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### Perceived Barriers of Homeschooled Students Moving into Higher Education: Case Stories and Qualitative Perspectives

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**Perceived Barriers of Homeschooled Students Moving into Higher Education:  
Case Stories and Qualitative Perspectives**

**By**

**Lizbeth Kliewer**

**This Dissertation is Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for  
the Educational Doctorate Degree  
in Educational Leadership**

**Minnesota State University, Mankato  
Mankato, Minnesota**

**November 2019**

Date:

This dissertation has been examined and approved.

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### **Abstract**

Homeschooling is a viable educational option for many families. Challenges often arise when students are ready to transition into higher education. Barriers to smooth transitions exist, both for the homeschooled student as well as for college admissions teams. The purpose of this qualitative study was to recognize these barriers in order to increase the potential for working toward solutions for those involved. This study used a combination of case story and qualitative research methodology to gather perspectives through interviews from three homeschooling families in southern Minnesota and three higher education professionals working in the field of admissions. Some of the main barriers revealed in the findings of this study include reliable methods of communication with the homeschooling network, lack of recruitment of homeschooled students, homeschooling transcript expectations, and consistent requirements from schools. Acknowledging and presenting this knowledge gained about perceived barrier challenges and ideas for meaningful change will help move this topic forward and lead to better understanding and recognition of possible solutions to ease the transition process for homeschooled students.

## **Acknowledgements**

As I work to live with intention, my family continues daily to infuse my life with joy.

Thank you for your support, encouragement, guidance, and laughter.

This goal has been a part of my life for so long that I feel the need to

STOP

BREATH

SAVOR THE MOMENT

and

REFLECT ON THE JOURNEY

To my cohort of professionals and instructors.

Your guidance makes me a better educator.

I value your input and bold actions.

I'm proud to have taken this step with each of you.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

#### **Background of the Problem**

Americans have been using their homes as educational spaces from colonial times up until the present (Gaither, 2009). Home education is an option that affords variety, specialization, cohesiveness, educational stimulation and challenge to those that participate. Families choose to homeschool for a wide variety of reasons, but it is safe to assume that most do so because they feel that this is a valid educational option for the youth involved. In the United States, most families provided parent-based education for their children until the 1850's at which time compulsory education laws became established (Davis, 2011). Research states that parents give a wide variety of reasons for homeschooling their children. In the 2011–12 school year, 91% of homeschooled students had parents who said that a concern about the environment of other schools was an important reason for homeschooling their child, which was a higher percentage than other reasons listed (Redford, Battle & Bielick, 2017). Redford et al. (2017) define homeschooled students as “school-age children (ages 5–17) in a grade equivalent to at least kindergarten and not higher than 12th grade who receive instruction at home instead of at a public or private school either all or most of the time” (p.ii). Currently more than 2.3 million children are being homeschooled in the United States (Cummings, 2012; NHERI, 2019). This number represents over 3% of all-American students within the school-age population, and this number continues to climb. As reported in A to Z Homeschool (2018), in Minnesota alone there were nearly 28,000 youth being educated

at home during the 2017/18 academic year. This accounts for 1.86% of the school-age population, as opposed to states like North Carolina where over 5% of students are home educated. As these youth move on into higher education, there are perceived barriers to this transition that exist both on the side of the homeschool family and on the side of the institute of higher learning.

Non-formal research such as discussions with homeschooling families, blog posts, online comments and conversations, and personal experience has shown that there are currently obstacles for homeschooled students as they transition into higher education. One of the consistent challenges is proving educational standing and academic preparedness. Another challenge is inconsistent documentation requests from institutions of higher learning. Colleges and universities create their own rules for necessary documentation and the expectations vary. These may include testing results, recommendation letters, transcripts, detailed explanatory statements, or any others. Financial aid eligibility or lack thereof adds to the obstacles that homeschooling families face.

Barriers on the college or university side may include among others; lack of school counselor reference, lack of a thorough academic transcript, no class ranking score, inability to compare the student to others based on their shared experience in the classroom and missing or differing testing scores. Hoover (2008) states that people used to equate testing results with ability, but as a country, we have come to a much clearer understanding that those scores have more to do with opportunities. Morgan and Burd (2003) add that college officials site ambiguity in the Education Department as far as

guidance and their belief that state law governs such matters as home schooling. These challenges create a lack of cohesiveness with student applicants from traditional school settings. It is hard to compare “apples to apples” when you’re working with “apples and oranges”.

Families choose to homeschool for a wide variety of reasons including academic, social, religious, political and others. How these students will compete academically as well as fit in socially is the question of many school officials (Lines, 2003). Critics of home education argue that choosing to educate outside of the traditional classroom setting shelters children from society (Medlin, 2000). Parents argue otherwise saying home education offers the kind of socialization experiences and opportunities that they want for their children. Homeschooling parents mention they are involved in a wide variety of activities with people from a variety of backgrounds, races, religions, belief systems, and economic situations. Producing solid evidence of these experiences leads to the challenges of proving academic standing.

From the homeschooling family side of the equation comes a lack of knowledge of the application process and expectations. Traditionally, school counselors play the role of liaison between the student and the higher education institution process. Challenges of proving educational background, finding ways to highlight student accomplishments, the inability to compete for financial aid opportunities, and requirements for testing and documentation are some of the barriers perceived by homeschoolers.

Not all of the news is bad for the homeschooling community. Gathercole (2009) wrote about the fact that in many instances' college admissions officers are now actively seeking out homeschoolers due to their ability to succeed in higher education. Although they have a lack of formal credentialing, many home educated individuals are well prepared for further education and will rise to the challenge. According to Cooper and Sureau (2007) "Leading colleges have relaxed their requirements for official grade point averages and report cards from schools and are accepting homeschooled children's academic portfolios, recommendations, and interviews as a positive basis for university admissions" (p. 127). This may be true in some areas of the country; in other regions this is certainly not the case. Davis (2011) further asserted:

Homeschooling requires a great deal of work in deciding and developing curriculum, learning how to manage time, learning how to organize requirements and document everything, understanding the laws and regulations for homeschooling, ability to apply curriculum to the state standards, and designing curriculum that is both effective and engaging. (p. 32)

### **Problem Statement**

Barriers for home educated youth moving into higher education are well known throughout the homeschool community. Yet, there has been very little scholarly research that has investigated the perspectives of families and institutions as to the extent and prevalence of these perceived barriers. This is a topic in need of examination where accurate and reliable homeschooling statistics are few and far between. Families are often left without an educational support system and forced to find their way through the

laws, suggestions, paperwork, testing requirements, and financial obligation involved.

This knowledge deficit is also true for the institutions of higher learning. They are challenged with recruiting, evaluating financial assistance and placing students that they know very little about through means that do not always apply to this minority population.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to identify the perceived barriers to college acceptance of homeschooled students and institutions of higher learning in Southern Minnesota. Acknowledging perceived barriers could lead to better understanding and recognition of possible solutions to ease this transition process.

### **Primary Research Questions**

1. What are the perceived barriers of homeschooled students as they prepare to attend higher education?
2. In what ways, if any, do homeschooled student applicants perceive they are treated differently than other student applicants, in a positive or negative way, by higher education admissions personnel?
3. In what ways, if any, do higher education admissions personnel perceive that homeschooled student applicants are treated differently than other student applicants?

## **Significance of the Research**

As home education continues to gain popularity in the United States it is imperative to learn more about how this population makes its choices about higher education as well as where this education will take place. Current expectations for educated individuals include college or university degrees but recruiting and help with registration does not take place in the same manner for the home educated population. This research will lead to greater knowledge about the perceived barriers that are in place and are impeding the process.

## **Delimitations**

This study was limited to homeschooling families in southern Minnesota with children who had recently or would soon be applying to higher education institutions. Three families were interviewed based on their willingness to volunteer for the study that was described in an online newsletter directed to the regional home educators' group.

Admissions personnel were limited to two colleges and one University in southern Minnesota. Understandably, not all homeschooled students will choose to attend these higher education options, but they represent a variety of styles of education choice within the community.

## **Definition of Key Terms**

**Compulsory Education Laws.** The Minnesota Compulsory Attendance Law M.S. 120.10, requires that every child between seven and sixteen years of age shall attend a public or private school during every day that the school is in session any school year. Homeschools are a type of private school.

**Home education/Home schooling/Parent-based education.** Redford et al. (2017) define homeschooled students as “school-age children (ages 5–17) in a grade equivalent to at least kindergarten and not higher than 12th grade who receive instruction at home instead of at a public or private school either all or most of the time”. (p. 5)

**Socialization.** The process of learning how to behave in a manner that is acceptable to society. This is a topic of considerable debate when it comes to homeschooled students.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Review of the Literature**

In order to give a thorough background of the subject, literature pertinent to the study has been reviewed and summarized. Topics researched included: homeschooling history, higher education preparedness, barriers from homeschool perspective, barriers from higher education perspective, and benefits of research. By reviewing these subjects, the researcher gained a clear perspective of not only the history of the movement, but where problems and gaps in the research exist.

Numbers of people engaged in the process of homeschooling are rapidly changing, in fact the total percentage of American students being homeschooled doubled from 1999 to 2012 (Prothero, 2016). It is estimated that 50% of these home-educated youth will pursue higher education, but many college admissions offices are still not certain how to evaluate their academic experiences (Bress, 2006). How these students will compete academically as well as fit in socially is the question of many school officials (Lines, 2003).

This study will explore reasons for these perceived barriers in Southern Minnesota by exploring the history of homeschooling, as well as collecting information both from homeschooling families as well as viewpoints of professionals working in higher education fields that recruit and review college and university applicants.

Concern over changing expectations, including common core curriculum are also steppingstones that need to be navigated (Colleges and Common Core, 2014).



There are also barriers on the college or university side which include among others; lack of school counselor reference, lack of a thorough academic transcript, no class ranking score, inability to compare students to others based on their shared experience in the classroom and missing or differing testing scores. According to research, these barriers are beginning to change.

Knowledge gained from this study has the opportunity to better prepare both sides of this education equation for the future needs of smoothing academic access for home-educated youth.

### **Homeschooling History**

**Background.** Parenting is an exhaustive but incredibly rewarding job. From the moment the child is born, the adults involved become the most important teachers of the child's life (Cooper & Sureau, 2007). These first teachers are not only working on moral development of the child, they are establishing foundations in education, religion, citizenship, community and public relations. Without much convincing people understand that home schooling is taking place with these young ones.

Homeschooling is not a new idea or practice. For centuries children have learned outside of formal school or public settings (Lines, 2003). The exact numbers of home educators in countries around the world are very difficult to pinpoint for a variety of reasons. In some countries, children who have never been to school are not required to register with any governmental authorities. Even in places where it is more challenging to home educate, it is taking place, but rarely known to others (Kortmaz & Duman, 2014).

According to Lines (2003), deep thinkers from a variety of philosophical traditions have not been convinced that formal schooling was the best choice for a variety of reasons.

- 17<sup>th</sup>-century English philosopher John Locke believed that virtue was the main goal of education and that the home was the best place to teach it.
- American educator and philosopher John Dewey believed that school was artificially set apart from society and in this way was challenging and not ideally set up for experience.

The idea of educating at home has been around for centuries, while compulsory public education is a relatively new idea (Lines, 2003). According to Davis (2001), compulsory education in the American colonies was first established in the mid 1600's in Massachusetts. This law was initially brought about to provide education to orphans who had no parents to educate them. The new law required that every town create a grammar school. The government-imposed fines on parents who failed to send their children to school. Prior to this change taking place, homeschooling was the primary form of education of the masses as the concept of hiring a teacher or tutor was only available to the elite (Distefano, Rudestam, & Silverman, 2004). By the early 1900's, compulsory education laws were adopted by nearly every state in the union. These mandatory laws decreased the number of homeschooled students dramatically as homeschooling was at this point a controversial form of education and in many cases illegal. Above all else it was regarded as a tremendous controversy (Cogan, 2010; Davis, 2011; Jones, 2004).

Although homeschooling has had a past driven by challenges, legislation, and reform, by 1993 every state in the union had made homeschooling legal regardless of whether or not the parents held a teaching certificate (Gaither, 2009). Due to the fact that homeschools are generally not accredited, rules for parent/teachers are another stipulation that varies greatly (States News Service, 2017). This continues to be a point of contention for those that are less than supportive of this educational option. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2008); and Cogan (2010), the population of homeschooled students in the United States is nearly as much as the population of students in New York City and Los Angeles combined. This group is a growing force in education.

Since this initial change in education, homeschooling has gone through many evolutions. Frustrations with society, government, and culture often bring on increased numbers of parents choosing to take on the role of primary educators for their children. There are a variety of reasons that families are motivated to educate their children at home. These may include: a desire to provide religious or moral instruction, concerns over peer pressure, worries about drugs, alcohol and safety within the public school setting, dissatisfaction with the quality of local instruction, desire for increased family time, financial constraints, travel opportunities, physical barriers or distance, health related issues and any number of other personal reasons (Hercules, Parrish, & Whitehead, 2016). For some, of course, this is not a choice at all, but a necessity. There are times when threats of violence, economic conditions or geographical barriers make public educational choices unavailable (Lubienski, 2003).

Although the idea is millennia old, Ray, (2004) asserts that home schooling is now arguably the fastest-growing form of education. “Increasingly, people are withdrawing from many of the common institutions that have defined social life in market democracies over the last century” (Lubienski, 2003, p.167). Wilhelm and Firmin (2009) contend that during the past several decades, the American public’s understanding and familiarity with home schooling has evolved from a level of almost complete ignorance to one of widespread awareness. Bauman (2002), stated that we have managed to bring homeschooling from obscurity to public awareness. Today there are even children’s picture books in the public library explaining the homeschool journey (Bean, 2015) that add to the common nature of this lifestyle.

**Reasons for homeschooling.** In most cultures, “the home-based education of the past was nearly always done from pragmatic rather than ideological reasons” (Gaither, 2009, p.331). Practicality is still a major reason that many people choose to educate at home, but increasingly it is a choice made by families rather than a forced alternative.

