

CALIFORNIA BAPTIST UNIVERSITY  
Riverside, California

**Home School: A Growing Market**

A Dissertation Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Business Administration

Rodney J. Ballard Jr.

Dr. Robert K. Jabs School of Business

April 2024

**Author Note**

I have no conflicts of interest to disclose. This research was approved by California Baptist University University's Institutional Review Board

Home School: A Growing Market

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**April 2024**

DocuSigned by:  
*Henry L Petersen*  
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**Henry L. Petersen, Ph.D., Committee Chair**

DocuSigned by:  
*Robert Stauffer*  
3AB0C3779016C41B

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**Dr. Robert Stauffer, D.B.A., Committee Member**

DocuSigned by:  
*Levi Garret*  
442B11 450940E41E4 0003

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**Levi R. Garrett, D.H.Ed., Committee Member**

DocuSigned by:  
*Dean Tim Gramling*  
CA2D1A3A6D50B45H

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**Tim Gramling, LPD., FACHE, Dean, Jabs School of Business**

## **Abstract**

The private home has long been the education center of school-aged children in the U.S., from the late 1700s until the early 1950s, when the government assumed responsibility for a child's education, obligating parents to enroll their children in public school systems. Parents generally opposed the government's interdiction into family affairs by way of mandated public-school attendance for children grades K-12, contending that children educated by the state result in the socialization of children consistent with state interests and values, which may not include many of the values, needs, and interests sought by parents that had historically reared and educated their children. The 2.6 million homeschooled students in March 2020 grew to nearly 5 million in March 2021, and when combined with U.S. private school enrollment during these periods, non-public school K-12 enrollment in the U.S. in 2021 totals 15 million, or approximately 30% of public-school enrollment of 49.4 million students. This qualitative, phenomenological study aimed to discover why an increasing number of parents of K-12 students in the U.S. are removing their children from public school education and homeschooling them. Homeschool and public-school K-12 students may have similar and distinct interests, needs, and values from one another that need to be considered in any form of education.

*Keywords:* biblical worldview, competency levels, curricula, disagreeable values, engagement, freedom, safety, homeschool, homeschool association, homeschooling, inflexibility, learning deficit, parent groups, public-school, public-school parity, quality, regulatory compliance, research, safety, culture, school problems, special needs, STEM, teacher quality, time with children, values.

## **Acknowledgments**

Thank you, my committee chair, Dr. Petersen, for your continual encouragement, recommendations, and support. You said this was possible, which agrees perfectly with Scripture: Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, and Matthew 19:26: “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” A special thanks to Dr. Putulowski, who supported my early decisions and was always a source of encouragement: “You can do this!” Thank you, Joe. From the beginning, this has been undertaken in faith in Christ and all glory to his Father and mine. I can’t wait to see how he uses this in the future. To the two homeschool associations in St. Louis, MO, who provided indispensable help to me with this study – M/M Quon and Friends of Home Education, and Senator Andrew Koenig and his wife, Brook, of the West County Christian Home Educators Association for significant assistance in recruiting participants. Thank you to all the participants who generously allowed me the time to learn about their homeschooling experiences.

## **Dedication**

To my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whom I love with all my heart. I've undertaken this challenge in faith, knowing that he will use it for good, to bless others, and to advance the glory of his name. To Molly, my love, my life, my wife - who is a constant source of encouragement, giving me needed space and time to complete this work successfully, and to my son, Jordan, who completed his dissertation, beating me to the finish line – he is always a faithful encourager. To my children – and their children - whose many events at school, church, and sports I missed in pursuit of this dream: Katie, Jordan and Rebecca, Jeremy and Jessica, and Jacob and Annee; grandchildren Jenna, Kara, Blaze, Brett, and Lottie; Joshua, Jack, and Naomi; and Nolan – each the joy of my life and tremendous blessings from Father, God. In Christ, where we belong.

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## **Chapter 1: Home School: A Growing Market**

School is the single most influential factor in school-aged children's growth and social dynamics, according to Guterman and Neuman (2017a). An increasing number of K-12 parents in the U.S. adopt Maslow's hierarchical needs theory when considering K-12 education for their children. According to this theory, safety is the first motivational need for any human being, and only when this need is met can higher-order needs like the desire to learn be met (McLeod, 2023). Due to the safety risks in public schools, parents are now increasingly choosing private/homeschooling. Academic and curricular quality remains a top priority by parents when selecting a private school or homeschooling environment for their children, followed by a small class size, low student-teacher ratio, strong test scores, high teacher quality, and the inclusion of moral values (Schneider et al., 2000; Stewart & Wolf, 2014; Teske & Schneider, 2001). Erickson (2017) stated that attributes of private schools (e.g., safety, religious instruction, school location, extracurricular activities) have become increasingly appealing to parents because of limitations in these attributes within public schools.

The home had long been the education center of school-aged children in the U.S. from the late 1700s to the early 1950s. However, when the state government assumed responsibility for a child's education, parents were encouraged to enroll their children in public school programs (Guterman & Neuman, 2017b). The state-operated public-school model soon became the predominant means of educating children in the U.S. (Provasnik, 2006). Many parents oppose the state's involvement in family affairs by way of mandated public-school attendance for children in grades K-12 (Guterman & Neuman, 2017). Some contend that children educated by the state are socialized in a manner consistent with state interests and values, which may differ from their own (Guterman & Neuman, 2017).

The public-school mandate permitted enrollment in alternate educational systems, such as private and parochial schools, although these alternatives were only affordable for some affluent families (Van Galen, 1991). Carper (2000) argued that public education presents a materialistic belief system that, in some ways, is incongruent with the closely held values of many religious families. Some families with gifted children have expressed fear that their children would not receive a quality education in public schools, leading to a rise in the rate of homeschooling over the past decade (Jolly & Matthews, 2018). Pannone (2014) explained that homeschooling has allowed parents to establish a nurturing environment that stimulates learning and critical thinking in ways that public schools may not. According to Sabol (2018), three main drivers are responsible for this increase in homeschooling, including the need for quality family time, a flexible learning atmosphere, and the available support from others with a like-minded view of education. Van Galen (1991) added that religion, faith, and moral training are reasons families homeschool. Noel et al.'s (2013) study showed that approximately 64% of families expressed a need to instruct religious education in the home (Noel et al., 2013). Homeschool associations began to emerge in 2008 (Bielick, 2008).

There is a significant increase in the number of students vacating public schools in the U.S., as McQuiggan et al. (2017) explain, and at the same time reported homeschooled students grew by 1033% between 1988 and 2017, outpacing the growth of public and private school enrollment at 40% growth during the same period (Institute of Education Sciences, 2008; McQuiggan et al., 2017; Murphy, 2012). Based on many years of researching homeschooled families, Jolly and Matthews (2020) describe two frequently given motivations of parents to remove their children from K-12 public schools: Parents do not agree with the curriculum presented in public schools and the potential influence on their children, and more conservative



parents holding to particular religious values disagree with the liberal values espoused by in many public school classrooms. Disapproval of public education curriculum drives ideologues to move away from public schools, according to Van Galen (1988), while pedagogues leave public education due to the desire to follow a religious-based curriculum that espouses conservative political and social values not always found in public schools. The increased student withdrawal rate from K-12 public schools in the U.S. and the growth of private and homeschooling have led to a student body that may be considered a new consumer group nearly half the size of K-12 public school students - almost 50 million (Ray, 2022).

Ray (2022) explained that the 2.6 million homeschooled students as of March 2020 grew to nearly 5 million by March 2021. When combining U.S. private school enrollment and homeschooled student reporting during these periods, non-public school K-12 enrollment in the U.S. in 2021 represents a 15 million industry (Ray, 2022). Online education has quickly grown in popularity, where nearly unlimited academic resources, data portals, social media platforms, and other capabilities facilitate using the Internet via the home computer as the predominant learning center. The Internet is the medium that most K-12 children use extensively.

Parents and other family members are the predominant educators from earlier times in the U.S. However, evidence suggests that most families in the U.S. during colonial days practiced home education, instructing in reading, writing, arithmetic, faith, morals, and interpersonal skills (Gordon & Gordon, 1990, pp. 245-73). Parent-teachers began with ideological reasons and values that established the primacy of the household. The Puritans, for example, considered the family the basic unit of the church, the commonwealth, and, ultimately, the nursery of sainthood (Cremin, 1970, pp. 135-36). Gordon and Gordon (1990, p. 245) explain that domestic home-based schooling continued into the 1600s and 1700s.

As America grew in the mid-nineteenth century and many immigrants began arriving, a desire for a standardized education grew. Under government control, Horace Mann and others planned early schools to share a common philosophy with every American of every heritage and persuasion (Rudy & Cremin, 1962). The local government(s) grew in their interest in a state school, shaping citizens' thinking and behavior, ultimately impacting home-based education, as Mann and others abandoned this goal for another: to go after the hearts and minds of children. "Men are cast iron, but children are wax," posits Mann (Glenn, 1988, p.79). A state-run education system with a new vision and standards would be created for the betterment of America and society, having less to do with economic or egalitarian goals and more with shaping future American citizens through a standardized education. Within this initiative was the intent to take children from their homes and churches so that schools could educate citizens to be "properly fit for the state" (Glenn, 1988, p.76).

A resurgence of evangelical faith in the mid-1960s led to dissatisfaction with the secularization of public education, which included cultural trends related to drugs, sex, and general disorder (Carper & Hunt, 2007). A paradigm shift among evangelicals led to greater reliance on Sola-Scriptura (i.e., Scripture alone as the basis for faith and living) and deepening disenchantment with state-run public education, according to Clark's work (Carper & Hunt, 2007, pp. 201-203). The humanist's strategy is to occupy children's time and attention to such an extent that they will have no opportunity to hear competing views. With their compulsory attendance, public schools are to be accustomed to inculcating secularism (Carper & Hunt, 2007, pp. 201-203).

In the 1970s, explains Lynn (2019), educational theorist John Holt sought school reform. In his opinion, public schools focused on rote learning, which led to under-challenging

classroom environments for students. Homeschooling at the time was legal in every state.

However, burdensome regulations (e.g., parents as teachers were required to earn a teaching license in some states) constrained many families from homeschooling (Lynn, 2019). By some estimates, nearly 65% of K-12 students were enrolled in public schools in the 1970s, although by the early 1980s, the homeschool movement had become increasingly popular (Lynn, 2019).

Mike Smith and Mike Farris, two homeschooling dads and attorneys, launched the Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) to advance and preserve the fundamental, God-given constitutional right of parents and others legally responsible for their children to direct their education independent of government interference (Lynn, 2019).

Over time, the concepts of schooling and education began to be considered to have the same meaning. Schools typically refer to a place or an institution away from the home where teachers instruct in specific subjects like reading, mathematics, and arts, and secondarily in topics such as manners, philosophy, and morals (Ray, 2016). Educating children was considered an effort to enlighten students' minds and instill philosophy, morality, manners, socialization, and self-control. Along with this comes character development and establishing values that may, or may not, complement the principles held by homeschooled families (Ray, 2016). This increased favor toward homeschooling (National Home Education Research Institute [NHERI], 2021). Other reasons that parents choose to homeschool, explains Ray (2016), include:

- Customize or individualize the curriculum and learning environment for each child.
- Accomplish more academically than in school.
- Use pedagogical approaches other than those typical in institutional schools.
- Enhance family relationships between children and parents and among siblings.
- Provide guided and reasoned social interactions with youthful peers and adults.

- Provide a safer environment for children and youth because of physical violence, drugs and alcohol, psychological abuse, and improper and unhealthy sexuality associated with institutional schools.
- Teach and impart values, beliefs, and worldviews to children and youth.

School administrators and community leaders quickly learned to distinguish K-12 public school students from private and homeschool counterparts based on their different preferences, values, and interests, as Ray (2016) explains. Homeschool families may be inclined to turn off the television due to unwanted, disagreeable content delivered through cultural terms and trends displayed in the programming (Ray, 2016).

The factors leading to the recent growth of homeschooling in the U.S. may be studied further to discover why there has been 300% in growth during the 2020-2021 academic year, continuing at 8% per year, making homeschooled K-12 students one of the largest new, emerging subcultures (NHERI, 2021). Homeschooling is the fastest-growing mainstream education model, with nearly 9 million Americans reporting having been homeschooled during K-12 education (Kaminski, 2024). This study contributes to the understudied area of homeschooling in the U.S. by discovering why parents, at an increasing level, are taking their children's education from public schools to their homes.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The interests, needs, and values of many private/homeschooled K-12 students may significantly differ from the interests, needs, and values of public school students, although few distinctions are made in the one-size-fits-all public school approach to education (Ray, 2015). The Supreme Court decision in the 1960s "effectively removed religious influences from government-run schools," making home education a safe haven for many religious families

(Wilhelm & Firmin, 2009, p. 307). Many conservative Christian parents consider educating their children as their God-given right and responsibility (Kunzman, 2010). The choice to homeschool includes a diverse group of people with various religious and political interests and all income levels, explains Ray (2015), and the different values that lead parents of K-12 private/homeschool students to avoid the cultural trends that permeate public education purposely. For example, an increasing number of families leave public school education and choose to private/homeschool because their children are exposed to bullying, sexual promiscuity, drug use, and other harmful peer-driven activities, explains Ray (2015).

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

The problem this study aimed to address is why there is increasing growth in the number of students being removed from the public education system, with parents choosing to educate them at home instead. Ray (2022) reported that the number of homeschooled students nearly doubled from 2020 to 2021, reaching 5 million in March 2021. When combined with private school enrollment, non-public school enrollment exceeds 15 million K-12 students, nearly 30% of 2021 public school enrollment of 49.4 million. According to Catt and Rhinesmith (2016), K-12 parents' public-school parents are increasingly concerned with the safety of their children in public schools. Mcleod (2023) adds that safety and personal welfare are essential and, where thought to be insufficient, are among the leading reasons parents move their children from public schools. Educational quality is also a concern of many parents, as the school environment and presented curricula relate to the quality of education a student receives (Teske & Schneider, 2001). Parental concerns about student safety, diminishing test scores, excessively large class sizes, values inconsistent with parental rearing at home being routinely presented to students, and questionable teacher quality closely follow and are among the influencing factors for parents

who remove their children from public education (Schneider et al., 2000). However, Erickson (2017) disagrees, stating too little is known about which factors have the greatest influence on parents' decisions to remove their children from public education. Here lies a gap in the body of literature regarding the specific reasons for parents removing their children from public schools. This study does not seek to study other non-public school education choices in the U.S. (e.g., private schools); it does examine the growing popularity of the homeschool model as an alternative to public schools.

### **Purpose Statement**

This qualitative, phenomenological study aimed to discover why an increasing number of parents of K-12 students in the U.S. are removing their children from public school education and homeschooling them. The combined private/homeschool sector in the U.S., according to Ray (2022), has reached a population of 15 million students in 2021, nearly 30% the size of public-school enrollment during the same period, and homeschooling is expected to grow 8% annually. The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the growth of alternative education systems in public schools, as many families began to appreciate the benefits of remote learning. The social distancing mandates and other COVID-19-related governmental restrictions resulted in public schools across the country closing for significant periods, forcing many parents to seek alternative education models so that their children would not fall behind in their academic growth (Ray, 2022). This led to serious consideration of homeschooling by parents who had yet to previously think of homeschooling as a viable alternative to public schools (Ray, 2022).

Knowing the motivations behind parents' removal of their children from public education and choosing to homeschool them may lead to understanding what U.S. public and private education may look like in the years ahead. This study fills a gap in the literature concerning why

parents of K-12 students leave public education for private and homeschool alternatives. This education-focused study has significant implications for the business and economic sectors. For example, as online learning continues to grow, companies that serve the needs of education markets, like McGraw Hill Education, Blackboard, and Pearson, may enjoy financial growth through participation in this homeschooling trend. Thus, it will significantly benefit these and many other companies to understand which factors influence parents' decisions to convert to remote learning and how they can best orient their business models to cater to these families' needs.

### **Research Questions**

This study was informed by the following research questions:

**RQ1.** What factors motivate parents to withdraw their children from public schools?

**RQ2.** What factors influence parents' decisions to homeschool their children?

### **Significance of the Problem**

Public school safety is a growing concern to parents of K-12 students in the U.S., leading parents to consider and sometimes choose to remove their children from public schools in favor of private/homeschooled education (McLeod, 2023). According to Guterman and Neuman (2017a), a school significantly influences school-aged children's learning, growth, and socialization. It plays an active role in childhood development. Parents take a safety-first approach to their children's education, followed closely by academic quality and other factors (McLeod, 2023). Ray (2022) reports an increase from 2.6 million homeschooled students in 2020 to nearly 5 million in 2021. When added to private school enrollment in 2021, the private/homeschool sector totals 15 million students, almost 30% of public-school enrollment. Ray (2022) continues, adding that the private/homeschool student volume in the U.S. has

reached critical mass for commercialization as marketers and other organizations pursue ways of reaching this emerging consumer group. Ray (2017) states that as private/homeschool curricula mature and become specialized, the viability of homeschooling is demonstrated by parents who have successfully undertaken homeschooling their children. The increasing acceptance of homeschooling and its increasing credibility when combined with financial incentives, such as school vouchers and tax-credit scholarship programs, provides financial means for parents wanting to take control of educating their children outside of the public schools (Ray, 2017). Online resources, content, collaboration, research, and entertainment may enrich the educational process along with an increasing variety of curricula, giving parents the confidence that they have the tools to successfully teach their children at home (Ray, 2017). Many and varied reasons are given in the existing body of literature about public schools and homeschooling in the U.S. This study addresses the gap in the literature by identifying the leading reasons that parents remove their K-12 age children from public schools, choosing to homeschool them instead.

### **Definitions**

The following operational definitions were used for key terms:

#### **Homeschooling**

Education is provided entirely outside of a traditional classroom environment and typically led by a parent or caregiver (Ray, 2017).

#### **Hybrid Education**

A hybrid education is a combination of traditional and home-based education (Carper, 2000).



### **Motivational Factors**

In the context of this study, any factor influencing parents' decision to remove their children from public education in favor of homeschooling (Catt & Rhinesmith, 2016).

### **Public Education**

Public education is education regulated by the state government and following a standardized curriculum (Huerta & Gonzalez, 2004).

### **Remote Learning**

Remote learning is learning that takes place remotely via technology and outside of a traditional classroom environment (Fontelle-Tereshcuk, 2021).

### **Organization of the Study**

This chapter introduces the study, in which background information related to the problem was first discussed, followed by the conceptual framework, giving context to the study. The specific problem statement underpinning the research was then introduced, followed by the significance of the research, the purpose statement, and the research questions for this qualitative study. Chapter 2 is the literature review of homeschooling in general and the research questions in particular. Chapter Three presents the study methods, and Chapter Four details the results. Chapter Five contains a discussion of the implications of the study and concludes the dissertation.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

This chapter discusses the literature related to key variables and constructs of interest associated with the research problem. Then, consideration is given to the genesis of homeschooling in the U.S. Risks within public schools are then considered, leading to a discussion on factors motivating parents to remove their children from public education. Challenges associated with homeschooling are then considered. Finally, gaps in the literature are discussed, leading to the rationale and justification for this study.

### **History of the Subject Being Studied**

In the past 100 years, the state has assumed the role of the central administrator of a child's learning in the U.S., obligating parents to enroll their children in public school programs (Guterman & Neuman, 2017a). This mandate was greatly opposed by parents wishing to educate their children without state involvement (Guterman & Neuman, 2017b). What fueled family opposition to state public education is that the community in which children are raised becomes the sole basis for their social world and family (Guterman & Neuman, 2017a). Nonetheless, the state-operated public-school model soon became the predominant means of educating children in the U.S. (Provasnik, 2006). Numerous studies have been conducted on how homeschooled children interact with others in social situations.

As America grew in the mid-nineteenth century and many immigrants began arriving, a desire for a standardized education grew. Under government control, Horace Mann and others planned early schools to share a common philosophy with every American of every heritage and persuasion (Rudy & Cremin, 1962). The local government(s) grew in their interest in the state school, shaping citizens thinking and behavior, ultimately impacting home-based education, as Mann and others abandoned this goal for another: to go after the hearts and minds of children.

"Men are cast iron, but children are wax," posits Mann (Glenn, 1988, p.79). A state-run education system with a new vision and standards would be created for the betterment of America and society, having less to do with economic or egalitarian goals and more with shaping future American citizens through a standardized education. Within this initiative was the intent to take child-learning from the homes and churches so that schools could educate citizens to be "properly fit for the state" (Glenn, 1988, p.76).

A resurgence of evangelical faith in the mid-1960s led to dissatisfaction with the secularization of public education, which included cultural trends related to drugs, sex, and general classroom disorder (Carper & Hunt, 2007). A paradigm shift among evangelicals led to greater reliance on Sola-Scriptura (i.e., Scripture alone as the basis for faith and living) and deepening disenchantment with state-run public education, according to Clark's work (Carper & Hunt, 2007, pp. 201-203). The humanist's strategy is to occupy children's time and attention so they will have no opportunity to hear competing views. With their compulsory attendance, public schools are to be accustomed to inculcating secularism (Carper & Hunt, 2007, pp. 201-203).

