

RETURNING TO THE FOLD: A STUDY OF HOMESCHOOLERS WHO  
RETURN TO THE PUBLIC SCHOOL

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## **Dedication**

This is dedicated to my loving and patient wife Linda, my father Curtiss, and mother Shirley. Okay mom, now you have two doctors in the family!

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## **Abstract**

### **RETURNING TO THE FOLD: A STUDY OF HOMESCHOOLERS WHO RETURN TO THE PUBLIC SCHOOL**

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Parents have a variety of choices for educating their children. One option is homeschooling, which is a growing movement. As the number of families choosing this option increases, so does the number of children from those families who transition their homeschooled child back to a public school. The literature investigating the process involving homeschool transition is limited. The current study used a qualitative methodology and interviewed families and school leaders in an effort to investigate why families send their children back to a public school, the unique challenges associated with this transition, and school programs and policies used for these transitions. The data, gathered from a large, suburban, mid-Atlantic school district was analyzed by thematic analysis. The results showed that parents had a variety of reasons for transitioning their children and that these transitions produced several challenges for both families and school leaders. Further, it was found that although the enrollment process was fairly straightforward, no unique transition programs or policies exist specifically for the

homeschooled population. Despite the general transition programs in place that are used for all students, more can be done to ameliorate the unique challenges experienced by families during this process. Also, the complete lack of training among school leaders on the topic of homeschooler transitions should be addressed so that appropriate strategies can be crafted and used rather than base administrative decisions on stereotypes generated from limited experience in working with this unique population.

## **Chapter One**

Each year, a number of students leave the public school classroom in order to homeschool. Many studies have been done on why parents homeschool their children (Morton, 2010). Each year a number of students cease homeschooling and return to or begin to attend a public or private school. However, very few studies have been done on why parents enroll their children in a public school after a period of homeschooling. In addition, there is very little research on school leaders' attitudes, actions, and programs for ensuring the smooth transition and educational success of these students. With the numbers of homeschooled children increasing, it is worthwhile to examine the reasons why parents cease homeschooling and enroll their children in a public or private school, so that teachers and school leaders can understand the motivations, academic strengths and weaknesses, and talents of such students. Further, it is important to learn about the school leaders' role in the transition of homeschool students in order to increase the ease of transition as well as the academic success of this ever-increasing population.

### **Statement of the Problem**

A careful review of the literature reveals that very little research has been done on why parents stop homeschooling their children and enroll them in a public school setting. Generally, families who homeschool believe that the public school does not offer the types of programs that will ensure academic success for their children (Winstanley,

2009). Yet, if this is the case, why do substantial numbers of former homeschoolers enroll in public schools? Do the public schools now have programs that will ensure success, or did the perception and motivation of those who homeschool change? The literature is sparse on this question.

As stated previously, the reason parents homeschool their children is varied, however the literature is silent on whether the initial reason for homeschooling has been addressed resulting in the enrollment of the child in a public school. For instance, much research has been done on the socialization of homeschoolers (Medlin, 2000). Studies have shown that one reason why parents homeschool their children is to have control over whom their children are exposed to and the types of children with whom their offspring socialize and develop relationships (Walford, 1990). If this is accurate, then what has changed during the time of homeschooling that causes parents to enroll their children in a public school? Has the public school social climate improved such that it is now acceptable to the parents? Or have the children been so strengthened socially that they can make better relationship choices or find kindred spirits within the confines of the public school? What has changed on the part of the school, the student, or the parent, that would prompt parents to allow a child to leave the environment of homeschooling and enroll them in a public school?

The role of the school leader has been thoroughly researched and studied (Bays, 2004; Fullan, 2002; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Research abounds on the role of the school leader, the attributes of the successful school leader, and how school leaders should be trained and developed. While there is some research which reports on the

attitude of public school principals toward homeschoolers, it is limited to their views and attitudes toward those who homeschool (Rockney, 2002). The literature, however, is lacking in terms of school leaders' perceptions and attitudes toward those who have homeschooled and then enrolled in a public school. With former homeschoolers representing an ever-increasing population within the public school, it would be beneficial to examine both leaders' attitudes about this population as well as the programs that have been instituted, if any, to ensure their successful transition.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to examine school leadership through the lens of a specific population and the school leaders who deal with this population. Research has not addressed adequately the issue of the reasons why parents enroll their children in a public school after a period of homeschooling. The unique challenges that this presents to both families and school leaders has been ignored in the research. In turn, school leaders have nowhere to turn to learn of programs and dispositions necessary to ensure the successful transition of this population into the public school setting. After reviewing the literature detailing the historical and current reasons why parents homeschool their children and finding an absence of research regarding their placement in a public school, three research questions were formed that frame this study:

- 1) Why do parents enroll their children in a public school after a period of homeschooling?
- 2) What unique challenges does this pose for the family and the school?

- 3) What programs or practices exist in public schools to ensure the success of this population?

### **Significance**

This research is vital for a number of reasons. First, the current size of this population as well as its rate of increase suggests that this is going to be an ever-growing concern to school leaders. One longitudinal study demonstrated that 37% of homeschool students return to a public or private school after just one year of homeschooling, and as many as 73% of homeschooled students return after just two years of homeschooling (Isenberg, 2007). According to this study, then, somewhere between 1.4 and 1.75 million students return to public and private schools after two years of homeschooling. This has implications for school finances, human resource needs, and the physical plant. How, or in what ways school and district leaders plan for and deal with this phenomenon is thus critically important for all students and staff, not merely the returning homeschoolers.

Second, this information is also important because it contributes to the growing body of knowledge related to student achievement and school success. Studies have shown that entering a new school or moving to a school at a different level (elementary school to middle school, or middle school to high school) can be traumatic to the student (Witherspoon & Ennett, 2009). A student re-entering or entering the public school after a substantial amount of time in a homeschool environment may experience considerable stress and anxiety. Little is known about programs in place to assist former homeschoolers with transition, or what types of programs and practices might be thought to be good practice. Thus, investigating this promises to provide needed information to

school leaders. Research has shown that in many cases, students returning to public school do not have records listing grade level achievements, assessment outcomes, and prior attendance (Krout, 2002). Understanding parental motivations and reasons for this exit and entrance into a traditional school setting can help to make such transitions smoother for the student. It can also assist school leaders in developing programs specifically designed to support this population, which could provide pertinent information needed when the student enrolls in the public school.

A third area of significance centers on perceptions of public schools. This is a key area of concern to the school leader. Associated with the reason parents homeschool their children are often misguided impressions that many public schools have an inordinate number of illiterate students, students who score poorly on state exams, and that the public schools add to the general decline in reading, writing, and math competencies (Klicka, 2002). In many cases, misunderstandings or lack of appropriate information can lead to negative perceptions. Knowing the reasons why parents make educational choices for children involved in homeschooling can provide an opportunity for the school leader to craft the dissemination of information in such a way that it is viewed more accurately by the community.

A fourth area of significance is economic. State funding for local school districts is usually based on the enrollment or attendance on the last school day in September. There have been some suggestions that public school leaders should work to establish good relationships with homeschool parents (Romanowski, 2001) in an effort to encourage homeschoolers to return to the public school, primarily concerned with



revenue. With charter schools becoming more accepted in the United States, one study pointed out that the loss of revenue to local districts from homeschoolers becomes an even more acute concern (*Homeschooling in Nevada: The budgetary impact*, 2005). A more recent study reiterated these findings and puts forth that the loss of income from homeschoolers will only become more acute in the future (Klein & Poplin, 2008). A third study suggested that school leaders need to find the right balance in cooperating with homeschool parents while they educate their children and view those same students as potential new enrollees in their local district, in order to add to their revenue stream (Wilhelm & Firmin, 2009). This article discusses the efforts of a rural school district in Ohio's effort to win back homeschoolers, in which one district lost ten percent of their enrollment in a short period of time to homeschooling. Because it was a large rural district, the loss of funding created a tremendous strain on the school system. The district implemented several measures to communicate with and work with homeschooling families, including an on-line educational opportunity. The success of their programs not only helped homeschoolers with course offerings not available in the home, but also led to many families returning to the local district. There is no way of knowing how common this type of experience may be, but with the growth of homeschooling, there are enough questions raised that would merit further scholarly study, which could result in positive recommendations for school leaders faced with a similar situation.

## **Methodology**

This study used a qualitative approach in answering the three research questions. Interviews with homeschool families and school leaders, as well as a survey (used for demographic purposes) with the homeschool families were used to gather data for the study. Interviews with four families who returned their children to a public school were done initially as a pilot study. These four families had transitioned their children into a public school during the 2013-2014 school year. The purpose of these interviews was first, to assist in answering the first research question of why parents choose to return their child to a public school after a period of homeschooling. Second, from these interviews an introductory survey was developed which was mailed to each family who had homeschooled and returned their children to a public school in a large, suburban, mid-Atlantic school district, and who had agreed to participate in this study. The survey answered in part the first research question, provided some demographic information, and gave some insight on the second research question: What unique challenges does this transition hold for the families and the public school? The survey also provided the families with an idea of the nature of the follow-up interview and allowed them time to formulate answers to questions about why they chose to enroll their child in a public school and the process of transition to that public school. Data from the survey was evaluated by the researcher to determine if additional follow-up questions, unique to each family, should be included in a second set of in-person interviews.

The second set of interviews that made up the main data source from homeschool families who returned their child to a public school during the 2014-2015 school year.

These interviews provided evidence related to all three research questions, though more so for the first two questions than for the third (i.e., what programs or practices exist in public schools which ensure the success of this population). These families were secured with the assistance of the targeted school district and one of the homeschool associations within the targeted district. To more fully answer the third research question, interviews with school leaders and counselors within the target district were conducted and then analyzed thematically.

Using a qualitative approach allowed the researcher to explore the three research questions more deeply than using a quantitative method and provided flexibility to explore in a much deeper sense, information about this population, motivations of families, and the transition process as a whole. In this way a more accurate and in-depth picture of what is happening and why could be developed. A more detailed description of the method used is provided in Chapter Three.

### **Summary**

This study addresses an area that is not thoroughly dealt with in the literature. Although the number of families who homeschool their children increases each year, research shows that an increasing number of students who homeschool also return to public and private schools each year. Although much research has been conducted on why parents homeschool their children, very little has been conducted on why they return them to a public school subsequently, what unique challenges this population causes for school leaders and what programs, if any, school leaders have in place for these students. This study addresses these three questions using interviews and a survey, with

homeschool families and school leaders. In doing so, the information gained could contribute to increased success with this particular population.

Chapter 2 presents an in-depth review of the literature related to aspects of homeschooling and school leadership that pertains to this study. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology used in the study. Included is a more detailed account of the research design, the participants, data collection, data analysis, and limitations of this study. Chapter 4 contains the results of the study and Chapter 5 contains a discussion of these results, limitations of the study and implications for further research.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms used in this study are defined here:

*Homeschooling* – Students were considered to be homeschooled if their parents reported them being in school at home instead of a public or private school, and if their enrollment in a public or private school did not exceed 25 hours a week, and if they were not being homeschooled solely because of a temporary illness (Bielick, Chandler, & Broughman, 2001). This definition allows for the differences in hourly requirements that exists between various states, with 25 hours being the top number of hours allowed.

*Ideologues* – those who homeschool their children who are religious conservatives and homeschool due to a religious motivation (Van Galen, 1991).

*Pedagogues* – those parents who homeschool their children because they mainly desire to improve their child's academic environment (Van Galen, 1991).

*Return* - Homeschool students who “return” to the public school includes both those students who started their education in a public school, withdrew to be homeschooled, and then return to the public school, as well as those who began their educational career by being homeschooled, and then at some point enrolled in a public school.

*School leader* – While this normally refers to a principal or assistant principal, it can also refer to administrative staff, teacher leaders, and guidance counselors. For purposes of this study the term refers to those individuals who design and implement academic programs and place students in those programs.

*Traditional school* – In this study the term traditional school can refer to any public or private elementary or secondary school.

*Transition* – for the purposes of this study, this is the process of moving from a homeschool environment to a larger, more complex public school environment.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Review of the Literature**

Many aspects of homeschooling have been thoroughly researched. However, an in-depth study of the literature reveals a large gap as it pertains to why parents either return their children to a traditional school or enroll them in a traditional school after a period of homeschooling, the unique problems that this transition process presents, as well as the programs school leaders have in place to ensure the success of this population. This chapter includes a brief review of what is known about homeschooling in the United States in order to provide a context for the study, continues with a review of topics related to homeschooling and school leadership, and concludes with a summary of what is known and what is yet to be discovered through this study.

### **An Overview of Research on Homeschooling**

Parents in the United States have a variety of choices when it comes to the education of their children. Some of these choices include but are not limited to private schools, charter schools, public schools, and homeschools. Although the modern homeschool movement in the United States began in the last third of the twentieth century, home education has been practiced by many cultures throughout history (Ray, 2000), and has been prevalent and played a key role in western civilization (Rockney, 2002). Homeschooling was, in fact, the principal method that was used in the early period

of the United States, and homeschooling was quite successful in producing a literate populace (Wichers, 2001). During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century parents acted as teachers for their children and tutors from the community were used to either extend the home education or fill the gaps that parents felt existed in their tutelage (Jones & Gloeckner, 2004). During the colonial period, grammar schools were started in some communities and were seen as an extension of the home where education normally began (Klicka, 1994). As communities began to grow during and after the colonial period, it became increasingly typical for parents to put their children in the common school and homeschool education declined (Carper, 2000).

Prior to the advent of compulsory education, schooling at home from their parents or older siblings was the primary way that children in the (now) United States were educated (DiStefano, Rudestam, & Silverman, 2004). By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were concerns that all students should receive an education consisting of basic skills that were necessary to lead a productive life and be a contributing member of society, and states began to implement standardized curriculums and enforce compulsory attendance (Dailey, 1999). By 1918 all states had passed compulsory attendance laws and parents, for the most part, left the education of their children to the public schools (Dailey, 1999). These compulsory attendance laws had the effect of decreasing dramatically the number of students educated at home because many states determined that schooling at home was a controversial form of education, and several states designed their compulsory attendance laws in such a way that made it illegal for parents to educate their children at home (Knowles, Muchmore, & Spalding, 1994). The desire for an

dequate and well-rounded academic program and the necessity of students being properly equipped to function in a democratic society were among the reasons espoused for this prohibition. Homeschooling continued on a small scale until the beginning of the modern homeschool movement in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Knowles et al., 1992). Thus, homeschooling is as old as education itself, and is a growing and vibrant alternative education movement today.

Although homeschooling is legal in all 50 states at present, it was not without a struggle. Some states, especially those that had large rural areas, did not pursue the few students who were homeschooled (Dobson, 2000), essentially choosing not to enforce their own compulsory attendance education policies. During the last third of the previous century, as homeschooling experienced a re-birth, many states passed laws that in some cases permitted homeschooling, while others placed heavy restrictions on those who homeschool (Gordon & Gordon, 1992). Lawsuits filed by parents who homeschooled in states where it was prohibited, or where restrictions were deemed burdensome, became another way that parents won the right to homeschool (Ray, 2000).

Even today, it is difficult to get a good sense of the extent of the homeschool movement. As one researcher commented:

...Research on homeschooling can be difficult. Facts about homeschooling can be hard to come by. Homeschoolers do not like big organizations, often refuse government-paid assistance, and otherwise avoid doing things that make it easy for bureaucrats to count them. Many families even shun private organizations. Although homeschooling associations are growing rapidly, group leaders think



that the vast majority of homeschoolers are not members. To date, no government or foundation has paid for a careful assessment of all homeschoolers' learning or of older children's experiences in jobs or higher education. Thus, a researcher is left with interviews with homeschool association leaders and with school district officials who assist homeschoolers and with facts that can be gleaned from the many homeschool websites. (Hill, 2000, p. 21)

Because of this, there are many gaps in the literature and many questions about this population that have yet to be explored.

**Number of homeschoolers.** Currently, homeschooling is considered to be one of the fastest growing segments of primary and secondary education in the United States (Ray, 2009). The number of students who are homeschooled is increasing every year (Duvall, Delaquadri, & Ward, 2004). Some estimate this growth at a rate of 15% each year (Ray, 2000). A recent study found on the number of homeschool students puts the number at 2.04 million (Ray, 2011). It should be noted that this study was conducted by a homeschooling advocate. A government report shows that 1,770,000 students were homeschooled in 2011 (Statistics about Nonpublic Education in the United States, 2012). This is an increase, according to the same website, over the 1,520,000 homeschool students reported in 2007. To more easily comprehend the size of the homeschool movement, this number is more than all public school students currently enrolled in every public school in the states of Maryland and Virginia. Homeschool students may then constitute up to 3.4% of the school-aged population in the United States (Cooper, 2007; Statistics about Nonpublic Education in the United States, 2012).

**Reasons for choosing homeschooling.** The characteristics of families who homeschool their children fall into two general categories: those who are ideologues and those who are pedagogues (Van Galen, 1991), sometimes referred to as religious motivations and academic concerns (Lubienski, 2003). While there are variations of these two general categories, the ideologues can be defined as those who mainly desire to improve their child's academic and social environment (Van Galen, 1991), typically to limit interaction with diverse student populations and/or focus on religious indoctrination. The pedagogues focus more attention on the quality of the academic experience and methods of instruction for primary and secondary students.

Morton (2010) divided those who homeschool into three groups: the first group includes those who view homeschooling as a "natural" choice, sometimes presented as political opposition to existing social structures of education. The second group views homeschooling as a "social" choice relating to the conscious transmission of various forms of social capital. The third group views homeschooling not as a choice at all but rather a necessary requirement of parenting. Regardless of how homeschoolers are classified, concern for the direction and control of character development of the children who are homeschooled appear to be a predominant theme among most parents (Cooper, 2007).

For purposes of this study, Van Galen's distinctions between ideologues and pedagogues will be considered normative. Van Galen's two groups, while distinct in one sense, contain a diverse number of reasons for homeschooling. Some parents choose to homeschool as a way to exert control over what their children are exposed to and the

types of children with whom their offspring socialize and develop relationships (Walford, 1990). Those who are considered religious fundamentalists would generally fit into the group called ideologues. “The relative freedom and flexibility of homeschooling allows parents to craft an educational environment that reflects their values and priorities, and religious conservatives find such an option particularly appealing” (Kunzman, 2010, p. 18). Evangelical Christians make up the largest part of the ideologues and there is little to no literature, other than brief mentions, of religious homeschoolers outside of this group. It should be understood, however, that while religious fundamentalism normally refers to those who consider themselves to be evangelical Christians, those who have deep religious beliefs including Catholics, Lutherans, Mormons, and Jehovah’s Witnesses would also be considered ideologues. Kunzman (2010) further stated that the structural flexibility of homeschooling allows it to be used as a vehicle to support countercultural movements of all varieties. One researcher points out that the writings of John Holt, where the modern homeschool movement gained early inspiration, supported a socially progressive philosophy (Gaither, 2008).

Isenberg (2007) cites a United States Department of Education report which breaks down the reasons why parents homeschool their children into seven categories. According to this report, 36% homeschool their children in order to provide religious or moral instruction; 20% homeschool their children because of their concern about the school environment; 17% homeschool because of their dissatisfaction with academic instruction in traditional schools; 14% cite other reasons, a single category on the survey, but one which includes a wide variety of reasons that do not fit neatly into the other six

categories. An additional 7% homeschool their children in order to provide a non-traditional approach to their child's education; 4% cite that their child has a special need which they believe can be more effectively met by homeschooling; and the final 2% note that the child has a physical or mental health problem that would prevent them from being enrolled in a traditional type of school. This data generally supports the breakdown between Van Galen's ideologues and pedagogues.

The National Center for Education Statistics of the U. S. Department of Education released the results of a survey, conducted in 2011-2012, which showed the five most important reasons why parents homeschool. Although the percentages are different than the reasons cited by Isenberg (2007), which were also taken from a national survey by the Department of Education, the reasons why parents homeschool remain essentially the same. The table below shows that a concern about the environment of other schools has supplanted the desire to provide religious or moral instruction, which was the number one reason in the 2007 survey. Religious and moral instruction is still a major reason in 2011-2012, as is dissatisfaction with the academic instruction at other schools. The other reasons showed very little change over the years. *The results of the 2011-2012 school year are shown below:*

Table 1

*Parents' most important reasons for homeschooling*

Reason	2011-2012	Notes
A concern about environment of other schools	25%	4% increase from 2006-07 NHES results
Other reasons (include family time, finances, travel and distance)	21%	7% increase from 2006-08 NHES results
A dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools	19%	2% increase from 2006-07 NHES results
A desire to provide religious instruction	16%	In 2007 NHES, religious and moral instruction reasons asked as one with a 36% result
A desire to provide moral instruction	5%	In 2007 NHES, religious and moral instruction reasons asked as one with a 36% result
Child has a physical or mental health problem	5%	3% increase from 2006-07 NHES results
A desire to provide a nontraditional approach to child's education	5%	Interpret current data with caution, coefficient of variation is 30% or more
Child has other special needs	-	Reporting standards not met for 2011-12

*Note.* Adapted from “Parent and family involvement in education, From the National Household Education Surveys Program of 2012,” by A. Noel, P. Stark, and J. Redford, 2013, National Center for Education Statistics, Department of Education, Washington, DC.

Another survey, also from the National Center for Education Statistics, shown below, demonstrates that parents have more than just one reason for homeschooling:

Table 2

*Parents' reasons for homeschooling their children (in percentages)*

Reason	2011-2012	2006-2007	2002-2003
A desire to provide religious instruction	64	83	72
A desire to provide moral instruction	77	83	72
A concern about environment of other schools	91	88	85
A dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools	74	73	68
A desire to provide a nontraditional approach to child's education	44	65	Not asked
Child has other special needs	17	21	29
Child has a physical or mental health problem	15	11	16
Other reasons	37	32	20

*Note.* Adapted from "Parent and family involvement in education, From the National Household Education Surveys Program of 2012," by A. Noel, P. Stark, and J. Redford, 2013, National Center for Education Statistics, Department of Education, Washington, DC

Of note in this table are the fluctuations of percentages over the years. The desire to provide religious or moral instruction hit a peak in 2006-2007. A concern about the environment of other schools rated as the highest reason in all three years. Dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools and concern about academic environment at other schools showed small but steady increases over the three time periods presented in the surveys.

**Characteristics of homeschoolers.** The background of people who homeschool their children are as diverse as the reasons for homeschooling itself (Bates, 1990;

Hadeed, 1991). A characteristic of homeschoolers in both groups is that they are more likely to be in households that include two adults with moderate to high education levels, with one of the two adults either not in the labor force or working part-time (Lois, 2006). Lois points out that children who are homeschooled are more likely to be greater in number in areas that have been destinations for internal migration as well. In the West they are located in greater numbers in rural and suburban areas that receive immigration streams from California and other immigration gateway states. In the rest of the country, the greater number of homeschoolers came from what the United States census calls “melting pot” states. Families of both groups believe that the public school does not offer the types of programs that will ensure academic success for their children (Winstanley, 2009), and in both groups the mother tends to be the primary instructor (Duffey, 1999).

