A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF HOMESCHOOLING CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

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A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF HOMESCHOOLING CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

A Thesis

by

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Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation,
School Psychology, and Deaf Studies
Abstract

of

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Statement of Collaboration

Both research partners discussed in detail with their advisor the collaboration that would occur at the beginning of the project. Collaboration occurred at all levels of the project, from creating research questions, sending initial emails to contacts, following up with contacts, researching, analyzing the data, and writing the final product.

Statement of the Problem

Research statistics show that homeschooling is an ever increasing trend in the United States (Ray, 2009). Further statistics also show that the rates of autism are on the rise (Centers for Disease Control, 2009). As the rates of autism have continued to increase, it is speculated that there may be more families who choose to homeschool their children with autism and related disorders, although the exact number is unknown. There are no statistics showing the number of families who homeschool their children with autism.

The purpose of the study is to analyze homeschooling children with autism from the parent perspective including the overall parental perception of homeschooling a child with autism, the reasons for homeschooling, the benefits, and the challenges.
Sources of Data

Twenty-nine participants from California and thirteen participants from out-of-state were recruited through three main sources: California regional centers, the California Homeschool Network, and Internet support groups. Data were collected through a survey utilizing open and closed ended questions sent via the website Survey Monkey.

Findings and Conclusions Reached

The current study found that parents chose to homeschool their child with autism due to an overall dissatisfaction with the school district. Within the theme of dissatisfaction, seven main categories were found: concerns with the appropriateness of placement; a perceived low level of support from the school; dissatisfaction with quality; a lack of progress; mistreatment by students or staff; the desire for religious or moral based instruction; and multiple reasons. Benefits to homeschooling a child with autism were found to be similar to parents who homeschooled children without developmental delays. Challenges varied and included finding the right type of socialization, financial difficulties with one parent staying home, and lack of free time for the parent homeschooling. The researchers concluded that parents who homeschool their children with autism are a unique subgroup within the homeschooling population and community. They may have less free time than typical parents and more financial difficulties; however, they believe that they are giving their children the best education possible. Additional research is needed to examine how services are delivered to children with
autism and how school districts respond to parents when they feel the district does not have a placement that meets their child’s individual needs.

_______________________, Committee Chair
Jean Gonsier-Gerdin, Ph.D.

_______________________
Date
DEDICATIONS

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents. Without your love and unwavering support throughout the years, this would not have been possible. Your constant belief in my passion for my work and drive for education made this project a reality. I would also like to thank all of my family members, including my brother Chris, whose bravery inspired me to dive into the unknown and push myself farther than I would have thought possible. I would also like to thank my grandfather and late grandmother for their unconditional love and support throughout my life. I would like to thank Traver for being there to support me throughout this process; from the late-night classes through the seemingly endless amounts of reading and homework, you have been there to keep my motivation up and celebrate my milestones. I would also like to thank my thesis partner Jessica. If it weren’t for your idea and willingness to share your topic with me this project would not be a reality. I can truly say that this process has been more enjoyable with you as my partner. Throughout the day-to-day grind of research, you have always found a positive aspect and made me laugh. Thank you for all your hard work and dedication to our project.

Sarah

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my son Kai for being my driving force and motivation; to my father Dale and step mother Nancy for all their love, support and guidance and; in addition to my late Uncle Christopher for encouraging me to follow my dreams. I would like to express my gratitude to my family and friends for giving me the encouragement and strength allowing me to make this vision a reality. A very special
thanks goes to Jin, I could not have done this without you. Lastly, I want to thank my partner Sarah for all the late nights, long days, the laughs, the cries and ultimately completing this journey with me.

Jessica
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We would like to thank our advisors. First and foremost we would like to thank Dr. Jean Gonsier-Gerdin for guiding us through our thesis “journey.” We would also like to thank the department of Special Education and our second reader, Dr. Kathy Gee, for their support throughout this process.

If it weren’t for the trials and tribulations within both of our master’s careers, the opportunity for collaboration would not have existed. We would like to acknowledge our work for their support and flexibility throughout this process and providing us with the opportunity for our paths to cross.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Homeschooling is an alternative form of education in which children are instructed at home rather than in a traditional public or private school (Lips & Fienberg, 2008). Homeschooling appears to be a growing phenomenon within the education system in the United States. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 1.5 million students were being homeschooled in 2007, an increase from 850,000 in 1999. This represents an increase from 1.7 percent of school age students in 1999 to 2.9 percent in 2007 (NCES, 2007). However, the exact number of children being homeschooled currently is debated, as the NCES (2007) reported that the total number of people who homeschool at least one child in their household has a margin of error of +/- 231,000.

Families are choosing to homeschool their children for a variety of reasons including but not limited to the following: the overall safety of the school environment including drugs and peer pressure, a dissatisfaction with the academic instruction within the public school system, and a preference for providing religious and moral instruction not found at public schools (Lips & Fienberg, 2008). Approximately 8% of parents who homeschool report that they do so because their child has a disability. Yet, these reported statistics do not state additional demographic information such as what specific disability the child has (Bieleck, 1999).
During the same time period in which homeschooling has increased, the incidence of autism, a developmental disability considered the result of a neurological condition affecting normal brain function, development and social interactions with no known cause, has also increased (Hetiz-Picciotto & Delwiche, 2009). Diagnoses of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) have been increasing since the initial diagnostic criteria were published in the 1980 edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). Current trends suggest that the autism rates for the United States are between 1 in 100 and 1 in 300 with an average of 1 in 150 (Centers for Disease Control, 2009), constituting 1% of the population. In California, as of 2006, the average number of children who are diagnosed with ASD is 11.2 per 10,000 births. This is an increase from .8 per 10,000 births in 1990 (Hertz-Picciotto & Delwiche, 2009).

As previously stated, prevalence rates of autism are on the rise and additional reports suggest that the number of children who are homeschooled is also increasing. One assumption that might be made is the number of children with autism who are homeschooled may also have increased in the last decade. Since there are no reported statistics on the number of children who are homeschooled, and who have a diagnosis of autism, it is difficult to verify this assumption. Furthermore, there does not appear to be research conducted on the reasons that parents of children with autism might choose to homeschool their children and the additional difficulties that they might face securing services for their child with special needs. In light of the decentralized nature of the homeschooled population, increased rates of autism, and the lack of research on homeschooling children with disabilities, specifically those with autism, this study sought
to analyze the factors that influence families’ decisions to home school their children
with the specific disability of autism.

   Background of the Problem

   Homeschooling began as the primary method of education in the United States
prior to the 1700’s. In fact, many of America’s founders were homeschooled. Although
they debated about it, these founders eventually decided to leave the decision to
homeschool as an individual family choice and state choice rather than as an amendment
in the United States Constitution (Plett, 1999). In 1852, Massachusetts state instituted a
compulsory education law requiring children to attend school (Katz, 2001). Shortly after
Massachusetts implemented the compulsory education law, other states followed until all
50 states had compulsory education laws. The main reasons for this shift to school-based
education were not so much to give children a better education, but rather to keep them
out of the workforce and to teach them to be better citizens (Gatto, 2000).

   Around the turn of the 20th century, while many people felt that working in the
factories and coalmines was not the best place for children, they also had concerns that
children were not receiving the best education in the public school system (Gatto, 2000).
In the middle of the 20th century, homeschooling became an underground and mostly
rural form of education until the 1970’s when Ivan Illich published his book *Deschooling
Society* (1970), which called to abolish the compulsory education laws that had been in
place since the 1850’s (Katz, 2001). After this book was published, many more people
began to write about homeschooling and a magazine, *Growing Without Schooling*, was
voice in the homeschooling society and published several books including, *Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better* (1976), and *Teach Your Own: A Hopeful Path for Education* (1981). In the mid-1980’s, the majority of states enacted laws that made homeschooling legal as part of compulsory attendance (Bauman, 2002). Since that time the number of homeschooled children has increased each year and now encompasses an average of over 2% of the school-aged population (Isenberg, 2007).

In 2007, the number of homeschooled students was about 1.5 million, an increase from 850,000 in 1999 and 1.1 million in 2003. The percentage of the school-age population that was homeschooled increased from 1.7% in 1999 to 2.9% in 2007. The growth in the percentage of homeschooled students from 1999 to 2007 represents a 74% relative increase over the eight-year period and a 36% relative increase since 2003 (NCES, 2007).

Currently, parents choose to homeschool their children for a variety of reasons. According to the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics 1999 Parent Survey of the National Household Education, 48.9% of parents homeschooled their children because they believed that they could give their child a better education at home; 38.4% homeschooled for religious reasons; 25.6% homeschooled due to a poor learning environment at school; 16.8% homeschooled due to family reasons; 15.1% homeschooled to develop character and morality; 12.1% homeschooled because they objected to what school taught; 11.6% homeschooled because they believed that school did not challenge his/her child; 11.5% homeschooled due to other problems with available schools; 9% homeschooled due to student behavior
problems at school; and 8.2% homeschooled because his/her child had special needs or a disability (Bielick, 1999). Although 8.2% of the parents who homeschooled their children responded that one of their reasons was due to their child having special needs, they did not report on the specific disability that their child had. Therefore, there are no reported statistics on the number of parents who homeschool children with autism.