In the 1970s, explains Lynn (2019), educational theorist John Holt sought school reform. In his opinion, public schools focused on rote learning, which led to hostile classroom environments for children. At the time, homeschooling was legal in every state. However, burdensome regulations (e.g., parents as teachers were required to earn a teaching license in some states) constrained many families from homeschooling (Lynn, 2019). By some estimates, nearly 65% of K-12 students were enrolled in public schools in the 1970s, although by the early 1980s, the homeschool movement had become increasingly popular (Lynn, 2019). Mike Smith and Mike Farris, two homeschooling dads and attorneys, launched the Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) to advance and preserve the fundamental, God-given

constitutional right of parents and others legally responsible for their children to direct their education independent of government interference (Lynn, 2019).

In the late 1980s, homeschooling accounted for approximately one percent of the forty million children enrolled in public schools in the U.S. (i.e., 105,000 – 300,000), according to the U.S. Department of Education (1988). They were generalized as predominantly White children from two-parent, more affluent homes, where the stay-at-home mother assumed responsibility for homeschool planning and operations. Many fathers were listed as in full-time ministry, and the families were likely to attend church regularly. Most of these children were former traditional school students before changing to the home school model. Lack of religious content and little to no support for the spiritual interests of the family were among the reasons given for homeschooling (Lines, 1991). Adding to the rapidly evolving home school model, Murphy (2012) argues that there are two general home education components: the rejection of public schooling and the selection of the home as central to children's education (Murphy, 2012, p.6).

The number of homeschooled children in the U.S. has proven elusive due to few states requiring parents to report their decision to homeschool and the number of homeschooled students. McQuiggan et al. (2017) and the U.S. Department of Education (1988) state that homeschooling, between 1988 and 2017, grew by 1033%, outpacing the growth of public and private school enrollment at 40% growth during the same period (Institute of Education Sciences, 2008; McQuiggan et al., 2017).

The Supreme Court decision in the 1960s "effectively removed religious influences from government-run schools," making home education safe for many religious families (Wilhelm & Firmin, 2009, p. 307) that, for many conservative Christian homeschool parents is their God-given right and responsibility (Kunzman, 2010). The choice to homeschool includes a diverse

group of people with various religious and political interests and all income levels, explains Ray (2015), and the different values that lead parents of K-12 private/homeschool students to avoid the cultural trends that permeate public education purposely. An increasing number of families leave public school education and choose to private/homeschool because their children are exposed to bullying, sexual promiscuity, drug use, and other harmful peer-driven behavior.

Public school safety is of great concern to parents of K-12 students in the U.S., leading parents to consider and sometimes choose to remove their children from public schools in favor of private/homeschooled education (McLeod, 2023). According to Guterman and Neuman (2017a), a school significantly influences school-aged children's learning, growth, and socialization, although approximately 20% of homeschooled students simultaneously attend public and private schools, carrying with it intrinsic socialization that homeschool critics suggest may be lacking. School plays an active role in childhood development. Parents take a safety-first approach to their children's education, followed closely by academic quality and other factors (McLeod, 2023). Increasingly, parents opt to remove their children from public schools and enroll them in private/homeschools, explains Ray (2022), reporting an increase from 2.6 million homeschooled students alone in 2020 to nearly 5 million in 2021. When added to private school enrollment in 2021, the private/homeschool sector totals 15 million students, almost 30% of public-school enrollment, Ray (2022) continues, adding that the private/homeschool student population has reached critical mass for commercialization as marketers and other organizations develop ways of reaching this emerging consumer group.

Three landmark factors accelerated homeschooling to early adoption: (a) acceptance and regulation of the homeschool education model in all fifty U.S. states during the 1970s and 1980s; (b) the proliferation of the Internet; and (c) a broad correlation between homeschooling and the

improved quality of the family unit (Gaither, 2009; Huerta & Gonzalez, 2004; Jolly & Matthews, 2018; Lines, 1991; Murphy, 2012). The official birth of the Internet is believed to have been in 1983, growing over the next ten years to 16 million worldwide users. Google contributed to the popularity and utility of the Internet in 1993, along with other repositories of stored data, as usage continued to grow, exceeding 3.2 billion users in 2015 and 5 billion users by early 2022 (Johnson, 2022). In 1998, parents reported little to no use of the Internet and online programs for homeschooling. By 2008, 80% of parents relied upon educational materials and resources from the Internet (Jolly & Matthews, 2020). The explosive growth of the Internet led to virtual schools with online programs and educational resources focused on homeschooling families. It delivered independent asynchronous and synchronous online education formats of worldwide content, creating alternatives to traditional K-12 school models in the U.S. (Barbour & Reeves, 2009).

### **Homeschool Associations**

As early as 2008, homeschoolers began associating with public education, involving 20% of homeschooled children who also attended public or private schools part-time (Bielick, 2008). Isenberg (2007), supporting Bielick's finding by referring to data from the National Household Education Survey, said that 55% of homeschooled families also use traditional public schools for at least one of their children. Common reasons given for choosing to homeschool, reports by Van Galen (1991), were religion, faith, and morals, with Noel et al. (2013) saying that 77% of families choose to homeschool to provide requisite moral training to their children, similar to the 64% of families choosing to homeschool to provide religious education (Noel et al. (2013).

According to the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA, 2016), many school districts in the U.S. accommodate homeschoolers who wish to participate in part-time learning activities. Many homeschool parents question the quality and integrity of the educational content

of public schools, preferring to train children at home, "the most important institution in society (Van Galen, 1991, p.67), where John Holt (1964) had drawn this conclusion thirty years earlier when claiming that public schools provide a poor, even harmful environment with teaching processes that were "absurd and harmful nonsense (Holt, 1964, p.174). Carper (2000) explains that public education presented a belief system contrary to the conservative Christian education sought by homeschooled parents. Stevens's (2001) work explains that the academic quality and social climate in public education in the U.S. are both unfavorable and a threat to the values established by parents in the home. The Supreme Court decision in the 1960s "effectively removed religious influences from government-run schools," making home education safe for many religious families (Wilhelm & Firmin, 2009, p. 307) that, for many conservative Christian homeschool parents is their God-given right and responsibility (Kunzman, 2010).

Sabol (2018) identified homeschooling choice as primarily based on three main principles: a flexible learning structure, family quality time, and support from others with a like-minded view of education. Pannone (2014) adds that the homeschool model is a nurturing environment for entrepreneurial thinking. Jolly and Matthews (2018) report that parents with gifted children often prefer to homeschool because public education does not always recognize or accommodate children with advanced learning capabilities. The choice to homeschool includes a diverse group with various religious and political interests and all income levels, independent of the parent's education level (Ray, 2015).

Homeschooling associations have grown with the popularity of home education, providing support resources not readily available to homeschooling families, explains Gaither (2008). Approximately 85% of homeschools use external resources, often accessed through technology (Wilhelm & Firmin, 2009). Homeschooling, which combines home education with

external education and extracurricular activities, is an increasingly chosen hybrid model, explains Kunzman (2005). While a parent is frequently the principal educator of their biological children, ordinarily in the home, homeschooling frequently involves students meeting at another student's parent's home, cooperative associations, church buildings, and public-school facilities, rendering the term "homeschooling" somewhat of a misnomer (Kunzman, 2005, p. 4).

### **The Decision to Homeschool**

Jolly et al. (2013) found that, as homeschooling grew in both acceptance and popularity, the demography of homeschoolers became more defined. In 2007, the Institute of Education Sciences (2008) reported that the three most important reasons to homeschool included the public-school environment, religious and moral instruction needs, and frustration with the academic quality of traditional schools (Institute of Education Sciences, 2008). McQuiggan et al. (2017) found that, for one school, the school environment remained a leading driver of homeschooling. Parental concern for religious and moral instruction fell from 83% of surveyed parents to 67% as parents assumed responsibility for the learning environment, curricula, processes, and practices, each a part of safely educating their children. Additional reasons for homeschooling at this time included the education needs of special needs students, those with learning disabilities, and the needs of talented and gifted students, although some argue that homeschool teacher training, certification, and resources seldom rise to the level of public-school gifted student programs, or challenged student support capabilities (Jolly et al., 2013).

### **Disappointing Public Education**

Kunzman and Gaither (2013) explain that the most notable expansion of homeschooled education is occurring in the United States regarding the number of homeschooled students and the percentage of homeschooled students in public school districts (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013).



The homeschool model is considered by many to be a recent phenomenon, although it is a return to an older, original model of educating children in the U.S. (Davis, 2011). While there are many reasons parents may seek to remove their children from public school education, their concern about the public-school environment, including their children's exposure to premature sex, access to drugs, alcohol, and harmful peer pressure, are among the frequently given reasons according to Grady (2011). Dissatisfaction with the academic instruction and test score results were given by 17% of surveyed homeschool parents, and 16% wished to include religious education as part of the curriculum (Grady, 2011). Critics of homeschooling report the lack of homeschooled student socialization outside of the home as a deficiency and a potential reason not to homeschool children. However, Ray (1997) interviewed 1,485 homeschooled children to understand their social lives. He discovered that they participated in a wide range of activities with diverse people, including friends from their peer group and adults from outside their families (Ray, 1997). Other critics of the home education model say that children may be left unattended without adult supervision.

Because children develop an interest in online entertainment through the Internet as early as two years old, with point-and-touch user interfaces making children's Internet use nearly second nature by age four, homeschooled children are easy targets for online exploitation by marketers (Nannatt et al., 2022). Childhood infatuation with everything-Internet continues to grow with age, and Wallace estimates that children between the ages of 8 – 12 use social media an average of six hours daily, while slightly older children, ages 12-18, spend a daily average of nine hours online, more time than any other activity (CNN, 2015). This creates a phenomenal opportunity for those who want to influence kids at an early age, potentially impacting them for

life. Marketers, for example, will spend \$876 billion by 2026 to reach lifetime consumers (Statista, 2018).

### **Section Summary**

This section contained a discussion of the genesis of homeschooling in the U.S. Historical trends leading to the current increase in homeschooling were presented. Additionally, consideration was given to factors contributing to parents' motivations to remove their children from public schools. In the following section, a more detailed discussion of how risks in public schools serve as underlying factors causing many families to leave the public education system.

### **Risks in Public Schools**

One of the main factors contributing to parents' decisions to remove their children from public education is the risks in these environments. These risks range from physical bullying, drugs, and violence to poor educational quality. Each of these contribution factors is discussed individually within this section.

#### ***Physical Bullying***

School crime and student safety continue to be public school concerns. According to the Publication of the National Center for Education Statistics at IES (2022c), 22% of public-school students aged 12 – 18 reported being bullied during the 2019 school year. The physical bullying that occurs in public schools includes the destruction of personal property and the threat of harm, pushing, shoving, tripping, and spitting on others (Report on Indicators of School Crime et al., 2020). Swearer and Hymel (2015) point out that victims of bullying are also vulnerable to depression, anxiety, and other health issues, tending to skip or drop out of school altogether.

Suicides and school shootings are also of great concern regarding the public health implications of bullying. Females 12 – 18 years old are more frequently bullied at school (25%)

than the general school population (22%) (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2022c). 80% of public schools during the 2017 – 2019 school years recorded one or more acts of violence, theft, or other crimes, amounting to 1.4 million incidents. 47%, or 422, 800 of these incidents became police matters (Violent and Other Criminal Incidents Recorded by Public Schools and Those Reported to the Police, 2021). 14% of public schools reported bullying incidents at least once a week. Disrespect for teachers (12%) in public schools includes verbal abuse, student disrespect, widespread disorder, racial/ethnic tensions, and sexual harassment (NCES, 2022a).

### ***Electronic Bullying***

Electronic bullying has grown to be nearly as prevalent among grades 9 – 12 as physical confrontation bullying, with 16% of public-school students reporting to have been bullied in the previous 12 months (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). Electronic bullying was higher for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students (27%) than for heterosexual students (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). Typical electronic bullying reportedly consists of making fun of others, name calling and insults, spreading rumors, threatening harm, exclusion from group activities, and forcing a person to do something they did not wish to do (Report on Indicators of School Crime et al., 2020). Electronic bullying through email, chat rooms, instant messaging, websites, and texting is typically done on Instagram, Facebook, and other social media sites (Report on Indicators of School Crime et al. (2020).

### ***Physical Assault***

A significant indicator of disorder and incivility in public schools are guns, drugs, fights, and alcohol use. A recent report indicated that 5% of 12-18-year-old public school students were

fearful of attack or harm while at school. 5% of the same student group reported avoiding one or more places on public school premises for fear of attack or harm (NCES, 2022e, 2022f).

Twenty two percent of students in public school grades 9 – 12 reported being in a physical altercation within the previous twelve months, on and off school property (NCES, 2022b). Unfavorable environmental conditions in public schools also include the presence of gangs and the proliferation of hate-related words and graffiti. According to Students' Report of Gangs et al. (2021), public schools reported 9% of gang activity and 23% seeing hate-related graffiti, with 7% reporting being referred to in hate-related terms. Hate-related words most frequently used toward students were based on race, ethnicity, religion, disability, gender, or sexual orientation, with race being the most frequent hate-related characteristic (Students' Report of Gangs et al., 2021).

### ***Weapons, Alcohol, and Drug Use***

Weapons are a grave concern for public school administrators. According to NCES (2022d), 13% of students in grades 9 – 12 reported carrying a weapon anywhere in the past 30 days and 3% of the time on school property. The possession or consumption of alcohol by minors under 21 threatens educational and health outcomes, reports French and MacLean (2006). 42% of public-school students in grades 9 – 12 reported consuming alcohol at least once in the previous 30 days, with the use percentage increasing at each grade level (NCES, 2022h). Table 1 illustrates rates of alcohol and drug use in schools. One of the main factors contributing to parents' decisions to remove their children from public education is the risks in these environments.

**Table 1***Alcohol and Drug Use at School*

Race, Sexual Orientation, Other Characteristics	% of Public-School students by race who were offered, given, purchased, or used illegal drugs or alcohol on public school property in the past 30 days
Unknown Race	28
Hispanic	27
Black	21
White	20
Asian	14
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual	30
White	24
Unsure	24
Heterosexual	21

*Note.* Characteristics of K-12 student alcohol and drug use in the U.S. according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019).

***Classroom Disorder***

School and classroom order and safety from the perspective of public-school teachers have deteriorated in recent years, according to the National Teacher and Principal Survey - National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS)/Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) (2022). During 2015 – 2016, 10% of public-school teachers were threatened with injury by one or more students, and 6% reported being physically attacked during this same period. A greater number of elementary public-school teachers than secondary school teachers (11% vs. 9%) reported

being threatened or attacked (National Teacher and Principal Survey - National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS)/Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), 2022).

### ***Discipline, Safety, and Security Practices***

Maintaining a safe, orderly process of public-school activities has long been a priority among principals and staff, with most schools introducing preventative and response measures. In 2019, approximately 94% of students reported that their school had a written code of conduct, and 89% reported that school staff and other adults regularly supervise the school hallways (NCES, 2022g). The use of technology as a safety tool has increased since 2009 when 70% of students interviewed at the time reported being aware of closed-circuit cameras on the school property. In 2019, this rose to 86%. Locked entrance door policies and the employment of security guards and police officers rose during the same 2009 – 2019 period, from 64% to 85% (NCES, 2022g).

### ***Active Shooters and Bomb Threats***

Public school principals responded to the 2017-2018 survey questions about their degree of safety preparedness and security measures and whether they were written policies for staff to follow (NCES, 2022i). According to the interviewed principals, 94% of public schools had a written plan to address safety events and natural disasters. 92% reported plans for an active shooter event and 92% for bomb threats. Concerning disruptions caused by students, 35% reported that the school exercised disciplinary action for student offenses during 2017-2018 (SSOCS, 2022). Disciplinary actions increased with the student's age, with 17% of disciplinary action occurring at the elementary school level, 58% in middle schools, and 76% at the high school level.

## **Section Summary**

This section contained a discussion of the role that risks in public schools have played in motivating parents to remove their children from public school settings. These risks are wide-ranging but predominantly relate to the physical and emotional safety of students and the exposure to factors like violence, substance abuse, and bullying. In the following section, consideration is given to the current status of homeschooling in the U.S.

## **Current Status of Homeschooling**

Homeschooling remains in flux as parents and families seek ways to avoid the safety risks associated with public schools while providing their children with a high-quality education grounded in educational theory and pedagogy. There needs to be some clarification as to whether a home is a suitable environment for education and if this environment constitutes a school or schooling. Over time, the terms schooling and education have been considered to have the same meaning. Holt (1964) had concluded thirty years earlier that public schools provide a poor, even harmful, environment with teaching processes that were "absurd and harmful nonsense (Holt, 1964, p.174). Van Galen (1991, p.67) sharply disagrees with Holt, saying that parents consider the school to be significantly influential on their children and have reason to question the quality and integrity of the public-school environment and course content." Parents and school administrators are vested in accurately determining public schools' environmental and academic quality (Van Galen, 1991, p.67).

Ray (2017) argues that the increasing alternatives to public school education, such as private/homeschooling and charter schools, combined with financial offset incentives, such as school vouchers and tax-credit scholarship programs, provide incentives and economic resources for parents to take control of educating their children outside of the public schools (Ray, 2017).

Schools typically refer to a place or an institution away from the home where teachers instruct in specific subjects like reading, mathematics, and arts, and secondarily in topics such as manners, philosophy, and morals (Ray, 2016).

Educating children was considered an effort to enlighten students' minds and instill philosophy, morality, manners, socialization, and self-control. Along with this comes character and values that may or may not agree with the principles held by homeschooled families (Ray, 2016). This is just one driver of the decision to homeschool (NHERI, 2021). School administrators and community leaders quickly learned to distinguish K-12 public school students from private and homeschool counterparts based on their different preferences, values, and interests, as Ray (2016) explained. Homeschool families may be inclined to turn off the television due to unpleasant content presented through cultural terms and trends in the programming that relate more to public school students than many homeschool families.

### **Homeschools and the Home**

According to Jolly and Matthews (2020), homeschool growth is driven by a greater acceptance in parents' minds and among educational governing bodies of home school as a viable, sometimes preferred alternative to K-12 public education in the U.S. The standards-based curricula and assessment practices allay the initial concerns of parents and educators (Van Galen, 1988). Furthermore, Van Galen (1988) states that family diversification has impacted the growth in the selection of home school education as an alternative to public education. The proliferation of the Internet, introduced in 1983, advanced curriculum quality, access, study plans, and learning resources, has led to general acceptance and approval by most governing authorities (Van Galen, 1988).



Early homeschooling parents fell into two groups based on their reasoning for moving away from K-12 public education in the U.S. (Jolly & Matthews, 2020). Ideologues, reports Van Galen (1988), chose home school education because of disapproval of the public education curriculum and the desire to strengthen relations with children through time spent educating them at home. Pedagogues, explains Van Galen (1988), chose to homeschool their children with a religious-based curriculum espousing conservative political and social values not found in public education. Feeling that public schools were failing children due to inadequate curriculum and teaching methods, pedagogues see public education as not serving children equally (Van Galen, 1988, p.55). Ideologues generally trust traditional school education and processes, while pedagogues do not trust the public education system, including the content selection and delivery process.

### ***Changing Home Dynamics***

The home in the U.S. began to change in the 1970s and 80s, more women entered the workforce in the U.S., and rising divorce rates led to more single-parent families, explains Kasser and Linn, 2016. As a result, more children were left without parental supervision. Paradoxically, as parents grew worried that life on the street or in the neighborhood would be unsafe, they found another way to entertain their children safely: the television (Kasser & Linn, 2016). Children left alone without supervision while their parents worked became known as latchkey children by social services. Corporations found 8 to 12-year-old children to be a promising market. They soon developed advertising crafted explicitly for this demographic. According to the Chicago Tribune (Kasser & Linn, 2016), new child-focused programming was financed by corporations whose commercials on broadcast television delivered the expected financial returns.

### ***Child Commercialization***

Elliott (2022) explains that targeting children as end-user consumers is a strategy that companies have used for many years, mainly after the introduction of television in the home. For example, children's vitamin advertisements emphasize sweet products that taste great, with none other than Bugs Bunny infused on the product packaging, labeling, and product shapes (Elliott, 2022). In 1972, the U.S. Senate Committee for Commerce investigated marketing strategies targeting children (Senate Committee, 1972). Many advertising techniques violated the "Truth in Advertising" policies established by the Senate Committee promoting products described as having a "yummy taste" expressed through popular cartoon characters that child consumers easily recognize, argues the Senate Committee (Elliott, 2022). The Action for Children's Television (ACT), an advocacy group promoting the need for "Truth in Advertising" laws, cited "fear advertising" as a growing concern for both children and parents alike. Celebrity cartoon characters do send messages to entice children and adult consumers. ACT called them "poor judgment" target marketing (Senate Committee, 1972, p. 282). Carmody called for the removal of all "fear advertising" from the airwaves, particularly during busy Saturday morning kids' programming supported by an abundance of commercials (Elliott, 2022; p. B2).