The Digest of Education Statistics published a chart entitled *Number and percentage of homeschooled students ages 5 through 17 with a grade equivalent of kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, by selected child, parent, and household characteristics: 2003, 2007, and 2012* (See Appendix H). At first glance, it is noticeable that the number of homeschoolers is less than some of the literature suggests. This disparity may be because of the unwillingness of some to participate in providing more detailed data. The table reveals a number of interesting characteristics about homeschoolers, nevertheless. The percentage of students who are homeschooled has increased from 2.2% to 3.4% of the total school-age population from 2003 to 2012. Over the course of the survey, females out-number males who are homeschooled. Those identified as white represent the greatest ethnicity to be homeschooled. By 2007,

Hispanics were the second largest ethnicity to be homeschooled, and are still the second largest group despite decreasing by more than 50% between 2007 and 2012 as a percentage of the total. Families with three or more children represent almost half of the families who homeschool while single child families are the smallest group. In 2003 and 2012, more middle schoolers (grades 6 – 8) were homeschooled than any other group, followed closely by those in high school (grades 9 – 12), whereas in 2007, those in grades 1 – 3 had the highest percentage of homeschoolers. This is particularly noteworthy when one considers the common perception of the difficulties that homeschool parents face in either teaching the higher level subjects, or securing instruction for higher level subjects. By far, most homeschool families have two parents and in more than half of these families, only one parent participates in the labor force. This was true in all three years reported. More than half of the parents who homeschool have a bachelor's degree or higher, and the income level of the majority of families who homeschool is between \$50,000 and \$100,000. Families who reside in cities make up the smallest percentage of homeschoolers, followed by those who live in the suburbs. The largest percentage of families who homeschool live in rural areas with small towns second. This trend was true in both 2007 and 2012. This data demonstrates that homeschooling families have very diverse demographics.

A large portion of the pedagogues include two seemingly contrasting types of students, both seeking to enhance their academic achievement: gifted students and those with special education needs. While at first glance they appear to be at opposite ends of the educational spectrum, they have many characteristics in common. Families in both



groups believe that existing programs in traditional schools either do not match the needs of their particular child or they are too generalized to the total population to be effective (Winstanley, 2009). Three distinct advantages, while benefitting all homeschoolers, seem to be especially pertinent to these two groups. First, the homeschool program is individualized. Second, in many cases the teaching in homeschooling is one-on-one between student and parent/teacher. Even with the current emphasis on differentiation of instruction in public schools, the individual nature of instruction cannot be matched with that of homeschooling. Third, homeschooling gives the student a safe place where they can proceed at their own pace, whether slower or faster than their public school counterparts (Duffey, 1999), thus meeting a concern of parents of both gifted and disabled students.

There are differences between the two groups, however. Duffey (1999) points out that in a public school setting, labels must be given to students in order to participate in certain programs. In the homeschool setting, no such labels are needed, making it not only harder to study this particular group, but also to identify parents that may disagree with the designation or program that the public school identifies as fitting the student.

### **Why Parents Return Children to a Public School**

Very few studies have been done on why parents return their children to a public school after a period of homeschooling. One study that did examine the transition of homeschool students to a public school maintained that those parents who homeschool for ideological reasons tend to return their children to a public school for pedagogical reasons, and those who homeschool for pedagogical reasons tend to return their students

to the public school for ideological reasons (Koonce, 2007). That is, the pedagogues discussed above felt that they could provide a better learning environment at home had a tendency to transition their children for ideological reasons such as providing social and emotional growth. The ideologues, who homeschooled for moral or ethical reasons, had a tendency to transition their children to public school for pedagogical reasons, which include the concern for the child's educational development.

**Socialization.** Educators have strong opinions on why parents cease homeschooling and return their child to a public school. A common reason given by educators is the socialization of the student (Romanowski, 2006). It is thought that a student who is homeschooled would lack the proper social skills necessary to navigate in our society. Romanowski (2006) traces this belief to the misunderstanding of what homeschooling entails, and the underlying belief that the public school is the only effective way to socialize children. The individualized nature of homeschooling might lead to such a conclusion, but in fact, the existing literature shows something quite different.

Socialization normally takes place as children take part in daily routines which immerse them directly in the values of the community (Lewis, 2004). Socialization includes more than just what goes on in school. It includes family, activities that the family engages in, and activities that the student and family engage in outside the home as well as with extended family. In contrast to the common assumptions, studies have shown that families who homeschool are deeply committed to providing positive socialization experiences for their children (Mayberry, Knowles, Ray, & Marlow, 1995).

A careful reading would show that these type of socialization experiences are those defined as acceptable by parents who homeschool their children, hence this is unlikely a motivation for returning children to the public school setting.

Indeed, many homeschool parents find the socialization processes that take place in the public schools to be objectionable. Complaints include the notion that schools have a rigid environment; children are exposed to often hostile social situations such as bullying; and the school climate may be contrary to the moral environment desired by the family (Medlin, 2000). From this point of view the “social environment of schools is actually a compelling argument for operating a homeschool” (Mayberry et al., 1995, p. 8).

Numerous studies of various aspects of the socialization of homeschool students have been conducted. One study found that only 3% of homeschool students watched more than three hours of television a day compared to 38% of public school students (Rudner, 1999). Another study examined how many different people homeschool and public school students interacted with, how long the interaction lasted, and what was discussed. Homeschool students, on average, interacted with 49 different individuals per week, while public school students interacted with 56 (Chathan-Carpenter, 1994). The difference was not statistically significant, thus casting doubt on the notion that homeschooling is an isolating environment for children, and they do not have as large a pool of opportunities to socialize as public school students. In another study, homeschool parents reported that their children were involved in a wide variety of social activities including church activities, sports programs, summer camps and programs, community

groups including 4-H, boy and girl scouts, music and dance lessons, volunteer work, paid jobs, playing with friends, and hobby groups (Ray, 1997). Another study demonstrated that homeschool students actually participate in more activities which foster socialization than students who attend a traditional school (Delahooke, 1986). The peer reviewed literature, from advocates as well as skeptics, is quite thorough on demonstrating that socialization, or lack thereof, is not likely a reason why parents who homeschool their children return them to a public school.

**Parental options for secondary subjects.** Another reason often assumed for homeschool students returning to public schools is that the teaching of higher level subjects such as Algebra, Chemistry, and Physics is beyond the capability of most parents who teach their children. Research also casts doubt about whether this is a valid argument. There are many resources available to homeschoolers in middle and high school academic subjects. Although in most cases homeschool parents are the sole teacher of their children, many families use other resources (Collom, 2005). Some parents will send their children to a public school for a limited number of courses. Iowa, for example, has passed legislation which allows homeschoolers to have dual enrollment. Other states allow homeschool students to enroll for individual classes, and additional resources are often available to those who homeschool. Some parents who are certified in high school advanced math or the sciences will form groups or “co-ops” (Hill, 2000). Many large textbook publishing companies, private and public colleges, and certain religious organizations provide assistance to homeschoolers in the higher mathematics and science necessary for a well-rounded education, and online resources are increasingly

available, including whole courses of study. While in a few cases parents may choose to return their children to a public school in order to have access to higher-level or specialized courses, the literature does not support this as a significant reason for doing so.

**Family pressures.** Another argument is that few parents have the self-discipline to push aside interruptions that occur during a typical school day to successfully homeschool their child (Romanowski, 2001). Interruptions such as a needy sibling (such as a baby crying), household occurrences like deliveries, a phone call, or neighbors visiting, cannot be controlled as they can in a public school. While recognizing that clearly defined educational tasks require intense concentration with unbroken periods of study, critics would argue that such an environment would be difficult to achieve in many homes (Simmons, 1994).

Homeschool advocates would argue that the public school environment is often disruptive, and point to the homeschool students' scores on standardized tests compared to their public school counterparts as a defense against this argument. Several studies have been completed on the academic achievement of homeschoolers (Ray, 1997, 2000, 2009). Most of these studies show that homeschoolers have scored, on average, at the 65<sup>th</sup> to 80<sup>th</sup> percentile on standardized achievement tests, although critics of such statistics point out that these data reflect a somewhat skewed population to begin with, and hence comparisons of this kind are problematic.

One study cited the possibility of "teacher burn out" on the part of the mother as a reason why parents return their children to a public school (Lois, 2006). Although this

may be an actual cause of such movement, systematically collected information like this could be helpful in understanding parental expectations.

**The “Best Interest” of the Student.** A study done by Stoppler (1998) indicated that parents of some homeschoolers return them to public schools because they believe it is in the best interests of the children, even though the details of those “best interests” vary and are not examined deeply. Of course, “best interest” might include any of the above-mentioned causes, and this study lacks specifics, yet it brings to light some areas that should be examined to determine what those “best interests” are and in what manner they were compelling enough to cause a family to make this transition. Included in these “best interests” not already mentioned earlier was the ability to participate in a sports program.

### **Summary**

In regards to the first research question of why parents return their children to a public school after a period of homeschooling, the current literature examines some reasons why parents do this and debunks others. Socialization and access to higher level subjects, often cited as reasons for returning a child to a public school, are both adequately answered in the literature. Data from the U. S. Department of Education shows that middle and high school grades comprise the largest number of homeschoolers, casting doubt on the assumption that parents either cannot teach or have limited access to higher level subject instruction. Family pressures, sports and the “best interests” of the student were identified as reasons why some parents transition their children to the public school.

However, gaps in the literature remain on this question. An answer to this remains unclear, at best. It can be concluded that further study specifically dealing with this question, and involving a larger sample, would be worthwhile and add to the existing literature.

### **Unique Challenges for School Leaders**

If the purpose of public schools is to ensure that all children are well educated, then it follows that school leaders must be concerned about all aspects of education, both traditional and alternative. When it comes to homeschooling, public school educators have moved from advocating strict regulations in the 1980's to partnering with homeschoolers in the 1990's (Peavie, 1999) and beyond (Lines, 2004). This leads into the second research question, which is to examine what unique challenges this population presents when students transition back to a public school.

The transition process has been studied, typically in relation to student transition from one level of schooling to the next. Transitions from one level to another affect almost every student to some degree (Montgomery & Hirth, 2011). It might be assumed, then, that the transition of a student from one type of educational setting to another may have an impact on their success. Transition supports, which include transition programs, have been shown to have a positive effect on student success (Ellerbrock, Denmon, Owens, & Linstrom, 2105), but whether such programs exist for students transitioning from homeschool or if such programs are effective has not been a topic of systematic study.

**Student perceptions.** Students will experience many changes as they progress from level to level. For example, while the elementary school tends to provide a nurturing environment with a great deal of task support, the secondary school tends to focus more on performance. As a result, many students perceive a quality of school life decline as they progress from level to level (Anfara & Schmid, 2007). Middle and high school teachers generally spend less time with students than do teachers in elementary schools, and the comfort of a safe and nurturing environment (the classroom) disappears. Teacher/student relationships also go through a change as the student may have one teacher for most of the elementary day, whereas in middle and high school they travel from teacher to teacher (Miller, 1983). Adding to this potential alienation is that instruction changes from small group in elementary school to whole-class instruction in middle and high school (Eccles et al., 1993).

One study examined the perceptions of school leaders regarding challenges that students face due to transitions (Weldy, 1991). These challenges include but are not limited to changing classes; reduced parental involvement; dealing with more teachers; new grading standards and procedures; more peer pressure; developmental differences between boys and girls; fear of larger, more impersonal schools; and coping with adolescent physical development. In the general area of the transitioning of students, the challenges that school leaders face are numerous and critical. Dealing with every population requires both skill and knowledge.

**Socialization.** While the issue of socialization was previously covered in detail earlier in relation to why parents elect to return their child to the school setting, it relates



to the challenges schools face when students transition as well. Because homeschoolers spend most of their time among family in a presumably accepting climate, there is a concern about whether they can function with a high level of confidence in a multiage situation that is present in a public school (Romanowski, 2001). A positive school community is one in which all members of that community feel valued and respected. Socialization plays a part in the building of those ideals. Some researchers note that homeschoolers are frequently exposed to a wider variety of situations and people than is experienced in a traditional classroom where interaction is limited to 25 to 35 individuals of similar age and socio-economic background (Nelson, 1998). The challenge for the school leader then, is not whether the homeschooled student is socially awkward or that they lack essential social skills, but how easily and successfully the homeschooled student can integrate into the public school setting (Romanowski, 2006).

Since homeschool parents may believe that the home and not the public school offers the type of socialization that they as a family desire, school leaders must have in place mechanisms that allow these students to successfully navigate the public school setting. What may appear as social awkwardness may simply be unfamiliarity with a new setting. This is particularly possible with this population since homeschool parents, as a general rule, want their children to focus more on academics rather than peer relationships, and concentrate more on individuality as opposed to fitting in. As noted earlier, socialization is one of the first items mentioned in most conversations regarding homeschooling, by both those who homeschool and those who do not.

**Parent expectations.** Another area that could be a unique challenge to the school leader deals with the expectations that homeschool parents have about the classroom and school programs (Romanowski, 2001). By nature of the one-on-one instruction, homeschoolers do not have to contend with a large number of students in a classroom. As a result, the homeschool teacher can construct the curriculum and instruction to meet the exact needs of the student. The pace of instruction can be set to match the needs of the homeschool student, and the nature of one-on-one instruction can provide the student with undivided attention, allowing for more opportunity to ask questions, receive feedback, and help the student develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter. The flexibility that is available to the homeschooler is almost non-existent in the public school classroom. Time constraints, standardized testing, and curriculum pacing guides serve to standardize the public school program. While this has been identified by Romanowski (2001) as a concern, there is little detail in the literature relating to this challenge.

Hill (2000) points out that because homeschool parents, after working with their own child as a student for a period of time, know how much their children can accomplish, they can be extremely demanding about the standards of the school and the pace of instruction. They may perceive the school program is lacking rigor. What may begin as an open mind on the part of both parent and school leader, can devolve into a negative public relations situation for the school.

**Content knowledge.** Another area of concern is the depth and breadth of knowledge required in some content areas, particularly at the secondary level (Simmons, 1994). While it has been demonstrated by research that home school parents have many

resources to draw from in the teaching of higher level subjects (Collom, 2005; Hill, 2000), a school leader must be concerned with the academic preparation that a homeschooler has, as they would with other students that progress from grade to grade in the public school or a student that transfers from another type of school, such as a private school, or another school system. Studies have shown that homeschoolers have done well and in some cases, out-performed their public school counterparts on certain achievement tests (Isenberg, 2007). However, no information was found in the literature that demonstrates that those who homeschool keep abreast of changes in the methods, curriculum, and practices in the public schools. As an example, there is no reason to expect that parents who homeschool have kept up with changes due to the adoption of common core or state-level standards. Further, as discussed in the next section, it is often hard to know what prior learning a specific home school student experienced other than through anecdotal information provided by the family.

**Pertinent school records.** Imagine that a physician, when greeting a new patient, had only the information provided by the patient, in layman's terms, concerning the patient's condition and medical history, and could not obtain medical records from any prior caretakers or hospitals. At best, the physician would need to repeat a myriad number of baseline tests and examinations, and could very well miss some vital diagnostic evidence that may be consequential to the quality of care s/he could provide. A quite similar dilemma faces schools that transition homeschoolers into their programs.

A very practical challenge that a school leader faces with this population is in the area of record keeping. By its very nature, homeschooling is an endeavor that is hard to

quantify. While legal in every state, the requirements placed on homeschoolers vary from state to state. In some states, homeschoolers are required to register with their district, provide an educational plan for the student, and list the credentials, if any, of the parent who will do the teaching. There are “part-time” homeschoolers who enroll in a public or private school in order to take a course or two (Bauman, 2002). The challenge for the school leader is not only securing an accurate data set on students, but knowing where to place them in the public school program so that the homeschool student will be able to function appropriately in the core subjects. Whereas students transitioning from one school district to another come with extensive, generally comparative academic records, documentation accompanying a child who has been homeschooled may be considerably less useful or even non-existent. This poses a considerable challenge to school leaders, and may affect the quality of the experience of the homeschooler and his/her family.

**Facilitating transitions.** Social scientists have long expressed opinions about the potential negative effects that school transitions can have on adolescents (MacIver, 1990). While an appropriate environment may have some positive effects on students, there is clearly a risk that transitioning from one school level to the next, with the required change of building, staff, and environment can overwhelm the coping skills that students possess. This can be evidenced in the areas of self-esteem, psychological adjustment, and motivation to learn (Anfara & Schmid, 2007). With homeschoolers, who would experience a more radical change of environment, the potential negative impact may be even greater.

Literature on school transition suggests some steps school staff and leaders can take to ease the potentially negative impact of transition on students (Osterman, 2000). Activities that orient new students and their parents to a new school enable them to be better prepared for their new responsibilities and the new curriculum and social obligations they will encounter (Toy & Spencer, 2011). For example, establishing a buddy system which pairs new students with veteran students and activities that allow new students to attend actual classes in their new school before the school year begins have also had success. Summer school is also a way that some schools help to bridge the divide between elementary and middle school, and middle school and high school. While a program of this type is mainly used for at-risk students, school leaders may find some benefit in expanding this type of program for students who come from homeschooling. Another activity that can be easily implemented is having all new students attend a day in the new school before the rest of the student body (Toy & Spencer, 2011). This allows the new student an opportunity to find their classrooms, locker, and orient themselves to the cafeteria, buses, and new schedule without the crush of the entire student body.

Another study, using a student with autism as the participant, developed a 20 component process for facilitating transitions (LaCava, 2005). While every component would not be applicable to every population, there are some universal processes that would work with homeschoolers. These processes include collecting as much needed information about the homeschooler before the transition takes place. While this is not possible in every case, and especially with some homeschoolers, where records may not

have been kept, a school leader can lessen the challenge by gathering as much useful information possible.

### **Facilitating Return: A Challenge for School Leaders?**

The last research question asks what programs or practices school leaders have in place, if any, to ensure the success of homeschool children who are returning to their school? Since the literature provides little direct guidance to approach this final research question, it may be helpful to consider the broader literature on effective school leadership to suggest some fruitful areas of inquiry.

**Effective school leaders.** Understanding the role of school leadership in fostering a positive transition for returning homeschool students is informed by what is known, more generally, about the role of school leaders in promoting school effectiveness. Clearly, the emerging literature attests to the importance of school leadership in this regard: one study (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003) asserted that “to learn well, students need access to high-quality instruction and a well-crafted curriculum. After that, they *benefit most of all from the positive effects of strong school leadership*” (p. 2).

There is a wealth of literature on what is and what makes an effective school leader. That there is a relationship between leadership and student achievement is beyond argument (Schulte, Slate, & Onwuegbuzie, 2010). In defining effective school leadership, many studies develop lists of responsibilities. Hallinger (2003) categorizes these qualities of leadership practices as purpose, people, structures, and social systems. Another study indicated that effective school leaders exhibit three sets of practices that make up the basis of effective school leadership: setting directions, developing people, and

redesigning the organization (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Building on this foundational model, Wahlstrom, et al. (2010) has added a fourth category, managing the instructional program. This work attests to the fact that effective school leaders draw on knowledge, skills and dispositions connected to these four areas, albeit drawing on different combinations of these depending on the specific leadership challenge and school context. These four leadership attributes are reviewed briefly below.

**Setting directions.** Setting direction can be best understood as relating to the schools' mission and vision. The school leader sets goals, determines the implementation of the mission and vision, and sells the school's direction to those stakeholders who assist in the operation of the school (Peterson, 2002). This is perhaps the most important job that a school leader has as it impacts every facet of the organization. In the Wahlstrom et al. (2010) formulation, setting direction connects to the leaders' ability to motivate staff and community to high levels of performance and achievement. In the present study, it is important to understand whether school leaders have a vision for the re-integration of homeschool students into their schools; what this vision is; and whether the vision is shared with stakeholders.

**Developing people.** Effective school leaders provide intellectual stimulation, individualized support, and suitable models of best practice and beliefs that are central to the organization (Gold, 2003). Motivations for individuals to work effectively for an organization are greatly influenced by the experiences the individuals have with those in leadership positions and the context in which they work (Rowan, 1996). Developing people includes professional development, distributive leadership, and convincing

individuals of the beliefs and goals of the organization (Sebastian, 2012). In the context of the present study, this raises the question: What, if any, professional development do schools offer to help staff deal with returning homeschoolers?

**Redesigning the organization.** Student learning depends on the capacities and motivations of both teachers and school leaders, acting individually and collectively. At a fundamental level, this leadership attribute involves creating structures and practices to meet the needs of students and staff. Practices included in this concept include those that serve to strengthen the school culture and building collaborative processes (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). In some cases, district or state mandates can challenge or limit the ability of teachers and school leaders to effectively implement the vision of the school. High stakes testing and limited finances are two examples of external influences that can affect the effectiveness of a school, but two influences that every school leader must be able to deal with (Dantley, 2003). In this study, what organizational practices and processes exist to assist the transition of home schoolers is a central question.

**Managing the instructional program.** School leaders are charged with ensuring that teachers are working effectively with students, as well as making certain that students are learning what they should in their schools. The school leader has control over the resource allocation within the school and as such, manages the instructional program. Practices included in this category consist of organizing students and classes; managing time; providing instructional support; monitoring the progress of the school as a whole as well as student progress; and keeping outside demands unrelated to the schools' mission and vision from interfering with the effectiveness of the faculty and



staff (Day, Stobart, Sammons, & Kington, 2006). Some studies have concluded that of all the responsibilities that a school leader has, this area has the least impact on student learning (Hallinger, 2003), while others have shown that it has significant impact on student achievement (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). As an area of inquiry in the context of this study, managing the instructional program has to do with such things as placement, scheduling, and assessment of returning homeschoolers.

**Four paths of leaderships.** Recently, a different approach to understanding effective school leadership championed the idea that effective leadership influences student learning through four distinct “paths” (Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010). The four paths along which leadership flows in influencing student achievement are the rational, emotional, organizational, and family path. The rational path is fixed in the knowledge and skills about curriculum, teaching and learning in general. An effective school leader must know how to improve the teachers within the school by providing professional development, monitoring and giving feedback on classroom teaching, and knowing how to effectively communicate. The disciplinary climate of a school is also related to the rational path of school leadership. A recent study found that schools with better disciplinary climates had greater student achievement than schools with inadequate disciplinary climates (Ma & Crocker, 2007).

The emotional path deals with feelings and dispositions of faculty and staff. In highly effective schools, teachers and school leaders shoulder the responsibility for the learning of all students. Where school leaders and teachers have set high standards for their students’ success, there is a tendency to spend more time on classroom instruction,

planning and evaluation, and activity based instruction with a high degree of interaction between teacher and student (Leithwood et al., 2010). Another study points out that the school leader is critical to establishing trust among teachers, parents and students (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Trust is a key element in improving student achievement. This path is concerned with teachers' and leaders' sense of efficacy, a potential area of interest in regard to this study in relation to transition.

The organizational path deals with what we might normally associate with managing the organization. Instructional time, student grouping, class size, and professional learning communities are but a few of the aspects of this path (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). While some of these are not directly controlled by the individual school leader, others are greatly influenced by the building principal, and each may be an area of concern related to transition, particularly in relation to the information needed to manage transition and decisions related to placement and grouping.

The last path is the family path and it includes two types of family-related factors: those that are alterable and those that are not. Examples of unalterable factors are family educational background and family income. Alterable factors would include the ability of a school leader to impact a family's educational culture. A school leaders' communication abilities as well as the vision that the school leader has for the organization impact the family path (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). This study is focused, in large part, on the family path variables in the sense that a central question deals with family motivations and decisions related to re-entry into the regular school setting.

As a new way of looking at school leadership and how it impacts student learning, this four path approach, according to Leithwood et al. (2010), contends that the school leader can be effective by improving the variables that make up each path. Rather than react to the challenges of students, faculty and staff; of scheduling, class size, budgetary concerns and instructional time; of communication with families, communities, and other stakeholders; the effective school leader must be proactive in shaping and influencing each of these paths. The school leader must take an active role in shaping the culture of the school, and in meeting the unique challenges and contributions of each group of students and staff: “School leaders and leadership researchers should be guided much more directly by existing evidence about school, classroom, and family variables with powerful effects on student learning as they make their school improvement and research design decisions” (Leithwood et al., 2010, p.672).