In the 1970’s, for the first time historically, a movement of parents kept their children out of public education not by necessity, but by design. It was a deliberate act of political protest against formal educational settings and became a viable alternative for many (Gaither, 2009). Lines stated in 2003, that for a number of different reasons, parents were, and continue to be, losing faith in the American classroom. Some parents have chosen to home educate in order to protect their children from drugs, violence, sex, and the psychological abuse that they believe is taking place in traditional schools (Haan & Cruickshank, 2006). Because of this, homeschooling is becoming a serious alternative

that continues to grow in popularity. Gaither (2009) asserted that at first many Americans belief systems were challenged by the notion that children were being kept out of public schools, but as they have learned more about it and saw that many homeschooled children were excelling academically, the attitudes and laws have shifted. Today, both the left and right wings of homeschooling are active, and many families have both philosophical and religious reasons for their choice. (Lines, 2003). For those choosing to homeschool for religious reasons, or the lack thereof, evangelical Christians are now joined by Jews, Muslims, Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox religions as well as atheists (Haan et al., 2006).

**Homeschooling today.** Growing interest in the education of homeschooled students, due to their ever-increasing numbers, has brought considerable attention to this method over the past decade. The American public sees and reads about homeschooled students who win or do well in national geography and spelling competitions; attend the best universities; and how they are now being recruited based on their academic achievements (Romanowski, 2006). Educators and government officials alike study public perceptions towards homeschooling, as well as curriculum, socialization issues, support groups, educational opportunities, and the advantages and disadvantages of these choices in order to enact future policies (Korkmaz & Duman, 2014). Current data on the number of homeschoolers is at best challenging to find, and impossible in many cases due to the fact that a large number of states do not require families to report homeschooling (Wilkens, Wade, Sonnert, & Sadler, 2015). The homeschooling movement is continuing to experience robust growth. The network of families involved

have become much more connected as well (Cox, 2003). “A movement once considered the domain of aging hippies and religious fundamentalists increasingly has been embraced by the main-stream” (Cox, 2003, p. 25).

One of the unique aspects of the homeschooling community is that it appeals to a demographic diversity that includes virtually all races, religions, socioeconomic groups and political viewpoints (Romanowski, 2006). Although this is true, there are certainly under-represented portions of the population. Currently in the United States most homeschooling families are white/non-Hispanic in terms of their racial/ethnic background. African Americans and other non-Caucasian groups are under-represented among homeschooling families, but their numbers continue to climb.

As numbers of homeschooling families increase, critics continue to show concern over the potential for unreported abuse, psychological harm, and even lack of academic rigor (Wilkins, Wade, Sonnert, & Sadler, 2015). At the same time advocates claim that homeschooling promotes flexibility, the opportunity for individualized education, and improved academic performance of those students involved. Lubienski (2003), asserted that four of the most prominent arguments for reasons to get involved in the movement include: assertion of parental rights, control over academic achievement of students, improvement of schooling possibilities and opportunities, and taking a more active role in parental duties.

As homeschooling has become less controversial and more familiar to the mainstream, more and more people are turning to it as an option for their own children. Consistently, families are choosing this option not out of frustration with public

schooling, government, or even inflexible curriculum offerings, but simply because it makes sense for the time being given their family circumstances. They are the new domestic educators, returning to the historic practice of using the home to educate for practical reasons rather than an ideological fight against the mainstream (Dunn & Derthick, 2008). Homeschooling families today do not necessarily plan to educate their children exclusively at home. In fact, according to Wilkens, Wade, Sonnert, and Sadler (2015), it is a rare student who exclusively homeschools over the entire K-12 schooling years.

Along with considerable growth comes continued challenges. Another of the challenges facing the movement is the vast differences within the legislation and mandates of each state (Gaither, 2008). Today, even though all 50 states permit homeschooling, the states themselves establish guidelines, requirements, and rules that must be followed (Davis, 2011). This variety in educational oversight is the cause of much confusion and debate within the homeschooling movement.

The day to day work of homeschooling involves a great deal of commitment on the part of the families involved. From deciding on and developing both flexible and highly individualized curriculum, time management frustrations, following documentation and paperwork requirements, researching and understanding laws and regulations, as well as deciding on involvement or lack thereof within organizations, religious groups, and other homeschooling families. This does not even take into account the overarching goal of keeping students motivated and engaged with curriculum choices that meet both personal goals and state requirements. The commitment level is immense.

According to Cooper and Sureau (2007), those parents who make the conscious choice to take on this role believe firmly that they are in a better position to make decisions regarding their children's education than are other government entities involved. Home schooling is a tremendous responsibility for parents to assume and this high-risk endeavor must be believed to be high reward as well for those involved (Collom & Mitchell, 2005).

Cooper and Sureau (2007), claim that the perception of homeschooling in the United States has changed over the years. A little over 30 years ago, only 16% of Americans believed homeschooling was a "good thing." Those numbers have changed dramatically as people have become more familiar with the choices that these families are making, and the educational standards being met by many involved.

The increasing number of families involved in the home education choice has created a powerful political movement (Apple, 2004). It is a vital and ever-expanding political force in the society of the United States. "Besides sheer numbers and growth is the power that the homeschooling movement is gaining legally, politically and socially. Homeschoolers have forced changes in curriculum, structure, local, state, and national laws" (Cooper & Sureau, 2007, p.111). To date the U.S. Supreme Court has never specifically ruled on the constitutionality of homeschooling, but most parties cite the 1925 *Pierce v. the Society of Sisters* ruling which declared private schools to be constitutional (Cooper, 2007). The growth of political power with this group has been aided by a national lobbying group, The Home School Legal Defense Association which began in 1983 (Morgan & Burd, 2003). With their assistance, homeschoolers and their



supporters have made a regular practice of pressing lawsuits and in gaining access to public resources (Cooper, 2007).

As these families are generally well informed, active, and influential they are becoming more able to influence court proceedings both on the state and national levels. Cases generally involve parental rights, compulsory attendance laws, and/or educational requirements. These dilemmas are ongoing and crucial for homeschooling advocates. The internet has been a way of linking together families with other homeschool networks. Support groups also abound but are generally split between conservative religious groups and everyone else (Gaither, 2008). Statewide organization and their annual conventions are often times split along these same types of divisions.

Due to the increasing presence and political power of the homeschooling network, educational leaders at all levels have had to alter their approaches and policies. Cooper (2007), cites critics of homeschooling as often seeing homeschooling families as a direct attack on the publicly supported institution of education. They are viewed as narrow minded, antisocial, antiestablishment, and a political threat. In the past, media coverage of the homeschooling movement has portrayed these parents as neglectful and irresponsible. Today, news stories are much more positive about the effects of home-based education. They portray parents as positive influences in the educational movement and students as well-adjusted scholars who are contributing positively to their communities (Cooper, 2007). Americans have grown accustomed to hearing about homeschooled students, even though they may be misinformed about the process (Drenovsky & Cohen, 2012).

As the families involved are a very diverse population, we can make few claims as to what typical homeschooling looks like, or what common experiences students who homeschool have (Wilkins, Wade, Sonnert & Sadler, 2015). As the numbers continue to grow homeschooling can no longer be easily divided into ideologues and methods of delivery (Cooper & Sureau, 2007). Basically, home-educated individuals are generally very positive about their experiences, actively involved in their local communities, involved and engaged both civically and culturally, moving on into higher education opportunities at a rate higher than the national average, religiously active, hold a wide range of world beliefs, and are generally tolerant of others' viewpoints (Ray, 2004). Lines (2003), added that hard evidence supports the belief that the vast majority of homeschooling families are more active in civic affairs than public schooling families. Time commitments and structural differences may make it easier for engagement to take place, but homeschoolers are also increasingly participating in after-school activities like school sports, drama, music, and other civic clubs and groups (Gaither, 2009). Apparently these youth are not only doing well socially and physically, but mentally as well. Ray (2004) asserts that the self-concept of homeschooled students is significantly higher than that of public-school students when compared through testing.

These well-adjusted students are now increasingly moving into higher education. Bolle, Wessel and Mulvihill (2007), state that about 30,000 homeschooled students begin college per year and in order to continue to facilitate the success of these student learners, institutions of higher education must strive to understand how these students will navigate the complex experience of college life and adjusting to these vast changes.

**Homeschooling in Minnesota and the Mankato area.** In Minnesota our history is intertwined with that of the native American culture. According to Jones (2004) education has always been viewed as inseparable from life for native Americans. In that culture, learning from elders through example was typically the only way in which children were educated not only about history, daily tasks, protections and the environment, but art, culture and relationships as well. Although public education is a part of the native life these days, much of the tradition is still carried out through home-based education.

Homeschooling in most places is invisible, and the Mankato, Minnesota area is no exception. These families work hard to deliver a quality educational experience to their children and make only periodic demands on the public schools and school systems in general. Children of homeschooled families in this community are seen in a generally positive light (Broughten, 2019). Minnesota is considered to have moderate homeschooling laws and regulations as compared to the rest of the 50 states. Requirements include notification, assessment scores and/or professional evaluation of student progress (Davis, 2011). According to regulations within the Minnesota Department of Education (2019), curriculum and instruction must be provided in at least the following subject areas: (1) basic communication skills including reading and writing, literature, and fine arts; (2) mathematics and science; (3) social studies including history, geography, and government; and (4) health and physical education. Instruction, textbooks, and materials must be in the English language. There is also a generic

requirement that they administer a nationally normed standardized achievement test (Quinn, 2018).

Organizations are functioning at all levels to help with the process and regulations of homeschooling. Organizations include:

- The National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI)
- Home School Legal Defense Association (NSLDA)
  - A national legal, political, and media advocacy group for homeschoolers and their families. Website ([hsllda.org](http://hsllda.org)) describes ongoing legal, legislative, research, and social debates and ways nationally and locally for homeschooling families to get involved in many of these issues.

In Minnesota there are many local groups, but also two state-wide associations:

- Minnesota Association of Christian Home Educators ([mache.org](http://mache.org))
- Minnesota Homeschoolers Alliance ([homeschoolers.org](http://homeschoolers.org))

In many ways Minnesota is on the forefront of the homeschooling movement. Karl M. Bunday, a homeschooling advocate from Minnesota, maintains a web page that, at last check, lists over 1000 colleges and universities that have admitted homeschoolers (Learn in Freedom, 2019). Moving on into higher education is a challenge for even the best and most prepared students, so facing perceived barriers to this process is one of the challenges facing homeschoolers today.

### **Higher Education Preparedness**

**Homeschoolers and ranking.** Beyond grades, test scores, recommendations, and writing samples, colleges and universities are looking carefully for evidence of

motivation, creativity, intellectual curiosity, examples of original research, and the capacity of the applicant to take on the responsibilities of their own education (Bress, 2006). Studies by Smith and Sikkink (1999), found that homeschooling parents, when compared to parents of publicly schooled children, are more likely to vote, contribute money to political causes, contact elected officials about their views, attend public meetings or rallies, and/or join community and volunteer associations regardless of age, race, family structure, geographic region, and number of hours worked per week. Basically, they are committed to civic engagement at all levels and use this as a way of teaching their children about the importance of the same. Due to this engagement as well as many other factors homeschooled students are particularly well prepared to move into higher education. Davis (2011) stated that, students who were homeschooled through their whole K-12 education had very high academic achievement and public-school students did not achieve the same equivalency in their achievements.

Homeschoolers, on average, achieved higher scores by 30 to 37% in all subject areas than similar students who were publicly schooled. Homeschooling families appear to be doing something right, because in study after study, the homeschooled participants scored, on average, at the 65<sup>th</sup> to 80<sup>th</sup> percentile on standardized academic achievement tests in the United States and Canada, when compared to the public-school average of the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile (Ray, 2004). Ray (2004) cited studies showing that the home-educated students were performing as well or better than their public-schooled counterparts once they graduated and moved on into the college level as well. Homeschool graduates have proven that they are generally as ready for college as traditional high school graduates.

According to research, they are more likely to attend and finish college than those who attended traditional primary and secondary schools (Haan & Cruickshank, 2006).

Lubienski (2003) argued that there were several critical methodological obstacles standing in the way of attempts to demonstrate an overall superiority of homeschooling over other forms of educational alternatives. Critics agree, and argue that without clear knowledge of how many people are actually choosing home education, for what reasons, in what ways and to what effect, it is impossible to draw accurate conclusions about the degree to which the actual act of homeschooling boosts academic performance, especially relative to other choices in education (Lubienski, 2003). The most frequent argument against homeschooling and the choices involved has been that these students will be socially delayed due to the lack of socialization with other students (Davis, 2011).

**Socialization.** Concerns about the lack of socialization for children, as well as concerns about poor curriculum content, lack of adequate teaching methods, and a serious lack of protection for children being taught at home are just some of the arguments against home education (Cooper & Sureau, 2007). According to Medlin (2000), the harshest critics believe that isolating children from the larger society and making choices about their social development are the main goals that homeschooling parents are trying to accomplish. In fact, Medlin (2000) conducted a survey of public-school superintendents and found that 92% believed home-schooled children do not receive adequate socialization experiences. When asked to explain their views, some of these superintendents commented that home schooling families are trying to exclude all influence that is not coming from the parents. They don't want outside people

influencing their children and tend to believe communities are undesirable entities. Some superintendents also stated that they believed the homeschooling families were trying to ensure ignorance in their children and were causing serious harm both educationally and socially by the choices they were making (p. 109). There are always critics of every type of method whether it be educational or otherwise, but further research has shown these findings to be generally untrue.

The goals of the American education system have historically been mixed, but in the last 50 years or so, schools have been made more and more responsible for an expanding range of socializing activities that previously were considered the roles of family, church or other social institutions. Perhaps because of this, education and socialization have become intertwined and very closely linked in our cultural consciousness. Many people now assume that traditional schooling offers essential socialization experiences that home schooling cannot (Medlin, 2000). Because of these challenges, psychologists warn that home-schooled children may have difficulty getting along socially with others or may not fit in with mainstream society. Some critics believe that homeschooled youth only are exposed to the viewpoints of their parents and have little chance to establish their own views. They suggest that homeschooling shelters children from society, and interactions that take place within the average public-school experience (Medlin, 2000).

