table 12.

During introductory remarks, interview participants were informed of their
right to refuse to answer any questions. Prior to the start of the demographic series,
participants were again reminded that they could refuse to answer any questions. The
only questions any interview participant refused to answer were in the demographic
series of questions. Four interviewees opted to pass on some or all of the questions
pertaining to family wealth. One person refused to answer the question about political
views. About one third (36%) of homeschoolers interviewed maintained some
privacy about family finances or political views by refusing to answer some
questions. All those interviewed were responsive to all questions about philosophy,
homeschool practices, vision of education, reasons for homeschooling and views of
public schools.

*Demographic characteristics of homeschool families*

The homeschool families interviewed had a mean family size of 4.55 people,
with a standard deviation of 1.635. The family sizes ranged from 3 to 7 people. The
average family size in the studied school district is 3.14 (Seversky, 2006). Table 1
displays the comparison of homeschool and non-homeschool family size. A family is
declared, within this demographic context, as two or more related people living in the
same home. A two-tailed, one sample t-test found that the homeschool families were
significantly larger than the average district family \( t=2.851, \text{df}=10 \text{ and } \text{sig}=0.017 \).
Homeschool families are larger than the average size household in the school district and are intact families with two-married parents and children.

Table 1

Comparison of mean family size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Type</th>
<th>Family Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homeschool</td>
<td>4.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-homeschool</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mean age of parents in the homeschool families interviewed was 44.5 years for fathers and 41.8 years for mothers. People in that age range represent 15.95% of the population of the school district (Seversky, 2006). The range of fathers' ages of the homeschool families involved in this project is 30-62 years and the range of mothers' ages was 29-51 years. The median age of school district residents is 41.40 so the interviewees were representative of that median-aged resident (Seversky, 2006). A two-tailed, one sample t-test found no significant difference between the ages of homeschool parents and other residents. For fathers $t=1.029$, df=9, sig=.330. For mothers $t=.193$, df=10, sig=.851. Table 2 displays the comparison of homeschool and non-homeschool parent ages.

Table 2

Comparison of mean age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adult type</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homeschool</td>
<td>43.15 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
None of the interviewees were born or attended school in the school district in which they now reside, although 81.9% were born in New York State. Of the homeschool parent

parents born in New York State, 54.6% were born and raised in the New York City region and 27.3% were born and raised in other New York State cities. The remaining 18.2% of the interviewees were born and raised outside of New York State. That distribution contrasts with the school district population nativity of 71.18% born in New York State and 25.45 born in a different state (Seversky, 2006). Table 3 displays the comparison of homeschool and non-homeschool parent birth location.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent type</th>
<th>Current School District</th>
<th>New York State</th>
<th>Outside of NY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homeschool</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>81.9%</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-homeschool</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>71.8%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Dash means data is not available.*

The families that were interviewed represented all primary English-speaking households. This aligns with district statistics showing 95.45% of district households being English-language-only households (Seversky, 2006). Homeschool families are
typical of others in the district in speaking English as a primary language, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family type</th>
<th>English-only speakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homeschool</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-homeschool</td>
<td>94.45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The homeschool families represented in this project had a mean educational attainment of 16.18 years for fathers and 16.0 years for mothers; 16 years of education is equivalent to a Bachelor’s degree. This shows a high level of education compared to the 31.4% of the school district population age 25 years or older who hold a Bachelor’s degree or higher (Seversky, 2006). While 85.9% of the district residents over 25 years of age are at least high school graduates, only 15.14% have Bachelor’s degrees and an additional 16.23% have graduate or professional degrees (Seversky, 2006). No homeschool family interviewed had a parent with less education than a high school diploma and this contrasts with school district data showing 3.54% of district residents with less than a ninth grade education and an additional 10.48% of district residents with some high school education but no high school diploma. A total of 43.45% of district residents have a high school diploma or less whereas 91% of homeschool parents have at least some college education. Table 5 displays the comparison of homeschool and non-homeschool years of schooling. Homeschooling parents have a significantly higher educational level compared to
district residents with fathers' $t=5.022$, df=10, sig=.001 and mothers' $t=4.339$, df=10, sig=.001.

Table 5

Comparison of mean years of schooling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family type</th>
<th>years of schooling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homeschool</td>
<td>16.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-homeschool</td>
<td>13.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fathers in the homeschool families interviewed reported occupations that were classified as 70% white-collar and 30% blue-collar. Examples of fathers' occupations reported are teacher, furniture refinisher, engineer, lawyer, manager, and analyst. Of the mothers represented in this study, only one reported a blue collar occupation. The rest reported a wide variety of professional occupations although most were described as part-time or non-practicing. Examples of mothers' occupations reported are landscaper, teacher, editor, business owner, event planner, alternate medicine practitioner, therapist, and pharmacist. The educational levels and professional experiences reported by the homeschool mothers, coupled with comments made during other portions of the interviews, suggest that the homeschool mothers are educationally and professionally qualified to be employed in professional positions outside of the home, although most are not employed full time.

District residents are more likely to be government workers than are homeschool parents. Only 4.7% of the interviewees reported that one parent was employed in a government job while 11.33% of all district residents are government
employees. (Seversky, 2006). Homeschool families in the interviewed group are not only better educated than other district residents, they are less likely to hold government jobs than their neighbors.

When questioned about political views, most interviewees were willing to discuss their ideology. Because questions were open ended, responses were analyzed by grouping key words. No data was provided for three homeschool parents because one interviewee refused to provide political views for the two adults in the family and another adult was deceased. Responses given reported one parent as apolitical, one as having “mixed” political philosophy, five liberal and eleven politically conservative. The homeschool families represent more conservative than liberal political views by a 2:1 margin. That contrasts with data provided by the County Board of Elections which indicate, based on 2006 and 2007 general election results and registered party affiliation, that school district voters represent very balanced views with no party membership or voting line having a clear majority.

The demographic questions that interviewees most frequently refused to answer concerned family socio-economic indicators. Interviewees were asked to report their family income within a range but no ranges or suggested answers were provided. Approximately one-third (36%) of those interviewed did not provide an answer. A comparison of income levels for homeschool families and non-homeschool families is provided in Table 6. Of the respondents, the range of family incomes was from “$30-50,000” to “$140,000.” The range of answers provided aligns with the mid-range of district family incomes and corresponds to the income levels of 53.33% of all district residents (Seversky, 2006). No homeschooler reported a family income
in the bottom 20% of the district average. Of all district households, 13.34% have an
income over $100,000 (Seversky, 2006) and 16% of responding interviewees
indicated family income over $100,000. No homeschooling family had income levels
in the top 5% of district incomes. The pattern of results indicate that homeschooling
families are reticent to share information of family income, but of those that
responded, there was no significant difference in incomes between homeschool and
district families with \( t = 1.635, \ df = 5, \ sig = .163. \)

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Range</th>
<th>Homeschoolers</th>
<th>Non-homeschoolers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $34,999.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>19.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$35,000-$49,999.</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>11.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000-$74,999.</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>17.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,000-$99,999.</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>8.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000-$149,999.</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over $150,000.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The rural nature of the school district studied means that public transportation
is not readily available. Therefore, automobile ownership is high. Less than 5% of
district residents do not have a car and 18.67% of district households have 3 or more
vehicles available (Seversky, 2006). Two interviewees refused to answer the question
about number of vehicles in their household but, of those who answered, families had
an average of about 2.5 automobiles per family with a range from 1 to 5 vehicles. All homeschool families have at least one car per adult in the household and are therefore able to be mobile.

The homeschoolers interviewed live in houses with a mean estimated value of $208,125 and a median estimated value of $250,000. The median home value in the district is $120,900 (Seversky, 2006). The range of home values of interviewees was $150,000 to $350,000. Two interviewees declined to give home value information. Most (82%) of homeschoolers owned the home in which they live while 18% rent. Table 7 displays the comparison of homeschool and non-homeschool mean home values. Homeschoolers interviewed for this project live in homes that are of significantly higher value than other district residents with \( t = 2.947, \text{df}=7, \text{sig}= .021 \).

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family type</th>
<th>Home value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homeschool</td>
<td>$250,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-homeschool</td>
<td>$120,900</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The homeschoolers interviewed represent a low residential mobility group with 91% of interviewees having lived in their current home for more than five years. In the district as a whole, 66.38% of residents live in the same house as they did five years ago (Seversky, 2006). The district has stable residency trends compared to New York State and United States mobility figures. Homeschoolers in this district move even less frequently than other school district residents.
In the past, homeschooling was associated with strong religious affiliations, as discussed in Chapter 2. In this study, 72.7% of the homeschoolers interviewed reported that they regularly attend religious services, while 27.3% do not attend regularly or never attend. Of those who participate in organized religion, denominations were reported as 25% Christian, 25% Roman Catholic, 25% Jewish, 12% Presbyterian, and 12% Quaker.

In summarizing the demographic data collected in this study, homeschooling families in the examined school district are larger than typical families, with well-educated parents who were not born or raised locally but who have resided at their current address for over five years. Family members are employed in high-paying, mostly private sector jobs and have expensive homes and plenty of vehicles. The families were republican or conservative by about a 2:1 margin and most attended organized religion of a variety of denominations.

Vision of education

To collect data for the research question "What is the vision of education that the homeschooling family wishes to provide," the interviewers asked four separate questions:

1. What is your vision of the homeschool program you want to provide?

2. How is your homeschool program different from what your child would do in the local public school?

3. What aspects of participating in the public school experience, if any, would not be suitable for your child?
4. What are characteristics of a high quality homeschool program?

Prompts for question number four included questions about hours per day, days per week, schooling calendar, physical location, amount of student choice, testing, and assessing student achievement.

Information derived from interview questions sometimes applied to more than one research question. The totality of data collected built an understanding of what homeschooling families want their educational program to look like. Interviewees gave long responses to the questions and demonstrated deep thoughtfulness on the topic of the kind of education they want their children to have.

Seven responses specifically referenced flexibility of homeschool education to follow the interests of the students and to give freedom to pursue areas of interest without artificial limits of class periods or restrictive curricula. A parent stated, “To spend all day having someone else tell you what you should do with your attention seems to me to rob a person of their birthright, of connecting to their own being.” Homeschool parents are very interested in having an individualized program and thirteen responses mentioned that homeschool parents envision providing programs that are tailored to their child’s individual needs. Parents used words such as “individual needs”, “customized”, and “follow their own interests rather than being so institutionalized.” Parents expressed a desire for students to develop a love of learning and to think deeply on topics. Interviewees talked about creating excitement and passion for learning, about long periods for study and about life-long learning. In describing a child’s strong academic self-direction one parent stated that they “pound that out of you in public schools.”
Parents differed in their concern for academic rigor. One parent stated that the family's vision for homeschooling was to do basics, like learning to "read, write, do math and a reasonable amount of history." That family placed high value in completing academics and getting outside to work. The program described during that interview was the least academically oriented. More families expressed a desire for high levels of academic challenge. One parent was emphatic that "challenge" was the most important thing in a homeschool program and other parents agreed that challenge was important, although with a different ranking of importance.

Parents conveyed a desire to have some control over what was being presented and what their children were pursuing. This was demonstrated by a parent's vision of "exposure to as much of the world as I feel they are prepared for" and a different parent's statement that their program provided a "superior education at home with more control over what they learn." Parents described their vision of homeschooling in terms of attachment with children, more parental involvement, greater family involvement, discipline, a healthy environment, controlling negative influences and avoiding rougher schools. While parents want flexibility, they also want some degree of control over what is learned, where it is learned, who presents the learning and how the learning is structured.

No parent expressed concern for the quality of the homeschool experience or any concern that their children's education could be very different from a traditional public school education. Some parents mentioned aligning their programs with public school curricula to allow students to rejoin traditional schools if desired and one parent stated very clearly that their family wanted to make sure their children would
be prepared to return to public schools if "something were to happen in our family."
While parents talk about individual freedoms and self-directed learning, most reported programs that had a basis in traditional core subjects of language arts, math, social studies and science.

When discussing their vision of homeschooling, many parents spoke about ways they wanted homeschooling to be different from public schools. Parents commented on the time wasted in the public schools, and they asserted that homeschooling was much more efficient. Parents talked about doing a full day of academic work in the morning when public schools would take all day. The use of time was mentioned frequently as one of the desired points of flexibility in homeschooling. Parents reported that public schools' practice of segmenting time into periods put artificial boundaries on student learning, and caused students to be interrupted when they were involved and excited about following a line of thinking. One parent also complained that public schools wasted time in "crowd control." A few parents stated that public schools wasted money and one parent made the point strongly by stating that "they spend over $20,000 per student if you take the budget and divide it by the number of students and yet the kids don't have textbooks, they are not learning and in this whole school if you took that amount of money you could go to private school, you could even live there, have a beautiful cafeteria to eat in, in a mansion with beautiful food, indoor sporting complexes, etc. Yet in this school they can't figure out how to get the kids textbooks..."

One parent had a very back-to-basics vision and made the clear statement that the public education "system is corrupt" and the family "just want to go back to the
way things used to be and get a quality education.” That parent said that homeschooling was more about actual learning than the “social experimentation” seen in public schools which don’t teach “basics like history” but teach “weird social studies or other issues.” While two parents were very overt in their criticism of the public education system, most made platitudes toward the public school. However, the longer parents talked about homeschooling as an alternative to public education, the stronger their negative opinions of public schools were expressed.

When discussing their vision of education, many parents made holistic statements like “all work is learning” or, more than once, “life is learning.” A number of parents discussed their vision in relation to unschooling and said they tended toward the philosophy of unschooling but had some areas about which they insisted their children be educated. One parent clearly stated, “There is no such thing as a necessary curriculum.” No homeschooler described their program as unschooling.

When asked about their vision for homeschool education, parents reported that homeschooling was much more efficient and allowed students to personalize the use of their time to follow their interests and meet their learning needs. In addition to describing their positive vision of a homeschool with well-rounded, individual programs that allow for in-depth study in a controlled social environment, parents described things they wanted to avoid by homeschooling, such as wasted time, social pressures, inexpert teachers, wasted money, and large classes. No parent suggested that public schools have any better resources, teachers, materials or ability to offer learning experiences. Overwhelmingly, parents expressed confidence that the
homeschool program they were providing was superior to other schooling options available to their children.

To allow the reader to hear parents' own descriptions of their vision for their homeschool program, selected quotes from interviews are listed in Table 8.

Table 8

Parents' vision for homeschooling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Parent comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>&quot;I want them just to learn the basics of reading, writing and math and a reasonable amount of history and I want to focus on how to do critical thinking and how to think for themselves.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>&quot;I have a sense of responsibility of providing them with an education that's well-rounded. However, I definitely follow their interest and their way of wanting to learn things...It is incredibly individualized. And it's challenging. It's respectful of, um, their needs, of them as people.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>&quot;So I guess what she gets, what I want to give her is, the idea is to provide her with a lot of stuff from the outside that I can't give her, specific kinds of skills and also really knowledgeable teachers. And then another part of that vision, I guess, is for her to make a lot of those choices; what it is that she wants from the outside world...She doesn't just study about it, she studied it, she read about it, she thought about it, and listened to it, and she has a very...&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
strong direction. They pound that out of you in the public school system. Because all the time you don’t go with what you are drawn to, you go with what is put on the table or what your teacher directs.”

“Exposure to as much of the world as I feel they are prepared for. And that means to all kinds of people, all kinds of, ah, subject matter, all kinds of places, music, art, history. To whatever, whatever I can give and show them. That is my operating principal as a parent and as a homeschooling person for them....The other thing is that being citizens of this world, being natural people in this world, there is a structure that we have in place in society and I’ve known people who, and I went to schools where there were kids who were unable to fit in, either because of mental disabilities or by choice or drugs or whatever and they just were outside and could not blend. In order for my children to be in the world and to be able to blend if they wish to, I wanted to give my children the same structure that everyone else had, as much freedom within that that I could.”

“To promote, um, independent learning. Um, to find out, to have them be better prepared for college when they go to college and when they are more or less on their own, have them think for themselves and, if they really need an answer, they have to know
where to find it. To follow their own interests rather than being so institutionalized...I want more involvement."

"At this point I don't feel as though I'm providing it so much as I'm networking. I'm holding the umbrella open over all the choices and helping for her. Like finding the courses and finding somebody who is a botanist to do botany, like say finding writers to work on her play writing. Ideally, but the time she is this age, she is the one who is finding what to do."

"Superior education at home with more control over what they learn. Ah, better control over their discipline. And self-discipline and a healthy environment, so that as parents, we should be the ones that have the decision about what is being taught and making sure our children are doing what they are supposed to do by having more control over the negative influences on the outside....We are Christians and we believe that, you know, God made the world and we wanted our children to be taught that."

"I think the distinction would just be consistency....If you look back at the old handbook, the dress code, the code of conduct, things like this, there is so much more that used to be required of human beings and society on how to dress, how to act, how to be polite, how to be studious, how-about wasting other peoples' time, and now look at how people dress themselves."
I  “Meeting his own needs, challenging him, resulting in an individual who is, you know, well-learned and has a passion for learning and continues that throughout his life. Has a passion for learning and continues that throughout his life.”

J  “Homeschooling allows us to let him stay on a subject for as long as he wants and that is actually part of the reason we started, because early on, he demonstrated an interest in his staying on a topic for a long period of time and, in school situations, where the bell is gonna ring and you gotta put that down. So that allows us to go far as his interest stays and in as much depth as he wants.”

K  “Our philosophy of education is that our children become life-long learners and that is really our whole criteria is that they love learning and that they continue to do that.”

Three prompts were used to clarify parent vision regarding testing, student choice in the curriculum, and program parameters. Parents were asked to discuss their views and practices on the use of standardized testing, and on student choice in the curriculum on the general parameters of time and place of homeschooling.

Use of standardized testing

Parent views on standardized testing transverse the spectrum from “totally against testing” to parents who annually do standardized assessments. Only one interviewee expressed extremely negative views on testing and that parent honestly admitted that they are “not going to lose any sleep over it… not going to put myself
out to grade them...might have to submit to what the state wants me to do.” That parent has young children and had not done any formal testing yet. Another parent had not done any testing yet but is not opposed to it and may do it in the future if it is required. That parent was unclear as to whether the state required standardized assessments although the state in which these families homeschool (New York State) does indeed require standardized assessments from homeschoolers. Of the homeschoolers interviewed, 64% regularly use some form of standardized testing including the PASS achievement test, California Achievement Tests, and Iowa Achievement Tests. Families with older children reported that their students have taken SAT and SAT II subject areas tests. Although testing was commonly accepted, one interviewee stated, “Testing is an invention of an institution. It does not apply to a small family.” Most, but not all, homeschool parents appear to be open to testing that they feel will advance students’ academic careers or allow them to be accepted into college and many parents use testing to monitor student progress. Fulfilling requirements of the state does not appear to be an impetus for parents to participate in standardized assessments.

Student choice in the curriculum

Homeschool families often mentioned the advantages of flexibility in home education but they appear to follow a typical core curriculum and to give limited choices to students about what topics will be studied. Only one respondent stated that students had a “lot of choice” about what was studied. Most parents reported that students did not have much choice or that choice was within the parameters of parent determined curricula. Commonly, students had choices about what order to do school
subjects or what projects to do in a subject area. Most families reported using curricula that mirrored a traditional school program but that allowed students to determine the time spent on topics or the method of demonstrating knowledge. One parent explained the common philosophy of "very little choice" in four core subjects because the parent fears that children "won't fit into society because they don't know who Abraham Lincoln was. So it doesn't give them much choice as far as learning in most subjects, but in other areas they have tons of choice." Another parent said, "I try to keep up with what the school is doing" by topic but the children are given choices on types of projects to do. "Choice within structure" as one parent phrased it, is the most common attitude toward student choice in homeschool curriculum. While parents spoke about wanting children to follow their interests, when specifically questioned about the amount of choice children have, parents indicated that students did not have much choice in the curriculum but had choices in sequencing, duration and learning activities.

Program structure

The third sub-area investigated under the research question of parent vision concerned how homeschoolers structured their programs. As with the questions on testing, parents were frank in discussing what state requirements asked them to do and what they were really doing. Parents acknowledged that sometimes they had to report more specific structures than they really used. This attitude was expressed by one parent's comment, "I fill out the forms because I'm here in this state and I want my kids to have the legal references...I take what they are learning and I put it in their categories, but it is just not that way." Some parents agreed with the parent who
honestly said that the state required a certain number of hours so “I sort of made it up...I always say I do the hours.” One family was very acutely aware of the difference between the hours they homeschool and the hours that students attend formalized schools. That parent estimated that the family’s children spent two to two-and-one-half hours on academics per day and “the academic stuff is accomplished so quick that it’s a rip-off to pack your child to school...they take six to seven hours.” Homeschool parents structure their programs in a wide variety of formats. Some families homeschool year-round while many others use a school calendar. Only one family reported doing a full day academic program. Most families agreed with the parent who said homeschool is “not a five day, six hour thing.” Homeschool parents configure learning in a wide variety of formats and, while they purport to follow legal requirements for reporting educational activities, they use an adjustable schedule of days, times and seasons in which to schedule learning activities.

*Forming an opinion of public schools*

When parents decide to homeschool their child, they are also deciding not to utilize the services of the local public school. A series of questions were asked to determine what information sources parents use in forming their opinion of public schools. The semi-structured question series varied according to responses given by parents. Responses from earlier question in the interview determined which questions needed to be asked in this series.

Questions included

1. Did any children in the family ever attend public school?
2. Did you (parent) and your spouse attend public school?

3. Have you been in public schools lately? For what reason?

4. Do you read about public schools in the newspaper or see stories on local television?

5. Have they talked to other parents with children in public schools?

Parents interviewed were very blunt about their own educational experiences. Only one interviewee did not discuss educational experiences. All other interviewees reported that they attended public school for all or most of their education, except one who attended Catholic schools. Interview comments about parent educational experiences were classified as satisfactory, neutral, negative or very negative; see Table 9.

Of the three satisfactory comments, the most positive parent said the public school was “satisfactory…wished family could have afforded Catholic school.” Other satisfactory commentaries on parent public education experiences included, there were “drugs” but graduates were “well prepared for college” and “loved it…learned nothing.” There were no strong positive endorsements. However, there were many negative comments such as “hated it”, “too much authority and power trip”, “dissatisfied…deadening”, “short end of the stick”, “not satisfied…want more for my children.” Most interviewees (63.6%) gave responses which were categorized as negative satisfaction ratings when reporting on their own public school learning experiences.
Table 9

Classification of parent public school experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
<th>Parent comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Very Negative</td>
<td>&quot;My husband and I, for opposite reasons, both had bad school experiences. I hated the public school experience.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>&quot;We both went to public schools for years...I wouldn't say he was satisfied with his education. I wasn't real satisfied...too much sort of authority and power trips and you had to go along.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>&quot;our own public school experience was, um, you know not particularly fulfilling or exciting....in all those years there were two teachers who stuck out in my mind. Who were actually exciting and inspiring, but everyone else was really, the more I think about what they did, it was, you know, pretty lame....I feel like my own love for academics was damped down by that....My</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
experience in high school was just so deadening.”

D Very negative “I felt so cheated really that I had to be in this idiotic school and got sent home because I didn’t wear a bra and had to have a slip to go pee…. My husband was very, very disappointed with his educational experience. He was much more disappointed than me.”

E Negative “I loved school and I was a bubbly cheerleader in high school and I had a great old time in high school. Um, looking back, it was a complete waste of my time…I had a great time, that is what I did, and I didn’t learn anything.”

F Negative “I went to a great high school and had great academics and yet part of me knows that it is just the short end of the stick to be limited by the curriculum.”

G Negative “I wanted to spare my kids some of the grief
and trauma and stuff that I did [in public school]. I hoped that they could have a better experience than I did.”