Autism is a spectrum disorder with five categories of diagnosis: 1) Autistic Disorder occurs in males four times more than females and involves moderate to severe impairments in communication, socialization and behavior (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Easter Seals, 2009); 2) Asperger syndrome, sometimes considered a milder form of autism, is typically diagnosed later in life than other disorders on the spectrum. People with Asperger syndrome usually function in the average to above average intelligence range and have no delays in language skills, but often struggle with social skills and restrictive and repetitive behavior (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Easter Seals, 2009); 3) Rett syndrome is diagnosed primarily in females and involves children who exhibit typical development until approximately five to 30 months of age when they begin to regress, especially in terms of motor skills and loss of abilities in other areas. A key indicator of Rett syndrome is the appearance of repetitive, meaningless movements or gestures (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Easter Seals, 2009); 4) Childhood Disintegrative Disorder involves a significant regression in skills that have previously been acquired, and deficits in communication, socialization and/or restrictive and repetitive behavior (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Easter Seals, 2009); and 5) Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-
NOS) includes children that do not fully meet the criteria for the other specific disorders or those that do not have the degree of impairment associated with those disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Easter Seals, 2009).

People with ASD share some similar symptoms, such as problems with social interaction. However, autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) affect each person in different ways, and can range from very mild to severe. There also are differences in when the symptoms start, how severe they are, and the exact nature of the symptoms (Centers for Diease Control, 2009).

It is estimated that between 1 in 100 and 1 in 300, with an average of 1 in 150 children are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders, constituting 1% of the population. The disorder is four more times likely to be diagnosed in boys than girls (“Centers for Diease Control”, 2009). In California alone, it was estimated in 2006 that the prevalence rate of autism was 11.2 per 10,000 births (Hertz-Picciotto, & Delwiche, 2009). This rate had risen from 0.8 per 10,000 births in 1990. The cumulative increase, which measures all children diagnosed in California, including those diagnosed after age five, was from 6.2 per 10,000 in 1990 to 42.5 per 10,000 in 2006 (Hertz-Picciotto, & Delwiche, 2009).

Clearly, the number of children being diagnosed with ASDs has risen over the past decade; yet, it is unclear whether the increase is due to changes in diagnosis or a true increase in cases (Autism Developmental, 2007). Each year since the early 1990’s, special education programs have been required to report how many children who receive services are diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. In 2005, about 223,942 children ages 3-21 were served under the autism classification for special education services,
making up three percent of the total number of children receiving special education services in the United States (Autism Developmental, 2007).

With the increased number of children being diagnosed annually, school districts are faced with the task of educating a growing number children on the autism spectrum. Most school districts offer a variety of services and placements for children depending on the individual skill levels and abilities. Educational placements can include full inclusion in the general education setting with push-in services; inclusion in the general education setting with pull-out services; a segregated classroom with integration opportunities; segregated classroom or school; or segregated, non-public school placements. Although the exact number of students with autism who are homeschooled is unknown, there is evidence that parents have begun to homeschool their child with autism; thus adding another service delivery approach to the education of children with autism.

Statement of the Research Problem

Statistics show that homeschooling is an ever increasing trend in the United States (Ray, 2009). Further statistics also show that the rates of autism are on the rise (Centers for Disease Control, 2009). As the rates of autism have continued to increase, it is speculated that there may be more families who choose to homeschool their children with autism and related disorders, although the exact number is unknown. There are no statistics showing the number of families who homeschool their children with autism, nor is there research investigating the following questions: What are the factors that lead parents to the decision to homeschool their children diagnosed with autism?, and What is the overall parental perception of homeschooling a child with autism?
Purpose of the Study

This study sought to analyze the factors that influence a family’s decision to home
school their child with autism through an Internet survey. Families who homeschool their
children with autism throughout the state of California were invited to participate with
additional participants from out-of-state responding. Specifically, research questions
addressed included:
1. What major themes emerged around the reasons for homeschooling?
2. What do demographic factors (i.e., child gender, parental education level, supervision
level) “look like” in families that homeschool children with autism?
3. What is the overall parental perception of homeschooling a child with autism?
4. What are the themes that emerged with regards to the benefits of homeschooling a
child with autism from the parental perspective?
5. What are the themes that emerged with regards to the challenges of homeschooling a
child with autism from the parental perspective?

Research Theoretical Framework

The latest research suggests an increasing trend in both the rates of autism
diagnoses and the number of children who are homeschooled; however, current research
does not combine investigation of the two increasing trends. The available research on
parents who homeschool their children with autism is limited to one dissertation
involving parents who homeschool their children with disabilities, not limited to autism
(Duffey, 2000). The numbers of parents who homeschool their children with autism is
not known, nor are their reasons for homeschooling. The lack of theories on
homeschooling children with autism led to the choice to employ the use of an emerging grounded theory design. This design allowed the theory to emerge from the data rather than providing more evidence towards an existing theory (Glaser, 1992). Since homeschooling, how parents come to the decision to homeschool, and the steps taken to homeschool involve a process, this design was the best fit to answer the research questions. A grounded theory design involves qualitative data collection and analysis procedures that seek to explain a process about a substantive topic (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The grounded theory design was specifically chosen for the current study due to the fluid method of data analysis and the importance of letting the theory emerge from the data (Glaser, 1992). This design allowed for the current study to examine all of the possible themes and resulting theories that emerged on the topic of homeschooling children with autism as previous research did not give enough information for a clear theory to emerge (Glaser, 1992).

Emerging grounded theory design consists of three key elements. The first is that grounded theory is a more abstract conceptual form of research. The second is that a theory is not forced into predetermined categories, but is instead grounded in the emerging data. Finally, the theory must meet certain criteria: fitting into the reality of the situation and study, work to explain the variations of the participants, and finally, it should be a fluid theory and modified whenever new data is present (Creswell, 2008).
Definition of Terms

*Asperger Syndrome*

Sometimes considered a mild form of autism, this is typically diagnosed later in life than other autism spectrum disorders. A person diagnosed with Asperger syndrome typically has above average intelligence and often has no delays in language acquisition. The main areas of deficits observed in this syndrome are impaired social skills and restrictive and repetitive behavior (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Easter Seals, 2009).

*Autism*

A neurological disorder characterized by deficits in communication, social skills, and behavior excesses. Estimated to occur in 1 in 150 children in the United States with boys more affected than girls by a ratio of four to one (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Easter Seals, 2009).

*Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)*

Autism spectrum disorder is a term used to describe the disorders of autism; Asperger syndrome; pervasive developmental disorder, not otherwise specified; Rett syndrome; and childhood disintegrative disorder. These disorders fall on the continuum that is the autism spectrum (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Easter Seals, 2009).

*Childhood Disintegrative Disorder (CDD)*

This disorder involves a significant regression after age five in all skills that have previously been acquired. Areas of deficit include communication, socialization, and
restrictive, and repetitive behavior (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Easter Seals, 2009).

Compulsory Attendance Laws

These are educational laws enforced by each state that require children to attend either a public, private, or home school until they reach a certain age. Massachusetts instituted the first law in 1852, with other states following shortly thereafter. Average beginning age for compulsory attendance laws is five, while the exit age ranges from 16 to 18. Parents or legal guardians are held legally accountable for their child’s mandatory attendance in school based on the state’s compulsory attendance law.

Education for All Handicapped Children’s Act

The Education for All Handicapped Children’s Act was signed into law in 1975 by President Gerald Ford (Yell, 2006). This act set aside a portion of the federal budget to fund programs for students with special needs and listed a set of criteria for qualifying for these services. Most recently reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004, it delineates the 13 categories of disability under which students may receive special education services (Yell, 2006).

Homeschooling

Homeschooling is an alternative form of education where children are instructed at home rather than in a traditional public or private school (Lips, 2008).

Individualized Education Plan

An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is a document that is created for students identified as having a disability which qualifies under IDEA 2004. This document
contains the services that are offered to the student based on their identified areas of need as well as goals written to address these identified deficits. The IEP is developed at least one time per year at an IEP meeting where members of the team who work with the child meet to discuss the current progress and needs for the student in the upcoming year. The members of the team may include: parents, general education teacher, special education teacher, speech pathologist, occupational therapist, school psychologist, principal, aides working with the student, and the student him/herself (Yell, 2006).

Outside and Related Services

Outside and related services include those services that children with an autism spectrum disorder, including autism, PDD-NOS, Rett, Asperger, and CDD, receive in addition to regular educational services. These include, but are not limited to: speech and language services, occupational therapy, physical therapy, feeding therapy, treatments based on applied behavior analysis, and social skills groups (Yell, 2006).

Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS)

This disorder is classified by impairments in areas on the autism spectrum; however, the person does not meet the number of criteria or degree of impairment associated with autism or Asperger syndrome (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Easter Seals, 2009).

Rett Syndrome

This syndrome is diagnosed primarily in females who develop typically until five to 30 months when regression is observed. Regression is typically seen in motor skills and loss of abilities in other developmental areas. The person may acquire repetitive and
meaningless motions and gestures (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Easter Seals, 2009).

Assumptions

The assumptions for this study included the following. The survey measure allowed for responses that were accurate reflections and representations of the participants’ perspectives and viewpoints. The sample selected was representative of the population of interest and responses were independently completed. Lastly, the researchers independently analyzed the data and strove to remain free of bias.

Justification

The benefits of the current study to the larger special education community include: a) a clearer understanding of the factors behind the decision to homeschool children with autism from the parent’s perspective; b) the knowledge of recurrent trends across and within groups regarding demographic information (e.g., length of time homeschooled, age when first homeschooled); c) the knowledge of outside services children with autism who are homeschooled receive and how they gain access to these services; d) and the knowledge about the overall perception of homeschooling within families of children with autism. This information can all serve to improve how parents, districts and regional centers support students with autism who are homeschooled and the process by which outside services (speech, occupational therapy) are obtained. In addition, the current research may revealed opportunities for collaboration between families, agencies who supervise homeschooling families, the regional center, and school districts within California.
Limitations

The current study focuses on a broad analysis of the homeschooling process from the perspectives of parents who have children with autism. The sample size for this study was partially gained using snowball sampling methods. This method of sampling allowed for more participants to be identified, but it was not the most preferred method as it created a sample population that may not have been representative of the target population for the study (Creswell, 2008). The current study relied on a survey based on self-report, which may have contained information that was not truthful or may omit information that participants did not wish to share. Finally, the qualitative results of this study are not able to be generalized outside of the sample group to different school districts, regional centers or statewide populations without further study (Creswell, 2008).