Lois (2008) asserted, "Socialization is not always a desired outcome in and of itself, thus home schooling, in many cases, may be a superior choice to conventional education" (p.615). Lois (2008) continued that, some research shows that peer influence

in public school settings is not always appropriate or a desirable type of socialization. Medlin (2000) found that homeschooling parents described conventional schools as rigid and authoritarian institutions where students are rewarded for being passive and conforming to social standards. Peer interactions are often hostile, and students must learn to work within a climate that can be perceived as less than ideal. Home schooling parents argue that this type of environment can cause harm to children's self-esteem and at the same time stifle creativity and individuality. Some feel that it can undermine family efforts to teach positive values and appropriate behavior. Medlin (2000) continues, that homeschooling parents insist that it is unlikely to foster the kind of rewarding and supportive relationships that encourage personal and moral development. It seems that most homeschooling parents are aware of the issues related to socialization and are strongly committed to providing positive opportunities for socialization for their children (Romanowski, 2006).

Since home-schooled youth are not peer-grouped in school, they often have the opportunity to learn along with a variety of people. This creates situations where they can express social maturity and adjust to new and challenging situations. These students tend to have extensive and diverse social networks rather than the stereotype of being socially isolated (McCulloch, Savage & Schmal, 2013). Medlin (2000) offered evidence that the highly individualized academic opportunities given to homeschooling children create an ideal learning environment and teaches them the skills necessary to do well both in college and in a career. This researcher also stated that because home-schooled



children learn and grow in a secure and nurturing environment within the family, they develop a confidence and resiliency that helps them to succeed as adults.

Research suggests that children are found to be thriving in the home school environment and that there is much to be learned about this method of teaching (Medlin, 2000). According to Cox (2003), homeschoolers tend to have three advantages over traditionally schooled youth. Closer family and sibling relationships, more relationships with adults, and more friendships with different ages and genders of youth. Positive socialization experiences seem to be happening at many levels. Naturally, these daily routines often involve parents, but they also include other family members, peers, neighbors, friends of the family, books, television, movies, coaches, music teachers, camp counselors, religious leaders – in fact, socialization is occurring each and every time there is any point of contact with another person. A study by Medlin (2000), found that home-schooled children actually participated in more activities than did children attending a conventional school. Despite the widespread belief that home schooling is socially isolating, the research shows quite clearly that home-schooled children are very much engaged in the social routines and opportunities of their communities. They are involved in many kinds of activities with many different kinds of people. The flexible schedule that homeschooling allows may make it possible for these children to participate more fully in extracurricular activities and other community opportunities. The perception of homeschooled students as being isolated, uninvolved, and sheltered from other people is simply not supported by the data. Rules of engagement are being learned and roles defined in a wide variety of ways (Medlin, 2000). Children are forming their

own unique understandings of the social world around them as they interact with a wide variety of individuals.

Medlin (2000) asserted, “Parents choose to home school for many reasons, but often they believe that home schooling is most likely to offer the kind of socialization experiences they want for their children” (p. 109). Socialization is a complex set of rules of behavior and system of beliefs and attitudes that allow a person to effectively function as a member of a particular group. Many home-schooling parents are committed strongly to providing positive experiences for their children that promote their socialization into mainstream society. These parents are working to provide safe, secure, and positive environmental factors for their children to be able to live and develop. These parents believe that their children are developing through positive socialization experiences allowed both inside and out of the family. These opportunities abound because of both structured and unstructured activities of the homeschooling process. These children are acquiring the rules of behavior and systems of beliefs that others gain during a traditional schooling experience. The main areas of development that these parents are working to incorporate are personal identity, morality, career goals, independence, social relations and skills as well as knowledge of appropriate sexuality. The youth appear to be developing appropriately and have good self-esteem as well as fewer outbursts of inappropriate behavior (Medlin, 2000). The research confirms that home-schooled children are learning the rules for appropriate social behavior and developing healthy attitudes about how they fit in with society.

Relationships with adults outside of the nuclear family, including the elderly, people from various socioeconomic, religious or ethnic backgrounds than their own, as well as coaches, instructors, and mentors add to the socialization of homeschooled youth (Medlin, 2000). They are taking part in the daily routines and opportunities of their communities. According to Ray (2000), they are quite involved in youth group and other church activities, jobs, sports, summer camps, music lessons, and take on leadership opportunities more willingly than other youth their age. Contrary to critic's beliefs, they are certainly not isolated. Children are often encouraged to take advantage of social opportunities outside of the family unit. This variety of experiences prepares these youth for not only successful higher education experiences but fosters their leadership abilities. Medlin (2000) stated flatly that they are the leaders on campus. These children are more mature and better socialized than those who were sent to traditional schooling situations. Colleges that have accepted homeschooled students appreciate the maturity and self-directions that these students are able to demonstrate (Bress, 2006). The students tend to be motivated learners that are comfortable assuming positions of leadership, both in the classroom and in social situations.

**Requirements.** As homeschooled students begin to move from the process of home education into higher education it is important to examine the attitudes and perceptions of college admissions personnel toward these homeschooled graduates and, more specifically, to examine the college admission policies for homeschooled applicants. According to Jones and Gloeckner (2004a), admissions personnel in college and university settings across the United States continue to struggle with how to address a

growing population of the newly graduated homeschooled student that is now moving into higher education. Sixty-two percent of college admissions officers agree the homeschool movement is having or will have a significant impact on higher education (Ray, 2004). Overall, the attitudes and beliefs of those working in the college and university admission departments are favorable toward the expected success of homeschooled graduates. A large percentage of these individuals anticipate that homeschooled students will be successful or even more successful than publicly schooled students (Jones, et al., 2004). These beliefs are backed by research (Ray, 2004), that shows home educated college applicants are very likely to succeed in college, both academically and socially. Many studies show that home schooled students outperformed their public-school peers on national standardized exams, including the Stanford Achievement Test and the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, at nearly all grade levels (Jones, et al., 2004). At the same time, these homeschool students achieve higher ACT scores, grade point averages, and graduation rates when compared to publicly educated students (Cogan, 2010). Research shows that home educated youth can be expected to do well once they reach the milestone of higher education. The transition, however, is not always a smooth process.

### **Barriers from Homeschool Perspective**

**Lack of information.** Homeschooling creates both benefits and complications when it comes to moving into higher education. One of the main complaints of these families is lack of information. According to Gaither (2009), homeschooling support groups are a lifeline for many struggling homeschooling parents. They help to navigate

the educational and legal systems while being able to give advice from the perspective of those that have gone down the path already. Families rely on these groups to alleviate isolation and potential ignorance on curriculum standards as well as to share information about materials and legal matters (Wichers, 2001). Homeschoolers that lack these affiliations and those who are not integrated into homeschooling organizations are not as likely to feel supported or that they are part of the larger movement of home education. Local, regional, state, national, and international networks function as a kind of central network for tracking developments and trends as well as protecting the rights of homeschooling parents (Collom & Mitchell, 2005).

The mandatory paperwork involved in the homeschooling process and supplied to school districts, can be very burdensome. Some parents are asked to file a declaration of intent to homeschool as well as to receive attendance records, lesson plans, testing results, and more (States News Service, 2015).

Due to the fact that homeschooled students do not routinely have access to precollege counseling, guidance counselors or academic fairs they tend to get their information about potential colleges and universities from the internet. Research findings suggest that these sites frequently do not provide information for home-schooled applicants even though their admission policies often differ from those of other students. Suggestions for improvement include customized information, videos, interactive functions, and access to other homeschooled students who are already attending (Duggan, 2010). Currently most higher education websites lack clearly identified sections specific to homeschool applicants, despite the presence of sections for other populations such as

transfer students, high school students, new students, and returning students. In order to find the information needed, these students need to be very persistent or very patient (Duggan, 2010).

**Recruitment.** With the ever-increasing cost of higher education, along with the variety of specializations that they offer, the question of which college to attend has become more important than ever (Pride, 2012). One of the challenges with lack of information for homeschoolers happens within the recruitment process. In traditional secondary school settings, there are guidance counselors who help to navigate the admission process as well as gently push students in the right directions to find out information about potential colleges. As homeschooling families do not have the luxury of this service it is up to them to do research on colleges and universities as well as their specific admission policies. Homeschoolers work within their network to learn about institutions that are known to be “friendly” to homeschooling. While colleges recruit both in public and private school settings, the homeschooled population is largely left out of this process. Open houses for homeschooled students and their parents are one possibility for both educating and recruiting these students as they learn about the admission process but are rarely happening. Making use of current students who come from a background of homeschooling could assist in the planning and staffing of such an event (Sorey & Duggan, 2008). Many colleges and universities that treated home schooled students with suspicion in the past are now attempting to reach out to them as desirable applicants (Wasley, 2007). At a local community college this is already taking place on a small scale. When potential students are brought through on tours,

homeschooled students are met with current college students who were homeschooled as well. They are able to answer questions as well as make suggestions that were important to this group (M. Broughten, personal communication, March 12, 2019).

Since the number of homeschooled applicants is increasing, colleges need to develop and publicize formal admission guidelines for this population. These guidelines should be flexible, fair, reasonable, and based on research while addressing the specific needs of these individuals (Sorey & Duggan, 2008). Admission policies are too often developed without taking into account the specific challenges of this population. Accommodating or unaccommodating policies can either cause homeschoolers to continue the process or be biased against a college based on their experience (Jones & Gloeckner, 2004a). Sorey et al., 2008, added that our unknown biases and prejudices may be affecting our view of the homeschooler's education despite literature that shows these students to be both academically and socially as prepared or even more so than their traditionally schooled peers.

**Financial aid and scholarships.** Financial aid is another area that has proven to be a challenge for homeschooling families to navigate. Ray (2004) noted that the total annual household income for homeschooling families is close to the median (typical) income for other American families. Due to this fact, many students are eligible for financial assistance. Understanding and navigating the process of applying for federal aid as well as seeking out scholarship opportunities is an exhaustive process for many.

In 1998, the United States Congress amended the Higher Education Act (HEA), changing the basis for awarding federal financial aid dollars to homeschooled students

(Callaway, 2004). These new regulations allowed these students to self-certify that they completed homeschooling and were thus eligible for federal aid. Home schooled students who satisfy the requirements of compulsory attendance laws are then eligible to receive title IV funding. They no longer are obligated to prove their eligibility to benefit by testing (Callaway, 2004; Good news for young college-bound homeschoolers, 2002).

One of the goals of this new legislation was to smooth the process that homeschoolers face when transitioning into college. So far it has proven to be easier for most individuals to get financial aid at state run institutions. Those at private colleges are generally less fortunate and difficulties are widespread. In these cases, certification for eligibility is dependent upon cooperative schools (Callaway, 2004).

One of the sources of challenge has been a mistake that took place in the Federal Student Aid Handbook (a guide sent to virtually all colleges in the country and accessible on the U.S. Department of Education's financial aid website) during the Clinton administration. This important piece of information and guidance for schools contained inaccurate information and led to financial aid officers and college admissions officers that believed schools would lose their institutional eligibility for aid if they admitted homeschool students (Klicka, 2003). The U.S. Department of Education formally corrected the error, but misinformation and challenges continue.

Generally public institutions use the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) in order to determine eligibility for federal dollars. Schools, however, oftentimes use additional requirements and stipulations that make the process for receiving aid more challenging to those who have been educated at home. State laws



vary on how they treat the process of graduation from a home school. Because of this, in some states the students are considered high school graduates, while in others they are required to still pass additional testing to prove certain standards in education have been met (Callaway, 2004). Due to these differences, court cases have been fought and won by homeschoolers who demanded equal treatment in access to federal loans and grants for postsecondary education (Lines, 2003; Smith, 2018).

As an ever-increasing portion of the population, homeschoolers are forcing colleges and universities to amend or in many cases establish guidelines for admission and access to resources. Court rulings have made the process easier, but there is still progress to be made in order for eligibility to be equal for all (Callaway, 2004). Financial aid officers are often put into positions where they are forced to be on alert for dishonest students and families that falsify their status in order to receive more funding than they deserve. These workers may be held accountable by federal officials for cases in which funding is issued to ineligible students, so they are diligent about protecting themselves against such issues (Morgan & Burd, 2003). Homeschooling families want and deserve to get their fair share, but rules and regulations need to be followed in order for equitable distributions.

**Proof of education.** Proof of education is just one more way in which homeschoolers are treated differently. This difference occurs because no single informational source exists for homeschooling laws. In general, even though the Home School Legal Defense Association and the National Home Education Network are good sources of information there exists no homeschooling authority on the national level

(Callaway, 2004). The National Education Association has stated that homeschooling, “cannot provide the student with a comprehensive education experience” (Cogan, 2010) and because of this home schooled students often lack any way in which to prove they have received the equivalent of a high-school education (Morgan & Burd, 2003). In some states, students must pass GED testing to prove their educational status while in others their homeschooling diploma is considered adequate proof of educational standards. No comprehensive national law exists which is challenging for the homeschooled individual. Some of the other requirements that vary by state include; filing curriculum outlines and goals with the district, filing daily logs of teaching, and having an outsider regularly evaluating the teaching as well as interview the students involved (Doherty, 2005).

Even though the type of school attended was not a statistically significant predictor of college success according to Cogan (2010), there still appear to be barriers to homeschooled students as they make their way into higher education. One suggestion that has gained some backing is for colleges to provide homeschooled applicants with a credit evaluation form to be completed in lieu of a high school transcript (Sorey & Duggan, 2008). In this way there would be more consistency then each family creating their own transcript to present to schools. Understandably the application process for colleges and universities is designed to weed out applicants in favor of those who will be the best fit for the institution, but homeschooling families are looking for their legally guaranteed equal opportunity (States News Service, 2013).