H Neutral

“I went through school, sitting through class, doing nothing, and graduated third in class.”

I Satisfactory

“Yeah, [my public school experience was satisfactory].”

J Satisfactory

“In high school, at the time I went, there was already drugs...it had a good accelerated or advanced placement program.”

K Satisfactory

“I went to public school. My husband went to Catholic school. We both had satisfactory experiences.”

Many parents told very emotional stories about their own schooling such as,

I hated the public school experience, I hate it! And because we both hated it, it seemed really stupid if we put our kids through it...They knew their father hated school and they knew, I...I still to this day when I see the buses, when I see the little kids lined up going on the bus it breaks my heart. I see it as humiliation in the way of our country’s youth.
Emotions like this were conveyed in visceral and heartfelt manners. Interviewee C said, “In my own personal experience, I felt that it is a way of really railroading the kids who weren’t inside the box and kids who don’t work that way, into insisting that things work for them...can be rather scarring.” Another parent discussed public schooling as “I’ve been there. I’ve done it. I know there is a better way.” No homeschool parent reported a strong, positive endorsement for public schools based on their educational experience but 27% of respondents reported educational experiences that were categorized as satisfactory. Neutral responses were given by 9% of respondents and 64% reported negative to strongly negative educational experiences. Negative personal experiences in public schools are one factor that appears to influence parents to homeschool their children.

*Information from media sources*

In addition to parents’ own experience in public schools, homeschool parents reported that they gathered information to form their opinion about public schools through the media and by speaking with parents who have children in public schools. When asked what they learned about public schools through the media, 40% gave responses that were categorized as neutral and 60% gave responses categorized as negative. No parent reported hearing positive information about public schools in the media.

Examples of comments which were classified as negative include one parent’s report of reading about public schools in the newspaper and hearing stories on television about “people getting shot and drugs and sex and bombs...” Another parent said that she hears about schools “when a kid comes into school with a trench coat
and some guns.” One comment, classified as neutral, was “I’ve heard stories here and there, you know about kids being beat up on the playground in kindergarten and stuff. I think those are almost like urban legends.” Parents demonstrated that they sometimes gained information about public schools from the media, which they appeared to combine with their personal experiences to form their opinion of public schools.

*Information from other parents*

Homeschool parents also formed impressions of public schools based on information from other parents. No interviewees reported gathering positive information from public school parents while 44% reported receiving neutral information from public school parents and 56% reported that public school parents provided them with negative impressions of public schools. Interviewee D had an interesting interpretation when reporting:

I hear people like the schools and I ask children ‘how’s school’ or ‘how are you liking it?’ And it is like, um, they like it and they think the schools are good. My secret thought is, but so is a tight shoe until you take it off. It is fine to wear, to wear restrictive clothing until you take it off. I worked in Manhattan, I used to wear high heels and taking them off at the end of the day was heaven. This might be arrogance of me, but they just don’t know. They are satisfied with what they are doing but they don’t know there is something else. And because, because they don’t know it and people think it’s different, and I do this a lot, if it is different from me then it probably is wrong.
Homeschool parents did not report that their association with other parents influenced them to form positive views of public school.

**Personal contact with public schools**

Homeschool families were reported to have numerous interactions with public schools. Parents who were interviewed had personally been involved in activities and had children who were involved in activities such as producing a public school stage show, attending basketball games, volunteering at the library, participating in a medieval festival, and acting in Shakespearean productions at the public school. Even though 55% of the interviewees cited pleasurable involvement within the public school, these first-hand experiences did not appear to influence the homeschoolers’ opinion of public schools.

Parents who are currently homeschooling their children had satisfactory to traumatic public school experiences and appear to have formed negative outlooks on public schools based on their own experiences as students, based on media reports and based on contact with parents of public school children. Their negative impressions have not been mediated by some positive interactions within the public schools and public school programs.

**Reasons for homeschooling**

Parents interviewed gave full and passionate answers to questions about their reasons for homeschooling and they were asked to rank the importance of their reasons. Table 10 gives illustrative quotes of parents’ reasons for choosing to homeschool.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Primary-second-third reasons to homeschool</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Primary: “The first reason is social-socialization. I don’t want the schools to socialize our children.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Primary: “The most important reason was that my daughter was not getting the education that I thought she deserved and should get.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary: “We discovered how individualized it could be. How rich and incredible it is.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Primary: “The individual characteristics of my child firstly.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary: “Second in there would be wanting to spend more time with her.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Third: “My overriding philosophy of, sort of, life and life school and they way we learn. Well, maybe that would be third.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Primary: “The most important reason I wanted to do this for my kids is to make them citizens of the world, to give them the opportunity, not make them, but to give them the chance to be in the world which I think is the natural way we are supposed to be. I think school is unnatural.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Primary: “I missed my son terribly. Like he was going to school and I felt rushed constantly and I was like this is not the way childhood and life should be.”

Primary: “My most important reason is that I wanted my kids to have to grow as though there isn’t anything between them and their highest authority. Like you could say, in between them and God or between them and their spirit... I didn’t want them in a situation where they had to continually defer to what someone else was saying was the right answer.”

Secondary: “I didn’t realize how much of my attention was locked up trying to get the best teacher or trying to get the best classroom or to just, as I described earlier about the science teacher, I had so much energy involved in that that I realized withdrawing my energy from that and creating a vessel the kids could learn what they need to learn.”

Third: “They don’t become peer directed in the same way.”

Primary: “The most important reason would be the greatest influence on my children is that the teachers would not be, like I would be.”

Secondary: “We could provide our children with a superior education without public schools.”
H Primary: “The most important reasons have become the school is just a complete and total failure and that the more that people participate in it, you are just supporting a system that does not work and that should be done away with.”

Secondary: “The second reasons would be, you know, educational quality.”

Third: “Third would be more of a, I don’t want to participate because of the things that go on.”

I Primary: “He is gifted as well as learning disabled. So he is all over the page in terms of ability and it would be very difficult for the public school system to be able to deal with both of those pieces simultaneously. …to have a child in second grade so unhappy and frustrated; it was unacceptable in my eyes…That is number one.”

J Primary: “The most important is the quality of education. I don’t know if there is another one behind that. That is really the driver for us.”

K Primary: “I think the most important reason we homeschool is so that we can have some sense of where the learning goes and so that our kids get an opportunity to love learning and not sit in a definite mold.”
Parent reasons to homeschool were coded by themes. Three broad themes were identified: parents' desire for social control, concern for educational quality and general philosophy. Table 11 illustrates the themes assigned to interviewee responses.

Table 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Primary reason</th>
<th>Second reason</th>
<th>Third reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Social control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Educational quality</td>
<td>Educational quality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Educational quality</td>
<td>Social control</td>
<td>Philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Social control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Social control</td>
<td>Educational quality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>Educational quality</td>
<td>Social control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Educational quality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Educational quality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Educational quality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parents' first, second and third most important reasons to homeschool were assigned quality points reflecting relative rankings and frequency of parent mention. Primary reasons received three value points, second reasons received two points and third priority reasons received one point. The total points for each theme were then
totaled. Table 12 summarizes the frequency of mention and the value points assigned by parent prioritization of reasons.

Table 12

Value ranking of parents’ reasons for homeschooling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequencies</th>
<th>Social Control</th>
<th>Educational Quality</th>
<th>Philosophy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total mentions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As primary reason</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As second reason</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As third reason</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality points</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 12, the highest ranked reason for parents to choose homeschooling was quality of education. Parents who choose homeschooling are fundamentally concerned about the quality of education their children receive. This reason was ranked as the top reason for the decision to homeschool by 45.4% of parents and was cited as one of the factors motivating homeschooling by 81.8% of the interviewees. Parent G stated that homeschooling provided a “superior education” and the children “liked it better.” Parents who homeschool want a high quality educational program for their children and believe that they are able to provide that quality.
Individual characteristics of the homeschooled child were mentioned by parents as a contributing factor in the decision to homeschool and these comments were grouped into the theme of educational quality. That leads to a question of whether parents made the decision to homeschool as a result of seeing the child in a school atmosphere and finding the match inappropriate, or was it made before any formal schooling experience. Analysis of interview data showed that 45% of families had enrolled at least one child in a public school prior to making the decision to homeschool. The remaining 65% never tried any school-based experience for the children. However, because families often tried a first child in school, then moved to homeschooling, many younger children in families have only been homeschooled. Of the twenty-seven children represented in this study, 22% had school-based educational experiences and 74% never had a school-based experience. Only one family currently had children both homeschooled and in a public school. So while some parents cite the individual needs of the child as a contributing factor in deciding to homeschool, they are making the decision that public schools can not meet their child's needs without enrolling him or her in public education. Most families make the decision without sending their children to school first and most homeschool all children in the family.

In their discussion of educational quality, parents gave examples of poor quality in public school. Included in parent examples were weak teacher knowledge, unchallenging curricula, non-diversified teaching to a diverse group, limited parental choice of teachers, overworked students, rote learning, poor discipline, and low behavioral and appearance expectations. In the course of interviews, parents offered
these examples to demonstrate aspects of public schools that they object to and that they believe demonstrate poor educational quality.

The second value-ranked reason to homeschool had to do with the parents' desire for some social control over the educational experience. Table 10 displays quotes from parents regarding their concerns for control over social experiences, but the full transcripts, provided in Appendix B give a more in-depth understanding. Interviewee A stated the most important reason impacting the family's decision to homeschool was "I don't want the schools to socialize our children." The parent went on to relate a story of a tomato seedling as an analogy for homeschooling:

Someone said, I think it was a homeschooler, and he said if he, he took a tomato plant and started it in seed and it just started to grow, why would you take that plant when it is still shooting and put it out in the garden before it was ready to grow? And I think that is a good analogy for homeschooling. You had your child and you aren't ready to put it out for six, seven hours a day. Think about it. It doesn't make sense. Why would you really do that?

Interviewee G stated that the family wants parents to be the greatest influence on the children, not teachers. Interviewee F asserted that homeschooled children are less influenced by peers than children that attend typical schools. That parent said,

There is a whole different emotion that happens between siblings also when kids have this opportunity [to homeschool]. They don't become peer directed in the same way, so that, even just when we would go skiing by ourselves it would be so different than when we were with a herd of school kids. I remember them, they go so different when they become internally referenced.
Because once they get to a certain age everything is externally referenced... It is a comparative mode. It is approval/disapproval mode. I want them away from that. In every way, it is the person you like, the skirt you are wearing or the game you play or the person you spoke to. All of that. It is the culture of the world that wasn’t what I wanted for them.

Parents’ desire to have time with their children in inexorably intertwined with parental desire for social control. One parent had an interesting commentary on the topic,

What I’ve noticed is there are two kinds of homeschoolers. And you may or may not have experienced this because the people who would be attracted to talking to you would be in the second group. The first group is people who start in little mothers’ groups and they don’t like the idea of leaving their child, in a day care or in a nursery school you know, they don’t want to leave their child so they decide to homeschool. But then when it gets, it comes down to the brass tacks of being with your kid all the time and it’s up to you and you can’t get away or then you don’t feel capable of teaching your kid or you think that is what homeschooling is, which it really is not. What it is, in my opinion, those homeschoolers vanish. It is not an opportunist, at least not in a negative way. It’s the kind of person who says maybe they’ll do it for a while, or they’ll create a foundation for the kid in advance. Then there is the homeschooler who is like, “There is never a way that I am ever gonna put my kid in school. ... So there are two kinds of homeschoolers the ones who are
completely from the first or ones who are, you know, having the appetizer tray
but not staying for the main course. It is really a huge commitment.

The issue of socialization pervades discussions of homeschooling, with
homeschool participants or non-participants as well. Many interviewees mentioned
that non-homeschoolers question them about how homeschool children learn social
skills. Homeschool parents overwhelmingly assert that homeschooled children are
adequately or even admirably socially-able. This is substantiated by a preponderance
of research (Bauman, 2001; Basham, Merrifield & Hepburn, 2007). During this
research project, the researchers noted that casual conversations about homeschooling
almost always turned to questions of the ability of homeschool parents to develop
adequate social skills in children who do not attend schools. The concern of
homeschool parents is almost the reverse of the concerns expressed in those casual
conversations. Homeschool parents do not want children to be socialized by others,
and they wish to control social experiences to protect children from unseemly
influences in the outside world. A representative expression, quoting Interviewee A
is, “We are not at all enthusiastic about what’s going on in the kid’s world right now
with the game boys and cell phone and the computer stuff...by the time they are
exposed to all that stuff they will be better grounded and won’t be as susceptible to
trends or fads which I think are destructive to our society.”

One parent related a long story about a discussion she had had with a
workman about socializing children. Her emotions rose as she proceeded through the
story, culminating with,
What do you mean by socialize? Because, you know, if you mean learning how to use a gun or not having your head stuck in the toilet when you don’t pay the kid who tells you you have to pay him fifty cents every day or, if it means, um learning to sit next to someone all day and be quiet all day. Well, what does it mean?

Parents who homeschool are concerned about the social atmosphere in schools and in society as a whole. Of those interviewed, 54.5% cited the desire for social control as one of their reasons for homeschooling and 27.2% stated it was the primary reason influencing their decision to homeschool. Parents who homeschool want to control the speed at which their children are exposed to social experiences and to have knowledge of the social learning of their children. While some parents tended toward protectionism, none seemed to be isolationists.

Parental philosophy of learning, life and personal freedoms were cited by 36% of interviewees as a factor influencing the decision to homeschool. Parent C stated that the decision to homeschool was about an “overriding philosophy of life and how we learn”, while Parent D bluntly said “I think school is unnatural.” Parent F believed that homeschooling did not “give away [the student’s] amazing freedom, independence of her intellect, her mind and emotions.” The theme of philosophy encompassed parental reasons that involved spiritual and religious reasons to homeschool but religion was not found to be a primary theme in the reasons to homeschool given by parents interviewed. Parents’ choice of homeschooling allows families to align their philosophy of education and learning with their practices.
To summarize findings on reasons for homeschooling, parents reported that quality of the academic program was the most important factor influencing the decision to homeschool. Parents felt they could provide an educational experience superior to that of the public school. The second most prevalent reason to home school was parents’ desire to have some control over the social experiences and social influences on their children. The third most common theme involved philosophy of learning and life; this included references to spirituality. Parents’ reasons for homeschooling vary but these three common themes were demonstrated by the parents interviewed in this study.

Summary of findings

Transcripts of eleven interviews with homescoolers are contained in Appendix B. Demographic data collected from the same families is presented in Table 13 in Appendix C. Chapter four discussed and presented the data in light of the four research questions of this study.

The data shows that the homeschooling families in the target school district are larger than typical families in the district. The parents of homeschool families were not born or raised in the school district and are well-educated people employed in well-paying, usually private sector jobs. The families live in expensive homes, are more often politically conservative and most attend organized religion.

Homeschool parents have a vision of the homeschooling experience they wish to provide that uses time flexibly, respects student interests within a fairly standard course of study, and creates a love of learning. Parents were not uniformly opposed to
the use of testing and many parents were willing to adhere to state reporting requirements, even if they did not comply with all homeschool regulations precisely.

In deciding to homeschool, parents had collected some information on public school through the media and by talking to other parents but parents appeared to be strongly influenced by their own experiences as public school students. Parents often transferred their negative views of public schools from other locations and generalized their negative school history to include all public schools.

Finally, parents reported that the most influential factors in making the decision to homeschool were the desire for a quality education, the desire for parental control of social development and the desire to align educational practices with personal philosophies.
Chapter 5
Conclusions

Restatement of purpose and guiding questions

Homeschooling is only one of a growing number of school choice options that families may select as educational placements for their children. Although public schools have been the primary educational venue since the first compulsory education laws began emerging in the 1640s, multiple forms of competition have always existed and competition from homeschools, charter schools and vouchers is currently increasing. Homeschooling enrollments continue to increase even though the exact number of homeschoolers is difficult to document. As the number of homeschoolers has grown, so too has public acceptance for the practice.

This study investigated four research questions on the topic of homeschooling and conducted interviews with homeschooling families to gain insight into four key areas: demographic characteristics of homeschoolers, the vision of education that homeschoolers intend to provide, factors influencing parents' opinions of public schools and reasons why families homeschool.

These research questions are important in understanding factors that influence families to homeschool and the questions are of particular importance in the school district that was studied. The locale of the study is a small, rural school district with a dwindling public school population that is causing current, and surely will cause future, changes in the financial and educational structure of the public schools. Homeschool families represent approximately 4% of the school-aged population of the school district while, based on research, a 2% homeschool population would be more typical. Belfield
(2002) found that residents of the North East are least likely to homeschool but that is not the case in the Northeast community studied. Students, such as homeschoolers, who are opting out of public education are a potential source of district attendees and, therefore, understanding of the phenomenon of homeschooling can help public education leaders to plan for the future educational needs for all students. The exodus of students from public schools, to homeschooling and to other forms of educational choice, must be examined to prepare for the future of public education that will meet learning needs, lifestyle choices and differing values of all citizens. No single format or educational venue is best suited for all students, and educational choices should and will continue to exist, but understanding what drives families from some options and towards others will inform a public education system that is responsible to consider the needs and wants of all the taxpayers who support public education.

Summary of major findings

Chapter four reviewed the extensive information provided by homeschool parents during interviews. Demographic data collected found homeschooling families in the examined school district to be larger than typical families, with well-educated parents who were not born or raised locally but who have resided at their current address for over 5 years. Fathers are employed in moderately high-paying, usually private sector jobs, while mothers are typically not employed, or at least not full time. The families have relatively expensive homes and plenty of vehicles. The families are republican or conservative by about a 2:1 margin and most attend organized religion of a variety of denominations.
Analysis of responses concerning the vision that families have for their homeschooling program found that homeschool parents valued being able to personalize the use of time to follow student interests and meet individual student needs. Parents expressed no concern about their resources, teacher preparation, materials or ability to offer learning experiences. Overwhelmingly, parents expressed confidence that the homeschool program they were providing was superior to other schooling options available to their children. Parents used time flexibly; some school year-round and some follow school calendars. Parents had differing opinions on the use of formal testing but many homeschooling families did use standardized testing. Families ostensibly adhered to reporting requirements of State authorities, although homeschool parents seemed to consider such requirements as reporting steps they had to comply with rather than any true supervision or restriction of their homeschool program. Homeschool curricula included traditional subject areas and parents made the major decisions about what the curriculum contained, although students had a voice in the order of daily activities or the projects that could be done to demonstrate learning.

Parents who homeschool have formed opinions of public schools based on information derived from their experiences as students, through conversation with other parents, via media sources, and by having personal exposure to public schools. Media and other parents were not reported to provide any positive images of public schools but neither did the media nor other parents appear to impact significantly on homeschoolers' impression of public schools as a potential educational venue. Many homeschool parents reported having mediocre to traumatic public school personal experiences and many have formed very negative outlooks on public schools based on their own experiences as
students. Parents who attended other school districts transferred their relatively negative image of their own education to their current district of residence. Participating in public school programs or activities did not appear to positively dispose parents to send students to public schools and parents reported that tours of public schools or participating in school activities like drama club sometimes confirmed the parents’ or the students’ preference for homeschooling.

Parents’ reasons for homeschooling were grouped into categories and these were ranked based on the number of parents who cited the reason combined with the priority given. Parents reported that quality of the academic program was the most important factor influencing the decision to homeschool. Parents felt they could provide an educational experience superior to that of the public school. The second most important reason to homeschool was the parent’s desire for some control over socialization. Parents expressed a desire to have time with their children, to be the main model for their children and to control the impact of outside social influences. Parental philosophy of life, learning and freedom was the third most important reason for parents to choose homeschooling. Spirituality was included in the theme of philosophy. Parents conveyed strongly held values about homeschooling and their reasons to homeschool were grouped under the three themes of educational quality, social control and philosophy.

Interpretation of demographic indicators

The demographic characteristics cited in previous homeschool research, discussed in Chapter two, align with the school district studied herein. The rural location of the studied district makes private schools difficult, though not impossible, to access. Due to regulations that require public schools to provide school bus transportation to private
schools within a maximum range of 15 miles, there are few private schools which
students can access by school bus. There is no public bus transportation in the area.
Realistically, that means that most private school students need to have a parent available
to transport them. Luebke (1999) found that higher homeschool populations existed in
rural areas studied compared to urban areas. One reason for that may be transportation
requirements. The need to meet the financial demands of private school tuition, plus
having an adult available to provide transportation puts the option of private schools out
of financial reach for all but the highest wage earners. Since private schools present
transportation and financial challenges, homeschooling is a more attractive option than
private schools in rural locations and that may partially explain the seemingly high
percentage of homeschoolers in the studied district.

This study concurred with research cited in Chapter two which found that
homeschooling families are typically above average in size (Basham, Merrifield &
Hepburn, 2007). The families studied had an average size of 4.55 compared to 3.14 of all
district families. Parents who really enjoy having a lot of children around may be
predisposed to homeschooling so they can maintain close proximity to their children.
Homeschool families are consistently found to be larger than typical and that could be
attributed to religious beliefs or may be a reflection of families that value and enjoy
children. Larger family size is another factor that limits the attractiveness of private
school attendance for the local residents who wish to avoid public schools. Additionally,
larger family size coincides with Belfield's (2002) proposition that increased family size
disposes families away from private schools and toward homeschooling as an alternative
to public education. This study concurred with a preponderance of research that homeschoolers are larger than average families.

Research has also found that homeschool families are much more likely to have two married parents, and only one full-time wage earner, than non-homeschool families (Lyman, 1998; Rudner 1999). This study found the same. It is not surprising, given the time and effort required to homeschool, that homeschooling families are almost exclusively two-parent families. While previous research finds that homeschool mothers typically do not work outside the home and are the primary instructors, a portion of homeschoolers, both in the district studied and in national research samples, are families who seem to defy logic by homeschooling without being home themselves (Bauman, 2001). Unfortunately, no such family was recruited for this study, but the phenomenon is fruit for future study especially in that it may involve arrangements such as cooperative instructional groups, internet courseware, other technology advances, or may be a symptom of educational neglect if homeschooling is not being adequately supervised or pursued.

Lange and Liu (1999) reported family characteristics from their study that corresponds to the findings in this study. The Minnesota homeschoolers studied by Lange and Liu had high rates of parents with college level educations, higher family incomes and most of the families studied had entered at least the eldest child in a public or private school at some point during their educational career. This study had similar findings except that 45% of the families studied, not a majority, had enrolled at least one child in public school prior to making the decision to homeschool. The US Census Bureau (NCES, 2004) found that 75% of homeschool parents had educational levels beyond high
school compared to 56% of parents nationwide. This study found similar higher than average levels of homeschool parent education.

The demographic characteristics of homeschool families appear to be consistent across numerous studies. Although Apple (2000) reports increased racial diversity in the homeschool population, the studied district has little diversity in the general population so could not be indicative of trends in diversity.

This study found that there is an integral selectivity of those who opt to homeschool. The process requires parents who will commit their time and energy to educating their children. The parents must have enough information to know that the option of homeschooling exists, to pursue educational resources, to plan an educational program and to provide adult supervision of the program. All of the families studied had a stay-at-home mother who had primary responsibility for the homeschool program. Although there are examples, even in the studied district, of families who homeschool without a parent at home full time, that is atypical according to the families studied. Although the mothers in this study were well educated, most had previous employment histories and all appeared to be employable; they chose to stay home, at least partially for the purpose of providing their children with what they intend to be a superior education. The mothers place higher value on their children’s education than on their own career or financial gain. Homeschool families typically have a father who has a high enough paying job to support a non-employed spouse and family. For these reasons, homeschooling is less of an educational option for the lowest socio-economic level families and for single-parent families.
Implications for practice

The public school district studied probably cannot use the demographic characteristics of homeschoolers to anticipate which families may choose to not attend the public school. Middle to upper-middle class families with multiple siblings and an educated, at-home parent are the families represented in this study of homeschoolers. Homeschooling families have demographic characteristics in common but if those characteristics are indicators of potential homeschoolers then the phenomenon of homeschooling has barely scratched the surface of its potential market population. There are many more stay-at-home, well-educated mothers with larger families who are not homeschooling; therefore, using these indicators, the possibility of future growth is huge.