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study is to answer the three research questions posted in chapter one: 1) Why do parents send their children back to a public school after a period of homeschooling?, 2) What unique challenges does this pose for families and school leaders?, and 3) What programs or practices exist in public schools to ensure the success of this population? There is a wealth of research that has been done on the reasons why parents homeschool their children, the types and characteristics of homeschool families, and the number of students who are homeschooled. But the literature is almost void of research conducted on the reasons why parents return their children to a public school, save for the widespread beliefs that socialization and the difficulty of secondary subjects

warrants the transition of homeschoolers back to the public schools. An examination of research related to socialization (Chathan-Carpenter, 1994; Ray, 1997) as well as parental options for teaching secondary subjects (Collom, 2005) has shown that these two areas are in fact not likely to be major contributors in causing parents to return their children to a public school, making the need for systematic, empirical study even more compelling.

The literature on school leadership revealed that the school leader must be someone who can deal with the complexity of the modern public school. Student achievement is dependent upon strong leadership. A thorough understanding of each group that makes up the diversity of the traditional school could enable a school leader to be more effective in establishing and managing an effective educational program. Discovering and understanding the reasons why parents who homeschool their children choose to return their children to a public school, as well as uncovering the unique challenges that this group poses to the school leader can lead to new programs or modifications of current programs and policies which could enhance the transition process and academic success of homeschoolers.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to examine school leadership through the lens of a specific population and the school leaders who deal with this population. To do this, the three research questions that framed this study were: 1) Why do parents enroll their children in a public school after a period of homeschooling; 2) What unique challenges does this pose for the family and the school; and 3) What programs or practices exist in public school to ensure the success of this population? This chapter will discuss the methodology used for this study and is presented as follows:

1. Research design
2. Procedures
3. Participants
4. Instruments
5. Data collection procedures
6. Analysis
7. Limitations

## **Research Design**

Using a case study design, participants were asked open-ended questions that revealed thoughts, motivations and processes. The questions for the initial interview came from information gathered in the literature review, from a pilot study that the researcher had conducted, and from knowledge that the researcher had gained from observations, readings, and other experiences. Successive interview questions were developed from these sources as well as from the evidence collected in the initial interviews with the four families who had transitioned their children in a previous school year. Each set of interview questions were asked of several participants, resulting in a “collective case study” (Glesne, 2006). As such, it allowed the researcher to investigate a “phenomenon, population, or general condition” (p.13).

This exploratory case study consisted of interviews of three groups: an initial group of four families who transitioned their children during a previous school year in order to develop questions for subsequent interviews; interviews with a group of families who transitioned their children during the 2014-2015 school year; and finally interviews with a group of school leaders.

## **Procedures**

The qualitative nature of this study allowed the researcher to conduct an in-depth examination of the reasons why parents who homeschool return their children to a public school, the unique challenges that this transition makes for the school leader, as well as information about what programs and attitudes school leaders have for this group. Because the purpose of this study was not only to look at the “what” of this phenomenon,

but also the “why,” interviews were conducted with particular groups within the homeschool and school leader community within a targeted district. A table showing the sequence, date, type and design of questions, participants, and research question can be found below:

Table 3

*Sequence of Study*

Sequence	Date	Type	Design	Participants	Research Question
1	March-April 2014	Qualitative	Interview	Parents of 4 homeschoolers who returned during 2013-2014	1
2	June-September 2015	Qualitative	Interview	Parents of homeschoolers who returned during 2014-2015	1,2,3
3	October-December 2015	Qualitative	Interview	Nine school leaders	2,3

The initial stage of the study employed an interview with a small number of families who have homeschooled their children and returned them to a traditional school. The purpose of these interviews was to determine appropriate questions for the introductory letter/survey which were mailed to the second group of parents who were interviewed. Information from these interviews was also used to develop questions for the interviews with the second group of parents as well as the interviews with school leaders. These interviews followed a narrative research design in that the researcher wanted to know their individual stories (Creswell, 2005). These stories revealed the

purposes, motivations, and reasons why they chose to return their children to a public school. All four of these interviews took place in the home of each family. Each interview lasted about 45 minutes. Questions used in these interviews can be found in Appendix B.

The next stage of the study involved securing participants for the second set of interviews. The target school district identified 80 families that fit the profile for this study and sent each of them an email informing them of the study and asking requesting them to participate. Because only four families responded, a home school association within the target district was contacted and it sent emails to 36 member families who also fit the profile. A letter describing the research, an introductory survey, and a signature page indicating a willingness to participate, was mailed to each family who contacted the researcher. The introductory survey can be found in Appendix C.

Once the researcher received the completed form, a phone call or email was used to set up an appointment for the follow-up interview. Eleven of the interviews took place in the family home, one interview took place in a coffee shop, one interview took place in the lounge of a grocery store, and one interview took place in the outdoor seating area of a restaurant. These interviews lasted about 45 minutes. Questions used in these interviews can be found in Appendix D.

The last stage of the study involved interviewing school leaders which included both Guidance Counselors and building principals. Emails were sent to all administrators and Guidance Counselors by the target district informing them of the study and requesting their participation. Eleven school leaders responded. Of the 11 who responded,



nine were interviewed. A phone call or email was used to set up an appointment for the interview. In all nine cases, the interview was conducted in the office of the individual being interviewed. The interviews lasted about 30 minutes. Questions for these interviews can be found in Appendix E.

Prior to data collection, the researcher completed the mandatory training for persons conducting research using human subjects which is available on the George Mason University website (Appendix A), and prior to data collection, permission to conduct research was sought and received from the George Mason University Human Subjects Review Board (Appendix A). In addition, permission was obtained from the target school district once the University HSRB granted approval of the research (Appendix F). Due to the low number of responses from the target district, the researcher contacted a homeschool association that had member families within the target district. The president of the homeschool association emailed a letter from the researcher soliciting their participation in this study. This email is contained in Appendix G. All procedures were conducted in accord with HSRB rules and regulations, and in accord with the protocol reviewed.

### **Participants**

The participants for this study were comprised of three separate groups. The first group consisted of four families that homeschooled their children and returned them to a public school within the target district during the 2013-2014 school years. In order to ensure useful information, participant families were chosen who had transitioned children to all three levels: one elementary school, two middle school, and one high school. Two

of the students who were transitioned were male and two were female. All four were two-parent families. None of the children were adopted. In all four families, the father was the primary earner of the family and the mother handled the large majority of the homeschool instruction. Three of the four families used co-ops or outside groups for instruction in at least one academic class. In all four families the students had been homeschooled at least two years, and two of the students had been homeschooled exclusively until they transitioned to a public school.

The second group was made up of 14 families who also homeschooled their children but returned them to a public school within the target district during the 2014-2015 school year. The 14 families had 15 children who transitioned from homeschooling to the public school at the elementary, middle or high school level. One family transitioned a child to middle school and a child to high school. All 14 families were two-parent families, and in 13 of the cases the children were natural offspring and in one family the child was adopted from another country. In all 14 families the father was the primary earner and the mother was the primary instructor of the homeschooler. Ten of the families also had their child instructed by either a co-op or another outside instructor, while in the remaining four, the mother did all of the teaching. In only one family did the father have a major instructional role, in math and science, and this instruction took place in the evenings, after the father had come home from work. Nine male and six female students made up the transition population including: two males and one female in elementary school, two males and three females in middle school, and five males and two females in high school. Ten of the students had been homeschooled from the beginning

of their educational experience and five of them had prior experience in either a public or private school before beginning to homeschool.

The third group was comprised of nine school leaders within the target district, including one guidance counselor and two building principals from each school level (elementary, middle and high schools). The principals included four males and two females, and the least experienced building principal had held this position for six years, while the most experienced had 18 years of service as a principal. Three of the building principals had served as principals of two different district schools and three had served as principals in three different district schools. Guidance counselors were included because they were part of the leadership team, and played a major role in the transition process. One guidance counselor served in her position for six years, another served as a guidance counselor for 13 years, and one served for 20 years.

**Sampling procedures.** Participants were chosen in different manners due to either the size or make-up of the sample. The first four families were selected purposefully based on recommendations from administrators in the targeted school district. By purposeful, the researcher means that one family was chosen at each level: elementary, middle and high school. A fourth family was added to allow for additional data on the middle school level because the researcher did not feel that the data from the first middle school interview matched the depth and breadth of the data collected from the elementary and high school families. In each case, an administrator contacted the identified family on behalf of the researcher. Once the family indicated their willingness to participate, a phone call was made by the researcher which explained the nature of the

study, provided a brief description of the interview questions, and confirmed their participation. Informed consent was obtained at the meeting arranged prior to the interview.

The second group of 14 families was secured from two different sources. The target district identified 80 potential families that met the parameters of the study and sent an email in the spring of the 2014-2015 school year, which solicited participants for the study. Those who were interested in participating were instructed to email the researcher. Four participants responded. All four were mailed the introductory survey as a preliminary step, and three agreed to be interviewed. About this same time the researcher contacted one of the largest homeschool associations with members in the target school district. Thirty-six potential families within the targeted school district who met the parameters of the study were identified and emails were sent to them soliciting participation in the study. Eighteen families responded and of these the first 11 respondents were interviewed. This brought to 14 the number of families that were interviewed. It should be noted that all of the families who agreed to participate in the study had also been contacted by the target school district, but chose not to participate at that time. Once the researcher received an email from a family who indicated an interest in the study, whether secured from the target district or the homeschool association, the researcher sent by regular mail an introductory survey. This provided some demographic information, and asked questions about the process of transitioning, and provided a written agreement to participate in the interview.

The third group, comprised of school leaders, received an email from the target school district informing them of the study and introducing the researcher. A group of 30 school leaders, consisting of 18 principals and 12 guidance counselors were selected at random by the researcher: four guidance counselors at each level, and six principals at each level (elementary, middle and high school). An email, explaining the nature of this research, was sent by the researcher to each individual in this group asking for their participation. Five guidance counselors responded, and one from each level, making three total, were randomly chosen for interviews. Although both male and female guidance counselors were included in the original solicitation, proportionate to the entire group of guidance counselors within the target district, all five respondents were female. Likewise, of the principals selected to receive the invitation to participate, all who responded were male. Eleven principals from all three levels responded, and two from each level were randomly chosen for the interviews. Using an equal number of school leaders from each level provided a balanced view of the homeschool population and assisted in the concept of saturation needed to provide an accurate picture of the research study.

Originally, the researcher intended to only include principals due to the concept of site based management that the targeted school district used. However, information gained prior to implementing this phase of the study suggested that principals and guidance counselors were the individuals on school leadership teams who played a major role in the transition process, though the relative importance of each varied by school. In some cases, students who transitioned back to a public school may not necessarily have interacted with the school principal. Middle and High Schools normally have more

people in the Guidance department, due to the nature of individual and program schedules, and a transitioning student and parents may deal directly with them and not with the building principal. Hence, both principals and counselors were included.

### **Instruments**

Three sets of interview questions were the primary means used to gather the data. An introductory survey was also used with the second group of parents that were interviewed.

**Interview questions for group one.** The purpose of this set of interview questions was to provide data from which the introductory survey and other interview questions were developed. These questions are found in Appendix A. The questions were focused on exploring families' experiences with the transition process and were generally arranged in a chronological order, from the time when a family determined that they would homeschool, through the homeschooling experience and decision to return to a public school, ending with observations after the transition back to a public school had taken place. An earlier pilot study conducted by the researcher demonstrated that arranging the questions in this manner helped those who were interviewed to describe the journey to homeschool and back much more easily.

The first four questions investigated the family's decision to homeschool, including the motivations, timing and attitudes toward this new experience. Questions were included that addressed homeschooling from the parents' and student's perspective, the duration of the homeschooling experience, as well as the impact of this decision upon the family.

Questions five and six inquired about the beginning of the process to leave homeschooling and transition back to a public school. One question looked at the chronology of when the family began to consider a transition, and a follow-up question asked about the specific event, if there was one, that first caused the family to consider this transition.

Following this, questions were then asked that considered the primary reasons for transitioning their child back to a public school and the impact that the transition back to public school had on the family. Parents were also questioned about any type of counsel that they may have sought while going through this decision making process

The next questions explored the steps that parents took to transition their children back to a public school. Questions explored the different school leaders that the family interacted with and how these interactions were perceived, as well as any programs that were either offered to the student or required of the student during transition.

Several questions examined the family's perceptions of the first day back in a public school. One question approached these perceptions from the perspective of the student and the other from the perspective of the parents. Two additional questions examined the adjustment of the student in the public school as well as any special programs that the student participated in to help him/her adjust.

An opportunity was provided for the family to add anything they felt was either missed by the interview or that they believed would be helpful to the research. It should be noted that during interviews of this type, it is human nature to desire to be perceived in the best possible light. Therefore, it is possible that some bias may occur. The

introductory survey was developed with the knowledge that some bias may be displayed in some of the answers.

**The introductory survey.** Originally, the survey was intended to provide a variety of information from a large group of families which would augment the interviews and allow triangulation and to a lesser extent, extend the ability to generalize results of the study. However, due to the very low response rate from the school district email, and taking into consideration the time constraints of this study, the survey was used to gather some demographic data as well as information about the transition process. This section details the procedures used to design the informational survey. The survey served the purpose of gathering certain demographic data and gave both the families and researcher an introduction to each other, while informing the families about the intent and content of the interviews and research study. The survey is found in Appendix B.

A cross-sectional survey was designed by the researcher based on information obtained from the four initial interviews conducted in April and May of 2014. Information in the literature that dealt with the issues of transitioning and student needs also informed the development of the survey.

The first section of the introductory survey explained the purpose of the study, confidentiality and participation issues, as well as an introduction to the researcher, a statement about consent, and an estimation of the amount of time it would take to complete the survey. The first eight questions concerned basic demographic data including gender, age of transition, number of children homeschooled and who was the primary instructor. Following these questions were 15 questions on a five-point Likert



scale that allowed the parents to express the extent of agreement or disagreement on a variety of reasons why the family may have considered returning their child to a public school. This is followed by 14 questions, again on a five point Likert scale, on the level of agreement or disagreement of statements that dealt with the process of transitioning their child to the public school. This is followed by eight statements that examined the family's experience since they enrolled their child in the public school. These are also on a five-point Likert scale expressing degrees of agreement or disagreement. A careful comparison of these questions to the second set of interview questions showed that the eight questions in the survey reflect the information contained in the survey questions.

The survey allowed the researcher to get a picture of the family before the actual interview and informed the parents as to the content of the interview questions. All 14 families expressed to some degree that completing this survey helped them understand the purpose of the interview and eased some of the anxiety they initially had in volunteering for this study. The last section of the survey allowed families to indicate their agreement to a follow-up interview. The surveys were mailed to each family after they had contacted the researcher by email, and each survey contained a stamped, returned addressed envelope, for the convenience of returning the survey to the researcher.

**Pilot testing the survey.** There are several reasons to pilot test a survey but two in particular stand out (Creswell, 2005). The first is to ensure that it measures what is intended in a clear and concise way, and the second is to check for difficulties in the delivery of the survey to those it was intended. Creswell (2005) also stated that it is

typical for a researcher to go to a panel of judges or experts on the topic being studied in order to determine whether the survey is valid. For this survey, three individuals considered to be experts on this topic were chosen. The first was the university professor who assisted on the interview questions. The second was the individual in the target district who approved all research within the district. The third was the president of the homeschool association from which participants were solicited.

Creswell (2005) stated that the pilot testing ensures that the individual in the sample will be able to complete the survey and understand the questions. The three experts also helped ensure the validity of the survey. All three pilot test subjects were informed of the purpose of the study and were given all three of the research questions. This was done so that they could frame their evaluation of the survey in the context of the research questions. From their feedback, minor changes were made in the survey in order to help clarify the substance and intent of the questions.

**Interview questions for group two.** Group two comprised the 14 families from which data was obtained to answer the first two research questions. The interview questions for this group are found in Appendix C.

The first question was very straight-forward in asking the “why” of the decision to place their homeschooled child in a public school. This was followed by two questions that dealt with the process of the transition and the individuals that the family interacted with during the transition process. Questions four and five dealt with the impact of the transition upon the family and how the child was doing in the public school. Questions six and seven examined any special programs that were either offered or required of their

child as a result of the transition, and if, in the parent's opinion, the needs of their child were being met in the public school. The last question was a very open catch-all type of question asking if there was any aspect of the transition that was either missed in the questions themselves, or if there was any additional information that the parent would like to share that they felt would be helpful in the researcher understanding their child's particular transition.

**Interview questions for group three.** Group three were school leaders which included both guidance counselors and building principals. The interview questions for this group are found in Appendix D. As with all of the interview questions, these were intentionally designed to be open-ended so that those being interviewed could allow the researcher to investigate the transition process in the greatest depth, and allow for a variety of follow-up questions. There were a total of seven questions for this group, and answers to each question usually led to a follow-up question or questions by the researcher.

The first question asked what the school leaders knows about homeschoolers who transition into their school. Questions two and three investigated the procedures involved in such a transition and the specific role the individual being interviewed played in the transition process. Question four examined, from the school leader's perspective, how well this population was doing in their school. Question five inquired about any special program that was either offered or required of the homeschool student in order to transition into the public school. Question six asked what the school leader felt that they needed to know about this population in order to ensure the success of the homeschooler

in the public school. The last question was, like the last question in group two, a catch-all question that allowed the school leader to share any additional information that they felt had not been covered or that would be helpful to the study. If it had not been answered already, at this point a follow-up question inquired about any specific professional development or training about homeschoolers that was either offered or completed by the school leader.

**Pilot testing the interview questions.** The purpose of pilot testing is to ensure that the questions used in the interviews actually answer the research questions (Glesne, 2006). The subjects used in the pilot studies were asked to reflect critically on the usability of the questions, as well as the grammar, clarity, fit, and value of the questions to the participants. The questions for the first interviews were developed with the assistance of a university professor in a Graduate School of Education. This individual has done numerous research studies and is very familiar with developing interview questions. The set of questions for the second set of interview questions took a different tack, as the researcher wanted reactions and feedback from subjects similar to those who would be interviewed using these questions. In addition to receiving feedback from the same individual who assisted in the first set of interview questions, the second set were tested on the four families who were interviewed with the first set of interview questions. Considering the feedback from both sources, the questions were edited to their final form.

Pilot testing the interview questions for the school leaders was a little more challenging. Because the researcher did not want to use the same pool of school leaders of the target district to both interview and pilot test, three building principals from nearby

school districts were contacted and asked to review and provide feedback on these questions, with an emphasis on usability, grammar, clarity, fit, and value. In addition, the same individual who assisted with the development and review of the first two sets of questions also provided feedback. The individual responsible for approving any research involving the target district was asked to review the questions and provide feedback. This helped in demonstrating the value of this research to the district where the research took place. In all three sets of questions, minor changes were made to improve on the clarity and usefulness of the questions.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

While both qualitative and quantitative studies have their strengths and limitations (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), a qualitative approach allowed the researcher to investigate more deeply into the “why” of the research questions, uncovering data that a purely quantitative approach would not accomplish. The time limitation of the study did limit the number of families that could be interviewed, and that could impact the generalizability of the results. Having a robust sample of respondents from the survey would have provided an opportunity for triangulation of the results, but nevertheless, conducting in-depth interviews with a limited number of subjects provided a picture of what happened and why it happened with this group.

This qualitative approach generally followed what Creswell describes as an exploratory sequential design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The initial qualitative phase of four interviews informed the development of the introductory survey as well as the questions for the second and third interviews. To a lesser extent, the second

qualitative phase informed some follow-up questions that were used with the set of questions that were developed for the school leader interviews. The families from both the first and second interview groups as well as the group of school leaders that were interviewed came from a large suburban, mid-Atlantic school district. Data was collected and analyzed in order to shed light on the generalizability of the initial qualitative findings. Trends were developed and common themes discovered that were examined in greater depth in the subsequent interviews. Trends were verified in the subsequent interviews because the qualitative nature of the study allowed the researcher to do a deeper examination of the initial trends, which led to the discovery of some of the motivations and reasons why particular trends existed.

The three strands (initial interviews, subsequent family interviews, and school leaders' interviews) used in this approach provided a fuller, more robust picture of what happened in the transition process and following. This enabled a better understanding of the first research question concerning the reasons why parents return their children to a public school after a period of homeschooling. In turn, the data answered the second and third research questions and provided insight for the school leader as s/he faces unique challenges with this particular population and can help foster discussions and investigation into developing programs to ensure the success of this population. Greene (2007), likens this to multiple ways of seeing and hearing, that is, evaluating the same phenomenon from different perspectives, that is utilized in everyday life. It allowed, to a degree, the answering of the three research questions in a manner that is both familiar and comfortable to the practitioner.

A qualitative research study is not dependent on the size of the sample interviewed, but whether the researcher has reached theoretical saturation (Kruegar & Casey, 2000). The goal of choosing participants, including parents and school leaders from all three instructional levels, was to adequately research situations that are unique to each level without the study becoming too cumbersome or narrowly focused.

All interviews were recorded to allow for accurate transcription and analysis of data. Participants were assured of confidentiality, and were furnished with a thorough description of the study's purpose, procedures, and benefits as a part of the informed consent process. Participants from all three groups were also instructed that they could end the interview at any point and excuse themselves from the study, but none did. The digital recording device was stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office until transcription was completed, and then they were erased and the digital recording device was re-formatted. Transcriptions and all analyses were stored on a password-protected thumb drive and a copy was kept in a locked, fire-proof cabinet in the researcher's office. Similarly, a legend that associated numbers with characteristics of subjects were kept in the locked file cabinet. Only the researcher had access to this cabinet.

**Data analysis.** There are different ways to analyze qualitative data. For this study the researcher chose to use thematic analysis (Glesne, 2006), in which the data was coded so that it could be grouped into data "clumps" for later analysis. These clumps generally followed the three research questions. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and participants were given a code number to ensure their confidentiality. The researcher then read each transcribed interview as a whole to determine if any common themes existed.

This was done in the order in which the interviews were conducted. Once this was completed, the researcher then began coding the segments of each interview. This allowed the researcher to continually analyze whether the placement of a particular segment was assigned properly and assisted in “filling out” the various themes that emerged from the interviews.

Coding of the data used the interview questions to develop themes. The researcher placed each interview question on a 3X5 notecard. Each interview was read and the answer that emerged was put on an additional 3X5 card and placed below the card with the question on it. Once all the interviews were read, the researcher then grouped similar answers together which formed themes. Themes that emerged were written on yellow sticky notes which were placed next to the appropriate 3X5 cards. This process produced a large data chart which allowed the researcher to see individual themes as well as an overall flow of the data. During this procedure, data that did not fit in at least one of the three research questions was noted but placed aside from the main data chart that emerged. Broad themes emerged as the data was coded. Seeking themes from multiple sources is one form of triangulation, and is a common data analysis method used by qualitative researchers to ensure trustworthiness of conclusions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Triangulation allowed the researcher to test for consistency across cases (Patton, 2002). In this study, triangulation was achieved by using data from the interviews across subjects and groups to check for consistency. The researcher was also able to expand clarity in detailing the themes that were developed. The three strands of data (initial interviews, homeschool family’s interviews, and school leaders interviews) were used



iteratively to inform the research questions and provided a fuller, more robust picture of what happened.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations to this research study. The first centers on the location and size of the sample. While it is necessary to limit the size of the study as a practical matter, the location of the sample is limited to a specific geographic region which may not be reflective of the entire homeschool or school leader population. The school system used for this study may be representative of many large, suburban districts in the United States, but there is no claim that the results are widely generalizable.