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces homeschooling, autism spectrum disorders and the rate in which they are diagnosed, and details the purpose of the current study. Chapter 2 examines the literature on the history of homeschooling children; homeschooling children with special needs; homeschooling children with autism; the benefits, challenges and outcomes of homeschooling children in general and those with special needs; and the benefits suggested when homeschooling children with autism. Chapter 3 provides a description of the research methods used and a rationale for using such methods. Chapter 4 discusses the findings using both quantitative and qualitative methods based on the research methods discussed in chapter 3. Finally,
Chapter 5 provides a synopsis of the findings and a discussion as to the limitations of the study and implications for future practice and research.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This review of the literature will examine the history of homeschooling, including the growth in popularity; relevant legislation and case law; reasons why parents homeschool; types of homeschooling; the benefits and challenges to homeschooling; and an overview of homeschooling children with special needs, including those with autism.

Historical Overview of Current Homeschooling Movement

Although most research on homeschooling has been conducted since 1969 (Plent, 1999), homeschooling is not a new phenomenon. In fact, in the 1700’s, parents were homeschooling their children (Plent, 1999). Homeschooling began as a means for families to educate their children while allowing them to participate in home activities, such as farming and cooking, that allowed the family to survive. Although the topic was debated when the U.S. Constitution was being ratified, the founding fathers, many of whom were homeschooled themselves, decided to leave the decision to homeschool to the individual families and state rather than have the federal government decide (Plent, 1999; Gatto, 2001; McGhan, 1997; Rothbard, 1999).

Popular Growth

Homeschooling continued until the mid-1800s when compulsory attendance laws were enacted and states began to regulate the education of children by making it a legal requirement that children attend a public school (Gordon & Gordon, 1990). Between the 1870’s and the 1960’s, homeschooling was a phenomenon seen mostly among rural populations (Gordon & Gordon, 1990; Stevens, 2001). In the 1960’s through the 1980’s,
homeschooling became more widely known with publications by John Holt, including *How Children Fail* (1964) and *Teach Your Own* (1981) (Basham, Merrifield, & Hepburn, 2007). In these books, Holt discussed the notion that public schools do not teach children the values and ideals necessary to be a member of society. These books further suggested that parents “unschool” their children. “Unschooling” is defined as a homeschool structure where there is no fixed learning style. The belief is that children learn best through unstructured, real life experiences in a nurturing home environment, which would create greater autonomy in educational choice by the parents and a decentralized school society within the United States. Unschooling has been referred to as laissez-faire homeschooling by critics of Holt and his work (Basham, Merrifield, & Hepburn, 2007).

During this same time period, Dr. Raymond Moore took an additional approach to public and home schooling. He felt that parents should homeschool and delay sending their children to public schools until the child was between 8 and 12 years of age when the child is more mature (Basham, Merrifield, & Hepburn, 2007). This idea resounded with Christian Right ideologists with the publication of *Home Grown Kids* (1981) and *Home-Spun Schools* (1982) by Moore (Basham, Merrifield, & Hepburn, 2007).

Interestingly, in the mid-20th century the most accurate description of homeschoolers were those who were more liberal, believed in new-age philosophies and were considered to be “hippies” or “homesteaders” (Basham, Merrifield, & Hepburn, 2007). However, by the 1980’s, the majority of people who homeschooled their children would be considered the Christian Right and by the late 1990’s, 75% of those who homeschooled were practicing Christians (Livni, 2000). As of 2010, the majority of
homeschooling families still consider themselves as religious, with the non-religious homeschooling families being the minority (Russell, 2010).

**Current Demographic Characteristics of Homeschoolers**

As of 2007, it was estimated by the National Center for Education Statistics (2007) that 1.5 million children in the United States were being homeschooled out of a total school population of 114.8 million children enrolled in kindergarten through 12th grade. More White students are homeschooled than African American, Hispanic students or students from other racial/ethnic groups (NCES, 2007). Students who are homeschooled are more likely to be in two-parent households, with one parent in the labor force (NCES, 2007). The majority of parents homeschooling children (97.9%) are married and have an average of 3.5 children, compared to the general population average of 2.0 children (Ray, 2009). Homeschooler’s median family income ($75,000-$79,999) closely spans the nationwide median ($75,000) for families headed by a married couple with one or more children under the age of eighteen (Ray, 2009). The education levels of parents that homeschool can vary however, the majority of homeschooling parents having a bachelor’s degree (Ray, 2009). In order to understand the context of homeschooling, it is important to note that the ability for a parent to homeschool is influenced by legislation and case law which will be discussed in further detail in the following section.

**Legislation and Case Law Related to Homeschooling**

Prior to the U.S. Constitution and regulations by the states, the first compulsory education law was passed by the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1642 (Grant, 2005). This law required those in charge of children to provide an education in reading and trade. By
1671, the colonies, with the exception of Rhode Island, had passed compulsory education laws based on the original by the Massachusetts Bay Colony (Grant, 2005). As stated previously, the U.S. Constitution made no mention of compulsory attendance laws. However, after the Revolutionary War, many states began to enact mandatory school laws, beginning with Massachusetts in 1789 (Grant, 2005). These new laws required parents to send their children to school for a certain amount of weeks, if they were between the ages of 8 and 14. By 1918, all states had adopted universal compulsory attendance laws (Grant, 2005).

There were noteworthy legal exceptions to compulsory education laws. If children completed the requirements for grade 12, regardless of age, they were exempt from the compulsory education laws. Additionally, if children lived farther than two miles walking distance from school, or if their families specific situation required them to work (e.g., farming families), or if they had certain physical (e.g., home-hospice required) or mental disabilities requiring hospitalization or frequent medication, they were also exempt from the laws (Lines, 1984, 1995).

Challenges to the compulsory education laws which were outside the scope of the above mentioned exceptions have been brought to courts since the early 1920’s. Specific cases such as Meyer v. Nebraska (1923), Pierce V. Society of Sisters (1925), Farrington v. Tokushige (1927), Wisconsin V. Yoder (1972), Scoma v. Chicago Board of Education (1974), and Perchemlides v. Frizzle (1978) set the stage for the compulsory education laws that we have in place now and the addition of homeschooling as an acceptable form of education in relation to this law.
In 1923, *Meyer v. Nebraska* led to a ruling that it is a parents decision whether a child receives foreign language instruction or not (Uerling, 1982). Although not directly related to homeschooling, this case suggested specifically that parents had a right to direct the education of their children (Uerling, 1982).

Two years later in 1925 the Society of Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, brought suit against the Governor of Oregon, Walter Pierce, for passing a law in 1922 requiring children to attend a public school (Mizia, 2000). Prior to this law, parents were required to send their children to school, although they had a choice between public, private, or parochial. The court ruled in favor of the Society of Sisters and stated that under the 14th Amendment, parents had the right to direct their child’s education and to send their child to a parochial or private school (Mizia, 2000).

In the state of Hawaii in 1927, *Farrington v. Tokushige* further established the rights of parents in directing their child’s education (Clark, 1986). The Hawaiian legislature passed a law requiring strict school hours, textbooks, and curriculum that children were taught in their native language in all schools in the state. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that this amount of regulation imposed on private schools was unreasonable and that parents had the right to exercise control over their child’s education, so long as it was unrelated to any state goal deemed rational (e.g., basic curriculum standards) (Clark, 1986). This ruling eventually allowed parents more freedom to homeschool if they registered as a private school as the regulations regarding school hour flexibility, textbook choices and curriculum choices within the state standards, were deemed to be parents choice by this ruling.
An important case in 1972, *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, ruled that the state of Wisconsin could not force children of the Amish community to attend a public school (Lines, 1985). The court further stated that the state could not force children to attend school past the eighth grade in the face of strong religious convictions and if the children were developing into functioning adults in their community as determined by the elders and the guidelines set forth within the community itself. *Wisconsin v. Yoder* set the stage for religious reasons to be considered when deciding where a child is to be given an education (Lines, 1985).

During the mid 1970’s and 1980’s, several court cases appeared that began to allow more children to be homeschooled under the compulsory attendance laws. In *Scoma v. Chicago Board of Education* (1974), the courts ruled that a homeschool can be considered a private school, and thus meet the requirements of the compulsory education laws of the state so long as the parents have a suitable education level (i.e., finished high school) and are registered as a private school (Lines, 1983). In 1978, the case of *Perchemlides v. Frizzle* furthered the notion that a homeschool could be an alternative to public school, and determined that by not allowing parents to choose their child’s education setting, it is a violation of their constitutional rights to find a suitable alternative to public education (Bumstead, 1979). Subsequently, court cases have continued to allow homeschooling to be considered an alternative method of schooling in relation to public education.
Homeschooling Regulations

Homeschooling as an alternative to public school is not without regulations. As of 2010, 40 states have regulations regarding homeschooling, while 10 states do not require parents to give any notification that they will be homeschooling their children (Homeschool Legal, 2010). Of the states with regulations, these fall into three categories: low regulations, moderate regulations, and high regulations. There are 14 states with low regulations, meaning that these states only require parents to notify them that they are homeschooling their children; California is one of these states. There are 21 states that have moderate regulations. These moderate regulations require parents to send a notification that they will be homeschooling their child, along with test scores and/or professional evaluation (i.e., psychological review) of the student’s progress. Finally, five states have high regulations which require parents to notify the state that they are homeschooling their child, send test scores on achievement tests and/or professional evaluations of progress, have their curriculum approved, and be a qualified teacher or have a professional teacher make home visits (Homeschool Legal, 2010). These regulations are general to the entire homeschooling population within the United States. These regulations do not take into consideration specific circumstances with children who have special needs and are homeschooled.