It may be possible for the studied school district and other districts that wish to increase their appeal to the homeschooling population, to solicit the involvement of young, educated professionals, even those without children. By exposing that population to positive experiences with the public schools, such as by adopting students as mentors, making career presentations at career fairs, serving as work-based career experiences, or serving on planning commissions such as facility planning or strategic planning, potential homeschoolers could be offered direct experiences with the local school district that could negate negative memories of their own public schooling and could forge a connection based on mutual respect and open communication long before the community member becomes a parent contemplating homeschooling. Epstein et al. (2006), through the National Network of Partnership/Schools at John Hopkins University, developed a framework of community involvement that challenges school to involve all families. The types of involvement specified by Epstein include areas that may facilitate an inviting
climate to draw identified homeschoolers, or those with the demographic markers of potential homeschoolers, into collaboration with the public school in an effort to give community members first-hand knowledge of public schools and personal investment in creation of a system of quality public education. This may encourage those invested community members to participate in public schools when, and if, they become parents.

*Interpretation of parents' vision of homeschool education*

Parents chose to homeschool because their philosophy of learning desired more personal and academic freedom for students even if they pursued a fairly standardized core curriculum. Parents also desired to control the impact of social influences outside of the home. Nearly half (45%) of parents specifically used the words "individualized" or "individual needs" in describing their vision of education. Parents communicated a vision of flexible time use, a lack of rote aspects of learning, and creation of excitement in learners that caused students to want to engage with their learning. When discussing how they wanted their homeschool program to be different from public schools, 45% of parents specifically discussed social issues such as avoidance of social pressures, avoidance of dangerous students, fear that the parents do not know the background of students in public schools and fears that students may be adversely affected by what other students say or do. Parents who homeschool clearly want to provide a program that is not formally controlled by structures such as school time periods and that allows the parents control over the social experiences of their children.

The vision statements shared by parents in interviews communicated that parental vision for the homeschool program they are striving to create is not dramatically different from traditional education in terms of curriculum. Parents are not trying to redefine
knowledge; they are trying to avoid what they perceive to be the negative aspects of schools: overregulation, inflexibility, lack of individualization and negative social experiences. The vision homeschoolers strive for is less creation of a new paradigm of schooling than an avoidance of what they do not want their children to experience.

*Implications for practice*

The school district under study, and other districts interested in forging new relations with homeschoolers, could utilize the insight gleaned from interviews with homeschool parents to interpret the homeschoolers' vision of desired education and how the public school can appeal to that vision. The most important avenue of appeal would be to attempt to convince homeschoolers or those considering homeschooling that the public school works under a framework of flexible units of time, respects student interests and talents, and provides small class size. Public schools could adopt or enhance the use of teaching strategies that increase flexibility of instructional time such as block or flex scheduling. Schools could reinforce their focus on individual needs of students and could share that focus within the community. Public schools need to continue to foster relationships with all students and all parents and to take every opportunity to publicize opportunities for individual student attention, creative use of learning time, and parent involvement.

The studied school district could consider capitalizing on what was shared by the homeschoolers interviewed to target opportunities to change parental vision of public education. Exposure to public school students doing community-based service or learning would allow homeschool, or potential-homeschool parents, to see public school students in flexible settings. Inclusion of homeschool students in non-traditional courses of study
such as electives, authentic science competitions or scholarly mini-courses, might allow parents to realize that the public schools have many very creative, highly original programs. Parents reported that media information is not effective in changing their perception but personal contact with highly motivated, achieving students may be more persuasive.

*Interpretation of reasons to homeschool*

Moore’s (1969) research on education started the movement that would become known as the “Christian Right.” Moore’s philosophy attracted a large number of homeschoolers in the 1980s and during the 1990s when 75% of homeschoolers in the United States were practicing Christians (Basham, Merrifield & Hepburn, 2007). This led to the popular assumption that homeschooling is a function of religion. It is evident that homeschooling is not the exclusive preserve of Christian groups or any religious sect. It involves a broad range of families and religious affiliations. Bauman (2001) found that while many homeschooling families participate in organized religion, only 33% cite religion as a reason to homeschool. This study concurred in finding most homeschoolers (72.7%) regularly attended organized religious services, but only 18% mentioned religion when discussing reasons to homeschool. The two interviewees that did discuss religion tied it in with overarching philosophy and life values that encouraged them to homeschool. The decision to homeschool does not appear to be made based on any solely religious or political views; however, many of the reasons reported by parents are based on their perception of difficulties within the current public school system.

Putting aside the conventional belief that homeschooling is a function of religion, this study supports earlier research, such as Basham, Merrifield and Hepburn (2007) and
NCES (2004) that parents homeschool for a variety of reasons. No one religious, philosophical or anti-state viewpoint dominates parental decision making. Parents demonstrated dissatisfactions with aspects of public education, including the learning environment, the level of academic challenge and the structure of schools. Clearly, homeschooling is an indicator of disaffection with the public education system. There is a burgeoning culture of parents who prize educational alternatives that can be tailored to the unique needs of each child.

Many parents who homeschool value the strengthening of their relationship with their children. The mere parental involvement in the children’s education may be a factor impacting academic success. Research indicates that when parent involvement in education is high, children become more academically successful (Romanowksi, 2001). Homeschooling may be the epitome of parental involvement in education and the impact of the parents’ presence, involvement and obvious valuing of education may influence student success.

Parental control is an underlying theme discovered in interviews with the homeschoolers. Parents want to make their own educational decisions, even if their vision of education is not very different from a typical school program. Homeschooling parents do not feel restrained or controlled by the regulations that are in place governing homeschooling. In fact, they are rather open about not being concerned about the regulations. Parents interviewed conveyed a lack of awareness of the regulations to submit standardized test data and a lack of concern about meeting the time requirements for homeschoolers. Therefore, it can be said that parents’ values drive them to homeschool not because they are pursuing a dramatically different vision of education but
because they are trying to avoid what they perceive to be the negative and bureaucratically-controlled aspects of schools. Homeschool parents trade their time and efforts for the deregulation of education and decentralization of authority over their children.

Parental education experiences contribute to homeschool parents' desire to avoid entering their children in schools. Parents discussed their lack of academic motivation and lack of inspiration to achieve academically during formal schooling as contributing to their negative view of education. Interestingly, no parent discussed negative social situations, peer issues or conflicts; they all talked about not getting a good education. Additionally, negative media reports are seen to confirm that decision to homeschool, not to drive the decision. Homeschool parents are not influenced by conversations, positive or negative, with parents of children who attend school. Some homeschool parents convey an attitude of superiority or insight when discussing their willingness to homeschool as rejecting social convention and knowing a better way of which traditional schoolers are unaware.

Homeschooling families reportedly spend less than $4000 per year per household on homeschooling, though that does not place a value on the adult time used in education (Basham, Merrifield & Hepburn, 2007). That sum may include educational costs for a number of children since homeschool families often include all siblings. The cost is inexpensive compared to typical public school costs; the district studied spends about $11,500 per student. While public spending on education continues to rise, increased expenditures have not demonstrated a publicly documented increase in output quality. Costs figures substantiate that homeschoolers provide a much less expensive, and in the
view of some homeschoolers, less financially wasteful, education for homeschooled students.

It is alarming that so many parents feel they can give a better education at home and feel that the learning environment in schools is poor. For parents to feel so disengaged from and so distrustful of the quality of public schools that they would undertake the mammoth task of educating their own children should cause public educators to reevaluate both their programs and their community involvement levels. Schools need to work harder to communicate with parents, and with potential parents, and to provide more opportunities for meaningful input into the educational system.

The studied district has good evidence of quality educational programs and student success, at least using the data scrutinized by New York State Education Department (NYSED) as evidence of success. The district has a four-year graduation rate that stays near 85%. The dropout rate is in the 7% range and all schools have remained "in good standing" as referenced by NYSED. There is a suspension rate of less than 5% at high school. High school student achievement, as measured by State exams, demonstrates that approximately 80-85% of high school students are above the proficiency standards for language arts and math as set by the State. These data suggest that students attending the public schools are relatively successful, using conventional measures of academic success. Yet, homeschool parents still list educational quality as their number one reason to homeschool. Since the studied District has conventional markers of success, one must ask why so many homeschool families find they must seek educational quality outside of the public school. A question for future study is how homeschool parents describe educational quality.
Homeschool parents' secondary reasons for homeschooling were collectively themed as social control. There is little that the public school can do to control the type of people that are in public schools or to give parents more control about what their children are exposed to in schools. Homeschool parents named topics such as lax dress codes, poor student behavior, and students becoming peer directed as objectionable experiences. While laws protect certain student freedoms within schools, school codes of conduct help to control safety in the school environment. Although not a strong focus from parents in this study, problematic school safety can be a contributing factor in increasing homeschooling as demonstrated by increases in homeschool enrollment in Colorado after the Columbine High School shooting (Morris, 1999). Parents' desire for social control may have roots in their desire to protect their children from danger and unseemly influences. Widespread dissemination of information on school behavioral expectations, behavioral enforcement, code of conduct and school violence data could assuage parent concerns about school safety. Unfortunately, all schools have incidents of student behavior that become public controversies. Administrative management of such problem incidents must be swift, informed, and wise. Maintenance of transparency with the community, to avoid the appearance of hiding problem incidents, and sound decisions that maintain the safety of the school while judiciously educating the offender toward socially acceptable behavior is the complicated, but professionally required, role of school administrators. While parents in this study did not devote a lot of attention to school safety, it was mentioned, and is an area in which the public school studied has a positive record that they should be sharing with community residents.
Implications for practice

The studied district might consider that homeschool parents’ focus on educational quality could be tied to an unspoken belief that the homeschool students are highly capable learners and have capacities above the level of average public school students. Research discussed in Chapter two illustrates that there is a public perception, driven by researchers with homeschool advocacy groups, that homeschoolers are successful learners. Well-educated parents, who are very invested in their children, may assume that their children need instruction above the average level. The public school district studied has limited gifted and talented programming and increasing such programs may build a public school program that current or potential homeschoolers may view as having higher educational quality. School districts that have accelerated, gifted and talented, or other enrichment programs would be wise to take every opportunity to make the public aware of such programs.

If homeschool parents’ definition of educational quality includes factors such as national achievement and college acceptance, the public school in question and other school districts may be able to examine how information on successes of public school students is disseminated to the community. While parents claimed that media information did not positively influence their view of public schools, it would seem important to publicize situations in which public school students were highly successful. Additionally, at least two homeschoolers interviewed discussed situations in which they personally met and were strongly influenced by interactions with homeschool students. If personal contact with articulate and admirable homeschool students influenced parents to homeschool, perhaps personal contact with articulate and admirable public school
students is needed to demonstrate successes in public education. A previous section of this chapter mentioned opportunities for public school students to be in the community, such as in career shadowing or community service. Additionally, either district officials or individual students could invite homeschool families to annual events such as senior expositions, project nights, or science fairs where exemplary student achievement is demonstrated. Public school students could be the best advertisement there is for the public education system, just as homeschoolers were influential in encouraging families to homeschool.

Some homeschooled students eventually rejoin traditional schools. Another way that public schools, including the studied district, could demonstrate increased openness to homeschoolers would be to prepare a transition program to assist in the entry of homeschoolers. Research about student reintroduction into public schools identified areas of adjustment to be social acquaintances, experience with conventional schools organizations and facing challenges to personal values and beliefs (Romanowski, 2002). Students reported that having previous acquaintances with those who attend public schools eased their transition. These relationships usually developed by mutual participation on community sports teams (Romanowski, 2002). Public schools can capitalize upon this by attempting to place previously homeschooled students with a known peer. To facilitate the transition from homeschool to traditional school venues, parents and school officials need to discuss and explicitly teach students about school rules, routines and procedures since students may have limited or no knowledge of conventional schooling. Public schools also should plan to provide supportive student services to give homeschoolers assistance with new situations that may challenge their
values and beliefs. A reintroduction plan could be a tool for school officials to develop to indicate their openness to students returning after having experienced homeschooling.

Policy considerations

Homeschoolers in New York State do not receive a high school diploma although other states give local school districts the option of granting diplomas or conferring high school diplomas to homeschoolers based on standardized test scores. Some writers in the field of homeschooling, such as Pearson (2002), suggest that public education systems have responsibilities to provide homeschoolers with the ability to obtain high school diplomas and this could lead to development of exit standards for homeschoolers. To monitor progress toward exit standards, state education departments would have to identify effective homeschool programs, enforce monitoring of homeschooling and require documentation of academic progress. This would ultimately lead to having homeschooling programs under the direction of state departments of education. Homeschool families and public educators need to decide if this is the desired direction for the future of home-public school interaction. This change would be consistent with increased output accountability required of public schools but it may evoke opposition for homeschool advocacy groups that object to moves that increase state oversight of homeschooling.

State laws define the degree to which public schools can forge cooperative relationships with homeschoolers. State regulations, case law and state attorney general opinions currently demonstrate a trend toward less restrictive, more cooperative relationships but major alterations of public-homeschool interaction require legislative changes. Different states permit different degrees of homeschool access to public school
services. The district under study, in New York State, has very limited homeschool interaction. The public school maintains records of self-identified homeschoolers, requests and maintains annual homeschool plans and quarterly progress reports, and collects standardized assessment data when submitted by parents. The District reminds parents of their obligations but does not actively seek any homeschooler who does not self-identify, nor do they offer any judgment of quality of homeschool programs. The public school offers homeschoolers the opportunity to participate in State testing conducted at the public school, but otherwise does not enforce the regulations for the provision of standardized test information. The only recourse provided for enforcement of homeschool regulations is to file charges of education neglect against parents through the child abuse and neglect system of Child Protective Services. Though the district has utilized this avenue in a few cases, it has proven to be ineffective in increasing parental compliance with homeschool regulation. Currently, the relationship between homeschoolers and the public school district is largely one of district responsibility to assure compliance with State regulations governing homeschooling, without any enforcement ability. A total change in the purpose of the relationship between the public school and homeschoolers could be considered as part of the district’s effort to encourage current or potential homeschoolers to reconsider if the public school could serve student needs, but legislation changes would be needed.

A new relationship between the public school and homeschoolers would require attention from decision makers such as the State Education Department, board of education and school administrators. Increased cooperative interaction could allow homeschool students to participate in some school classes or activities but currently dual
enrollment status is prohibited. Public schools might serve as a resource center to share the wealth of teaching materials, books, videos, maps, CDs and computer programs that are owned by the public school. Homeschool students could be allowed to access facilities such as science labs, technology labs, performance arenas, or physical education venues during times that would not conflict with existing public school instructional periods. Expert instructors could be made available as resources for homeschool instructors. Specialized services such as counseling, speech therapy or psychological evaluations could be offered to homeschoolers, possibly at no increased cost to local districts. If the school district under study created new opportunities for cooperation with homeschoolers, it would be allowing current homeschoolers to see some of the educational quality that they might not be aware of and could establish a new attitude of public school responsibility for all students.

A December 5, 2007 Wisconsin appeals court ruling illustrates how conflicts between creative programming and public-homeschool cooperation can be thwarted by state policy (Johnson v. Burmaster, 2007). Wisconsin Virtual Academy is an 800 student online public school that allows students to study at home under the direction of their parents. Wisconsin has other online schools that enroll thousands of students. The virtual schools in Wisconsin are popular with families who prefer to homeschool, but they are opposed by public school unions and other critics who contend that uncertified parents are teaching students in publicly funded schools. The public school collects state funds for students attending the virtual schools even though students are not physically attending the school. Students enrolled are often from outside of the geographic boundaries of the public school that claims the virtual school students as attendees. That
causes conflict with educational regulations requiring students to attend the public school in their residency area. The December ruling found that the Wisconsin Virtual Academy violated state laws in the areas of teacher licensing, funding and enrollment laws. Unfortunately this case did not examine if the virtual schools produced well-educated students or if the virtual schools allowed a mutually beneficial relationship between homeschoolers and professional educators; it merely examined the conflicts between current state regulations and one attempt at creative programming. The Wisconsin case is an example of the need for policy makers to be part of changes to allow for more productive, cooperative interchanges between homeschoolers and public schools.

One overriding lesson for public policy makers to learn from this study is that homeschoolers are able to provide an educational program that well-educated, involved parents find to be at least satisfactory, if not high quality, with a minimum of cost and governmental regulation. Homeschooling is saving tax payers a considerable sum of money by not requiring per pupil expenditures in public schools, but homeschooling is also, therefore, costing public facilities a considerable amount of money by removing those students from rosters and by not generating per pupil state and federal dollars. If private school families are potential recipients of voucher funds, then homeschool families should also be considered for possible tax reductions or rebates considering the model of economy and effectiveness homeschooling presents. Although homeschooling is neither desirable nor possible for all families, it appears to be a relatively inexpensive and successful system for those who do participate.

The fact that some families have chosen not to participate in public education does not remove the responsibility that each state, and consequently each school district,
has for the education of all children. State officials, local school districts, and
homeschoolers could develop a new vision of public responsibility for education that still
maintains respect for parental control. Such changes could help homeschoolers become
more invested in the local school district, where they in fact are tax payers.

Possible future scenarios

A reasonable future-based scenario could anticipate that homeschooling will
continue to grow as new technologies make it easier to locate educational resources and
to simplify record keeping. Homeschooling parents will be well-educated people who
believe the public school is not adequate for their children. Upper-middle and upper class
mothers, who delay child rearing through their own education and early professional
years, may view homeschooling as the height of selflessness and child-centered families.
Homeschooling in the future may be just another modern convenience, conducted within
the confines of a cyber-connected smart home, by mothers who are well-informed and
concerned about their own children above all else. Homeschooling could be a badge of
honor, and possibly a new status symbol, for well-educated, well-to-do mothers who
revel in staying home to personally direct their children’s development and care. Of
course, this would lead to an extreme socio-economic polarity between families that are
able to homeschool and families that are left behind in a global, intelligence-commodity
economy. The latter may not be able to devote their lives selflessly to educating their
children due to being relegated to low-paying jobs and lack of opportunity for
undereducated parents.

A dramatic increase of homeschooling, combined with other possible future
scenarios of virtual schools, charter schools and increases in immigrant populations could
change the population of public schools. A homeschool population that drains students from educated, affluent homes will result in public schools with a higher proportion of poor and new immigrant families. That would increase class demarcations, and could increase demands on public education, especially in urban areas.

There is a hidden, but fast growing, group of parents that are currently using private tutors to homeschool their children and this model may be an area for future growth in homeschooling. This is a throwback to the days of governesses or private tutors for the elite. Wealthy families, those who travel, or parents who are not confident or interested in being their child’s primary instructor can still remove their child from a traditional school if they have educational, social or philosophical concerns. Private at-home tutoring can provide unparalleled individual attention and flexibility for families that can pay for the service. Companies such as Professional Tutors of American with 6060 teachers in 14 states, On Location Education based in Manhattan, and Partners with Parents, all report that demand for their tutoring services for homeschoolets is growing (Saulny, 2006). This trend may increase the rate of homeschooling in wealthier families.

Homeschooling will continue to be facilitated by new technology including increased availability of broadband internet access and increased educational materials online. The internet will allow homeschoolers or like-visioned individuals to be brought together for interactive instruction or dialogue. Entrepreneurs will undoubtedly continue to provide new computerized learning tools and even access to online instructors, thereby further easing the parental burden of homeschooling and increasing its attractiveness.
Recommendations for additional study

There are good reasons to be suspicious about research comparing student achievement between homeschoolers and traditional school students since there are no assurances of comparable testing conditions, levels of student participation, or sample selection. Having said that, many studies find that homeschool students outperform peers (Basham, 2007; Rudner, 1999). The issue of homeschool students’ achievement was intentionally not included in this study. High quality research on the educational performance of homeschoolers is needed. Information provided by parental interviews suggested that homeschoolers have more difficulty providing instruction in some areas than in other. Additionally, observation of homeschool portfolios suggests to this researcher that many homeschool programs are much stronger in language arts and fine arts than in math and science. An investigation of relative strength of homeschoolers could look at differences in competency among subject areas, perhaps in relation to strengths of the parent or instructor. Since public schools are being pressed with regulations for highly qualified teachers, an interesting question is what is the effect of unregulated parent credentials on homeschoolers’ academic achievement?

A logical area of subsequent study specific to the target district in this study would be the factors influencing parent decision making to choose private schools over public schools or homeschooling. There are more private school students than homeschoolers in the studied district and a replication of this study with the private school population is a logical next step in answering the district’s questions about why residents opt-out of the public school system.
The homeschool parents studied established educational quality as a primary motivator in deciding to homeschool. Further study is needed to examine homeschool parents' description of educational quality. This study found parents described their vision of the desired homeschool program to be fairly typical of traditional educational curricula. Although parents reject time frames and restrictive physical settings, they seem to accept conventional curricula and, for many, even the use of standardized testing.

Since parents in this study rated educational quality as such an important factor in choosing to homeschool, a correlation study could be done comparing homeschool populations in the highest performing and lowest performing public school districts. If quality of education is the driving reason for homeschoolers, is the rate of homeschooling higher in low performing district and lowest in high performing districts?

Finally, interesting questions could be answered by locating families that considered homeschooling and decided to utilize public school services instead. What influenced the decision to select public schools and what information sources informed that decision?

Closing

This study found that homeschooling is an expression of core values of freedom, personal liberty and respect for education. It epitomizes the decentralization and choice movements that are part of the current educational landscape. Homeschooling achieves what many charter schools strive for—quality educational output with relaxation of regulations, imposed structures and governmental oversight. The lessened regulation of homeschooling allows for increased flexibility and autonomy of the homeschooling family and creates greater commitment and, ultimately, satisfaction with the educational
Homeschoolers have strong personal commitment to the program that they create and deliver and, therefore, they believe their program to be successful. There was no suggestion of inadequate quality or effort in the homeschoolers interviewed; however, the lack of any degree of public oversight or accountability illustrates that there is a huge potential for abuse. It is clear that families could say they are homeschooling but could neglect to provide any services and the children would be hidden from the usual systems of public protection such as mandatory reporting of child abuse or neglect. The potential for educational neglect in homeschooling is very real even though this study found no suggestion that any neglect is taking place. Homeschool organizations, such as the HSLDA, have lobbied strenuously against state efforts to increase oversight of homeschooling and research has demonstrated that states that have higher levels of homeschool regulation do not demonstrate any higher educational outcomes for homeschoolers than states with the lowest levels of regulation (Ray, 1997). Therefore, governmental oversight is not shown to produce better homeschooling outputs for those who are registered homeschoolers, but the current system has the potential for unscrupulous parents to neglect and isolate their children.

Currently, about 2.2% of the school-aged population of the United States is being educated at home and does not attend public or private schools. Parents who homeschool are committed to removing their children from a bureaucratic system that many found did not serve their own needs well. Homeschoolers desire more parental control over educational decisions, a relaxation of imposed educational structures such as time frames, more individual decision making rather than group planning, and high expectations for academic achievement. All of these values are inherently consistent with public education
and public schools can be responsive to parent desires for such changes. Public schools that continue to decentralize, utilize local and shared decision making, give parents a strong voice, create flexible learning environments, and individualized and diversified programming, will not only continue to create better public education systems but will make those systems more attractive to families that may consider alternate educational choices. Continuous improvement will allow public schools to maintain a population base in the coming era of increased educational competition and increased family choice.