The time frame in which this study was conducted is also considered a limitation, in that the practicality of limiting the number of subjects interviewed was constrained by the time it took to adequately interview a subject and analyze the data. The number of subjects, somewhat influenced by the time frame of the study, was also a limitation. If time were not a limiting factor, the researcher feels, after going through the process of soliciting volunteers for the study, that it would be possible to secure enough subjects to include a quantitative aspect to the study. To do so may also require expanding the geographic area of the study to include several nearby districts and make this a regional study.

Time was also a limitation as it related to the subjects, especially the first family group. The first group of families was interviewed a little more than a year after they had transitioned their students. The second group was interviewed about a year after they

went through the transition process. This could be enough time for them to forget some details and possibly be a little unsure of others.

The target school district is also a limitation of this study. While it is a large, suburban mid-Atlantic school district, it is considered an affluent school district. Thus, it may not reflect the same responses that might be obtained from a less affluent district, or from a larger geographic region.

Researcher bias is also a limitation. This subject reminds me of a quote, the source of which has long been forgotten. It was that “quantitative researchers do their best to eliminate bias whereas qualitative researchers understand that bias will happen.” To that end, the researcher readily admits that he is a middle school teacher in the target district. However, data from any families that the researcher knows was not included in this study, nor was any data collected from his school. In addition, the sample included participants from all three educational levels of the target district: elementary, middle and high school. As mentioned previously, triangulation was used to support validation of the themes that emerge from the data.

I do not consider myself to be an advocate for or against homeschooling. My experience with homeschoolers goes back many years to when I was a private religious school principal. In that role, I found this particular group of families to be one of the most difficult groups to deal with and one of the most demanding. My experience in the public school setting has been different, leading me to believe that as a private religious school principal I was dealing with one small subset of the total homeschool population. The homeschool families that I have dealt with in the public school are a much more

diverse group in almost every aspect. My prior experience lead me to an interest in the research questions posed in this study, but not any particular perspectives on how they might be answered. If anything, I would consider myself to be an advocate for students. Therefore, by informing school leaders with a more complete knowledge of the thinking, motivations, and expectations of this group, the benefit will ultimately flow to the student.

While bias cannot be totally eliminated, the fact that the researcher recognizes that bias exists, can be a limiter of bias. The steps taken by the researcher in the development of the interview questions, and pilot testing the questions in the manner described also helped to limit the bias of the researcher. Several other individuals, from different perspectives, who evaluated the questions on the basis of the three research questions, could also have been a check on researcher bias.

All that being said, this study, despite its limitations, will add to the literature and lead to a better understanding of the motivations, challenges, and decision making process of this group, thereby enabling the school leader to craft better responses and programs for this group.

### **Summary**

This study examined the reasons why parents cease homeschooling their children and transition them to a public school, the unique challenges that this poses, and the programs that school leaders have in place to ensure the success of this population. The objective of this research is that school leaders could improve their effectiveness by looking at transitions and needs through a homeschool lens.

Using a qualitative approach, a sample population of homeschool parents who transitioned their students into a public school were interviewed. From this group additional questions were developed from the data which were used to interview a second, larger group of homeschool parents who transitioned their students into the public school during the 2014-2015 school year. This allowed the researcher to dig deeper into the reasoning and motivations of responses to the first research question, which is why parents return their children to a public school after a period of homeschooling. The interviews with these families also informed data for the third research question which concerns programs that school leaders have in place to assist the transitioning of these students. Family reactions to these transition programs or lack of programs was also discussed in the interviews. School leaders from the same district as the sample population were also interviewed with questions based on the results of interviews with the homeschool parents. These interviews enabled the researcher to answer the second research question which deals with the unique challenges that school leaders may have with this particular population.

Qualitative data was analyzed as required for an exploratory study with the goal of discovering what occurred and why. By using a qualitative approach, both a breadth and depth of this subject could be explored in an effective manner.

## Chapter Four

### Results

With the data collected from the interviews with families and school leaders, I was able to gather insights into answers for the three research questions: 1) Why do parents enroll their children in a public school after a period of homeschooling; 2) What unique challenges does this pose for the family and the school; and 3) What programs or practices exist in public school to ensure the success of this population? The purpose of this study was to examine school leadership through the lens of a specific population and the school leaders who deal with this population. The data presented in Chapter 4 is organized by the interview questions, and shows how and what themes emerged from the data. Synthesis and analysis of the data with the research questions and how the data answers the three research questions are presented in Chapter 5.

First, data from the eight questions posed to the families were grouped into six sections as follows:

- 1) Reasons for transitioning their student
- 2) The process of enrolling their student in the public school
- 3) The impact of transitioning on the family
- 4) The success of the student in the public school
- 5) Special programs available to assist transitioning

6) Meeting the needs of the student

Second, the data from the seven questions posed to the school leaders were grouped into five sections as follows:

- 1) Reasons for transitioning
- 2) The process of enrolling and the roles of school leaders
- 3) The success of the transitioned student
- 4) Special programs to assist transitioning
- 5) Necessary knowledge on the part of the school leader

In addition, I present a discussion of another category that emerged in the interviews with school leaders. Themes that emerged are stated and examples of each are given.

**Findings from Homeschool Families**

Data from interviews with homeschool families was used to answer research questions one and two: why parents chose to return their children to a public school and what unique challenges this raised for the families.

**Reasons for transitioning their student.** Five themes emerged from the questions concerning the reasons why parents chose to return their child to a public school. The themes are presented in order, from the greatest number of times each theme occurred to the least amount of times each theme occurred. The table below lists the reasons why parents return their child to a public school and the frequency for each reason.

Table 4

*Primary reasons and frequency for transitioning*

Reason given for transitioning student to a public school	Frequency
Student missed friends	3
Student needed to prepare for high school	3
Parents inability to teach own child successfully	3
Student wanted the experience of the public school	2
Non-academic reasons: sports and arts	2
Curiosity about the public school setting	2
Family economic situation changed	1

The first theme that emerged is that the children missed their friends. As an example, family 13 stated,

He really missed his friends. And we had a few home school groups that he took classes with, and he made some friends there, but he consistently found that there were not any families that were close enough to ours that he felt a kinship, a friendship.

The students were also missed by their friends so the pressure on the family came from two sources: their own children and the families of their children's friends. Family 1 said,

I would say that we considered it [putting her back in a public school] right from the beginning of homeschooling. Our attitude was one of always looking for the appropriate time to return her to public school. She had friends in the neighborhood who would be in her class and school who wanted her to return. Her friends wanted her back, and while she enjoyed homeschooling, she wanted to go back, and it did cause a strain.

Interestingly, in each of these instances, all three students had started in public school and left to be homeschooled. In each of these three cases the parents explained that the reason why they homeschooled was due to a lack of confidence on their part in the academics, all in elementary school, as well as a concern that the public school would not teach their child how to make appropriate life decisions. Again, family 1 shared,

We never wanted to take our daughter out of the public school. However, we did not feel that she would get the training she needed to successfully make good decisions and develop acceptable life skills when she was in a classroom with an adult who obviously could not make good decisions and who had very poor life skills.

Consideration of missing friends was not among the factors that the parents used when making the decision to homeschool, demonstrating in these three cases that the reason for returning to the public school was unrelated to the reason(s) why parents began homeschooling. Although the students were successful in homeschool, and in spite of this fact, or perhaps because of the fact that the student kept in contact with their friends from public school, over time the students expressed their desire to return to the public school and be with their friends.

The second theme to emerge was that the child was returned to a public school to prepare the student for a high school program. Three additional families transitioned their child to public school for this reason. All three of these transitions were in middle school so that the student would be comfortable with the traditional school environment before beginning a high school program. One family felt that it would be easier to successfully



gain admission to the regional specialty high school if their child was in a public middle school rather than making application from a homeschool setting. Family 3 stated,

My older son was homeschooled along with my daughter, but he was five years ahead of her. When he went to high school, he told her that if you are going to go to high school, you really need to go to school in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. You need to get used a system. That was his recommendation. (Our daughter) wanted to apply to (a specialty regional high school) and I felt she needed to be in the system to prepare her for it if she got accepted and not just jump in and run and wait around until you adjust. There are systematic things that she was just not used to.

It should be noted that a follow-up question in each of these cases revealed that the parents had always intended to return their child to the public school. Each family stated that homeschooling was part of a long term plan for the education of their child. Family 6 stated, “We thought about putting our son back in a public school right from the beginning. We really did not want to homeschool him for his entire education.” So in these cases, the reason for transitioning was somewhat related to the reasons for homeschooling.

The last group of three families transitioned their students back to a public school because of the parent’s inability to successfully teach their own child. Further explanation is needed here because this was not an issue of the parent’s inability to teach advanced subjects, as some critics of homeschooling allege, but rather of a lack of success in getting their own child to respond positively to their instruction in the homeschool environment. In all three cases the children attended a co-op for at least one class and the

parents compared how their child did with another teacher as compared to how they responded to their own parent. The parents could see a difference and despite family discussions of why this happened and what could be done to remedy it, nothing seemed to work. Family 5 shared,

He would not do his work for me. I know that sounds silly. He just wouldn't produce for me. He is smart as a whip but he would not do his assignments, or he would do them and lose them and I thought he just needed somebody else to report to. Although we did farm out a couple of classes. Those worked out very well, so I thought that full time might be the answer.

In two of these cases, parents expressed frustration in not being able to be as successful with their own child as they would have liked, despite any changes or new approaches that they took. For example, family 11 stated,

We had been homeschooling about two years after an initial year and a half in third grade. She was just, would not do school for me. She would not listen to me, she would not do the work for me. She was on medication but she just wouldn't do it for me. It was like, she just fought me so hard and I felt like she needed to be educated elsewhere.

Two of the three parents detailed how the poor behavior of the child who was transitioned negatively impacted the homeschool experience of siblings. Family 10 stated,

Also there is some social things at home, he is like, he was driving us all crazy with his attitude toward us, and his attitude toward his brothers. It was nice to

have him away from us and his brothers because he is really mean to his brothers. When he would do his school work, he would bother his brothers while they were doing their homework. His brothers are happy that he is gone.

The third case was a single child home, and the parents indicated that over time, the child's response to the parent as instructor became more negative.

Two families shared that the main reason for transitioning their children was to give them the "experience of the public school." These two students had been in a public school before being homeschooled and missed the variety of structured activities such as recess, physical education, lunch, and the social environment of the public school program. Family 4 said, "This child is very social...our extrovert of the family. He wanted to be in a school environment."

The fifth theme to emerge is non-academic. Two students were transitioned back to public school for non-academic programs: sports and the arts. While the student who wanted to be on a public school athletic team failed to make the team, the main reason given for the transition was for sports. Family 13 said,

Our son wanted to go to public school to be on the school basketball team. He thought because he was an all-star in the church basketball league that he would automatically be a star on the public school team. The church league had no teams above middle school. Needless to say, it did not work out as he had intended. He did not make the cut.

As for the student who wanted to experience the arts, the parents related that although they could easily find any type of art offering in a private setting, each fine arts

experience would be separate, and expensive, and not all offered in one place such as the public school. Family 2 said,

She wanted to participate in some of the fine arts. Not that we could not do fine arts in home school, but we could not do the variety in art that she can get in public school, nor can she do theatrical productions or choral productions like she can in a large public school.

Another theme to emerge was curiosity. On the surface this theme may seem the same as “experience the public school.” The difference is the depth of curiosity that this student had. This was another family whose child had never been in a public school (as contrasted with the two students who had been to school and desired to return to something known to them) and yet, after the child heard from friends in his neighborhood, church, and other activities what went on in a public school, he expressed his desire to experience education in a public school setting,

He had never been to school. He wanted to go. He asked to go. He wanted to try it out. I think he was just curious as to what it was like. He is not a very social person, so I was very surprised that he wanted to do that.

This family had intended from the beginning of their student’s homeschool experience to place their child in a public school at some point in time, which in this case was reached when the child expressed interest.

The last theme to emerge was economic. One family transitioned their child back to a public school because the economic situation of the family changed. The father, who was the main earner of the family, lost his job and was only able to secure another job

that paid considerably less, causing his wife to have to cease homeschooling and acquire part-time employment.

Homeschool parents transition their children for a variety of reasons, mostly intentional, and some unintentional or the result of a change in family circumstances. Interestingly, most families interviewed stated that it was their intention to return their child to the public school at some future point. The reasons why parents return their child to a public school appear to be as varied as the reasons for choosing to homeschool in the first place.

**The process of enrolling their child in the public school.** The process of enrolling a student into a public school, regardless of level, was considered very straightforward. Answers to the question regarding the actual enrollment process were usually very brief and to-the-point, almost matter-of-fact. It was only when follow-up questions were asked did individuals mention any difficulties.

For the most part, all 14 families had similar experiences in enrolling their children in the public school, regardless of the level of school the transition involved. Every family mentioned “paperwork” and “forms” but all equally expected that this would be involved. Family 8 described it this way: “It really is no big deal.” Words like “simple” and “easy” were used often.

Although all 14 families were directed to and spoke to guidance counselors who gave them schedules, information, and described the program that their child would go through, ten of the families stated that the first person they encountered in the enrollment process were secretaries in the school office. Family 9 gave a typical response, “At the

school, I met a secretary who got me in to see the guidance counselor.” In addition to meeting with a guidance counselor, three families met with the building principal, two of them elementary building principals and the other a middle school principal. These were short meetings where the family and students had a conversation with the building principal in which the principal answered questions and described the school and program to the family. Two other families mentioned that they met with assistant principals. One of these occasions was on a tour of the building and the other was when the assistant principal was passing through the office and was introduced.

A cursory observation of these data would imply that it is easier to meet elementary and in some cases middle school principals but very difficult to meet high school building principals. Of the 15 students represented in this study, only four were elementary students: two males and two females. Five were middle school: two males and three females, and six were high school students: five males and one female. So, in spite of the fact that less than one-third of the students represented in the study were elementary students, they represented most of the principal contacts. It may also relate to the fact that high schools tend to have more guidance counselors than elementary or middle schools. It also appears that guidance counselors, at least in this school district, are the school leaders who are responsible for the actual enrollment and placement of the student, and thus the reason why every family met with a guidance counselor.

A little more than half (eight) of the parents spoke of going online to the district or specific school’s website and downloading all of the forms needed to enroll, while six went to the office of the school where their child would attend to get the paperwork and

forms. Without exception, all families said that this was the first step that they took, and most described this as an uneventful process.

Five parents mentioned, as family 14 did, that the people who registered their child wanted to make sure that all of the “I’s were dotted and t’s were crossed,” though there was no uniform process related to review of school records from homeschooling. Some parents shared that while the school was very concerned about the accuracy of the school forms, they had less interest in the homeschool records that were kept by the parents. Family 13 related that they “were really not interested in what we had done in homeschooling.” Others described a very intense examination of the records kept by homeschool parents. Family 3 was impressed that after examining the homeschool records, the guidance counselor made comments such as, “Oh, I think she would be bored in that class and this class would be better for her.” This was mostly related to the middle and high school students who were transitioning and the reason for that could involve allocation of course credits. In some high school cases, parents were required to give a detailed account of certain courses, in order to place the student appropriately.

The two areas that caused this scrutiny involved certain math classes and foreign language. In three cases, students were asked to take either a released SOL exam or the end-of-course exam to determine if the student was proficient in the content area required to take an advanced math or foreign language. All three parents expressed annoyance at this, and all three spoke of how well their child did on those exams. Their impression of these requests was that either the school did not trust the parents to have accurate records or that they did not know if the coursework completed by the homeschooler had enough

rigor. These were not positive experiences for the families, and it impacted negatively on their impression of the school leaders making the demand. Interestingly, no elementary parents mentioned that the school personnel gave a critical examination of the homeschool student records.

Four families indicated that their child was asked to come to an evening orientation session which was attended by other families. This is mentioned here because the families had the impression that attendance at these orientation sessions was a required part of the enrollment process. It should also be mentioned that these meetings were not designed specifically for homeschool students, but they were for any student registering for the school.

Three families explained that their child was already enrolled part-time in the public school, taking a course or two. Virginia allows homeschool students to enroll in middle and high schools for a limited number of classes. As it relates to the enrollment process, these parents felt that having their student already enrolled part-time made the enrollment process much easier. Family 5 said, “Yes, actually it started out as I put him in two classes at our base middle school. I think they already had the transcript from my application.”

Although most families spoke of the enrollment process as simple or easy to complete, there were four families who related difficulties other than the requirement to take an SOL or end-of-year exam. The first involved difficulty in getting the student the courses that the parents felt were appropriate. In this case the family was told that the student would have to take all of the unit exams from the previous course in order to



place the student in the class the family wanted. The parents requested a week to review content and then took the student to the school where he was given eight unit exams, one after another, in the same day. The parents waited for a response from the school concerning the tests and the placement. Finally at the end of the summer, the parents went into the school and were told by a guidance counselor that the reason why they had not notified the parents was because the school had “misplaced” all of the unit exams. The counselor then informed them that the student would be placed in the class that the parents wanted.

A second parent was told that the building principal was the one who had to make the decision whether their daughter would take Algebra 1 or Algebra 2. Family 2 said, We never met with the principal, but were told that she had to make the decision on whether my daughter could start with Algebra 2 or repeat Algebra 1. I asked to meet with her to discuss this, but was never allowed to. I was told that ‘it was not necessary to meet with the principal’ (heavy sarcasm).

After waiting several weeks for an answer, and after making several phone calls to inquire of the decision, they were notified of the placement just days before school began.

The last negative experience involved a 10<sup>th</sup> grade student, and the difficulty that the guidance office was having in placing the student in appropriate classes. After several meetings with guidance counselors and in-depth discussions about the work done while homeschooling, the exasperated guidance counselor asked the parents why they had waited until 10<sup>th</sup> grade to enroll their child and why had they not done so at the beginning of 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

All of these cases left a negative impression on the families and in one case resulted in the student being withdrawn and homeschooled again. In three of the cases the researcher was unable to determine if the building principal was aware of what had happened or what was said. However, even though this information is coming from just the parent's perspective, all of the situations appear to have been correctable or preventable.

Although the enrollment process was easy and simple for the most part, there were issues which arose that colored the transition process. The application portion appeared to be the smallest part of the entire process. Permanent records, requested courses, lack of timely answers to inquiries, and confusion over transportation, led some families to have a less than positive transition experience.

**The impact of transitioning on the family.** Of all the themes that emerged from an examination of the data, these were perhaps the boldest in the sense that parents displayed the most emotion when answering. Parents were very quick to point out the impact that transitioning to a public school had on their family. Three themes stand out. The biggest area of impact was the school calendar and school day. Seven families responded negatively to the impact of the school calendar and daily schedule. Family 13 stated that the mother felt "like a prisoner to the school schedule and our family is held hostage to the school calendar." Family 10 spoke of how the school calendar and school day was a "cramp on our freedom." Another family pointed out that there was now no longer any flexibility with family activities and trips and that special family events and get-togethers were either missed or had to be planned around the school calendar. Family

7 complained that they are “bound by the public school schedule,” and family 6 “had to plan everything we did around his (public school) education.” Perhaps the most vivid descriptors were used in this area, and many examples of the freedom of scheduling, both daily and yearly, were available when homeschooling and now were lost since the student transitioned to the public school.

Parents were also very specific when it came to describing the nature of this impact. As the father of family 13 stated,

Now we are tied to a school calendar and schedule. Our family wakes up at a different time, is required to take trips and visits at times that coordinate with the school calendar, and my wife must make sure that she is home when he leaves and when he comes home.

Another family described that as their homeschool education was very hands on, with camping trips conducted to coordinate with hands on learning, now their child’s education was less hands on, with considerably fewer field trips and a greater emphasis on worksheets and busy work. One family mentioned how something as typical as making a dentist appointment was now dictated by the public school schedule. Perhaps the most complete statement was echoed by family 2:

Where we had freedom when we homeschooled, we now are slaves to the public school calendar and public school bell schedule. No more quick field trips when we want to see something relevant to what we were studying, or taking a vacation when we wanted to do something that related to a concept or course. The public school dictates our day and our year.

Almost all of the families were also quick to point out that they understood the reason why the daily schedule and yearly calendar had to be regimented, but they genuinely resented the confinement to those parameters.

The second theme that emerged in this area was the void that attendance at a public school created within the family. Four families made specific statements on what emerged as the theme of “void.” Family 2 stated that

We feel a presence of a void in our family. We are not as close as we were because it is not the same talking about what you studied in school as opposed to what we studied together. I feel a void, my husband feels a void, and my daughter says she even feels a void. I feel that we have given up something very precious and very unique to our family.

Another family put it this way, “It was very hard for me to say, ok, for the sake of your social life, it is ok for you to have an inferior education.” Parents contrasted how that in homeschooling, the child would work on school work in the presence of the parent, at all times of the day, but now that the child is in the public school, the parents are downstairs and the student is upstairs in their room doing homework. Family 9 said that

It kind of left a hole in my life...I’m not sure if I am saying it right but I miss the daily time that I had with our daughter, and it seems now like she is in her own little world and we are in ours.

Family 2 also recognized this absence but seemed resigned to it: “As I said, there is a void that is very real in our family. I imagine it will fade as we all get used to public school.” The impact of this void cannot be understated. It was at this point in the

interview that some parents broke down into tears or struggled to speak. Parents would speak of how close the family while homeschooling, and now the daily, lengthy interaction between parent and child is gone. As much as several expressed in glowing terms the process of homeschooling with their child, the parent expressed as deep or intense the disappointment in the cessation of homeschooling. A deeper examination of these intense feelings about the absence of homeschooling may provide some insights into the opinions of homeschool parents toward the public school.

On the other hand, some families expressed almost a relief that their child was now in a public school, which is the last theme in this section. The mother of family 2 said that “it removed a burden from me since I did most of the instruction.” Family 5 said “I think it worked out really well. He got out early enough that we still had family time.” The father of family 1 stated, “It gave both of us a sense of relief. My wife did most of the teaching and it really put a lot of extra work on her as well as a lot of stress.” And while not exactly a ringing endorsement, family 11 described it as “you are just trading one set of problems for another set.”

A third situation involved an elementary student who the parents related was being bullied in the neighborhood by students at the elementary school where their daughter would attend. They scheduled a meeting with the building principal, and explained the situation, and were assured by the building principal that the school district had a no-bullying policy and that bullying was not tolerated at their school. The parent then proceeded to describe, quite emotionally, how her daughter was bullied by these same students for the entire year. According to the parents, both teachers and

administrators refused to take actions to resolve the situation, claiming that it was difficult to catch students in the act of bullying and informing the parents that this was a normal part of growing up, far different than the no-bullying policy they had been informed of at the beginning of the school year. This family removed their daughter from the public school before the school year ended and was being homeschooled again.

The data revealed that the biggest challenge for families that the transition from homeschooling to a public school appear to involve the school day and the school calendar. The issue of bullying, which is a major concern in public schools, can affect this population as well. Another, very difficult challenge, involves the void left by the family as the daily routine between parent and child changes dramatically. Although most children successfully transition, many parents are left with a feeling of emptiness when homeschooling ceases.

**The success of the student in the public school.** There were a variety of positive, and some negative responses in relation to this query. Three themes emerged here, with the first revolving around the notion that the children were “doing fine.” In fact, eleven families spoke in positive terms when asked about the success of their child in the public school. Phrases like “she is doing very well,” “fantastic,” “fine with it,” and “alright,” were used, complemented by “she is in a lot of honors classes.” Another family stated that their child was meeting the expectations that they had for him in the public school: “He is doing ok. He is just an average kid, so we aren’t expecting honor roll or straight A’s.” Family 8 viewed the question through their daughter’s eyes in saying that

“she loves it!” Family 10 stated that their child “is doing well, way beyond my expectations.” And family 14 related that “he did great. He got all A’s.”