**Additional testing.** Narrow and limited information is received by only evaluating test scores and grades (Webb, 2006). Since the change in the Higher Education Act (Pub.L. No. 105-244) in 1998, colleges and universities that receive federal funds are prohibited from requiring homeschooled students to take a GED or an Ability to Benefit (ATB) test in order to prove eligibility to apply for federal financial aid. This can only happen if the student can demonstrate: (1) successful completion of a secondary education in a homeschool setting, (2) has met all state laws and requirements, and (3) has been admitted to the college or university (Sorey & Duggan, 2008). The challenge is meeting these other requirements. Home schooled students are particularly affected in Georgia, where most state colleges require homeschooled students to take as many as eight subject-specific SAT II tests, and often want higher SAT scores – as much as a 200-point difference- for homeschoolers who apply (Morgan & Burd, 2003). Many competitive colleges nationwide require at least three SAT Subject tests due to the fact that college is an academic exercise and they need substantial proof of preparation (Webb, 2007). The pressure of these exams is one of the most severe tests of a student's ability to cope under stress, so not all students present their best side with only this one evaluative process (Amen, 2005). Requiring additional testing only of students educated in this manner could reasonably be seen as discriminatory (Callaway, 2004; Morgan, et. al., 2003). If schools do not require certain admission criteria of all applicants, they should be looking at the fairness of any policy required only of homeschooled applicants. As word spreads among homeschooled families, graduates tend to gravitate away from these types of institutions and this large, and often highly successful group of individuals

will seek their schooling elsewhere (Jones & Gloeckner, 2004b). Parents who homeschool should be diligent about checking admission pages of potential schools for their children as the rules and expectations vary greatly (Allen, 2001).

Whatever the solution, an equitable way of determining applicant's eligibility needs to be adhered to. The growth in the sheer number of homeschoolers warrants fair and equitable treatment through published guidelines. These families aren't asking for special treatment, just equal treatment.

### **Barriers from Higher Education Perspective**

**Structural difference.** The home-school movement, once considered only filled with religious fanatics or hippies, is all grown up and going off to college. These students seem to have the intellectual spark that colleges and universities are looking for but are challenged with supplying the transcripts and teacher recommendations that admissions offices rely on (Wasley, 2007). Most faculty members who have taught in higher education recently, whether in a private or public setting, have likely noticed an increase in the number of homeschooled students in their classrooms (Drenovsky & Cohen, 2012). With the popularity of homeschooling gaining strength, especially at the secondary level, the number of home-educated students attempting to enter institutions of higher learning is continuing to rise. Despite this trend, many college admissions officers across the United States seem ill-equipped and unprepared in evaluating these candidates for admission (Sorey & Duggan, 2008). Results of various studies do provide college admissions personnel with evidence that homeschooled students are educationally equipped and prepared for college and may even be considered high achievers when

compared to their traditionally schooled counterparts (Cogan, 2010), but colleges seem to still have a “natural bias” against home schooling because of its perceived lack of accountability (Morgan & Burd, 2003). Beasley (2016), added that the criteria being looked at usually includes GPA, class rank, and test scores. Some of which are challenging for homeschoolers to supply. Home educated students will often need to add explanatory notes to transcripts and other application materials depending on how unusual their coursework looks (Webb, 2009a). Learning styles and intellectual growth need to be shown (Webb, 2009b). Due to the lack of other available documentation, schools want to see the thinking behind the work they did and understand the reasons for it (McGrath, 2012).

Lack of information available to admissions personnel has proven to create obstacles. Homeschoolers are different than traditionally educated students in that they generally have different documentation or at times no documentation to submit for evaluative purposes. Although they are generally treated as any other incoming student, these families often need additional help navigating the process of college admission (Sorey & Duggan, 2008). Cox (2003) provided additional insight by adding that homeschooling can create an extra burden for administrators responsible for enforcing rules and standards set up for admission processes. These cases often require special attention both from the side of the paperwork involved and the guidance needed to navigate the system.

As greater numbers of homeschoolers enter colleges across the nation, those advocating for the fair rights of these students are becoming bigger players in

Washington (Morgan & Burd, 2003). The research is incomplete about the academic outcomes of homeschooled students once they begin college, but evidence is clear that these students do achieve higher standardized test scores than traditionally schooled students. Knowledge yet to be gained is in determining homeschool students earned grades, persistence rates and completion rates once they enter the postsecondary arena (Cogan, 2010).

In 2007, the National Association for College Admission Counseling held a panel to examine testing issues and make recommendations on how colleges might better make use of entrance exams to evaluate students. The findings of the report urge colleges to continually scrutinize their testing requirements, to reconsider their stance on scholarships being awarded based on these testing scores, and to ensure that policies around admission take into consideration inequities among applicants, including access to test preparation. This Association holds the belief that admission tests need to better reflect what students have learned in secondary education. Some individuals formerly believed that testing results were only based on ability, but now they have a clearer understanding that those scores often have much more to do with opportunities (Hoover, 2008). Colleges have a responsibility to be sure that these inequitable preparation opportunities are not the only determining factors for college admittance. They must remain flexible and consider a variety of eligibility requirements (Hoover, 2008).

Due to the influx of home educated students, nearly 75% of colleges and universities in the United States have adopted policies specific for homeschoolers (Cooper & Sureau, 2007). While this is true, some colleges admit many homeschoolers

on a regular basis, and others have yet to admit one. There is a lack of consensus over how homeschooled applicants should be treated and how their experiences with education should be evaluated (Tarricone, 1997). In fact, many of these admission policies are prepared without the guidance of the Education Department due to the fact that clear direction is lacking (Morgan & Burd, 2003). Advocates are working tirelessly to connect students to colleges that will prepare them for success both within their educational setting and after it (Cooper, et al., 2007). Certain colleges have changed their policies and relaxed their requirements for official grade point averages and report cards from schools. They are now beginning to accept homeschooling portfolios, letters of recommendation, and personal interviews as a basis for admission (Cooper, et al., 2007). Due to the fact that homeschooled students are consistently coming into college with significantly higher GPA's than their traditionally schooled peers (Sorey & Duggan, 2008), it is not surprising that colleges are expecting this same sort of outcome in their GPA's for higher education (Cogan, 2010). But, as Hoover (2008) added, "success isn't a grade-point average" (p. A1). Homeschooled students should look to provide information to potential schools that communicates competence, leadership, growth, initiative, motivations and goals, intellectual curiosity and work experiences as well as academics (Webb, 2006).

An ongoing concern for colleges is that lobbyists for the homeschooling network will ultimately push lawmakers and the administration to declare home-schooled students a "protected class," and make colleges legally vulnerable when they choose to not accept their application for admittance. College officials worry that these lobbyists will

persuade administration officials to require colleges to admit students who may not be adequately prepared as well as opening them up to lawsuits for refusing to allow their enrollment. In 2003, Edward M. Elmendorf was the Senior Vice-President for Government Relations and Policy Analysis at the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. He stated, “We do not believe that it is appropriate for the federal government to jump in and set admissions standards for 3,600 colleges and universities. It’s far too intrusive a role for the government to play” (as cited in Morgan & Burd, 2003, p. A19). However, new information will help with the process of reviewing and revising current enrollment policies for homeschoolers (Smith, 2018).

**Lack of documentation.** For years, homeschoolers have fought to be viewed academically the same as public and private school students. Colleges are beginning to look more closely at homeschooled students, particularly in competitive colleges and for scholarship considerations (Beasley, 2016). In 2008, Hoover said, “As human beings we want to quantify everything” (p.A3). As compared to students who received other types of secondary schooling, those students who were homeschooled: (1) were demographically similar to other students, (2) received similar SAT math scores when tested, and (3) earned higher advanced math scores during secondary education (Wilkens, Wade, Sonnert & Sadler, 2015). And yet, these same students are often overlooked for admission privileges and honors based on the fact that they lack a class ranking score among other things. A lack of official transcripts also made the job of admissions officials more challenging (Sorey & Duggan, 2008). When typical credentialing documents are unable to be provided students are either overlooked or expected to



provide additional documentation. According to Aron (2004), test scores, diplomas and other traditional evidence of education may not actually tell you anything about the applicant. Colleges should come to realize that learning does not always take the same path and success can be measured in a wide variety of ways.

College admissions officials use a variety of criteria and procedures for making choices about admission. But, translating years of homeschooling experiences and independent studies into something that resembles a high-school transcript can be challenging for the homeschooled applicant, and even more challenging for the admissions officer tasked with assessing it. Without traditional points of comparison, like class ranking, GPA's and reference letters, evaluators are often forced to fall back on standardized-test scores (Wasley, 2007). In the past, it was even more challenging for homeschooled students to be granted admittance to good colleges and universities, but times are continuing to change. Parents are now being allowed to use standardized tests, AP exams, and portfolios in order to prove academic efficiencies. These positive effects are in no short cause due to the effectiveness of home education and the reputations that these students have gained within the higher education community. Homeschoolers now attend over 900 different colleges and universities in the United States, including but not limited to Dartmouth, Harvard, Stanford, Brown, Cornell, Georgetown, MIT, The United States Military Academy at West Point, UC Berkeley, Yale, Notre Dame and Princeton (Davis, 2011; Romanowski, 2006). This news represents significant progress for homeschoolers, but challenges are still taking place for many. Many homeschoolers are still having various problems because their documentation is different (Klicka, 2003).

Postsecondary institutions need to have consistent and well documented admission and financial aid policies and procedures in order to help incoming students. Unfortunately, most attempts to reduce the admission and aid burden placed on homeschooled students may actually result in worse burdens and regulations for some. In some states, if you are a home-schooled student it can be a lengthy process to document that you are in compliance with all of the rules of the state. Traditionally schooled students simply ask for a transcript from their school, but, depending on state laws, homeschooled students may have to not only show documentation, but various permissions granted by local school administrators or the school board, attendance logs for the years of schooling, evidence of paperwork filed with the state of residence, as well as a variety of other forms of proof (Callaway, 2004).

Perceptions of college personnel, particularly admissions officers, have a great impact on the ability of homeschooled students to be granted both admission to schools and assistance with the process (Sorey & Dugan, 2008). In a recent survey, 96% of post-secondary admissions officers reported that their jobs were more difficult when the applicants were unable to submit transcripts and other paperwork for evaluative purposes. Further, while some substitutions were viewed as acceptable, roughly 57% of those surveyed did not believe that other forms of proof were an adequate substitute. These admissions officers not only admitted that they expected homeschoolers to be less successful, but that some homeschoolers had slipped in unnoticed by submitting transcripts obtained through special programs or by correspondence (Lines, 2003; Sorey, et al., 2008). It is not a stretch of the imagination to understand that these types of biases

are affecting the outcomes of homeschooled students as they try to navigate the systems in place within higher education.

While setting of admission standards is the responsibility of the institutions themselves, federal dollars have an impact on how the evaluation process takes place. Public schools are strongly encouraged to make every effort to evaluate and treat applicants from nonpublic, private and nontraditional educational programs fairly and in a nondiscriminatory manner when determining requirements for admission (Callaway, 2004). They are encouraged to understand that well-qualified homeschoolers bring fresh diversity to their student body and add to an already qualified mix of individuals (Lines, 2003).

### **Benefits of Research**

**Potential for success.** The concept of confirmation bias is the tendency for individuals to search for information that confirms one's preconceptions, while at the same time not noticing those who do not fit into the stereotype (McCulloch, Savage, & Schmal, 2013). With the size of the group as well as the positive results on achievement testing, the home-schooled student market is an attractive segment for colleges. These college personnel may possess a positive or negative academic bias toward homeschooled applicants that can be reflected. However, the unique circumstances of their educational background tend to lead to a large number of questions about how they adapt and succeed at the collegiate level (Haan & Cruickshank, 2006). Families who home school their children should not be made to feel that the education they are providing is inferior in any way to the traditional K-12 education of their neighborhood

peers. The results of studies consistently show that academic performance of home-schooled students when compared to traditional high school graduates has had no negative effects on a student's potential success in a college or university setting (Jones & Gloeckner, 2004b). These students tend to be highly motivated, intellectually curious learners who are very self-directed in their educational goals (Mason, 2004). Findings continually provide no basis to question not only the educational development, but also the social development of homeschooled youth (Lines, 2003). Occasionally, it has been shown that socialization might be a concern for these students, but not very often (Sorey & Duggan, 2008).

Callaway (2004) asserted that admission associations need to assume more of a leadership role in addressing both financial and admission issues facing homeschooled applicants and the institutions of which they are applying. Current knowledge is haphazard at best. With the potential of very large numbers of homeschooled applicants moving into higher education over the next few years, there are serious concerns about fit, retention, debt and responsibility to assure no undue burden to students. The trend appears to be toward acceptance, as long as regulations are in place (Lines, 2003).

Evidence shows that homeschoolers and traditionally educated students are generally similarly prepared for the collegiate experience. Homeschoolers do just as well in college overall as do those students from traditional settings. These facts give further proof as to the effectiveness of the homeschooling movement (Cooper & Sureau, 2007). Both full and part-time college students who were homeschooled prior to admission ended up with first-year grade point averages that were higher than students traditionally

educated (Jones & Gloeckner, 2004b). Even when considering their limitations, college grades may be the single best predictors of student's persistence, degree completion, and graduate school enrollment. Grades continue to be one of the most consistent predictors of these outcomes in studies taking place both in large national studies as well as numerous institutional studies (Cogan, 2010).

### **Summary**

There remains much work to be done in the area of homeschool research. Even a limited glance at the research findings reveal many studies that prove the homeschooling community is doing a job worthy of praise. Institutions of higher learning need to continue their efforts to be fair and impartial when it comes to making decisions about admittance as well as monetary aid for these students who are outside the traditional means of education (Medlin, 2000). They need to provide outreach to homeschooled students through the internet in order to meet the needs of students who lack other school research options (Groseclose, 2010). According to Wilhelm and Firmin (2009), significant challenges continue to exist for the home school education movement. As the home education of children continues to become an increasingly popular choice in the United States, these educators are becoming more recognized as mainstream. Romanowski (2006) stated, "Public schools do not, cannot, and probably should not be expected to meet the needs of every child in the community" (p. 129).

Instead of the constant comparison that is taking place currently, educators, should be looking into how they can learn from each other and then use the gained knowledge to improve the learning experiences of all children (Romanowski, 2006).

Research continues to be necessary into this growing phenomenon as much of the existing research is out of date or limited (Collom, 2005). Bress (2006) concludes that, as homeschooled students continue to enroll in colleges and universities in increasing numbers, these institutions will gain knowledge and procedures for evaluating their differing educational experiences. Although they account for only a small fraction of the number of college and university applicants, homeschoolers are proving themselves and winning over the attitudes and expectations of schools and admissions officers (Winters, 2000). In the meantime, it is the responsibility of the homeschooling families to understand the challenges that these schools face and to help prepare their child to successfully navigate the admission process. Bogart (2019) reminds us that education should be a delight, not a continual process of stress and striving. Students need to allow themselves time to enjoy the process.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Research Design**

This chapter will present details about how this qualitative study was conducted both with a selection of homeschool families and higher education admissions personnel in Southern Minnesota. Information on the interview process used for the three families and homeschooled students involved will be given as well as details about the three interviews with the educational professionals. In addition to these participants, information on the data collection procedures used and the data analysis process will also be presented.