While this study has limitations to generalizability, other districts may or may not find that these results apply to homeschoolers in their location. However, in all geographic locations it is unlikely that there is a single structure of future public education. The realities of strong parental opinions, increasing diversity, rapidly advancing technology, and increased governmental control suggest that the many forces at work will conceive a number of different future realities for public education. Public education, to fulfill the responsibility of creating educational opportunities for all, must maintain the support of communities that, under current property-tax systems, vote to support the public school system.
References


Johnson v. Burnmaster, Appeal No. 2006AP1380 (Court of Appeals District II December 5, 2007).


Seversky, P.M. (2006, August). Chatham Central School


Appendix A

Homeschool Interview Protocol
Homeschool Interview Protocol

A. Introduce self
   a. explain that you won’t refer to them by name during taping

B. Informed Consent
   a. get signature
   b. give participant copy

C. “I’m trying to get a very complete picture, in your own words, of your decision to homeschool. If any of my questions are intrusive or offensive, please just say that you don’t want to answer. Are you ready to start?”

D. Start recording

1. We are here to talk about your homeschool experience. Could we start with you giving me a general overview- who you homeschool and how long you have done it for?

2. What is your vision of the homeschool program you want to provide?

3. How is your homeschool program different from what your child would do in the local public school?

4. What aspects of participating the public school experience, if any, would concern you in relation to your own child?
   a. Prompt, if needed:

   What parts of participating in public school, if any, would not be suitable for your child?

5. What are some characteristics of a high quality homeschool program?
   a. Prompts, if needed:
hours/day
days/week
10-12 months
physical location/needs
amount of choice student has in curriculum
testing
assessment of student achievement/progress

b. Would you sign permission for me to look at your homeschool plan?

If yes, get signature now.

6. Do you participate in The Alternate Learning Center (TALC)?

a. Prompts, if participate in TALC:

  frequency and duration

  specific programs

b. If yes, did the availability of TALC support influence your decision to homeschool?

7. What are the reasons that caused you to decide to homeschool?

a. prompts, if needed:

Who had input in the decision?

  When did you first consider homeschooling?

  Did you ever consider/use/evaluate the public school?

8. You identified your reasons for homeschooling as ..., would you rank the importance of those reasons?

9. What is your impression of the local public school?
10. How did you know about public schools before you decided to homeschool?

a. Prompts, if needed:

Did any children in the family ever attend public school?

Did the parent attend public school?

What was the parent’s satisfaction with their own experience?

Have they been in the public school recently?

Did other parents or kids talk to them about public schools?

Did they read about schools in the newspaper or see it on TV?

11. My last series of questions are about you and your family and are more factual in nature so these will be quick. Please just say pass if you choose not to answer any of these questions.

a. Who lives in your home and what are their approximate ages?

b. Where were you born? Your spouse? (Country if not US, state if in US)

c. What is the primary language spoken in your home?

d. What was the highest year of schooling that you completed? Your spouse? (If 14a indicated a spouse)

e. How would you describe your political views? Your spouse’s views?

f. Do you regularly attend any organized religious group? Which?

g. What town do you live in?

h. Do you own or rent a home?

i. What would you estimate the value of the home you live in to be?

k. Have you lived in that same home for more than or less than 5 years?

l. What is your occupation? Your spouse’s occupation?
m. What is your average family income, within a range?

n. How many vehicles does your family have?

12. Those are the questions our research team has planned. To close, what question should I have asked that I didn’t, in order to get a full understanding of why and how you decided to homeschool?

13. Is there anything else you would like to add?
Appendix B

Transcripts of Interviews
Interview A

08-17-07

Q: Could we start with you giving me a general overview- who you homeschool and how long you have done it for?

One year, and I have two boys, a kindergartener and a first grader.

Q: What is your vision of the homeschool program you want to provide?

I want them just to learn the basics of reading, writing, and math and a reasonable amount of history and I want to focus on how to do critical thinking and how to think for themselves.

Q: How is your homeschool program different from what your child would do in the local public school?

That would be really difficult to answer but, um, my focus is to get the school work done so we can get outside and work. We just get through it as quickly and efficiently as we can so I don’t burn them out. If it looks like I’m losing their concentration we get up and get a snack. The focus is to get done and get out.

Q: What aspects of participating in the public school experience, if any, would concern you in relation to your own child?

Well, we are not interested in letting the public school do the socialize aspect. We want to give them a foundation of what we believe in before we turn them loose and let the world socialize the practice on them. So we, we expose them to the outside
world and they are going to see a lot of people who swear and alcoholism. But, it's all controlled. I'm not prepared to put my kid on a bus and see him in eight hours and have someone else do it for me.

We know who they are in contract with, how long they are with them and I try to keep track, to a certain extent, of what goes on in those interactions. So if there is anything that is a little, you know, a little bit bizarre or moral or whatever then we can talk about it.

Q: What are some characteristics of a high quality homeschool program; for example, number of hours per day, day per week, months per year, location or content?

Characteristics of your program?

Because I'm so new at it I don't think I'm qualified to give a good answer except that, um, my sister and my friend, they homeschool for religious reasons and I am using their programs. And I'm using a lot of Christian curriculum, not because I'm a Christian but because there are some good books.

In the history and science is the most problematic for religious reasons but I want to teach them basics. I want to stimulate them with outer space stuff and automation and real stuff. And in this program you give it to them in the living room or kitchen.

I'm really as [inaudible], but I'm just taking one year at a time. As the years go on I'll be better. I was not planning on using as much of their material as I am but for a lack of better alternative I am. When we get to a spot where it's clearly religious, I always offer what the other alternatives are. And make it clear that this is just one of many.
Q: How many hours a day do your children typically work?

[Proper name omitted], my mother-in-law helps with his kindergarten lessons, and I would do his lessons when we were doing music. [Proper name omitted] takes about two and a half hours, three at the most to do a whole day’s work of first grade work. That’s where, that’s where the rip off is in the public school. They take six, seven, whatever it is six hours and we can meet it academically in two, two and a half hours and that’s considering if you include a story at night. But the academic stuff is accomplished so quick that it’s such a rip off to pack your children to school.

We are supposed to do five days a week and I try my best but there were occasions, especially in the beginning of the year. I’m a landscaper and I get rid of clients every year but I am a landscaper and I would have to work on a Friday or a Monday and in the spring I have too much work. But I don’t think we can afford to do that now, I think you have to be more strict and do it all in the morning.

Q: How much choice do your boys have about what they study?

They have, have not much choice in the curriculum. If they have a lot of aptitude then I’m going to bump them up to a more, a sophisticated vocabulary program that I think they are ready for.

Q: Do you do any standardized testing?

I am totally against testing and it is going to become more of an issue later on but I think to test a first grader it is kind of crazy. It is usually by skills. The first quarter I was brand new so I actually added up all the test scores and I said ‘this is ridiculous.’
The kids have almost 100 on everything; they don’t do bad on anything. So if all the grades are in the A range then the grade is an A and I’m not going to lose any sleep over it. That’s it. I’m not going to put myself out grading them. I go through the book and they go through the curriculum and they go through the books and approve the curriculum. But if they approve them and they do well, so far we have not had a problem with them not being able to catch on to any stuff and I hope there never is. But I guess at that point it may be more important we would have to do achievement tests. The schools do that in third grade but that is going to be out of my control and I might have to submit to what the state wants me to do. If there is something he doesn’t want to do then he should have to satisfy his mother instead of satisfying a state requirement.

Q: Do you participate in the alternate learning center (TALC)?

Nope.

Q: What are the reasons that caused you to decide to homeschool?

My husband and I for opposite reasons both had bad school experiences. He was shy and an outdoors person and he hated school. He basically suffered through it and graduated but never enjoyed it. And I got in a lot of trouble in school and I was bored and then later on, you know, made mischief. And although I was a good student and got very good grades, I hated the public school experience. I hated it.
And because we both hated it, it seemed really stupid if we put our kids through it. So we wanted to avoid that. And then there's the social aspect that we are not at all enthusiastic about what is going on in the kid's world right now with the game boys and cell phones and the computer stuff. We realize we can't raise our children under a rock and I think it is already working that if we can give them 6 or 7 years of just a normal childhood, playing on the fence, in a creek or playing in mud or cutting down wheat, helping daddy with fire wood. You know, by the time they are exposed to all that stuff they will be better grounded and won't be as susceptible to trends or fads which I think are destructive to our society, real destructive.

My sister, [proper name omitted], she homeschooled and she has five kids and has homeschooled them all of them all along. And we were, at first, critical of her decision but then after I had kids and started thinking about, you know, sending them to school and I thought 'no.' So then I used her for support, you know.

Q: Did you ever consider a public school?

I got married late, I'm 41. I got married late and neither one of us had a good childhood. Neither one of us thought about it. I never even thought about it until it was imminent [inaudible]. I never considered myself even capable of doing it but my sister did. And I know that she is not, not to be derogatory, she is no more intelligent, I mean she's smart, then I am, so I thought if she can do it I can.

Q: Would you rank the importance of your reasons to homeschool?
The first reason is socialization. I don't want the schools to socialize our children and that's probably the biggest reason. They probably would do a good job academically like teaching them your reading, your writing and your math and they can probably offer them a lot of better things that are things that I can't, or I will, but I don't want that trade off in order to have a good social background. It's like the school proved in my case that they educated me very well but socially I was a mess. So, just because I picked up more knowledge later but, a good moral or social background, there's no replacement.

No, my public school experience was not good.

Q: Have you been in a public school lately?

When we decided to homeschool the [proper name omitted] district tries in, you know, a slightly subtle fashion to encourage you not, not to by asking you why don't you want to. What are you...

They are very helpful and want to know what your questions or concerns are and invited us for a tour of the school. I took advantage of and I took [proper name omitted] with me and toured. We toured the classrooms and saw what they were doing and it wasn't excellent. So we did tour the schools but that didn't have any effect on my decision at all and I was kinda hoping that it wouldn't. It would of made me feel bad if [proper name omitted] really wanted to go and I didn't. So I thought it was really brainwashing but, you know, I think they brainwash them or convince them. I think it is really brainwashing.
But I believe that we are doing the right thing. And he believes that I make good decisions so he believes that I’ve taken the right road. But it really is brainwashing. They were never, never inclined to the public school. They know their father hated school and they knew I, I still that to this day when I see the buses, when I see the little kids lined up going on the buses it breaks my heart. I see it as humiliation in the way of our country’s youth.

Q: Do you ever talk to parents whose kids go to the public school?

It makes people very defensive; they don’t like to talk about what their kids are doing. You see parents who could do more. It’s more selfish to go to work and sit behind a desk. I have to give up a lot to do this and I still do. And I think it makes parents defensive. Not that I would never say ‘why aren’t you doing this?’ They try to justify it and it’s always socialization. ‘How are they going to be socialized?’ If you ever see these kids on Main Street in [proper name omitted] and they talk to anyone about anything.

So, they’re not like aliens.

Q: Do you read in newspapers or see schools on TV?

All the time. People getting shot and drugs and sex and bombs. It is just not cool, awful. Bus accidents. It makes me wish I was not there. You have no idea what happens and they don’t always tell you. Of course not, maybe not on purpose but in their minds they are working on it and you don’t know if something really bad
happened or if they are being harassed or maybe they are harassing somebody else, you don’t know.

You don’t know.

Someone said, I think it was a homeschooler, and he said if he, he took a tomato plant and started it in seed and it just started to grow, why would you take that plant when it is still shooting and put it out in the garden before it was ready to grow? And I think that is a good analogy for homeschooling. You had your child and you aren’t ready to put it out for six, seven hours a day. Think about it. It doesn’t make sense. Why would you really do that? I mean, at some point later on in their life it might become important that they do go to school if I can’t remember past them. [Proper name omitted], I’m afraid might be too smart and he asks a lot of questions and he’s interested in [inaudible] and he likes to play instruments. And I don’t know how long I’ll be able to do justice and as soon as it looks like I am not, then the scales will tip again. And we, in the past, might watch if he has to get a better education. We’ll have to watch that. [Proper name omitted] is 7 and [proper name omitted] is 6 and they are very different. [Proper name omitted] learned to read so fast. He learns so fast. Like his grandfather is a really intelligent biochemist so he might have some advantages in high school and I don’t want to be, you know, responsible for stunting or, you know, ruining him because I have my own selfish hang-ups about socialization. I can’t do that to him. So we are going to watch it and I think deal with it and he might have to go to the public school. I mean that wouldn’t be the end of the world but at this point we hope to make it to sixth grade.
Q: Demographics—answers omitted from transcript. See Appendix C

Q: Those are the questions our research team has planned. To close, what question should I have asked that I didn’t, in order to get a full understanding of why and how you decided to homeschool?

It might not be a bad idea for college educated people to find out more about what our majors are, like if everybody was an English major. Mine was [inaudible] science. That might be an interesting thread to follow. How we are doing. And maybe, also, if the person being interviewed was homeschooled might be interesting. It will be interesting if more people in the future who were homeschooled homeschool their children.
Interview B
08-17-07

Q: Could we start with you giving me a general overview of who you homeschool and how long you have done it for?

Yes, I homeschool my two children my son and my daughter. My daughter is seventeen and a half now and I started homeschooling in fifth grade. She is pretty much about done with high school now. She is taking courses at community college. And my son is 13 and I homeschooled him since, let’s see, he went to preschool and had a really bad experience, um, so I found a sort of Waldorf preschool in the home sort of thing for him. I was thinking of homeschooling him but I can get into that later.

He had a terrible experience and it was the only school experience he ever had and it was this absolutely awful preschool teacher.

So I made an effort to find something else and it was a Waldorf kindergarten. So it was really not academic but in the afternoon I came back and did the academics with him. So the reason I did that is so his only school experience would not be this terrible. He’s going into 8th grade. I’m glad that I’m homeschooling, so glad.

Q: What is your vision of the homeschool program you want to provide?

Well, I would say it is to [inaudible], I want to, I’m not the kind of homeschooler who goes with whatever the kid does and that’s it. I have a sense of a responsibility of providing them with an education that’s well-rounded. However, I definitely follow
their interest and their way of wanting to learn things. That is very important to me. So sometimes I say you have to learn, you know you have to do this subject even if you hate it but I try to, you know, find a way that it will be interesting and fun and they'll be able to learn. And I don't know if that is good or bad. So it is kind of a combination. I guess I feel responsible for that, but my motto is never boring. Like I'm not, like, you have to do your spelling you just have to, I don't want to be ever like that.

Q: How is your homeschool program different from what your child would do in the local public school?

Hum, um, it's incredibly individualized. And it's challenging. It's respectful of, um, their needs; of them as people. I'm not saying the whole system would not be acceptable but challenging is very, very important, [inaudible], knowing who they are.

Q: What are the reasons that caused you to decide to homeschool?

Well, the reason we went to homeschooling is the unsuitability of the private school so I guess I can talk about that. I went to a public school that I felt comfortable with and I was told the, the district, um, was [inaudible], but what I found was, when I sent my daughter, let's see she went to kindergarten and it was half day at that time, it wasn't half day by the time my son was going. I definitely, I didn't want to do that whole day thing. I always felt, well they'll go to public school and whatever they don't get, well I'm a teacher and my husband's a teacher and we can, you know,
enrich and they'll be fine. However, what happens is she was really tired after and she
didn't want anything to do with it. You know she'd had it. Kindergarten was OK. It
was OK; it was half day and the bus it was a kindergarten bus going home which
helped. She is a very shy kid and very intelligent. It was OK. First grade, um, was
another story and it was all day, of course. She went on the bus and was in a gym
waiting on line to get on the bus, with kids stepping on her and kids not listening to
whoever, you know, was supervising. They get whatever they want and she started
coming home and saying things about her experience. And here she is six or seven.
Like you know, 'mom they tell them one thing, like you can't get on the bus unless
you do so and so, and the kids don't do that and they let them on the bus anyway.'
And you have a little kid saying this. You know a lot of discipline things like that.
She is also is the kind of person who likes to watch people and so I remember going
to a teacher conference. The teacher was a good person, a good person and she said
'she's not doing well in math.' And I knew she was really into math. I said, 'what's
that about' and I looked at some papers. She is probably sitting there and looking at
these kids and she's much more interested in who's getting in trouble. So we said,
'what can we do' and we find out there is no curriculum for math. They had gotten rid
of the old curriculum and they had not gotten a new one yet. You don't do that.
And then when we went to second grade you couldn't pick the teachers. You had no
choice of teachers. So, my husband went in and wanted to just observe. And he was
told he could only observe a certain time of the day with a certain head teacher and I
think only for a certain time. And he wasn't very impressed with what was happening
and they picked what he got to see! And he wasn't going to get to choose her
anyway! It was not OK. And so she actually went to a private school that was a pretty long hike and it was a little school and it was a private school. And there is a whole problem with private schools where there isn’t a union to make sure teachers are [inaudible] and teachers were let go for political, social and the whims of the principal.

And I just had it. And I said, ‘I can do this and I had this little child here and I am home anyway’ and I did it, you know, year by year. I never sorta really went, you know, I never was into it.

This was ridiculous. That’s how I first started doing it.

Now what was the question?

Right, it wasn’t challenging and we as a parent didn’t really have much say about what was going on and the behaviors were ridiculous and distracting to my daughter. And even in the private school I noticed the, you know, waste of time. You know the waste of time, you know you have a whole half hour and you are just sort of sitting there.

Q: What are some characteristics of your homeschool program, like hours per day, days per week, months per year?

We have to do a certain amount of hours, just so you know. When we first started I had a wonderful friend who helped me out and kept track of any, like, any educational thing you had to do. I sort of made it up. I did that for, like, the first half year and the first year. I, um, felt totally comfortable with what I’m doing. This is honest but, [inaudible]. So I always say I do the hours but I don’t keep track of every
single hour. What I try to do, for my kids, is that my daughter is pretty much self-taught. We say, like, mornings are more school work and more field trips and discussions are included. And part of it is my philosophy and in addition to this, you know, your life is learning and it actually, you learn it in life. It’s not like sectioned off when you go to school to learn and come home to goof off.

When my son was little so he always homeschooled, he never went to first grade. He probably could have done it. I never thought I was homeschooling. He could have walked into kindergarten and been fine. I was a preschool teacher and I would have never said that. I think he might have done better. He is the kind of kid that you think you should send him out in a group because he always wanted to be with me. If he had been allowed to be with me he would have been more secure by the time.

He was also very active. So when he was younger he actually would sit down and I also would be working with my daughter on table things. When he was done, he would get up and throw a ball against the wall, or play some wild ball game inside and we would come back and do more. And I often thought, ‘how could he ever gotten the things he needed’, you know?

Now I’ll go back to my daughter. My daughter started in fifth grade and she already, um, you know how they like school ideas and sitting. She, we went through a time when she felt [inaudible] because, even though I’m her mom, and she knows me really well, in school I was the teacher and I must know all the answers and I must be asking her questions because I just wanted to bug her, whereas, it wasn’t always that. It was like, ‘what do you think about this?’
So she went through a time where she just had to get through that. She was a very studious person so she would read this and do that. That wasn’t hard for her at all. She said, ‘if I ever homeschool my kids I would do it different’ and I said, ‘what would you do’? She said, ‘you would never let me anyway.’ She wanted to pick her own things. I said, ‘that sounds cool.’ I had to make these reports, you know, so there are certain things your dad and I think you have to learn, you know. And so she did that until eighth grade.

And my son he, you know, was a lot of sitting on the couch and reading together. He likes to read with me, together. He likes to read it and go back. He likes to read with somebody, sometimes outside.

Q: How much choice do your children have in the curriculum?

She definitely has a choice at a certain point, but there were definite parameters. Like you have to do a language, what language do you want to do? Or, um, I would say, they don’t so much have a choice about the subject matter but like my son is really into animals so we always have to do animals as part of science. But that doesn’t mean I wouldn’t do something else he doesn’t want to do.

Like I say, ‘you have to try tennis. You just have to try it, but if you didn’t like tennis anymore you would have to do something physical.’

Q: Do you do any standardized testing?

Maybe because I’m a teacher it is not that hard, I mean like, I work with them everyday, I sit there and I know what they are doing. Like, ‘can you write a
sentence?’ I know. My son actually, he likes tests, but, um, early on, because you have to give tests if you go through a school system you have to give a test. So I know people who don’t. So my daughter takes tests but he, I got it from the school. You don’t have to until fifth grade and I asked about it in second or third and I looked at the test and I thought, ‘wow he would not know what to do.’ It was like an essay thing where you have to read, I don’t know, the questions and it was about wolves. So I read it to him and he would be thinking about all of the stuff he knows about wolves. What they really were doing was reading comprehension so I thought he had to be told what it was about and how to take a test. I tell people about this and I get books and stuff on test prep. I read somewhere that the more you take those tests the better you do. I really, unbeknownst to them, you know, you are really smart people, but the powers that be are going to judge you by these tests. If you can’t take these tests or don’t do well on them don’t think you aren’t intelligent because you really are [inaudible].

Q: Do you participate in The Alternate Learning Center (TALC)?

I have used TALC.

Um, I think I would have done it anyway. I think I would have started anyway because I felt like I had to. However it was very helpful. I didn’t want the kids to sit around the table and never see, you know, other kids. I don’t think that vision of homeschooling isn’t real good and my kids are shy and it meant a lot to them. It took them a while. It was really great to see the same kids and get to know the parents and to know the parents in that particular group were really interested in the kids. So they
got to know the grown-ups and the kids and to feel comfortable and they came out really well-rounded and it was a positive experience.

Q: What are the reasons you decided to homeschool and who had input in the decision?

I homeschooled my son, um, I’m thinking I started with him first when she was still at the private school which was nice for me because I only had one kid to teach. It was helpful. It was sort of more manageable and you kind of get your feet wet. And they had, you know, it was my husband and I, you know, I mean [inaudible]. My son was happy because he had a [inaudible]. My son just went to pre-K and it was at a private pre-K. So he was fine with it. I remember once walking to the alternate learning center, and a school bus went by, this was like downstreet, and he looked at this building and he walked in to the building and he was like, ahhh, why. So I felt good about it. It was like a commercial.

My daughter, because the private school had gotten bad, she was, you know, it was not hard for her. The private school, it was really horrible. She couldn’t get [inaudible] at the public school. It was horrible, horrible. Where am I?

She, at a high school level, thought about going to the high school because of the social. She was wishing she had more of a social life. Not that she doesn’t, she kind of does, but to have more of a scope and meet more people.

She did the Shakespeare and Company at the high school. It was really great. The school is really good about letting kids participate in things they wanted to. So, um, athletics is against the law for them to do that. But with that, she got a feel for it and
she realized she didn’t really want to go to high school. She really wouldn’t want to be here with him.

Q: Would you rank the importance of your reasons to homeschool?

It is just like; I thought there was a decision thing then and evolution phase. The most important reason was that my daughter wasn’t getting the education that I thought she deserved and should get. And though it has been a hardship financially, it was something we could do, um, and I wouldn’t have felt right not doing it.

As it evolved, we learned as it came, because I feel like when I decided to like I had no choice it was when I had to do it, ‘I think it will be better.’ But I sort of went, ‘well it is one year at a time and we will decide at the end of the year if it was ok then we’ll do this again.’ As I homeschool them I realize from my reactions that it worked totally and perfect and, with my son, he responded perfectly. He would do some work and then come back wanting to do something at the table. It wasn’t a forced thing.

And also just, they, I think they, it is the right thing for them, for their lives and for who they are. We discovered how individualized it could be. How rich and incredible it is. Like you can’t go back. If they said they wanted to go back, if they said ‘I want to go back’ I could find a school or something, but this was the richest thing.

Q: What is your impression of the local public school?