### ***Socialization Concerns***

Another issue to emerge in the literature in response to the rise in the rate of families favoring homeschooling versus public education is socialization and social development. Guterman and Neuman (2017b) observed that the children spent 12 hours a week on average with children other than their siblings. Sixty percent participated regularly on sports teams, 82% in Sunday school, 48% in music lessons, and 93% in other extracurricular activities. Additionally, 45% of the children attended academic lessons with other students, away from

their homes (Guterman & Neuman, 2017b). Ray (1997) conducted additional research and discovered that 98% of homeschooled children participated in two or more activities and engaged in an average of 5.2 extracurricular activities away from home per week. These included scouting, dance classes, sports teams, and volunteer work (Guterman & Neuman, 2017a), citing Nelsen's (1998, p. 35) report, "Children in homeschooling are exposed more frequently to a wider variety of people and situations than children in school, whose exposure is limited to 25-35 people of their own age and socioeconomic background." Chatham-Carpenter (1994) studied how homeschooled children develop their social connections; those in public schools have contact with 56 different people in a month, compared to 49 for homeschooled children.

However, there were significant differences in the encounters. The homeschooled children interacted with a broader range of age groups, whereas the public-school students interacted with a higher proportion of people from their peer group. While there are many variations of homeschool models, there are broad differences among families in how they are implemented (Ricci, 2011). Most fall into either the structured or dynamic categories. Structured homeschooling often has fixed schedules at predetermined hours covering content chosen by parents. Unstructured homeschooling is not based on a fixed or predetermined schedule or content or dictated in advance by parents (Guterman & Neuman, 2017b).

### ***Internet Addiction and Exposure to Media***

A concern that has become increasingly apparent with homeschooling includes heightened Internet and social media exposure. According to the Cable News Network (CNN, 2015), children in the U.S. between the ages of 8 and 12 are engaged in online social media for an average of six hours daily. Children between 12 and 18 spend an average of nine hours daily engaged in online activities (CNN, 2015). Approximately 53 to 67% of teen online activity

involves mobile devices (CNN, 2015). Nannatt et al. (2022) explained that terms like Internet addiction, once reserved for adult consumers on online media, are now used to describe children as young as two years old.

Children using the Internet look for anything free (i.e., at no cost to them), such as games, ringtones, and applications, explains McCollum (2021), leading to peer-to-peer (P2P) sharing music, pictures, games, and program files. Wallace (CNN, 2015) estimates that U.S. teens spend as much as nine hours each day using digital media for entertainment; tweens (ages 8-12) spend an average of six hours daily engaging in digital media activity. Fifty-three percent of children access the Internet through mobile platforms (e.g., mobile Internet access), slightly less than their teen counterparts, spending 67% of their online time using mobile devices (CNN, 2015).

Children between 8 and 18 years of age spend more time using digital media technology (e.g., smartphones, laptops, tablets, and other screened devices) than time spent on any other activity, says Wallace (CNN, 2015). This is the name of the game for teens and tweens who report doing homework assignments while using social media or watching television, with 60% of kids texting and 75% listening to music at the same time. Neither teens nor tweens consider using digital media while doing homework disruptive (CNN, 2015). However, Ophir et al. (2009), citing a Stanford study (Wihbey, 2011) report that cognitive control and the ability of teens to process information varies greatly between heavy and light multitaskers.

### **Section Summary**

This section discussed some of the significant challenges faced by homeschooling families. Consideration was given to factors like socialization, excessive Internet use, and the lack of clear pedagogical or educational theories underpinning homeschooling. Each of these factors warrants attention as the number of families choosing to remove their children from

public education continues to rise. The following section contains a discussion of data associated with resourceful homeschooling.

### **Resourceful Home Schooling**

While there remain many challenges associated with homeschooling, a growing body of evidence demonstrates that this model of education can be effective. This section contains a discussion of resourceful homeschooling. Consideration is first given to collaborative homeschooling, followed by a discussion of homeschooling models and curricula. Lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic are then discussed. This section concludes with a summary and outline of key points.

### **Collaborative and Hybrid Home Schooling Models**

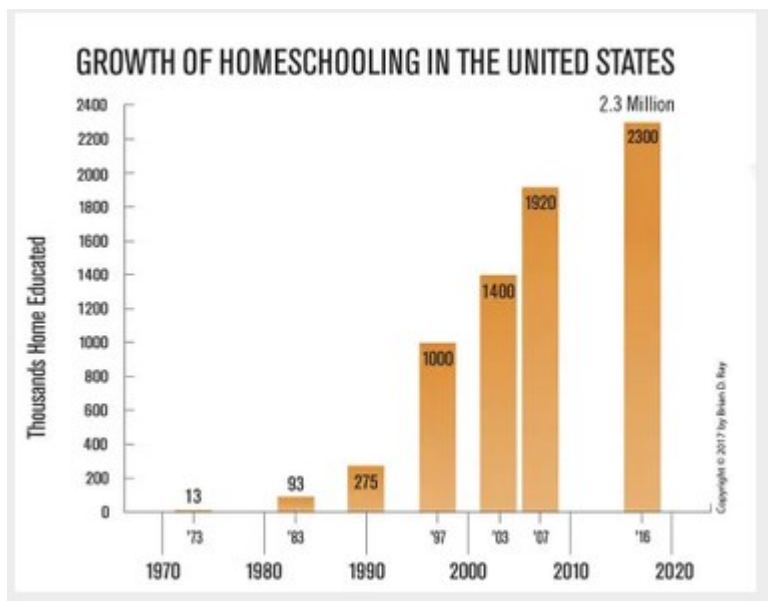
Evidence suggests collaboration can lead to effective homeschooling outcomes, particularly when hybrid models are used. Gaither (2008) referred to the efficacy of homeschooling as a hybrid model, where homeschooling parents collaborate with other like-minded parents to leverage experience and knowledge. This led to small groupings of students who worked independently in the same area, where parents or hired specialists shared teaching responsibilities to fill in knowledge gaps, including learning music, science, art, and athletic competition (Gaither, 2008). This sometimes leads to part-time public-school attendance on a subject-by-subject basis, following Tim Tebow laws allowing homeschoolers to participate in public school sports (Atkins, 2014).

Ray (1997) explained that children are no longer limited to the family and home culture for socialization, as homeschooled children are involved in various activities with diverse groups of people. Peer groups and adults outside the family influence the social dynamics of homeschoolers, who, on average, spend twelve hours a week with children outside the home

(i.e., not with siblings). 60% regularly participate in organized sports, and 82% attend Sunday school weekly. Other extracurricular activities of homeschoolers include music lessons (48%) and recreational activities outside of the home (93%) (Guterman & Neuman, 2017a). Ray (1997) adds that homeschoolers' recreational activities include participating in organizations with other similarly aged children, scouts, dance lessons, athletic teams, and volunteer groups (Ray, 1997).

**Figure 1**

*Homeschool growth in the US*



*Note.* Homeschool Growth in the U.S. (Ray, 2021).

A general understanding of homeschool growth drivers includes educational quality deterioration, intentional inclusion of damaging illicit content, and frequent poor products (i.e., students) of public-school education.

### **Home School Curricula**

Selecting the most appropriate homeschool curricula can be daunting and disappointing because, depending on the selected curriculum, the educational program may be incomplete and

delivered in chunks (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021). A one-size-fits-all curriculum, primarily among online platforms, can be too general, with little to no clear learning purpose, writes Fontenelle-Tereshchuk (2021). Lesson plans are organized like instructional notes rather than formalized, professional education material and often need more precise learning objectives, (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021). According to Reich (2002), p.56), some homeschool curricula may be substandard from an educational standpoint, which is particularly disappointing given that "homeschooling represents the apex of customization education" according to Reich (2002 p.56). The importance of proper choice of curriculum cannot be overstated, according to Brown et al. (2004), because there is a correlation between homeschool curriculum and student achievement. Murphy's work adds that homeschooled students perform better than public school students, averaging 15 – 30% higher scores on standardized achievement tests (Ray, 2016).

Parents have expressed confusion over how to develop an effective curriculum for their children in homeschooling contexts, often searching at homeschool curriculum fairs, in addition to getting recommendations from other families presently homeschooling (Pannone, 2014). Positive experiences with a homeschool curriculum are due to high academic achievement, as measured through testing (i.e., scores), student satisfaction, and intuitive use of the curriculum (Pannone, 2014). Curricula play a significant role in educators' choice of planned student learning experiences (McCutcheon, 1980). Selecting the homeschool curriculum may have the most significant impact on students' learning, intellectual growth, and readiness for college and careers, explains Schmoker (2011), and that the curricula are the predominant educational messaging system of schooling in general, and homeschooling, in particular, writes Bernstein (1977). The curriculum may be the most critical factor impacting student learning, intellectual development, and readiness for college and career choice (Schmoker, 2011).

In recent years, the use of computing devices has become significantly more accessible for children and adults, and the use of computers to access the Internet has become almost second nature (Edwards et al., 2018). Internet-enabled mobile devices, such as mobile phones, tablets, and notebook computers – nearly any device with a touch screen and instant access to the Internet - have put the online world in the hands of children as young as four years old. These "digitods" (as they are referred to) have early access to the Internet, in most instances, in the home using family computers and touch-screen-enabled mobile devices belonging to siblings or parents (Plowman et al., 2010). The ease of pointing, touching an icon, or dragging and dropping onscreen items becomes second nature to young people, as their internet cognition grows with the use of these devices to access the Internet (Edwards et al., 2018).

### **Lessons Learned during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted kids' media use across the country, with tweens' and teens' digital media use growing faster than in pre-pandemic periods. 2019 – 2021 saw the total screen time viewed each day increase from 4.44 hours to 5.33 hours among tweens and from 7.22 hours to 8.39 hours among teens (Robb, 2022). This 17% screen time usage, explains Robb (2022), shows a significant increase over time (e.g., 2014 – 2022) in screen-media usage, with tweens/teens from lower-income households online for more extended periods than tweens/teens from higher-income families (9.19 hours of screentime per day, 7.16 hours of screentime per day, respectively) (Robb, 2022). Black and Hispanic/Latino children use digital media more than white children (2.31 hours per day and 1.57 hours per day, respectively). Boys spend more screen time than girls; approximately 75 more minutes per day by teen and tween boys, explains Robb (2022).



Some experts have expected a return to regular online screen viewing habits as school and school activities resume, explains Robb (2022), though this has yet to be the case in 2022. Online media activity remains at pandemic levels, with boys, girls, White, Black, Hispanic/Latino, and those in low to high-income households reporting that watching online videos is the digital entertainment of choice. Children 13-18 years of age regularly use social media and watch online videos at least one time per week; 83% watch YouTube and 68% engage via TikTok, says Robb (2022). Companies intend to own children for life; kids are Internet active at an early age and stay engaged through young adulthood.

### **Homeschool Critics**

Homeschooling is often criticized because it is unregulated, posing a serious risk of abuse and neglect of home school students, insists Bartholet (2020, p. 15), who supports the claim from an in-house study, not a representative sample explains Ray (2020). The studies that Bartholet (2020) refers to were not intended to detail rates of abuse or maltreatment to argue that children who are homeschooled are more at risk than children in public schools. She alludes several times to the notion that homeschooling, by its very nature, puts children at risk of abuse to a greater degree than children who have been enrolled in public or private schools (Ray, 2020). West (2009) adds that homeschooled students lack social skills (i.e., socialization) because they are home-educated children who are "completely isolated in homes and, therefore, at greater risk of abuse.

Additionally, those who oppose homeschooling because it is unregulated and abuse or neglect may not be reported are advocates of greater regulation or a homeschool ban (Bartholet, 2020; Dwyer & Peters, 2019). Critics of home education say homeschooling is not transparent or accountable to the state, implying a disproportionate level of child abuse among homeschooled

children than children who attend public schools (Bartholet, 2020; Coalition for Responsible Home Education, 2024; Dwyer & Peters, 2019).

The predispositions that attend to homeschooling are vast and include ideas that homeschooling produces socially inept misfits, bad citizens whose reason for home education lies with the religious belief of the parents, whose children are left struggling for acceptance into colleges and universities when compared to students graduating from public schools (Jolly & Matthews, 2018). Others contend that homeschooling and private schools foster political dissidence and an unwillingness to consider other students' and teachers' perspectives or worldviews (Cheng, 2014). Home education may be considered self-serving and individualistic at the expense of the collective good in preparing next-generation adults (Brewer & Lubienski, 2017; Lubienski, 2000, 2003). Ray (2020) vigorously defends the homeschool record, stating that studies reporting the risk of homeschooled child abuse are based on faulty studies (Bartholet, 2020; Coalition for Responsible Home Education, 2015). Large-scale government reports on child abuse often do not include the study by the school sector (Ray, 2020).

### **Public Education Advocates**

While much criticism is levied against public schools, their support of students with disabilities, and for talented and gifted students, is generally superior to what may be provided by parents in a homeschool environment (Conejeros-Solar & Smith, 2021). Jolly explains that research on gifted student homeschooling resources or programs is scarce in the early stages, with such research limited to homeschooling in the U.S. (Jolly & Matthews, 2018).

Kabiri et al. (2021) report that mandatory public school physical fitness programs benefit students because of the muscular growth that progressively develops as a child ages. Endurance is essential for healthy bone development, giving child athletic participants a positive self-image

and quality of life (Marques et al., 2018). More than 80% of homeschool parents enroll their children in outside-the-home organized sports, an average of 4.68 hours per week; it remains questionable whether this level of athletic participation matches the benefits of public-school athletic requirements if only routine gym class (Kabiri et al., 2021).

### **Gaps in the Literature and Rationale for the Current Study**

While data related to homeschooling has increased, gaps in the literature still warrant attention. With the many reasons cited for removing K-12 students from public schools, this study fills a gap in the body of literature concerning the homeschooling phenomenon by exploring reasons parents of K-12 students remove their children from public education and choose the homeschool model. It may benefit individuals and organizations seeking to understand this trend toward homeschooling. It also contributes unique insight into the existing literature on the private/homeschool phenomena. Findings from this study also relate to businesses currently or aspiring to serve the education market in general and the homeschool market in particular. Commercial implications are addressed in Chapter 5 of this study.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter contained a synthesis of the data related to key variables and constructs underlying the problem of interest in this study. Background information and the evolution of homeschooling in the U.S. was first presented. Factors underpinning parents' decisions to homeschool their children were then discussed, emphasizing the risks associated with public school attendance. The status of homeschooling and its extant challenges were then considered, and data on effective homeschooling practices were discussed. While the literature on this topic has increased, many gaps warrant attention. This study served to assist in filling that gap by examining why parents remove their K-12 children from public schools and why they choose to

homeschool them instead. The following section presents the methods used to address the research questions guiding this study.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This section contains a discussion of the methods that were used in this study. The methodology and rationale for its selection are discussed first, followed by the design. Sampling procedures and methods of instrumentation, data collection, and analysis are then considered. Finally, attention is given to ethical issues underpinning this study.

#### **Purpose Statement**

This qualitative, phenomenological study aimed to discover why an increasing number of parents of K-12 students in the U.S. are removing their children from public school education and homeschooling them. The combined private/homeschool sector in the U.S., according to Ray (2022), has reached a population of 15 million students in 2021, nearly 30% the size of public-school enrollment during the same period, and homeschooling is expected to grow at 8% annually. The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the growth of alternative education systems in public schools, as many families began to appreciate the benefits of remote learning. The social distancing mandates and other COVID-19-related governmental restrictions resulted in public schools across the country closing for significant periods, forcing many parents to seek alternative education models so that their children would not fall behind in their academic growth (Ray, 2022). This led to serious consideration of homeschooling by parents who had yet to previously think of homeschooling as a viable alternative to public schools (Ray, 2022).

Knowing the motivations behind parents' removal of their children from public education and choosing to homeschool them may lead to understanding what U.S. public and private education may look like in the years ahead. This study fills a gap in the literature concerning why parents of K-12 students leave public education for private and homeschool alternatives. This education-focused study has significant implications for the business and economic sectors. For

example, as online learning continues to grow, companies that serve the needs of education markets, like McGraw Hill Education, Blackboard, and Pearson, may enjoy financial growth through participation in this homeschooling trend. Thus, it will significantly benefit these and many other companies to understand which factors influence parents' decisions to convert to remote learning and how they can best orient their business models to cater to these families' needs.

### **Research Questions**

This study was informed by the following research questions:

**RQ1.** What factors motivate parents to withdraw their children from public schools?

**RQ2.** What factors influence parents' decisions to homeschool their children?

### **Research Design**

This qualitative study was conducted to determine the reasons parents remove their children from K-12 public schools in the U.S. and the reasons parents choose to homeschool their children. This design was selected to understand the lived experiences of parents who remove their children from public education for a homeschooling environment. Hammarberg et al. (2016) suggested that qualitative research is useful when little is known about a particular phenomenon and a need exists to construct new knowledge. Quantitative research methods are more frequently used when much is known about a topic, and there is a need to understand the numerical relationships between variables or their impacts on one another (Hammarberg et al., 2016). A qualitative approach was an optimal choice because little is known about the many topics regarding homeschool education. The aim was to understand the nature of parents' experiences in this study (Kovacs et al., 2012). Qualitative methods address questions about experience, value, and meaning, most often from the participant's perspective, and the data are

seldom amenable for counting or measuring (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Qualitative research involves collecting non-numerical data through interviews, questionnaires, or surveys with questions created in advance and presented one-on-one with a participant with great care in protecting the data from unwanted bias or projected interpretations. Additionally, a qualitative method allows the researcher to observe participants' reactions to the questions and ask follow-up questions to clarify a topic (Burns & Veeck, 2019).

This study identifies the factors influencing parental decisions to withdraw from K-12 public schools in St. Louis, Missouri, and nearby counties. Questioning research techniques revealed personal beliefs and opinions through semi-structured interviews to focus on a topic or in-depth interviews to understand a condition or perception of an event or experience more deeply from a personal perspective (Hammarberg et al., 2016). For example, why may parents choose to place their children in one school rather than another? This is why this researcher chose a qualitative methodological approach for this study.

The Delphi technique, an iterative question-and-answer process, was used to validate that questions were understood and to authenticate participant responses (Dick, 2000). Redistributing summarized responses allows individuals to further reflect on posed questions by reviewing earlier responses to questions, the consensus response (i.e., summarized group responses) facilitating a thoughtful second thought about survey questions, and sometimes using disagreement to stimulate deeper analysis (Dick, 2000). By synthesizing differing opinions into a consensus, identifying outlier responses, and re-engaging the participant for further discussion of a question, a better understanding of closely held values, particularly among experts (e.g., homeschooling parents), may be captured (Dick, 2000). Delphi is a valuable complement to a

range of other evaluation measures. Experts agree Delphi may provide more detailed data for the design of surveys for a larger audience (Dick, 2000).

### **Population**

This qualitative study was based on parents of homeschooled children in St. Louis, Missouri, who volunteered to answer questions about their feelings toward and experience with public schools and homeschooling in an interview setting. One of many home school associations in the St. Louis, MO area, the Families for Home Education, was selected because of its apolitical charter, the absence of any religious affiliation, its large membership that includes economically diverse families of many races, sizes, geographical locations, political affiliations, and its parent-members span the K-12 spectrum. Within the state-wide association are seven county-based regions, with Region 5 comprised of seven counties of different sizes and demographic natures, urban and rural counties: St. Louis, St. Charles, Jefferson, Franklin, Gasconade, Lincoln, Montgomery, Osage, and Warren, with St. Louis County the largest (1M+ residents) and Montgomery County has the smallest population (11,049 residents) ("Region 5 /St Louis | Families for Home Education"). This potential population group's size and variance suggest that a good mix of respondents was possible. The researcher intended to extend invitations to participate in this study only to homeschool parents residing in St. Louis County, MO. These were randomly drawn from the respondent pool, each given a unique private identifier, which would be the sole basis of addressing them throughout the study. Twenty to forty respondents will be selected, sufficient to reach an anticipated saturation point where all possible answers to the interview questions are fully addressed and no new responses are given. The participants were parents of K-12 homeschooled students in Missouri and Families for Home Education (FHE) members who voluntarily responded to an invitation to participate in a



qualitative study about their decisions to homeschool. Families for Home Education was founded in 1983 to provide practical and legal support for families wishing to home-educate children in Missouri. FHE represents and supports homeschooling parents and their inalienable right to teach their children without state regulation or interference ("Region 5 /St Louis | Families for Home Education"). FHE is not affiliated with religious, political organizations, or special interest groups. A single FHE Board of Directors oversees state-wide operations and is comprised of seven geographical regions in the state of Missouri; Region 5 is comprised of the following nine counties: St. Louis, St. Charles, Jefferson, Franklin, Gasconade, Lincoln, Montgomery, Osage, and Warren. Because of proximity, Region 5 was chosen as the population for this study, 2023 residential population is shown below:

<b>County</b>	<b>2023 Population</b>
St. Louis	1,005,676
St. Louis City	296,262
St. Charles	418,696
Jefferson	229,142
Franklin	105,639
Gasconade	14,665
Lincoln	61,677
Montgomery	11,049
Osage	13,094
Warren	36,438

(Region 5 /St Louis | Families for Home Education, 2023)

## Sample

Following approval by the California Baptist University Institutional Review Board and approval by Families for Home Education Region 5 directors M/M Don and Kim Quon, an invitation (see Appendix B) to participate in the study was extended to associate FHE members on the FHE Facebook site, containing instructions on how interested members could participate. The Principal Investigator telephoned St. Louis, MO director Ms. Quon in mid-September 2023. Ms. Quon was given an overview of this study and what responding FHE members would be asked to do. Ms. Quon agreed to place the Invitation to Participate in this study on the St. Louis FHE members' Facebook page. Interested members directly emailed the Principal Investigator to express interest in participating in this study.

