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Homeschool Position

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Johnna Willis—Best Argument

Johnna Willis is a sophomore early childhood education major from Huntington, West Virginia. From a young age she has been interested in the development of the next generation's mind. Since then she has offered children's piano lessons and served at her state church camp.

Homeschool Position

Homeschooling has been available to families for centuries, but it has recently become prevalent around the United States, reaching 1.77 million children in 2011 (*Homeschool Statistics*, 2016). This large number of children represent many families and homes. In most households, the parents decide if they desire to homeschool their children or if they want to send their children to a public or private school. A parent's freedom to homeschool their children is a considerable option in America today. Homeschooling has many variations across the country, from methods to resources to requirements, but throughout the options, the choice to educate at home is a good opportunity for children.

One aspect of homeschooling that makes it desirable for many families is that homeschooling is different for every child. Customizing curriculum is an option for most families who homeschool; therefore, each child receives a unique education that can usually caters to their needs. Kathleen Berchermann, MD, quit working in the medical field to stay home with her children. She wrote in Children's MD's section *Mom Docs*, "Our kids are excelling academically as homeschoolers. Homeschooling allows us to enrich our children's strengths and supplement their weaknesses. The kids' education moves as fast or as slow as required for that particular subject area. They are not pigeon-holed and tracked as gifted, average, or special needs" (Berchermann, 2015). Families customize their curriculum because children each work in a different way. Children in the homeschool setting occasionally study at desks at home, but there might be a school table where multiple children work or a computer desk where they sit and work on their materials and lessons for the day. This difference in environment compared to public or private schools is beneficial for most students, for the setting provides fewer distractions. It is especially helpful for students with special needs. For example, children with autism can have accommodations made at home that students cannot find in a classroom. Many homes where special needs children live already have the accommodations built in, therefore the child can learn without frustrations and with a familiar setup. Children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) can also benefit from home education because the environment can change in order to create a learning setting most productive for their needs. Parents and other educators can help with confidence at home, for there are no children for the students to compare themselves to and there are no bullies.

The way in which children work often corresponds with the way they best think. Psychologist Howard Gardner's multiple intelligence theory states each mind has various strengths and weaknesses (Rathus, 2014). Focusing material to specific strengths, such as musical learners learning English rules through song, tends to help children learn more efficiently. When parents choose to homeschool, they choose to take education into their own hands which can adapt materials and subjects to reach their child's needs and strengths within their brain functioning and capacity.

Because of accommodations such as creating the ideal curriculum, statistics show homeschooling works well for families nationwide. According to the U.S. Department of Education, 1.77 million children registered as homeschooled in 2011 (Homeschool Statistics, 2016). This number has dramatically increased in the past few decades. Author and educator Joseph Murphy researched the reasons behind the decision parents make to keep their children at home rather than send them to a public or private school. In his studies, he noted families choose to homeschool for various reasons, but the top contributing factors include academics, school social issues, religion, and family (2014).

Lisa Rivero presents a list of reasons why families choose to homeschool throughout the United States in her book *The Homeschooling Option: How to Decide When It's Right for Your Family*. Her reasons include the flexibility of schedule, the safety of the child, the encouragement of family bonding, and the specificity for each student (2008).

Rivero's first point in her argument states, "Homeschooling works because it allows children to work at their own pace" (2008). Here, not only can parents establish a curriculum that works best with their child's brain functioning, but parents can establish a schedule that provides the optimal timing for children to get their best work completed. Bells do not ring and class periods do not change within the home. Each child stands alone and therefore can usually work longer on harder subjects, depending on the parents' preference. Homeschooling also does not have a start date and end date for Summer or Christmas breaks, so if a student needs more time on a subject in October, they can take time to work on that concept. Snow days do not apply either, which allows parents to choose a break day in other seasons if they need a day off. The schedule throughout the day varies, so children can sleep in and stay up late, if that is what works best for them and their parents. Seton Home Study School shares with its families "Science and history could be done on weekends or in the evenings with Dad or grandparents if more time is needed during the week for the other subjects" (*Homeschool Success Through a Flexible Schedule*, 2013). The parents choose the arrangements made for their children, not a principal or government. This angle works well with families who have children with learning disabilities. Oftentimes, children with needs such as dyslexia take a longer time to learn or need special teaching treatment. Homeschooling is a valid option for these children for they can receive this special alternative with little inconvenience to the instructor and with no worry of peer problems.