Um, it is not what it is supposed to be, um.
If you read their mission statement it sounds really great but you know you can write a mission statement. You can say whatever you want and it doesn’t mean it’s happening in any way, shape or form. So you know, yeah.

Q: How did you know about public schools before you decided to homeschool?
We both went to public schools for years and I, I student taught in a public school. My husband teaches in a public school. I wouldn’t say he was satisfied with his education. I wasn’t real satisfied. I became a teacher and I didn’t want to teach in a public school. I thought it was, like, too much sort of authority and power trips and you just had to go along. I don’t think I could. It would be really hard for me to work in that environment and my husband does but the school district lets him have a lot of freedom. Our kids could actually go to his district but he knows the sort of unevenness of the system and it is kinda weird politically, like to say, ‘there is nobody in fourth grade I want my kids to have so we are taking them out for that year.’

Q: Do other parents with kids in public school discuss it with you?
I have some friends, far away, that use public school. But I know people who homeschool and their kids then went to public school, parents who formerly had their kids in public school and decided to take their kids out. We had a little bit of discussion. I have one friend who homeschooled her child for a year [inaudible] with what’s happening in public school. She is going [inaudible]. So she would be understanding of why I homeschool. And another friend she sort of, how do I put it, I
don't know if she, she wishes she could homeschool her kids but she definitely isn't going to do that. She has a career and she wouldn't do that. So there is a little tension about not wanting to complain about that. And the public school might be fun. I've heard bad things that she's told me. The same thing is if they have a good teacher and everything is fine and then you have a child, like, who doesn't get along with the teacher. The teacher might not be as good a teacher and there is the whole problem. And there is a child in this situation all day long. Day after day. She is the kind of person who goes in and talks. She is not like hands off or anything but there is only so much you can do.

Q: Do you read about public schools in newspapers or on local TV?
I read about it, watch the news, and my husband's a teacher in the schools.

Q: Demographics-answers omitted from transcript. See Appendix C

Q: Those are the questions our research team has planned. To close, what question should I have asked that I didn't, in order to get a full understanding of why and how you decided to homeschool?
No, I think you covered it.
Interview C
08-20-07
Telephone interview

Q: We are here to talk about your homeschool experience. Could we start with you giving me a general overview- who you homeschool and how long you have done it for?
My daughter [proper name omitted] she’ll be 10 in September and we have always homeschooled.

Q: What is your vision of the homeschool program you want to provide?
Um, let me say that is an interesting question. I think I would have to say that we are a little bit in between, um, we seem to tend toward unschooling and she does a lot of things at this point that are outside of the home. You know, gymnastics, art and pottery classes, she does chorus, she does history with a bunch of other kids. We are part of a network that you have probably heard of, The Alternate Learning Center, and so,
so she does a full day of homeschool program In The Woods, with a nature educator. So I guess what she gets, what I want to give her is, the idea is to provide her with a lot of stuff from the outside that I can’t give her, specific kinds of skills and also really knowledgeable teachers. And then another part of that vision, I guess, is for her to make a lot of those choices. What is is that she wants from the outside world.
Q: How is your homeschool program different from what your child would do in the local public school?

Well honestly, I'm afraid that I can't say since we haven't really experienced it but my own public school experience was, um, you know not particularly fulfilling or exciting. So and I think what we do is she would never do a full day outside in the woods from a public school. So I guess the freedom and a lot of it is about I give her freedom and a lot of it is about not being exposed to the kind of rote aspect of public schools and also, too, you know, because it is a more pressured social environment which I didn't want her to have to be part of and like she chose, we are kind of year by year homeschooling, unless there is a point that she says I'm ready to see what school is like. We are not going to keep her form doing that. We are just going to find a place that works for her.

Q: So the rote aspect of school wouldn't be suited to your child. Is that specific to her?

I think that is kind of true of a lot of kids but, yes, I think it was very specific to her. I mean, I think, when we started homeschooling we hadn't really planned one way or another but we started homeschooling because she didn't like to be around a lot of young kids. Some children like to be around other kids, overall, she didn't. She really liked being with her, you know, parents and her grandparents and was just not that comfortable with other little kids. So I wanted to give her the freedom to make, you know, those connections as she liked rather than having to adapt to the situation in
which she was, you know, with 10 or 12 or 20 other little kids every day. I don’t know if that quite answers your questions.

Q: What other aspects of participating in the public school experience would concern you for your own child?

She wasn’t interested socially and um, to start with. At this point, of course, she has made all those kind of connections in her own time. And I’m talking about when you would traditionally start school which would be 5 or 6. She was not at all at that place.

And also she is very much an [inaudible] type. When she was four or five she tried to study anatomy and she got all these books and some more advanced books and just taught herself all these things about the body. And the different parts of the body. And then she got a guinea pig when she was around 7 and she went through this huge period where she studied about guinea pigs and in books and everywhere and just sucked up information. And she recently went through a period where she wanted to know all about popular music. She never had never really, you know, gotten into about pop music and, you know, started to really tune into that. She studied the Beatles. And she doesn’t just study about it, she studied it, she read about it, she thought about it and listened to it, and she has very strong direction. They pound it out of you in the public school system. Because all the time you don’t go with what you are drawn to, you go with what is put on the table or what your teacher directs. I just loved that she has that and I wanted to encourage that.
Q: What are the characteristics of your homeschool program, like hours and days per week, all that is part of your plan.
Let's see, I think it also changes seasonally, of course. But um, during our basic two semesters, fall and spring, she would be at the um alternative learning center one to two days per week. Doing various classes there, usually there are, um, the um, more for fun like maybe 3-4 session classes as opposed to an ongoing thing. She has also been doing a group history class with, um, a teacher who is very dedicated to that, a lawyer, who is very knowledgeable about government and history and so on. And that is the, um, every day all fall and all spring, I'm sorry, every week all fall and all spring for about 3 hours and includes a literature component. The, um, study group component, homework and discussion group and final projects and stuff like that. Ah, then her sort of physical education stuff, which includes gymnastics once a week and dance classes and, let's see. She has the nature program which is once a week which is like a six hour day out in the woods, you know studying flora and fauna, and making um, you know, rope and other kinds of stuff out of natural, um, material. That is through Find Your Nature Center based in [proper name omitted]. They run a camp all summer and they run homeschool groups during the other seasons.
Ah, at home she takes classes at IS 183 maybe once a week for an hour and a half or so. She also does a ton of art on her own at home. The thing that we try to do at home right now is basically math because that is not provided out there in any form. So what we have been doing with that is trying to spend maybe a half hour, it probably, realistically, comes down to half an hour every other day, every three days or a couple per week, depending on how good we are that week, and, um, just working on
multiplication tables and long division. We teach basically fifth grade math. So we try to do that a couple hours per week if we add it all together with math, fractions and stuff like that. We used to do more science at home. Um, we would do these kits that we would get through the mail and that was maybe a couple hours a week or so, no maybe less than that 'cause we would get them once a month so maybe three hours per month on the kits. Her other science she gets through her nature program. You know we do a lot of reading, and you know she might, also reads. She does a lot of work with my parents who are both, they are close by. They live about ten minutes away. My dad is retired and my mom is a yoga teacher so they have a lot of time to spend with her and, um, you know they can help with math and science and whatever happens to come up. So it is a little bit sporadic in terms that we do not have a set schedule and we do not have a curriculum but a lot of stuff gets thrown into the mix.

Q: How would you describe the amount of choice she has in the curriculum?

She has a huge amount of choice. She definitely chooses all the outside activities. For that she, you know we try to keep the math going but she actually says that we should actually spend more time on math because that is an area we didn’t get to spend much time on in the spring. So she really instigated that.

Because of her personality it really works much better when she is the one who is driving it. It is just about everything. I kind of believe, philosophically, in the larger sense that, you know, they are going to catch on. I do have a very bright kid who is going to get things really fast so it allows me to be a bit of a slacker. She gets
everything so if she had issues or whatever I would probably have to be much more on top of it, but as it is, she gets so much for everything that I don’t feel like it’s up to me to be sure she gets this, that and the other thing because I know if she is inspired to do so she is going to be able to catch up like really fast. So that kind of cuts me some slack.

Q: Do you participate in The Alternate Learning Center (TALC)?
Actually, the history is no longer part of the Alternate Learning Center. It was for a long time but the teacher is no longer part of the organization so it is actually an independent class. But yeah, we are there a lot and she does a lot of, um, art stuff. Some classes that she signed up for this semester, there’s a basic logic and a basic aid, like first aid, um there’s, what else did she want to do? American Girl doll clothes. There is just some fun easy stuff and what else, a creative writing workshop. Another aspect of the homeschooling stuff she has done is, together with two other families, a total of five kids together, for about two years we have um, each taken a time doing, you know, a writing group and the kids write with prompts in the group and share what they have written with each other and we have done a little bit of classic business letters and mailing those to each other. So that is also an outside, another structure, slightly structured.

Q: Who had input and when did you first consider homeschooling?
I think it would have been very early on, like I mentioned before, like four or five was the time we would have started to look at schools if we were going to. That’s when
she, we could clearly tell that she wasn’t somebody who would want to go to
preschool. I work from home, I’m a writer and editor and I do pretty much do
everything from home and, again having my parents nearby, that allows me the
flexibility. There was no, you know, need for her to be somewhere everyday like for
some parents. Um, I, so this kinda just gradually happened and it just kinda felt good
and we knew about TALC and knew there was a large support in our community.
So every year, we sort of, you know, it kinda became clear and we started adding
things to her schedule gradually until, at this point, she has a very full homeschooling
schedule.
Me, my husband, my parents, everyone seemed to feel that it was really appropriate
to her.
We never seriously considered a public school.

Q: If you had to rank the importance of your reasons to homeschool, what would you
start with as the most important?
Um, I guess, um, the individual characteristics of my child firstly. Um and I suppose
secondly, sort of, my overriding philosophy of, sort of, life and life school and the
way we learn. Well maybe that would be third and maybe second in there would be
wanting to spend more time with her and wanting to have the opportunity to be more
a part of her life. More than I would be if I didn’t see her, if she was away all day.
And on a more intellectual level, um, I feel that the school system, kind of, you
know, unless you are going to find a really excellent situation, and I totally feel that
for some kids, well for some children they just really love being in school because
they just love being with other kids. They get that and they like the structure and they
don’t want to be, you know, stuck at home all day. And they might need that and it
seems to work beautifully for some kids. But in my own personal experience, I felt
that is, is a way of really railroading the kids who weren’t inside the box and kids
who don’t work that way into insisting that things work for them and the adaptations.
That can be rather scarring.

Q: What is your impression of the local public school?
Yeah, I really don’t know much about the local public school but everything I know
about [proper name omitted], you know I’ve heard stories here and there, you know
about kids being beat up on the playground in kindergarten and stuff, I think those are
almost like urban legends. You never really know if they are true. But everything I’ve
heard about [proper name omitted] has been fairly positive and I know they are very
open to homeschoolers which is, to me, a point in their favor. You know after-school
programs and extracurricular and I’ve been there for plays and stuff. I, actually,
covered a high school play rehearsal a couple of years ago for a local paper and sort
of behind the scenes and it seemed lovely. I don’t really have a particular bone to pick
with the local system, it’s just not, school. I also have an issue with private school. I
think it’s the structure I’m talking about. And, unfortunately, of course public schools
sometimes have gotten short shift because of the money. And I had my own
experience in the [proper name omitted] school system, however long ago it was, well
maybe twenty-five years ago and at the time I thought, um, you know, at the time I
thought that it was just the way it is. But I don’t know if I think it should be any
different. But when I look back and realize out of three years of high school, four years, from tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades, I actually went to the [proper name omitted] private school in ninth grade, in all those years there were two teachers who stuck out in my mind. Who were actually exciting and inspiring. But everyone else was really, the more I think about what they did, it was, you know, pretty lame. I think it is a terribly difficult job. You know, I can't believe anybody can pull it off in a good way. With those two really excellent teachers I think, not so bad, given the demand for that job. But, you know, I don't want that for [proper name omitted]. I feel like my own love for academics was damped down by that. I don't think of myself as at all an academic person. My experience in high school was just so deadening.

Q: How did you know about public schools before you decided to homeschool?

Probably minimally but as I said the reaction wasn't against the local public schools at all. It was the other factors were what helped us make that decision. It wasn't really a direct negative opinion to the public schools.

Um, I think the only thing, I don't watch on TV, is the things I might have seen. When I lived in the town of [proper name omitted], they would send out, maybe like, a school district newsletter. And there might have been people running for boards who tell their whatever. That might have been something I read, yeah, might have been a school newsletter.

Q: Have you been in a public school lately?
Yeah, dissatisfied with my public school experience. The most time I was in a public school was in my nephew's public school in the spring and that's in the [proper name omitted] public school system.

Yeah, I don't even know that I've had a real discussion with people whose kid is in the public schools. Actually, I do know a few people who have kids in the [proper name omitted] public schools and they have always said that they've been fine with it.

Yeah, I talk to some who have but it really wasn't about terrible things.

Q: Demographics-answers omitted from transcript. See Appendix C

Q: Those are the questions our research team had planned. To close, what questions should I have asked, that I didn't, in order to get a full understanding of why and how you decided to homeschool?

It may be really interesting to factor in private schools. That tends to be the middle ground for people. It is common to say that people are just coming from this private school or that school but is much rarer for someone to say they are coming from or going to a public school. For many people who homeschool it was never really a question of a public school but they would do a Waldorf or [proper name omitted] or Montessori. All are used, it is kinda, those two things are pretty far apart on the spectrum.

One reason I have seen for kids to return from homeschooling to public school is because they have all the issues, the disabilities. Public school offers a lot of free
services. Lots of people have to do that because they can't do it independently if they homeschool. That definitely is a factor.
Interview D
09-15-07

Q: We are here to talk about your homeschool experience. Could we start with you giving me a general overview- who you homeschool and how long you have done it for?

I have two children, both of them homeschooled. We, they have never been in school at all. My oldest son was born in ’92 and my youngest son was born in ’96. And my oldest son is now doing eighth grade, ninth grade work. My youngest son is now doing sixth grade work.

Q: What is your vision of the homeschool program you want to provide?

My main operating principal as a parent, um, is exposure. Exposure to as much of the world as I feel they are prepared for. And that means to all kinds of people, all kinds of, ah, subject matter, all kinds of places, music, art, history. To whatever, whatever I can give and show them. That is my operating principal as a parent and as a homeschooling person for them.

Q: How is your homeschool program different from what your child would do in the local public school?

Um, having, having been a school, a school person myself, the thing that I think is most different is the liberty that they have with their bodies. That they can, ah, they can get up as early or late as they want they can go to sleep as early or late, they can
eat in the middle of the school day, they can, they can fast for the whole day.
Questions aren’t asked about when they go to the toilet or if they want to go climb a
tree there is not, there is, I guess the main difference is liberty. That they have an
ability to make choices for themselves and not to be told what to as much as would
happen in school.

Q: What aspects of participating the public school experience, if any, would concern
you in relation to your own child?
Liberty is part of it but also, um, but one of the main objections when I speak to
people about the way we live and homeschool, one of the main objections, that comes
up and it is a pretty standard questions is, ‘well how do you socialize your children’? I,
somebody came to do some work on my house this past week and when we were
outside, he said, ‘so, I’m not against homeschooling’, he said ‘but how do you
socialize your kids’? And I said ‘there are groups and stuff and they can talk to
someone who is eighty or someone who is three. They’re open and blah, blah, blah.’
And then he was talking about how his children are socialized in school and that is
what he counts on the school for and then when it was time to write the check for the
work he had done, he started to say, started to talk about his twelve year old daughter
who is sexually active now and is going out with people who he is not necessarily
pleased that she’s going out with. As of now she is fifteen but it started when she was
twelve and he obviously had some anger and fear about it. And I paid him with a
check and off he went and, in hindsight, I thought to myself, so he is socializing his
children and so am I. So the socializing factor that happens in school and being with other kids is really fun and that’s not what I object to. It’s the hands off that happens when we put or kids in school and we just assume that all is well, and um, and it may or not be. And I have more attachment with my children so I can see when something is not right for them. It’s one of those loaded words that they assume everyone knows.

The best retort I have ever had, it’s not really a retort, it’s engagement is ‘what do you really mean by socialize’? Because, you know, if you mean learning how to use a gun or not having your head stuck in the toilet when you don’t pay the kid who tells you, you have to pay him fifty cents ever day or, if it means, um, learning to sit next to someone all day and be quiet all day. Well, what does it mean?

Q: About how many days per week and hours per day do you actually engage in homeschooling?

My oldest son, ah, works four hours a day five days a week. My youngest son is less structured but actually is more self driven. So my oldest son we’ve put a plan from the outside for him that he works within. My youngest son kind of propels himself along. The operating, ah, model in the house is work then play so the idea is, when it’s working, you get business done and then you can go play.

The youngest does anywhere from one and one half to four hours.

Q: Do you work ten months per year or all year round?
This year we tried something different. Usually we work year-round and in the summer less. But we tried something different this year because I remembered how having a free summer was so great, so I said 'Ok, we'll have a break of a month where nothing is required of you' and it probably turned into two, two and a half months where we were away and didn't do anything, for, for two and a half weeks when we were home and so we tried a more traditional thing and what we discovered was it was actually, more, more difficulty that way because there was reentry into the pattern of school.

Q: Do you work mostly in your own home?

With academics we work in the home and we work with a curriculum that we got, that use, from Global Student Network, ah, it is totally non sectarian and very open. There are four subjects that they do academics with. They will read a lesson, answer questions, they might do essays or papers and they send it to me and I correct it and I have given them the opportunity that they can redo it until it becomes an A or they can just leave it as it is. Or they redo it until they get the number of things they want correct. So that is how, that is what we are doing.

Q: How much choice do the boys have as far as what they study?

The boys are given very little choice as far as those four subjects, and there is, I'm not sure what it is like for other people, but having been schooled myself, I went to a variety of schools and I would say the lion’s share of it was private school with a little bit of public. And, um, my experience, because I’m a school person, gets me stuck in
a place sometimes where I don’t trust it if it doesn’t look a little like school. So, the curriculum, for me, satisfies that, I guess it is a fear that they aren’t going to get what they should be getting. That they won’t fit into society because they don’t know who Abraham Lincoln was. So it, it doesn’t give them much choice as far as learning in most subjects but in other areas they have tons of choices, I think anyway.

Q: Do you do any kind of standardized tests?
I do standardized tests. What happens in New York State is you start in grade four and either you can do a narrative assessment, which is a written assessment or you can use a standardized test. So if in fourth grade you choose a narrative the next you have to do a test. Then in sixth grade you can use a narrative and in seventh you have to do a test. The beginning in ninth through twelfth grades you have to do a test every year. So both children have been tested, um, the standardized tests as well as the narrative assessment. That’s a legal requirement. What happens is we use the California Achievement Test and, and it is graded by them. What happens is the kids do it and it is sent to the testing place and they grade it and then it is sent into the state. That is New York State regulation. The test is submitted at the end of the year.

Q: Do you participate in any homeschool groups of The Alternate Learning Center?
At this point what we do and it is varies throughout the year. Right now, the main thing that we do that they love the most is during the school year when the kids are in school there is a games day on a Friday from one o’clock to four o’clock and it can run from one o’clock to five-thirty depending on who’s willing to stick around and
how cold it is. But the kids get together and they play and climb trees or do a team
game or trade [inaudible] card or ride around on their bikes or their skate boards. And
the mothers or sometimes the fathers hang out, hang out under a tree and talk about
what is going on.
That group is up in Saratoga and it is easily, in the whole group, it's on-line Home
Connect, and it is easily, I would say 70-80 families. But at that Friday games day
there might be three to ten families represented.

Q: When you were making the decision to homeschool, who had input into that
decision?
Me and my husband had input into the decision to homeschool. When I was in
seventh grade I was living in Bancroft, Thailand, and I felt so, so cheated really, that I
had to be in this idiotic school and got sent home because I didn’t wear a bra and had
to wear this uniform, had to have a slip to go pee. I was living in South East Asia
with a bunch of white people in a school and I thought, this is, this is a jip and I, I
didn’t know at that time that it was optional, that my parents didn’t have to do that.
And so I was, I think it was before I was even pregnant, I was watching Oprah
Winfry and I saw on the television a family, Nicky Tolfax, Homeschooling
Excellence, or Homeschooling For Excellence, I'm not sure of the exact title of the
book. This is a husband and wife that had two or three of their own blood children
and then they adopted two or three and they homeschooled and stuff, and a couple of
the kids went to Harvard or someplace and I thought, 'wow, I had an option, I didn’t
have to go to school and if I ever had kids they aren’t going to have to go to school.'
So it was before, before the baby met the air, you know. If I've got a choice I'm not choosing that thing. Like I said, I was lucky for the most part, as far as I had private schools and public schools.

Q: What were the most important reasons for your decision to homeschool?

The most important reason I wanted to do this for my kids is to make them citizens of the world, to give them the opportunity, not make them, but to give them the chance to be in the world which I think is the natural way we are supposed to be. I think school is unnatural. The way I rationalize that, justify that and appease my guilt for not going totally unschooling is two reasons. When I've unschooled, when I've done that we don't do much and that is hard for me, having been schooled to understand. One son would just spend all day maybe in the basement inventing something or out in a tree or riding his bike around and my younger son would maybe read for five hours literally or six hours but I couldn't, um, put that in a form that made sense to me having been schooled the way I was schooled. So that is one thing. The other thing is that being citizens of this world, being natural people in this world, there is a structure that we have in place in society and I've known people who and I went to schools where there were kids who were unable to fit in, either because of mental disabilities or by choice or drugs or whatever and they just were outside and could not blend. In order for my children to be in the world and to be able to blend if they wish to. I wanted to give my children the same structure that everyone else had, as much freedom within that that I could.
Q: What is your impression of the local public school?

I’m in the [proper name omitted] school district. I think the district is very good. I heard something yesterday, I think it was yesterday or the day before that someone was saying they really, oh it was last week, it was a local neighbor and her husband happens to be a principal, but she really likes the schools and one of her sons has a, has Asperger’s and she says that she has really gotten a lot of help. That’s what I hear. I hear people like the schools and I ask children ‘how’s school’ or ‘how are you liking it’ and it is like, um, they like it and they like it and I think the schools are good. My secret thought is, but so is a tight shoe until you take it off. It is fine to wear, to wear, restrictive clothing until you take it off. I worked in Manhattan, I used to wear high heels and taking them off at the end of the day it was heaven. This might be arrogance of me, but they just don’t know. They are satisfied with what they are doing but and they don’t know there is something else. And because, because, they don’t know it and people think if it is different, and I do this a lot, if it is different from me then it probably is wrong.

Q: We talked about your school experience, but what about your husband? How satisfied was he with his educational experience?

My husband was very, very disappointed with his educational experience. He was much, much more disappointed than me. Ah, he was adamant that we don’t send our children to school.

Q: Demographics-answers omitted from transcript. See Appendix C.
Q: Those are the questions our research team has planned. To close, what question should I have asked that I didn’t, in order to get a full understanding of why and how you decided to homeschool?

Should have asked an interesting question might be ‘are you, if you could abolish school all together for everybody would you do it. Are you militant about this or are you open to free choice’? Something like that.

One of the things that is coming up for homeschoolers right now, probably a constant thing is the fear for homeschoolers right now is the fear that the State regulations which are the worse in the Nation right now, I’ve heard, and if the regulations get tighter what would make you put your kid in school. I don’t think people who really believe in homeschooling would put them in school anyway.

One of the things I have observed over the fifteen years I have been doing this with my son, and we started getting into the homeschool world when he was two and a half. What I’ve noticed is there are two kinds of homeschoolers. And you may or may to have experienced this because the people who would be attracted to talking to you would be in the second group. The first group is people who start in little mothers’ groups and they don’t like the idea of leaving their child, in a day care or in a nursery school you know, they don’t want to leave their child so they decide to homeschool.