Families choose to homeschool for a wide variety of reasons, but most do so because they believe that it affords benefits that are better achieved through this method. It is estimated that currently more than 2.3 million children are being homeschooled in the United States. This number represents a growing force that will have a significant impact on higher education (Cummings, 2012; NHERI, 2019).

One of the challenges that exist for homeschooling families are the barriers that exist as children transition into colleges and universities. These barriers include lack of information, recruitment differences, financial aid and scholarship challenges, being able to prove their academic education, and additional testing requirements.

Since homeschooling is taking place outside of the normal realm of education, barriers exist from the higher education perspective as well. These barriers include structural differences and lack of documentation. Clearly defined methods of evaluating these students are often not in place.

The homeschooling community understands that they experience barriers as their children move on into higher education. Yet, there has been very little scholarly research on the perspectives of either the families or the institutions involved. This is a topic in need of further research. Colleges and universities work with the challenge of recruiting, evaluating, and awarding financial assistance to students that they know little about due to a lack of testing, transcripts, and other sources of information common to publicly schooled students. This deficit of information creates challenges.

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived barriers of both the homeschooled population and institutions of higher learning. The primary research questions included:

1. What are the perceived barriers of homeschooled students as they prepare to attend higher education?
2. In what ways, if any, do homeschooled student applicants perceive they are treated differently than other student applicants, in a positive or negative way, by higher education admissions personnel?
3. In what ways, if any, do higher education admissions personnel perceive that homeschooled student applicants are treated differently than other student applicants?

## **Participants**

**Homeschool participants.** Three homeschooling families in southern Minnesota with students who have recently been through or are currently working through the process of applying to higher education were interviewed. Families were selected from a



regional Home Educators group based on the first willing applicants to answer an email sent to the entire mailing list of the group.

Participants from homeschool families in this study were not compensated in any way, but the opportunity to share their experience and give voice to perceived barriers in order to smooth the transition for future scholars was the overarching goal. Cooper and Sureau (2007) state, “despite political pressure to conform, homeschool families have become well informed, active, and influential – all qualities that are critical to the political life of society” (p. 128). These families are willing and able to pave the path for future homeschoolers and their educational journey.

**Campus participants.** Academic professionals from three institutions of higher learning in southern Minnesota were interviewed in order to gain perspective on challenges faced within their professional roles. “Nearly 75% of colleges and universities have policies for homeschoolers, yet some colleges admit many and others have yet to admit one” (Cooper et al. 2007, p. 127) Because of this variance in acceptance a variety of institutions have been chosen to participate. These include; a public university, a community college, and a private college. These choices represent public and private institutions at both the two and four-year level. The participants were selected by asking for recommendations from academic professionals known by the researcher. Professionals interviewed within these institutions included a representative from areas that included student recruitment, applicant evaluation and financial aid.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

**Family interviews.** Unstructured interviews of 45 minutes to 1 hour took place at mutually agreed upon locations. Topics discussed included perceived barriers for students moving into higher education, the process taken to prove educational standing, where guidance in the higher education application process came from, financial aid and scholarship application process, suggestions for improvement in the application process, and overall impression of admissions personnel when it comes to working with area homeschoolers. Further questioning encouraged the telling of the family story regarding the choice to pursue higher education and at what school.

Case stories of each family were constructed from qualitative data collected through the interview process with family members and, at times, individually. Purposive sampling was used to secure participants from a regional Home Educators group. Three families were chosen to participate and be interviewed.

**Campus interviews.** Semi-structured interviews of up to 1 hour took place with each academic professional. Summations of data were collected through individual interviews. Major areas of issue when working with homeschooled students, both positive and negative, were identified and compared to the findings that emerged from the family case stories.

Questions that began conversations included:

- To what extent does your campus have formal policies relating to the admission of students who are or have been homeschooled?

- What are the perceptions of your campus admissions officers regarding homeschooled students?
- To what extent does your campus offer special programs or services to homeschooled students and their parents prior to or at entry to the college?
- To what extent has lack of documentation of homeschooled students created challenges to the admission process at your campus?
- To what extent does your campus actively seek out homeschooled students during the recruiting process?
- What is your impression of how well homeschooled students adapt to higher education following the admission process?

**Role of the researcher.** The researcher in this study was a former homeschooling parent who recognizes that her own experiences may influence her feelings about the subject and the depth of challenge that the barriers create. Recognizing this, the researcher was mindful of detailing the statements of the interviewed individuals precisely. As a former member of the Homeschooling Association and the homeschooling community in the area, the researcher had a unique position of access to this group of individuals who are generally less threatened by speaking with someone who is familiar with their lifestyle and educational process.

As the instrument of analysis, this researcher has some bias. As a homeschooling parent of five children who have been through the process of transitioning into higher education the process experienced by the researcher was very similar to what was experienced by the homeschooling families that were interviewed. One significant

difference is that not all of the researcher's children sought out higher education in Minnesota. Rules, regulations, and laws of other states added to the challenge and need for further research. If a homeschool network of friends and colleagues is not in place, the process of knowing which institutions are 'homeschool friendly' becomes much more complicated.

The viewpoints and experiences of the academic professionals involved were added into the research in order to balance out the one-sided experience of the researcher. Challenges exist to the process for all involved, and hearing from both sides added valuable information for future individuals navigating this process and as homeschoolers continue to make the transition into higher education in greater numbers admissions officials involved will begin to smooth out the process and create a clearer path for lines of communication.

**Instrumentation.** All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder for transcription purposes as well as notes being taken by the researcher during the interview process. The researcher obtained signed consent forms from all participants prior to initial interviews. Consent forms were e-mailed to all potential participants along with a detailed explanation of the research. Participants were encouraged by e-mail, and in person, to ask questions and were given further explanation as needed for clarification.

### **Data Analysis**

**Family case stories.** Interview transcripts were used to construct case stories of the homeschooling families that contain the student's perspective and one or more parent perspectives separate from each other. Thick, rich descriptions tell the stories of the

experiences of these individuals as they lived the experience of moving from homeschooling into higher education.

**Summations of data from admissions personnel.** Major areas of issue were identified based on the interview transcripts of the admissions personnel. The professionals interviewed supplied data that represented recurring topics when compared to each other. Admissions personnel interview data was synthesized in order to present major areas that overlap in these topics about working with homeschooled students. Summations of data were used to merge the information gained from the interviews and gave a clear picture of the experiences of the participants in the study.

**Merging of the data.** Presenting the different experiences of the people interviewed for this study allows for the future dialogue of those involved in the ongoing issue of the barriers from both sides of this study. As the researcher was fully emerged and actively engaged in the topic and information and impact gathering process, several recurring topics from both sides of the data became apparent. Research questions were addressed both from the homeschooling data perspective as well as the summations that came out of the admissions personnel data. Naturalistic generalizations of what was learned from the study will add to the knowledge base of the subject. The researcher provided vivid and compelling extract examples that relate to the themes, research questions, and literature. The subsequent analysis is supported by evidence from the interviews.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Findings**

According to research, barriers exist to the college acceptance practices and policies as they relate to homeschooled students. This study was used to identify these perceived barriers both from the side of the homeschooled student and their family as well as from the perspective of higher education admissions professionals in Southern Minnesota. The primary research questions being considered include:

- What are the perceived barriers of homeschooled students as they prepare to attend higher education?
- In what ways, if any, do homeschooled student applicants perceive they are treated differently than other student applicants, in a positive or negative way, by higher education admissions personnel?
- In what ways, if any, do higher education admissions personnel perceive that homeschooled student applicants are treated differently than other student applicants?

Acknowledging perceived barriers could lead to better understanding and recognition of possible solutions to ease this transition process.

The two overarching perspectives that will be presented in this chapter include the homeschooled family perspective and that of the admissions professional in institutions of higher education. The findings from homeschool family interviews will be presented as three case stories of southern Minnesota families who have recently made the transition past homeschooling and into higher education or are currently in the process of

exploring these options. Their perspectives and experiences are unique to them alone but represent the journey that is taken by many homeschooled students. The higher education perspective is presented by interview findings of professionals at various types of college and university settings in southern Minnesota. The viewpoints of these individuals represent not only their experiences, but the rules and guidelines that are followed within their institutions as they apply to homeschooled students.

### **Homeschooled Family Perspectives**

Homeschooling families were interviewed for their first-hand experience with the transition process from homeschooling into higher education. The interviews included not only the predetermined primary questions, but also a variety of secondary questions in order to gain a clearer understanding of the homeschooling families experience with the subject. Conversations naturally led to more detail and depth of experiential information.

#### **Family Case Story #1**

Family #1 consists of four homeschooled youth of various ages and their biological parents. The family has consistently homeschooled for many years and is actively involved in the network of community and religious neighbors who also chose this form of education. The family joked that homeschooling is an ongoing parental experiment, but it has worked for their family. As educators, the grandparents were originally adamantly against the idea of homeschooling. Their bias was mostly based on ideas about lack of socialization. Over time and with further proof, these same individuals became the biggest supporters of the process.

**Student's story.** This interview occurred with a very pleasant and polite 18-year-old young man who was well spoken and took the interview seriously. He stated that he followed in the path of his two older siblings in attending a small religiously based college for Post-Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) for his final two years of high school in order to complete his general education credits. As the third child in his family to make the transition into higher education he felt that the process was well laid out for him. He chose the same school and followed generally the same academic plan as his older siblings.

***Transition from homeschooling.*** The transition from homeschooling into a small religious based college with smaller class sizes seemed to be a better fit that was less overwhelming and intimidating than other options. Class sizes at this campus ranged from 20-30 students compared to his post PSEO university classes consisting of up to 300 students. In the smaller school professors knew his name and he knew the other students as well. Expectations for assignments were clearly laid out and reminders were given in class as opposed to the larger university setting where the syllabus listed assignments with the expectation that they are turned in and then graded. This student has since moved on into a mid-sized university to complete his education based on the fact that his choice of major was not offered at the smaller institution. Environmental Science is his declared major and the university setting is a much better fit in order to acquire the classes and experiences necessary for this career path. Cost was a lesser determining factor as the university was considerably less expensive than the private religious college.



In his family of origin higher education was something that was always encouraged, yet not demanded by his family. If children were not pursuing a college education upon completion of their homeschooling journey, work or some other career path was expected. He stated that he couldn't just live at home without a plan. He believed that higher education was more strongly encouraged and expected in his family than in other homeschooling families that he was aware of. He believed that many of those youth graduated and moved right into farming or a job and chose not to pursue higher education because it was not expected in their family. He has understood from a young age that his desired career path would require a college degree in order to succeed. Higher education was pursued by both of his parents and both maternal grandparents were university educators. He felt well prepared to move into higher education and it seemed to be the natural progression.

***Application process.*** The application process was completed with the help of his mother, but she didn't do it for him. She had the knowledge and did the research about what expectations needed to be met and he was expected to follow through on the application paperwork, phone calls, and appointments. He recognized that in some families these things are done by the parents or with lots of help, but that was not his described experience. The process of proving academic standing was mainly done by his mother. The paperwork was completed by her, but he was expected to go over transcripts to verify information. This was especially true when transitioning into the university setting after PSEO. No guidance counselor or academic support person helped with the

process. He felt that colleges should have people to help with the application process for homeschoolers. If families don't know how to do it, this process would be very difficult.

Financial aid assistance was clearly the father's role in this family as the student mentioned several times that his dad worked with the money part of the process. He didn't apply for any scholarships or extra financial help beyond the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). He filled out the paperwork online and submitted it, but since he was still living at home it was a lot of parental information that was needed, and his father provided that.

A barrier was discussed about moving into the PSEO process and his understanding that his American College Testing (ACT) score needed to be higher in order to be accepted. He thought that this was both fair and unfair. It was fair because the school needed to have a concrete way of proving his academic worth, and unfair in that he had to do more and achieve more than other students applying. He spoke of a higher standard for home-schooled PSEO students. He felt slighted at first but then understood the reasoning behind these rules.

He offered no concrete suggestions for improvement of the transition process beyond those previously mentioned. He joked that everyone should have siblings to go before them in order to pave the way. At the university, he didn't really know any other homeschooled students, but mentioned that it was a fairly common question about what high school he attended. He felt that people are not as surprised any longer when they find out he was homeschooled.

**Parent's story.** The mother of this family chose to be interviewed alone. The researcher found her to be intelligent, engaged, and very knowledgeable about the homeschooling process after having finished the process with three children and still working with one additional child. A spirited conversation about homeschooling and the process of guiding children through the process occurred. She made it clear that she was 100% in support of her children identifying necessary paperwork or proof required by their educators and guidance counselors. She believed it was not her job to make the initial contact. She went on to explain that in their family if you are capable of going to college then you are capable of contacting the admission office. These phone calls and/or emails were taken care of by the student themselves.

***Expectations of adulting after high school.*** This parent explained that the family had tried not to push the idea of higher education on to their children but expressed the idea that the youth had a lot to give to the world, so their job was to get out there and give it in some way. They didn't have to go to college, but they had to do something. As a homeschooling parent, she explained that she never knew what her kids were going to choose to do, but she saw it as her job that if they wanted to go to college they would be prepared to do so. They had to know what was available and be prepared to do what it takes to go after it. This parent expressed interest in the fact that they are friends with some other homeschool families that don't have that same attitude. These other families that she spoke of seemed to provide no encouragement of moving on and the youth were left just spinning their wheels, as the mother said, upon completion of their basic education.

*PSEO and college readiness activities.* The process of moving into higher education for this family began with the idea of taking advantage of PSEO. The mother herself had been one of the first in the state to explore this option before it became popular and has since worked this into the curriculum for all of her children. Information was gathered specifically from websites. She started the process with online searching for specific sections of higher education websites that were labeled with information for homeschooling. If they mentioned homeschool by name then the family knew that they were ‘homeschool friendly’. They knew that they had been through this process before and they wouldn’t have to be the first to navigate it. This was an important point for the family.