Missouri State Senator Andrew Koenig and his wife, Brooke, are directors of the West County Christian Home Educators Association (WCCHE), whose membership is predominantly from the St. Louis, MO, area. They were asked to review the Invitation to Participate in the study. After learning the study's purposes and goals, they agreed to post the invitation on the WCCHE Association member intranet in late September 2023. This set the stage for recruiting potential participants for this study from two disparate homeschool associations, one secular and the other religious, leading to an eligible sampling group from the general population of these two homeschool associations in the St. Louis, MO region. More than twenty responses were anticipated from the two associations. However, despite extending the availability of the invitation to participate for an additional week (i.e., three weeks total), only five eligible participants from the Families for Home Education emailed the principal investigator, expressing interest in participating in this study.

Twenty participants from two St. Louis, MO, Regional Home School Associations were chosen for this study. Five parents were members of the secular FHE homeschool association, and fifteen parents were recruited from the WCCHE Association, an association whose members are predominantly Christians. Eligibility to participate required parents to either have homeschooled children in the past or are currently homeschooling children. Five male and fifteen female parents were given pseudonyms and a unique code for further identification. Table 2 below lists the twenty participants and the number of years each has been homeschooling. It should not be concluded that a respondent had not homeschooled where no length of homeschooling time is shown. Not all participants answered all interview questions.

**Table 2**

*Study Participants*

Pseudonym	Gender	Years Homeschooling
Andy	Male	4
Chad	Male	5
Barbara	Female	13
Belinda	Female	13
Elizabeth	Female	
Ellen	Female	17
Gail	Female	7
Ginger	Female	10
Jeanette	Female	7
Jessica	Female	15
Jim	Male	16
John	Male	4
Julie	Female	
Linda	Female	11
Marian	Female	17
Mary Lynn	Female	3
Nelson	Male	
Patricia	Female	3
Reenie	Female	17
Suzanne	Female	8

*Note.* A total of twenty male and female participants became the study group, with an average length of time homeschooling nearly ten years each. Three participants did not provide a length of time homeschooling, as shown in the table above.

The Principal Investigator telephoned the five Families for Home Education respondents and met in person with fifteen West County Christian Home Educators Association respondents. The Principal Investigator quickly established a comfortable rapport with each participant. The Principal Investigator carefully read the Informed Consent form to each respondent from both groups before an interview was conducted, and each respondent stated that they understood the informed consent and gave verbal assent to the Principal Investigator. Each respondent said they wished to participate in the study. There were no ineligible interviewees from either association.

Each participant had been given a pseudonym and a unique alpha-numeric identification code that distinguished them from other respondents. Throughout the interview, the Principal Investigator did not refer to the respondent by their actual name. The Principal Investigator read each interview question aloud to each participant in sequential order while maintaining a comfortable pace, stopping, or pausing where needed when a participant raised a question about the interview question. The Principal Investigator took copious, handwritten notes about the participants' responses to each question and posed follow-up questions where additional detail was needed. This was in response to the participant asking a question or seeking clarification or when the Principal Investigator sensed that the participant might not understand the question (e.g., a puzzled facial expression). After each interview, the Principal Investigator wrote each participant's unique code on a piece of paper, each the same size, and put them in a bowl. If there were more than twenty respondents, twenty pieces of paper, each identifying a unique respondent, would be randomly drawn from the bowl, becoming the study's sampling group. Only twenty responses were received; all twenty respondents became the study's sampling.

### **Instrumentation**

Before selecting interview questions leading to the instrument of choice for this study, the researcher considered data collection instruments used by seminal author Dr. Brian D. Ray, an esteemed contributor to the vast body of literature about homeschooling. The intent was not to exhaust his writings in search of a suitable instrument method or style to adopt for this study, which would be an impractical undertaking given the scope of Ray's work. Instead, the researcher reviewed several of Ray's contributions to the literature on homeschooling to see if there was a pattern in the data collection methods and instruments used by Ray. It was discovered that Ray frequently utilized sizeable partners or outside firms to conduct his research (Ray et al., 2021). For example, Ray partnered with the Barna Group, a faith-based research firm in 2022 to learn about the current trends in child neglect and abuse in the U.S. The scope of Ray's and Barna's study was extensive, with more than 1 million interviews conducted, yielding more than 970 qualified participants for the study. The scope of this study typified most of Ray's work. This study of homeschool parental choices would not encompass a national search or nearly the number of qualified participants. The instrumentation used by Ray, which included an online consumer panel, would not scale to the needs of this study (Ray et al., 2021).

Robert Kunzman and Milton Gaither (2020) are two prominent researchers in U.S. homeschool education. Several data collection instruments they used were considered for this study, and like Ray, the scale and scope of their studies are vast. For instance, Kunzman and Gaither (2020), partnering with the Home School Legal Defense Alliance (HSLDA), conducted a study surveying 7,306 veteran homeschoolers on various homeschool education issues. Their study was beyond the scale and scope of this study's intended purposes.

Jennifer Jolly is an esteemed scholar in the field of homeschool education and, like Dr. Ray, conducts large-scale studies involving hundreds of participants (Jolly et al., 2013). For example, Jolly conducted a three-month study involving 987 eligible respondents to a published recruiting effort across 22 states in the U.S. The 19-question, semi-structured interview questions Jolly used seemed promising for this study (Jolly et al., 2013). However, further consideration of this study's target participants, the limited access to them, and the limited time of this study made it clear that the instrument used by Jolly et al. (2013) was unsuitable (Jolly et al., 2013).

Another study conducted by Kunzman and Gaither (2020) was an international project that spanned six months and netted 6,135 respondents. While an exhaustive search of a study by these authors was not conducted, the scale and scope of their studies were likely greater than that of this study. The data collection techniques Kunzman and Gaither (2020) used are more complex and not useful for this study.

A dissertation by researcher Dr. Joseph Putulowski (2015) was reviewed to determine if the instrument used in his study might be helpful in this study. Putulowski's study spanned eight weeks during the summer of 2015 and involved telephone interviews of upper-level students working toward completing a bachelor's degree at a U.S.-based university. Further consideration of Putulowski's 4-question interview instrument, while useful for his purposes, was not considered to be used in this homeschool study. This study sought extensive information from homeschooling parents, requiring more questions from a larger sample and more questions. The organization of Putulowski's instrument became the basis for this study's 11-question interview process (Putulowski, 2015).

Due to time constraints and practicality, there was no exhaustive search for possible interview instruments for this study. For this reason, this author created an 11-question survey,

each aligned with the study's research questions, following the example used by Dr. Putulowski (2015). The limited duration of this study, the limited number of anticipated qualified participants to be interviewed, and the availability of time to conduct individual interviews of homeschooling parents led to the creation of the 11-question interview instrument used in this study.

### **Interview Questions**

Participants were asked the following questions:

1. How familiar are you with the homeschool education model?
2. Do you now or have you previously homeschooled your children?
3. Why did you remove your children from public schools?
4. Do you agree or disagree with reports suggesting that a student's safety is the most critical job of a public school? Please explain:
5. Do you agree or disagree with reports suggesting that educational outcome (i.e., learning, readiness for adult life) is the most critical job of a public school? Please explain.
6. Which of the two are the most important attributes of a public school? Please explain.
7. What other reasons might a parent consider removing their children from public school? Please list them in order of importance (i.e., 1, 2 ...), with 1 being the most important reason. Please explain.
8. Please compare your chosen homeschool curricula to public school curricula presented to your children. Please explain.
  - a. What curriculum do you use?

- b. What were your reasons for selecting this curriculum?
- 9. Are there “must have” features of the home school curriculum? Please explain.
- 10. What features or capabilities would you like to see in the next release of home school curricula?
- 11. What recommendations would you give parents considering leaving public education to homeschool their children?

### **Data Collection**

The study aimed to determine why an increasing number of parents are removing their children from public education and, given the alternative educational systems (e.g., private, parochial, charter, Montessori, homeschool), why parents decided to homeschool their children instead. Additionally, the study sought to determine what factors led the surveyed homeschool parent to select their chosen curriculum. By selecting two homeschool associations in St. Louis, MO, with hundreds of associate members each, the likelihood of obtaining sufficient qualified participants appeared promising. The two associations allowed recruiting notices about the study on their intranets, Facebook pages, and other internal communications channels that associate members frequently visit. The researcher chose a survey method to answer the research questions.

The researcher created a survey instrument in Google Forms with eleven semi-structured questions. Sufficient space for interview notes was planned, however, this was not the result of the instrument design, and the form was abandoned. (See Appendix F). An interview form for each participant was created (in Excel) and used to list the eleven interview questions, allowing the necessary space for handwritten notes to be made as the interview proceeded. It also enabled measurement and data analysis once participant interviews were completed. Original participant



names were omitted, and pseudonyms and unique alpha-numeric codes were assigned during the interview. This Interview Question Form replaced the Google Form document for practical reasons.

The principal investigator created a spreadsheet containing the pseudonyms and each respondent's unique identifier. This document served as the repository of all interview schedules. This document remained confidential during the interview process, and once complete, it was stored on a thumb drive and secured in a vault under the principal investigator's control. Once all interviews were complete, data was organized for analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used to analyze data, which began with a coding technique. Coding is the process of labeling information into a helpful format during analysis, categorizing data by meaning by assigning definitive words or phrases to differentiate the data within the dataset. Saldana (2021) explains that a code is frequently a word or short phrase that captures the summary essence of the code in language or visual data. The definitive labeling of statements, observations, journal notes, loosely structured interview answers, and interview transcripts led to eventual data coding in this study (Saldana, 2021). Crosley and Jansen (2020) further describe coding as a style.

Deductive coding may be a predetermined set of data labels to be assigned to information collected through a gathering process (e.g., loosely structured questions). Deductive approaches assume that there are principles that can be applied to the phenomenon. An insight could be derived by applying the deductive model to the dataset and searching for consistencies and anomalies. (Roberts et al., 2019). In contrast, inductive coding labels data as collected – a go-with-the-flow coding process –useful for researchers investigating new ideas or concepts that are

understood or when trying to validate theories through data analysis (Crosley & Jansen, 2020). This study used the inductive coding method, drawing meaning from information given in response to interview questions or prompts.

After the interviews were completed, they were reviewed by the Principal Investigator, who compared them to other interviews by noting keywords and phrases in each interview transcript and then comparing them for commonality. In Moustakas's work (Robinson, 2023), all participant statements are given equal weight in this process. Furthermore, according to Saldana (2021), codes are symbolic words or phrases that provide language or visual data attributes. Repetitive or redundant codes were removed, leaving only the preliminary codes for analysis.

### **Limitations**

Because the study is both exploratory and qualitative, the findings may not be generalized. The large population of the selected home group associations and the limited time to conduct interviews and analyze surveys permitted a small population sampling. The group's lack of diversity is one limitation; each participant was a homeschooling parent of K-12 students. The home school cohort's geographic location was a limiting factor because it is isolated to St. Louis, MO, and may be influenced by Midwestern culture and values. The population for the study is directly overseen by two directors (Families for Home Education Region 5 directors), M/M Don and Kim Quon, who emailed all associate members the invitation to participate in the study. The relationship between each invitee and association directors, M/M Don and Kim Quon may influence prospective participants' choices and responses to the interview questions. There may be instances of a respondent completing the interview/survey without disclosing relevant information (e.g., they are not currently homeschooling). Finally, the researcher, in the process of interviewing respondents and asking the interview questions, may have introduced

inconsistencies when responding to statements or asking follow-up questions of the participants that varied between one participant and the others.

The number of parents participating in the study is a limitation. The anticipated number of parents expected to participate was 20 - 40, which may be a saturation point where all answers to the questions are fully addressed, and no new responses are given. The researcher made no effort to validate any responses or claims. For instance, the researcher did not verify the information provided by respondents or contact local public schools to obtain the public-school administration's input into this study. This study surveyed only parents who homeschooled in St. Louis County, MO and was limited to the few topics in the interview document. Participants' responses to interview questions may reflect the opinions of one or both parents, without differentiation between two respondents in each home. Home school students are not included in this study. The study does not exhaust the possible causes or effects in the answers provided by the respondents, who may be biased through personal knowledge, experience, or other factors unknown to the researcher. Finally, demographics do not play a role in this study; that is, no demographic or psychographic data is solicited by the survey questions or the researcher.

### **Delimitations**

This study surveys only parents who homeschool in St. Louis County, MO, and not a larger geographic area that would expand the sampling count, interviews, and resultant data. The study is limited by the time permitted by interviewees/participants who were busy adult parents of school-aged children. The researcher could only discuss some potential topics of interest, and value could be addressed due to the single interview time constraints. One spouse provides the responses to survey questions without the input of their spouse, whose responses to interview questions may differ. The interview environment varied, depending upon the participant's

availability and timing. For instance, some participants were interviewed at an athletic event where their children were participating, introducing potential distraction from the question and affecting a response. Other participants were interviewed by telephone, where the physical environment and home activity could not be considered. By design, home school students are not included in this study. The study does not exhaust the possible causes or effects in the answers provided by the respondents, who may be biased through personal knowledge, experience, or other factors unknown to the researcher. Finally, demographics do not play a role in this study; the survey questions or the researcher solicits no demographic or psychographic data.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the methods used in this study. The principal investigator chose a qualitative study and developed a consistent procedure to be followed, including sampling, data collection, and analysis. The following section presents the results of this process.

## **Chapter 4: Research, Data Collection, and Findings**

### **Overview**

The problem this study addressed relates to the fact that a growing number of K-12 students in the U.S. are leaving public schools for private and homeschooled education. This study does not include private, parochial, or other alternative schooling methods to public school education. This qualitative, phenomenological study explored why parents remove their children from public schools and educate them at home. This chapter presents the findings that emerged from the data analysis. The purpose statement underpinning this study is presented again, along with the research questions. Research methods and data collection procedures are described once again. A presentation and analysis of the data is then given. This chapter concludes with a summary and outline of key points.

### **Purpose Statement**

This study aimed to discover why an increasing number of parents of K-12 students in the U.S. are removing their children from public school education and enrolling them in private schools or homeschooling them. The private/homeschool sector in the U.S., according to Ray (2022), has reached a population of 15 million students in 2021, nearly 30% the size of public-school enrollment in the same period, and is expected to grow at 8% annually. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly contributed to this trend, as many families began to appreciate remote learning and home education. At the same time, social distancing and mandatory public-school closures created a perfect storm that upset the predominant dependency on public school education (Ray, 2022). Little is known about how this increase in homeschooling will impact public and private education's sociodemographic and socioeconomic composition. However, Ray (1997) interviewed 1,485 homeschooled children to get a sense of their social lives. He

discovered that they participated in a wide range of activities with diverse people, including friends from their peer group and adults from outside their families (Ray, 1997).

Understanding the motivations behind parents' removal of their children from public education may serve as a precursor to comprehending what public and private education may eventually look like in the U.S. This study fills a gap in the literature concerning the main reasons parents of K-12 students leave public education for private and homeschool alternatives. This education-focused study has significant implications for business and economic entities, online learning programs, and resources like Chegg, Blackboard, and Pearson Publishing that have already begun to enjoy incremental revenue from the homeschooling trend. Thus, it will significantly benefit these companies to understand which factors influence parents' decisions to convert to remote learning and how they can best orient their business models to cater to these families' needs.

### **Research Questions**

This study was framed by the following research questions:

**RQ1.** What factors motivate parents to withdraw their children from public schools?

**RQ2.** What factors influence parents' decisions to homeschool their children?

### **Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures**

This phenomenological study aimed to identify the factors influencing parental decisions to withdraw from K-12 public schools in St. Louis, Missouri, and nearby counties, using semi-structured interviews to focus on homeschool topics or in-depth interviews to understand the sampling's feelings or experiences with homeschooling more deeply, from a personal perspective (Hammarberg et al., 2016). For example, why would a parent place their children in one school rather than another? This is why this researcher chose a qualitative methodological approach for

this study. The Delphi technique, an iterative question-and-answer process, was used to validate that questions were understood and to authenticate participant responses (Dick, 2000).

Redistributing summarized responses allows individuals to further reflect on posed questions by reviewing earlier responses to questions, the consensus response (i.e., summarized group responses) facilitating a second thought about survey questions, and sometimes using disagreement to stimulate deeper analysis (Dick, 2000). Expert consensus generated by using Delphi can, for example, provide more useful data for the design of surveys for a larger audience (Dick, 2000). By aggregating differing opinions into a consensus, identifying outlier responses, and re-engaging the participant for further thought to a question, it becomes possible to understand better closely - held values, particularly among experts (e.g., homeschooling parents) (Dick, 2000). The Principal Investigator created an Excel spreadsheet containing the pseudonyms and unique identifiers of participants in the study. This document served as the repository of all interview schedules and participant responses to the eleven interview questions. This document remained confidential during the interview process and, once complete, was stored on a thumb drive and secured in a vault under the principal investigator's control.

### ***Qualitative Data Analysis***

Unlike quantitative methods that use scientific measures to determine data reliability and validity, qualitative research seeks to demonstrate trustworthiness and that the data is worth consideration (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An ontological and epistemological approach systematically assesses the credibility of the data collection process, which is more accessible to evaluate than the complex personal traits of the investigator, explains Adler (2022). Dodgson (2019) concurs with Adler when explaining that in a qualitative study, the research instrument is often the researcher. The constant repeatability of data collection methodology, consistently

chronicling data obtained from each participant, such that repeatability among researchers is probable, leads to the trustworthiness of qualitative studies (Dodgson, 2019).

As an inductive approach vis a vis the deductive approach of a quantitative study, qualitative analysis introduces a conceptual framework, explained carefully, such that consumers of the eventual study do not doubt the transparency. Therefore, the credibility of reported findings is established, explains Adler (2022). Consistent with both Adler (2022) and Dodgson (2019), the principal investigator in this study explains, in clear, understandable terms, the precise, repeatable data collection procedures, participant after participant.

Qualitative methods seek to naturally explore and understand rather than to collect and manipulate variables, as is a method in a quantitative study. Interpretive and contextualized interview questions are not likely suitable for quantitative analysis, but they are applicable in a qualitative study. Data are collected through interviews, field notes, diaries, and participant observation. Collected data is robust, well-informed, and supported through adequate documentation (Nassaji, 2020).

### ***Trustworthiness of Data***

In the absence of instruments to measure collected data, qualitative research depends upon the perceived validity and trustworthiness of participant responses and collected data, largely dependent upon researcher observation and assessment. The researcher establishes the trustworthiness of the research method, data collection and processing, and subsequent findings. The study's reliability is the degree to which data collection and analysis are acceptable and reliable, a measure of the nature of the chosen research method. Creswell and Creswell (2017) state that the reliability of a study rests upon four components: Credibility, transferability, trustworthiness, and conformability. To establish the trustworthiness of this study, the researcher



used precise triangulation methods to analyze and confirm the trustworthiness of gathered data based on participant interviews and the resultant answers to the eleven interview questions.

### ***Credibility***

The extent to which research findings and the conclusions of a qualitative study are believable, truthful, and represent the reality of the phenomenon under study is known as credibility and may be established by collecting many perspectives throughout the data-gathering process to ensure that the data are appropriate, explains Nassaji, (2020). Credibility was achieved as the researcher sought to understand participants' feelings, meanings, context, and intentions of responses through questioning processes as consistently and accurately as possible.

### ***Transferability***

Under similar contexts and data collection processes, the methods used in this study are transferable in likeness and form due to the universality of the data collection instrument used and the data analysis transparency. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) have said, transferability is not intended for generalized claims to be made by the researcher but to offer sufficient detail that makes transferability possible to other researchers wishing to do so.

### ***Dependability***

Assuring that the qualitative data collection is consistent among the sample group even when research environments or questioning processes change from one participant to the next is one manner of achieving this study's dependability. The study established data dependability through rigorous data collection methods and confirming the resultant data set.

### ***Conformability***

This study meticulously verified and reverified the collected data; other researchers could repeat subsequent participant data collection and analysis methods. The clear coding scheme

used during the analysis presents the codes and patterns that become apparent during the analysis process. A final audit of the data ultimately ensured the dependability of the collected data.

### ***Reflexivity***

Potential bias and misunderstanding are possible, explains Dodgson (2019), when the effects of the researcher on participants and participants on the researcher lead to a subjective rather than an objective analysis - known as reflexivity, a type of intellectual honesty maintained during all stages. The researcher in this study made every known effort to mitigate biases that could misconstrue or alter the data during the collection and analysis of this study by verifying the intentionality of participant contribution and cross-checking interview answers with one another.

### **Presentation and Analysis of Data**

Data were analyzed according to Saldana's (2021) recommendations described in Chapter 3. The coding schema followed a macro-to-micro view of the homeschool topics discussed in this study, beginning with the research questions. Eleven semi-structured questions were asked of each respondent in the interview process. Some answers to one interview question were closely associated with answers given to other questions, leading to a clearer understanding of how the respondent felt about the issues posed in the questions. Figure 2 presents codes identified via the first phase of this analysis process.

Table 3 (below) illustrates the research questions that were asked of participants and additional ‘thematic’ questions that emerged in the interviews.