Legislation Specific to Students with Special Needs

Although there are no specific court cases regarding children with special needs who are homeschooled, case law regarding compulsory education laws and homeschooling do apply to these children. Furthermore, under federal regulations, special
education funding under IDEA 2004 may not go to children who are homeschooled. However, if a child lives in a state where parents who homeschool may register as a private school, they may receive special education funding under IDEA at the discretion of the state (HLSDA, 2010). Additionally, homeschooling children with special needs falls under the same umbrella of regulations mentioned previously with the exception of four states. Iowa, North Dakota, Pennsylvania and Vermont have additional regulations for children with special needs who are homeschooled (HLSDA, 2010).

Within Iowa, parents may homeschool their child with special needs only after they have approval from the special education director of the Area Education Agency. Children with special needs who are homeschooled may also enroll in the public school for certain classes or activities while remaining homeschooled, and receive special education services, such as speech and occupational therapy under Iowa Codes 299A.9, 299A.8 and Admin. Codes 281-31.9 and 281-31.5, (HLSDA, 2010).

In the state of North Dakota, scores on standardized tests are used to determine if a child can be homeschooled or if they must remain within the public school system (HLSDA, 2010). If the child’s basic composite scores on standardized tests falls below the 30th percentile, they must be evaluated by a multidisciplinary team to determine if a child has a learning disability and should receive special education services. If the child is evaluated and special education services are not recommended, the parent may continue to homeschool their child as long as they file with the local or county superintendent a plan that addresses the remediation needs of their child and specifies how they will address the academic deficits. If the child is determined to have a learning disability and
special education services are recommended, the parent must file an individualized education program with the superintendent of the school district. If the child has been evaluated by a licensed school psychologist and determined to have a developmental disability (i.e., autism, down syndrome) a parent must meet the following conditions. The child’s parent qualifies to provide home education under the above mentioned plan; and the parent files with the district superintendent a notice that the child will receive home education, a copy of the child’s diagnosis, and a services plan for the child. Parents homeschooling children with a developmental disability must also file progress reports, prepared by an individualized education program team selected by the parent, four times during the school year (HSLDA, 2010).

Pennsylvania has additional regulations for students identified under the categories of disabilities under IDEA. These students can be homeschooled as long as the homeschool program addresses the specific needs of the student and is approved by a teacher with a valid certificate from the state to teach students receiving special education, or a licensed clinical or certified school psychologist (HSLDA, 2010). Written notice of the approval must be submitted to the state and the student may receive special education and related services, such as speech and occupational therapy, from the state through the school district when the state and parent agree to it (HSLDA, 2010).

In Vermont, all students enrolled as a homeschool student must submit an independent professional evaluation that the student does not have a developmental disability (HSLDA, 2010). If the student is determined to have a developmental disability, the parents must notify the state of any special services or adaptations made to
accommodate the specific developmental disability (HSLDA, 2010). The above factors regarding state regulations may play an impact in the parent’s ability to decide if homeschool is the right choice for their child and family; however, this is only the first step in the process of homeschooling.

Types of Homeschooling

Once parents make the decision to home school their child, they must choose a type of homeschooling. Home schooling approaches fall into one of four categories: traditional education, also called school-at-home; unit study approach; interest-initiated learning, also called unschooling; and eclectic education (Taylor, 2001). Additionally, students may be dually enrolled, attending the local public school or community college for specific classes not offered in the home environment and for social interaction. Dual enrollment occurs most commonly during the high school years (Dansby-Giles, 2002).

The traditional approach to schooling at home is the “I-teach-you-learn” philosophy where parents decide what is best for their children and they complete the assigned material emphasizing textbook learning (Taylor, 2001). This method is structured with lesson plans, textbooks, quizzes and tests, subject specific projects and grades. Usually, the core program includes four subjects: language arts (English), science, math and social studies, including history and geography. In most cases, children study every subject every day. Optional courses or electives may be added including music, art, religious studies, physical education or foreign language. Of note, the traditional approach is the most expensive way to home school due to the prepackaged curriculums and textbooks (Taylor, 2001).
A second approach to home education is using unit studies. The unit study approach is more open-ended than school-at-home (Taylor, 2001). Unit studies are used to promote more interaction with the real world and involve more hands on projects. Generally, instead of using a textbook, children pursuing unit studies will use a variety of sources: libraries, magazines, newspapers, people, and computers. It is believed that unit studies encourage curiosity and independent thinking more than traditional materials (Taylor, 2001).

Interest-initiated learning, also referred to as “unschooling,” is the third approach to homeschooling. In contrast to children in families using traditional and unit study approaches, children in interest-initiated environments select and direct their own projects and activities (Taylor, 2001). The underlying philosophy is that “students learn best when their interests direct their learning.” (Taylor, 2001, p. 143). Parents facilitate more than they teach, helping their children learn about the world around them, rather than about subjects listed on a suggested course of study. With community activities and everyday life at the core, interest-initiated learning can be inexpensive. This approach is flexible and hands-on, and often creates students that are self-directed learners. As a result, activities and learning do not look like school and every subject or topic may not be covered. Parents who select this approach make the decision that self-direction is more important than imparting a broad, arbitrary selected spectrum of knowledge (Taylor, 2001).

A fourth method of homeschooling is the eclectic approach, which combines traditional materials, unit studies, unschooling time and anything else that works (i.e.,
field trips, hand on learning, magazines, videos) (Taylor, 2001). This approach emphasizes flexibility to tailor educational experiences to the student without an adherence to one particular educational philosophy. With the eclectic approach, a balance exists between the traditional and the innovative. Students learn not only how to learn but how to handle traditional materials and locate and evaluate educational resources in the community. The primary disadvantage to this approach is that parents may lack the confidence to work cooperatively with their child and the necessary constant communication between the parent and the student may be challenging (Taylor, 2001).

In addition to these approaches, local public schools and community colleges may allow students to participate in dual enrollment. Attending the campus for elective courses, including art, physical education, and drama. Dual enrollment also allows for involvement in extracurricular activities, including sports teams, and social interaction. Students attending a community college can also receive college credit (Dansby-Giles, 2002).

Delivery of Home School Services

Along with the different types of homeschooling, there are various ways to supervise and deliver services. Within the state of California, supervision and delivery of home school services can be: private instruction by a teacher or a tutor; independent study program (ISP) or home study program (HSP) through public schools; private school satellite programs and filing a private school affidavit for exemption as a private school (Keith, 2010).
According to California education code §48224, students can be homeschooled under the instruction of a credentialed teacher or tutor. The education code states children not attending a private, full-time day school may be instructed by a parent or tutor with a valid teaching credential for the grades and subjects taught. Instruction must be for at least three hours a day for at least 175 days per year (California Education Code §48224).

Independent study program (ISP) and home study programs (HSP) through the public schools allow parents to teach their children at home by enrolling in the public school district's ISP or HSP (Keith, 2010). Parents act as teacher's aides, supervised by the program teacher. The program teacher works with parents to develop a course of study for the student that is in line with state requirements as determined by the teacher and school district. Parents and students typically meet with the program teacher once-a-month. The teacher reviews the student's work, collects samples of work, provides resources and study materials, and administers tests, grades, and diplomas (California Education Code §51745; Keith, 2010).

Private school satellite programs (PSP), formally known as the private school independent study program (ISP), allow parents to enroll their child into a private school home study program that acts as an administrative “umbrella” for their family's private school (Keith, 2010). The private PSP files the private school affidavit annually and keeps required records on file such as attendance records, health records, and an outlined course of study for each student. They may also keep track of cumulative files, grades, transcripts, and test results (if any). Then, parents typically take responsibility for their
child’s education and select and purchase their own curriculum (if any) (California Education Code §33190; Keith, 2010).

Lastly, parents can file a private school affidavit (PSA) for an exemption as a private school (Keith, 2010). This is the least restrictive method for homeschooling where parents teach their children without being involved with a school district or any form of government schooling. Parents can establish their own private school in their home by filing a Private School Affidavit with the CA Department of Education form with the superintendent of public instruction between October 1st and 15th each year. In California, private school teachers are not required to have teaching credentials (California Education Code §33190 & §48222; Keith, 2010).

Parental Reasons for Homeschooling

Homeschoolers can no longer be easily divided into ideologies and pedagogies. Studies suggest there are broad categories of motivation to homeschool which can have considerable overlap (Collom, 2005; Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; NCES, 2007). While religious values, academic and pedagogical concerns may be present, a general dissatisfaction with the public schools and a family’s dynamics (including having a child with special needs) are additional important motivators in a family’s decision to homeschool (Collom, 2005).

Green and Hoover-Dempsey (2007) studied the psychological and life context variables of 136 parents who homeschooled their children, and how those factors related to the parental reasons for homeschooling. Psychological internal motivators identified include the parental role construction and involvement, the parent’s self-efficacy for
helping the child succeed in school, and personal beliefs related to the decision to homeschool. Life context variables are those perceptions of the parents that influence the feasibility of homeschooling, including the perceptions of available time, energy, knowledge and ability to help their child learn (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007).

