**To homeschool or not to homeschool: That is the question.**

 Homeschooling is a viable option for students who are 6 to18 years old in the United States. Homeschooling offers a lot of freedom and choices that families appreciate. According to the National Home Education Research Institute (2018), about 2.3 million students in the United States are homeschooled (4–5% of all students, according to various sources). Homeschooling, which costs about $600 a year to educate a child at home, is becoming increasingly popular.

In my practice, I have often observed that parents sometimes choose this option too quickly, without enough deliberation about the pros and cons of this particular educational model. So I decided to take a closer look at factors that may have an impact on the choice to homeschool, possible obstacles to effective and successful homeschooling, and academic success indicators for homeschooling versus traditional education. I also review some general facts regarding homeschool models.

 **What is homeschooling and what are state regulations?**

 Homeschooling is an education that takes place at home. Parents, legal guardians, and private teachers can teach children, selecting any curriculum they wish (including remote corresponding schools). However, it is the parents’ responsibility to follow state standards and ensure that any selected curriculum meets those standards. Furthermore, according to the Oregon Department of Education, parents who withdraw their children from a traditional school with the intent to homeschool must register their children with their ESD (Education Service District) within 10 days of that withdrawal. Moreover, because Oregon has a compulsory school attendance law, if the decision is made to *return* to traditional (public or private) school, parents must notify their ESD in writing that this change will be taking place. In addition, the state does not provide homeschooling parents with a curriculum (parents have the right, and responsibility, to choose their own); however, student testing isrequired for grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. The ODE site does provide homeschool parents with a login and with valuable resources, as well as state standards and practice tests, and the site lists a number of tests parents can select from. But it’s the parents’ responsibility to cover any testing costs. The site also offers a list of authorized individuals who can administer a test to a child. Test results are required to be submitted to the ESD.

It is important that parents understand that preparing a professional transcript for their child requires a lot of work. Some homeschool programs may offer help in preparing transcripts, but colleges and universities will need the graduation diploma *and* the transcripts for grades 9–12 for the student who is applying. In addition to the official transcript showing all required graduation credits earned, many colleges and universities require homeschooled students to take ACTs or SATs to demonstrate academic proficiency. This seems to be the preferred method for assessing homeschooled students’ academic aptitude. These tests can be taken as many as four times (twice in 11th grade and twice in 12th grade, in fall and in spring). Schools will also review students’ writing scores, so selecting an essay option when taking the SATs is recommended.

**Who can homeschool children?**

 Parents and guardians, as well as volunteer, certified, and uncertified teachers can homeschool children. Some states require that parents who homeschool their kids have at least a high school diploma. Only a few states require a college degree, and some states do not have any requirements. There is much controversy surrounding the level of parental education that should be required (or not required) in order to homeschool, as many psychologists point out that illiteracy (and the inability to read for comprehension, specifically) can be passed down from generation to generation. The question is whether states should require parents to possess a certain level of literacy. The jury is still out on this, and homeschool blogs are inundated with posts on this topic.

**Why do people homeschool their children?**

 I posted this question on social media and received a wide variety of responses on why homeschooling may be preferred by some families:

* I don’t trust the traditional public school system to raise a morally healthy child.
* When my children are small, I think I am better able to teach them what’s right and what’s wrong. Once they have some moral foundation, when they are older, I might send them to a traditional school.
* Homeschooling offers many curriculum options and the programs are great. There are also co-op programs everywhere, so children are able to participate in social activities and take electives.
* For many people it’s a calling. And they will find the way how to do it.
* I want to raise my children with a clear understanding of who God is and with an understanding of our mission on earth. I cannot imagine sending my children somewhere to be under someone else’s authority for eight hours a day, then having them come home only to do homework. My children are homeschooled, but are involved in many activities, like horseback riding, gymnastics, music, church groups, etc. They get to interact with many types of people and encounter a variety of perspectives. I might consider private school, but kids grow so fast and I want to enjoy time with them, regardless of how stressful it sometimes gets. I want to form a strong bond with them, understand them, be an influential figure to them, and ensure that they are safe. As parents, we need to dedicate time to teaching our children the basic, important things in life. It’s our responsibility, not someone else’s.
* I homeschool my children for many reasons. I have wanted to homeschool my children since I was in college. My children receive an amazing education. They read quality literature from a very young age and have ample outdoor time (4–6 hours). They study composers, poetry, singing, dance, gymnastics. They socialize daily with both adults and children, and by age six will be more socialized than most people their age. Observing their learning process excites me. If they grasp a concept quickly, we move forward. I want them to be challenged. We usually finish our work early and they have more time to play. Children need to play more, dream, explore, investigate. I don’t want my kids to conform to what society is doing. I create learning situations for them and I invite them to role-play. Most homeschool children we know personally are happy, kind, and well rounded, and are able to communicate with adults. My daughters love learning and I know they will be able to attend any university of their choice.
* We homeschool our children because of teachers’ inability to manage the classroom. Also certain policy changes allow students to distract other students from learning and put other kids at risk without any consequences. There is also increasing indoctrination taking place in public schools.