But not all of the families spoke in glowing terms. Five families either conditioned their positive statements or made negative comments, suggesting that their assessment is “qualified.” Family 9 described her daughter’s experience as “a bit overwhelming at first, and there were days when she would come home and tell me that she wished she was still being homeschooled.” This family spoke of the challenge their child had in adjusting to different teachers and students and the level of noise that was present in her classroom. They also mentioned that the “discussions around the dinner table are not the same, not as warm.” Family 2 said that their child did

...not feel that her classes have the same rigor that her homeschool classes did, even those that were taught in the co-op. She does feel that she is doing more busy work in public school and it is impossible for her to skip over a concept that she has already mastered. So, she waits.

Family 4 felt that their son was doing fine, even very well, but the father does

...not like the exposure. It is kind of a battle...where your peer group is more important than your family. It is just interesting to hear him say things like pot should be legal, should be allowed. That has been our struggle.

One family removed their daughter from the public school due to the issue of bullying. “She never went back. She transitioned back to homeschooling.” The parent placed the blame on both teachers and the principal. The principal was in her first year and made it known to the parent that she was not going to offend the teachers during her first year.

The parent showed me a copy of an email from the teacher where the teacher stated that “I don’t have time for you. I don’t have time to deal with you. I am not going to answer any more emails.” This family felt that they had done all that they could do to resolve this issue and that keeping their daughter in the public school would be detrimental. On a personal note, this was one of three interviews, where the parent broke down and cried while relating her story, but insisted that she wanted someone to hear what had happened.

Although many parents spoke positively, and some ecstatically, about the success of their student in the public school, this was not a consistent experience with homeschool parents. The family who removed their child from the public school to return to homeschooling was perhaps the most extreme example of the experiences of the second group of parents who were interviewed. Some of the families were less than enthusiastic about their child’s success in the public school, and there was a sense that their lack of enthusiasm was a reflection of their expectations. These were the families who transitioned their children for sports and the difficulty of teaching their own child. They had initial expectations that involvement in an athletic program or interacting with other instructors would have caused a change in their child’s behavior.

**Special programs available to assist transitioning.** When the questions concerning special programs were developed, it was with the idea of programs that were unique to this population that assisted in the transition process. Both families and school leaders acknowledged that there were no special programs unique to this population. Both groups quickly pointed out other programs and practices that involve any new student to the public school.



The theme that emerged here requires two words: “None, but...” No homeschool family indicated that there were any programs that were *required* of them because they had homeschooled and 13 of the 14 families revealed that there were no special programs *offered* to them, either to assist in the transition process, or to assist with the academic success of their student. However, five families mentioned an orientation, which was held in the evening. Of these, three families said that they were told of an orientation, but that it was attended by all new students to the school and was not designed to specifically assist homeschooled students transitioning to the public school. Two stated that they inquired about an orientation night and were told that there was none. In addition, three families mentioned a “Back to School Night” and that it was attended, by grade level, by all students. Since these programs were offered to all students, whether they had been homeschooled, or transitioned from a private school or another school district, or even to students who were transitioning to a new level from a district school, the parents unanimously felt that these were not “special” programs.

In the experience of 14 families, attending different schools at different levels in the same district, there is an absence of any special programs for this population that would assist in their successful transition. But, it is clear that homeschoolers who transition to a public school have access to existing programs as does any other new student.

**Meeting the needs of the student.** This area encompasses the academic, social, physical, and ethical aspects of the student. Many of the responses focused on the academic part of the student, reflected by grades, homework, and classroom interaction.

Gifted programs, Individualized Educational Programs, and other academic programs were all mentioned in either meeting or not meeting the needs of the student. Parents discussed the socialization of the public school, often coupled with ethical or moral concerns. The families always spoke in terms of the “total child” in explaining whether the needs of the student were being met.

Several themes emerged here. While there were many positive comments, parents were quick to add a conditional to their positive statement, i.e., eleven families answered this question both positively and negatively. As an example, family 1 stated, “Academic? Yes, to a degree. She is not getting the depth of instruction that she had at home, but she is getting the basics.” Family 5 made a similar affirmative statement but also followed by a conditional: “Academically I think he could have been pushed a little further. It was ok that some of the classes were maybe a little easier for him.” Many of the families seemed to choose a middle of the road assessment as to whether the public school was meeting the needs of their child. Both the father and mother of family 7 demonstrate this. The father gave an answer of, “Okay. His grades are okay, not outstanding, but okay.” The mother was as guarded, “I would like to see his grades a little higher, but he is not failing.” The father continued, “So I guess you could say his needs are being met. We just both have the feeling that something is missing and we can’t put our finger on it.” Again, while this is somewhat positive, it is hardly a ringing endorsement. Family 13 described it this way:

Yes and no. He is getting an academic program, and socially he is doing fine because he knows many of the kids in his classes. My wife feels like a part of her is missing. And to be honest, I feel like I have been disconnected from my son. Once more, a positive but coupled with negatives. It is interesting to note that in several of the responses, the parents put themselves into the picture when asked about whether the public school was meeting the needs of the *student*. One respondent said, “I suppose. I just don’t think it is the total package though.” When pressed to define the total package, her answer was,

Not sure. It just seems as if there is something missing. It seems, the school seems, too mechanical. No flexibility. Everyone just has to fit the same mold. I am not sure what exactly I mean, but it sure feels to me that it is not a natural, or a warm situation.

Of all the questions asked during this set of interviews, it appeared to me that this one was the most difficult for parents to answer. The endorsements seemed lukewarm, at best. Family 8 feels that their son’s needs are being met, but not their daughter’s:

My daughter, and this is a sore point with me. If you have a child with a learning problem, you get an IEP and the school, it seems to me, bends over backwards to have a child with a learning disability to succeed. But if you have an average child, you cannot have anything to help them. Like my daughter, who I felt was falling through the cracks.

These responses seem to be related to the responses that parents gave when asked about the impact this transition has had on the family. Family 4 commented, “yeah, essentially,

except for the concerns that I have. Except for the concerns that I have.” The father from family 10 stated,

Now I feel very closed out. He has lost touch with his homeschool friends because everyone is so scattered. I am not sure if it is meeting his social needs. He doesn't seem unhappy, but he is a very inward person. He is not a social person. He is happy doing his own thing most of the time. If he was struggling he might not share it with me. Academically, I think it is ok. I don't think it is great.

Four families were very negative in their response to this question. Family 14 gave a very definitive “no,” and went on to clarify:

Sometimes they had spelling words and sometimes they did not. There were weeks when they would do spelling and weeks when they would not. I did not see books when I signed him up. I did see one math book, it was the new math book. But no history book. Grammar, no grammar book. I asked to see a Science text, and there was none, a history text, and there was none.

She followed these comments by sharing a comment from an area superintendent:

I did see an area superintendent and asked him why there were no textbooks in the classroom. And his face turned red and he very sternly said, ‘there are textbooks in (our) schools, what school does your son attend?’ And I was so scared, I said, ‘never mind’ and I left. I should have pursued it further but I did not.

Five families expressed disappointment that there were not any special programs offered to them, but attributed that to the average nature of their student. Family 7 put it this way,

While we are sort of satisfied with his education at this point, it is and was very obvious that they have programs for students with IEP's and they asked about athletics. There is a program for gifted students. But for most students, those who are not on either end of the spectrum, it just appears that there is nothing. They (the students) walk through the door, go to regular class, and walk out. With homeschooling we could modify what we taught so that we could appeal to some of his interests, or strengthen some of his weaknesses. In the public school, there is a rigidity, that moves things at their pace, on their time. Our son is not special. He sort of just fills a seat.

IEP's, or Individualized Educational Plan was another theme. Family 11 already had an IEP for the child since she was identified as needing one while being homeschooled, and it simply continued when she transitioned to the public school. Family 1 asked for IEP consideration and had just completed the process at the time of the interview. Services provided under the IEP were to begin the week after the interview. The third family, family 4, had completed the process earlier in the school year and services were being provided at the time of the interview. Having an IEP, however, is not what the researcher would consider to be a special program that is either offered or required of homeschool students.

Three families mentioned the SIGNET, or gifted program available at all district schools. Some of these three, like family 3, made it a point to inquire about the gifted program at the time of enrollment, and the student was accepted into the program after being evaluated. Two families related that their child did not make it into the gifted

program. The researcher would not consider the gifted program to be a special program that is either offered or required of homeschoolers because of their unique status of being homeschoolers.

The parents interviewed in this group have serious questions about whether the public school is meeting the needs of their child. The responses show the conflicted feelings about this area, in that most of the positive responses are always qualified. Answers to this question very often spoke not only to the needs of the child but also to the feelings of the parents and family. On a personal note, the themes were perhaps the most puzzling for the researcher and ones that certainly merit further, deeper investigation.

Parents transition their children to a public school for a variety of reasons. These transitions provide some unique challenges for the homeschool family. Though most students appear to successfully overcome most challenges, it is interesting to note that many families still struggle long after the student has transitioned. Most schools have programs and policies to assist all students who transition into the school, but there were no programs that were unique to the homeschool population.

### **Findings from School Leaders**

In this data discussion, there are two types of school leaders: three guidance counselors and six building principals. The school leaders are numbered 1 through 9, with school leaders 1 – 3 being the guidance counselors and school leaders 4 – 9 the building principals. The data from this section answers research questions two and three: what unique challenges does the transitioning of this population create for school leaders

and what, if any, programs or policies are in place to assist the successful transition of the homeschooler. Overall, the diversity of homeschoolers stood out as school leaders described their experiences with them,

Really, like all students, they are all different. When you first mentioned it to me of the process, they have all been different. I cannot say that we have had one specific experience. They have all been different and I cannot say that there has been a pattern.

In spite of the diversity, certain themes emerged to give a clearer picture of how school leaders perceive and work with this population.

**School leader perceptions of why homeschoolers transition to public school.**

There were several themes to emerge from this section. Five of the nine school leaders gave more than one reason for a homeschooler to transition and the other four listed only one reason. Somewhat startling was that three of the four were adamant that homeschoolers only transition for just the reason that the school leader shared.

The first theme to emerge was timing. All nine school leaders gave a detailed description of the timing of the transition. While students who homeschool may transition during any grade, the highest number of transitions take place in grades 5, 8, and 9, likely to prepare the student for the school experience at the next level. Fifth graders transition in order to have a year to acclimate themselves to the public school setting to prepare for middle school. Middle school leaders use the same reasoning when they state that most of their transitions from homeschooling take place in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Students want a year in a public school setting before they transition to high school so that they will be prepared,

and things like following a bell schedule, changing classes, being exposed to several teachers during a school day, lunch, lockers, and other characteristics of the public school are already familiar by the time they get to high school. School leader 4 stated, “parents somehow feel that they have somehow gotten past the developmental years and need to now get them set and ready for the real world, and the middle school is the real world while elementary school is not.” High school leaders say that most homeschool transitions take place in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. This is because 9<sup>th</sup> grade is the beginning of the high school experience and a homeschool student can start fresh at a convenient and natural beginning place. Of course, schools experience transition in other grades as well, though these appear to be modal.

Another theme related to transition had to do with students’ social experiences. As school leader 5 purported, “I think the biggest thing you see is they tend to have some social awkwardness. I think it is the biggest hallmark we see.” Of note, the guidance counselor at this same school was interviewed, and she did not mention any social awkwardness on the part of any homeschooler. In addition, this same principal made the following statement when discussing programs and policies, “So, no, we do not do anything special for just homeschoolers. Unless my guidance counselor says we do, and then we do (laughter).”

The third theme is sports. Three school leaders mentioned sports, and two of the school leaders quickly qualified this reason with an appraisal of the talent of the transitioning homeschooler. School leader 7 said, “Some of them come for sports, but I cannot think of any who have done that who have been really talented.” Interestingly, this



is one of the two reasons that were listed by two school leaders as *the* reason why homeschoolers transition to a public school.

The next theme was economic. School leader 6 suggested that the reason why homeschoolers transition to public school could be economic. This school leader spoke in general terms of a situation where the father in the family lost his job and his wife had to get work in order to help support the family.

Another theme was “no reason.” Although a variety of reasons were given by school leaders for homeschoolers transitioning, it is noteworthy that all of the responses came from six of the nine school leaders -- three of the school leaders either gave no reason, deflected to a different topic, or speculated on the reasons. School leader 1 shared the following, “I can think of one we have this year who is struggling because I think they have some gaps. I don’t know it is was someone who was lenient at home or whether the parent was qualified to do that....I don’t know.” School leader 2 did not mention a reason for the transition but gave a description of what grade they transition, their academic abilities, and the difficulty sometimes in matching coursework to the homeschool curriculum. School leader 3 and 9 gave no reason for students who transition. However, school leader 3 felt it was important to know the reason why the parents had for homeschooling, and school leader 9 mentioned that it was important for someone in the leadership team to have a conversation with the parents.

For those school leaders who speculated why homeschoolers transition to a public school, it usually involved stereotypes. Two of the stereotypes that were mentioned by school leaders were lack of socialization and the inability of parents to teach the higher

level subjects. School leader 1 questioned “whether the parent was qualified to do that,” yet it did not prevent the student from being placed in the appropriate grade level class. School leader 5 spoke of “social awkwardness” being “the biggest hallmark we see.” Yet, when pressed, he could not give a specific example of social awkwardness on the part of any homeschooler in his school, and related that he had heard this same characterization from other school leaders. And in a follow-up clarifying question, this school leader was asked if the “social awkwardness” demonstrated by the student was an awkwardness with other students or with adults. He stated that he based his comment on the observation that the homeschool student was so quiet. On the other hand, school leader 6, who had informed the researcher that he had done some reading about the phenomena of homeschooling, said that

There were not any of the stereo-typical problems that people who homeschool do not provide socialization or access to instruction in higher level courses. Parents who homeschool work together and they are able to construct a quality program for their students, than say, or even a higher quality that they can get in the public school in terms of socialization.”

Various descriptions were given of the academic abilities of homeschool students who transition to the public school. School leader 1 mentioned only two specific homeschoolers and that they were “struggling.” School leader 2 described them as “average to above average.” School leader 4 said that “sometimes these students come far more advanced than the other students.” School leader 5 related that “they are usually advanced academically.” School leader 7 spoke to both sides of the coin, “To be honest,

some are good and some are not so good.” So, while descriptions vary, more of the descriptions express an advanced or above average achievement.

When asked for an overview of homeschoolers who had transitioned to public school, school leaders expressed a wide variety of knowledge and opinion. Some aspects of the student were clearly known, such as the most common grades that homeschoolers transition, and to a lesser extent, that they generally are average to above average students. However, there are other areas where knowledge is lacking, such as the reasons why parents transition their students back to a public school. Some long held stereotypes are still existent among school leaders, and some school leaders gave opinions in place of facts when it came to some characteristics of homeschoolers who had transitioned to their school.

**Process of enrollment and the role of the school leader.** Just as families had a very clear understanding of the enrollment process, school leaders also knew exactly what the process was for enrollment. Answers given were quick, short and precise. I almost had the impression of being the administrator of an oral examination because the school leaders would revert to almost rote answers.

Four themes emerged related to the process of enrollment. On the whole, school leaders expressed that the enrollment process is easy. Several were quick to point out that homeschoolers who transition to public school enroll “just like any other student.” All nine school leaders indicated that for the most part it is the guidance counselor and secretary who deal with the nuts and bolts of registration, including the completion of forms, collection of records, and interacting with the family. School leader 9, a building

principal, stated that as his personal policy, he makes it a point to meet and have a conversation with every homeschool student who transitions to his school. “I meet with every family. They finish the registration process, they get sent back here to my office. And we just have a conversation.” This was the exception rather than the rule, however, although two other building principals shared that, at times, they will take homeschool families, like other families, on a tour of the school. In sum, then, homeschool students transitioning appear to be treated much like any other student registering, with no special accommodation or intake process.

Along the same lines, five of the six building principals described their role in the enrollment process as very limited, and readily admitted that the guidance counselor plays the larger role in the enrollment of new students. School leader 4 described:

Normally, I would say my role is usually pretty small but my guidance department, they are very good at making me aware when we have any situation that is out of the norm. I turn that (the registration process) over to guidance and let them handle it.

School leader 5 stated, “What I do, if any, is we will do school tours.” And school leader 7 affirmed that “I do not play a big part in this.”

Some leaders expressed that in the registration process, they play the role of referee. Where building principals do play a significant part is in making the final determination if there is a question concerning grade placement or course credit. Again, school leader 7: “If a parent is insistent on a student having a certain class, say Algebra 2,

and our guidance department or the department chairs cannot come to an agreement, then I have to get involved.” School leader 6 painted a little different picture:

My role was if they had additional questions and they didn’t feel anyone else could give them a satisfactory answer other than the principal then I would step in. It is not uncommon for parents of homeschool children to feel that way. They wanted to hear from the principal how the school is set up to support the student socially, academically, and intellectually.

Some school leaders mentioned that the first step in the enrollment process is to check with the district office to see if the family has filed the paperwork of their intent to homeschool. School leader 3 began her answer to the procedure question with “Number one, we contact the central office to find out to make sure that the student has the work that is required for them to be able to participate in homeschooling.” School leader 4 reflected similarly, “Very similar to what we do now with all of our students but first and foremost they go through student services to see that they have the approval to be homeschooled.” Although it seems most unusual to inquire about having permission to home school when a student is transitioning back to a public school, a follow-up question made it very clear that before a school can enroll a homeschooler, the prior notification to homeschool must be checked on. In an interesting contrast, most homeschool families spoke of a letter of notification of intent to homeschool, while two school leaders used the words “permission” and “approval,”

Regardless of the involvement of the building principal, guidance counselors have a very large role in the enrollment process. Confirming proof of residency, checking the

application forms for completion and accuracy, and examining school records usually mark the beginning of the process. Determining grade and course placement, creating the student's schedule, giving a tour of the facilities, and answering any questions that either parents or student have are also involved. School leader 1 described the guidance counselor's role as follows,

We check their comprehensive file, if they were taught by the parent or in a group (co-op). So once we research that, sometimes it is us the counselors who make the determination that they take certain classes, whether they are a little more advanced or whether they are average, or kind of struggling in some areas. And kind of formulating their schedule and placement. [In addition,] I do assessments, look over assessments, and records. When it is homeschool, it is different. And homeschool it is sometimes hard to get data, like if a certain individual is not qualified or if they have not provided any data.

School leader 2 described her role and responsibilities similarly, involving...

Looking at their history, looking at their schedule, looking at what courses they have taken, doing any extra testing, talking to them about what their interests are, and seeing how to best keep them on the same educational trajectory with trying to take something that can often be very personalized and put it into our framework.

In the high school, guidance counselors will often involve department chairs if there is a question about appropriate placement. "We also meet with the department chairs in

language arts and math just to make sure, in particular, just to make sure we are putting them in the correct course load that is going to match what they were doing.”

**Success of the student.** The interviews with school leaders revealed not only data about the transition process, but also how well the student was doing once enrolled in the public school. The enrollment process itself was much less important to the school leader than how the student was doing now that they were in the public school.

Five of the school leaders indicated that homeschoolers who transition to a public school usually do well but many of those comments were paired with conditions. Expressions such as “very well,” “okay,” “good,” and “quite well,” are a few of the descriptors school leaders used. As examples, school leader 7 stated that “We have had some exceptional homeschoolers who have come to us for the fine arts, like music.” School leader 8 added “I have also seen that in some areas, especially on what the nature of the program or subject is, they may have some insight and advanced knowledge, maybe some real world things, or science or social studies that we might not teach in our curriculum.” School leader 6 gave a good summary of the success of homeschoolers who transition to public school:

We found that the homeschool students really came to us with a high level of academic skill and prior knowledge, that they were socially well-adjusted, that the parents who brought them to us, in general, provide us with data through the homeschool network, or through neighbors, or others in the homeschool community who were equivalent in quality to those in the public school.

So, while there are those who do struggle with some aspects of the public school, the majority feeling of school leaders is that homeschoolers are quite successful in their schools, particularly academically.

An ancillary comment made by some school leaders is that homeschoolers who were in co-ops did a better job of transitioning to public school. School leader 4 stated, "You have these groups where somebody teaches English and somebody teaches Social Studies, and it is almost like a school, but it is a homeschool concept and the kids are very well prepared so they do have the ability to be in a school environment and to interact with others."

This seems logical, as some of the key transition differences experienced by some homeschool students, i.e., dealing with a number of teachers and students, do not appear to be issues for these students.

Four school leaders expressed a more mixed view of the success of homeschoolers who transition, noting a variety of reasons for this. School leader 7 reported, "Some transition okay, but others have a harder time of it. I think, to some degree, it depends on why they want to come to a public school." And school leader 9, an elementary leader revealed, "The younger ones don't tend to do so well at first. And those are the ones that you find that they don't want to be non-homeschooled. That the parents don't want them to be homeschooled. There is that struggle." School leader 1 said, "There are some social deficits sometimes with students who are homeschooled because they do not get the same peer interaction. Some do really well, but some do



poorly.” Similarly, school leader 2 attributed the lack of success to the attitude and experience of the student:

The ones that don’t do well are those that their parents want them here but they, the students, do not want to be here. They don’t want to be here. And the students who have the hardest time transitioning, even if they want to be here, are students who haven’t had to adhere to any kind of schedule before.

School leader 8 gave an overall generalization of the homeschoolers he observed in his school:

I have noticed that they start a little behind, again generalizing, in some academic areas, we might have a concern, mathematics, for example seems to be one that sticks out with the kids unless they are just a naturally strong math student. I don’t know if it is the level of math being taught.

While these examples were in the minority of observations given by school leaders, they hint at some issues schools might be wary about, for instance, whether both parents and children desire to transition back to the public school setting.

An area that stood out in the answers of school leaders concerned the behavior of the homeschool student who transitioned to public school. Across the board, when this was mentioned, it was always favorable. School leader 7 pointedly stated that,

One thing that does stand out is that usually these kids are not behavioral problems. I have found that parents who homeschool, or take the responsibility of homeschooling, even when they involve their students in co-op classes, and I am

speaking in general terms here, are usually much more involved in what their child is doing.

In sum, when answering the question about how homeschoolers do in their schools, all of the school leaders mentioned academics, with some school leaders speaking to the advanced academic knowledge or fine arts skills of the homeschoolers, while others spoke of gaps in their proficiency or academic program. Behavior of this population was universally addressed as an area of success while some highlighted social integration as an issue for some students. The overall view when examining the data in this area is that this population is mostly quite successful, and comport themselves to be well-rounded students, particularly when both the parents and their children seek to transition back to the public school.

**Special programs.** The next theme dealt with whether there are special school programs to assist students and their families with the transition back to the public school. For the purpose of this research, special programs, were considered those programs that were offered to or required specifically of homeschoolers to aid in their transition to public school or attempt to ensure their success once in the public school. It is significant that no program or policy unique to this population and their successful transition to public school exists in the target district. While this may be acceptable, it is also quite noteworthy. School leaders shared many different programs within their schools that were in place for all transitioning populations, and overall school leaders felt that these programs were sufficient for transitioning homeschoolers. To the degree that

there are special needs within this population, it may be the case that the district should examine this population more closely.