Parental role construction and involvement involves the parents’ beliefs and behaviors as to what they are supposed to do in relation to their child’s education (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007). The three main types are parent focused (i.e., the belief that parents are responsible for their child’s educational outcomes), school focused (i.e., the belief that schools are responsible for the child’s educational outcomes) and partnership focused (i.e., the belief that parents and school are jointly responsible for a child’s educational successes).

Parental self-efficacy is related to the parents’ belief about their personal ability to help their child in school. Parents with a strong sense of self-efficacy generally set high goals and put forth more effort to reach those set goals than parents with low self-efficacy. Parental levels of self-efficacy factor into the decision whether or not to homeschool.

Other personal beliefs of parents found to be related to the decision to homeschool include parental perceptions of the public school system’s ability to teach their child the appropriate curriculum and use teaching methods consistent with the parents’ ideas of a proper education for their child. These beliefs can be based on religious or moral values or viewpoints related to curriculum, grading and testing as well
as their child’s unique academic, behavioral, emotional and physical needs (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007).

Parents choosing to homeschool believe they should play an active role in their child’s education, have the ability to help their child succeed in school, and perceive that contextual factors in their lives make involvement or homeschooling possible (Hoover&Dempsey, 2007). Perceptions of time and energy are life context variables that influence the feasibility of homeschooling and a parent’s decision whether or not to home school (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007). Homeschooling parents devote a significant portion of their day into planning, teaching and supervising their child’s education. Parents must have the skills necessary to teach the child as well such as knowledge of relevant content, methods and enrichment events to ensure a quality education (2007).

During the same time period as the Green and Hoover-Dempsey 2007, the National Center for Education Statistics (2007) studied parental reasons for homeschooling their children. This study was based on a total of 290 homeschooled students, ages 5-17 with grades equivalent to kindergarten through the 12\textsuperscript{th} grade. The most common reason (36\%) reported by parents for homeschooling their children was the desire to provide religious or moral instruction. Additionally, parents in a separate study cited that they can allow their children to explore faith, religion and philosophy without worrying about a violation of church and state (Walsh, 2001). Educating at home allows families the freedom to incorporate prayer and religious lessons into the school day, while affording the parents the opportunity to know where their child is academically, socially, and morally (Walsh, 2001). Religiously motivated parents seemed to believe
that public schools fail to take religion seriously, although religion is a major part of American society (Edwards, 2007). Their wishes to protect their children from unwanted influences, particularly unwanted philosophies and beliefs, and to pass on to the children their family’s religious or moral views, may have guided their decision to homeschool (Lange, 1999).

Twenty-one percent of parents in the NCES 2007 study chose to home school due to concerns about the school environment itself. These concerns included the school’s safety, potential influence of drugs, and negative peer pressure. Parents may be anxious about the physical well being of their children in an increasingly violent school setting. They were also concerned as to how the violence is affecting the learning environment of their children and the academic achievement of youth in general (Wagner, 2008).

Dissatisfaction with academic instruction was another reason that 17% of parents in the NCES 2007 study chose to homeschool. Elsewhere, parents reported dissatisfaction with the quality of teachers and instruction, the physical environment of the school, school governance and the quality of schools in general (Lange & Liu, 1999). Additionally, parents reported concerns about inadequate academic standards and the financial status of the school or school district (Lange & Liu, 1999).

Other reasons for which parents in the NCES 2007 study decided to home school include family time, parental and family travel and finances. Similarly other research has shown, parents may choose to home school to increase the amount of time the child has with family members, including a father that may work nights or time with an ill grandparent (Cate, 2009). Family travel was another reason parents may choose to
homeschool, since it allows them to take advantage of “off” season savings on travel. These vacations can provide direct learning opportunities for students through experiencing cultures, history and geography in “real” life (Parker, 2010). Family members may also be in the military requiring the family to move and travel often. Homeschooling allows these families to offer consistency in schooling despite the need to move and travel. Financially, parents may decide to homeschool to save money on school uniforms, private school fees, transportation costs to and from school, food, and school supplies (Keith, 2010).

Of note, 6% of parents in the NCES 2007 survey chose to homeschool due to their child’s special needs including learning disabilities, medical needs, and giftedness. Additionally, Chopp (2003) found that parents of children with special needs often chose homeschooling because they believed “the public school was not fulfilling the Individual Education Plan, providing the services parents wanted their child to have, or providing enough service” (Chopp, 2003, p.132). Parents also believed the public schools were not allowing children with special needs to progress at their own pace, but rather forced children to progress at the pace of a typical child (Chopp, 2003).

There is one study which was specifically conducted to explore special education instruction for children with special needs who are homeschooled (Duffey, 2000). Duffey’s study consisted of 100 families of special needs children and collected data to analyze the reasons parents chose to homeschool a child with special needs. Parents were able to give multiple reasons for homeschooling. The study found that 62 of the 100 parents surveyed turned to homeschooling when conventional education failed to live up
to their expectations. In addition, these parents felt that home was a more suitable environment. Duffey found that 27 participants chose homeschooling because it was consistent with family dynamics. For example, homeschooling matched the need for family time due to father’s work schedule. Twenty-six parents chose homeschooling due to the desire to teach religious values citing that public schools do everything they can to keep religion out of schools (Duffey, 2000).

Increasingly in today’s schools often due to tightening budgets, gifted students are not receiving the specialized instruction recommended by authorities in gifted education (Ensign, 1998). As a result parents may opt to homeschool their children who are gifted in order to stimulate and encourage their gifted students to prevent boredom and underachievement (Ensign, 1998). Parents of children with medical needs may also homeschool due to the flexibility of scheduling to attend doctors’ appointments without the worry of what the child may miss in school (Wagner, 2001). Parents decision to homeschool may take into account their understanding of the benefits, challenges and outcomes of homeschooling which are cited in available literature. These benefits, challenges and outcomes will be discussed in the following section.

Benefits, Challenges and Outcomes of Homeschooling All Children

Benefits

The choice to home school can give parents the most freedom of any school choice option. In educating their children, they have the control over curriculum, schedule, training, requirements and educational delivery (Lange, 1999). Parents are responsible for selecting what their child will learn, when, how and with whom they will
learn making it a customized education (Reich, 2002). No other educational arrangement can offer the same freedom to arrange an education design for an individual student (Reich, 2002).

In regards to benefits of homeschooling, Peterson (2009) suggested that homeschooling gives parents the opportunity to structure the environment to fit the needs of their child. For example, they can adjust the temperature, light levels, background noise, amount of visual clutter and pace of instruction depending on the needs of the child. Homeschooling allows the flexibility for the child to take breaks throughout the school day, sleep in as long as needed, and have snacks and hot meals throughout the day. Parents are able to schedule doctor visits more easily and take family vacations in the off season. Children also may not become sick as often without the constant exposure to sick peers at school. Families have the ability to practice religious beliefs within the home environment. Peterson (2009) concluded that the social needs of the children can be met though a variety of activities such as Scouts, sports participation, dance class, neighborhood friends, church groups, volunteer work and homeschool support networks. She noted that a final benefit to homeschooling is that it is not a permanent decision, parents can give it a trial run and return to public school if needed (Peterson, 2009).

Challenges

Access to social interaction and extracurricular activities is the most commonly cited challenge and criticism of homeschooling (Wagner, 2008). Children that are homeschooled often do not have direct access to peers of their own age, unless their parents enroll them in activities such as sports programs, music lessons, 4-H clubs, or
religious clubs. Furthermore, parents choosing to homeschool may have little to no free
time, since the children are home the majority of the day and the parents have
responsibility to teach and supervise the school day (e.g., overseeing curriculum, direct
instruction and monitoring progress). In addition, parents seek to schedule activities and
social interactions that fit the needs of their children creating a lack of free time and
independence (Everything You Need to Know About Homeschooling, n.d.)

Another challenge of homeschooling is a financial one (Taylor, 2001). First, a
majority of parents customize their curriculum without using pre-packaged materials
resulting in the need to purchases many materials that can be costly (Taylor, 2001).
Families that homeschool are often single income families since one parent stays home to
homeschool, reducing the families’ income (Bauman, 2002). Finally, many parents also
pay taxes in a school district without benefiting from their money by receiving services.
(Grubb, 1998).

Although homeschooling gives parents the freedom to customize their child’s
education, this too may be a challenge of homeschooling. In other words, total
customization could threaten to insulate students from exposure to a variety of ideas and
people. Since homeschooled students may receive highly customized educations designed
usually to the preferences of the parents (Reich, 2002). In fact, children who are
homeschooled are least likely to be exposed to materials, ideas, and people that may not
have been chosen in advance by the parents (Reich, 2002).

The above mentioned challenges were based solely on factors that related to
parents who homeschooled their children. The students themselves may also experience
several challenges with homeschooling including a difficult transition back into the public education classroom or college setting. Challenges for students within the areas of academic, social, and emotional were noted in a 2009 study by Goode, *Transitioning Home-School Children into The Public School Classroom*. This study revealed that students may have difficulty with change in curriculum, problems understanding classroom expectations and socially acceptable behaviors related to the school setting, and a basic fear of change when transitioning back into the public school system (Goode, 2009).