But then when it gets, it comes down to the brass tacks of being with your kid all the time and it’s up to you and you can’t get away or then you don’t feel capable of teaching your kid or you think that is what homeschooling is which it really is not what it is, in my opinion, those homeschoolers vanish. It is not an opportunist, at least
not in a negative way. It's the kind of person who says maybe they'll do it for a while, or they'll create a foundation for the kid in advance.

Then there is the homeschool who is like, 'There is never a way that I am never gonna put my kid in school.' So there are people who come to me and say 'shouldn't you ponder homeschooling your kids through high school', it's such a silly question in my opinion if in my opinion. I wouldn't have started this if...

The whole system is screwy. So there are two kinds of homeschoolers the ones who are committed from the first or ones who are, you know, having the appetizer tray but not staying for the main course. It is really a huge commitment.
Interview E
09-15-07

Q: Could we start with you giving me a general overview— who you homeschool and how long you have done it for?
Um, I homeschool my, he’s 11 now, my son and my 5 year old daughter. I’ve been homeschooling him for 3 years and I started her formally this year but I was homeschooling her a little bit last year as well.

Q: In your mind, what is the vision you are trying to achieve in homeschooling?
To promote, um, independent learning. Um, to find out, to have them be better prepared for college when they go to college and when they are more or less on their own have them think for themselves and if they really need an answer, they have to know where to find it. To follow their interests rather than being so institutionalized. Of course, we do math and everything else to be able to follow what they are really interested in.

Q: How is your homeschool program different from what your child would do in the local public school?
Um, my son went to public school for the first few years and I was getting frustrated because some of the answers he was writing on his papers, they were just wrong and there was never any discussion as to how, like for example, I will never forget this
one question, it was 'name a mountain range' and he was in second grade. He said Mount Graylock and it was wrong and he ended up getting a D for the four questions. It was not a mountain range because it was only one mountain but to a little boy in second grade there should have been a little more, you know discussion on it you know. That is what I don’t like. I want the kids to express why they might have thought it was a mountain range and like ‘oh, yeah, you’re right’. When you look at it it looks like a big range of mountains. So I feel like they’re stifling you. ‘Your answer is wrong now move on.’ Push stuff out.

He was seven years old and I just feel like, um, maybe the teachers are a little bit, have maybe a lot to do. And it’s not the teachers’ fault but it is a lot to do and there are so many kids and they have a lot of work to do. A lot of parents, I don’t think are playing such an active role in their education and they are relying on teachers for everything. I just don’t want my kids to suffer for it, that’s all.

Q: What aspects of participating in the public school experience, if any, would concern you in relation to your own child?

Um, a lot of it, we, I stay home my husband works. I take care of the children. I take care of the house. I don’t work.

We’re more a, more of a old fashioned, I don’t know how to put it, we are that kind of a family where that I’m not going to work over taking care of my children and being there when my children have to go here and there and after school. In the public school system there are a lot of kids who, I think, are just left to fend for themselves. I have no problem with my children being in groups and organizations after school.
They are so busy it is not even funny. But it’s just, I feel like the public school system is filled with a lot of kids and parents who just don’t care.

I want more involvement, exactly. Well, that’s not always true but I’m finding that is more true than not.

Q: How many hours per day and days per week do the kids work at homeschooling?
They wake up seven o’clock in the morning, um, we try to keep to a schedule, they’re up at 7, they have breakfast by 7:30-8, we get dressed, they make their beds, and then we start schooling and all that kind of stuff. So between, I mean we do a full day. We are pretty much done by three, but we don’t sit down all day. I have a lot of field trips. My girls have a lot of things to do like, you know my youngest one does the music and art thing and my oldest one she does a ceramics class. So there are a lot of things they are going to so you can’t say that I’m sitting down from 8 to 3 but between those hours it is all about what can we do that can teach them. So it definitely is if my five year old is reading a book, or there is definitly something going on that is learning between those hours.

We work five days a week.

Q: Do you keep a ten month or a 12 month calendar?
I usually keep a school calendar.

Q: Where does most of the homeschooling occur?
I guess the academic part occurs in the home.
Q: How much choice do your kids get in the curriculum?

I, I, I want to keep up because I don’t want them to fall behind in anything. Originally I was going to do unit studies, I try to keep up with what the school is doing, and then what I do is, for example, the eleven year old is learning about ancient civilizations in sixth grade. I ask him what he wanted to do as far as projects and so things and he came up with the idea of doing like a 3-D ancient Rome like the coliseum. They help to figure out part of what we can do but I tell them the subject.

Q: Do you do any standardized testing?

I haven’t done any testing but I definitely want to at the end of this year. He is in sixth grade and I’m going to do testing at the end of the year but I haven’t before. I’m not sure if testing is required later on but right now I get to submit a portfolio and they either approve or disapprove. But I’m not sure later on in high school or things like that.

Q: Do you participate in The Alternate Learning Center or any group structures for homeschoolers?

Yes, Berkshire Home Schoolers, I’m part of and we are setting up two classes; an ancient history class and a science class for older kids that they can meet together and, you know, every couple of weeks and talk about things and they can learn, you know together, and not always just with moms and things.
There are these great books called "What Every Sixth Grader Needs to Know" and so I kind of go along with that and look in the index and find work books and work pages to correlate with that. And I stick with the grade and if we go beyond that, great, but at least that way I know we stick with the grade. You know I went to school and this is kinda out there for me so I want to make sure the kids do everything they are supposed to.

Q: When your family was deciding to homeschool, who had input into the decision? Um, I met three years ago I met these wonderful kids that were so polite and I asked 'so what are you doing in school'? And they hammered out everything that they were learning and they were incredible. I never met anyone like that and I said 'so where do you go to school'? And they said they were homeschooled and I said 'oh, my God.' So, their mother homeschools right now and I asked her about it and I had never heard of it before and it was these children that kinda made my decision to do that.

In the family, nobody supports our decision. Nobody supports our decision. I don’t think they have enough; they have very old school beliefs about it. I kind of got in an argument with my father-in-law who said, um, told me I might as well just veils on the girls and send them to Iraq. Oh, yeah. They don’t really know, if you don’t have a research and research and every thing that I have done and the benefits. Then you shouldn’t say anything at all. I do get a lot of people, a lot of family members say they are going to be socially inept in other words and I don’t find that to be true. I look and look and look and look at them.
It’s kind of funny, I don’t get it a lot but every once in a while somebody mentions, ‘don’t you think you should put them in school’ but it’s not like the kids are being affected in any way. They don’t even hear the conversation. You know they say it takes a whole city to raise a child, that’s what I was hoping for; hoping that, um, all of our family would be able to get involved in it. Like hey, why don’t you come over and read them a book, but it doesn’t seem to have happened that way.

Q: What were the most important couple of reasons that drove your decision to homeschool?

I missed, I’m not a connectivist, but I missed my son terribly. Like he was going to school and I felt rushed constantly and I was like this is not the way childhood and life should be. I felt stressed, like, um, he got home from school and I was like, come on we have to do our homework and hurry, hurry because you’ve got a half hour and then you have to go to baseball. And oh let’s get out the door and oh, did you eat something and throw an apple at him and let’s get out the door and then get back and get something else to eat after your practice. Oh your have to do your homework and you have to finish that and you have to go to bed and you have to get up early. You know, that there was no that was the number one reason at first. It didn’t really have to do with numbers or reasons or schooling or anything. It was like I don’t even know my child and when I, we just um, he wasn’t flourishing like he is now. He is such a bright personality. And it was like go, go, go. I hated that. So that was one of the reasons why.
Q: What is your impression of your local public school?

Um, they are not meeting the standards is what I read in the paper, like the scores and the standardized test scores aren't up there and you know that No Child Left Behind thing they have going on there, they aren't meeting the requirements for that. I do know, um, a couple of the schools around here are very good. The school that is like two houses away from me that I could throw my kids to is a really good school. I don't really have too much to say about the schools except that I think they overwork the kids and they give them too much homework. I have concerns with the testing, I'm against the testing, you know they're sending like kindergarteners home with too much homework and it's all they are hammering into these kids. Too much homework and, um, that's my impression of public schools.

Q: What was your satisfaction with your own education experience?

I loved school and I was a bubbly cheerleader in high school and I had a great old time in high school. Um, looking back, it was a complete waste of my time and that is part of the reason I've decided to put focus elsewhere. Yeah, I had a great time, that is what I did and I didn't learn anything and now that I'm able to research things on my own, I'd like more for my children. I want them to be able to travel and the kids to think in different directions other than what are we going to wear today. Not that I don't think being social with a bunch of other people is important, I do, and I just never thought about the other things I could have done, like you know I really would love to have done this or that, and you lose it. And you've lost all the wonderful opportunities that you have when you are younger to do things and to experience
things before you get married and you settle down. And I just want them to experience.

I attended catholic school. The kids’ dad attended public school. We have talked about it before and he loved his math teacher. He said he learned a lot in math in high school and he said he could take it or leave it all the up through middle school. But in high school he said he learned a lot from his math teacher so he doesn’t have anything negative to say. He could go either way. He is supportive of the decision to homeschool but it isn’t like he is gung ho about this. He sees, you know everything that they are learning and he gets, you know, very impressed by it. But he is not as actively involved, obviously, as I am because he is at work.

Q: Demographics-omitted from transcript. See Appendix C.

Q: Those are the questions our research team has planned. To close, what question should I have asked that I didn’t, in order to get a full understanding of why and how you decided to homeschool?

I think, if you homeschool you need a lot more support and I don’t know if I could do it if I didn’t have the support of the group that I’m in. There are so many people who are against it, who don’t really understand what you are trying to do. And the home school group that I am involved in is very supportive and we do a lot of thing together.

Without those kind of people I think it would be a lot harder. The support is mostly on line and you do go to meeting like, the one that’s local, we meet at the park every
Monday and we have "let's go to" and each family covers a different country and you know we do things together.

If I didn't have them and we didn't get to go out with people I think that I would kind of say, you think 'I might not be doing the right thing' because I can't be the best.
Interview F
09-19-07

Q: Could we start with you giving me a general overview of who you homeschool and how long you have done it for?

At this point, I only homeschool my daughter who is 17 and in her senior year in high school. We’ve been doing it for ten years, um, um, we began at the end of first grade. I have two children and her older brother was at the end of fifth grade when we started.

Q: What is your vision of the homeschool program you want to provide?

Well, at this point I don’t feel as though I’m providing it so much as I’m networking, I’m holding the umbrella open over all the choices and helping for her. Like finding the courses and finding somebody who’s a botanist to do botany, like say finding writers to work on her play writing. Ideally, by the time she is this age she is the one who is finding what to do.

Q: How is your homeschool program different from what your child would do in the local public school?

Well, any school she, um, starting at the very beginning like when she was seven, I didn’t want her to have to put her attention on something for forty minutes because someone else asked her to and then put her pencil down at the end of that time. Usually it takes that forty minutes for kids to really get into it so when she, on the
other hand, I understand that she, that my kids need to learn how to be responsive to other people in the world. But to spend all day, to spend all day having someone else tell you what you should do with your attention seems to me to robbing a person of their birthright, of connecting to their own being.

Ask your question again.

By the time she was about ten or eleven she would spend all day writing novels, one after another after another and she would just sit there and keep going. Sometimes she would spend six or seven hours doing it and she knew, and I knew, if she was in school when she came home she never would have done that. Ever. And so when she was in second grade, maybe in second grade, she played a lot with dolls. And one of them was Hispanic and she found a place that the doll would have come from and she found the place on the map and it was just over the border in Mexico. I can’t remember the town. Many times she had come across this town, I don’t remember where it was.

And then the other one was a doll that she decided was an immigrant and she had come from Russia in 1905. So took these two books that she was reading that were diaries that were historical fiction and she started those writing letters to each other. So, who is telling her what to write. It certainly is history. Also she started to learn about all kinds of cultural things. And then she decided that they would have a road trip and meet each other because she needed them in time, to spend time. And I told her that was ok but she had to, had to explore each state, make a map, and know what each State flower, whatever.
And she would spend all day playing, because it was her excitement and her passion. She was really learning things. I know with my education but I only learned things I was excited about. And the other things just a hole, you know.

Q: What aspects of participating in the public school experience, if any, would concern you in relation to your own child?

Concern? Well, I think what would concern me is, um. When she was in first grade and she had a science teacher she was this lovely young women who had good training who was teaching her about the human species. She was just in first grade and she knew more about this than the teacher who was teaching her. She knew that the reason that she was getting, my daughter had been very sick and the way we dealt with this was to changing her diet, and she had real extreme parameters. So when her teacher talked about milk and calcium she knew she couldn’t have that milk in her diet. So she knew more truly about what her body needed and nutrition because of our life style and the road she had been down in her own personal dealing than this women did. So for her to stay in that circumstance, for me, she would have gotten herself down and she had to lock up what she knew in a box to sit on. So I realized that is not typical and I know the teachers are so well tested, but for me and my world, that is the difficulty of putting her in the classroom. Because they have to pack their knowing.

For me the whole system of sitting in a classroom with many, many people and having to respond to whatever one person, however well meaning, is telling you is so
often, she knew more, she was a philosopher. She was wiser than what that person was asking her to do.

When my son, who went to school through sixth grade, was diagnosed as dyslexic somewhere along the way. And when he got out of school he said ‘wow, it feels like someone took a box off of my head’. Suddenly he could go where he needed to go and he could discover what his unique perceptual apparatus was. In school he was just not able to do that because he had to feed back to someone who asks you to feed back in a certain way. Like he was in the science class and he loved learning the sciences, he was right there on the edge of his seat, kind of like a sponge absorbing everything. And then this teacher would hand back, would hand out a quiz and he had to fill in the blanks and he couldn’t think of this enormous information and, and, and to put it in this tiny little fill in the blank and this is different from [inaudible]. I would say that over and over again in school, in any school, which is having to do what someone else is asking you to do and the result of that is having to shut down your own structural apparatus and then you have to decide is this right or is this wrong. Even schools that give huge lip service to individualized education do it that way.

Q: What are some characteristics of a high quality homeschool program? Like how many hours per day, days per week, months per year, physical location and amount of student choice?

Well, that last one. I’ll start with that. There is a long, I don’t know if anyone has talked to you about homeschooling. In the beginning that was really exciting to me
and then along the way, when my kids were probably in about sixth grade and second grade or maybe third grade and seventh grade, I met some 18 year olds who had been lifelong homeschoolers, they were unschoolers and they hadn't learned certain kinds of math. I don't remember what it was, it could have been algebra. I don't know what it was. And they felt that, um, as though doors were closed to them because they were uncomfortable asking to learn that now in their lives. And it really opened me up to the idea that I didn't really want to completely unschool. So in our family, the things that I perceived as important were, for my son, when he was in, like for my son when he was in seventh grade, sixth grade, he listened to, reading was a real challenge for him, even though he knew how to read, so he listened to literature about whatever, that was written about the time period he was studying in history, on tape, from the library for the blind and physically handicapped. All the time. He listened to book after book after book and he spent all day doing it and after a few years he said I wish I could teach my friends in school how this is.

He had this reality about, about how he took information in and how he processed it and where he wanted to go with it. And I could never say what the optimal situation is because it depends on who is doing the homeschooling and on the child, you know. My husband is great with math so he would have been quite taken to incite a fire in my kids about math but he wasn't really available to that that and I'm not a math person. So they didn't get a lot of math, but they got enough math to do really well, like on the SATs, because that is what they needed to get into college. And they got math along the way, but to me, and I'm sure it was enough in the state standards and the curriculum and they had sometimes people from the outside would come in and
do it with them. But for somebody like my daughter who likes to write all the time, having hours a day to write is wonderful and if I saw that she was missing something, like there wasn’t history or there wasn’t science, we would feed that it. Sometimes we would do one thing for months. And, um, for me there is no such thing as a necessary curriculum. I mean I fill out the forms because I’m here in this state and I want my kids to have the legal reference so, um, so I, I take what we are learning and I put it in their categories but it is just not that way. I think that to be a, what is education? To be a successful, functioning human being I think you need to know what your own [inaudible] is and you have to know how to learn what you need to learn and that’s it. Because, like my daughter wants to learn seven languages. She speaks Chinese. She speaks Hebrew. She speaks Spanish. There is no reason why she can’t just keep doing that, like as she goes. And some times, some days she spends more and some days she spends less and whenever. In our family whenever we try to do something rhythmical it didn’t work very well, just because that’s me. And we would never just sit down and do it all at once.

When my father was dying and we brought him to live in our house, it was very hard to get any academic work done but they had the most amazing education on death and dying that I think will throughout their whole life. I could never pinpoint how many hours. I think it depends on how old the child is, you know. It could be between two and four. It could be between two and eight. It could be all day long. You never stop. Anytime you are having a conversation about something. So my daughter now, at seventeen, she has specific classes that she has created that she goes to. So it is almost like a college situation. She takes, she has a
class here, a class there that she does with other homeschoolers or that are at college. All different things.

But for a little child, you know, every breath they take is homeschooling. Every game they play. Every time you cut up a pizza or you are making bread you are doing math. You know all those things. So it's interesting.

Sometimes my kids have felt as though there was no break and they wish that there was a break. But there were days off because our way of homeschooling was so much where they got to do with what they love that they didn't ask. The times when they wanted days off, there were other requirements, things that I asked them to do that they didn't want to do. We would have weekends and we really had summers that we didn't do much. It depends, you know. It is very hard to say.

Q: Do you participate in The Alternate Learning Center (TALC)?

No, we used to be in TALC but now we don't. TALC did not support or influenced the decision to homeschool.

Q: What are the reasons that caused you to decide to homeschool, as in who had input and when you first considered it?

I just kind of knew that we wanted homeschooling. Friends of ours ran a kind of homeschooling school the first year so that we could see what it was really like. Because most people whose kids are in school really value the time that they are in school and there is so much that you get to do for your own self whether it is your work or other things that you are pursuing. So that is how we did it at first.
And the decision, it was made between our kids and my husband and myself. What is interesting is that my, my oldest son had just finished ninth grade and he was, um, in a private school and then he, he chose to go away to school for high school for eleventh and twelfth and he could have been homeschooled until he left. He had all these rules about social life and about education and he thought it was a terrible thing that they didn’t go to school, his siblings. But now he has come to think that they are lucky. The input, people had been saying to me for a long time that kids know what they need to learn, so trust them. But I was afraid that I, that they would miss something or that I wasn’t competent. Anybody would, I don’t care who it is.

Q: Would you rank the importance of your reasons to homeschool?

Would I give each reason a rank?

My most important reason is that I wanted my kids to have to grow as though there isn’t anything between them and their highest authority. Like, you could say, in between them and God or between them and their spirit or between them and their wisdom or between them and universal consciousness. I didn’t want them in a situation where they had to continually defer to what someone else was saying was the right answer. And just, I really wanted them to know their own wisdom and that is absolutely the governing reasoning and the most important.

Other reasons, well, yes, there are a lot of them. I had a lot of interviews locked up in trying to make the best school scenario and I didn’t even realize how much of my attention was locked up trying to get the best teacher or trying to get the best classroom or to just, as I described earlier about the science teacher, I had so much
energy involved in that that I realized withdrawing my energy from that and creating a vessel the kids would learn the things that they need to learn. So that was another, was another good one.

There is a whole different emotion that happens between siblings also when kids have this opportunity they don’t become peer directed in the same way, so that, even just when we would go skiing by ourselves, it would be so different then when we’re with a herd of school kids. I remember them; they go so different when they become internally referenced. Because once they get to a certain age everything is externally referenced.

But then I, I still do it within myself at 52 years. It is comparative mode, it is approval/disapproval mode. I want them away from that.

In every way, it is the person you like, the skirt you are wearing or the game you play or the person you spoke to. All of that. It is the culture of that world that wasn’t what I wanted for them.

Q: Did you ever seriously consider the public school?

Well, yeah we visited it. We visited the public school. Um, it was an option and there were times with one of my children when, um, we considered it because she had a lot of friends there. So, but at the end of the day, we decided we were not giving away her amazing freedom and independence of her intellect and her mind and emotions, to be able to socialize. To have that kind of contact. So that was that.

I think the public school is great. I think it is, serves a purpose and I would love to see it [inaudible] do a better job than what it does. I don’t think anybody outside the
school can say what it needs to do better except in Massachusetts you can come in and do things with the school. And there were so many times I wanted to do that here and we couldn’t do that here. There are a couple of wonderful programs that homeschoolers are allowed to participate in, um. There is an extraordinary Shakespeare program. Um, there are so many public schools that don’t let them. There are so many public schools that when the kids don’t come to the public schools they don’t allow homeschoolers to participate. But [proper name omitted] does. And it has been the most important part of our group of homeschoolers.

Other homeschoolers have been able to participate in band and then the lab. There are many other things. When you have to find a lab for science, it would be nice if kids could go in for those lab sciences and come out for homeschooling. I don’t know if my kids would have done that. None of mine went to public school.

Q: Did you attend public school and what was your satisfaction with your education?

I went to public school. When I was a junior in high school I created an alternative school and I went to the alternative school for my senior year. That was a long time ago because I graduated in 1972. So, that was 1972 and it was still going. Then I went to, there weren’t any options for an alternative college. And so I went to a great high school and I had great academics and yet part of me knows that it is just the short end of the stick to be limited by the curriculum.

Q: Have you been in a public school lately?

Yes, I have been in the public school lately because of Shakespeare.
Q: Have you heard about the public school from other parents?

Again, I think it depends on the family, on the student and the family. I couldn’t
generalize about public schools.

Q: Do you read local newspapers or watch TV to get information about public
schools?

I might read an article when I see about homeschooling but I don’t read about public
schools. Because I had my experience with that and it is just not on the radar. There
are some people who just love their teachers in [proper name omitted] and there are
some remarkable teachers there. And then there are kids who are just bored. It is just
like anything else in life.

Q: Demographics-omitted from transcript. See Appendix C.

Q: Those are the questions our research team has planned. To close, what question
should I have asked that I didn’t, in order to get a full understanding of why and how
you decided to homeschool?

It is this unbridled creative aspect. Where your mind goes and where your attention
goes. It is out of the box and that is really the gist of homeschooling. With the internet
now, information can get gotten any time by anybody. So anybody can learn.
Whatever, it is the information is there. It is the kind aspect, beyond, open to people
who are most restricted.
To me it is liberation. To really afford children, however it happens, to really explore their unique mission.
Interview G

Q: Could we start with a general overview of who you homeschool and how long you have done it for?

Well, I have five children. My oldest is going to be nineteen, and then sixteen, fourteen, eleven and seven. And I have homeschooled all of them to different levels. The two oldest, I homeschooled through junior high and then they attended a private school starting in ninth grade. And they just graduated last year and they are both at Siena College. The fourteen year old, I put her in the private school in grade seven. And the eleven year old, I just put him in grade six. I still have my seven year old at home, who is in second grade, so there is only one left at home.

Q: What is your vision of the homeschool program that you would like to provide?

Um, superior education at home with more control over what they learn. Ah, better control over their discipline. And self-discipline and a healthy environment, so that as parents, we should be the ones have the decision about what is being taught and making sure our children are doing what they are supposed to do by having more control over the negative influences on the outside.

Q: So, how is your homeschool program different from what your child would do in a local public school, or even a private school?

Well, each child has very different learning style and being that it is a one-on-one situation, you can cater to your child’s needs. My eleven year old has a learning
disability, that’s dyslexia, and if I would have put him in public school, he probably
would have been put in with a special group of kids, perhaps would have gotten some
benefit from that, but the one-on-one at home gives you the ability to spend as long as
you need on the subject and go into as much depth as you can and if the child
understands something, you just move on. If they can’t do something on one
particular day, you have a lot more flexibility. To go with each child and you can do
other things besides school. In the afternoons, if we finish school, we can go for a
visit. It gives you a lot of flexibility.