**Table 3**

*Research Questions, Thematic Questions with Sub-thematic Questions*

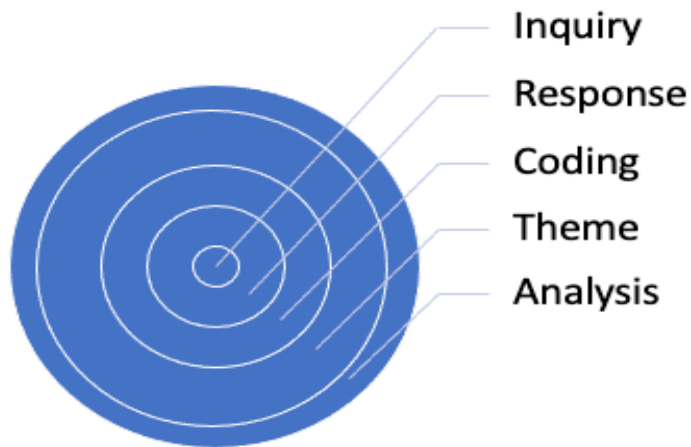
Research Question	Thematic Question	Sub-thematic Question
(RQ1). What factors motivate parents to withdraw their children from public schools?	(TQ1). Why do parents remove their children from public schools?	(STQ1). Why do parents choose to homeschool?
(RQ2). What factors influence parents' decisions to homeschool their children?	(TQ2). Why do parents choose to homeschool?	(STQ1). Is student safety the public school's most important responsibility?  STQ2. Is educational outcome the public school's most important responsibility?  STQ3. Which of the two, safety or educational outcome, is the public school's most important responsibility?

*Note.* Thematic questions derived from research questions. Subtheme questions are based on participant responses to interview questions.

The principal investigator entered the participants' answers to each interview question into a codebook. Initial coding labels were given to each response where pattern recognition is thought to be contained within the data, which may lead to categorical themes for analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This method was chosen for its utility in comparing data to data and conducting data triangulation, leading to thematic analysis via a data-driven inductive

analysis approach. This approach complements the research questions, the semi-structured interview questions, and their answers by allowing phenomenology to be dynamically integral to data analysis, code development, and thematic expression (Boyatzis, 1998).

The coding process involved carefully reading and re-reading collected data from interviews until common themes were recognized (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This occurred using inductive reasoning to recognize and encode an important word or statement, capturing the qualitative richness of the phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1998). Boyatzis (1998, p.161) defines a "theme" as a pattern in the information that, at minimum, describes and organizes the possible observations and, at a maximum, interprets aspects of the phenomenon. Using a template approach of cross-referencing data from these patterns led to the valuable analysis of statements and association among statements (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The codebook was a triangulation of participant-to-participant, participant-to-answer, and answer-to-answer (i.e., to-interview questions) association and comparison to determine the significance of common statements or themes based on the frequency of responses. Figure 3 illustrates the steps that were taken in this process.

**Figure 2***Progressive Recognition of Meaning*

*Note.* The progressive sequence and relationships between components of the recognition of meaning process.

Interviewing (inquiry) selected participants from a general population drawn from two homeschool associations in St. Louis, Missouri, led to the discovery of answers to the same interview question asked of each participant (response). The responses were carefully read and re-read until common keywords emerged and were entered into a study codebook labeling (Coding): re-reading sentences and interpretive analysis of keywords led to themes and subthemes. Table 4 presents keywords (i.e., codes), themes, and subthemes that emerged from the study.

**Table 4***Keywords, Themes, Subthemes, Research Question One*

Keywords	Themes	Subthemes
Problems	Reasons parents remove their children from public schools.	Safety
Safety		Educational Quality
Culture		Untenable Curricula
Disagreeable Values		Disagreeable Values
Inflexibility		Problems at School
Teacher Quality		Student/Teacher Ratio
Curricula		Teacher Quality
Unmet Special Needs		Kids not Learning
Learning Deficit		Teaching to the Lowest Learning Level

*Note.* Participant responses to Research Question 1.

When analyzing participant responses to interview questions about why parents a) remove children from public school and b) homeschool them instead, the following subthemes were discovered: 1) Safety, 2) Educational Quality, 3) Untenable Curricula, 4) Disagreeable Values, 5) Problems at School, 6) Student-Teacher Ratio, 7) Teacher Quality, 8) Kids Not Learning, 9) Teaching to the Lowest Learning Level. These are detailed below, with pertinent comments by participants responding to the interview questions about parents removing their children from public schools and homeschooling them.

### ***Theme One: Educational Outcome***

Several participants pointed out that the quality of education that public schools offer has changed over time, and recent changes in presented curricula may pose disagreeable values to students and parents alike. There is a correlation between class sizes and how well teachers can meet each student's needs. For instance, one participant, Jim, a homeschooling father of six

children, said the student-teacher ratio in the public school his children attended (before being removed) was too high. His children routinely described how they helped other students with their work in class because the teacher did not have the time to attend to each student (i.e., too many students – too short a class period). Ellen is a mother who homeschools her seven children. She reported instances where teachers pass students along from one grade to the next when the students' understanding or learned knowledge is not sufficient for the demands of the next grade level. The problem is compounded when the subsequent teacher presents material to the lowest (student) common denominator, that is, teaching with fewer demands and less rigor at the level of weaker students in the class – at the expense of higher performing, more proficient students who are capable of learning more.

Not every participant found educational quality in public schools deficient, as Mary Lynn, a homeschooling mother, explained that students should keep students safe but also teach students how to become responsible citizens. Explicitly referencing the role of the teacher in the public schools that her children attended, Mary Lynn said that teachers meet a variety of needs of children from vastly different backgrounds and connect students and families with available school resources (e.g., guidance counselors). John has homeschooled their children for four years due to the mandatory COVID-19 lockdowns. John said that this at-home, online model did not work for their children and that he and his wife soon realized that by homeschooling their children themselves, they could help them enjoy the learning process. He disagreed with the statement that educational outcome is the most important responsibility of a public school but also said, "I'm not too sure what the job (or public school) is exactly." He believes that public schools are not daycare centers and should educate children whose parents choose to enroll them in public education. Of the twenty participants who were asked if they agreed or disagreed with

reports suggesting that educational outcome (i.e., learning, readiness for adult life) is the most critical job of a public school, there was nearly an even split in the responses: fourteen of the twenty participants agreed with the statement, that educational outcome is the most critical job of public schools. Thirteen of the twenty participants disagreed with the statement that educational outcome was the most important job of public schools, and three of the twenty participants could not agree or disagree. These three participants said that both safety and educational outcomes were equally important responsibilities of public schools.

There are numerous other forms of disruption and trouble in public schools, ranging from the presence of and threat from gangs to the rare but increasing instances of students bringing weapons to school. However, a more prevailing set of problems can be found in the classroom. Belinda, a homeschooling parent for more than thirteen years, addressed the issue of classroom disorder in an answer to one of the interview questions. She states that hallway order begins with classroom order and that the frequency of hallway bullying, fighting, and racially driven tensions may be mitigated when a public-school teacher maintains discipline and order within the classroom. This is sometimes easier said than done, as public-school teacher scrutiny increases, particularly when disciplining a student is involved. Gail, a homeschool parent for seven years, said, "She believes that many teachers are obstructed from teaching as they'd like, restrained by laws that limit what a teacher may say or do." "This can lead to the inmates running the asylum," she said.

Marian, a mother of three children and a homeschool teacher for 17 years who did not send her children to public school, explained that a good friend and neighbor had a child with learning disabilities requiring extraordinary public-school resources, of which there were precious few. Her friend told Marian, with amazement, that it is easy and common for teachers to



graduate along with students with learning difficulties who have not or are unable to comprehend the learning material at one level to the next level, a disservice to the student, and the subsequent teacher, and the class that may experience attenuated learning opportunities because of the learning pace of struggling students.

Children with special needs abound in public schools, and many districts rise to the challenge with ample resources, programs, and practices. Often, it is a battle with schools and districts to access special needs programs, requiring knowledge, patience, expert witnesses, and persistence to have a child placed in a needs-based program. Not every parent succeeds in their effort. One consequence of leaving a special needs or disadvantaged learner in a classroom is diluting other students' learning opportunities. Ellen, rather harshly, said that "public school children are often illiterate; they behave irresponsibly and don't appear to be well-rounded topically." She feels this is because they pay attention to subjects of interest and minimal attention to the subjects they are not interested in and do not like. "I want my kids well rounded, with life skills, a strong moral compass,' the reason that Ellen and her husband began homeschooling their children. "No regrets," exclaims Ellen. When a teacher spends extra time to help a struggling student or ensure that students understand what is being presented, there is less time to devote to other students or learning activities. It is easy for a marginal student to slip through the cracks and go unnoticed but for poor grades. A correlation often exists between what is learned, understood, and absorbed and how well a student performs on tests and assignments.

When an instructor attenuates the content, volume, and degree of challenge to accommodate a struggling student, it may affect all students. This means that most students proceed to the next grade level, not knowing some of what will be required of them. This is but one hazard of public education. Jeanette, a homeschooling mother of two, said that public school

education could fail to challenge gifted students, essentially not allowing them to be challenged and learn more quickly. At the same time, students who learn more slowly can be left behind because they cannot keep up with grade-level assignments. As Jeanette described public education, the "one size fits all" approach does not work for all children.

Homeschooling, explains Nelson, permits a great deal of flexibility. Nelson offers an example. He and his wife's approach to math is to teach their children according to the program and then test for comprehension to determine what has been learned before moving to the next level. He sees curriculum as a "tool," not a "rule," a framework, not a rigid structure. When additional time is needed for his child to grasp the lesson and understand what has been presented, Nelson explains that they allow the necessary time to ensure their children are prepared for success at the next level. He wonders how many public-school students proceed from one grade level to the next, unlearned and underprepared for the content that awaits them at the next level. Jessica, who has homeschooled five children for fifteen years, removed their first child "right away" once she and her husband realized that public schools no longer aligned with their child's needs. Their four children that followed began school at home and did not go to public schools.

Belinda has been homeschooled for thirteen years and cites deficiencies in public school curricula as one of the reasons she and her husband began homeschooling. Belinda did not specifically mention the inclusion of racial issues or sexually oriented teaching in public schools as the reason for withdrawing from public education. Still, she said that public schools have inflexible curricula chosen and controlled by school boards. When they learn of disagreeable content in what is being taught at public schools, they find no relief or alternatives for their children. On the contrary, Jessica said that there is a plethora of homeschool curricula to choose

from today and that flexibility in selecting courses that align with their family values and educational outcome goals is a significant benefit of homeschool education.

Patricia and her husband have homeschooled their children from kindergarten and have no personal experience with public schools. She said that, from what she has heard among friends who send their children to public schools, public education is fraught with content and activities that disagree with the moral values of many families. Homeschooling has allowed them to individualize curricula according to the varying needs of their children and choose content that reinforces how they raise them from a Christian worldview. A homeschooling mother for fourteen years, Barbara had much to say about why parents might remove their children from public schools. Peer pressure at any age weighs heavily on a child's self-confidence and is present at any grade level, in her opinion. Today's peer pressure seems more derogatory than the kinds of peer pressure she felt as a child. There are more pressures on children to go along with early-age sex and the use of drugs and alcohol. Barbara said that the more they homeschool, the more they become aware of how their children benefit, learn, avoid problems, and develop healthy self-confidence.

Brooke Koenig, a director of the West County Christian Home Educators Association, explained that just recently, the teacher in her son's 6th-grade class in the local public school presented gender selection as an option and ways to undergo a sex change without parental consent. She was about to take the matter up with the school's principal when her husband alerted her that the principal was pushing the agenda and would provide unrelenting support to teachers who teach what they are told. Further, their son would face administrative consequences for parents who challenge her authority, and it has been reported that physical bullying of the child of a complaining parent is routinely directed from the administrative offices and that

neither the administration nor staff members intervene in these bullying incidents. They chose not to raise the issue with the school administration.

Gail emphasized that taking God out of public schools nearly forty years ago, and the discrimination levied against religious organizations and clubs has led to the deterioration of public schools today. She said that public schools are "brainwashing" students with political messaging, gender confusion, and the rewriting of history to a different version of American history than she and her generation were taught. For example, the 1619 Project, initiated, and sustained through the effort of The New York Times Magazine, was introduced in August 2019, commemorating the 400th anniversary of the purported beginning of American slavery, and is being taught in American history, sociology, and civics classes. This racially stirring approach to American history purposely fuels the minds and the tempers of all races in the public school system. What began as a quid pro quo – allowing one religion to be represented on campus led to allowing all religious organizations the same access to public school facilities. In a very short time, explains Linda, the public school went from every religion being welcome on campus to every imaginable idea being welcome: Witchcraft, Satanism, Luciferins, Dungeons and Dragons Club, and Atheist Clubs, with no limit. The Christian faith, however, represented, became less tolerated with super-charged antagonism to the extent that meetings could not be held without protests, shout-downs, and acts of violence.

Jim and his wife have six children and have been homeschooling for 16 years. Before removing his children from public school, his children told him they regularly help other students with their work during class because the teacher did not have the time to help struggling students. He described some of his child's public-school experiences as "too many students, too short a class period" due to an out-of-balance student-teacher ratio. Given the abundant resources

available through associations, other homeschooling parents, curricula, and publishers, Jim and his wife found homeschooling easier than they had thought. In Marian's experience, parents as teachers do not always work out, and not all parents are suited for the requirements of the homeschool parent-teacher role. The tensions that arise over employment demands, financial situations, child discipline, and personal aspirations require a compromise in other needed areas of home operations. Marian continued that not all parents are up to this challenge.

Jeanette, a mother of two who has been homeschooling for seven years, emphasized that bullying is a common problem in and out of school. Jeanette explained that bullying is not always apparent to busy, overworked teachers and other supervisors in public schools. Bullying, Jeanette said, comes in many shapes and sizes, including group exclusion, online bullying, or online exclusion from activities, and bullying is sometimes a spurious physical attack. Jeanette concludes it all relates to teacher awareness, availability, and intervention.

Nelson's wondering about public school students moving from grade level to grade level, not understanding what has been taught along the way, and experiencing heightened challenges to learn, if they can at all, is one side of the problem. There may be a tendency within a teacher to teach to the lowest level. That is, teaching at a volume, depth, and pace that accommodates the weakest student so that all students learn the same material at the same rate, albeit not the full complement the teacher might otherwise have presented. The upside may be that the next class is at a standard level of knowledge; the downside may be that the lack of understanding of material not covered may impede their learning at some point in time down the road, according to Nelson's reasoning.

In many public schools, Jeanette explains, teachers are encouraged to "move students along" from grade level to grade level and, in some instances, compensated, in part, based on the

percentage of students that completed the class. The "dumbing down" of class material to the level of the weaker students means that lower-performing (i.e., learning) students are awarded inflated end-of-course scores, moving forward to the next grade level, at the expense of higher-performing students eager to learn, who breeze through the class with little effort required. It is reported that in public schools, in some school districts, homework is no longer given to students. In other parts of the country, notably the West Coast, tests are not given in certain subjects because they may discriminate against students who cannot perform as well on tests as other students can, Jeanette reports.

### ***Theme Two: Reasons to Homeschool Children***

By analyzing participant responses to interview questions about why parents choose homeschool curricula for their children, the following subthemes were discovered: 1) A Controlled Environment, 2) Educational Quality, 3) Personal Values, 4) Biblical Worldview, 5) Flexibility, 6) Desire to Spend Time with Their Children. These are detailed below, with pertinent participant comments in response to the interview questions about homeschool curricula preferences.

Jeanette is a mother of two who has been homeschooling her children for the past seven years. She is quick to express her concern over increasing safety threats to public schools and the need for deterrents. She cites the dangers in all schools, however small, from individuals who attack schools and their students to the routine on-campus violence that is the talk at many dinner tables around the country. Jeanette brought up Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, which demands implicit safety in all schools.

Ellen has homeschooled seven children over the past 17 years. During her interview, she initially felt that educational outcomes were a greater responsibility of public-school

administrators than safety, which used to be a local law enforcement service. Reversing her position, Ellen said, "Safety shouldn't be the most important responsibility of public schools, but with today's culture, safety probably is the most important priority of public schools." Ellen's reason for homeschooling her children was because their grades began to fall in public school, and she sensed their apprehension of the topics to be substandard to their earlier school performance. A closer look revealed that the older of the three children was being made fun of in a math course, and this had been going on for quite some time. After a failed attempt to switch her daughter to a different math class, which the principal denied, she and her husband took inventory: They, indeed, did have the wherewithal to homeschool all three children and began doing so.

Jim and his wife have 6 children who have been homeschooled for 15 years. Jim initially thought that educational outcome was a more important responsibility of public schools than safety but reconsidered his decision and cited safety as the more important concern. Jim said that student safety must be ensured for the environment in which learning occurs, leading to a quality educational outcome. Jim further indicated that neither safety nor educational outcome had been the reason for removing his children from public school, as important as both are. There grew an increasing antagonism toward the Christian faith, while other religions were permitted to instruct students in class about their religion (e.g., Islam). One teacher was allowed repeatedly to present the history of Islam to several grade levels simultaneously. Their children began questioning why discussions of Christ and Christianity were not allowed. "The final straw was when a teacher was permitted to read their favorite book to the class – *The Dollhouse Murders*." Jim and his wife removed their children from public school and began homeschooling them with no regret.

Gail, a mother of 7, has been homeschooling for many years, recalled an incident when she was 11 years old, in the 7th grade at a public school in a small midwestern town, where the first mass-murder shooting in the U.S. occurred. Though present, Gail was unharmed, but for the dreadful memory of the event. The shooter, another student at the school, was routinely made fun of because he was the "fat kid" in the school. This student brought a loaded pistol to school one day, and seeing the weapon, his teachers thought it was a toy. After shooting several students at point-blank range, he took his own life. The fact that Gail still has vivid memories of the event is evidence of the kind of long-term harm that stems from a safety issue at school.

Student safety is not just about a "shooter" or other attacks on campus. I imagine a young girl who is laughed at, says Liz, because of her braces may have trouble getting over the public humiliation. Safety includes alerting and engaging teachers who intervene and prevent this kind of personal harm. Cyberbullying does not necessarily occur at school, but when students from school begin to pick at and belittle other students online, to the point of emotional distress to the student being belittled, it may become a school safety matter. Being introduced to marijuana by a student from school, on or off campus, may be considered a safety matter since habits may be formed, adverse behavioral patterns developed, and even the migration to harder drugs may be the result. When the students are involuntarily in the same class at the same time, there may be no escape from the student making the offer to share a joint after school. Nevertheless, it may become a serious school safety matter. The list of safety hazards that a student away from home, at school - is long, potentially growing each year as gender and transgender topics are discussed with students in public schools.

Some may argue that the responsibility for the quality of education rests with the student, not the environment. Moreover, parents are usually a child's first teacher. Still, parents witness



their children's declining grades, lower test scores, and diminished enthusiasm for school despite their best efforts to support and nurture them at home. Nelson is a church pastor and a father of 4 children who found public school teachers deviating from the subjects to be taught in a class, substituting some other lesson that the teacher felt was more important. He and his wife were shaping their children's worldview differently from that presented at the local public school. Nelson's children were in their formative years, during which faith, world outlook, confidence, and values are ordinarily developed, Nelson said. They wanted to direct these critical learning opportunities with their children, which led to him and his wife leaving public education and homeschooling them.

Elizabeth has two children who she homeschools. During her interview, Liz said that public school teachers are increasingly introducing opinions over controversial topics to their students at the expense of teaching them worthwhile lessons and skills. Gail, too, said that public schools today are "brainwashing" students by re-writing history and teaching a different version of American history. This version drives a preferred narrative and not the facts concerning the founding of the U.S. Unchecked, even supported by school administrators and school boards, some teachers take full advantage of a captive audience, introducing political and controversial topics instead of the academic knowledge necessary to their children's education. This dilutes the effectiveness of the school day and lessens the valid learning opportunities that public schools should espouse. Gail said that taking God out of the school seems to enable some teachers to present just about any topic or content without constraint.

During his interview, Chad shared a different perspective on public schools and the quality of education he'd come to expect. "We never gave our children the public-school experience," Chad explained. "We didn't want to risk their education. We didn't trust the

system," he continued. While many students succeed in the public school system and continue to adult success, Chad knows several families whose parents wish they could begin again – with some alternative to public schools.

Liz laments that there is no tolerance for the God of the Bible, which has become the norm in public schools. Christians make up more than one-third of the world's population – 2.8 billion Christians in a world of eight billion souls – and are systematically being silenced around the world, notably in the United States, a country whose very founding was based upon biblical principles. We are witnessing an Isaiah 5:2 resurgence: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" (*Colossians 3 NIV*, 2011). And yet, Born Again followers of Jesus Christ (i.e., Christians) are told by the Apostle Paul in his letter to Colossae (Col 3:1-2), "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." (*Colossians 3 NIV*, 2011), Suzanne reminds. Our minds are the requisite tool in education, and for people of faith, the Christian faith, school kids are sent to a spiritual war zone called the "public school."