Outcomes

Outcomes of homeschooling can include, but are not limited to admission to college, higher levels of academic achievement within college, community involvement and an overall enjoyment of life. The National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI) surveyed of over 7,300 adults who were homeschooled (Ray, 2003) and concluded that the end of homeschooling is not the end of the educational road for homeschool graduates. Over 74% of home-educated adults ages 18-24 in this study have taken college-level courses, compared to 46% of the general United States population in this age group who have taken college level courses (Ray, 2003). It appears that 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 (Cooper & Sureau, 2007).
In relation to college preparation, Lips and Fienberg (2008) summarized the available academic literature and reported that the evidence showed that homeschoolers performed as well as traditional public school students on college prep exams. In addition, the study showed that homeschooled students had a higher grade point average than traditional public school students during their first year of college (Lips & Fienberg, 2008).

Homeschool graduates are also active and involved in their communities. Seventy-one percent of the NHERI survey’s 7,300 respondents (homeschooled adults ages 18-24) participated in an ongoing community service activity, including coaching a sports team or volunteering at a school, compared to 37% of the general U.S. population of adults, 18-24. In addition, eighty-eight percent of homeschool graduates were members of an organization such as a community group, church to homeschool group, compared to 50% of U.S. adults, ages 18-24 (Ray, 2003). Furthermore, participants in the NHERI study were asked to report their overall satisfaction level with their life, all things considered, 59% percent of participants reported they were ‘very happy” with life, with another 39% declaring that they were “pretty happy.” When compared to the general population of the United States, homeschool graduates appeared content (Ray, 2003). In short, the study concluded that homeschooling can produce content and successful adults who are actively involved in their communities and who continue to value education (Ray, 2003).
Benefits, Challenges and Outcomes of Homeschooling a Child with Special Needs

Benefits, challenges and outcomes of homeschooling children with special needs may be similar to those of all children; however, research on homeschooling a child with special needs is scarce. Most of the following information about the benefits, challenges and outcomes is anecdotal and not peer reviewed.

Benefits

Benefits of homeschooling a child with special needs include the following: the ability to create a comprehensive and individualized curriculum; increased opportunities for socialization; real-life practice of skills; ability to address health concerns; provision of individualized education; and collaboration with outside therapies.

With regards to the ability to create a comprehensive list curriculum, parents have noted that they can tailor make the curriculum for their child and base it on where they are performing in each subject area (Mulvey, n.d., “Homeschooling Special Needs Children,” 2009). Individualized education is cited as an overall benefit for homeschooling children with and without special needs. Parents reported that they can give the child the attention they require on subject matter and can troubleshoot problems right when they occur (“Advantages and Disadvantages of Homeschooling a Child with ADHD,” 2009). Parents discussed that they can also take advantage of the weekend time with family for instruction and those family members can become an additional resource for teaching (Mulvey, n.d.; “Homeschooling Special Needs Children,” 2009).

These parents believe that they can ensure opportunities for socialization with peers who have or do not have special needs. Parents have noted that some schools
segregated their children with special needs from the general education population in public schools. They are concerned that their child will be isolated and not provided typical peer modeling (Mulvey, n.d.; “Homeschooling Special Needs Children,” 2009).

Practice in real-life skills is seen as an added benefit to homeschooling a child with special needs. Children are taught functional skills such as laundry, doing dishes, and making meals at times when and where it is appropriate for them to do so. This contextual based teaching may allow for the child to generalize practical skills later in life in the situations when and where they will use them (Mulvey, n.d.; “Homeschooling Special Needs Children,” 2009).

Another benefit reported by parents of children with special needs is the improved ability to address health concerns. More specifically, parents noted that children with special needs who were homeschooled were healthier because they were not exposed to the everyday germs at public schools, they can rest and receive medication quickly when the fall ill, and they are less likely to be stressed due to the school environment (Mulvey, n.d.; “Homeschooling Special Needs Children,” 2009).

Lastly, time for outside therapies (i.e., speech and language therapy, occupational therapy) has been named as a final benefit of homeschooling children with special needs. Parents reported that homeschooling allowed time for the therapy to occur. Parents also commented that by being home, they can practice the therapies with their children throughout the day, leading to a quicker acquisition of therapy related skills (Mulvey, n.d.; “Homeschooling Special Needs Children,” 2009).
Challenges

There are challenges of homeschooling specific to parents of a child with special needs which include: adequate space, understanding a variety of subject matter, the time-consuming nature of homeschooling, and social interaction. One such challenge is the need for adequate space for materials and equipment to meet the needs of their child (i.e., wheelchair, trampoline, ball pit) (“Advantages and Disadvantages of Homeschooling a Child with ADHD,” 2009; “Five Advantages and Disadvantages to Home Schooling,” 2010). Furthermore, the cost of homeschooling materials, such as privately purchasing textbooks and curricula packets with pre-made materials, has been presented as a challenge to homeschooling.

Parents are responsible for understanding a variety of subject matter which may include advanced high school curriculum and all subjects taught including English, math, and science. For all parents, homeschooling can be time consuming as they have to study lesson materials and adequately prepare for the lessons while taking the time to teach their child. This development and implementation of curricula may be made more time consuming if sensory breaks are needed throughout the day. Finally, parents are responsible for setting up peer interactions and facilitating social interactions. While this is a responsibility of all families with children, parents who homeschool their child with special needs have additional socialization factors to take into consideration including the need to facilitate developmentally and age appropriate socialization, not simply locate a same-aged peer (“Advantages and Disadvantages of Homeschooling a Child with ADHD”, 2009; “Five Advantages and Disadvantages to Home Schooling,” 2010).
Outcomes

Information on the specific outcomes of homeschooling children with special needs is limited to one study in 1998. A longitudinal study by Ensign (1998) was conducted over seven years with six participants who were considered to have special needs and were homeschooled. The outcomes of this research suggested that those students emerged from homeschooling with more self-confidence and achieved academic excellence (i.e., graduating high school) despite being defined as special needs (Ensign, 1998).

Benefits of Homeschooling a Child with Autism

To date, no formal research has been conducted on the benefits, challenges, and outcomes of homeschooling children with autism. Information on students with autism who are homeschooled is mostly anecdotal and focuses on the benefits. Benefits of homeschooling a child with autism that have been noted include: ability to address safety concerns; provision of one-on-one instruction; the ability for environmental adaptations; flexibility in scheduling; better opportunity for socialization; inclusion of the child’s specific interests in school work, and a focus on self-help skills in the child’s education (Gusman, 2008; “Questions about Autism Spectrum Disorder [ASD],” n.d.).

Parents of children with autism have expressed concerns surrounding safety of their children with regard to victimization, such as teasing or injury as a result of physical aggression. They also worry of other children “putting their child up to” different activities which may be harmful or cause the child with autism to get in trouble with the school (“Questions about Autism Spectrum Disorder [ASD],” n.d.). By homeschooling a
child with autism, families may perceive that they are limiting these types of interactions and situations and thereby reducing opportunities for safety concerns ("Questions about Autism Spectrum Disorder [ASD],” n.d.).

The opportunities for one-on-one instruction was viewed as a benefit to homeschooling children with autism; as well as to homeschooling all children with special needs. One parent compared one-on-one instruction with her son as permitting him to get on the train of learning. She stated that she could wait for her son to get on the train whereas in a school setting, the train would not wait for him as there were too many other children who were already aboard it (Forbes-Winter, 1995). Other parents noted that it was accepted within the public schooling community that a lower student to teacher ratio is better for learning and they felt that a one-on-one setting would be the best they could do for their child’s education (Gusman, 2008).

Environmental adaptations when homeschooling a child with autism appear to be a commonplace benefit within the homeschooling community. Parents stated that many children with autism are sensitive to sound and light and these can be distractions to learning (Evans, 2006). By allowing for the change in noise level or lighting, many parents felt that the environment became more conducive for learning for their child. Parents noted that they could better incorporate sensory breaks for their child, put on background music, allow the child to sit where they were comfortable, and/or minimize all distractions in the environment including other children than a school environment could (Gusman, 2008).
Flexible scheduling is another factor that many families who homeschool children with autism mentioned as a benefit. In the home setting, there were not the scheduling requirements as in school, such as attendance, mandatory recesses, and specific time spent on each subject (Gusman, 2008). By being, at home parents could change the schedule and allow the child to get the same amount of work done in less time, leaving the additional time for preferred activities. Flexible scheduling also allowed the parent to focus on schoolwork when it was the best time for the child to learn. Parents noted that some children with autism work better in the afternoon and evening, while others work better in the morning. Flexibility in scheduling allowed for parents to capture those moments for teaching (Gusman, 2008; Forbes-Winter, 1995).

Socialization as a benefit of homeschooling was widely mentioned by parents. In the homeschool setting, parents had the opportunity to expose their children to the “appropriate” examples, rather than taking the “good with the bad” in the public school setting (Gusman, 2008). Parents discussed that they hand chose other peers and facilitated interactions, focusing on their child’s specific needs in this area. These parents felt that this gave their better quality socialization (Gusman, 2008; Forbes-Winter, 1995; “Advantages of Homeschooling an Autistic Child,” 2009).

When homeschooling children with autism, parents expressed that their child’s specific interest could often be included in the lessons (Gusman, 2008). Parents created units of study around their child’s interest which increased motivation for the child to engage in the schoolwork, which may otherwise have been considered boring by the child. Parents also reported that in the public school setting, attempts to modify the
curriculum to their child’s needs would often take time, and be delayed but the homeschooling parent could modify the curriculum to the child’s interests immediately and even in advance (Forbes-Winter, 1995).

A final benefit for homeschooling children with autism was the ability to focus on self-help skills. Many parents noted that although the school may teach them self-help skills, it was only after they had been deemed to fail academically (Forbes-Winter, 1995). In other words, it appeared to be a choice between teaching academic skills or functional skills. Parents reported taking the many opportunities throughout the day and throughout school lessons to focus on important self-help skills, such as tying shoes and making meals (Forbes-Winter, 1995).