Q: So what aspects of the public school experience, if any, would concern you or not
be suitable for your child?

Um, putting a child in a school with other students, not knowing what their
backgrounds are, not knowing if, it, your child is going to be adversely affected by
what they are seeing and hearing. In the public school situation, you don’t have as
much control over that and what they learn. We are Christians and we believe that
you know, God made the world, and we wanted our children to be taught that and it
wasn’t me that gave equal time to evolution, the theory of evolution to be what is
taught in most institutions.

Q: What are some characteristics in your opinion of a high quality homeschool
program as far as hours per day and days per week and then months per year?

Well, we are usually able to finish a day’s work equivalent of a public schools day in
probably about three to four hours, whereas in a public school, it would take you six
or seven. And besides that, we usually go all year round, so we don’t have to spend as much time on a daily basis with our studies. If the child has a weakness in spelling or reading, we will do those subjects all year round. We can pick and choose as we go, so also the flexibility is there. Could you repeat the question again?

Q: The characteristics of a high quality homeschool program?
Um, giving your child the ability to focus on the areas that they really have an interest in and want to pursue. I have one daughter who really loves animals and so she has a job on an alpaca farm. She works there a couple days of week. The homeschooling allowed her to be able to do that. A good homeschooling program will allow your child to explore those areas of their strengths and reinforce the areas where they need help.

Q: How much choice do your kids have over what they learn?
You know, they have a choice about what order they want to learn things in, but they don’t really have much choice about what they learn. If we find that if a book doesn’t work, we will toss it and get a new one. But it’s pretty much ‘Okay, do you want to do math or spelling first’? It is not like ‘Do you want to do math? You have to do math, but do you want to do it now or later’?

Q: What physical location do you use for schooling?
We usually start in the living room on the couch by the fire for our devotion and we read the bible and do our reading. And then we move into the dining room where we
do our book work and then into the kitchen where we do baking and cooking and you
know, outside, we have the chickens and you know it is all about animal husbandry
and gardening and so everything is our school room, the world.

Q: How do you test or assess the kids learning.

Well, when we first started homeschooling, I was a stickler for testing. I had to take
every little test that we could get our hands on from the people that provided our
curriculum. And as time went on, we found out it was not necessary to test because, if
you are with your child all day long every day and you do not have twenty or thirty
other kids, then you know what your kids know and what they don’t know, so there
really is no reason to give weekly tests. But, at the end of each year, our kids do take
a standardized tests, which are the Iowa’s or the California Achievement Tests as
well.

Q: Do you participate in The Alternate Learning Center?

No.

Q: What are the reasons that caused you to homeschool? For example, who had
influence on deciding to homeschool?

Well, let’s see. We were Christians. We had become Christians and then as a result of
that, our work has been about our children viewing as Christians and a love of God.
There were other people who were in our church who had been homeschooling. Some
didn’t and some did. We talked with them about it. I also talked to loads and loads of
other people about it. We started doing research on homeschooling when my oldest, he was only three at the time. So, it took me awhile before I finally made the decision. It was just people from the library, talked with people from our church, talked to teachers, public school teachers, relatives, friends and got a whole lot of feedback, some negative, some positive and we just decided we were going to try it and take it one year at a time.

My parents were not approving of it. They said ‘you’re crazy’ and then by the time the kids were like fifteen or fourteen, they said, ‘wow, you did a great job!’ And ‘we’re glad you did it. It made a big difference in their lives.’

Q: Did you ever seriously consider public schools?

Not for the older ones. We have considered it for the one with the learning disability just because I wasn’t certain I could provide him with everything that he needed as a student with special needs, but when we brought him to the public school to be evaluated by the school psychologist and have yearly meetings because he was considered, I can’t remember the name of the program, but needing services. When I said, ‘would it be better for me to put him in the schools’, they said, ‘oh no, you’re doing a fine job with him at home. You are giving him more at home than we could possibly give him at the school.’ So they think I’m doing a good job, I think I’m doing a good job, so I’ll keep him home.

We had him evaluated by the school psychologist and we also brought him to a psychologist in Albany who works with kids with disabilities and got his input too.
Q: If you were to rank the importance, like when you talk about some of your
decisions, like reasons behind your decisions, and if you were to rank them, as the
most important reason, or second most or third most, how would you rank your
decision?
I would have to say that the most important reason would be the greatest influence on
my children is that the teachers would not be, like I would be [inaudible]. That I
would be the most of an influence.

Q: Were there decisions that came second to that, or underneath that?
Well, certainly, after homeschooling for a couple of years, we realized that we could
provide our children with a superior education without public school. At first, I
wasn’t sure we could even provide with equitable and then after awhile, it was like
‘wow.’ It really worked and we did a better job. They get a better education and they
like it better, although they never really had a chance to experience the public school
scenario. They just never wanted to go to school. And when we finally did put them
in, we got a lot of flack. They like the private school, though. The older two
graduated with a class of eighty and they liked it.
Yeah, my older one, he really did not want to go and it probably took him about two
weeks and then he loved it.
Our girl, [proper name omitted], who is in the same grade as [proper name omitted]
because of homeschooling, she learned to read when she was three and I just
homeschooled her at the same level as her brother. We didn’t even think she would
want to go because she was shy. She said, 'I kind of want to try it.' And so we said, 'okay.' It took her a while to make the adjustment, but she was the one who wanted to go and she had a hard time, probably for the first six months. She was a little shy girl who loves going to school and now she is at Siena and she is doing fine.

Q: What's your impression of the local public school?

Um, unfortunately from what I hear and what I read, it's not good. It's probably more the fault of the way the kids are being made to act. You can't expect them to show up to school and all to be really bright. There don't seem like very good stable families. I don't see many good, stable families now.

Q: Did any of your children attend a public school at any time?

No

Q: Did you attend a public school?

I did, yes. Well, actually, my son did attend special education classes with the public school last year. He did go to special reading and writing programs for one hour five days a week.

Q: Okay. Were you satisfied with your public school experience?

No. No. I had always heard of people who got to homeschooled and always wondered what that would be like and you know, I had similar struggles in school. I wanted to spare my kids of some the grief and trauma and stuff I did. I hoped that they could
have a better experience than I did. That was another thing that seemed to fall under religion, I've been there, I've done it. I know that there is a better way.

Q: Have you been in a public school recently?
Yeah. I was going into the school when I would walk him in for his class, and I would go to extracurricular activities at public schools, you know for basketball games and stuff at the high school. So I did see some.

Q: Have other parents or kids talked to you about public schools and their experience?
Yes, [proper name omitted] had experience in the [proper name omitted] Little League and he has a lot of friends who attend the [proper name omitted] school and we've heard stories, mostly negative about the experience of the kids and there was another child who had dyslexia. And we heard that the school was resistant to providing the child with what they needed to overcome his disability. You know, to level the playing field in their classes, like having a scribe, whatever they needed. Most of the feedback has been negative. That's what we've heard.

Q: Are newspapers, TV, local or national news a source of your information on public schools.
Yes, the local newspaper does have articles on the [proper name omitted] school and we don't really do a whole lot of TV watching. We also, of course, hear about when a kid comes into school with trench coat on and some guns. We do hear those things
[inaudible].

Q: Demographics-omitted from transcript. See Appendix C.

Is there any question that you think I should have included that would help clarify anything that I haven't asked yet?

Um, I can't think of anything. You were very thorough.
Interview H

Q: Can you give me a general overview of whom you homeschool and for how long you have done it?

I started homeschooling in 2001 for my oldest child, who is now eleven. And we continued on and now I have my eleven year old, seven year-old and a six year-old.

Q: What would you say your vision for the homeschool program that you want to provide would be?

Oh, sort of two-pronged. One is I refuse to participate in a system that is corrupt. And the other thing is I just want to go back to the way things used to be and get a quality education.

Q: How is your homeschool program different from what your child would receive at public school?

It is more about actual learning than about social experimentation; basic things like history, historical concepts. It is not about weird social studies or other issues. OK.

Q: In respect to your child specifically, what concerns you about the aspects of the public school experience?

You know, that in [proper name omitted] schools, they spend over $20,000 per student if you take the budget and divide it by the number of students and yet the kids have don’t have textbooks, they are not learning, and in this whole school if you took
that amount of money, you could go to private school, you could even live there, have a beautiful cafeteria to eat in, in a mansion with beautiful food, indoor sporting complexes, etc. Yet, in this school, they can't figure out how to get the kids textbooks and they might, you know.

Q: What are the characteristics of a high quality homeschool program, like hours per day, days per weeks, months per year?

You know it's nothing like that. Because the structure is teaching one, two, three kids at home, it is completely different than controlling classroom of twenty. Much of what goes on in public school, you know, is crowd control. So the quality issue is not about how much time or anything like that. I think the distinction would just be consistency. We can sit down with a workbook and just do a page each day. And if you are doing anything, I don't care what textbook you’re using, it is actually that the parent is actually following a path and being consistent.

Q: What physical location do you use?

Dining room.

Q: Is there any choice in the curriculum?

They go to the library and they choose, you know, if we’re going to do science or history, to pick something related to read and they’ll bring it home with them.

Q: How about the testing for achievement. Do you have standardized tests? Do you
assess it on your own?

I started doing the PASS, the achievement system, for the past two years and we have done that at the end of the year. But again, testing is an invention of an institution. It does not apply to a small family. We did a spelling test and a math test. We do have testing, but it is more for my purposes, like 'okay were you listening?'

Q: Do you use the tests that come in the book or do you make your own?

Yeah, the grammar tests come in the textbook, but the spelling curriculum is actually a giant book for all the years and the testing program which they suggest, which basically is the same kind in school, and the math book comes with tests included. I don’t test for science and history. That is more effort based. If you put in effort to come up with ideas about what is going on or do a project or learn something, draw a diagram, then that’s good.

Q: Would you sign permission for us to look at your homeschool plan?

I don’t know that I have a plan. It is nothing that is really codified. Actually, I use The Well Trained Mind. It is actually in the library, if you would like to look at it. It does not have a curriculum in it itself, but it is a guide book for how and what to buy and where to buy it. They have a schedule and stuff like that. I pretty much follow it, although I simplify it a little bit. It is hard to be that rigorous with three children.

Q: Do you participate in The Alternate Learning Center (TALC)?

I did for one semester and hated it. Basically, I went there with a five year old
literally carrying two babies. I got there and they had a lot of outlines. It is so
disorganized. Everybody was late. People were supposed to teach things and just
decided they weren’t going to. This was then, this was six years ago. And then, at the
end of the year, we had a meeting. ‘Okay, what was good, what was bad’? I brought
up some of my concerns and it was, ‘you know people have kids, they are going to be
late.’ I had two babies! I have no patience for stuff like that!

Q: Did the availability of TALC support your influence or influence your decision?
No, I found out about it afterwards.

Q: What are the reasons that caused you to decide to homeschool?
To be honest with you, it was more of a panic thing at first because my child was
kicked out of preschool. And, um, basically, the reasons for it was that there wasn’t
anything wrong with him and he didn’t do anything bad, but when they had circle
time, which is you know, they get around a circle and talk about feelings and other
things, he was not down with it. He wanted to go and do and they basically did not
have the manpower for it. I came fearful that he would be labeled ADD or something
else, but that he needs a year or two to mature before we send him off. I did not want
to delay his education because he obviously he was very active. I did not want him to
be like me, where I had to wait a year for the school, because you have to be five by
December first, and my birthday is the fourth. My mother said, ‘well can you make an
exception because she knows how to read?’ You would think they would let me in,
but no. I went through school, sitting through class, doing nothing, and graduated
third in class. Everyone thought I was brilliant, but it was only because I was just a
couple of years ahead of everybody. And also, because of my parents, I was in very
many ways homeschooled, because if I had a question of how do I do that, she would
teach me how to do it. Two years later, you get to it in school and it was, you know, I
didn’t want to do that to my kids.

Q: Did you ever seriously consider the public schools for them?
No. Nope.

Q: Given the reasons for homeschool, how would you rank them, first for most
important?
The most important reasons have become the school is just a complete and total
failure and that the more that people participate in it, you are just supporting a system
that does not work and that should be done away with. On principle, I refused to
participate. The second reason would be you know educational quality. The third
would be more of a, I don’t want to participate because of the things that go on.

Q: What is your impression of the local public school?
This one is hideous! In Hoosick Falls, they are much better. I think there is more of,
you know, there is less money up there and it more sort of average people and they
have more average values. I would have considered going there, but this you know,
every parent who has kids here, old teachers that my husband had said ‘don’t do it’.
So, all good advice.
Q: How did you find out about the public schools?

Talking to someone. Uh, we have family members who, you know, started off in the school when it was halfway normal. They do a lot of experimentation here and actually they did it with my husband's class. It is more about 'let's experiment with teaching styles' and these, you know, sort of social constructs and group learning rather than do kids know how to read? Do they know how to write a letter? Do you know how to find out what X equals? You know, it's more about, I guess they get money sometimes for doing some of these programs.

Q: Is any of your impression of the schools based on what you read in the newspapers, TV?

We don't get the newspaper unless we know somebody who is in the newspaper. We don't get cable TV and our antenna does not work very well. So we don't do much TV. We listen to talk radio and I would say that some of that reinforces the idea that okay, we are doing the right thing!

Q: Demographics-omitted from transcript. See Appendix C.

Q: You mentioned about the private school in Pittsfield?

Yeah, my husband worked there for a year as director of psychology, so you get a lot of the dirt from one side. Even there, there is a lot of things that are strange. One third of the girls there, are learning disabled.
Q: A third?

A third.

A: Do they get private testing?

They get private testing and all these other things. It's like so and so has been diagnosed with something and she needs extra testing time. These are wealthy kids, that had good nutrition, medical care. There is no reason why they should have these issues. They all have emotional problems because they are spoiled. Because Dad married a woman half his age and she shipped them out to something like this. You know they are going down to South American to get their [inaudible] reshaped.

The point is that with the same amount of money, you could get so much more. Why can't we get textbooks, current maps? They have computers.

Q: One of our questions is did you ever consider public school, but did you ever consider private school?

We could never afford it. I really don't think they could do any better. If you look back at the old handbook, the dress code, the code of conduct, things like this. There is so much more that used to be required of human beings and society on how to dress, how to act, how to be polite, how to be studious, how about waste other peoples time, and now look at how people dress themselves.

Q: But yet we have to enforce all the other rules.
Well you try to, but it seems like it always comes back to sort of low expectations. Even like school dances. Dances used to be formals with tuxedos, gowns, gloves and all the stuff and now they are wearing hardly anything at all and doing these sorts of dances that you know what I am talking about. It is like, what has this become? In a way, it is not better then it was, but at least the education was there. I buy my own textbooks. For $50, you can have a textbook that will last you for five years.

Q: I just wanted your opinion of public versus private was?

I think there used to be more of a distinction, but now it's not that strong, not for the money.
Interview I

Q: Could you give me a general overview of who you homeschool and how long you have done it for.
At the current time, I am schooling our son, and he has just turned 12. He has been homeschooling since third grade.

Q: What’s the vision of the homeschool program do you wish to provide?
To provide him with the best possible educational experience that he can have meeting his own needs, challenging him, resulting in an individual who is, you know, well learned and has a passion for learning and continues that throughout his life. If we achieve that, we will be happy.

Q: How is your homeschool program different from what he would receive in a local public school?
We’re different. I don’t know if this is the point where you really want to get into the why we choose. Well, um, you know, our son is a child that if you are labeling him, he would be twice exceptional. So, he is gifted as well as learning disabled. So, he is all over the page in terms of ability and it would be very difficult for the public school system to be able to deal with both of those pieces simultaneously. Just in a nut shell and I am sure there are questions that we will go into more detail.

Q: What aspects of participating in the public school experience would concern you
in relation to your own child?

Well, what led us to look at this to begin with, um, you know, I noticed very early on, I noticed in Kindergarten that there were discrepancies between ability and performance. That is something hard for the early school teachers to see because they don’t know the child, but I would see things that were coming home and if wasn’t my child and I knew the ability that was there. And so, I began to question, you know, from the beginning that, you know, there is something else going on here. I didn’t receive a lot of support in that, so, you know, we stuck it out through first grade. Looking back now, we should have pulled him right away, but we managed to get through second grade in part because I was in there a lot and was offering a lot of additional programs to keep him motivated as well as some of the other children that were in there. Um, but, it was not working for him at all. I had a child that went from being, you know, excited and happy to getting off the bus every day either in tears or furious.

Q: What are some characteristics of a high quality homeschool program? (Hours per day, days per week, months per year)

I don’t think you can say that. Um, I think that a high quality homeschooling program is one that works for that child and that family, so, you know, there is no given. I know people that go 12 months a year and I know people that go six months a year and I think it is not just what works, it is what works that year, or that month for your child and that is one of the nice things about it. You have the flexibility to tailor it with whatever is going on.
Q: Do you have any physical locations or needs as to where you do the school? Do you have a desk? Do you do it in the kitchen?

My son said to me the other day, ‘why do you call it homeschooling, mom, we’re hardly ever home’? Which is true. No, we don’t use a desk. A desk would be the last thing that would work for him. He is extremely right brained. I mean for kids who are extremely left brained, a desk may be fine for kids then. He works in the tree house. He works in the hammock. He works out in the yard with the dog. He works down by the stream. He works at the kitchen table. He works on the couch or on the floor. Wherever.

Q: Does he have a choice in the curriculum?

Definitely. There is choice within structure for us. That is how we do it, you know. It is not a choice that we are doing algebra this year, but there is choice within that of you know, these are the things that we need to cover first, in order to have a good foundation, ‘what might you like to do?’ I try to give him as many choices as possible where that is appropriate to do. I give him choices of things. ‘These are the things we said we were going to cover today. Do you have a preference of what we do first’? Anywhere, where there is a possibility because I think it is important to teach how to make good choices. So wherever that is possible, but it is not a choice of, you know we’re doing ancient civilizations this year. That is not a choice. I mean, that’s what we’re doing.
Q: Now will you give more choice as he gets older, say high school? Will there be more choice in the curriculum? Different languages, stuff like that...

I'm not sure of that right now because I don't know. I mean it will depend on whether he begins to develop a feel of where he might want to go. Um, we have, um, academics is a very high priority in our family. So, it is not an option to not continue to be challenged. But, if he reaches the point in high school and just really loves biology, you know, and would like to do more, you know, advanced biology as opposed to perhaps doing physics, I mean, that would be something we would consider at that point, but, you know, I can't say right now.

Q: Is there testing or what do you judge his achievement on?

That's, you know, we do periodic assessments and we finish units. We do that. I work very closely with him, so it's assessment on a daily basis actually. I try as much as possible to, and I'm going to put mastery in quotes, "mastery" or as close to that, because I really feel if that foundation is not there, the next step is going to fall at some point. You may get to the third story before it falls, but it is going to. So, I'm constantly assessing that and if there is not a really close to mastery as you can get, then we will continue on that until there is. We do have periodic assessment by someone outside of the district. He is just beginning to develop an interest occasionally, he will say, 'grade this for me as it would be graded if I were in [proper name omitted school].' Sometimes, that is something he would like to do. We go back and forth on that.
Q: Would you sign permission for me to look at your homeschool plan?
Sure.

Q: Do you participate in The Alternate Learning Center?
We do. That is where he is right now. We have cut way back on that. Um, we are there just a half day one day a week and that's it. The program is two days a week. In large part because I think we are moving a little faster with the academics then what some of the other folks are comfortable doing. So, we have actually branched off with a number of other people that were with TALC and have developed another group with children who are very bright and very motivated to learn and so, we are doing some other courses with them now. I mean, it is still a learning group, but is just separate from TALC.

Q: Did the availability of the TALC support your influence to homeschool? Did that have any part in it?
I wouldn't say that the availability of it influenced, no. It really has been wonderful, but if that wasn't there, we still would have gone ahead.

Q: What are the reasons that caused you to decide to homeschool? Who had the input and when did you first consider to homeschool?
Well, as I mentioned before, we knew right from the beginning that there was something there. Um, and initially, I was not thinking homeschooling. But, I am remembering back to, you know, kindergarten, there was some discomfort and there
was some questioning, but at that point, you know you say ‘well, maybe things will settle in.’ Maybe the reading, the writing piece, you know he is not quite there yet and everything else he is just fine on. But it was in the back of my head. You know, something was niggling. First grade, I knew very clearly and kept bringing it up and saying, ‘there is something that is going on here.’ And although, everyone was very nice and understanding, but there was just the feel that, ‘no, there is nothing here. Why are you concerned? He is so bright. He’ll catch up. And maybe you are comparing him to his sister’ who was reading and writing before school. They were just not really hearing what I was saying. By second grade, the bottom just fell out and we knew this just was not going to work. It is difficult in a setting where there are multiple children, to be able to meet the needs of the child who, you know, was accelerated many grades in most subjects and at that point operating at a preschool level with writing and spelling and you could not make out anything that he was putting down on paper. So, schools struggle with the gifted piece by itself. When you have a child who is gifted, but yet can’t see the gift. It wasn’t happening. You can’t put him in a class to remediate him with other children that require remediation when he is so bright. He would not have lasted a day in there. He would have been literally pulling his hair out, but yet he needed the extra help, which is very difficult.

Q: You said that there were a couple of reasons that you decided to homeschool. Could you rank those in terms of importance, first most important, second?
Well, I mean, the first was looking at what it was doing to him. I mean, looking at his sense of self. Um, to have a child in second grade so unhappy and frustrated; it was
unacceptable in my eyes. There should be no child at that age that is not just thrilled to be learning. That is number one. And then, just the twice exceptional piece, looking at that and knowing that it’s going to be a struggle for someone who is like him.

Q: What is your impression of the local public school?

There are positives and negatives. I mean I do have to say that the district has been very, very supportive of our decision. Extremely supportive of our decision. You know, I have been able to work well with them. Folks have been very willing to, you know if there is, you know, some unit that we were doing and if I went in and said ‘do you have some things that I might be able to use for this’? And teachers have been very willing to sit down and provide that. I don’t feel that this district is really strong on the gifted piece. I would like to see that worked on more. We have a daughter also in school and it is a constant struggle. There are things that they do well and there are things that they definitely could do a lot better on.

Q: How did you get your information about the public schools before you decided to homeschool? Did your children attend the public schools, did you attend public schools? Did you talk to other parents?

Well, one of the things that we did, when we were looking to move to this area was to critique all of the schools around. We knew we wanted to live somewhere in this area and so we checked out testing scores. We went in and talked and had an interview and see what district did we think would be the best. I do have to say, if you are
looking at, you know, test scores and New York Assessments, I think [proper name omitted] school district was doing much better when we initially moved here that what they are now.

Q: Did you attend public schools?
Yes.

Q: Was it a satisfactory experience?
Yeah.

Q: Have you been in a public school recently?
Yeah, my daughter is enrolled right now in [proper name omitted].

Q: Do you read about the public schools in newspapers or on TV? Did that affect your decision at all?
Did it affect my, well, again, there is nothing in the paper that would change my mind about if this is the right thing for our son right now that we are doing.

Q: Demographics-omitted from transcript. See Appendix C.

Q: Are there any questions that I should have asked or any input to share?
Well, the point of this study is what. What are you trying to understand better?
Q: To get an idea of why people homeschool. To get a better feeling for the type of person who does homeschooling these days. It is for a doctoral thesis so they are making conclusions based on the questions.