This leads to the second point made by Rivero. She continues with the statement, “Homeschooling works because it provides a safe learning environment.” (2008) The highest single response given in the U.S. Department of Education’s survey asking why families chose to homeschool was parents’ concern about the environment of the school the children would attend (Reasons Parents Homeschool, 2014).

In the home, the child normally feels comfortable. There are no class threats in the home. Children do not need a security guard walking the hallways or inspectors checking on lockers for safety measures. Parents staying home with children do not need special arrangements to take their students on a field trip in a bus or other school transportation. Parents and close friends orchestrate any trips for education which allows the families access to all information and confirmation of safety for their child. Because of these comforting measures, parents feel better about their child’s well-being and the child is not distracted in what is supposed to be a learning setting. Not only can a parent ensure the safety by monitoring their child’s environment physically, but the concern of peer pressure and bullying can also be closely watched. Sometimes school systems have a variety of children attending, and parents never know what certain children will say or do in front of their child. For protective purposes, a homeschooling family can stay actively involved in the child’s environment and keep an eye on a child’s friends and influences.

The topic of influences leads to the common argument against homeschooling: if children stay at home they will not make any friends or get any kind of social interaction. This is, as a whole, untrue. The belief that no classmates means no friends usually is a false assumption. Many homeschoolers throughout the country have friends from organizations such as girl scouts, activities such as local sports leagues, and communities such as church families. Another large resource for homeschooled children to receive socialization is through cooperation groups, or “co-ops,” where several homeschool families from a region get together regularly for activities such as physical education classes, tutoring, field trips, and fun days off. Cooperation groups typically can be found around the country, but not in every area. This not only helps the children make friends from similar backgrounds, but it gives the parents a chance to get out of the house and spend time with other adults. “Co-ops” are often family-based with activities for all ages, but they are still an option for homeschooling families with only one child.

For the families who choose to educate more than one child at home, Rivero continues to make the third claim, “Homeschooling works because it strengthens and nurtures families” (2008). When the children are younger, they typically develop a strong bond with their parents due to the necessity to be with them frequently. If there are multiple children, they separate during the school day to go to their various classes. Both of these separations do not occur in homeschooling. Many homeschool families work on classes together, go on field trips together, and eat meals together. Spending time together and making joint memories builds

relationships between family members. Stefani, a homeschooling mother and blogger, talks about this older-younger sibling bond in her article *Learning is Better Together: Fostering Strong Sibling Relationships*. Her experience is expressed, “When we are working together to help our youngest learn something new, my older boys are learning that childhood is precious, short and worth cherishing. They are learning that having a younger person around is a real gift!” Testimonies such as this occur frequently among families who choose to keep their children home.

This story from Stefani seems heartwarming and encouraging, but not every family gets these results when they attempt to homeschool. Some parent-child relationships undergo stress when they spend large amounts of time together. Children have the dual mindset of a parent and a teacher, and for smaller children this may become confusing. The parents also could feel bad about the grades they must give their children which creates tension between parent and child.

The parents and the children both sacrifice when they stay at home, but families who homeschool come to the decision that the better education is worth it. Rivero’s final point says, “Homeschooling works because all children’s needs are worthy of special attention” (2008). Each child is special and learns uniquely. A classroom teacher teaches to a classroom, that is all he or she is expected to do with his or her classroom. This method, however, does not reach each child’s needs. Select teachers can assist students who struggle or excel, but the majority of the time the teacher must teach to the children as a whole. With the homeschooling method parents or home educators can cater the material particularly for that specific child. Just like the argument of reaching the child’s specific intelligences (such as those Gardner theorized) and the pacing argument made by Rivero previously, the specificity of education program proves to be one of the more important reasons why families choose to homeschool.