As previously noted, research on homeschooling has shown outcomes, benefits and challenges for kindergarten through twelfth grade students in the United States. However, the research on homeschooling children with special needs, specifically those with autism, is far scarcer and is centered on anecdotal data, mostly parental reports. The current study seeks to add to the literature by further exploring the perspectives of parents regarding homeschooling their child with autism.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The current study utilized an exploratory mixed method design (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009; Holland, Chait, & Taylor, 1989). Specifically, qualitative data were gathered on the parental perspective of homeschooling and the factors which lead to the decision to home school their child with autism, as well as quantitative data were gathered on demographic information including: the geographic location of the family; parent education level; the primary teacher; ethnicity of the parent; marital status of the parent; number of children in the family; number of children homeschooled; child age; child diagnosis; length of time in school district placement; length of time homeschooled, and grade level. The primary unit of analysis was the qualitative data. The quantitative data was used to gain an understanding of the demographics of children with autism who are homeschooled and the parents who homeschool them.

Qualitative survey methods were chosen to gather data on overall themes utilizing open-ended questions. The emerging grounded theory analysis stresses the importance of letting a theory emerge from the data and not restrict the data by attempting to verify an already existing theory (Glaser, 1992). Previous research has not given enough information on this topic for clear themes or theories to emerge, therefore, emerging grounded theory approach allowed for the current study to examine all of the possible themes and resulting hypotheses and theories that emerged from the data on the topic of
homeschooling children with autism, specifically, the perspectives of homeschooling and the factors which led to the decision to homeschool.

The current study utilized a survey which is an instrument used to collect data that describes one or more characteristics of a specific population (Creswell, 2008). Survey research is often used to collect data to answer questions about people’s opinions on a topic or issue (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). Survey researchers seek information that is not already available (Gay, 2009). Due to the nature of the current research questions (i.e., what factors lead a parent to the decision to home school their child with ASDs), the desire for a larger number of participants, and the limited research currently available on this specific topic, a survey was chosen as the primary data collection method. (The current study’s survey can be found as Appendix B.)

Participants

Participants for this study were parents who homeschool one or more children with ASD within their household in the state of California and 11 additional states. There were no additional restrictions for participation.

Beginning in December 2009, participants were recruited through three main sources: the twenty-one regional center offices in California, Internet support groups, and state-wide homeschool providers. Letters to each regional center in the state of California were sent out explaining the current study and asking the service coordinators to identify any participants who fit the criteria and were interested in the study. Once possible participants were identified, the service coordinator forwarded the study website to them.
Utilizing the California Homeschool Network, a group comprised of teachers and families across the state of California dedicated to homeschooling, emails were sent to the local contact for each county within California, requesting to identify parents that may be interested in the study. Once possible participants were identified, the California Homeschool Network contact sent the link to the survey to these individuals. Additional participants were sampled from Internet support groups for families who homeschool children with autism. These support groups were located via a web-search by the researchers for homeschool support groups. Letters explaining the current study were sent to list moderators for approval. Once moderators approved the study, a post was placed on the website of the support group that the current study was open beginning on December 21, 2009 and closing on March 31, 2010, with the letter of consent and link to the online survey. Participants had to follow the online link and click through the survey to answer all the questions. Finally, snowball-sampling methods were used to gather additional participants. The participants identified were asked in the if they knew of any other families who homeschooled children with an identified autism spectrum disorder and who were interested in participating in the current study. Additional participants were given the link to the survey by the person who referred them to the survey or by the researchers.

Within the first two weeks of sending the letter to the regional centers, two service coordinators (one from Westside and one from Alta California) replied that they would send out the survey. Service coordinators from three regional centers (San Gabriel Pomona, San Diego, and East Los Angeles) replied that they were unable to send out the
survey due to time constraints and center policy. Service coordinators from the remaining 16 regional centers did not respond. A final email to the service coordinators at the 16 remaining regional centers, California Homeschool Network and all contacts through internet support groups was sent in the middle of March requesting final participants by March 31, 2010.

The three main sources of sampling were used to ensure a representative sample of the population and included those who may not be receiving services from the regional center system and those who preferred to gain information and support on homeschooling mainly via Internet support groups. It is unknown how many links to the survey were sent out in total as the regional center contacts, internet support groups, and the California Homeschool Network were not able to give the researchers a final number of contacts to whom the survey was sent. All participants in this study volunteered without any coercion on the part of the researchers and they were given the option to complete the survey anonymously. The total number of participants who began surveys was 53. Eleven participants surveys were not included in this analysis due to 10 incomplete surveys and one diagnosis that did not fit the criteria set forth in the study. As a result, a total of 42 surveys were analyzed. There were 29 participants from within the state of California and 13 participants from out of state. Further description of participants will be described in chapter 4.

Procedures

Once participants were identified through one of the three main sources of participant sampling, they received a link to the online survey. As previously discussed,
data for the current study was collected through a survey utilizing both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The survey was sent out via the Internet survey provider, Survey Monkey. A joint email account not linked to the personal account of either researcher was utilized for the current study. Both researchers had access to this account, which was used to send and receive any correspondence from participants. They were given the option to provide contact information voluntarily to be entered into a drawing to win a fifty-dollar gift card for completion of the survey. Participants notated at the end of the survey if they wanted to enter with no prejudice toward the participant from the researcher(s) if declined.

At the beginning of January 2010, an additional question was added to the survey requesting information on how participants heard about the survey. Twenty-three participants responded to this question with 11 reporting they found the information from the internet (i.e., support groups), 5 from a family member or friend, and 6 from the regional centers in California. After the survey closed, the current researchers determined that participants who provided their contact information would be sent five follow-up questions via email requesting additional demographic information about ethnicity, martial status, number of children in the household, supervision of homeschool curriculum, and homeschool methodology. In the final analysis, 14 of the 38 participants contacted returned information on the five follow-up questions. The additional 24 participants did not respond by the deadline set forth by the researchers.
Protection of Human Subjects

During all phases of the research study, all information was kept strictly confidential including the participant’s names, district, and any other identifying characteristics if provided. All materials were kept in a locked file container in one of the researcher’s home office with access limited to the researchers only. All participants received a letter explaining the research with each survey. To ensure anonymous return of the survey, participants were not required to return signed consent forms. On the bottom of each survey, it was noted that by returning the survey participants consented to the research and analysis of their surveys. Participants were given contact information for the researchers. If at any time participants chose not to have their returned survey analyzed, they had the option to contact the researchers and provide their participant number revoking their participation.

Data Analysis

The analysis of completed surveys began by compiling all survey responses and adding demographic information to each survey. The analysis then followed the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1978) and findings were discussed regularly between the researchers and with the researchers’ advisor via in person and phone consultation. The constant comparative method allowed for themes and theories to be consistently developed, added, and revised throughout the course of the research based on new information being collected and analyzed. First the researchers read each survey independently and noted emerging ideas and recurring statements on each survey. Next the researchers met together to discuss the emerging ideas and developed a set of
categories in which to continually code the data. Categories used to code were continually revised as new information emerged from the data. The final product included themes and hypotheses about what factors influence a parent’s decision to homeschool their child with autism, what homeschooling looks like for families surveyed, and the benefits and challenges of homeschooling experienced by the families surveyed.

Rigor and quality were brought into this study through several methods utilized by the researchers. The researchers checked the consistency of the categories used and data that were coded within those categories with and against each the others’ analyses. The researchers also looked for non-examples of the categories that were emerging in order to ensure that these categories were a true representation of the data and not forced coded by either researcher. Both researchers discussed their potential biases prior to data analysis and were conscious of their partner’s biases throughout the analysis. The researchers were then able to view their partners’ conclusions and note if they sensed a bias forming. If it was sensed that a bias was forming, the researchers discussed the particular incident and determined if it was a researcher bias or a difference in opinion. In the following chapter, the discussion of findings from the analysis of participants survey responses will be further explained.
Chapter 4

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the responses to the *Autism Home School Survey* are reported. First, quantitative data on demographic information collected from the respondents are presented, including the number of respondents within the state of California, out-of-state respondents, and demographic information for parents and children. Second, qualitative data are presented regarding the reasons that parents chose to homeschool a child with autism, the overall parental perception of homeschooling a child with autism, and the benefits and challenges of homeschooling from the parents’ perspectives.

Findings from Quantitative Data

A total of 42 surveys were completed by parents homeschooling a child between the ages of 5 and 22 years, diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. Participants were from both California and out-of-state populations. In the following sections, more specific demographic information will be reported on: geographic representation; parent education level; primary teacher; number of children in the family who are homeschooled; children’s ages, children’s diagnoses; length of time children were in a school district placement, length of time children have been homeschooled, and outside services received. Upon the closing of the survey, 38 participants who gave their contact information were emailed additional demographic information questions including: marital status, parent ethnicity, and number of children in the family; 14 participants replied to these additional questions and their responses are also reported in the following
sections. After reporting on demographic information listed above, responses to specific questions regarding service delivery are addressed. This information included the methodology of the parents’ teaching style from a choice of five options and the oversight of their curriculum between two choices.

Parent and Family Demographic Information

Geographical representation.

Within the state of California, 29 surveys (69.04% of total) were completed representing a total of 18 out of 58 (31.03% of counties) within the state. Out-of-state respondents (not including California) constituted 13 completed surveys (30.9%), representing 11 out of 50 (22%) states within the country. (Reference Tables 1, 2, and 3.)