Interestingly, when asked, all nine school leaders immediately began to list all of the programs they have in place for new students. Terms or phrases such as “for all students,” “no more than the other new students,” “we don’t have anything just for homeschoolers,” “nothing specific,” or “not for this group in particular,” were used to point out that school leaders view this population as just one of a number of different populations who transition into their schools. Six school leaders spoke of programs or practices in their school that would include homeschoolers relating to the transition process or being a successful student in their school. No special programs designed for homeschoolers were mentioned, nor was there a sense that any were needed beyond programs existing for registration and enrollment of any child.

Five school leaders singled out “Open Houses,” where new students and their parents would come in for an evening session in order to tour the building, see an overview of the academic, sports, and fine arts programs. Two school leaders offered transitioning students the opportunity to attend their school for a day, in order to see what the schedule of the school day entailed, a sort of open house but one that permitted prospective students to get a feel for the rhythm of the school.

One school had a committee of school personnel who were specifically charged with considering the needs of students, and in particular, the new student. Another school scheduled social activities just for new students, such as a school dance, so that everyone who attended knew that all participants were new to the school and had at least that in

common with everyone else. And one school had a program that was geared to parents: “[we have] the outreach where we give the parents the option to come into the building, (and) see what it is like to be in a public school.” Perhaps the most unique response for transitioning students was shared by school leader 9:

Usually the first week and a half or so, students are given passes so that if they are feeling anxious or nervous, they can automatically, they get a color coded pass and they just hold it up and the teacher sends them to the guidance counselor to kind of talk through whatever it is.

As with the enrollment process, the school leaders who are responsible for operating these programs are guidance counselors.

School leaders mentioned including the process of checking in with students as they transition as a sort of “special program” to help students acclimate. School leader 1 did what she called “transition groups,” that consists of five to eight students who transitioned into her school. At times she will involve the school social worker in the group, but most of the time she does this by herself. The purpose of the group is to check and see if there are any areas the students are struggling with and address them in a way that could benefit other members of the group. She also does “15 minute checks” every other week with students who have been identified by her or a teacher as struggling with a particular area. This is a one-on-one session. School leader 2 spoke of similar checks that are done with new students: “If it is one we know is coming from a looser structure, we will probably check on them a little more.” Another school will team the transitioning student with a buddy that has the same schedule as the transitioning student. Depending

on the school, these programs are called “the buddy program,” “ambassadors,” or “mentors.” The purpose is to give the transitioning student someone that can show them where their classes are, become a familiar face to who they can go to with questions, and also ease them into the schedule and structure of the new school as a way to reduce anxiety that comes from being in a new environment.

Three school leaders mentioned that students new to their school may be picked on by other students if they are singled out or the subject of any special program or practice. School leader 7 gave one practical reason why they do not single out a particular group but do this with all new students: “I might have a problem with setting this one group apart, or any group for that matter. They or their parents might feel ‘picked on’ or singled out. I don’t think that would make for a good transition.” School leader 8 shared that with any type of “buddy” system, the transitioning student has the ability to choose not to participate or have a buddy go through the day with them.

Finally, when responding to the query of special programs, almost all school leaders mentioned either SIGNET, the gifted program, or an IEP. Neither of these “special programs” are designed for homeschool students, nor are they designed to assist in the transition process. It is worth noting that when asked what programs exist to assist students, school leaders think quite broadly, identify and might access any number of existing programs or practices. However, to the degree that former homeschool students have unique issues with transition, the absence of specific programs may be an issue.

To sum up then, although no school has a program specific to homeschoolers, aiding their transition and success as a student, every school leader has at least one

program that assists in these two areas. Though called by different names, the goals are the same: to help the new students adjust positively to a new environment or to provide a resource that the new student can access in the event of a problem. For the most part, these programs involve other students acting as a buddy for the new student, in many cases, having the same schedule as the new student. Other programs provide activities either for the student or the parent, to provide an opportunity to receive information and have questions answered. The building principal plays a limited role in these programs, and so the responsibility for the implementation and operation of these programs is typically given to the guidance counselor.

**Necessary knowledge on the part of school leaders.** School leaders indicated that there is certain knowledge that they require in order to make the transitioning of students easy and their enrollment in public school a success. This is especially true with homeschoolers. During the interviews, school leaders expressed a variety of information that they desired to know about this population.

When asked what the school leaders needed to know about this population to ensure their success, without exception, all nine school leaders wanted to know what the homeschooler knew, i.e., where they were in school, what learning experiences they have already had, and what social skills or disposition they possessed. School leader 5 shares a common thread,

Part of it is knowing where they are socially and where they are academically.

What they have done, through their homeschool program, is not always aligned with what we do here at our school. Just trying to figure out what they know and

where they are. For placement, that does have an impact. Especially for language arts and math, determining if they should be in extended or regular or an inclusion class. So that they are placed appropriately.

School leader 3 wanted to know the rigor of the program the homeschooler experienced, and other school leaders asked, “What kind of curriculum were they following? Were they following a secular curriculum, or were they following a strongly religious curriculum?” School leader 7 summarized: “We need to know as much as we can about what they have done and what they have studied. If they followed a set curriculum or if they made it up as they went along.”

The second theme related to transition issues for the school is matching curriculum. School leaders mentioned the difficulty, at times, of matching the curriculum in the public school to what homeschoolers have studied. School leader 7 mentioned that the target district has approved some homeschool curriculums, so if the student has used one of those, it is easier to match appropriate coursework. She said,

And you have to see if they were following one of the curriculums approved by the county or whether it is something that they have pieced together themselves, or a deeply religious curriculum.....those are the most difficult because it is difficult to determine an accurate course of study.

Another school leader mentioned the district’s approved programs but gave no indication nor explanation of how they were used in the transition process. Curiously, no other school leader mentioned the target district’s approved homeschool curriculum, even though this theme was prominent and represents a potential difficulty with transition.

This finding of apparent variability between schools within the target district raises the question of whether there are specific practices and guidelines when it comes to approved curricula, or whether there is a need for additional and shared information. This variability raises several questions: what policies concerning the curriculum of homeschoolers exist; what precedents have been set; who or what office within the district approves the curriculums; and by what standard are they approved?

The third theme mentioned by six of the school leaders was their desire to know the reason why parents homeschooled in the first place. School leader 4 asked, “What is it that makes people think that the public school is not the best choice for their kids?” School leader 3 said, “If there is a reason behind why the homeschooling started, and have they always been homeschooled?” School leader 8 approached this a little differently, by speaking to how important the institution of public education is, almost questioning why anyone would homeschool:

People have their reasons and they have their previous experiences to make them choose that. I feel like we can always improve public education. I do think it is a vital institution for our country. You socialize together, you learn to interact with diversity, kids who aren't behaving appropriately and how do you manage life dealing with all those situations? I am not saying it is perfect and it can definitely be improved.

School leader 4 said:

So I am curious as to why, and you do see a difference in the kids that come in, and I don't know if it is that faith based piece that really keeps or that drives this



decision (to homeschool), or is it all of the other things that are happening in the regular, in just society, that keeps them from (having) their children to being exposed or around students in the public school.

These responses seem to hint at leaders' expectation or concern that parents who transition their child back to the public school may not appreciate the institution, or might be apt to question policies and practices, or see fault where others might not.

Four school leaders felt it was important to know who taught the student in homeschool, for instance:

I think it would be helpful to know if it was just a parent who did all of the teaching or whether they were part of one of the homeschool co-ops. The importance of that is that students who attend co-ops have a little bit more of a semblance of a school experience. They usually would meet at a set time and at a set place.

School leader 2 echoed similar concerns, "You have to look at, did they do one-on-one with their mom, or were they in a cohort?" So, in addition to knowing what students know, leaders feel it is important to understand the nature of the pedagogy students have experienced and the social setting related to homeschooling in order to be able to help with transition.

Two school leaders felt that it would be important to know why families who homeschool wanted to put their student in a public school. School leader 3 said, "I think it is important to have that assessment (why they returned to public school). That is going to help provide that support and direction for the transitions of these students. School

leader 9 was very succinct in addressing this point, “Basically why they are coming, what their intent in coming to public school, and just any kind of information that they want to provide that they feel is necessary or pertinent.”

When asked in an open-ended manner, school leaders expressed a variety of information that they felt necessary to know in order to ensure the success of these students. Most of that information has to do with what students know academically, where they are academically, and what they experienced in the homeschool. Almost as important to school leaders is knowing who conducted the instruction for the homeschool student. Motivations and reasons for homeschooling in the first place, as well as the reason and intent of bringing a homeschool student back to a public school were also on the mind of school leaders. It would seem only natural that guidance counselors and building principals would be most interested in the academic achievement and knowledge of the transitioning student.

**Professional development.** A topic that emerged that was not an *a priori* topic of the inquiry dealt with professional development, namely, the lack of training or professional development offered to school leaders about this specific population. It should be noted that this observation was very powerful and stated with much emotion on the part of the four school leaders who mentioned it.

Specifically, four of the nine school leaders readily admitted that they had never received any type of training or professional development about this population and by the end of each of those interviews, asked the researcher for resources to correct their

lack of knowledge. School leader 2 gave a thoughtful, reflective assessment at the very end of the interview:

I have never had any kind of meeting on homeschooling, no in-service, never had any training transitioning homeschoolers. SPED, special needs, physical handicaps, divorce, death, all kinds of other educational issues or issues that relate to education I have had training, professional development or meetings on. But in 20 years of being a guidance counselor, I cannot recall a single instance where homeschooling or the needs of homeschoolers transitioning into the public was even mentioned in a meeting or training or in any professional development.

School leader 6 stated,

There are certain stereotypes about homeschoolers that are still out there and I have found that they really don't hold true. I find that they are well adjusted, well educated, and well prepared for success in our schools. And, you know, since I have been an administrator, in three different schools in our district, I have never had any training or workshops on homeschoolers.

Interestingly, the leaders who mentioned this spanned all levels of the school system, and included counselors and principals. It is curious, as well, that their reflection on the lack of professional development is juxtaposed against the variety of training they have had related to the needs of other populations. Perhaps as school systems awaken to the growing numbers of homeschoolers and returnees, this issue will receive attention, though the finding that leaders themselves do not think that the schools require programs specifically geared to transitioning former homeschoolers would tend to negate that need.

## **Summary**

The data revealed that there are a variety of reasons why parents choose to return their children to a public school after a period of homeschooling. Although the enrollment process appears simple on the surface and is easily completed by many, it also appears to become more complex as the grade level increases. This is due to inaccurate records, the earning of course credits, and prerequisites required for certain higher-level courses. Challenges for families and school leaders are not limited to just the enrollment process, but extend to the time the student is actually attending classes in a public school. Both families and school leaders acknowledge that there are no unique programs to aide transitioning homeschoolers, though school leaders point to a myriad of programs and policies that are in place to assist the successful transition of all students. Homeschool families point out that this does not take into consideration the uniqueness of their children. Several school leaders also pointed out that they have not had any professional development when it comes to this population. Chapter 5 presents an analysis and synthesis of the data and literature as they answer the three research questions. In addition, some recommendations for school leaders and topics for future research will be given.

## Chapter Five

### Discussion

This study examined the responses of 14 families and 9 school leaders to questions regarding the reasons for, challenges of, and programs in existence to support the transition of homeschool students to a public school. The themes that emerged from the data were presented in the previous chapter, and in this chapter how these findings relate to each of the research questions that make up this study is explored.

To review, the purpose of this study was to examine school leadership through the lens of a specific population and the school leaders who deal with this population. The three research questions that were answered by the research data are: 1) Why do parents enroll their children in a public school after a period of homeschooling, 2) What unique challenges does this pose for the family and the school, and 3) What programs or practices exist in public schools to ensure the success of this population?

The data from this research is important for several reasons. First, the current size and increasing rate of students that experience homeschooling suggests that this is going to be a growing concern for the school leader. Additionally, the data from this study are important because the findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge related to student achievement and school success. The perception of the public school is a key concern for the school leader and a further area of significance. Last, because school

funding is usually based on enrollment, the economics related to the increasing transition of this population is significant.

Whereas the previous chapter detailed findings based on subject group, this chapter will deal thematically by research question, integrating family and school leader responses with the literature to provide the most comprehensive possible answers. At the end of this chapter, some recommendations for leaders as well as for future study are given.

### **Research Questions**

**Why do parents enroll their children in a public school after a period of homeschooling?** The research in this study demonstrated that the reasons why parents transition their children back to a public school are varied and do not fit common stereotypes. Just as there are a variety of reasons why parents homeschool (Isenberg, 2007), the same is true for their return to a public school. One study evaluated the reasons of 13 families who had transitioned their children to public school and found the reasons fit into four categories (Koonce, 2007). Those four categories were educational and social opportunities, upper level math and science courses, extracurricular activities like sports, music and drama, and other experiences that were important to the students' future success. Parents and school leaders in this study provided responses that fit into 11 different themes as reasons for the transition. These 11 themes, similar to the seven categories for homeschooling (Isenberg, 2007), fall into the two categories of pedagogues and ideologues (Van Galen, 1991), in that they addressed educational development as well as social and academic environment. Some of the reasons identified in this study

support the reasons given by Koonce (2007). Variety, then, is a good way to consider the themes that answer this research question.

In chapter 4, a table was presented which showed the reasons why the 14 families transitioned their children to the public school. It is reproduced here and expanded to show the reasons that school leaders gave why homeschoolers transition.

Table 5

*Transitions: Reasons, perceptions and frequency*

Reasons why families transition their children to public school	Frequency	School leaders perceptions of why homeschoolers transition to public school	Frequency
Missed friends	3	No reason/no idea	4
Prepare for high school	3	Timing	3
Inability to teach	3	Sports	3
Experience of public school	2	Socialization	3
Sports and arts	2	Inability to teach	2
Curiosity about public school	1	Economic	1
Economic	1		

It should be noted that there were 14 families representing 15 children interviewed for this study and there are exactly 15 responses offered by these respondents. There were only nine school leaders interviewed but a total of 16 responses were given, even though four of the nine school leaders either gave no reason or knew of no reason why families who homeschool their children transition them to a public school. The remaining five school leaders gave 12 reasons why homeschoolers transition to a

public school, which showed that they were reflecting on several homeschoolers who had transitioned.

Both families and school leaders identified some similar themes which included sports, economics and timing, i.e., preparing for high school. The inability to teach higher level subjects, while present on both lists, means different things to the two groups. For families, this related to the struggle to get the student to respond to their teaching, whereas school leaders felt that the parent was incapable of teaching higher level subjects. The literature showed that this and socialization are both considered stereotypes as reasons for transitioning. It was disquieting to hear school leaders repeat common stereotypes that have been debunked for years. It was also quite surprising to learn that four school leaders, almost half, had no idea why parents transition their child to a public school.

Knowing the reason why a student was homeschooled and why they were now transitioning were two of the pieces of information that more than one school leader mentioned that they would like to know. This could be useful as the school leader crafts a plan for assisting in the successful transition of this particular student.

A practical result of knowing the specific reason and motivations behind a parent transitioning their child to a public school is that it could be the beginning of establishing a rapport with both family and student. Several school leaders spoke of making a connection with new families as well as building a relationship. The school leader is critical to establishing trust among teachers, parents and students, and trust is a key element to improve student achievement (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Several parents



mentioned that they had no interaction with a building principal during the enrollment process. This sense of disconnectedness that some parents pointed out could be partially alleviated by taking a small amount of time during the enrollment process to begin developing that rapport.

Why a family chooses to transition their child can also reveal parent expectations. Families who homeschool their children are deeply committed to providing not only a rich educational experience for their child but also providing positive socialization experiences for them (Mayberry et al., 1995).

Two of the most common themes mentioned by homeschool parents and school leaders alike were to prepare their child for high school, or to experience the public school, which is related to the development of positive social interaction with peers and teachers, a theme prominent in the literature (Krout, 2002). Homeschool parents, by nature of their choice to homeschool, are very involved parents. The study revealed that parents who transitioned their child to a public school had, as part of the total educational plan for their child, intended that their child would receive a portion of their education in the public school. Some stated that they had planned to place them in a public school at the same time that they chose to begin homeschooling. This may suggest that school leaders can be proactive in terms of transition if they were to contact homeschool parents or associations to track mobility intention and plans.

The second most common theme for transitioning a child to public school is because they miss their friends. Three families spoke of missed friendships as the main reason they moved their child back to the public school and two additional parents

mentioned this as a secondary reason. Several school leaders spoke of programs that they had in place for new students in which they assign another student to go with the new student and assist them in finding their classes, help with their locker, and other things that make up a student's day. These programs were referred to as "ambassador program," "buddy program," and "mentor program." A school leader could, during that initial "rapport building" meeting, inquire if the transitioning student has any friends in the school and assign to the new student someone that they already know.

The third most common theme for transitioning their child to the public school was the family's inability to successfully teach their own child. Families who mentioned this reason admitted something similar to "she just wouldn't do the work." Knowing this is important to school leaders because they have the responsibility to provide an environment that will acclimate new students to their new responsibilities, curriculum and social obligations (Toy & Spencer, 2011). Such students may require some of the monitoring programs or "checking in" programs that several school leaders spoke of in order to successfully negotiate these new requirements. Guidance counselors in particular, in their responses, felt that one of their primary responsibilities was to check in regularly with new students. Two building principals spoke of group meetings they had with new students, so that the new students could know who the principals were as well as answer questions that many new students have.

One study gave as a reason for transitioning a child to the public school the access to sports and other extra-curricular activities (Dailey, 1999). This is the same reason cited by two of the families interviewed, and three school leaders recognized that there are a

number of homeschoolers who enroll in public school to participate in sports or other non-academic activities that parents cannot furnish at home, often associated with the arts. Similarly, school leaders noted that very often the homeschool child is not able to make a sports team (though they were more favorable with regard to children's skills in the arts). When school leaders discover that sports or extra-curricular activities are a motivating factor for the transition, a realistic presentation of the athletic program or extra-curricular activities should be given. This information might best be used to build the rapport with both the parents and student that is critical for the success of the student. Finding a common interest makes it much easier to make a connection.

While some school leaders did mention two of the commonly held stereotypes, socialization and inability to teach the higher level subjects, (Ray, 2009), not one of the fourteen families mentioned either of these as a reason for the transition. One school leader recognized these two areas as stereotypes, and mentioned that he has heard them from other school leaders. The interviews with the families showed that the decision to transition their student is more often a calculated, thoughtful, and difficult decision, just as the decision to homeschool is one that is not entered into lightly (Gaither, 2008). Interestingly, as it pertains to stereotypes, nothing was found in the literature about stereotypes that homeschool parents have about either the public school or their leaders. Just as much research has been done to debunk the stereotypes that are held about homeschoolers, research should be done on what stereotypes exist on the part of homeschool families.

The very nature of the homeschooling environment allows the child to spend most of his/her time with their family in an accepting climate, which causes school leaders to have a concern about whether these students can function effectively and successfully in the multiage situation that is present in the public school (Romanowski, 2001). The biggest takeaway from this research may be that the variety of reasons why parents return their child to a public school offers the school leader the opportunity to build a connection and develop rapport with the student and the family by entering into a conversation centered on the reason why they want this transition to take place. Knowing specifically the reason(s) behind the transition could provide information the school leader needs to design an appropriate program as well as reveal potential pitfalls for the success of the transitioning student. An example of this was the student who was a stand-out basketball player in his church league, but who ultimately failed to make the cut for the school team. A conversation about the athletic program of the school could have helped the family and the student have a more realistic expectation. Also, this initial conversation could assist the family in having a clearer picture of the mission and vision of the school as well as answer specific questions that they may have. This rapport building conversation could increase the confidence of all parties, and help families know that the decision to transition was the appropriate one.

One significant non-finding stood out upon final reflection of the data: the absence of the mention of religion or a faith-based motivations during any of the interviews. National data, referenced in Chapter Two, shows that a large part of the population of homeschoolers mention religious reasons for homeschooling. Why then,

was there no mention of any religious impetuses for transitioning back to the public school? Two parents mentioned that they were not happy with some of the language their child heard in the public school, but this concern was not mentioned in the context of a religious objection. Since the literature was heavy with a religious motivation for many homeschoolers, the absence of this in the data of this study was noteworthy and might suggest that there were some anomalies related to the sample itself (e.g., the fact that respondents live in a relatively well-off suburban school district).

**What unique challenges does this pose for the family and the school?**

Although no studies were found which examined the transition process for homeschool students returning to public schools, the ease or difficulty of the process can color an impression of the institution itself. Interestingly, the most prominent finding among the respondents interviewed for this study was that transition is not terribly difficult or might even be termed “routine.” For almost all of the families and school leaders, the enrollment process was described as simple or easy. From the perspective of families and school leaders alike it appears that the target district has done an impressive job in making enrollment easy for any new student, and leaders considered the process for the homeschooler to be much the same as for any student registering for school. All necessary forms are either on the website or available at each school. Interactions with secretaries were without exception positive. Only one instance of a negative experience with enrollment was given in the interviews and that concerned was just one minor and easily addressed aspect of the total process. Although this is not a unique challenge for either families or school leaders, discussion of the transition process separated clearly the

responsibilities that guidance counselors and building principals each have. Guidance counselors shoulder most of the responsibilities of this process, and building principals have, for the most part, excused themselves from this part of the public school experience. Thus, transition procedures do not appear to present much of an issue.

In terms of academic challenges, several studies have been done on the academic achievement of homeschoolers. One such study cites standardized tests and compares the results of those former homeschoolers' tests to their public school counterparts (Ray, 1997). This study shows that the academic achievement of homeschoolers is greater than their public school counterparts, but it must be noted that the author is an advocate of homeschooling and approaching the issue as an advocate. Another study cites evidence that homeschoolers' average achievement is higher than non-homeschoolers (Hattie & Anderman, 2013). In sum, then, available studies suggest that former homeschoolers perform academically (at least) as well as their peers.

The responses from families and school leaders in this study supported the findings of those studies. Respondents from among both families and school leaders suggested that homeschoolers do fine academically, though there are naturally variations; both groups saw the academic achievement of homeschoolers who had transitioned to public school to be more than adequate. Several families used superlatives such as "great," or "wonderful," and others described their child's achievement as average. School leaders described the academic achievement of homeschoolers in their schools as average to above average. Both families and school leaders exhibited a degree of comfort when describing this aspect of the students' experience.

There were aspects of the transition process that were frustrating to both groups, however, the areas of frustration experienced by the families were different than those mentioned by the school leaders. In most cases, family frustration was exhibited when asked whether the public school was meeting the needs of the child, whereas school leaders usually expressed frustration when discussing the need for accurate records and academic information, which is supported by the observations of Koonce (2007).

When discussing whether the school was meeting the academic and social needs of the child, parents balanced their generally positive comments about how well the student was doing with conditional statements that demonstrated the parents felt that one or more needs of the student were not being met. Some of this may be due to strong opinions held by the family that the public school's existing programs are either too generalized to meet the needs of the "average" student, or do not match for the needs of their child (Winstanley, 2009). This disconnect could be related to the fact that this population usually has very involved parents and the homeschool program is naturally quite individualized to the needs of each child.

One study was done that noted the possible parent dissatisfaction with the time constraints, standardized testing, and curriculum pacing of the public school (Romanowski, 2001). School leaders need to have a greater appreciation that the homeschool transitioned student spent most of their time in a very small, protected, family environment, and that the parents who taught them believe strongly that they know exactly the skills and abilities of their child. The flexibility that is available to the homeschooler is almost non-existent in the public school classroom. Hill (2000) points

out that homeschool parents who have worked with their own child as a student for an extended period of time, and who know what their child can accomplish, can be demanding about the standards of the school, the rigor of the academic program and the pace of instruction. Another study revealed that the transitioning student faces challenges involving changing classes, reduced parental involvement, dealing with more teachers, new grading standards and procedures, peer pressure, and coping with larger, more impersonal schools (Weldy, 1991). It is not difficult to understand then, why parents may feel that the needs of their child, whether it is academic, social, or physical, are not being met by the public school.