Paperwork that schools generally asked for were a combination of essays, test scores, and transcripts. Letters of recommendation were also required, but the ACT scores were the primary focus. In fact, this homeschooling parent was told by one admissions counselor that they really won’t pay any attention to the transcript. This admissions professional mentioned that you can put whatever grades you want on the transcript that has to be submitted for the file, but it will not be taken into account.

Overall, their family experience with admissions professionals was positive. This homeschooling parent believes that in the current culture of admissions they recognize by and large homeschooled kids are active, not just with schoolwork but in their community as well. These students are socialized and don’t fit into the stereotypes that once existed. She found that if these professionals had any personal bias, they never showed it or were anything less than welcoming to the family.

*NCAA sport requirement and recruitment challenges.* The challenge for this family began with their second and third children. They were actively involved in high school sports and this created certain problems. Transcripts were required on a regular basis throughout their high school years in order to prove academic standing and they also learned that if the child has any intention of playing sports competitively at the college level the paperwork process needed to begin in 9<sup>th</sup> grade or before. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) rules for sport involvement are challenging for homeschooling families. If you are a Division 1 or a Division 2 athletic candidate and you have been homeschooled, there is an entire packet of information that the parents must provide. They have to go through all four years of high school education proving academic standing and it all has to be verified and approved. The process is very rigorous, and this barrier can keep kids from participating in college sports. The NCAA ruling is not a homeschool friendly process in the opinion of this family.

None of their friends played sports competitively, but an online network helped with gaining information. This homeschooling mother finds organizations and networks to be both helpful and frustrating. There is often a lot of misinformation. Being able to search online was helpful, but also allows others to give out false information without the chance to correct these errors. She tries to make corrections if there is information that may be steering someone in the wrong direction. She expressed that she probably would not have felt confident enough to do this several years ago, but now after having graduated three children she feels qualified to act with authority.

The bigger learning curve for this family was navigating the process of recruitment. The second child in the family was actively recruited by athletic departments. Because of this fact an academic profile went along with the information and opened doors to compete for academic scholarships. Due to this profile the student earned two almost full ride academic scholarship options. The student would not have been on these schools' academic radars without the athletic recruiting process. Sports became the way for this family to be recruited and be recognized for academic achievements as well. Without the inroad of sports recruiting most higher education institutions would have had no idea who these students were. Schools are not generally actively recruiting homeschooled students based on their academic achievements. A good example of this was given by this parent. A homeschooling friend's child had earned a perfect ACT score the previous year and was not recruited or offered any scholarships based on this fact. There is no obvious way to let schools know about these types of achievements without paying to have the scores sent to them. However, student athletes are encouraged to complete athletic 'recruit me' options online for schools that they might have an interest in attending. This opens possibilities for scholarships and academic attention. Student #1 was recruited by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) based on athletic merit. This opportunity opened the doors to academic recruiting with the school.

Another major learning curve for this family was the fact that they felt their job was to be proactive about reaching out to schools themselves. The students needed to send schools information about themselves in order to be considered for academic or

financial resources. The process was understandably overwhelming, but the payoff was worth the hassle.

The family found that once their children were accepted into college the students all became actively engaged in the collegiate life process. When in college these children discovered a generally welcoming environment. The youth in this family expressed to their parents that they would not have loved the higher education process as much without a sport or some sort of club involvement. Sport and club involvement helped these children discover a support network of friends. This parent felt that they didn't have to work as hard to find a core group of friends due to extracurricular activities.

The parent mentioned that school admissions teams should offer an online 'recruit me' option much like the athletic departments. Here non-traditional graduating high school students could provide test scores, extracurricular activities, community involvement, and awards which could open the doors to scholarship invitations.

Along these same lines, this parent expressed the opinion that education will continue to evolve, and that higher education institutions will need to adapt as well. This could be in the form of a nontraditional admissions advisor who specifically recruits homeschooled students, charter school students, and online public-school students.

In closing, the interviewer asked this homeschooling parent about her involvement in guiding other homeschooling families with the process now that she has been through it several times. She laughed and shared that she is now considered a 'veteran homeschooler'. A large contingency of families reaches out to her about the homeschooling process since she is well known within the homeschooling community.

In fact, she held an informational symposium at a local private religious college for parents who were either interested in PSEO or college in general. She conducted a workshop about transcripts and shared what she had learned by providing numerous examples. She plans to stay engaged in the homeschooling movement, but more in the background. A degree in technical writing allows her to feel confident in her abilities to share information with other homeschooled families concerning the process of writing effectively. She plans to continue teaching co-op classes as well as working with families that struggle to teach writing skills.

***Need for centralized information.*** She feels that homeschooling families are currently looking up the same information over and over due to a lack of centralized information. There is a disconnect for sharing reliable information, so parents spend countless hours verifying or simply searching for accurate homeschooling information. Making connections with a network of peers is valuable at all levels. Homeschooling families need to work collectively to share information about subjects pertinent to their educational process. There are no reminders of deadlines for homeschooling families, just expectations to know and follow. A resource for helping families through the process would be useful according to this parent.

### **Family Case Story #2**

This homeschooling family was made up of four youth and their biological parents. The family has lived in many different locations throughout the United States and has both homeschooled and attended public and private schools, as well as trying online education for a time. A strong family background in education gives the parents



confidence in their continued ability to provide a solid educational foundation for their children. Both parents attended public schools for their educational background.

**Student's story.** A 17-year-old young man was interviewed. He is currently a senior in high school academically but is attending a two-year community college as a PSEO student. He stated that he has been homeschooled for most of his life but attended small religious based schools for both 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades. When asked about the choice to attend public, private, or be homeschooled he made it clear that these choices were family ones at the time. He said that if the choice was his alone he would always choose homeschooling. Changing from what he described as a flexible homeschooling environment to a more rigid school environment was difficult, but he was able to adapt over time. The student was able to converse at a high level but seemed to be unaware of many of the logistics of the schooling process. He is currently seeking out a part-time job but is finding difficulty due to the fact that he doesn't have a driver's license. His mother stated emphatically that he needs to get one, but that idea seemed to be held by her alone.

The student has lived in Minnesota for approximately four years. The family has also lived in Arkansas, Pennsylvania, and Missouri. When asked where he 'grew up', the answer was Arkansas.

***Experience with homeschooling.*** The researcher asked the student to describe his schooling experience. He defined it as lax. He described the workload as getting things done as they needed to be done with plenty of time to learn everything without pressure. He felt that this was a nice way to accomplish the tasks at hand but that a rigid school system would be able to cover more subjects and knowledge.

Moving on into higher education seemed to be his choice. He described several areas of interest including biochemistry, engineering, and culinary arts. He believed that he might enjoy all of these topics of study, but some may not end up being as useful as others. Ultimately the choice to attend a two-year public technical college was made based on location. The family had looked into other schools in Denver and Chicago but had made the decision to stay near family and friends. The major topic of study was chosen by love of the subject area. He described it as giving him a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. Choosing culinary arts is his way of making a bigger impact with his family as well as community.

***Application process.*** The process of applying for higher education was a family affair. The student described the whole family helping with the application process. He thought that percentage wise he probably did 50% of the work and the other 50% was done by collective family members. When asked if he knew exactly what paperwork had to be supplied to the school this student was unable to describe any examples.

Transcripts were defined and that was something that he was familiar with. He said that the process of preparing these took some time to do. He thought that it was hard to keep track of grades and was unsure of the importance of knowing what previous grades had been attained. Financial aid and opportunities for scholarships were discussed, but the student clarified that he had not been involved in this process.

Overall the student described his feelings of possible barriers to homeschoolers moving into higher education based on the type of homeschooling they had received. He

felt that more routine would be better, but a more flexible situation gives the opportunity to do more independent study and homework.

**Parent's story.** The mother of the family attended the interview alone. She described time constraints and commitments as reasons for lack of involvement from other family members. She had also been in the room when her son was interviewed and explained that she winced a bit while he was speaking because she thought her son may not have understood some of what went into the overall homeschooling process. She said that since he doesn't prepare the transcript, grade the papers or keep the records that he didn't have a clear picture. He did the assignments and then she took over and did the grading and record keeping. Being the third child in the family, things were a little busier and there were more 'catch up sessions' of logging in his grades so the process was not always apparent to him. Over the years the process included keeping track of records, assigning a report card each semester for each student, and keeping records of what their classes were. The majority of these items were not asked for when applying for higher education.

***Homeschooling involvement.*** The process of home education for this family began with the oldest child in the family experiencing extreme shyness. Due to this condition he was unable to ask for clarification or help at school and needed to be reinstructed at home. The family was not happy with either the public or private school choices, so determined that it would be ultimately easier to keep everyone at home together. The mother of the family originally hesitated about the decision, but the idea was pushed strongly by the father. Over the years a combination of schooling choices

was used for all members of the family. Generally, what would happen in traditional schooling is the children would be placed in different academic situations and would subsequently fall behind with assignments and would be pulled out returning to homeschooling. Throughout all of these academic choices, parents questioned their judgement on schooling, but the mother described her sense of validation when her second student attended a private college, received scholarships and ultimately graduated with honors. She happily expressed that they had done the right thing and they had given the children the right information that they needed to succeed.

***Transition process.*** The process of transitioning from homeschooling into higher education was a relatively smooth one for this family. Guidance was not given from any homeschooling network as they were not affiliated with one in the state of Minnesota. They had been involved in a group in Arkansas, but never made the connection after moving to Minnesota. Online research was done as the main source of information about education. This online research led to knowledge about coaching to prepare transcripts, applications, and other necessary paperwork. School websites were used for admission requirements and the parents looked specifically for information including homeschooling requirements. As with other families, this information was seen as being ‘homeschool friendly’.

Online research led to the knowledge that schools on the east and west coast are more open and accepting of homeschooled students. Since the family was not looking at any of the highly prestigious academic institutions they were not as anxious about how they aligned with these schools. The parent had heard about students being recruited for

various schools but had never experienced it. She heard that some schools are actively seeking out homeschooled students based on a perceived higher caliber of dedication and maturity. The process of applying to schools was fairly easy. The paperwork supplied to schools was accepted without question, which was a surprise based on the horror stories she said she heard from other homeschooling families. This mother was new to the application process in working with her third child as her husband had been the main parent involved in the process for their first two children. The father had recently completed his own higher education degree and the requirements were fresh in his mind at the time.

The mother commented that the family has been happy with the ease of the higher education transition process. Their family had heard horror stories of other students' transcripts being questioned or not accepted as well as other various challenges. They found admissions personnel to be pleasant, knowledgeable, and willing to offer suggestions. It had been an overall good experience working with these individuals. Advice was given by staff, admissions counselors and academic advisors that they had met with, but the family had ultimately done their research and knew what to expect. The mother offered no suggestions for improvement. She stated that she had been very pleased with the process and it was easier than she thought it would be.

**Testing.** In preparation for applying for further educational opportunities each of their children had taken the ACT even though it was not a requirement for admittance. They chose to take the test based on the possibility of moving to a different college later in the process. The mother believes that the student scores could have been improved if

the test were repeated. Yearly evaluation tests had been administered to the students, but aptitude for testing was questioned. She wondered if their abilities would show and if the information would hinder or help the process. Overall this family has had an easy time with transitioning from homeschooling into higher education. They appreciate the dedication of professionals in the field and accept help willingly.

### **Family Case Story #3**

Initially reluctant to share their homeschooling experience, this family of five grown children and their biological parents prefers to make their choices without the interference or opinion of others. They view their educational choices as theirs alone and something that should not affect their place or status in the community. The family comes from a military background and the two male children of the family have both served their country as part of the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program while attending college. This was a strong expectation of the family, at least for the male children.

**Student's story.** The student was an extremely shy and polite young woman. Prior to the interview her mother explained that this child was the youngest of their five and had been fairly sheltered due to learning difficulties. It had taken her many years to learn to read as well as facing various other challenges.

**Educational choices.** This student had graduated from homeschooling in the spring of 2019 and has since been working at the family business. She does not currently have any plans for additional schooling for at least a year and is uncertain if she will pursue any higher education. The researcher questioned her if she believed that higher

education was an expectation of her family and she didn't believe that it was. She said that her parents would be fine either way. When asked if that expectation was the same for her older siblings she thought that it was probably the same.

Discussion about her brothers' military experiences was something that she was happy to share. When questioned about the female siblings spending time in the military she stated that it was not encouraged, but really not discouraged either. She added that none of the girls had ever shown any desire to serve, so it really never came up in family conversation.

**Barriers.** Questions about barriers to homeschoolers as they move into higher education were met with uncertainty. She knew that the application process was difficult but wasn't sure why. She believed that it was mostly due to 'what we had to send in'. Paperwork was discussed, but she expressed no knowledge about what would be involved. However, she was certain about the fact that it was much easier for the younger children than it had been for the older ones. She felt that the family had figured out ways to do it better as time went on. When asked if she knew how much her siblings had been involved in the paperwork part of the process she wasn't sure but thought that her parents had done most of this.

Being in the workplace was something that she expressed satisfaction with. She enjoys working and wasn't sure if she would ever go on to school or not. She said that since she didn't really know what she wants to do in life that it wasn't a good idea right now. When asked about possibilities for future schooling she expressed that she really

likes horses, so hoped to find some way to incorporate that into her future. She recognized that this would be difficult.

***Educational funding.*** Student was questioned about financial aid, scholarships, and how higher education was funded in her family. She knew that the boys had received money both through ROTC and the National Guard. The girls didn't have any financial assistance from the colleges that she knew of, so the parents paid for additional schooling.

***PSEO option.*** PSEO was discussed as this was an option that several of her homeschooled friends had taken part in. She thought about trying it but ultimately decided that working with computers was too challenging and that the internet was probably a barrier. She seemed to understand that PSEO was generally done by actual attendance in the classroom and there would be online homework.

Overall this delightful young woman had a supportive family who would help her with whatever choices she makes regarding her future. She is happy and content, and although shy, doesn't seem to worry about her future.

***Parent's story.*** This mother, and now grandmother, is a soft-spoken yet very confident woman. She expressed that she had an education degree but has not worked outside the home after having children. Her husband holds a prominent position within the community, and she made it known that they work hard to protect their privacy and stay out of any situations that may form polarizing opinions. After having decided to participate in the interview she was very professional and was respectful in answering questions but did not offer much in the way of family history.