Others noted that

* Homeschool is an option for children who are often sick.
* Homeschool is an option for children who are bullied and need an emotional break.
* Homeschool or any type of individual program may best suit children who are gifted in a particular discipline, like art or sports, because those students could receive a very specific, individualized schedule.

 When people were asked why they would **not** homeschool their children, the following responses were given:

* I prefer a more rigid schedule.
* I want to be able to compare the progress of my child with other students.
* Because a traditional school’s structure fits my work schedule.
* Because we are in a private school that agrees with my beliefs and I don’t have to worry about unnecessary indoctrination.
* I would not survive if my kids were at home all day.
* I don’t have the energy to drive them back and forth, so prefer and rely on school bus transportation.
* I want my children to be well socialized.
* I do not have enough of an educational background to teach them at home.
* Teachers in our public school are great. I am well educated, but a teacher would have a greater depth of knowledge in particular subjects.
* I am not trained in pedagogical delivery methods.
* My children learn from their peers. They are exposed to different kinds of thinking and different ways of looking at the world.
* I absolutely love the flexibility of the American schools. One year you can go to private school, one year to public, and next, homeschool.
* I am a pushover. I could not teach my own kids at home. I want my children to be introduced to a variety of teaching styles.
* I don’t have the patience for it. I want them to socialize with peers who are unlike them.
* I want them to learn to read social environments and adjust, adapt, and thrive, because this is a necessary skill for their future. There is a certain level of discipline, focus, and rigidity that the homeschool environment can’t create.
* There has to be a valid reason to begin with for choosing to homeschool.

As you can see, the issues involved in this choice are rather complex and can provoke heated and serious discussions, with the resulting opinions being somewhat polarized. Having taught for more than 15 years and having been a principal for 12 years, I can testify to what I *do* know and what I have observed. With the exception of one (yes, one) student, all students who came to my school from a homeschool program were academically behind. However, the one student who had thrived in the homeschool environment graduated from high school early, entered an engineering program at a local university, and graduated with honors. At my school, however, that was the only story with a successful conclusion. When I have spoken to parents who are opting out in order to homeschool, the most common reason given is “it fits my schedule”; other reasons are the commute to and from the traditional school, the availability of a mother who will already be at home with younger children, the heavy workload at a private school, or a lack of trust or agreement with the values taught at public schools. All of these reasons may make choosing the homeschooling option seem easy. However, my observations about the benefits and drawbacks of homeschooling are based only on my specific experience. It may be that the lower academic preparedness of homeschooled students enrolling in my school has to do with the particular population of students and parents that I work with.

According to the National Home Education Research Institute (2018), homeschooled students score 15–30% higher than public school students on standardized achievement tests. These students score higher than public school students *regardless* of their parents’ level of education or income. Whether the parents were certified teachers or not was found to have no effect on student achievements. Moreover, colleges are actively recruiting homeschooled students. This leads me to conclude that there is a right way to homeschool students—by using customized curriculum and unique pedagogical approaches, through enhanced family relationships, by the provision of guided and reasoned social interactions with peers and adults, and by creating a safe environment that eliminates physical violence, drugs, and alcohol, psychological abuse, racism, improper sexuality, etc.—and that there is a wrong way to homeschool students—for example, by waiting too late to select a curriculum or by not regularly testing children, and by failing to observe a schedule, such as allowing them to sleep until 11 a.m., then making pancakes and letting them watch a lot of “educational TV” in their pajamas or considering a trip to Mexico four times a year as part of their schooling.

 I would encourage parents to take a frank look at the facts/situation and clarify for themselves whether this is the bet and most effective way for their children to receive a good education, or whether this is primarily best for their own schedules and lifestyle. My advice would be to realistically assess both their abilities as potential teachers and the time they will be able to dedicate to the learning process. If parents suspect that their child will spend most of homeschooling time on the home couch, have that child change his pajamas for jeans, put him on a school bus, and send him off to the local school.