A specific area that challenges homeschool families when transitioning their child to the public school involves the academic program the parent desires as compared to what the public school may offer. This is related to the area of parental expectations (Romanowski, 2001). Several parents spoke of difficulties in obtaining the class or course that they felt the student was ready for, as opposed to what the school was willing to offer. Accounts of a thorough examination of records, discussions between parents and school leaders, and requests to take additional tests contributed to the challenge of parental expectations.

Concurrently, some school leaders complained that the information they receive from some homeschool students is lacking in terms of what is necessary to make an appropriate placement, whether in a particular class or a program. This was reflected in a study concerning the depth and breadth of knowledge required in some content areas in the secondary school (Simmons, 1994). This area revealed the most difficulty to both



parties. Parents shared experiences of their child being asked to take released SOL's, unit tests, or some other type of assessment in order to provide a means for making a judgement on class placement. Adding to this aggravation was a couple of instances where assessments that were taken by the student were misplaced. In both instances, the solution offered was that the student was placed in the class or course that was originally requested.

Homeschool families have an obligation to provide detailed records and information about the academic program and progress of their child if they want to enroll them in a public school. Most homeschool families follow a commercially available curriculum (Collom, 2005). Some school leaders spoke to the fact that the target district has approved certain homeschool curriculums which make it easier for homeschool students who want to transition to a public school. It is a state requirement in this case that the family notify the district of their intention to homeschool. Perhaps a well-crafted letter from the district in response to their statement of intent to homeschool, informing homeschool parents of approved curriculum, or of the necessary documentation should the family desire to transition to the public school at some future time may be helpful.

Concerning the frustrations that were evident on both families and school leaders, Romanowski (2001) pointed out the existence of an "us versus them" attitude on the part of many public school leaders and homeschool parents. This may be exacerbated by the finding that parents tend to focus on the various needs of their child, and the school on procedure and records. There is, of course, a link between these – to the extent the school has accurate and complete records, students' needs might be best met with an appropriate

placement and access to school resources. Yet, there is also a possible point of conflict here. A comment made by a family during the enrollment process was the school wanted to make sure that “the I’s were dotted and the T’s crossed.” This might hint at frustration with the focus on policy and procedure. It may be profitable for school leaders to develop a process or checklist that would include everything needed to make decisions on class placement, and the school system might make this information available to homeschool families on file. Information provided upfront eliminates any surprises as the school leader works through the process of developing the student’s schedule. The need for additional information can be presented at this time, and the family would have a clear idea of how the school works through placement and scheduling. This process can also assist in further building a rapport between family and school leader, and help reduce the “referee” role that some school leaders had to play in resolving disputes.

Another area of frustration for parents occurred when decisions took long or were made quite late. In one case, parents were told that the building principal was the one who had to make the final decision concerning a class placement and it took over a month for this decision to be made. Another parent shared that in their case the decision was not made until just a few days before school began. Parental responses to these two incidents painted a very negative picture of the school leader. If, as research shows, the school leader is responsible to strengthen the culture of the school as well as build collaborative processes, which include parents, lack of timely communication can only serve as an impediment to these responsibilities (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008).

Clear procedures, policies, and practices can help get information to all stakeholders, including parents. Outreach programs that involve parents in the activities of the school may assist in this area. Volunteers are usually in great demand, whether in the realm of the PTO, or a classroom parent, chaperones on field trips, or running the concession stand at athletic events. Homeschool parents are normally very involved and concerned, which makes them natural to recruit as volunteers in the school community (Koonce, 2007). The more parents are involved in the school, the more connected they can be, and it may help alleviate this feeling of a void that many families expressed, as well as the negative responses that several families mentioned when asked about whether their child's needs were being met.

The final set of themes challenging families may be much harder to tackle, as they relate to the very nature of the difference between home and public school. Homeschool families exhibit a deep commitment to the development of the total child (Mayberry et al., 1995). It is easily understood then, that after a period of intense interaction between family members, it is difficult for them to abruptly give up control over an area of family life such as their daily, weekly, or yearly schedule. Activities as mundane as the time a dentist appointment is scheduled to a larger activity like a family vacation, that used to be scheduled in coordination with the homeschool education of the child, are now limited to when the school district schedule allows.

Terms like "slave," "prisoner," and "helpless" were expressed by parents in terms of their experience with the transition of their child to public school. In order for the student to be successful in the public school, the family must follow the public school

calendar and daily schedule. An acknowledgement that this is a very real change on the part of many homeschool parents is necessary on the part of school leaders in order to increase the rapport between home and school, and bring these individuals into the school community. Recognizing that adherence to a school schedule is a necessary result of enrollment in a public school, school leaders may be able to help alleviate this feeling of being a hostage by involving the parent in the school community. One school leader spoke of allowing parents to come into the school building to see how the school day progresses. The outcome of this was that parents reported that this activity answered many questions that they had. With greater knowledge comes greater comfort.

Conversely, homeschool parents need to recognize that their daily and yearly schedule, as well as talking to their child about their school day, rather than experiencing the school day with their child as their teacher, is a natural progression in the transition process and attendance in a public school.

Likewise, families expressed the feeling of a void in their own life and/or in the family once their child transitioned to the public school. Homeschooling provides a flexibility to craft an educational program that results in an extremely close relationship between parents and child (Kunzman, 2010). Once the student transitions to a public school, the daily preparation and instruction interaction between parent and child ceases and a void exists. While several parents mentioned this void, one parent in particular pointed out the difference between doing school with their child and talking about school with the child once they were in public school. One parent used the term “separation anxiety,” to describe how she felt. This area was perhaps the most difficult part of the

interviews to sit through. Answers were marked by long pauses, hand-wringing and in several cases, crying. It was obvious that these parents were missing something that was very deeply felt. The void permeated many areas of family life: working together on school work, planning of the day and week, scheduling, sharing in activities and school activities to name a few. It should be pointed out that only the parents were interviewed, and this feeling may not be felt by the student.

When these emotional issues are considered together, it points to a large problem that more than half of the families who were interviewed mentioned in one way or another. Could a parent or family support group, voluntary in nature, be set up where families, who share this particular issue, could meet for sharing and encouragement? Schools already have community outreach programs as an integral part of the school mission and vision. One study examined school-based programs for integrating traumatized students into the school environment where support groups were a part (Baweja et al., 2015). Another study was done on eating disorders in high school girls where support groups were formed (Ciao, Latner, Brown, Ebnetter, & Becker, 2015). There are school based support groups for students who are pregnant, who have organizational issues, and those who need help with homework or specific academic subjects. Establishment of a support group could assist families and students with the social and emotional toll some experience as children transition to public school. It may even be possible to involve the area home school associations. This could assist in helping with trust issues as well as reducing the “us versus them” attitude that appears to be real.

**What programs or practices exist in public schools to ensure the success of this population?** The themes that emerged to answer this research question showed interesting patterns. Two themes, one from families and one from school leaders, approach the same concept, but they appear to be from different, contrasting directions. When viewed together, it is easy to see that both groups answer this question in the same way, but answer it from their perspective. The theme, as seen from families, is “none, but...,” and the same theme from the school leaders is “lots, but...” Both families and school leaders indicated that there are no programs or practices in this school district to ensure the success of this unique population as they transition. However, the interviews revealed that there are programs and practices in place in all of the schools represented for new students in general, which would include homeschool students. So, from a family perspective, there was nothing, but from the school leader perspective, there were lots of programs when this population was viewed as one type of new student.

While there is always a risk that transitioning from one school level to another can overwhelm the coping abilities of any student, an appropriate environment may have some positive effects on students (Anfara & Schmid, 2007). Activities that orient new students and their parents to a new school enable them to be better prepared for their new responsibilities, curriculum, and social obligations of the public school environment (Toy & Spencer, 2011). School leaders were quick to point out that there were several activities that are offered that help with the transition. These include orientation meetings or nights; special activities such as school dances just for new students; tours; and having the student or parent attend school for a day before matriculation so that they could see

what the school day entailed. Many schools pair the student up with a “buddy,” called in some schools the ambassador program, so that situations such as lockers, lunch, location of classrooms, extra-curricular activities could be explained as the new student accompanied the current student through the school day. In addition, parents and school leaders shared that there were meetings with school leaders both before and after the student started school in order to answer any questions that they may have about the public school experience.

Another study developed a 20 component process for facilitating transitions (LaCava, 2005). One school leader mentioned the formation of a committee that had as its primary responsibility the successful integration of all new students into their school community. Other school leaders spoke of brief but regular meetings that a guidance counselor or principal would have with each new student to inquire about their transition into their new school.

Social scientists have long expressed opinions about the potential negative effects that school transitions can have on adolescents (MacIver, 1990). Studies have been done that suggest certain steps that can be taken by school staff and leaders to ease the potentially negative impact of transitions (Osterman, 2000). While both families and school leaders were quick to point out that there are no unique programs to facilitate a successful transition for homeschoolers, it is interesting to note that no family interviewed expressed a desire to have such a program geared just to the homeschool student. Additionally, school leaders also shared that they would be reluctant to have such a program that only dealt with one particular population for fear of causing parents

or students to feel they were being “picked on.” Yet, there may be unique needs that only homeschoolers and their families experience.

It was encouraging to note the number of programs and practices that school leaders had in place for the successful transition of all new students. Both parents and school leaders spoke of orientation meetings or orientation nights, where parents and students could come and hear a presentation of the school program, meet many of the school faculty and staff, and have questions answered. Guidance counselors in particular spoke of checking in with all new students on a regular basis. These were usually in the form of weekly or bi-weekly chats where any issues that the new student had could be answered. Even some building principals participated in similar activities. Some schools held events, such as school dances, just for new students, so that everyone who attended would have been a new student. One school even provided a color coded pass that would, without question during the first few weeks of school, allow the student to leave any class and go to guidance if they felt anxious or had a question that they needed to get answered at that moment. It may be helpful for school leaders to share these programs and procedures during the enrollment process so that parent and student know what kind of assistance will be available once they begin the public school experience.

Research shows, and some school leaders affirmed that the transition process is easier when the student is already enrolled part-time, as allowed in many states (Bauman, 2002; Dailey, 1999). Since the 1980’s, school leaders have moved from advocating strict regulations regarding homeschooling, to partnering with the homeschool family (Peavie, 1999). Many states have passed legislation which allows homeschool students to enroll in



individual classes or participate in extra-curricular activities (Collom, 2005). School leaders interviewed in this study stated unanimously that those students who were already enrolled in the public school part-time, transitioned much more easily and more quickly than those who are not. One parent interviewed said that she did not know about a certain program offered in the public school she enrolled her child in until after the student was enrolled. Her response was to post this information on the homeschool association website. This points to a lack of marketing or “selling” as Peterson (2002) described. Outreach by the school leader to homeschoolers, perhaps through their associations, letting parents know of opportunities to participate in classes or activities, can lend itself to increased enrollment of homeschoolers part-time. In turn, this would ease the transition of this population if and when the need arrives.

In addition to allowing the homeschool student to ease into the public school setting, this affords a great opportunity to provide a positive display of the public school to the homeschool parent. Another way that a homeschooler could ease into the public school environment is to allow homeschoolers to attend summer school (Coleman, 1992). The results of this study points out that this is already a strategy of many school districts in easing the transition of students from one school level to the next. Normally summer school is for a short period of time, weeks, not months, a shorter day, and a smaller student body than a student is immersed in during the regular school year. Allowing homeschool participation in summer school could also be used to assist the smooth transition into the public school. While part time enrollment and summer school may

make transitioning easier, they still present challenges that face both homeschool families and school leaders, as no other significant population does this.

**Professional development.** During the interviews with school leaders, an unexpected finding related to professional development or additional training emerged. Although this theme was an indirect result of the interview questions, it is an area that deserves discussion, and ties to the idea that leaders expressed a need to know what homeschoolers know, who taught them, why they were homeschooled, and why they are transitioning to the public school now. This broad theme involves knowledge and expertise.

Some school leaders told the researcher that they agreed to the interview because this was a topic that they had thought about many times during their career and that they wanted to know more about this population. One school leader was curious to know why this population felt that the public school was not the best choice for their child. Concerning homeschoolers, school leaders listed several things that they wanted to know more about:

- 1) They wanted to know what the homeschool student studied,
- 2) They wanted to know who instructed the student,
- 3) They wanted to know why parents chose homeschool,
- 4) They wanted to know where the student was socially,
- 5) They wanted to know the rigor of the homeschool program
- 6) They wanted to know about the curriculum the homeschooler used, and

- 7) They wanted to know why parents felt that the public school was not the best choice for educating their child in the first place.

While some of this information could best be learned in a conversation between homeschool family and school leader, leaders also expressed a desire for training or professional development, which might provide some answers as well. There is a wealth of material on the homeschool movement, and professional development may be the most efficient way to educate school leaders on the information they would need about this population, albeit providing general information rather than knowledge contextualized to their school community. On a personal note, it was very powerful to hear school leaders tell how long they had been in their area of responsibility, and then list all of the areas of training, seminars, or professional development they had during their careers and then say that homeschooling had never been mentioned. Considering the challenges that school leaders perceive students have when transitioning (Weldy, 1991), it was startling to hear that there is such a dearth of training. Given the growth in this population (Isenberg, 2007; Ray, 2009), and the fact that most homeschoolers will at some point be in public school, it is easy to see why professional development or training of some type should be considered almost a necessity. Respondents to this study clearly believe that such training is desirable.

**Surprises.** At this point, it would be appropriate to consider some of the things that revealed in this study that represent surprises, or information that might be considered new. While every researcher has a preconceived idea about what may lie at

the end of the study, once the results are analyzed. There were some concepts that were quite startling and bear mentioning here.

The first interesting piece of information came in answer to research question one. It was surprising that more than half of the families interviewed wanted to return their child to the public school after a period of homeschooling. This seems to indicate to me that there was some factor that caused them to begin homeschooling, and during those family deliberations, their desire to return their child to the public school outweighed these original concerns, or the concerns disappeared. In some cases, the decision to return to the public school was made before homeschooling began. This would be a good area to consider for further study.

Another noticeable perception occurred during the interview questions that dealt with research question two. While difficult to quantify within the scope of this study, there was a palpable lack of trust on the part of both families and school leaders toward each other. Evidence of that was demonstrated by the number of responses I received from the initial letter sent by the school district (4 of 80) compared to the number of responses from the homeschool association (18 of 36). Every respondent from the homeschool association had received a letter from the target school district, yet choose to only respond when they were approached by the homeschool association. At times during the interviews with both families and school leaders, I felt as if they were “two ships passing in the night,” with no way to get the two sides to communicate with each other. This concept is further discussed in the recommendations for practice.

Another interesting piece of data was the inconsistency among the schools in relation to the enrollment process. While the process may have been “easy,” it was hardly consistent. This was evident in a number of respects. First, there was inconsistent awareness of approved homeschool curriculum. There is no way of telling if this was an oversight on the part of those who failed to mention these approved programs or whether the school leaders were unaware that the district had approved certain curriculums that homeschoolers use. Second, the use of released SOL exams, unit exams and end-of-year exams was another area that varied across the schools. Some schools required completion of these exams for enrollment or placement. Other schools requested but did not require the completion of such exams, and some schools did not use these examinations at all. This raises the question of whether this is an area regulated by policy, or if it is an area where district policy is not implemented consistently? The finding of variability in practices across schools within the district raised the question of whether there are specific preferred practices, guidelines, or precedents that might be shared across schools (a district responsibility). Given the frequency of problems with placement, there is a need for additional and shared information.

Perhaps the most compelling and surprising piece of information to come out of the study dealt with the lack of professional development for school leaders on homeschoolers. It was quite obvious that each school leader was aware of homeschoolers that had transitioned into their school, and may not have given a lot of thought to their unique needs in transition. It was also obvious that each school leader had an opinion or “picture” of this population. Almost half (four out of nine) expressed that they had never

received any type of professional development on this particular group. School leaders, as the results show, had many questions about this population and were forthright in stating exactly what they wanted to know. The intensity of interest on the part of some school leaders was such that it was hard to understand why even the most basic of information about homeschoolers had not been given to school leaders.

Not every child who homeschools will transition to the public school, but the literature clearly demonstrated that the majority of children who homeschool will transition. Could the public school partner with homeschool associations and homeschoolers in the sharing of knowledge to make this process smoother for both the family and the school? This could assist in answering many of the questions each group may have about the other, as well as quash some of the stereotypes that each may hold about the other. This cooperation would be to the benefit, ultimately, of the children, which is something that both homeschool families and school leaders hold as a core conviction.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

The first recommendation for practice relates to establishing some type of professional development on homeschooling for school leaders. This could come in the form of a seminar with an expert on homeschooling, or a workshop where school leaders meet and share their knowledge, expertise, and experiences with homeschoolers who have transitioned in and out of their schools. A clearer understanding of the motivations of this group can assist school leaders as they assist in the transitioning process and monitor the transitioned student once they begin classes in the public school.

Another recommendation for practice relates to the enrollment process. As this study has shown, most schools do an excellent job of enrolling students. The study did reveal a glitch or two in some areas, often select problems cited by parents that were unique or episodic (e.g., not knowing where transportation was offered). A checklist of necessary paperwork, forms, and procedures for all enrolling students may help to eliminate misunderstandings like this.

The establishment of a rapport between the school leader and the family was discussed in this study. As part of the enrollment process, there should be a meeting with the family and a school administrator. The main purpose would be to begin establishing that rapport but it can also serve to have any questions that the family has answered by the person they deem to be in charge of the operation of the school. During this meeting, the school leader can inquire about why the parents want to transition their child to the public school, as well as inquire about necessary information like curriculum, assessments, and special needs.

The issue of lack of trust between school leaders and homeschool families as well as the issue of the void that some families felt once the child had transitioned to the public school could be minimized by active outreach on the part of the school leadership to involve these parents in volunteer opportunities within the school. Understanding the commitment that this type of parent demonstrates by virtue of the undertaking of homeschooling would seem to indicate that these are the very type of volunteer that a school would desire. Involving these families in the school community could allow them to have questions answered, and learn more about the operation of the school community.

They could become a part of the community rather than someone without knowledge on the outside looking in. In turn, homeschool families should seek to engage in the public school as they engaged in homeschooling.

Two school leaders mentioned that the school district has approved some homeschool curriculums and that this approval makes the enrollment process easier. Not only should the process of evaluating and approving homeschool curriculums continue, but this information needs to be made known to all school leaders. The responses of some school leaders implied that they were unaware of these approved curriculums.

Once students begin their education in the public school, some follow-up or “checking-up” on students who transition into a public school should be put into place. Although every school leader had some practice or policy that helped new students adjust to the public school, it is less clear that a wide-ranging program for monitoring is the norm. Necessary components appear to be happening across schools; these ideas can be shared among school leaders in a workshop type of setting, and guidelines can be established by the school district for improving the follow-up of new students as a comprehensive transition program is endorsed.

Last, I think some type of support group, voluntary in nature and operation, should be established for the parents of homeschoolers who transition to public school. This could be done by school, or by the district, if the numbers at the school level are low. It was difficult at times to listen to the heartfelt concerns and difficulties that some homeschool families had during and after the transition process. As one understands the intimate nature of homeschooling between parent and child, and link to that the amount



of time that is involved in homeschooling, it is easier to see how drastic a change takes place within the family when a child is transitioned to the public school. A voluntary group, where parents can share experiences and concerns, would not only help to resolve issues related to the transitioning experience, but assist in building a stronger school community.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

First, a study that would expand the scope of this study would be beneficial, particularly one that included more than a single school system. This study was conducted in a relatively affluent, suburban, mid-Atlantic district. A statewide or regional study could encompass a variety of socio-economic school districts and may reveal different policies reflective of regional or economic realities. Such a study could be completed if the researcher established and used contacts within the homeschool community. This could be done by enlisting the support of homeschool associations throughout the state or region. One idea that was shared by many families was that they really wanted to share their experience with somebody, preferably someone who could get their story to the public school. By expanding the geographic area of the study, a mixed method approach could be used, utilizing surveys as well as interviews. Time was a constraining issue in this study and was mentioned in the limitations. A study outside of the dissertation process would not necessarily have such a constraint. An expanded study could also focus on district policy on homeschool transition, which would be another area in need of systematic inquiry.

Besides expanding the geographic area of this study, as well as the time involved, there are some areas uncovered in the study that merit further study. An investigation of attitudes and perceptions of school leaders towards homeschoolers could reveal the extent of stereotypes still being held. It was interesting, after doing all of the research about this population for the literature review, to still hear some school leaders parrot stereotypes that had been debunked long ago, i.e., the reason why parents return their child to a public school is because of socialization, or that homeschool parents are incapable of teaching the higher level subjects. Even more startling was to hear school leaders admit that some of their colleagues still held such stereotypes.

Another area of investigation could be the contrast between how well parents and school leaders felt homeschool students who transitioned were doing in the public school and yet how few parents felt that the public school was meeting the needs of the homeschool student. The disappointment that many parents expressed is an area that needs to be studied further. This might lead to a better understanding of this theme, and may suggest remedies for this phenomena.

Although there have been many studies done by homeschool advocates on how well homeschool students do on standardized tests compared to public school students, it would be interesting systematically study how well homeschool students do in public school. Such a study could examine the engagement of the student in the public school as well as their social adjustment and academic progress. The academic and social success or lack thereof may reveal new insights on dealing with this population and assisting in its success.

Another area of future study could involve the depth of the impact that transitioning has on the family. As mentioned previously, some parents mentioned the void in their family once the child had transitioned to the public school. The contrast between their descriptions of family life as well as their own feelings before transitioning as compared to after transitioning was stark and intense. Just as research has been done on the issue of separation anxiety in other areas of life, a study on this one aspect could reveal some coping strategies for some homeschool families.

Along the same lines, it would be interesting to see the transition process from the perspective of the student. An area of future study would be to examine the transition process through the eyes of the actual students who transition.

Last, some type of training is clearly needed for school leaders given the ever-growing size of this population. Home school families are aware of the diverse population of the public school, and challenges for their students exist. One such example of this is the inappropriate language that can be present in a public school. Training about this population for school leaders should lead to better transitions because to be more informed is to be better able to make appropriate decisions. Further study on the lack of training of this population for school leaders could more clearly show the need for such training. It could also lead to the development of what information should be shared in the professional development as well as who should conduct such training.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to examine school leadership through the lens of a specific population as well as how school leaders deal with this population. A review of

the literature shows that very little research has been done on why parents return their children to a public school after a period of homeschooling. In addition, the unique challenges that this population causes for families and school leaders alike has received scant attention. Whether there are programs and policies unique to this population that would ensure their success as they transition back to the public school was yet another question. Two groups of families and one group of school leaders were interviewed in order to answer three specific research questions. The research took place in a large, suburban, mid-Atlantic school district. Volunteers for this study were contacted by the school district as well as a homeschool association within the school district. Families and school leaders were chosen randomly from those that volunteered and a series of interview questions were administered to each group. A thematic analysis of the data was done in order to answer the three research questions. The findings showed a variety of answers to the research questions. Families transition their children back to the public school for a variety of reasons. These include but are not limited to internal factors such as missing one's friends, or preparing for a traditional high school experience, to external factors, such as economic influences upon the family. This transition does create some unique challenges for families as well as school leaders. Although the enrollment process is pretty simple and easy, there are issues of inadequate information regarding coursework, assessments, class placement, and school records. In addition, some families experienced difficulties adjusting to the change within the family dynamic once homeschooling ceased. Some school leaders faced a unique challenge with this population when it came to the depth of their knowledge of homeschoolers. In addition,

some school leaders had to make sometimes difficult decisions concerning class placement, due to inadequate knowledge of the homeschool curriculum, assessment results, and lack of an adequate permanent record.