During Nelson's interview, he expressed frustration and disappointment that his values are no longer welcome in public schools. For this reason, he and his wife have chosen to homeschool their children. Nelson expresses concern that the public schools seek to shape their children's worldview differently from the Christian worldview they are led to in the home. During these formative years, Nelson said, faith, world outlook, self-confidence, personal values, and trust in a risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, must be firmly established, Nelson explains. As a Christian, Nelson, the Bible is God's Word, his source of truth, and his principles to live by. King David said, as recorded in the Book of Proverbs chapter 22 verse 6, "Train up a child in the

way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6 NKJV). Jim and his wife found it impossible to trust the public schools with the welfare of their children, so they began homeschooling them. As a local church pastor, Nelson marvels at God's faithfulness. The peace and joy the entire family enjoy through homeschooling is more than he had imagined.

"Some parents, including herself," explained Reenie, "see a decline in values and morality in high school-age public school students that invariably is taken into adulthood." Additionally, she says that many public-school high school students are underprepared, undereducated, and nowhere near ready for life when they graduate. Reenie and her husband have homeschooled their four children for 17 years. Andy and his wife now homeschool their four children after the older children had a short stint in public schools. They saw how well the younger two were doing at home in homeschooling, and the older children readily accepted the idea of joining the family in homeschooling. Andy points out that public schools do not teach or promote biblical values. Andy said homeschooling allows them to raise their children in a faith-based home environment. "Teaching science 'the right way' is important to Andy and his wife, implying that traditional family values and a biblical worldview of science present a more accurate rendition of scientific knowledge than that presented in public schools.

Julie and her husband have homeschooled their only child since he was in 7th grade, following six years in the public school system. "Peer group pressure is a threatening factor anywhere the child spends a lot of time – and school is where the child spends the most time, ordinarily," Julie explained. She understands people's influence on one another and wonders if their son's peers positively influenced him. Julie adds that politics has found its way into public schools, causing her to wonder, "Are there politically motivated groups, individuals, or school

board members with an agenda to push on my child." She said this "could undermine the beliefs and values of the family."

A frequently cited reason parents choose to homeschool their children is the degree of flexibility they enjoy. When instructing, if additional time is needed to understand a concept fully, homeschool families have the freedom to dwell on a topic until it is understood. For example, suppose the parents would like to take a field trip to the Creation Museum. In that case, they can reconnoiter the lesson plan for the week without forfeiting time or student progress in a particular subject – they change days and times around to accommodate the field trip. Flexibility extends to the choice of curricula addressed in this chapter. Still, one of the most appreciated examples of homeschooling flexibility is the freedom to tailor a study plan at the individual level – not a "one size fits all" as in public education.

Gail, a parent, and homeschooler with seven children, raves about the flexibility she has found in both the process of homeschooling and the curriculum flexibility she has used over the years. She found that public schools have one set of curricula for all students, each grade level, and do not consider the uniqueness or particular needs of the child. This is not to say that special needs children, continued Gail, do not receive a different approach to education, with unique goals to help students learn what they can as they progress from one level to the next. The uniqueness or special needs that Gail is referencing pertains more to nuance – not quite an attention deficit disorder student, one student's attention span (e.g., listening skills) may be at a different level than expected of all students in the class. Public school teachers, stressed on several levels, cannot always take the time to discover each student's unique strengths and quirks, leaving many students and parents with the task of finding a working system for the challenged student. Gail did say that she has purposely selected curricula that closely parallel the

curricula of the grade level and subject in the public school so that if the need to re-enter public schools arose, their children would be in step with the class levels they would likely transfer to. Even this, Gail explains, is an example of the flexibility afforded to homeschool students.

Ginger is a mother of two children and has only homeschooled them – no public-school experience. She also enjoys the flexibility homeschooling permits and gives an example from curriculum selection. She and her husband approach homeschool curricula similarly to Charlotte Mason, an educator from the 1800s. Ginger describes the curriculum as short lessons with plenty of reading, narrating, and writing. She explains, "When their children are connecting with the curriculum, she observes them in their studies, and (they) are absorbing, learning and progressing, they stick with it." She emphasized that the curriculum must work for her and her children, with work being a subjective evaluation that may differ from parent to parent. Still, Ginger said, "The best rule of thumb is (to choose) the curricula that she and the students actually do - sticking with it and excelling."

"The flexibility to 'hand-pick' curricula for the specific child, at a particular grade level" is one benefit of homeschooling that she appreciates, explained Marian, a mother of 3 who has been homeschooling for 17 years. She described the early days of homeschool curricula as "humble beginnings" – fewer writers, underfunded publishers, incomplete or partial curricula, but this is no longer the case, Marian adds. She claims that having the flexibility to select the best curricula for the student is invaluable.

Nelson says that flexibility with homeschooling is necessary, giving an example of math curricula, sometimes a "one and done" course in the public school, then advancing to the next level. Nelson and his wife teach their children according to the selected curriculum program, and then they review what has been presented to them. If remedial learning is needed, they take

additional time to ensure the student has learned the material. "They'll catch up" has been a typical response by teachers during parent-teacher conferences when asked about students falling behind (referring to his children), Nelson says.

It should be stressed that acceptable curricula are state regulatory-approved curricula accredited by the governing authorities. Imagine teaching a child a certain way, going some distance into their education, only to discover that the curricula do not meet the accreditation standard requirements. This could easily set a student back several years while extending high school graduation. Using the carpenter's metaphor, Nelson explains, "It is better to measure twice and cut once" when selecting homeschool curricula.

Earlier studies reveal many reasons why parents remove their children from public schools and homeschool them instead. One unreported reason is that a surprising gap in the earlier body pertains to Research Question #2 of this study, "What factors motivate parents to withdraw their children from public schools?" Parents' desire to spend more "Time with their children" was among the top reasons participants gave when asked this question. Given the many possible reasons, it was surprising that spending time with children" was frequently given as a reason parents removed their children from public school. During the interview, Liz responded by explaining that she and her husband wanted to provide a well-rounded education for their children, which they felt the public schools would not do. They also focus on a solid family relationship, which she proudly says is characteristic of their home.

Linda cited several reasons for parents to remove their children from public school, giving an example of a student with special dietary requirements that the public schools do not meet. Linda said, "the desire to have more time with their children – to see them grow up through developmental stages – just to be with them." Linda spoke of family trips to the

Smithsonian or the Indianapolis 500 Raceway, which could not have been possible had their children been enrolled in public schools. The flexibility of home education puts parents in charge of coursework, sequence, and planning of daily events. A field trip, on occasion, with other homeschooling parents and children adds a social dimension to homeschooling. Some homeschool critics claim that the socialization of homeschooled students is anemic at best and absent at worst.

One of the study's more surprising findings had to do with participants' reasons for the question, "Why did you remove your children from public schools?" There were 17 respondents to this question. There were 6, or 35%, of the respondents who had never sent their children to public schools, reducing the remaining sampling group to 11 respondents, or the remaining 65%.

The second overarching theme pertained to reasons parents choose to homeschool their children. Table 5 contains a presentation of keywords, themes, and subthemes related to the second research question leading to the identification of this overarching theme.

**Table 5**

*Keywords, Themes, Subthemes, Research Question Two*

Keywords	Themes	Subthemes
Research	What factors influence parents' decisions to homeschool their children?	Controlled Environment (i.e., safety)
Engage		Educational Quality
Association		Personal Values
Special Needs		Biblical Worldview
Time with Children		Flexibility
Biblical Worldview		Parents want time with Children
Freedom		
Flexibility		
Safety		
Values		

*Note.* Participant responses to Research Question 2.

### *Theme Three: Curricula Preferences*

The third overarching theme to emerge pertained to factors that play a role in parents' decisions to use a particular curriculum, although curricula are not associated with the study's research questions. Table 6 contains a presentation of the findings related to this theme, including subthemes and codes leading to its derivation.

**Table 6**

#### *Reasons for Choosing Home School Curricula*

Keywords	Themes	Subthemes
Research	What factors play a role in parents' decision to use a particular homeschool curriculum?	Freedom to Choose
Association		Personalize Learning
Other parents		Faith Inclusion
Regulatory		Compliance
Compliance		Abundant Choices
Student Competency		
Level		
Flexibility		Flexible
STEM		Public
Similar to Public School		
Special Needs		
Education		
Quality		

*Note.* Reasons that participants chose a particular homeschool curriculum.

Many participants in this study who had enrolled their children in public schools before removing them and beginning to homeschool felt that their public-school curriculum was suitable for their children until school administrators and boards of education began introducing non-educational coursework based on political positions and disproportionate race-based topics, to name a few. For instance, the American History curriculum taught sequentially in the ninth and tenth grades accurately portrayed the history of America as it had been for years. The



curricula taught were consistent with the actual events as America grew as a country. Similarly, Civics taught students what it meant to be a patriotic, law-abiding citizen, how to contribute to the welfare of society, the basics of law and order, and respect for authorities and one another. The participants talked about school subjects they took and found to be academically and personally beneficial. The agendas became anti-American, anti-government, and anti-religion, even anti-family. American history was rewritten around an entirely racial agenda with no factual basis. One participant expressed that they felt academics became political, with a socialistic bend.

Liz makes the decisions about curricula in their home. She chooses curricula appropriate for each age level of her children, from year to year, like what is taught in public school for the respective age or grade level. Liz has choices from The Good and The Beautiful, Right Start Math, Shorman Math, Science, Sonlight, and Story of the World. Most important to Liz is "that they are learning everything they need to know for success as an adult." According to Linda, her family adds non-traditional learning opportunities, including computer education, gardening, painting, math, history, English, and science, which are core subjects. When her family began homeschooling 11 years ago, Linda chose curricula in a box. At \$200, My First World was an excellent introduction to her children and the world around them. In subsequent years, Linda chose Master Book History, Liberty Kids (American History), True to the Flag (Civics), Essentials in Writing (Composition), Math in Focus, God's World (Science), and the World Watch Bible course.

Reenie has been homeschooling for 17 years, a mother of four children, taking a mentoring approach to teaching, not simply a "Mom teaching" approach. She adds many experiential courses to the curricula, such as trips to science centers, botanical gardens, and zoos.

Her experience with public schools found they follow a classic-style education model that is rigid and structured. In contrast, Reenie prefers curricula that foster freedom, flexibility, and the ability for students to "do their own thing." She later added that education is not a race and that if more time were needed in a subject (e.g., math) at the expense of time spent on another subject, she would take the necessary time to ensure her children understood before returning to other subjects in subsequent days.

There was some overlap in the answers given by the 20 participants, but not so much as to saturate possible answers. For four years, John, a homeschool parent, has selected the *Good and Beautiful, Not Grass History* because of their Biblical worldview. Every lesson, John said, seems to demonstrate integrity, honesty, responsibility, and, of course, faith in Jesus Christ, all leading to character development. The curriculum, based on his experience, is a joy to learn.

Patricia and her husband, both new to homeschooling, began to homeschool during the COVID-19 school lockdown and soon grew to enjoy it. Her approach to curricula is to take an individualized approach, considering the age and characteristics of their children. There are some similarities to public school curricula, mostly core classes like science and social studies. Still, Patricia emphasized that they do not necessarily include the information that may be found in the corresponding course in a public school. Because she and her husband customize curricula to meet the needs and interests of their children, they piece together curricula from various sources.

Chad, who with his wife has homeschooled two children for the past ten years, said that while he is involved in some classroom teaching, topics that he knows and feels confident to teach, his wife is the predominant homeschool teacher and selects the curricula. The Bible is central to all learning, leading to successful living at every stage of life. When Chad and his wife began considering homeschooling, they got involved with a coop, an association known as

Friends of Home Education, who introduced them to curricula choices and made initial recommendations for the grade level of their children. Chad emphasized that while they are not what he would call pushy Christians, other parents have the same rights as they do, concerning educating their children. Chad continued that the Bible is necessary to learn Christian faith and behavior, develop integrity, and the subjects otherwise taught in public schools.

Mary Lynn was more reserved in the interview than many other participants, not even revealing how many children or the length of time she homeschooled. She said that their curricula are religious. They wanted safety for their children, a solid religious foundation, and the desire for more family time. She uses Abeka, a brand, and style of homeschool curricula, which, for her purposes, focuses on phonics, Classical Conversations, which is social studies oriented, and Masterbooks, which she emphasized was low cost. Mary Lynn chose curricula because "It is low cost, and not contrary to God."

Reenie, a mother of four who responded to other topics discussed earlier, has chosen Essentials of the English Language, Classical Conversations, and Global Logic, adding that a Latin course (whose name escaped her at the moment) was worthwhile. She includes the *Mystery of History* and *Timeline* (Creation to 911). Her approach to education is to lead learners, not to take on a "teacher" title. She emphasized that she teaches her children to "learn how to learn. Reenie was not finished but went on to mention Abeka curricula that she tried but found too voluminous and overwhelming, to which she added that "less is more" is a good strategy. The 3Rs are essential, Reenie said, as is a logic course for effective decision-making. Summing the "must haves," Reenie listed Reasoning, Debate, Research, Grammar, Logic, Math, and Exposition. Variety is a high priority for her and her children.

Marian, a mother of 3, has homeschooled her family for the past 17 years and recalls the "humble beginnings" when homeschool curricula first evolved. There were too few writers and publishers, leading to incomplete curricula, inadequate depth, and too few topics. Not so today. Marian explains that, in many ways, homeschool curricula have lapped public education in quality, choice, flexibility, and ease of administration. Her approach is the selection of curricula that best fit the learning needs of her children at each child's respective grade level. She emphasized the need to learn what is required by law and the state board of education. Marian enjoys the flexibility of choice for her family: Rainbow Resource, First Beginning, Oak Meadow (Art), Human Nature, Lightning Literature, and Saxon Math (K-12).

She suggested parents choose topics that parallel public-school topics in the event there is a need to return to public education; curricula that are reusable from student to student; and workbook-intensive curricula are not easily reused as the workbooks are completed through the original student's use. Quality is essential, leading the learner toward college-level preparedness. Jeanette, a mother of two, has homeschooled for seven years and enthusiastically expressed appreciation for the flexibility homeschooling affords her and her family. She found that public schooling was inflexible, routine, fast-paced, and not the kind of environment that her children would thrive in for any length of time. She enjoys selecting classes and coursework, as packages and as individual courses, to piece together educational matters specific to the needs of her two children. Jim, a 16-year homeschool veteran, encourages new homeschool parents to choose curricula that meet state regulatory requirements and to refresh their knowledge of the requirements year by year. That said, he invites new homeschoolers to take advantage of the flexibility homeschooling affords students and teachers. The beauty of tailoring an education "fit for the child" is the central value of the homeschool education model.

The enthusiasm found in the freedom to select homeschool curricula to customize the homeschool education according to each child's strengths and interests, this freedom comes with a warning, explains Jim, a father of four who has been homeschooling for 16 years. In his lengthy history of homeschooling, Jim and his wife have seen many governmental and regulatory changes that impact the homeschooling family. Jim and his wife chose the Bob Jones University homeschool curriculum. This full K-12 complement is comprehensive and flexible, allowing for variation based on a student's needs without compromising the rigorous learning regiment that satisfies state education accreditors. Any curriculum chosen for home education, Jim said, must meet local and state regulatory requirements. For his family's purposes, they chose Bob Jones University's high school curriculum and Saxon Math. With more than one hundred different homeschool curricula packages to choose from it is understandable that compliance with regulations is necessary to maintain quality education accredited at the state level. The freedom to granularly select coursework at the subject level from multiple sources has its hazards.

Ginger is a mother of two who has been homeschooling for ten years. When she began homeschooling, she did not know how to go about it and needed professional help. In addition to befriending several homeschooling parents, she joined the West County Christian Home Educators Association, where she met specialists on dietary safety and provided governmental regulatory assistance that she drew upon in her early days, "then and now," Ginger said. Ginger's family approaches homeschool curricula in line with an educator from the 1800s, Charlotte Mason, in addition to classical methods. She describes these as short lessons with plenty of reading, narrating, and writing. Ginger uses varied literature, depending on the child. Their children have used *Master Books*, *Simply Charlotte Mason*, books by Susan Wise Baur, and

other publishers. She explains that when their children connect with the curriculum, as she observes them in their studies, and are absorbing, learning, and progressing, they stick with it.

Marian, a homeschooling mother for 17 years, emphasized the need to learn what is required by law and the state board of education before selecting homeschool curricula. She suggested that parents choose topics that parallel public-school topics in the event there is a need to return to public education. To maintain progression within the public schools, homeschooled students must complete grade level requirements or their equivalents to stay caught up if re-entering public schools. If possible, she encourages parents to purchase reusable curricula from student to student; workbook-intensive curricula are not easily reused as the workbooks are completed through the original student's use. Quality is essential, leading the learner toward college-level preparedness. The twenty participants identified their choices of leading reasons to withdraw from public education and homeschooling their children: Safety, Education, and Spend Time with Children.

#### ***Theme Four: Student Safety***

One reason parents choose not to enroll their children in public schools or remove them from public schools is the matter of safety. It used to be a foregone conclusion that children were safe at school, but safety at school today is no longer a given. Surprisingly, there was no unanimous consensus about a school's responsibility for the safety of attending students. When asked about school safety, Andrew answered that it isn't the public school's responsibility to provide a safe environment in the first place, but it is society's job to enforce laws, reiterating that public schools are there to teach; it is other authority's responsibility to provide safety. Jessica agreed with Andrew, saying that safety in school is paramount, but she did not feel it was the school's responsibility to protect the students; it was the local law enforcement's role to

assure safety in the public schools. Suzanne, a homeschooling mother of five children, said that student safety at school is a must, whether public, private, or homeschooled, adding that quality results (i.e., educational outcome) are important responsibilities of any school. This educational outcome prepares the student for successful adult living. "Both (safety and educational outcome) are equally important," Suzanne explained. "You can't deliver quality education, and students can't focus on quality education unless safety is assured," she continued.

**Table 7**

*Interview Question Four Analysis*

Do you agree or disagree with reports suggesting that a student's safety is the most critical job of a public school? Please explain:	
Response to Q 4	%
A (Agree that Safety Is Most Important)	55
D (Disagree that Safety is Most Important)	30
B (Both are important)	15
Stated in Response	%
S (Safety)	54
E (Education)	46

*Note.* Percentage of participants that agree with statement that student safety is the most important job of public schools.

Interview Question (IQ) 4 emphasizes student safety by asking: "Do you agree or disagree with reports suggesting that a student's safety is the most critical job of a public school?" The upper three entries of Figure 4 show the respondents' answers. Most respondents (55%) agree with the report's findings, and 30% disagree with the report's findings. In other

words, student safety is more important to the respondents than educational outcomes. The lower two entries address more direct follow-up questions that do not refer to what a report might say but ask participants their opinion on which is the most important responsibility of the public school – assuring student safety or the student's educational outcome. When the question is asked in this manner – respondent answers were nearly the same – 54% answered that student safety is the most important responsibility of the public schools, and 46% of respondents thought the student's educational outcome is the most important responsibility of the public school.

Two of the eleven interview questions pertained to a public school's responsibility for student safety or a quality educational outcome. Surprisingly, student safety was not the unequivocal priority, according to most respondents. Several parents were quick to agree with the first question, "Do you agree or disagree with reports suggesting that a student's safety is the most critical job of a public school?" only to change their minds when asked the follow-on question, "Do you agree or disagree with reports suggesting that educational outcome (i.e., learning, readiness for adult life) is the most critical job of a public school?" Four of twenty participants answered that both safety and educational outcomes are important responsibilities of public schools, changing their minds when the second question was asked of participants.

The first three interview questions were purposely non-challenging and easily answered; all respondents were comfortable with them. The fourth interview question about safety being the most important job of a public school introduced tension into the discussion and responses. It was evident that many were second-guessing themselves, as they vacillated between their first choice, be it safety or education being most important, and having second thoughts on the matter. Safety for many should be a "given," but the question's phrasing created a dilemma for many.



Safety is needed, but is it the school's responsibility to ensure safety? Is safety the most important job of the school? Many thought not – the school's job is to educate the students.

1. A total of 70% of respondents agreed, and 30% disagreed with the statement that student safety is the most critical job of a public school, and among the reasons they withdrew their children from the public school and chose to homeschool them.
2. 41% felt that student safety in any school is the most critical job, and 20% thought education was the most important job of public schools. Safety and educational quality are among the most important reasons parents began homeschooling their families after removing their children from public education.
3. A total of 18% could not choose between safety and educational outcomes being the most important, stating that both were factors that led to them homeschooling their children rather than sending them to public schools.

#### ***Theme Five: Educational Outcome***

Interview question five emphasized students' educational outcomes in the way the question is asked: "Do you agree or disagree with reports suggesting that educational outcome (i.e., learning, readiness for adult life) is the most critical job of a public school?" The upper three entries of Figure 5 show the respondents' answers. The overwhelming majority of respondents (78%) agree with the report's findings, and a meager 5% disagree with the report's findings. In other words, educational outcome is more important to the respondents than student safety when the question is phrased differently.

**Table 8***Interview Question Five Analysis*


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Do you agree or disagree with reports suggesting that educational outcome (i.e., learning, readiness for adult life) is the most critical job of a public school? Please explain.	
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Response to Q 5	%
A (Agree Edu Most Important)	78
D (Disagree Edu Most Important)	5
B (Both)	17
Stated in Response	
S (Safety)	7
E (Education)	93

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*Note.* Respondents overwhelmingly feel the educational outcome is the most important responsibility of public schools.