***Family higher education journey.*** The family has homeschooled five children. The oldest, now 30, started his higher education journey at a large university. The mother said that no help was extended in the process of admittance. She clarified that she did not expect to be catered to because of their educational choices, but this was an unknown process at the time. The transcript that was created for application purposes apparently did not meet the requirements of the school and was rejected. However, no guidelines were given for what the school really wanted. In the end it took three attempts to produce an acceptable document.

The homeschooling parent mentioned that she had spoken with her son about the interview for this research. His opinion was that nothing was ever done at the university to make him want to be successful at the time. It was as though the institution would prefer that he was not successful. His opinion was that one form of education was pitted against another.

He was disappointed to report that when he did seek help he was met with statements of, ‘oh, you’re homeschooled’. Before attending college, he had believed that if students were struggling, and had questions, they would be provided with assistance. He didn’t feel that this was the case in his situation.

As the next child in succession entered higher education less struggles were met. The family had the opinion that they were supposed to magically know the information of how the admissions process worked. The mother felt that the family were pioneers in the application process, even though this clearly wasn’t the case. Others probably did it more efficiently in her opinion. She stated that they were not an abnormality in the

homeschool movement, so she wasn't sure about why this was such a difficult process. Her opinion was that families were expected to file paperwork and be quiet about it and the institutions would be happy. She expressed her belief that this stigma continues.

The next two students started out at a smaller institution. The process was much more welcoming and ultimately a more hands-on approach was encountered. All of the paperwork that the family submitted was accepted without question. Her overall opinion of admissions personnel at small schools was very positive, but this was not the same for larger institutions because they didn't seem to have a desire for the children to be successful.

***Perceived barriers.*** When asked to describe other perceived barriers to her homeschooled children as they moved into higher education she spent some time describing her children. She stated that the children were not sheltered. They were certainly out there, certainly had friends, certainly were a part of the community. She was surprised about the amount of drama going on between students, especially young women, as her children moved into college dormitories. She expressed that her daughters were shocked as they were not used to the drama.

***Network and community.*** Guidance about the journey out of homeschooling into higher education was found both online and from fellow homeschooling families who had walked the road before. The importance of the homeschooling network was discussed and appreciation for those who have paved the way was mentioned. The mother stated that relying on network and community is essential. The importance of the homeschooling network is not clearly understood, and even those inside it may not

understand it until it is needed. She described the process of making educational choices as a family for so many years without the involvement or expectation of anyone else and then suddenly there is a need to understand the admission process. Administratively there were things she expressed that could have been done differently or documented differently. Especially if she had had any knowledge about how the process of admission works.

This parent expressed a need for guidance with the process. She didn't necessarily want to fill that need but believes she could be a resource to others. She recognizes that, although not engaged with the homeschooling community anymore, their family has made personal connections with younger homeschooling families. She explained that they have some pretty good things to offer. When looking back there is a desire that homeschooling communities need more community or smaller networking opportunities. She also described the importance of being focused on the here and now. The important things at the time were completing objectives and goals, and what needed to be completed daily. She mentioned that what children want to learn and need to learn will happen as they get older. Her role was to give them the tools to learn how to learn.

***Current involvement.*** Now that the family homeschooling journey is complete the researcher asked if it was a relief or a sense of loss. The parent easily answered that it was both, "relief that we made it, we're done, they are all well-adjusted contributing members of society." She stated that the children were happy people with a very deep care for others. That was the goal. According to this parent, academics was not as important as the character of the young people that came out of the home. She now feels

a disconnect with the homeschooling network because she doesn't really know anybody there anymore. The thought is described as bittersweet. She happily added that the plan is for her grandchildren to be homeschooled in the coming years, so she is beginning again to accumulate educational materials. This is an exciting part of the journey for her.

This mother went back to again stress the benefits of having a network or community of friends who were also on the homeschooling path. This gave them the chance to remind each other over the years that right choices were being made. She stated that, "as a homeschooling parent you feel the weight of the world on your shoulders. You are responsible for these young people. Not only bringing them up, but their safety, character, and future education. Having those close friends who are going through the same thing and being able to say we are doing alright is essential. We remind each other that the children are good people and are doing good things". Over the years, this mother expressed that it has been essential for her family to remind themselves that things were okay, and they were doing all right. She mentioned that it all would have been exponentially harder without that support.

### **Academic Professionals' Perspectives**

Homeschooled students have many choices when it comes to furthering their education, such as private or public and two-year or four-year colleges. Three academic professionals who work within a variety of educational options were interviewed for their experiences as they relate to the admission process with previously homeschooled students. An admissions professional at a private four-year, public two-year, and public four-year college were interviewed. Narrative descriptions of the results of their

interviews are provided in the following sections. Their perspectives represent a growing trend toward acceptance and acknowledgement of students who come from a wide variety of educational backgrounds.

### **Admissions Director at a Private Four-year College**

This person didn't go to school with the intention of working in admissions at an institute of higher education but instead grew into the position after working as a student in the office. She has now worked in her current position for 16 years and still enjoys the everyday process of engaging with students. At this point her career consists of serving as an Admissions Director at a private college.

**Equivocal admission policy.** The main policy regarding admission at this institution is to try to treat everyone equal, regardless of whether they were homeschooled, attended public or parochial schooling or some other alternative schooling situation. Possibly due to this fact, she feels that the school has a reputation within the homeschooling community of being welcoming. She is aware that homeschooling families often speak of the positive experiences they have working with faculty and staff at this institution. The workers tend to be welcoming, helpful, work with the documentation given and seem to have a positive reputation within the community. The school works purposefully to engage with homeschooling families early in the process and to invite youth to campus for a variety of activities. These may include physical education classes, theatre performances, or any number of other opportunities. They feel that by welcoming the families onto their campus and showing them that it is a positive atmosphere, students and parents will remember when it is time to make a decision. The

school has also hosted homeschooling symposiums and guest speaker nights in order to keep this group involved with the campus community.

**Pre-transition information.** Another reason for working to engage homeschooling families early on in the process is to share information about necessary documentation when transitioning into higher education. Letting families know that they should be keeping track of courses and grades makes the process of transcript development much easier later on. This particular institution is willing to work with students and rarely questions the paperwork that comes in, but at times needs to provide significant levels of guidance. She stated that generally the level of parental involvement in the admission process is high. In some situations, this is involvement to a fault. Parents assume their children will excel at all tasks, but there are times when parental beliefs and assigned grades must be questioned. One example of this that was given was the story of a homeschooled student who scored very low on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) in English skills, yet this child's transcripts showed they had received A's in Latin for many years. There are times that admissions personnel need to note significant differences between the perceived level of accomplishment and the actual, but this is rare.

**Transcripts without required GPA.** This school requires a transcript submission, but no grade point average (GPA) is required. The transcript is necessary for tracking purposes and a 4.0 scale GPA is calculated for competitive scholarship opportunities. The school is looking for a well-rounded student overall. There are misperceptions about how students make themselves stand out, but generally schools just

want active and involved individuals. This individual noted that few administrative personnel have access to private admission information.

**PSEO involvement.** PSEO enrollment at this college is significant. The small campus and class size add to the less than overwhelming reputation for students moving into this next step of the educational process. The campus was described as a smaller school. “Families know that they can trust us, we’re small, we’re comfortable”, stated the admissions officer. PSEO orientation is attended by students and parents together. No hard data was offered, but anecdotally it is believed that homeschooling parents show up for this in greater numbers than other families. In some situations, the parent is clearly driving the process and the student is not making their own informed decisions. Some parents navigate this process well and others do not. How well the student will adapt to the new situation is based on how ‘bubbled’ the homeschooling environment was. This experience can be a culture shock for some, but overall these students adapt according to this professional.

**Reputation within the homeschooling community.** The reputation of this school with the homeschooling community at large is positive. The school is seen as the best of both worlds and a bridge before sending the student away to college. The school itself hopes to sell the students on the experience and have them stay for their college career. A 50/50 ratio was given for students that actually remain at the school after the PSEO portion is completed. Families with multiple children are common and tend to send all subsequent siblings to the same school once they become familiar with the admission process.

One of the nice things about the PSEO process is that retention and graduation rates are unaffected by these students. Their engagement does not factor into the college enrollment statistics. Of course, they would like all students to stay and attend college at their institution, but families choose to move on for a variety of reasons. Some transfer due to lack of program availability, while others see this as a step between high school and college life.

Once students decide to take the step to apply for higher education at this institution the requirements are the same for all students, regardless of their schooling background. They must submit a high school transcript including courses, grades, and overall GPA. They also must have an ACT or SAT exam score even though no minimum score is required. The requirement is used for placement purposes. Recently several families have fought for the right to use the new Classic Learning Test (CLT) in place of the more common SAT or ACT. The school has decided to accept the CLT for admission purposes, but not for scholarship consideration. Not enough data is available through this type of testing. The CLT appeals to some families due to the perception of less bias, but for informational purposes the other tests are still necessary according to this professional.

**Perception of admissions team.** She stated that overall the attitude of the admissions team is to look at the student more holistically. They don't want their students to be numbers, but to be actually associated with names and backgrounds. The overall perception of the admissions team for homeschooling families is described as welcoming. New hires in the office include two staff members who were themselves



homeschooled. The feelings of the group have ebbed and flowed over the years based on the families they have worked with. Some families were described as overbearing. These types of individuals question every requirement and have a difficult time supplying the needed information. It appears that recordkeeping for some is lacking and this can be frustrating for those asking for information. They need something to process and the good word of the parents involved is not enough. The admissions officer expressed the opinion that if parents are intelligent enough to be teaching their high school student algebra or advanced mathematics they should be able to figure out how to put together a transcript.

First children in a homeschooling family usually require more discussions to get registered. Paperwork requirements, explanations of unfamiliar terms and situations, and overall calming of fears takes time. Parents often come in with expectations about the experience that are not based on fact. This could come from the media or even college preparatory books. One common belief is that students need to produce an extensive college essay in order to apply to schools. Some families also believe that the students will need multiple letters of recommendation from various sources. The actual and perceived barriers are often not realistic. Some families believe there are more difficulties than exist. According to this professional they need to learn not to complicate the process. They don't have the actual facts, so they get terrified about making mistakes. This new experience is a learning process for all involved.

There is a spectrum of homeschooling families; some that understand the admissions process and others that lack information. This admissions official mentioned

that “overall these students and families are rock stars. This campus is excited to accept them”. She stated that homeschooled students come to campus excited to learn, and eager to get into a classroom setting. Families come into this situation with different reasons for homeschooling and their reasons are varied. Whatever the reason, the families are welcomed and engage in the higher education process as much as possible.

**Progress of homeschooled students.** Due to the fact that no one else outside of the admissions office knows which students were homeschooled unless the student shares this information the worker finds it interesting to watch the progress of these students. She finds it fun to see the conversations taking place between students. Some of the homeschooled students have lived in a sort of bubble and have to learn to open up. The transformation on both sides of the engagement is educational as they open up to each other. Some are naive to begin with and over time learn to stand on their own and have an opinion. This is gratifying for her to see.

**Information challenges.** Getting information out to the local homeschooling community is challenging for schools. There is no centrally located office or person in charge, so creative ways must be found to disseminate information. This school takes on this challenge in many ways. They annually attend the Minnesota Association of Christian Home Educators (MACHE) conference as well as reaching out through social media. The admissions team are members of local homeschooling Facebook groups in order to have an outlet for information as well. Events of interest happening on campus are posted as well as spreading the word through homeschooling families on campus already.

Recruiting these students is done in a wide variety of ways. The admissions professional believes that continual involvement seems to be the best way to recruit from the homeschooling community, but it is also done through athletic coaches, music honor festivals, and local teachers and tutors.

This professional said, “working with homeschooled families is great. It’s awesome! It’s fun to hear the reasonings behind their choices and some of these students have been the most fun to watch as they transform over time.”

#### **Admissions Officer at Two-year Community College**

The two-year community college that this professional works for has policies in place for admission of students regardless of where they come from in their schooling background. To be admitted students need to fill out an application and provide a high-school transcript or General Education Development (GED) equivalent. These policies cover all admissions. This individual mentioned that the school is hoping to remove barriers for admission for all people regardless of their background. Homeschooled students at this institution are viewed no differently from any other student. This individual is personally familiar with a variety of homeschooled students, so believes that he has a good understanding of the process. These homeschooled students were described as having a good sense of accomplishment. They express themselves and are confident about what they are talking about and they come well prepared.

**Recognition of students.** The professional stated that it is interesting to see the dynamic that goes on when they meet with a student who has been homeschooled. “As a trained professional, you can almost tell right away that the student has something

special. Usually they are well spoken, they are able to frame their questions in an excellent manner, their communications skills are very nice and very personable, whereas many of the traditionally schooled students coming from the high school seem to be a little bit more shy or apprehensive about having a one on one conversation.” This professional added that this is true especially if they come in with their parents because they tend to let their parents lead the conversation.

The worker continued that he personally enjoyed working with students who have been homeschooled. These students bring a different dynamic to the table. They know how to ask questions. They understand that there is no such thing as a dumb question and all of their queries are valid. They are usually organized, and their questions are well thought out.

**Parental involvement.** This professional’s belief is that parents who are homeschooling their children seem to have a better understanding of their student’s needs. The worker corrected his own statement to clarify that he has had both types of homeschooling parents. Those who ‘get it’ and those who are confused. The parent’s questions are generally very clear, and they commonly inquire about PSEO options because of the monetary savings that it offers.

Parents that have traditionally schooled students feel the need to speak on behalf of their students. They believe that they know best what the student wants. That is, until the admissions professional takes a glance at the student and they show them through their facial gestures and body language that they may not agree. The students are then reminded that at the end of the day they are the ones who will be taking the classes and

that no one else knows them better than themselves. The worker addresses them, “So...can you handle it? Challenge your own barriers? You have all the power to remove that barrier and we have all of the support here to help you.”

It’s interesting to the worker that homeschooled students don’t shy away from asking questions. They ask for help and are able to get it.