Homeschool families, as a general rule, are very involved parents, and at least in this study, were very eager to share their experiences and concerns. School leaders, on the other hand, expressed a genuine concern about homeschoolers, during the enrollment process and were interested in their success after they began classes. As with any group, it would be most helpful to school leaders to have accurate, usable information about this population, as they do about many other populations within their school. Homeschool students should be monitored to ensure their smooth transition to the public school as well as their success in navigating the public school program. Families and students can benefit by having clearly delineated policies and procedures, as well as support groups and activities that work to involve them into the school culture. School leaders can benefit from additional professional development, accurate records, and useable information about homeschoolers.

After interviewing both families and school leaders, it is obvious that it is possible for both groups to work together to ensure the success of the home school student who transitions to a public school. Leaving the small, sheltered environment of the homeschool setting and transitioning to a larger, and in many cases, much more impersonal environment of the public school presents challenges to the family, student and the school leader. It is my hope that the research done in this study will not only add

to the literature but provide some insights on programs, policies, and procedures to ensure the success of the student who makes this transition.

## Appendix A



IRB Approval Letter

Office of Research Integrity and  
Assurance

Research Hall, 4400 Univeristy Drive, MS 6D5, Fairfax, Virginia  
22030 Phone: 703-993-5445; Fax: 703-993-9590

DATE: November 11, 2013  
TO: Scott Bauer, PhD  
FROM: George Mason University IRB  
Project Title: [505043-1] Returning to the Fold: A study of why parents  
return students who have been home schooled to a public school.  
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project  
ACTION: DETERMINATION OF  
EXEMPT STATUS DECISION DATE:  
November 11, 2013  
REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category #2

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Office of  
Research Integrity

& Assurance (ORIA) has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW  
according to federal regulations.

Please remember that all research must be conducted as described in the submitted  
materials.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be submitted to the  
ORIA prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

If you have any questions, please contact Karen Motsinger at 703-993-4208 or kmotsing@gmu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.



Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

Research Hall, 4400 University Drive, MS 6D5, Fairfax, Virginia 22030 Phone: 703-993-5445; Fax: 703-993-9590

DATE: November 26, 2014  
TO: Scott Bauer  
FROM: George Mason University IRB  
Project Title: [683184-1] Returning to the Fold: A study of why parents return students who have been home schooled, part 2  
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project  
ACTION: DETERMINATION OF  
EXEMPT STATUS DECISION DATE: November 26, 2014  
REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category #2

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Office of Research Integrity

& Assurance (ORIA) has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

Please remember that all research must be conducted as described in the submitted materials.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be submitted to the ORIA prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

If you have any questions, please contact Karen Motsinger at 703-993-4208 or kmotsing@gmu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within George Mason University IRB's records.



## Appendix B

### Initial Survey Questions

- 1) Why did you begin homeschooling your child(ren)?
- 2) Was there a incident or motivation that led you to homeschool?
- 3) How long did you homeschool your child(ren)?
- 4) How would you describe your family's homeschool experience?
- 5) Why did you return your child(ren) to a public school?
- 6) Was there a specific incident that led you to consider transitioning your child(ren) back to a public school?
- 7) How did your child(ren) respond to going back to a public school?
- 8) Did you seek counsel of any type while making this decision?
- 9) What impact did this decision have on your family?
- 10) What was the first step that you took to transition your child(ren) back to a public school?
- 11) Describe your interactions with school officials during the transition process.
- 12) Were there any specific programs that your child(ren) were offered or required to take upon returning to a public school?
- 13) Which school personnel did you interact with during this process?
- 14) Were there any special requirements place upon you or your child(ren) because you homeschooled your child(ren)?
- 15) How would your child(ren) describe their first day in the public school?
- 16) How would you describe your feelings about your child(ren)'s first day back in a public school?
- 17) How do you think your child(ren) is/are adjusting to public school?
- 18) Were there any programs or actions taken for your child(ren) to assisting a successful transition back to a public school?
- 19) How would you describe the principal's role and actions relating to your child(ren)'s transition?
- 20) Is there anything else you would like to share that you believe would be helpful about this process that your family experienced?

## Appendix C

### Introductory Survey

#### **Introduction and Consent**

##### PURPOSE

This research is being conducted to examine school leadership through the lens of home school families who return their children to a public school and the school leaders who deal with this population.

You are being sent this survey because your child recently enrolled in a public school after a period of home schooling.

##### CONFIDENTIALITY

The data in this study will be held in confidence by the researchers. We do not ask your name on this survey, nor do we have any way of associating completed surveys with any specific respondent.

We are also seeking a number of respondents to participate in a separate part of the study, involving face-to-face interviews. A separate return form and return envelope is included in this packet to ensure that survey responses remain anonymous should you decide to volunteer to be interviewed.

##### PARTICIPATION

Participation in the study is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time or for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

##### QUESTIONS

This research is being conducted by Carl Dennis in the Graduate School of Education at George Mason University. He may be reached at 703-303-5250 for questions or to report a research-related problem. The faculty advisor for this research is Dr. Scott Bauer, who may be reached at sbauer1@gmu.edu or at (703) 993-3775. You may contact the George Mason University Office of Research Integrity and Assurance at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

##### CONSENT

Your participation in answering the questions posed on the following pages and returning the completed survey form indicates that you have read this introduction and consent page and agree to participate in this study.

The survey should take about 20 minutes to complete.

Thank you for your participation.

## Demographics

Below are some demographic questions that can provide pertinent information for this study. In answering these questions, please consider the experience of your child who most recently moved from home schooling to being enrolled in a public school. Please answer each of the following to the best of your ability.

**1. Age of your child when s/he enrolled. (Please enter a whole number)**

**2. What is your child's gender?**

Female

Male

**3. What grade did your child enter?**

**4. How many school-age children were in your home when your child enrolled?**

**5. When your child was home schooled, which parent/guardian was primarily responsible for instruction?**

mother

father

Other (please specify)

**6. Was the child returning to public school the first child in the family to be home schooled?**

yes

no

**7. How many other children are in the home who were home schooled who also returned to the public school previously? Please enter a whole number (enter "0" if none)**

**8. Are there other children in the home who are still being home schooled?**

yes

no

**9. Below are a variety of reasons that might have contributed to your decision to enroll your child in a public school after a period of home schooling. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree that these reasons contributed to your decision.**

	strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree
We accomplished all of our family goals for home schooling.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child missed his/her friends.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The expense of home schooling was too great.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Home schooling required a greater time investment than we anticipated.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The parent/guardian who was primarily responsible for home schooling returned to or entered the workforce.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Home schooling was disruptive to our family.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Home schooling did not meet the academic needs of our child.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Home schooling did not meet the social needs of our child.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Home schooling met the emotional needs of our child.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Over time, our belief in the necessity of home schooling lessened.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Home schooling allowed us to adequately prepare our child to return to public school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Support materials available to us to continue home schooling were insufficient.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Support groups available to us to continue home schooling were insufficient.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I/we could not teach certain academic classes effectively.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We know of other children who successfully transitioned to public school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**10. Below are some statements which speak to the process of transitioning your child to a public school. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree
The decision to place our child in a public school was a difficult one.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The specific public school my child was able to enroll in was a major factor in transitioning them to the public school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The process of enrolling our child in the public school was easy to do.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child returned to the public school in order to receive a greater choice of courses.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child returned to public school in order to participate in sports and/or other extra-curricular activities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child returned to the public school to receive special education services.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The personnel of the public school were very helpful in enrolling our child.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The principal played a major role in enrolling our child in the public school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The assistant principal played a major role in enrolling our child in the public school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The guidance counselor played a major role in enrolling our child in the public school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There were programs in place that assisted my child in transitioning to public school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It was obvious that the personnel of the public school had experience dealing with situations like ours.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child feels welcomed at the public school in which he/she is enrolled.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our family feels welcome at the public school in which our child is enrolled.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**11. Finally, below are some statements that pertain to your family's experience since your child has enrolled in the public school. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree
We would have preferred to continue with home schooling.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Time and circumstances made this the perfect time to return to public school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child was placed in appropriate classes in the public school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am pleased with my child's academic program in the public school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child is adjusting well in the public school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If our child is not successful in public school, we will return him/her to home schooling.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child is enjoying his/her public school experience.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our family believes that enrolling our child in the public school was the right decision.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Please return the preceding pages of this survey in the pre-addressed return envelope.

As part of this study, I will be conducting follow-up, in-person interviews. These interviews will last approximately one hour. This will enable me to expand on and clarify answers received on the survey. If you would be willing to participate in a follow-up interviews, please provide the following information requested below. Return this information in the separate pre-addressed return envelope.

Thank you for your help in making this study a success.

**12. By completing the following information and returning this information in the supplied pre-addressed envelope, I / we agree to participate in the interview portion of this study, if selected.**

Name	<input type="text"/>
Address	<input type="text"/>
City	<input type="text"/>
Phone	<input type="text"/>
Best time to call	<input type="text"/>

## **Appendix D**

### Second interview questions

- 1) Why did you put your child back in public school?
- 2) Can you describe in detail, the process you went through to transition your child to the public school?
- 3) Please describe any interactions with administrative staff, including principal, assistant principal, and/or guidance counselors.
- 4) How has this move impacted your family?
- 5) How is your child doing in the public school?
- 6) Were there any special programs that were offered or required of your child?
- 7) Are the needs of your child being met in public school?
- 8) Is there anything else you would like to tell me?



## **Appendix E**

### Third interview questions

- 1) What can you tell me about homeschoolers who transition back to your school?
- 2) What procedures does a student who was homeschooled go through to be enrolled?
- 3) What part do you play in this process?
- 4) Tell me how well this group has done transitioning back to the public school.
- 5) Do you have any special programs in place to ensure a successful transition of this population?
- 6) What do you need to know about this population to ensure their success?
- 7) Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the transition process?

## Appendix F

Permission from target school district

May 1, 2015

Carl M. Dennis  
Grade 6 Mathematics Teacher  
Marsteller Middle School  
14000 Sudley Manor Drive  
Bristow, VA. 20136

Dear Mr. Dennis;

The purpose of this letter is to let you know that your request to conduct school administrator interviews related to children that were home-schooled and subsequently enrolled in \_\_\_\_\_ Public Schools (\_\_\_\_\_) in 2014-2015 has been reviewed and approved by the leadership. Approval was granted with the stipulation that principals must give final approval for conducting interviews with voluntary administrators within their schools. This letter may be used in your efforts to contact principals. All research is voluntary and names of participants may not be used.

The \_\_\_\_\_ Home School Instruction Office sent an email to parents of home-schooled students that recently enrolled in \_\_\_\_\_. The email explained your research objective and requested that parents contact you directly if they had interest in sharing their opinions on home schooling.

\_\_\_\_\_ requests a copy of the findings from your dissertation research. We wish you success with your study.

Sincerely,

Supervisor of Program Evaluation

## Appendix G

### Homeschool Association Email

June 15, 2015

Dear Parents,

My name is Carl Dennis. I am a Math teacher at \_\_\_\_\_ School and a PhD student at George Mason University. I am seeking families who would be interested in being part of a research study for my dissertation. I am researching families who have home schooled their children for a period of time of at least one year and at some point transferred them to a public school. To this point, my research has shown that this is a population that has been researched sparsely and one that flies under the radar with most school administrators. I am interested in knowing the reasons why you enrolled your child in a public school after a period of home schooling as well as how the transitioning process to public school went for the student as well as the family. The goal of my study is to provide information for public school leaders that would lead to programs that would ease the transition for this population as well as ensure their success as students.

As with all studies of this nature, your participation is completely confidential. Only the information shared with me, the researcher, will be used in the study, and it will be used in such a way that anyone who reads the study would not be able to determine who the participants were. There are two parts to the study: a six page survey which should take about 15 minutes to complete, and a follow-up in person interview which should take about 45 minutes. The interviews will be conducted in June, July and August of this year. If you participate, I will ask you sign a permission statement before the interview begins. A copy of this permission statement will be given to you to keep. The interviews can be conducted in your home or a neutral place, such as a coffee shop, or Wegman's, for example.

To participate, I will need your name and address. My email and postal address is below. Should you have any additional questions, I would be happy to discuss this with you on the phone. Just email me and I will send you my cell number. Once I receive your name and address, via email or regular mail, I will mail you a copy of the survey along with a stamped return addressed envelope. Let me thank you in advance for your help. It is only through families sharing their experience and thoughts of this process that will allow my study to be a success and hopefully have a positive impact on others who complete this same process.

Sincerely,

Carl M. Dennis

# Appendix H

## Number of Homeschoolers

Table 206.10. Number and percentage of homeschooled students ages 5 through 17 with a grade equivalent of kindergarten through 12th grade, by selected child, parent, and household characteristics: 2003, 2007, and 2012

Selected child, parent, or household characteristic	2003			2007			2012		
	Number of students\1\ (in thousands)	Number home-schooled\2\ (in thousands)	Percent home-schooled\3\	Number of students\1\ (in thousands)	Number home-schooled\2\ (in thousands)	Percent home-schooled\3\	Number of students\1\ (in thousands)	Number home-schooled\2\ (in thousands)	Percent home-schooled\3\
<b>Total</b> .....	<b>50,707 (89.3)</b>	<b>1,096 (92.3)</b>	<b>2.2 (0.18)</b>	<b>51,135 (155.3)</b>	<b>1,520 (118.0)</b>	<b>3.0 (0.23)</b>	<b>51,657 (98.7)</b>	<b>1,773 \3\ (115.7)</b>	<b>3.4 \3\ (0.23)</b>
<b>Sex of child</b> .....									
Male .....	25,819 (286.8)	569 (61.9)	2.2 (0.24)	26,286 (255.6)	639 (75.1)	2.4 (0.28)	26,620 (318.2)	499 (48.0)	1.9 (0.18)
Female .....	24,888 (277.7)	527 (58.2)	2.1 (0.23)	24,849 (386.9)	881 (97.4)	3.5 (0.39)	25,037 (314.0)	583 (63.4)	2.3 (0.25)
<b>Race/ethnicity of child</b> .....									
White .....	31,584 (187.2)	843 (77.5)	2.7 (0.25)	29,815 (197.9)	1,171 (102.2)	3.9 (0.34)	26,978 (161.7)	893 (81.2)	3.3 (0.30)
Black .....	7,985 (45.7)	± (†)	± (†)	7,523 (114.0)	± (†)	± (†)	7,191 (45.8)	± (†)	± (†)
Hispanic .....	8,075 (35.1)	± (†)	± (†)	9,589 (84.8)	147 (27.5)	1.5 (0.29)	11,814 (55.1)	72 (17.3)	0.6 (0.15)
Asian/Pacific Islander .....	1,432 (114.5)	± (†)	± (†)	1,580 (122.9)	± (†)	± (†)	2,849 (118.4)	± (†)	± (†)
Other .....	1,631 (127.7)	± (†)	± (†)	2,629 (141.0)	± (†)	± (†)	2,825 (120.0)	± (†)	± (†)
<b>Grade equivalent\4\</b> .....									
Kindergarten through grade 5 .....	24,269 (24.7)	472 (55.3)	1.9 (0.23)	23,529 (68.1)	717 (83.8)	3.0 (0.36)	25,842 (141.1)	423 (61.1)	1.6 (0.24)
Kindergarten .....	3,643 (24.7)	± (†)	± (†)	3,669 (67.9)	± (†)	± (†)	5,295 (136.2)	± (†)	± (†)
Grades 1 through 3 .....	12,098 (#)	214 (33.3)	1.8 (0.28)	11,965 (2.4)	406 (64.5)	3.4 (0.54)	12,101 (135.0)	203 (45.6)	1.7 (0.38)
Grades 4 through 5 .....	8,528 (#)	160 (30.1)	1.9 (0.35)	7,895 (2.1)	197 (41.4)	2.5 (0.52)	8,446 (128.1)	142 (26.1)	1.7 (0.31)
Grades 6 through 8 .....	12,472 (6.5)	302 (44.9)	2.4 (0.36)	12,435 (8.7)	371 (65.3)	3.0 (0.53)	12,006 (139.1)	373 (44.3)	2.4 (0.37)
Grades 9 through 12 .....	13,958 (81.8)	315 (47.0)	2.3 (0.33)	15,161 (129.3)	422 (58.2)	2.8 (0.38)	13,808 (112.0)	341 (42.8)	2.5 (0.33)
<b>Number of children in the household</b> .....									
One child .....	8,033 (218.1)	110 (22.3)	1.4 (0.27)	8,463 (227.1)	197 (32.5)	2.3 (0.38)	10,899 (182.6)	179 (21.4)	1.6 (0.19)
Two children .....	20,530 (319.4)	306 (45.1)	1.5 (0.22)	20,694 (295.3)	414 (67.2)	2.0 (0.32)	20,337 (251.8)	314 (44.5)	1.5 (0.22)
Three or more children .....	22,144 (362.8)	679 (80.2)	3.1 (0.36)	21,979 (330.7)	909 (102.4)	4.1 (0.46)	20,421 (209.6)	589 (63.5)	2.9 (0.30)
<b>Number of parents in the household</b> .....									
Two parents .....	35,936 (315.1)	886 (82.7)	2.5 (0.23)	37,219 (300.7)	1,357 (111.5)	3.6 (0.30)	34,252 (254.7)	908 (79.2)	2.7 (0.23)
One parent .....	13,260 (319.2)	196 (42.6)	1.5 (0.32)	11,777 (296.8)	118 (28.4)	1.0 (0.24)	15,436 (250.8)	137 (34.5)	0.9 (0.22)
Nonparental guardians .....	1,511 (100.1)	± (†)	± (†)	2,139 (203.2)	± (†)	± (†)	1,968 (112.5)	± (†)	± (†)
<b>Parent participation in the labor force</b> .....									
Two parents—both in labor force .....	25,108 (373.1)	274 (44.1)	1.1 (0.18)	26,055 (318.3)	518 (76.2)	2.0 (0.29)	22,884 (293.3)	295 (41.3)	1.3 (0.18)
Two parents—one in labor force .....	10,545 (297.2)	594 (73.7)	5.6 (0.67)	10,754 (286.1)	808 (94.3)	7.5 (0.82)	11,561 (275.2)	618 (70.1)	5.3 (0.60)
One parent—in labor force .....	12,045 (267.9)	174 (39.8)	1.4 (0.33)	10,020 (277.1)	127 (29.5)	1.3 (0.30)	13,063 (238.6)	96 (19.2)	0.7 (0.15)
No parent participation in labor force .....	3,008 (171.4)	± (†)	± (†)	4,308 (228.9)	± (†)	± (†)	4,108 (187.3)	74 ! (26.9)	1.8 ! (0.65)
<b>Highest education level of parents</b> .....									
High school diploma or less .....	16,106 (272.3)	269 (51.6)	1.7 (0.32)	14,306 (292.9)	208 (35.5)	1.5 (0.24)	16,762 (83.8)	270 (53.3)	1.6 (0.32)
Vocational/technical or some college .....	16,068 (323.4)	338 (57.7)	2.1 (0.36)	14,581 (326.5)	559 (77.5)	3.8 (0.52)	15,621 (173.9)	344 (38.4)	2.2 (0.24)
Bachelor's degree/some graduate school .....	10,849 (275.0)	309 (48.5)	2.8 (0.45)	11,448 (276.5)	444 (64.7)	3.9 (0.57)	11,675 (168.4)	275 (41.9)	2.4 (0.36)
Graduate/professional degree .....	7,683 (239.5)	180 (41.6)	2.3 (0.35)	10,800 (236.0)	309 (50.0)	2.9 (0.46)	7,599 (34.1)	192 (26.5)	2.5 (0.35)
<b>Household income</b> .....									
\$20,000 or less .....	9,079 (146.2)	164 (38.9)	1.8 (0.43)	8,488 (201.2)	186 (42.1)	2.2 (0.50)	7,593 (39.6)	59 (12.1)	0.8 (0.16)
\$20,001 to \$50,000 .....	16,515 (336.1)	430 (60.3)	2.6 (0.36)	13,648 (306.1)	420 (59.8)	3.1 (0.42)	13,973 (84.7)	321 (44.2)	2.3 (0.32)
\$50,001 to \$75,000 .....	10,961 (282.2)	264 (51.1)	2.4 (0.46)	10,289 (132.9)	414 (58.8)	4.0 (0.57)	9,406 (23.9)	278 (40.8)	3.0 (0.44)
\$75,001 to \$100,000 .....	6,432 (238.0)	169 (42.9)	2.6 (0.66)	6,899 (210.8)	264 (57.2)	3.8 (0.83)	6,916 (29.5)	211 (42.4)	3.0 (0.61)
Over \$100,000 .....	7,718 (212.6)	± (†)	± (†)	11,811 (228.2)	236 (57.5)	2.0 (0.49)	13,769 (56.5)	214 (34.4)	1.6 (0.23)
<b>Locale</b> .....									
City .....	---	(†)	---	15,998 (292.3)	327 (40.4)	2.0 (0.26)	15,191 (236.0)	226 (28.0)	1.5 (0.18)
Suburb .....	---	(†)	---	18,988 (291.3)	503 (78.8)	2.6 (0.41)	19,356 (330.6)	303 (48.4)	1.6 (0.22)
Town .....	---	(†)	---	5,574 (208.4)	168 (37.1)	3.0 (0.65)	4,839 (197.9)	112 (30.8)	2.3 (0.63)
Rural .....	---	(†)	---	10,576 (110.9)	523 (75.9)	4.9 (0.71)	12,271 (249.1)	441 (65.0)	3.6 (0.52)

---Not available.

†Not applicable.

#Rounds to zero.

!Reporting standards not met (too few cases for a reliable estimate).

\1\Refers to all students in public and private schools and homeschooled students.

\2\Numbers and percentages of homeschoolers exclude students who were enrolled in school for more than 25 hours a week or who were homeschooled only due to a temporary illness.

\3\The National Center for Education Statistics uses a statistical adjustment for estimates of total homeschoolers in 2012. For more information about this adjustment, please see *Homeschooling in the United States: 2012* (NCES 2015-019, forthcoming). All other estimates about homeschoolers do not use a statistical adjustment.

\4\Students whose grade equivalent was "ungraded" were excluded from the grade analysis. The percentage of students with an "ungraded" grade equivalent was 0.02 percent in 2003 and 2007. There were no students with an "ungraded" grade equivalent in 2012.

NOTE: While National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES) administrations prior to 2012 were administered via telephone with an interviewer, NHES:2012 used self-administered paper and-pencil questionnaires that were mailed to respondents. Measurable differences in estimates between 2012 and prior years could reflect actual changes in the population, or the changes could be due to the mode change from telephone to mail. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Some data have been revised from previously published figures.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program (PFI-NHES:2003, 2007, and 2012). (This table was prepared November 2014.)

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## **Biography**

Carl M. Dennis grew up in Pennsylvania. He attended Baptist Bible College of Pennsylvania where he received his Bachelor of Religious Education in Elementary Education in 1975. He went on to receive a Master of Religious Education from Temple Baptist Theological Seminary in 1981. In 2005, he received a Master of Education from George Mason University. He received his Doctor of Philosophy in Education from George Mason University in 2016. He currently teaches Middle School Mathematics in Prince William County Public Schools, and is an avid paraglider pilot and amateur radio operator.