The lower two entries are in response to more direct follow-up questions that do not refer to what a report might say but ask participants their opinion on which is the most important responsibility of the public school – assuring student safety or the student's educational outcome. When the question is asked in this manner – respondent answers were nearly opposites – 7% answered that student safety is the most important responsibility of the public schools, and 93% of respondents thought the student's educational outcome is the most important responsibility of the public school.

Having just wrestled with whether a student's safety is the most critical job of a public school, the responding participants faced another absolute statement to consider - that

educational outcome, such as learning and readiness for adult life, is the most critical job of a public school. The consensus was that a school's job is to provide quality education to attending students and that schools offer many other benefits to students.

1. A total of 55% of the respondents agreed with the statement, and only one disagreed.
2. A total of 30% said there were other, equally important jobs of the public school to education (e.g., safety, socialization, community).
3. A total of 15% of respondents felt safety and educational quality are equally important jobs of the public schools. These numbers do not agree with the statement, one way or the other (i.e., safety is most important, and education is most important).

Ellen disagrees that safety is the most critical job of a public school, saying, "Quality educational outcome is the main responsibility of public schools - both safety and educational outcome were equally important." She elaborated, explaining how she feels about public school education:

Public school students are often illiterate, behave irresponsibly, and don't appear well-rounded - they learn some but not all the essential subjects in public schools. I want well-rounded kids with life skills and a strong moral compass - the reason they began homeschooling.

Jim vacillated between the need for student safety and quality education as being most important. He went as far as to say both should be "givens," and both are warranted expectations of parents of public schools. Jim returned to this question later, stating that student safety is most important, as no quality education can be delivered in an unsafe environment. There were numerous instances of parents changing their minds about this question. Many disagreed with the statement suggesting that student safety is the most important responsibility of public schools,

and many agreed. When the phrase "... Do you agree or disagree with reports suggesting" was removed from consideration, respondents replied that safety and education were nearly equally important: 54% - 46%, respectively. An interesting contradiction is that while 70% of respondents agreed that safety is the most important job of a public school (Question 4), 78% from the same group of respondents thought that educational outcome is the most important job of public schools.

Chad summarized what most parents had talked about problems in public schools that potentially affect the student body: Avoid peer pressures and trouble that can come with that the older the student is - drugs, alcohol, sexual behavior at an age far too young for this in high school. Safety - from name calling to bullying - this happens as kids grow up regardless of where they go to school, but we, as parents, can help our kids with this kind of meanness.

Barbara contributed to this subtheme, saying, "If a child is harmed in some way, their future years may be adversely affected without parents being aware of the trauma that led to trouble down the road." Gail thinks the public schools today are "brainwashing" students by rewriting history and teaching a different version of American history. She said that: "Taking God out of the schools" over the past forty years and more has led to the deterioration of public education, where secular teaching prevails. A godless education aside, Gail also said that the student-teacher ratio in public schools is too large, leaving insufficient time for a teacher to get to know and consistently address the needs of the individual students." Strippers and lap dances are the last thing any student needs to see in the classroom, as they cannot be unseen, Gail said.

Jeanette believes that bullying is a common problem in and out of school and that bullying is not always apparent to teachers and other supervisors in public schools, according to the experiences of family friends whose children were bullied, excluded from groups, and

sometimes physically attacked. Her children previously attended Parochial schools, and she witnessed the same kinds of bullying, although to a lesser degree.

Chad said that teachers must maintain a safe environment for students – that is their job – the same as parents do in our homes, on field trips, or attend other homeschool teacher's classes. Jim reported that he and his wife saw increasing antagonism toward the Christian faith. At the same time, different religions were allowed the freedom to instruct students, in class, in the history and ways of various religions. "One Muslim teacher was repeatedly allowed to present the history of the Islam religion to several grade levels at a time in the public school," Jim said. The "final straw," according to Jim, was when a teacher was permitted to read their favorite book to the class, "The Dollhouse Murders." Their children began to question why faith in Christ was not taught. He described this as the "final straw" when he and his wife removed the children from the public school and began homeschooling them instead. "No regrets," says Jim.

Gail believes many teachers feel obstructed from teaching as they would like, restrained by laws, principles, and school boards that limit what a teacher says or does while dictating the course curricula. Ellen adds that the (public school) experience was good through 3rd grade when the trouble began. Her daughter was regularly made fun of in math classes, which led to her withdrawing socially and at home. Ellen worked with the public-school principal to try to change classes and teachers for her daughter, but this did not work out. At that point, she and her husband decided to homeschool both children. "The best decision they ever made," she said.

Ellen is a mother who homeschools her 7 children. Ellen said their first two children began their education in public schools, and the experience was initially good. Ellen discovered that the older of the two students was falling behind, was quieter than usual, and was not paying attention to her (Ellen) when being spoken to. The (public school) experience had been good

through 3rd grade when the trouble began. Her daughter was regularly made fun of in math classes, which led to her withdrawing socially and at home.

***Theme Six: Common Public-School Detractors***

Theme six pertained to the limitations of public schools, which included many attributes. Respondents had difficulty settling on a single answer, given that both safety and educational quality; some thought both were equally important responsibilities of any school:

1. 44% of respondents answered that both are equally important.
2. 31% thought student safety was most important, and among the reasons they withdrew their children from the public school and chose to homeschool them.
3. 25% of respondents thought educational outcomes to be the most important job of public schools, and among the reasons they withdrew their children from public school and chose to homeschool them.

This is the third time participants considered the same question without the distraction of another question being asked (i.e., do you agree with the report ...) at the same time. Participants moved back to the center in their responses, some reversing earlier decisions, others affirming earlier decisions. As shown in Figure 6, 44% (nearly half) of participants answered IQ6 that both student safety and educational outcome are equally important responsibilities of the public school. 31% of the participants responded that student safety was a more important responsibility of public schools, although by a slim margin, as 25% of the respondents said that educational outcome was the most important responsibility of public schools.

**Table 9***Interview Question Six Analysis*

Which of the two are the most important attributes of a public school? Please explain.	%
B (Both)	54
S (Safety)	31
Other	15

*Note.* Participants state that both safety and educational outcome are most important responsibility of public schools.

The study showed that the main reasons parents choose to homeschool their children are their concern over student safety in public schools and disappointment in the educational outcome of public schools. "Other" reasons for removing children from public schools and homeschooling them instead included:

1. Values – 45% of responding participants felt that their personal and family values are in stark contrast with the liberal agenda promoted in the public schools in the U.S. Intolerance of Christian beliefs and having removed God from public schools are included in the "values."
2. 55% of responding participants felt that teacher quality was among the reasons for withdrawing from public education. Teacher quality included maintaining classroom control, responding to disrespect (toward them) in the classroom, and a high student-teacher ratio that limits the degree of one-on-one interactions with students.

An outlier reason was repeated by 30% of participants responding to the "other reasons" question #7 of the Interview Questions (i.e., What other reasons might a parent consider removing their children from public school?):

Parents wished to have more time with their children. One participant cited the pace at which children grow up. They wanted to enjoy their children for the short 18-20 years they had them, and homeschooling allowed them to enjoy "time with kids."

These were the leading "other" reasons for removing students from public schools and homeschooling them instead. Still, the predominant motivations were the lack of assured student safety and the quality of education. Of the eleven responses to the interview question, "What other reasons might a parent consider removing their children from public school? Please list them in order of importance (i.e., 1, 2 ...), with 1 being the most important reason" no parent chronologically listed possible reasons despite the principal investigator's repeated attempts to quantify responses by the instructions given in the question. As expected, there was no saturation of choices made by parents of homeschooled children concerning curricula – there are more than one hundred individual choices, many of which overlap with others. The respondents' replies to the third research question aligned with the interview questions 8-10 are many and varied, with some overlap. There are no prevailing favorites, although other associations may recommend curricula that members may choose from.

The earlier discussion revealed what the respondents had to say about curriculum choice and why they chose the curricula they did. It was often to personalize the curricula for their children, as all learners learn differently, at different paces, and through other curricula. Some chose curricula based on overall value – could it be reused when siblings reach the age where the curricula apply? Can the curricula be shared with other homeschooling parents, particularly in the startup years? Not every respondent had a religious persuasion, so the extent of religious material in the curricula would greatly interest some respondents and deter others. One factor that all respondents mentioned concerning curricula choice is the need for the curricula to



comply with the governing authorities to be accredited and lead to an accredited education.

Jeanette explained that public schools could fail to challenge gifted students, essentially not allowing them to be challenged and learn at their speed. At the same time, students who learn more slowly can be left behind because they cannot keep up with grade-level assignments.

Jessica said she researched homeschool curricula and was uncomfortable with memorization-driven curricula – it would not work for her kids. One of her complaints with public schools was the degree of memorization needed to pass a test at the expense of learning - she did not want this in their homeschool coursework.

Marian told the story of one of her children who had special needs. She witnessed the struggles of other families in trying to appropriate the necessary teaching and financial resources that special needs students require to advance academically. Her close friends would explain how quickly schools and school districts would pass along special needs students to the next grade, not addressing or helping with the student's needs (e.g., as simple as Attention Deficit Disorder, ADD). The lack of sufficient occupational therapy (OT) and physical therapy (PT) in the public school, Marian explained, would leave the needs of special needs students in the hands of the parents battling with school districts for extraordinary attention to their child's needs. Marian pointed out the challenges that parents with children with Autism face with proper diagnosis, resources, and treatment as an example of the under-preparedness of public education to meet the peculiar needs of each public-school student.

Jessica's sentiments characterized many participants' comments regarding why they homeschool their children. Jessica wanted to spend more time with her children as they grew fast. "With public schooling, someone else is essentially raising my children, leaving little time for me to be with them - only a few hours in the late afternoon and early evening," she said. She

wants to enjoy her kids grow through stages "real-time" by being with them as they grow. Jim shared that the COVID-19 pandemic online model did not work for his children. "Then, we realized that by homeschooling under those conditions, we were able to help our kids better enjoy the act of learning. We didn't send our children back to public schools," Jim said. Linda said their desire to have more time with their children – to see them grow up through developmental periods and to be with them- was enough incentive to homeschool them. She said that they travel as a family several times each year. Linda gave examples of trips to the Smithsonian or the Indianapolis Raceway - time away as a family that they would not have the freedom to do if the kids were in public schools.

Marian concurred with many other parents who homeschool their children to be with them as they grow and learn. She wanted to spend time with her kids, realizing that she had them for a short while, that the impressionable age was a brief window of time, and that she enjoys having them home with her - loves them, enjoys them. Marian is in good company, as 30% of participants agreed they wanted their children at home to spend more time with them. In contrast, only 25% of respondents thought maintaining core values in their children's education was most important to them.

Belinda explains there are many other important things that public schools try to control, such as classroom order, hallway bullying and fighting incidents, racial issues, and the teaching aspect, of course, she said. When homeschooling, most of these issues are in the hands of parents to manage, though they are much less likely to occur at home. Chad says that peer pressures and the trouble that can come with that, such as drugs, alcohol, and sexual misconduct, that occur in public schools are not likely to be issues for the homeschooled student. Ginger agrees that learning should be the focus of public schools and home schools. If the environment is safe, she

explains, a student can learn. It is up to the parents to secure the environment and ensure that their children are learning.

The non-routine approach is preferable to Ellen, who went into detail about their chosen curricula, given that they have been homeschooling for over 17 years. The Classic Model of homeschool curricula is efficient, flexible, and allows many choices in learning sources (e.g., textbooks, online programs). Ellen has used Essentials of the English Language for the past seven years, including Classical Conversations, which includes global geography, and additional portions of curricula, including logic and Latin. Belinda recommends that parents plan each school day from 8:00 AM until 12:00 PM but be flexible when life interrupts the plan. Melinda added that homeschool parents must frame the learning activities and sequence based on how well they know their children's unique needs - each grade level does not have to match what might have been planned for an older sibling.

We use the Bible and Bible-related book sets for the "religious" part of our curricula," Barbara reports. Julie says, "My son, currently a 10th-grade student, completes quizzes, homework, tests, essays, reports, and research papers just as he would in a public school." She continued by saying that in homeschooling, there are expectations that assignments will be completed by set deadlines. The most significant difference between their homeschooling and public school is that her son studies each subject from a Christian worldview." Linda adds, "Homeschool curricula can closely parallel that of public schools, such the common core studies - math, science, English, composition, history, although homeschool would present these from a Christian worldview."

### ***Theme Seven: Curricula Preferences***

The seventh theme pertained to homeschool preferences as shown in Table 7. When participants were asked to compare chosen homeschool curricula to public school curricula, the following is the breakdown of answers given:

**Table 10**

#### *Homeschool Curricula Characteristics*

Factor	Quantity	%
Christian	3	17.65
Flexible	6	35.29
Parallel Public-School	8	47.06
Total	17	100

*Note.* Participant preferences in homeschool curricula characteristics.

- 47.06% of respondents chose curricula that parallel public school grade levels and subjects “just in case our children have to return to the public schools,” one parent added.
- 35.29% of respondents say their choices are more flexible than public school curricula.
- 17.65% of respondents prefer to choose curricula with a Christian worldview not found in public school curricula.

Concerning which curricula were used, as shown in Table 8, the following trends emerged:

**Table 11***Curricula Source*

Factor	Quantity	%
Unspecified	4	20
Various	16	80
Total	20	100

*Note.* Predominant choice of multiple curricula publishers.

- 20% of respondents did not provide the specific curriculum they use.
- 80% of respondents said they use varying and different curricula based on their child's needs, and it changes from grade level to grade level.

When asked why they chose the curricula they did, as shown in Table 9, the following trends emerged:

**Table 12***Other Factors for Choosing Curricula*

Factor	Quantity	%
Curricula Price	<u>1</u>	<u>6</u>
Perceived Quality	<u>3</u>	<u>19</u>
Christian Worldview	<u>12</u>	<u>75</u>
Total	<u>16</u>	<u>100</u>

*Note.* Participants rank-order of important factors in choosing curricula.

- 6% of respondents chose the lowest price curricula.
- 19% of respondents chose curricula based on the perceived quality.

- 75% of respondents chose curricula with a Christian worldview.

These examples of parents' experiences, how they feel about homeschool curricula, and what they think are essential components represent the twenty parents interviewed for this study. No "favorite" or "must-have" curricula exists among them. There are incidents of overlap, but no predominant curricula were discovered. The parents believe that curricula should be flexible, similar to public schools (i.e., grade level to grade level), should include unique content for special needs children, and should include STEM coursework (i.e., science, technology, engineering, and math). Including a Christian worldview in educational material was a repeated point of interest among the participants.

### **Summary**

This qualitative study aimed to determine why parents removed their children from public schools and chose to homeschool them instead. Because curricula are essential in homeschooling, this study also sought to know what curricula were preferred among homeschool parents and why curricula were selected. After selecting two homeschool associations in the St. Louis, Missouri area, the principal investigator contacted the director of each association and explained the purpose of this study, asking if they would assist in the recruitment of homeschooling parents who would like to participate in the qualitative research by posting an invitation on the association's website or similar portal that association members regularly access. Findings showed that parents choose to remove their children from public schools because of poor educational quality, safety concerns, and the potential for the indoctrination of social ideals that may not align with those of their families. Additional themes emerged concerning how parents homeschool their children, such as which factors play a role in their selection of curricula. These findings illustrated that religion is the underlying factor that guides

decision-making in these cases. The study fills a gap in the body of literature about why parents remove their children from public school and choose to homeschool them. Chapter Five presents conclusions that can be drawn from this research.

## **Chapter 5: Findings Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations**

This phenomenological study aims to discover why an increasing number of parents of K-12 students in the U.S. are removing their children from public school education and enrolling them in private schools or homeschooling them. Private/homeschooled or public-school K-12 students may have similar and different interests, needs, and values from one another. Because curricula are essential in homeschooling, this study also sought to discover what curricula homeschooling parents preferred. This chapter includes a summary, findings and interpretations, conceptual and empirical implications for companies seeking to serve this new growth market, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research.

### **Major Findings**

Several themes and sub-themes emerged from the analysis of these interviews, predominantly about factors contributing to parents' decisions to remove their children from public education in favor of homeschooling. The main reasons involved parents perceived poor educational quality in public schools and safety concerns in public education settings. Additionally, themes emerged related to how parents model their homeschooling pedagogical approaches and which factors influence their curriculum selection. There was nominal overlap in chosen curricula among this study's sample group, homeschooling parents of K-12 students. Multiple vendors of K-12 curricula topics (e.g., Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) offer sets comprising an entire grade level and individual curricula by subject that may be mixed and matched with other curricula by the same or different vendors to make up a student's coursework.



**Table 13***Keywords, Themes, and Subthemes*

Keywords	Themes	Subthemes
Problems, Safety, Culture, Disagreeable values, Inflexibility, Teacher Quality, Curricula, Unmet Special Needs, Learning Deficit	What factors motivate parents to withdraw their children from public schools?	Safety, Educational Quality, Untenable curricula, Disagreeable values, Problems at school, Too large a student-teacher ratio, Teaching quality, Kids not learning, Teachers teach to the lowest learning level

*Note.* The above table lists the keywords and the three themes based on interview responses.

The study showed that the main reasons parents choose to homeschool their children are their concern over student safety in public schools and disappointment in the educational outcome of public schools. “Other” reasons for removing children from public schools and homeschooling them instead included:

1. Values – 45% of responding participants felt that their personal and family values are in stark contrast with the liberal agenda promoted in the public schools in the U.S. Intolerance of Christian beliefs and having removed God from public schools are included in the “values.”
2. 55% of responding participants felt that teacher quality was among the reasons for withdrawing from public education. Teacher quality included maintaining classroom control, responding to disrespect (toward them) in the classroom, and a high student-teacher ratio that limits the degree of one-on-one interactions with students.

An outlier reason was repeated by 30% of participants responding to the “Other reasons” question #7 of the Interview Questions (i.e., What other reasons might a parent consider

removing their children from public school?): Parents wished to have more time with their children. One participant cited the pace at which children grow up. They wanted to enjoy their children for the short 18-20 years they had them, and homeschooling allowed them to enjoy “time with kids.”

These were the leading “Other” reasons for removing students from public schools and homeschooling them instead. Still, the predominant motivations were the lack of assured student safety and the quality of education.

Of the eleven responses to the Interview Question, “What other reasons might a parent consider removing their children from public school? Please list them in order of importance (i.e., 1, 2 ...), with 1 being the most important reason” no parent chronologically listed possible reasons despite the principal investigator’s repeated attempts to quantify responses following the instructions given in the question.

As expected, there was no saturation of choices made by parents of homeschooled children concerning curricula – there are more than one hundred individual choices, many of which overlap with others. The respondents' replies to the third research question aligned with the interview questions 8 -10 are many and varied, with some overlap. There are no prevailing favorites, although other associations may recommend curricula that members may choose from.

### **Unexpected Findings**

Many of the findings were expected. However, an unexpected finding was that problems at school were occasionally mentioned, though not as an answer to interview questions that did not broach this subject. Problems or trouble at school were evident to most parents, and given the nature of the research questions, very little was said about the issues at school, per se.

Public schools seldom consider the differences among children in a class, taking a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching. As Jeanette described public education, the "one size fits all" approach does not work for all children. The student-teacher ratio in public schools might be why parents remove their children from public education, Jeanette explained, where students requiring more one-on-one instruction are not given the necessary time and attention.

Additionally, the student-teacher ratio is too high in public schools, Jim thought, as his children told them how they were helping other students with their work during class because the teacher did not have the time to (too many students- too short a class period). With the increasing rate of homeschooling and private school enrollment, rather than public schools, fewer students might lead to smaller class sizes, thus decreasing the high student-teach ratio that many respondents reported as among the reasons they homeschool their children. Most students have had a gripe with a schoolteacher at one time or another over an assigned score, for instance. Public school teachers have a tough job – a lot of responsibility and little authority to achieve it.

There were also routine reports of students completing high school with an exciting graduation ceremony. However, many graduating students need help to do basic math, give the correct change, or accurately explain significant global and U.S. events. Parents may question the quality of public-school education, with reports that some teachers pass students from one grade to the next when their understanding or learned knowledge isn't sufficient for the next grade level. The same has been said of universities across the country. Not that colleges and universities pass along underqualified students to higher learning in subsequent classes, but the student who enrolls in the institution may not always be the student as represented by their ACT or SAT scores. From a hiring manager's perspective, a high school degree may mean something other than what it may have been a year ago.

Another surprise finding amongst the many that might be expected, such as school safety, educational quality, classroom order, and teacher quality, is the fact that when asked why they removed their children from public school and began to teach them at home, 30% of the total participants wanted more time with their children, more than the importance of shared values (e.g., morality, ethics, wholesomeness) at 25%. Peer pressure and trouble can come with older students, such as - drugs, alcohol, and sexual behavior at an age far too young for this in public school. Safety - from name calling to bullying - this happens as kids grow up regardless of where they go to school, but we, as parents, can help our kids with this kind of meanness and other behavioral issues.

### **Conclusions**

Public school teachers must be prepared and empowered to maintain order, discipline, and student performance expectations in a controlled classroom environment. Andy explains that it isn't the public school's responsibility to provide a safe environment in the first place. It is society's job to enforce the laws. Homeschooling offers an environment whose safety against similar incidents in public schools depends solely on the parents – at home or on a field trip. Homeschooling parents have control over the opportunity for a quality educational experience in curricula and activity selections. With more than one hundred curricula packages to choose from, a homeschool student who applies themselves has all the potential, likely more, than their public-school counterpart. Homeschool associations add tremendous value to the overall homeschool experience. The beauty of homeschooling is the freedom to manage the educational experience, including Bible study and a Christian worldview toward learning and life.

