

Dispelling The Myths About Homeschooling

By Christine Webb

Myth: *Homeschooled children are lacking in opportunities for social interaction.*

Reality: In the homeschool community this question is usually met with looks of disbelief and a quiet chuckle. There are literally thousands of opportunities in Oregon for homeschooled children to get together for activities. Roller skating, theater groups, study groups, archery lessons, swimming, park days, recitals, ski outings --- the list goes on and on. And, although all families do not enjoy access to this wide variety, most do have the opportunity to play sports, to join community groups like scouts or 4-H and to participate in religious communities.

Children have the opportunity to develop friendships with children of widely varying ages. They learn social skills from their families, and, in a supportive community, from those who are more experienced at getting along in the world.

Myth: *Homeschooled children lack "real world" experience.*

Reality: Homeschooled children are quick to point out that they live very much in the "real world." Life is not "on hold" during the day for homeschooling families. These children learn at an early age how to succeed in the world at large because they participate in it with their families. They, for instance, shop, bank, and visit nursing homes. Older children volunteer in the community, hold part-time jobs, take classes, and participate in mentoring projects with adults.

This life experience adds up to well-rounded and capable young people who can successfully make the transition to living on their own or to moving on to college.

Myth: *Homeschoolers all homeschool in the same way.*

Reality: Just as in public and private schools, you will find a wide array of education philosophies in the homeschooling community. The real strength of homeschooling is that each family can choose and implement that which works best for its children and its situation. They are not limited to a "one-size-fits-all" curriculum, time frame, or education philosophy. Children can be given the gift of time to learn at a pace that meets individual needs and the resources to learn through their strengths.

The low child/parent ratio allows these children large amounts of individual attention, contributing to the homeschooling community's extremely high literacy rate.

Myth: *Parents are not qualified to teach difficult subjects.*

Reality: Although many students successfully opt to self-teach or to learn together with an interested parent, the options for children extend well beyond the family. Some families choose to get together to form study groups around a particular subject and to hire a tutor. Some students opt for community college classes. Others barter help with one subject for help in another. Classes over the Internet or the television are increasingly available options for many families, as are videos and computer software.

Learning options are excellent and varied so there is something to meet the needs of every family.

Myth: *All homeschoolers belong to a single religious and political group.*

Reality: People who believe this myth generally think that homeschoolers are "Christians with a conservative political agenda." In fact, homeschoolers come from all walks of religious and political life. For some, homeschooling is all about faith -- they feel compelled to do this from deeply held religious beliefs. For those homeschoolers, (a wide variety of Christian denominations, Jews, Bahais, Muslims, Buddhists, and a host of other religious preferences), homeschooling is an opportunity to more fully immerse their children in the spiritual life of their family and their religious community. But for many, religion is not a deciding factor in why they homeschool. It may be a matter of simply continuing a lifestyle that is family-centered. On the other hand, many seek out homeschooling after a negative experience with a public or private school. Increasingly, families are choosing homeschooling because they believe it is an excellent education option for their children.

The reasons for homeschooling are as varied as the families. For thousands of families, homeschooling is a lifestyle choice, an education choice or a health choice.

Myth: *Parents homeschool in order to cover up neglect.*

Reality: A parent who keeps a child home in order to abuse or neglect that child is not homeschooling and no homeschooling law could protect that child or apprehend an abusive parent. Parents who homeschool spend incredible amounts of time with their children. People who do not want their children around do not homeschool -- they send their children to school. It is easier and cheaper.

Education laws are not effective deterrents to abuse and should not be crafted for that purpose.

Myth: *Homeschoolers do not support the public schools.*

Reality: This is such a sad thought and so thoroughly untrue. Homeschooling parents, remember, are primarily the result of public school education. Most are college-educated. Their children's playmates most likely attend public school. Although a decision to homeschool is certainly a decision to keep the child out of the public/private school system, it is not necessarily a decision to withdraw support from the public school system. Homeschool parents own homes and pay taxes that provide financial support for the schools. Some even volunteer in the schools or provide daycare for school-age children.

A choice to homeschool is not a vote against public or private schools.

Myth: *Homeschoolers without a GED or diploma have difficulty entering college.*

Reality: Hundreds of colleges across the country are enrolling homeschoolers without either a GED or a diploma: state colleges, Ivy League colleges, private colleges and community colleges.

Colleges are interested in capable, motivated learners and responsible people. They find both in homeschooled students.

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