Homeschooling may not be the best option, depending on the child and family situation. Specificity is helpful in a child’s education, but some children require the social and discipline aspects of attending a school with classmates and teachers. Rivero counters her own argument of the benefits of homeschooling with, “All children- homeschooled or not- can lack self-discipline or parental guidance and example. If a child ceases to show interest in or engagement with life, parents would be wise to look carefully at what might need to be changed in the child’s environment, habits of thought, self-concept, or family dynamics” (2008). Different children require different learning environments; therefore, they may need to be in a school setting. Each child has his or her own needs that can be met by either a home-based education or a private or public school education. This involves the parents’ knowledge of the child’s performance and a discussion between parent and child. It could be great for a specific child to stay home rather than attend a nearby school; it also may be a wonderful decision for the mother or father who would enjoy teaching. Unfortunately, however, if that child is strong-willed and does not want to do his or her schoolwork and the parents cannot find him or her new motivation, the best option may be to send the child to a new school setting that might encourage him or her to learn and

take education seriously. Therefore, the needs presented by the student may be different than what the student wants, which requires special decision making by the parents and the schools.

Hard decisions such as deciding for or against a child's will are just one aspect of the struggle of homeschooling. As great as it may sound at times, homeschooling can prove difficult for many families. The main problem in the transition to homeschool typically resides with the parents. Rivero says, "When child-directed learning works well, it can require even more parental involvement, time, guidance, and skills than more traditional homeschooling approaches." (2008) Parents who choose to homeschool accept a full-time and important job of orchestrating their child's education.

Most families face challenges when considering staying home to educate their children or hiring someone to come teach. When families homeschool, usually the mother stays home to assist in the education rather than work a full-time job. This results in a decrease in the family's income, even if the mother switched to a part-time job or hired a tutor to homeschool the children. Unfortunately, due to these circumstances, many families' only option financially is to send their children to a public school.

Worries about income can weigh in greatly on a family's decision to homeschool, but other families worry about the politics involved in the reports to the state about their children's education. The majority of states in the United States have regulations regarding how they keep up with children who are not in the public-school system. Depending on where the family is located, the state laws may pose an issue in the homeschooling field. The Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) mapped out the states in which homeschooling is easiest and most difficult. Regulations vary by region. High regulation states (5 states, all in New England) require parents to turn in to the state the student's test scores, teacher certification, house tests, and get their curriculum approved by the state (Davis, 2013). Moderate level regulation (19 states nationwide, including Hawaii) requires turning in to the state the student's test scores (Davis, 2013). Low regulation states (15 states, mostly in the south and the west) just require parents to inform the state that their child will no longer attend a public school (Davis, 2013). Some states (11 states nationwide, including Alaska) have no regulations (Davis, 2013). These demographics greatly contribute to the way in which parents teach and view home education.

The state may control an aspect of homeschooling, but, as a whole, the family environment contributes the most to whether or not the homeschool method is successful. As stated previously, sometimes the family environment changes when parents keep their child or children home. Spending a majority of their time at home together might be great for the strength of the family, but it might create problems that might create stresses within the home. Parents have been known to show frustration in teaching subjects they are not qualified to teach and in turn their attitude affects the child's behavior and attitude toward learning. Other parents

get tired of spending all day with their kids rather than with other adults. The decision to homeschool does not only involve the child's needs and preferences, but the parents'.

Overall, homeschooling is a team effort between parents, siblings, school systems, children, and the state's regulations. Homeschooling is a fantastic option for many families nationwide. The majority of parents who homeschool chose that route because of the flexibility in curriculum and schedule, the environment it creates, and the way the child performs in another school setting. However, not every family can or should homeschool. Difficulties at home create a negative environment in which children can learn, financial resources do not always allow a parent or tutor to teach the children privately, the children may thrive in their schools, and state requirements could provide issues in the home educational system. Therefore, although homeschooling is a wonderful and considerable freedom allowed in America that thousands of families take advantage of, it is not the preferable option for every family.

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