I guess one of the things that I would like to make sure that comes across in the interview, I think, well, I'll be blunt. I know that the school could not come close to meeting [proper name omitted] needs that way that we can through the homeschooling. That's not public school bashing. It's realistic. They have got twenty plus kids in the classroom. I am a therapist. I know what it's like with a lot of the kids that come in. I mean, it would be impossible. I think they would make an effort. I know they would make an effort, but it would not be happening. We are using a college level text now for ancient civilizations. The group that he is in, it is amazing what these kids are doing. But we can that, because he is an N of 1, or in a group, he is an N of 6, so we can do that. We can be doing ninth and tenth grade algebra, but he can use the tape recorder. He can use me as a scribe, so that the wonderful ideas that he has can get out, and yet we know we continue to work on the writing piece because it is important that he develop that and get stronger on it. It is always going to be a problem for him, but if he were in a school setting, there would be some things that they would be able to do, but it would certainly not be to that level. He would be bored in a lot of areas. He would not be able to be asking the questions that he is asking and be able to, you know, you asked a question early on, how much does he direct the curriculum? You know, especially in science and history, when there is something which really interests him, which is often, he loves those subjects, it is fine for us to then say okay, we'll spend the rest of the week on that particular topic and
he goes into it with incredible detail. To me, that is the optimal. I understand that the optimal is not possible a lot of times when you have multiple children, so it is not a, I would never sit here and say I would expect them to do what we are doing and that they are not doing their job, because it just couldn't be. Do I think that it could be better for kids like him? Yes, I do. I think hopefully teachers will begin to see that there are more kids like him out there that are twice exceptional and that maybe more teachers begin to take some training in that and districts begin to look for someone with that expertise when they hire, you know, so that these kids needs are better met. But, it would be impossible for him to be able to fly the way he is flying if he were there. I think what would happen is that some teachers would recognize his gifts, but others would only see the deficits. It would be a constant struggle.
Interview J
09-//-07

Q: We are here to get an idea of your homeschool experience. Could we start with you giving me a general overview of who you homeschool and how long you have homeschooled for?

I have homeschooled my son and I guess if you count when he would have entered kindergarten, it has been seven years, but homeschooling really started earlier than that.

Q: What is your vision for the homeschool program that you would like to provide?

Well, we always debated whether we would continue right up until college and now that we are getting, we're in middle school, it is looking like that's what we'll do.

Q: How is your homeschool program different from what your child would do in a local public school or even a private school, if that was ever an option?

Homeschooling allows us to let him stay on a subject for as long as he wants and that is actually part of the reason we started because early on he demonstrated an interest in his staying on a topic for a long period of time and in a school situation, where the bell is gonna ring, and you gotta put that down. So, that allows us to go far as his interest stays and in as much depth as he wants.

Q: What aspect of participating in the public school experience, if any, would concern
you or would not be suitable for your child?

The one is the fact that there are periods and so that class has to stop and move on to the next thing, whether or not they are in the middle of something or not. Also, the fact that the teaching has to be done at the median level as far as, you know, you are trying to accommodate the students that are accelerated. It is not as much individualized as homeschooling would be. Also, there are times that we do participate. There are school activities and after-school activities and community activities. What we do experience is, that there are a lot of time spent or wasted, just sort of corrailling people to the next place and re-establishing the discipline and so, for as many hours as they are in a real classroom setting, you don’t actually get that many hours worth of education.

Q: What are characteristics of a high quality homeschool program in your opinion as far as hours per day, or days per week and months per year?

My son will say that he never gets a break because we pretty much go through the summer. Uh, we stop for vacations, so if we are traveling some place we don’t pack a lot of books. But, it is pretty much year round, ah, with a number of additional activities. There is some theater and some recreational stuff. Doing those things means we are still getting a lot of work done, so we are often working still on a Saturday or on a Sunday, so, I wouldn’t say that it is seven days a week all the time, but, it is definitely not a five day, six hour thing.

Q: What about the physical location. Do you use one space the most?
We do have a dedicated space for it, and um. That space, we definitely do a neat shared program with a couple of other families. So, when they come over, that is the space that we use for science. We often use that space ourselves because we can set up in a classroom style. It is also nice to be able to do the work where we happen to be.

Q: Could you comment on your ideal amount of student choice? Like, how much choice the student has in the curriculum?
Hmm, well we never really, um, part of it is style. I know there is a different style. We are just following the same materials that are followed in the public schools to stay on track. Because at any point we may decide that we want to let him go back into, well, not back into because he has never been in, but if he was gonna go to public school, we don’t want him to be out of sequence.

Q: So, the testing you give your child is the same as what they give...or is it different?
Yeah, it is different. We use a Pass test, which is for homeschoolers. We are just about done with it. He finishes in the eighth grade and he finished with sixth grade and actually tested out at most things in the eighth grade level. So we have to find another test. So we will start looking, which will be the same as what they do.

Q: Overall, what would you say the student achievement is based on? Like, how do you assess or evaluate achievement.
Well, with the testing we only do once a year that PASS test. So, really it is just a
continuous monitoring.

Yeah, by whether he is asking the right questions. If it goes to discussion, whether he gets the main points and some of the text that we are using do have tests that you need track with. He does those.

Q: Okay, would you sign permission for me or actually the other researcher to look at your homeschool plan, which is on file at the public school?

Oh, sure.

Q: Do you participate in The Alternate Learning Center?

We used to, yeah.

Q: Did the availability of help, you know, at The Alternate Learning Center, did that support or influence your decision to homeschool?

No, we were homeschooling before we came on board with them.

Q: What are the reasons you decided to homeschool and could you also mention who had the input in the decision? Who helped you to make the decision? And when you first considered it?

We first considered it, probably when he was about three. Both my wife and I discussed it and agreed that it was a good choice to make and at that time, we were living some place else, where the public schools were a little rougher. At the elementary school level, it would have been fine, but I was concerned as he would get
to middle school and high school. So, we decided we would start there. What were the other parts of that question?

Q: Who helped you to make the decision? Who had the input in the “say” and the decision?

Yeah, so it was just my wife and I. We do have friends that were already homeschooling.

Q: Did you, I know he was really young, so maybe not, but did you ever consider, seriously consider, sending him to public school?

Yes, actually, where we were at the time before we came up to Columbia County, the elementary school that would have served our neighborhood was very good.

Q: How would you identify your reasons, if you were to rank them, as the most important reason or second or third most important?

Well, the most important is the quality of education. I don’t know if there is another one behind that. That is really the only driver for us.

Q: Making sure that the time would be sufficiently.

Yes, and so, the use of time, the customization to exactly what his current level of understanding is. Um, and the ability to stay on a task for really, some times, six or eight hours at a clip.
Q: What is your impression of the local public school here?

I think it's good. In our interaction, in fact we have done volunteer work in the library. We participated in some of the medieval festivals and he had some knowledge on that particular area in Europe, so we came and talked to the students about that. So, our interaction with the school district is very good.

Q: So, did any children in the family ever attend public school.

He is the only one.

Q: Did you yourself attend public school?

I did.

Q: What was your experience with it?

Um, well, that is the school district he would have grown up in. So, in high school, at the time I went, there was already drugs and that is probably something that is everywhere. But, it is closer to New York City and so, I was concerned about that. It had a good accelerated or advanced placement program. It can be, I think it can be modified, so that the challenges, but even then, we had another twenty students or so that are in that accelerated program. There are different levels.

Q: Are you saying you were satisfied with your public school you were in?

Yes. Well prepared for college.
Q: Have you and your son been in public school recently?
Well, he interacts, but he doesn’t attend. So, he’ll be in for an hour or two, attend
some program there.

Q: Have you yourself been in the public school recently?
I have been, yes. I do some consulting for a program called University in High
School. So, I have done some work in the Chatham school. I have done some work in
the Greenwich school, north of Albany.

Q: Did other parents or kids talk to you about public schools? Is that a source of
information about public school for you?
Well, I guess also early on, probably when he was still, certainly when he would have
been five or six, something like that. My cousins were going through elementary
school and at that time. There was a whole thing about not correcting students
because of the damage to the delicate psyche. And so, correcting spelling is
something that eventually a letter was sent home to the parents that said, don’t correct
their spelling. It will come with time. For awhile, it was entertaining to get those
letters. We always put thank you letters and things because you could make out what
they were saying, but it was really pretty weird. We decided that, and also at that
time, I think it was called [inaudible] Education, where there was less emphasis on
right answers. And both my wife and I come from science and math backgrounds and
there is a right answer. I guess in terms of what we heard about public schools at that
time, and this was probably ten or more years ago, this is something that we felt like
if that is the direction that public schools are going, that we would rather stick with things that have right answers. Some of it is room for opinion type discussions and other topics too.

Q: Is the newspaper, TV, local or national news a source of your information about public schools?
No actually, it is not a decision that we review very often.

Q: Demographics omitted from transcript. See Appendix C.

Q: In closing, is there anything that I did not ask, in order to get a full understanding of why and how you decided to homeschool?
No, I think you did well.

Well, thank you so much.
You're welcome.
Interview K

Q: Could you give me a general overview of who you homeschool and how long you have done it for?

I currently have four of my five children schooling at home. My oldest is away at school in college. Um, my two older children attended public school until they were in seventh grade and fourth grade and my younger children have never attended public schools.

Q: What is the vision of the homeschool program that you want to provide?

Our philosophy of education is that our children become life long learners and that is really our whole criteria is that they love learning and that they continue to do that. We did consider, there is a Catholic school in [proper name omitted] county. If my kids had to go to school, our next first option would be to a Catholic school environment, because we like the philosophy of the education. And the public school here is fine, I have no issues with it, but that would definitely be our second choice. We do use some materials, but not all with catholic culture and we definitely encourage our children to do some exploring of their faith in their learning process.

Q: How is your homeschool program different from what your child would do in a public school?

Yeah, definitely. When my children were in public schools, I was very easily able to ask the school [inaudible], but I found that I was spending a lot of my energy trying to
be involved in the school environment. We were tutors at the school at the time and that it was easier to put us all in one place, because we all discussed basically the same time period of history, although we explored them at the grade level as they go. It is easier when we do economics and current events, it is a lot easier to get that open discussion in a catholic sense when we are all together than having to fit it in to what the teachers are doing in the public school.

Q: What aspects of participating in the public school experience, if any, would concern you in relation to your child specifically? Are you talking about this public school or any? In the public school here, it was a wonderful experience. So, I actually make sure that our kids were in a place where if something were to happen in our family, and we were to have to change our situation, that they could easily all go into the school setting, here, right at the local school.

Q: In your estimation, what are the characteristics of a high quality homeschool program, hours of day, days per week, months per year? I don’t know if time. In New York State there’s guidelines that we include in all of our reporting every year that our children has some qualified hours of instruction, because in a public school setting, when dealing with so many aspects of different personalities and behaviors, you have to kind of quantitate with a number. I don’t know that I would quantitate with a number. I would definitely hope that most families are teaching a love of learning, and teaching the kids how to learn which is a significantly important skill. Making sure that they do cover enough material that
their kids can be functional members of society, which is a really important piece that sometimes even folks in private school and public schools omit. My hope is that families would not be too focused on any one thing, and that they would forget to be well-rounded. In our family, we have a community service component to our life, but it has nothing to do with our homeschooling. We do things together as a family. We think that having supportive, loving people around you is important. I hope that my kids will always want to do that and carry on into adulthood, whether it’s having families of their own or being in a group of people that all do that, so they learn to be good functioning members of a group as well as functioning on their own and being able to live in society. You need a good base in this society. That the things that I think.

Q: With your homeschooling, do you think there are any physical locations or needs? Where do you do your schooling?

In our house everybody has a desk where they have a quiet space so if they need to go somewhere and have a good writing surface, that they can use it. And it’s just their’s and they can decorate it however the want to and they have bulletin boards next to it. They each have a physical space that is their learning environment. But, there are many days that they never get there. They will sit at the kitchen table or outside, sitting on a blanket or, you know, wherever. In our house, my kids each because their grade levels are so varied, they each have their own basic work they have to accomplish. So, a lot of times they call me to somewhere in the house, so I have to make sure that I can get to each of them, you know if they have a question or that
kind of stuff. So, sometimes, the physical desks are difficult, because then I have to
get from room to room to make sure I am helping. A lot of times it is easier for
everyone to do their math at the kitchen table or everybody brings. It depends on the
day.

Q: Do they have any choice in the curriculum?

My kids who are high school are very open to what they would like to learn. My
oldest now is looking at being a philosophy major, so this year instead of his Latin
studies, and language study, he is actually going to tap into, although he is still going
to be studying his [inaudible], but he will also be looking and using that same tutor
for the philosophy, because he is realizing now that most of his interests comes from
what he learns from other people that live in different environments. So, yes, they do
get some kind of choice. We cover a classical curriculum, which means we take
history in four sections. This year, in our house its American history, contemporary
American history, we start with the Civil War and we go through. So, everybody is
kind of stuck in that, but I know my oldest has already done that twice. He has that
laid foundation in his learning, so he will probably more because he is interested
more in the economics of the United States, you know the depression and how things
evolve with money and the gas shortages that have evolved through time. He is
currently taking a course on energy in a college setting. So, we have had a lot of
discussions recently about where the different energy issues in our country have made
in history. So, although he'll be doing American history, but exploring it more in-
depth related to the other things he is doing.
Q: How do you do the testing? What is the student achievement based on? Do you give tests, or do you...

Some of the curriculums that we use in our house do have actual tests, but brand curriculums all have unit tests at the end of the unit to make sure that they have a knowledge of what was covered. Their math curriculums also have, but those are things that I do. You know that I evaluate and sometimes I will look over something and say he really didn’t learn as solid as I hoped, so let’s go back and make sure that we get that clearer in your understanding, but the thought of standardized tests for New York State, I don’t have a lot of confidence in the Regents Exam. So, I don’t push my kids to do that. They do take the SAT II subject tests at their level, just a couple, just to show that they are capable. They take a regular SAT because they all have aspirations of college, so we try to start that early, so they take it in tenth grade, eleventh grade, twelfth grade, but as far as the other testing, my son has taken the National [inaudible] because he is interested and he wants to, but not because we made him.

Q: Would you sign permission for me to look at your homeschool plan?

Um, that’s fine. Sure.

Q: Do you participate in The Alternate Learning Center?

Yes, since the beginning and I sit on the board there.
Q: Did the availability of the TALC support or influence your decision to home school at all?

It didn’t influence our decision at all because we lived somewhere else previously where we could already explore our family’s educational choices and considered homeschooling. So, we had thought about homeschooling well before we moved here. Um, it definitely made it easier over the years, because it was simpler to find people to tap into one to one with, but also we use a lot of people in the community, so, for foreign language instruction, for expertise. My kids have worked with physicists and they have worked with biologists and those people and it would have taken me a lot more energy to find those people if I didn’t have a network to do that. We have actually started a secondary network for people who don’t want to commit to a cooperative learning environment twice a week. There is another network called the [inaudible] Network, which is an E-list, which could just post on; ‘Okay I have a friend who has this expertise. If you want him, to share it, or whatever.’ Currently, we are running a Civil War exploration of similar cultures in that, not necessarily a time line and battle with numbers, but more of what the culture of the Civil War was. What did they eat? How did they sleep? How did people at home celebrate when they were missing members of their families? And that we could put it out on a frame work so kids who [inaudible], their families can get in touch with me and we will gather together and do that together. It started out as secondary piece but grew out of the TALC.

Q: What are the reasons that caused you to homeschool? Who had the input? When
did you first consider it?

We first considered it when my oldest was in public school downstate. We were looking at a Catholic school for her to attend and the Catholic school told us that she could not come because she was in the gifted program in the public school and they could not serve her. We considered that if we could not pay someone to educate our child to a standard that we wanted, what exactly were we looking for in education. It has been reevaluated point in our family where we are through with the fact that I don’t work outside the home over the years and so that is definitely something that we kept looking at, but at the time, that wasn’t so sure in our life, so we waited. Then, when we moved up here, the school was great. She was having a great experience, but our third child was kindergarten age and the kindergarten here was a full day and that was something we didn’t have a comfort level with, so we kept her home and we did that for two years and figured out that it was easier to bring the older kids home because then we could be a family and school together and travel together. We do a lot of field trips and travel around.

Q: Would you rank your reasons in terms of importance?

I don’t know, I think it’s a strong look every time about the reasons why and not. I think the most important reason we homeschool is so that we can have some sense of where the learning goes and so that our kids get an opportunity to love learning and not sit in a definite mold. I don’t know if that really counts because we do use the curriculum. We’re not unschoolers. It’s funny because we have little bits and pieces of all different kinds of philosophy mixed in. I think that the, um, Catholic piece was
maybe the driving force behind it.

Q: What is your impression of the local public school?

I have a pretty good relationship with the local public school and currently producing middle school stage show. I have a really good relationship. I can’t say enough. There have been some teachers that don’t understand why my kids are in the drama program and, you know, at this point, there is actually quite a lot of homeschoolers in the drama club over at the high school and in the middle school. My son does all of the lighting for the elementary school drama program. So, there are people and teachers that never understood that connection and weren’t really open because they saw homeschoolers as bucking the trend of the school. I think it is just a wonderful environment; it’s just not the environment I choose to have. You know, it costs me a lot more money to homeschool my children than to send them to school and that’s the choice we have made as a family and I have had to educate people about that, like individual teachers. For the most part, this district has been great. We have been involved for so long at this point that people respect the fact that we have made the choice, which is really nice.

Q: How did you know about public schools before you decided to homeschool? Did your children ever attend?

Yes, I went to public school. My husband went to Catholic school.

Q: Did you both have satisfactory experiences with it?
We did have satisfactory experiences. I think that one of the things that I felt from my own school experience is that I would have benefited if I had been offered a Catholic school education. Because living in my family, we really could not afford it. That was one of the things that we thought we would do for our kids and that is maybe why we chose their philosophy as our philosophy.

Q: Have you been in a public school recently?

Yes. I have a lot of rehearsals. I think that the teachers there are good. I think that the kids are well cared for in their time there. No situation is perfect when you have to deal with so many different needs and so many different learning styles and so many different family styles. I think the school district does a good job with the money that they get. I wish there was more money for education in this country. I wish there was more educational choice, but I choose to live in a rural community so I can’t expect charter schools and right now Catholic school education isn’t doing well either. So, you know, I think education in general is hurting for money in this country and I don’t know how to change that, but I think this local school district does the best job they can do with the funds they are given.

Q: Do you talk to other kids and parents about public schools at all?

I know there are people who don’t like the public school environment. I know there are people whose kids are there who feel trapped, and feel that they can’t make changes, but that is true for homeschoolers and private schoolers too. There are people that spend, I know a family where one parent returned to the work
environment to pay for a private school education and still doesn't have a perfect school experience. Overall, I think that most people today, most people are educated enough to make really good education choices for their kids and change where they live based on if the schools are good or not. If you have a child with special needs, you find out where those programs are and you go there.

Q: Do you read about the schools in the papers or TV? What is your impression? I will mention to you that I think that Catholic education, especially in this area is definitely a dying art. I feel that it is a sad thing. But, I think there will be some other thing that will be pick it up, whether it be parents like me who decide to do that or the church in general will decide the problems[inaudible], so I'm not surprised. Public school education, I think, is that right now the government works really hard to try and have standards, but think that publicly in the New York, with the Regents experiences, that it is not a perfect structure and I think they that eventually that will evolve and change. Educational ideas change whether it is a certain math style and they change to the old math or those type of things. And as a home educator, I try, because my kids range in age, I try really hard to keep up with what the newest of the forms are so that when they are in a group learning environment, they can easily share with other kids who have similar experiences. But, um, yeah, I think I keep up to date on those kinds of things. I would like to see Charter schools. I would love to see school vouchers. I would love to see education money get spent in the wisest way, but I don't know, I don't have the answers of how to do that. Personally, I choose to spend my energy in schooling my children. May be they can find the answers to
things like world peace, energy issues. I do what I can do to get my kids to be functional adults and help social problems.

Demographics-omitted from transcript. See Appendix C.

Q: Anything I didn’t ask that you would like to share

I do think it is important to look at when you are looking at a homeschooler environment, well, there are two things. One, I think it is important to realize that more educated, well versed, white people homeschool. That is changing a little bit. I just read something on NPR on inner city areas, even in [proper name omitted], though it is true. The majority of those who succeed and stay homeschoolers are people who know how to get the resources and can spend the money to be with their kids. I have always said that to homeschool is not an education choice, it is a life style choice. I think that is something that should be looked at. Not that I think that everybody should homeschool, I definitely don’t think that everybody should homeschool, just like I don’t think everybody should send their kids to private school or send their kids to public school. I am glad there is freedom. The other thing is, I know recently in the paper, someone just brought it to my attention that [proper name omitted] has a higher geographical area of homeschoolers than other school district and the school district was kind of questioning that and I think they have to realize that the school district is as welcoming as they can be. Yes, I would love it if my kids could play on a sports team and I would love it if my kids could be in the orchestra, whatever, but I understand the limitations. I understand that they have to do with the
tax dollars what they were intended to. I am very glad that there is open door club and the drama department because it does help them and help us because they get to have a different pools of kids come in and it definitely is something that we don’t mind spending the energy to get our kids in the rehearsals, which is an extra burden. So, I am glad for that, but also in general, outside of the school district, there is a local empowerment and that is due to the fact that there are many other, there are other resources. TALC is here. There are resources. It is easier for people to make their education choice and live in the area where there are resources available. We would have homeschooled on Long Island if it came to that, but downstate, the resources would not have been as easy to find. I think that’s all.
Appendix C

Demographic Data from Interviews
Table 13

Demographic data from interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Family Size</th>
<th>Father’s Age</th>
<th>Mother’s Age</th>
<th>Children’s Ages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>6, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>13, 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Deceased</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>10, 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1, 3, 5, 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>7, 11, 14, 16, 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1, 6, 7, 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>15, -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>40+</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>6, 12, 14, 17, 20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Dash indicates data was not collected in interviews.
Table 13

Demographic data from interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Birth location</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Attend religion</th>
<th>Denomination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>NY, NY</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>NY, NY</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>NY, NY</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Pittsfield, MA</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>NY, NY</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>NY, NY</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Christian Baptist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Troy, NY</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Rochester, NY</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Quaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Kingston, NY</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Long Island, NY</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Dash indicates data was not collected was not collected in interviews.
Table 13

Demographic data from interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Father Schooling</th>
<th>Father Political view</th>
<th>Mother Schooling</th>
<th>Mother Political view</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>Liberal-Conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>Left</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>Left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>Left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>Republican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>19 years</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>Apolitical</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>Independent-Conservative</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>Independent-Conservative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Dash indicates data was not collected in interviews.
Table 13

Demographic data from interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Family income</th>
<th>Father job type</th>
<th>Mother job type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>&quot;not much&quot;</td>
<td>Blue collar</td>
<td>Blue collar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>$140,000.</td>
<td>White collar</td>
<td>White collar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>$50,000.</td>
<td>Blue collar</td>
<td>White collar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>$30,000.-50,000.</td>
<td>White collar</td>
<td>White collar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>$65,000.</td>
<td>Blue collar</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>White collar</td>
<td>White collar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>$80,000.</td>
<td>White collar</td>
<td>White collar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>White collar</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>White collar</td>
<td>White collar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>White collar</td>
<td>White collar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>$90,000.</td>
<td>White collar</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Dash indicates data was not collected in interviews.
Table 13

Demographic data from interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Home value</th>
<th>Own/rent</th>
<th>Length of residency</th>
<th>Number of vehicles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>$175,000.</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>&gt;5 years</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>&gt;5 years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>$150,000.</td>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>&gt;5 years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>$175,000.</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>&gt;5 years</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>$165,000.</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>&lt;5 years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>&gt;5 years</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>$300,000.</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>&gt;5 year</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>$350,000.</td>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>&gt;5 years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>$200,000.</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>&gt;5 years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>&gt;5 years</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>$150,000.</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>&gt;5 years</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Dash indicates data was not collected in interviews.