Homeschooling is known for its flexibility, such as the ability to tailor courses to the specific needs of students with different needs without compromising the rigorous learning

regimen that satisfies state educational requirements for accreditation. She describes public schools as too busy, fast-paced, routine, and not flexible enough to be the kind of environment that her children would thrive. Curricula that allow a flexible, non-routine approach would be preferable.

## **Implications**

### ***Businesses and Commercial Enterprise***

Businesses currently serving or aspiring to serve the home education market may find these results beneficial to their strategic business plans as they seek to expand their business by entering new growth markets. Companies that design and provide learning management systems, such as Canvas and Blackboard, could migrate their online course management products and services used by many colleges and universities to homeschool educators or associations. These curricula management systems are well-suited for the home education markets. This study may inform businesses that the size of the homeschool market may have grown large enough that companies may now justify the expense of entering this market when considering the projected home education annual growth rate of 8%.

Publishers (e.g., McGraw Hill) serving the education market may benefit from this study as they learn about the interests and values of homeschool families and the anticipated growth of this market sector. Learning Management Systems (LMS) providers, such as Canvas and Blackboard, could serve the K -12 homeschool market by aggregating more than one hundred disparate curricula from many sources into a consistent, well-organized, and elegant homeschool user experience.

### ***Public School Administrators***

Public school administrators and principals seeking to understand the declining enrollment phenomena may discover which part of the student body is prone to leaving and, just as importantly, why. The federal Department of Education, state regulatory agencies, and the two most prominent teachers' unions in the U.S. (e.g., the National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers) influence what is taught and not taught in public schools. Public school administrations may have yet to consider the number of students leaving public schools for alternative schools, such as homeschooling, consequential in number or having reached critical mass in the past. To remain relevant to the growing homeschool student body, public school administrators may seek to understand the interests, values better, and the current trajectory of students leaving public education in favor of education at home. Based on the answers to the interview questions, parents of K-12 students in this study's sampling group, public school administrations, principals, teachers, and the parents of students remaining in public schools may consider the declining public school enrollment a significant phenomenon. The gap this study addresses and the knowledge that it offers may be helpful to those seeking to stem the tide of student departures from public schools. Others may benefit from this study, including post-high school administrators, colleges and universities, vocational training centers, military recruitment operations, and those interested in K-12 homeschool graduates.

### ***Colleges and Universities***

Many parents interviewed during this study reported that they plan for their children to continue their education after completing the homeschool programs of study. This study may inform college administrators about the growing number of K-12 homeschool graduates and their specific interests, values, and goals in higher education. They may come to recognize that

homeschooled students and parents may have different interests, values, and educational goals than those graduating from public schools. Three-quarters of the participants in this study belong to a Christian homeschool association. Many of these parents expressed interest in their children continuing their education at Christian universities. University administrators could monitor the increase in student applications and plan for any needed infrastructure changes (e.g., classrooms, labs, dormitories), instructors, and staff.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study addresses the combined growth of homeschools and private schools while public school enrollment in the U.S. declines; it does not seek to inform about or elaborate on the private school sector, instead leaving this to additional research outside of this study. Based on these findings and inherent limitations in qualitative, phenomenological research, several directions for future research emerge from this study. The study needs more input from this sector of K-12 students, and future research is needed in which their perspective is sought.

The home school cohort's geographic location was a limiting factor because it is isolated to St. Louis, MO, and may be influenced by the Midwestern culture and value system. Thus, further research is needed outside of this context. The population for the study is directly overseen by two directors (Families for Home Education Region 5 directors), M/M Don and Kim Quon, who emailed all associate members the invitation to participate in the study. The relationship between each invitee and M/M Don and Kim Quon may influence prospective participants' responses. There may be instances of a respondent completing the interview/survey without disclosing relevant information (e.g., they are not currently homeschooling) when the survey intends for all respondents to now be or have previously homeschooled their children. Each of these issues must be addressed in further studies.

In the process of interviewing respondents and asking the survey questions, the researcher may have done so inconsistently, without intending to, when responding to statements or asking follow-up questions of the participants that varied between one participant and the others. Thus, alternative designs and methodologies are necessary to understand this issue in greater depth and to determine the generalizability of these findings. The small number of parents participating in the study was another limitation, and further research is needed with larger sample sizes.

### **Concluding Remarks and Reflections**

This phenomenological study aimed to discover why an increasing number of parents of K-12 students in the U.S. are removing their children from public school education, enrolling them in private schools, or homeschooling them. Private/homeschooled or public-school K-12 students may have similar and different interests, needs, and values from one another. According to earlier literature, there are numerous reasons that parents withdraw their children from public schools. This study sought to narrow these down to a single reason parents remove their children from public school. K-12 homeschool market as a new growth opportunity and a means to increase annual revenue.

This study fills the gap in the body of literature about why parents remove their children from public schools and homeschool them. Scholars identify numerous reasons for removing children from public schools. Still, this researcher found no consensus in earlier literature regarding the leading cause among the many reasons given. This highlights the importance of homeschool curricula having been accredited by governing authorities. The intentionality of most of the parents and children I spoke with is unmistakable.



Findings from this study help to extend the data discussed in Chapter Two and add to the body of literature related to homeschooling and its growing role in American education. A large body of research is dedicated to home education and homeschooling families, continually pointing out its rise in popularity and presence in many school districts. Earlier research identified numerous reasons parents leave public education and homeschool their children instead. However, before this study, there was no consensus on what motivates parents to remove their children from public schools and homeschool them instead. Here is the gap in the literature that this study addressed, with empirical implications for existing literature on the subject. The unrelenting growing attention given to student safety and quality educational outcomes discovered in this study makes the case for these two reasons for homeschooling being atop of any list of reasons to withdraw children from or refrain from enrolling children in the public school system from the start and making the action and commitment to homeschool.

This study is about acquiring and transferring knowledge about the growing homeschool phenomenon in the U.S. Knowledge is often understood as an awareness of facts or practical skills and may also mean familiarity with objects or situations (Staff, 2023). Knowledge of facts, propositional knowledge, is often defined as true belief distinct from opinion or guesswork by justification (Staff, 2023). Whether companies, schools, or the social fabric within the U.S., knowing what is coming is always advantageous. This study addresses present and forecasted growth in the number of K-12 homeschooled students in the U.S. It fills a gap in the existing body of literature on homeschool education by identifying two predominant reasons that parents remove their children from the public education system and homeschool them, instead, based on the limited sampling of homeschool parents interviewed in this study.

The statement "knowledge is power" is frequently attributed to Sir Francis Bacon from his *Meditations Sacrae* (1597). Thomas Jefferson adopted this phrase on at least four occasions concerning establishing the University of Virginia (*Knowledge Is Power (Quotation)*, 2022).

Dale Carnegie disagreed with the phrase, insinuating that it is incomplete. He added that "Knowledge isn't power until it is applied," in other words, applied knowledge is power (*A Quote by Dale Carnegie*, 2024). These maxims and this study will benefit scholars and businesspeople alike.

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## Appendix A

### Website Invitation

Hello. I am Rod Ballard, a doctoral candidate at California Baptist University, Riverside, CA. I am working on a dissertation research project, a final step in earning a Doctor of Business Administration degree.

**How may you help?** You may be asked to participate in one or two telephone or Internet-based video calls, during which you will be asked a series of questions about why you've chosen to homeschool your K-12 children. Additional questions may ask your opinion about K-12 public school education. Finally, there may be questions about homeschool curriculum preferences. With your help, I will arrange a convenient time for us to speak. The interview must be brief but allow you to elaborate on your answers as you like. I anticipate an initial introductory call with a question and answer time, followed by one additional call to share my findings from other parents in this study and obtain your opinion of the aggregate results. Again, I'll always be brief and to the point, but not at the expense of your contribution (i.e., thoughts and opinions).

**Voluntary:** Your participation in the research project is purely voluntary.

**Confidentiality:** Your identity, the identity of your family, and any other matters will remain entirely confidential, except for your responses to the questions, which will have no association with you or your family.

**Beneficiaries:** This research project may assist, to name a few, existing or new home school associations, administrators, families considering private education, and companies involved in developing curriculum or content conveyance (e.g., Learning Management Systems).

If you would like to participate in this brief survey or have questions, please get in touch with me anytime. Again, the interviews will be pleasant and considerate of your time.

Warmly,

Rod Ballard

(636) 346-2711

rodballard@protonmail.com

## **Appendix B**

### **Invitation to Participate**

Hello M/M. Last Name, I am Rod Ballard, a doctoral candidate at California Baptist University, Riverside, CA. Your help with my dissertation phenomenological study is appreciated. Thomas Jefferson claims that "People are learners all their lives," reminding us that we've much to learn during our lifetime. William Hundert, the esteemed professor in the movie *The Emperor's Club* ("A Quote by William Hundert - the Emperor's Club," 2023), said, "The end depends upon the beginning." These two statements make a case for the importance of childhood education, intended to lay the foundation for a lifetime of learning.

This is particularly important to parents of K-12 students in the U.S. Students who begin well are more likely to finish well, whether public, private, or homeschooled. The current phenomenon of parents removing their children from public schools, and choosing to homeschool their K-12 children, has nearly doubled in the past three years. The growth forecast for K-12 homeschool growth in the U.S. is 8% per year, although this may be a very conservative estimate with current public education events. This study aims to discover why parents choose homeschool education over public school.

The study begins with the researcher contacting you to schedule a fifteen-minute telephone or Zoom discussion posing eleven semi-structured survey questions. With your permission, additional follow-up questions may be asked where more detail is sought. Your participation is voluntary, and you may stop the interview for any reason if you choose to. The survey will be casual, with ample time to respond as you like. Your identity and your answers will remain completely confidential.

Thank you, in advance, for participating in this important study.

Sincerely,

Professor Rod Ballard

[rballard@calbaptist.edu](mailto:rballard@calbaptist.edu)

(636) 346-2711

## Appendix C

### Informed Consent

#### Homeschooling – A Growing Alternative to Public Education

***What is the study about?*** This study concerns the significant growth in homeschooling in the U.S. in recent years, ordinarily involving removing a student from a public school. It also concerns homeschooled students who began their education at home education, not enrolling in public or private schools.

***What will be asked of me?*** As a parent of homeschooled children in the K-12 range, you will be assigned an alpha-numeric code that will serve as your unique, confidential identifier throughout the interview. You are asked to participate in a brief telephone or video-call interview by the study's principal investigator and to answer eleven semi-structured questions about your experiences as a parent of homeschooled children (i.e., past, or present). The interview should require no more than 15 minutes of your time. All of your responses are held in the strictest confidence, and there will be no association between you and the interview answers, only the unique identifier that you will have been assigned before the interview begins. You may refuse to answer any question or stop the interview altogether for any reason.

***Who is involved?*** You and Professor Rod Ballard, Adjunct Faculty Member of the California Baptist University Online Studies Program, DBA candidate (serving as a Principal Investigator), and a local Missouri resident.

***Are there any risks?*** You will face no known risks. You may find questions sensitive because they ask your opinion about homeschool education and homeschooling as a parent of homeschooled children. You can leave a question blank if you wish. Your identity will remain

confidential during and after the survey. If you like, you may stop participating in the study at any time.

***What are some benefits of your participation?*** Aside from knowing that you may help other parents consider homeschooling their children, there are no direct benefits to your participation. You likely recall the time your family decided to homeschool. Completing the short survey will provide much-needed information to prospective homeschool families, helping them to make confident, informed decisions.

***Is the study anonymous/confidential?*** Indeed! Only the researcher will ask you questions and record your answers. As you will be assigned a unique identifier to which you will be addressed throughout the interview, there will be no association between your identity and your responses to questions. Once complete, the interview document and any notes taken will remain confidential, being stored on a thumb drive, and maintained in a locked safe under the principal investigator's control for ten years.

***Can I stop participating in the study?*** You may stop participating at any time. You may skip over any question you'd like for any reason.

***What if I have questions about my rights as a research participant or complaints?*** Please direct your questions or comments to the principal investigator, **Rod Ballard**, by phone at (636 346-2711) or by e-mail at ([rballard@calbaptist.edu](mailto:rballard@calbaptist.edu)). If you'd like to speak with someone at the university, you may contact the Internal Review Board (IRB) at California Baptist University: [irb@calbaptist.edu](mailto:irb@calbaptist.edu).

I understand and agree to the process and terms explained above and voluntarily wish to participate in the study:

Printed Name:

Date:


## Appendix D


### Homeschool Parent Interview Instrument

### Home Education Preferences

This survey asks parents that are currently homeschooling their children about their decisions to begin homeschooling, criteria used when selecting home school curricula, and what additional features or capabilities would parents like to see in new releases of home school curricula.

The survey is confidential, and will remain private

rodjballard@gmail.com [Switch account](#) 

 Not shared

How familiar are you with the homeschool education model?

Your answer

Do you now, or have you previously, homeschooled your children?

Your answer

Why did you remove your children from public schools?

Your answer

Do you agree or disagree with reports suggesting that a student's safety is the most critical job of a public school? Please explain:

Your answer

Do you agree or disagree with reports suggesting that educational outcome (i.e., learning, readiness for adult life) is the most critical job of a public school? Please explain:

Your answer

Which of the two are the most important attributes of a public school? Please explain:

Your answer

What other reasons might a parent consider removing their children from public school? Please list them in order of importance (i.e., 1, 2 ...) with 1 being the most important reason. Please explain:

Your answer



Please compare your chosen homeschool curricula to public school curricula presented to your children. Please explain:

Your answer

Are there "must have" features of the home school curriculum? Please explain.

Your answer

What features or capabilities would you like to see in the next release of home school curricula?

Your answer

What recommendations would you give parents considering leaving public education to homeschool their children?

Your answer

Submit

Page 1 of 1

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Google Forms

## Appendix E

### Interview Supplement Form

(Supplement To Google Form Interview Document)

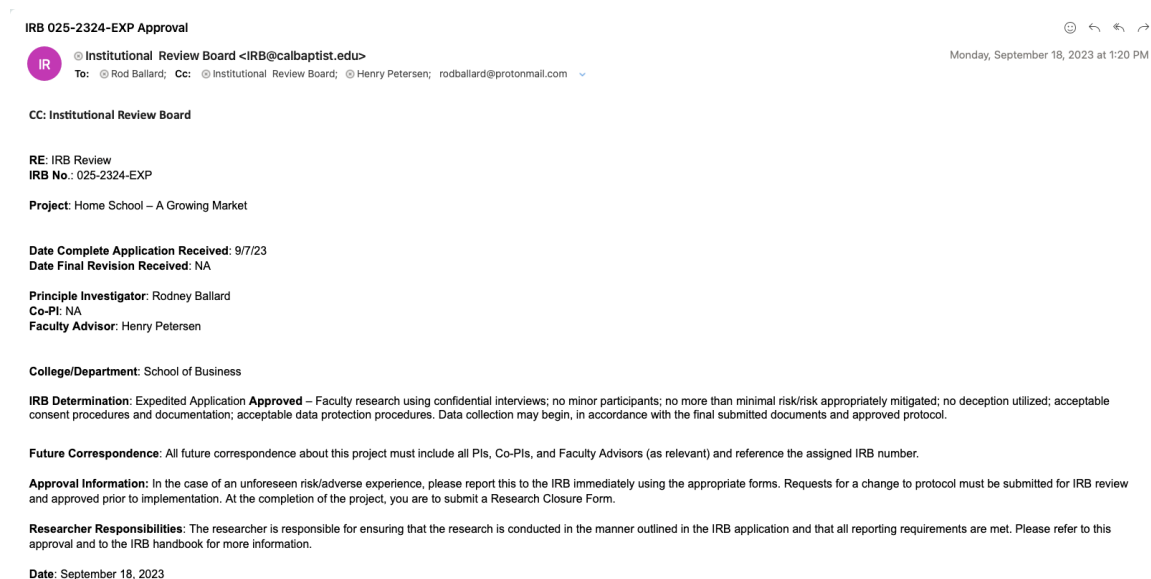
Interview – (Pseudonym) \_\_\_\_\_ Code: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How familiar are you with the homeschool education model?
2. Do you now, or have you previously, homeschooled your children?
3. Why did you remove your children from public schools?
4. Do you agree or disagree with reports suggesting that a student's safety is the most critical job of a public school? Please explain:
5. Do you agree or disagree with reports suggesting that educational outcome (i.e., learning, readiness for adult life) is the most critical job of a public school? Please explain.
6. Which of the two are the most important responsibilities of a public school? Please explain.
7. What other reasons might a parent consider removing their children from public school? Please list them in order of importance (i.e., 1, 2 ...), with 1 being the most important reason. Please explain.
8. Please compare your chosen homeschool curricula to public school curricula presented to your children. Please explain.
  - a) What curriculum do you use?
  - b) What were your reasons for selecting this curriculum?
9. Are there "must have" features of the home school curriculum? Please explain.

10. What features or capabilities would you like to see in future home school curricula?
11. What recommendations would you give parents considering leaving public education to homeschool their children?

## Appendix F

### IRB Approval



**IRB Determination:** Expedited Application **Approved** – Faculty research using confidential interviews; no minor participants; no more than minimal risk/risk appropriately mitigated; no deception utilized; acceptable consent procedures and documentation; acceptable data protection procedures. Data collection may begin following the final submitted documents and approved protocol.

**Future Correspondence:** All future correspondence about this project must include all PIs, Co-PIs, and Faculty Advisors (as relevant) and reference the assigned IRB number.

**Approval Information:** In the case of an unforeseen risk/adverse experience, please report this to the IRB immediately using the appropriate forms. Requests for a change to the protocol must be submitted for IRB review and approved before implementation. After the project, you are to submit a Research Closure Form.

**Researcher Responsibilities:** The researcher is responsible for ensuring that the research is conducted as outlined in the IRB application and that all reporting requirements are met. Please refer to this approval and the IRB handbook for more information.

## Appendix G

### IRB Change Approval 025-2324-EXP

**IRB 025-2324-EXP Amendment Approved**

☺ ↶ ↷ ↸



☺ Institutional Review Board <[IRB@calbaptist.edu](mailto:IRB@calbaptist.edu)>

Friday, October 27, 2023 at 6:25 PM

To: ☺ Rod Ballard; Cc: ☺ Institutional Review Board; ☺ Henry Petersen ▾

CC: Institutional Review Board

Dear Professor Ballard,

The **IRB** has reviewed your amendment **application** for 025-2324-EXP to waive the documentation of consent as a written record, instead documenting a verbal consent after a thorough review of the informed consent document (narrative script). This request has been approved.

Please refer to the original approval notice for guidelines and expiration date (if applicable).

On behalf of the **IRB**,

---

**Erin I. Smith, Ph.D.**

Fletcher Jones Endowed Professor of Research

Professor of Psychology

College of Behavioral and Social Sciences

Office: 951.552.8626

Fax: 951.343.4569

[esmith@calbaptist.edu](mailto:esmith@calbaptist.edu)

[www.calbaptist.edu](http://www.calbaptist.edu)

---

California Baptist University, 8432 Magnolia Ave, Riverside, CA 92504



## Appendix H

### Coding Reference by Interview Questions

Question #	Interview Question	Code	
1	How familiar are you with the homeschool education model?	VF	Very Familiar
		F	Familiar
		No Response	
2	Do you now, or have you previously homeschooled your children?	Y	
		N	10.06 Years Ave.
3	Why did you remove your children from public schools?	O	Other
		V	Values
		TwK	Time with Kids
4	Do you agree or disagree with reports suggesting that a student's safety is the most critical job of a public school? Please explain.	A	Agree
		D	Disagree
		B	Both
		S	Safety
		E	Educational Quality

Question #	Interview Question	Code	
5	Do you agree or disagree with reports suggesting that educational outcome (i.e., learning, readiness for adult life) is the most critical job of a public school? Please explain.	A	Agree
		D	Disagree
		B	Both
		S	Safety
		E	Educational Quality
6	Which of the two are most important responsibilities of a public school?	B	Both
		S	Safety
7	What other reasons might a parent consider removing their children from public school? Please list them in order of importance (i.e., 1, 2 ...), with 1 being the most important reason. Please explain.	SN	Special Needs
		Q	Edu Quality
		V	Values
		O	Other

*Note.* Codes used in handwriting participant responses to Interview Questions.

Question #	Interview Question	Code	
8	Please compare your chosen homeschool curricula to public school curricula presented to your children. Please explain.	U	Unlike Publ School
		PS	Like Publ School
8a	What curricula do you use?	V	Varies
8b	What were your reasons for selecting this curricula?	C	Christian Values
		Q	Quality
		S	Cost
9	Are there "must have" features of home school curriculum?	V	Values
		SN	Special Needs
10	What features or capabilities would you like to see in future home school curricula?	F	Christian Worldview
		STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Math
11	What recommendations would you give parents considering leaving public education to homeschool their children?	E	Engage with other homeschooling parents, families
		DO	Just Do It
		R	Research
		A	Associations
		O	Other

*Note.* Codes used in handwriting participant responses to Interview Questions.



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