**Admissions information.** The researcher questioned the admissions representative about how homeschooling families find out about navigating the admission process. He answered that he doesn’t know how it really works for the homeschooling families to find out about how the application process works. He stated that he knows that they have access to some resources., not only within the other families that are homeschooling their children, but in the community as well. It was his opinion that many of the families that are homeschooling have some kind of a link to a church or other resource in that area. He believed that this fact alone brings community together. There seems to be a really strong network involved and the worker believes that it is a great resource.

**Homeschooling recruitment.** It was expressed by the worker that schools don’t see recruitment in this area as a place to increase enrollment, so little has been done to reach out to homeschooled students. The strategies institutions currently use focus on where they are going to get the most bang for their buck while yielding them the most students.

The admissions officer was very inquisitive about how they as an institution can do better with this. “How do I reach out to them? Where do I find these folks?” He

expressed the fact that at national college and career fairs there is limited opportunity due to the overwhelming amount of people trying to get information. There will be a few homeschooling families there, but there is also everyone else asking for information which limits the time and attention available.

**Communication barriers.** It is necessary to find a middle ground for the two sides to connect. Creating awareness is great, but we need to find ways to do it better. The worker stated, “I don’t even know where to start or where to look.” The conversation turned to the worker asking what the researcher has found out from others about how they are doing it or how best to make it happen. This person was ready and willing to take notes about ideas for improvement in the process. His hope is that the school will be able to reach out to specific groups like this in the future. He asked about what steps the researcher took to initiate contact with homeschooling families. The process of the online group was discussed as well as local Facebook groups. The worker stated that having access to this network would be critical to his work. The worker added that the school participates in events, goes out to high schools, reaches out to students of all different backgrounds, and we ignore homeschooled students. The worker stated that he was feeling almost embarrassed in having to say that the school or admissions group hasn’t reached out to this population but that he really does hope this can change. He asked the researcher to follow up with any and all ideas for change.

Getting back to the discussion of those homeschooled students who do find the information and begin the application process, it was stated that there is no specific programming for these students. The school has open access and open enrollment. They

are not looking at GPA's, letters of recommendation, ACT or Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA) requirements so the process is designed to be smooth. If students do happen to have any of these materials it helps place them in the right level of classes. The school offers the Accuplacer test which is a placement test to give a better idea as to where the student is in regard to reading, writing, and mathematics. The test is not a pass/fail exam, and traditionally the homeschooled students do well on it.

**Elimination of barriers.** The results of the school working to eliminate as many barriers as possible has proven to be a positive one. Enrollment has gone up. There is no difference in the financial aid or scholarship process for students of differing school backgrounds, and they actively encourage all students to apply for these types of assistance.

In closing, the worker was asked about his knowledge of how the homeschooled students do once they begin the higher education process. He expressed that a better answer to this question is needed. The worker sees these students as they are coming through the door and then they disperse. Maybe the first couple of days they don't know what to expect, but otherwise the worker believes that they are doing ok. He said that he wished there was more research and qualitative data on this question.

#### **Admissions Officer at a Four-year Public Research University**

For the past 18 years this person has worked in their roll within the admissions field at a major university. It is described as not a highly selective institution, but an access institution. He has seen the field change over time including the perceptions and expectations of working with students who come to the university from a wide variety of

academic backgrounds. He stated that “homeschooling is just one of the ways that students are being educated outside the traditional path and admissions staff needs to change and adapt to be inclusive and work without bias.”

**Admission policies related to homeschooling.** Part of the admission policy at this university mentions admission requirements, specifically for homeschooled students. Although not very extensive, it does reference this group and articulates the requirements for their admission. The admission requirements are not different for them, but a homeschooled student’s GPA is not looked at in the same way that a GPA from a public or parochial school is. Without a school district or some type of public entity providing a standardization of the process, a benchmark is necessary. Because of this, the homeschool GPA is not factored into the overall admission decision. The policy states that homeschool students are treated in the same way as students who do not have a GPA. This applies to students who also completed their prior educational process through achieving a GED or a project-based learning school that uses authentic assessments instead of grades.

The current admission policies are not new ones. Decisions were made in the early 1990’s by the state system and became standard practice for universities at that time. It is the belief of this admissions professional that the policy was created because universities wanted to eliminate subjectivity. When questioned about why the homeschool GPA was still required even though not considered the answer was that it is used to look at the types and number of courses taken. However, if the student has test



scores, PSEO courses, or other university coursework the decision is easier because there are objective benchmarks.

***Minnesota State policies.*** The other Minnesota state universities within the system have all based their admission practices around the same state policies according to this professional. By ruling, universities are allowed to have guidelines that are stricter than those outlined by the state policies but are not allowed to require less. According to this admissions professional the requirements seem to be generally very similar at all of the Minnesota state universities. The requirements all are based around students being in the top half of their class academically with a score of 21 or higher on the ACT, which is roughly equivalent to the top half nationally.

***Required documentation.*** The other types of information required of students during the application process are; application, application fee, transcript, and standardized test score (SAT or ACT). Based on earlier legislation, MCA scores need to also be allowed. In reality, decisions about admittance are still made the same way that they have been for years. This professional's opinion was that admission requirements are beginning to evolve to make them fairer. He believes homeschooled students are treated as any other student and are given the same opportunities.

***ACT scores.*** One of the policies that has been changing in recent years is putting stipulations in place to minimize the importance of the ACT scores. This is based on its lesser predictability for success in school. It is still viewed as an enrollment requirement but is not weighted as heavily as before. When this admissions professional began his career in the field 18 years ago there definitely was a stereotype about homeschooling.

The overarching goal of the admission process is to collect evidence that indicates the student is in a position to be successful. If students come in without this preparation it can be an expensive mistake, particularly when tuition is almost \$9,000 per year at this institution. Admissions officers work to show equity in their policies and the lack of documentation offered by some homeschooling families creates a big challenge in their work. It is noted that while some families are very structured and have clear documentation of their homeschooling process, many others do not.

**Appeals process.** There are homeschoolers who choose to try to work against the system instead of with it. Although special programs or services are not offered to homeschooled students at this school, one of the most beneficial procedures is the appeals process according to this professional. The appeals process is the opportunity to do a case by case review of the application. This is an important opportunity for homeschooled students. Operating standards are in place for efficiency, but the appeals process provides the opportunity to consider those that don't fit into the standard rules. The appeals process is the opportunity to gain context. The process is often perceived as 'I'm not good enough', or 'this is an extra barrier', but it should be viewed as an opportunity for school acceptance.

The process requires at minimum; a personal statement from the student, a letter of academic recommendation preferably written by someone without bias outside of the family, and senior grades. The school can then evaluate like grade trend (have they progressed over the years). Excuses are not viewed the same as a true explanation of extenuating circumstances. If students can demonstrate self-awareness, can talk about

what they do well and what they struggle with, and how to deal with challenging situations their case will be reviewed again. The standards aren't any different and the decisions aren't made any differently, but the university recognizes that one test score does not accurately represent the student. The appeals process gives them a chance to show what evidence they have to support their efforts. According to the admissions officer this process allows the staff to look at this data which helps verify potential success.

**Privacy of information.** During the process of admission, as well as appeals if necessary, the parents are often involved. The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) addresses and speaks to privacy of student's information once they have enrolled. Data of students is not protected in this way during the admission process. However, in the state of Minnesota the Data Practices Act does. These guidelines are much less restrictive. Homeschooling parents are often engaged in the process of higher education admission. Today parents of highly engaged students are often representing the student rather than the student attending alone. This professional mentioned that students are often too busy with school, work, afterschool clubs, athletics, and volunteer work among other things. Parents are even known to contact schools themselves to ask questions about their student's grades, financial aid, and admission paperwork. Parents need to be informed as much as the student. If students don't have the context to navigate the higher education process, especially homeschooled students, parents need to be engaged in the process. Admissions personnel are actively looking for healthy ways to partner with parents instead of trying to keep them out of the process. Of course,

protected data is a concern, but they offer to bring the student and parent together in order to partner with permission. Engaging with families is often a way to smooth the process for all involved. Admission information has a little more privacy flexibility than financial aid, academic transcripts, and the registrar's office.

**Recruitment.** This professional stated that homeschool families seem to work hard to seek out an academic institution that will provide a rigorous academic experience for their student. Another factor affecting their decision is finances. This admissions professional didn't have an impression that these families make their choices any differently than students who are traditionally schooled. The difference comes in their access to information about options. Homeschool students are not being sought out proactively because their numbers are not large enough and the return on investment is insignificant. The decision to attend a university of this type must be made by the family. One of the only ways for universities to acquire the names of homeschooled students is to purchase the names of students who take the ACT or SAT test. Over the past several years this admissions officer has begun to question this decision. He wonders, for example, how important it is for colleges and universities to reach out and support homeschooled students. He wonders if his school has a good reputation within the homeschooling network. This change in attitude comes about by getting to know homeschooling families personally and by recognizing the growing number of alternatively educated students applying for admittance.

**Evidentiary documentation.** The admissions official expressed a hunger to know about what types of evidence could be used to prove the status of homeschooled students.

The current process is inherently not equitable, but parents assigning a GPA to their own child is also very subjective. Bias is predictably present. Stereotypes of how homeschooled students adapt to campus life was discussed, but no data was available. These are the types of questions that need answers according to this officer. He would be very interested to learn more about completion rates and perceptions of the university process, as well as better ways to meet the needs and change any adverse opinions of those involved.

### **Interviewer Impressions**

Those interviewed were able to share experiences of how homeschooling relates to their family or career. The information is valuable for making strategic changes in the higher education application process. This transitional time of life should be equitable to all students no matter what their educational journey was, and admissions officers also need to be given information relevant to their job needs without bias. A clearer understanding of how the process works from each side should help to eliminate barriers.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **Conclusion**

In this study, homeschooling families and admissions personnel were asked about the perceived barriers involving homeschooled students as they transition into higher education. The research supports the idea that barriers exist both on the side of homeschooled families and the institutions of higher learning. The primary research questions of this study were:

- #1. What are the perceived barriers of homeschooled students as they prepare to attend higher education?
- #2. In what ways, if any, do homeschooled student applicants perceive they are treated differently than other student applicants, in a positive or negative way, by higher education admissions personnel?
- #3. In what ways, if any, do higher education admissions personnel perceive that homeschooled student applicants are treated differently than other student applicants?

The information for this research was collected by conducting interviews with homeschooled families in Southern Minnesota, but for perspective and to eliminate bias, admissions officials from three models of higher education institutions were also interviewed. Although the samples were extremely limited, the data that emerged was compelling. The evidence collected was telling in its raw and factual form.

### **Summation of Information from Homeschooled Families**

Homeschoolers are working within limitations that are both perceived and actual. They gather information from a wide variety of sources, but at times the information received is construed or inaccurate. The intentions of the homeschooled families appear to be generally what they believe is in the best interest of their children and they spend a great deal of time and energy seeking information. The network of friends, family, and homeschooled associates is integral to the process. Information about how things are done, why they are done that way, who is responsible, and whether there are established rules seem to guide much of the homeschooling journey for the families interviewed. The parents seek out information about how the transition to higher education is done and oftentimes multiple children in the family follow the same path. Information is shared within the homeschooling network about what has worked, and families feel compelled to follow the same path that has been laid out for them. Few individuals expressed any interest in blazing new trails or taking the road less traveled.

### **Summation of Information from Admissions Professionals**

Various information about the barriers of working with homeschooled students was gathered from admissions officials. Several consistent themes emerged from the interviews. For example, homeschooling GPA is required, but not considered. Colleges and universities are working to treat all students, whether homeschooled or educated in another manner, as equitably as possible. The perceived barriers discussed in the review of literature are present and substantial, but as alternative forms of education continue to gain popularity higher education needs to develop better guidelines to make the transition

process easier. One of the biggest challenges higher education faces that was mentioned in all interviews was the lack of a means to get information to homeschooled families. Admissions professionals try through a variety of methods to reach out to these families, but unless they are established in a database success will be limited.

### **Merging of the Data**

Both higher education and homeschooled families agree that there needs to be a process in place for identifying and recruiting those students who are ready to transition into higher education. Establishing new lines of communication between both sides is critical. Homeschoolers should have direct and easy access to admission information and the application process, but these colleges and universities also need to have a direct line of communication with the homeschooling network in the surrounding area. Universities and colleges have programs, knowledge, and interactions to share, but without a clear and easy line of communication, homeschoolers will be left out.

### **Implications**

The information collected about the transition process supplied implications for those involved. These include:

- The homeschooling network is vitally important for both information and support to many involved in the process. This network should be used to pass reliable and time sensitive information out to homeschooling families. This means of connection and information should be enhanced to include social media sites that are accessible to both homeschooling families and admissions professionals.



- There are colleges and universities viewed as ‘homeschool friendly’ by the homeschooling community. The ways that schools earn this reputation should be made public so that all higher education schools can work to be viewed in this same manner. Creation of a checklist would be appropriate for this work.
- A homeschooling transcript and GPA are not viewed as reliable measurements of the student’s educational experience. Reasons for requirements of these measurements should be made clear to eliminate the feeling of bias against homeschooling families.
- Recruitment is hindered due to unreliable avenues for communication. The homeschooling network should address this issue and make a public forum accessible to both families and schools.
- Better methods of communication with each group are wanted both from the homeschooling families and the admissions professionals.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study was limited to three homeschooling families and three admissions professionals in southern Minnesota. Expanding the pool of both homeschooling families and institutions of higher learning outside southern Minnesota would be beneficial for future research. If the problems identified in this limited study are occurring in other states, then future research is necessary to help homeschoolers transition into higher education. Expanding the study to include various types of higher education institutions in other areas of the country would give a better understanding of how the admissions process is working throughout the country.

Families and admissions professionals who rely on accurate information could learn from each other and share this information with others where homeschooling is prevalent. Are the rules and guidelines the same or even similar? Are there state or local laws that affect these choices? Do other areas have a definitive plan for the sharing of information? Are recruitment efforts taking place with the homeschooling community in other locations?

Communication was an area that was in need of reform on all sides of this study. Homeschooling families need access to information about the process of moving into higher education, and admissions professionals would benefit from having access to clear lines of communication with the homeschooling network.

The questions surrounding this topic are numerous and worth exploring. As the option of homeschooling continues to gain popularity, both the families involved, and the higher education institutions need to find ways to work together and open lines of communication that will benefit all.

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