Table 1

*Geographical Representation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(n)</th>
<th>(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California Surveys</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>69.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of State Surveys</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA Counties Represented</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>31.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S States Represented</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

*California Counties Representation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County within CA</th>
<th>Participants (n)</th>
<th>Participants (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Santa Clara</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Orange</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kern</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mono</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shasta</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacramento</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contra Costa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Dorado</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverside</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Barbara</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humboldt</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Bernardino</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ventura</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanislaus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total in California</strong></td>
<td><strong>29</strong></td>
<td><strong>69.04</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

States Representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Participants (n)</th>
<th>Participants (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total from Out of State</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td><strong>30.9</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parental education level.

Parental education level of the primary homeschooling parent for California and out-of-state ranged from three (7.14%) being a high school graduate to one having a PhD (2.38%) with 15 (35.71%) parents completing a bachelor’s degree and 10 parents (23.81%) completing some college. Within California, parental education levels of the primary homeschooling parent ranged from three (10.44%) being a high school graduate to one (3.44%) having a PhD. Of the parents’ homeschooling, 12 (41.37%) were college graduates, an additional six (20.68%) of the respondents received a Master’s degree with
one participant (6.89%) holding a valid California teaching credential. The out-of state parental education levels ranged from six (46.15%) having some college course work completed to three (23.07%) holding a Master’s degree. One participant (7.69%) completed an Associates’ Degree, while three (3.07%) completed a Bachelor degree. Zero respondents held a teaching credential or Ph.D. (Reference Table 4.)

Table 4

*Parental Education Level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Education Level Achieved</th>
<th>California (n=29)</th>
<th>California (% of 29)</th>
<th>Out of State (n=13)</th>
<th>Out of State (% of 13)</th>
<th>Total (n=42)</th>
<th>Total (% of 42)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.44</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.79</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46.15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AA Degree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.89</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA Degree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>41.37</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23.07</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>35.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Credential</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Graduate</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.68</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23.07</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Primary teacher.

Of the total number of participants, 40 (95.2%) of respondents reported that the mother was the primary teacher within the homeschool environment, with the remaining two (4.76%) reporting fathers as the primary teacher. In California, 27 (93.1%) of primary teachers were the mothers and two (6.89%) were fathers. The out-of-state respondents reported 100% of the primary teachers were mothers. (Reference Table 5.)

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Teacher</th>
<th>California (n)</th>
<th>California (%)</th>
<th>Out of State (n)</th>
<th>Out of State (%)</th>
<th>Total (n)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>93.1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>95.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.89</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of children homeschooled.

Data on number of children homeschooled was gathered from all 42 participants who completed the survey. Families of children that homeschooled within California typically had zero (58.62%) other children that they homeschooled with a range of 0-3 additional children with an average of .69 children. Out-of-state respondents most commonly reported having no other children that they homeschooled with a range of 0-3 and an average of 1.23 children.

Parental ethnicity.

When asked in a follow up email to report on their ethnicity, 14 parents of the 38 contacted from both California and out-of-state responded. Thirteen (92.86%) parents
identified themselves as Caucasian with an additional one (7.14%) reporting African American. Within the state of California, all nine (100%) parents reported their ethnicity to be Caucasian. Out-of-state respondents reported four (80%) being Caucasian while one (20%) participant reported being African American. (Reference Table 6.)

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>California (n)</th>
<th>California (%)</th>
<th>Out of State (n)</th>
<th>Out of State (%)</th>
<th>Total (n)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>80</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>92.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Please note above data is based on 14 respondents to additional questions.

Parental marital status.

Again, data within this section was based on the 14 participants who completed follow-up questions after the survey closed. When asked about heir marital status, 10 (71.43%) participants from both California and out-of-state reported married, three (21.43%) reported they were divorced and one (7.14%) parent reported they were in a domestic partnership (same-sex partners). Within California, eight (88.89%) parents reported they were married with one (11.11%) stating that they were divorced. The out-of-state participants reported that two (40%) were married, two (40%) were divorced and one (20%) reported they were in a domestic partnership (same-sex partners). (Reference Table 7.)
Table 7

*Marital Status*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Martial Status</th>
<th>California (n)</th>
<th>California (%)</th>
<th>Out of State (n)</th>
<th>Out of State (%)</th>
<th>Total (n)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>88.89</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>71.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Partnership</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Please note the above data is based on 14 respondents to additional questions.

Number of children in the family.

Data on the number of children within the family was also collected during a follow up survey after the survey closed. Of the 14 participants who responded to the follow-up questions, parents who homeschool a child with autism within California and out-of-state had a range of one to six children. Within California, three (33.33%) families had one child, two (22.22%) families had two children, three (33.33%) families had three children and one (11.11%) family had six children. Of the out-of-state participants, two (40%) families had one child, two (40%) families had three children and one (20%) family had four children. (Reference Table 8.)
Table 8

Number of Children in Family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>California (n)</th>
<th>California (%)</th>
<th>Out of State (n)</th>
<th>Out of State (%)</th>
<th>Total (n)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22.22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Please note the above data is based on 14 respondents to additional questions.

Childhood Demographic Information and Homeschooling Information.

Demographic information was reported on the homeschooled child with autism, including their gender, age, and diagnosis information. The majority of families from both California and out-of-state reported their child’s gender was male (38 total, 90.47%) with four females (4 total, 9.52%). Within California, 26 respondents surveyed had a male child with autism (89.66%) and 3 respondents had a female child with autism (10.34%). Of the out-of-state respondents, 12 were male (92.3%) and 1 female (7.96%).

Of the total respondents from both California and out-of-state, the mean age reported was 10 years, 1 month with a range of 5 to 22 years. Within the state of California, the mean age was 10 years, 6 months with a range of 6 to 22 years. The out-of-state mean age was 9.0 years with a range of 5 to 13 years (Reference Figure 1.)
Four categories emerged in regards to diagnostic information. Out of the total 42 respondents, 12 (28.57%) reported a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome, 25 (59.52%) reported autism, four (7.14%) reported PDD-NOS and one (2.38%) reported spectrum disorder. Within the state of California, three (10.34%) reported a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome, 23 (78.31%) reported autism as primary diagnosis and the remaining three (10.34%) reported a diagnosis of PDD-NOS. Out-of-state respondents reported 9 (69.23%) with Asperger syndrome, two (15.38%) with autism diagnosis, one (7.69%) with PDD-NOS and one (7.69%) with a spectrum disorder. (Reference Table 9.)
Table 9

*Diagnosis Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Diagnosis</th>
<th>California (n)</th>
<th>California (%)</th>
<th>Out of State (n)</th>
<th>Out of State (%)</th>
<th>Total (n)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asperger syndrome</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.34</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>69.23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>79.31</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15.38</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>59.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDD-NOS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.34</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spectrum disorder</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Time in district placement.

Data on both California and out-of-state respondents found that 15 parents (37.5%) reported their child was in a district placement for 1 to 3 years. Twelve (30%) reported that their child was never in a school district placement. Five (12.5%) stated their child spent 3 to 5 years within the school district system. Four (10%) had their child in a school district program for 5 to 7 years. Two (5%) had their child within the school district programs for less that six months. Finally, one (2.5%) respondent had placed their child in the school district system for a time length between six months and one year and one (2.5%) participant did not take their child out of the school district until he/she had been there for 7 to 10 years. Note two participants did not respond to this question.
district placement was 1 to 3 years with a range of zero to ten years. Eleven children (40.74%) spent 1 to 3 years in the school district. Six (22%) parents reported that their child was never in a school district placement. Four (14.15%) were in the school for 3 to 5 years. Another four (14.15%) of children were in the school district for 5 to 7 years. Finally, 1 (3.7%) spent between six months and one year in the school district and 1 (3.7%) spent between 7 and 10 years within the school district. Out-of-state children spent between zero and 3 to 5 years within a school district placement. Six (46.15 %) of children spent no time in a school district placement prior to being homeschooled. Four (30.77%) spent 1 to 3 years within the district. Two (15.38%) children spent less than six months within the school district. Finally, 1 (7.69%) child spent 3 to 5 years within the district. (Reference Tables 10.)

Table 10

Length of Time in School District Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of time in public school</th>
<th>California (n)</th>
<th>California (%)</th>
<th>Out of State (n)</th>
<th>Out of State (%)</th>
<th>Total (n)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46.15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 6 mo</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15.38</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 mo-1 yr</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 yrs</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>40.74</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30.77</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 yrs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-7 yrs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-10 yrs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Length of time homeschooled.

Of the 41 who responded to this question, from both California and out-of-state, 18 (45%) stated their child were homeschooled for 3 to 5 years. Eleven (27.5%) children were homeschooled for 1 to 3 years. Four (10%) children were homeschooled for 7 to 10 years. Finally, 3 (7.5%) were homeschooled for less than six months, 3 (7.5%) were homeschooled between six months and one year, and the additional two (5%) were homeschooled for 5 to 7 years. Within California, 10 (37.03%) were homeschooled for 3 to 5 years. Nine (33.33%) have spent between 1 and 3 years being homeschooled. Three (11.11%) children were homeschooled for less than six months and 3 (11.11%) were homeschooled for 7 to 10 years. Finally, two (7.4%) were homeschooled between six months and one year, and 1 (3.7%) child was homeschooled for 5 to 7 years. Out-of-state participants reported that 8 (61.54%) were homeschooled for 3 to 5 years; two (15.38%) were homeschooled for 1 to 3 years; 1 (7.69%) was homeschooled between six months and one year; 1 (7.69%) was homeschooled between 5 and 7 years; and 1 (7.69%) was homeschooled for 7 to 10 years. (Reference Table 11.)
Table 11

*Length of Time Homeschooled*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Time Homeschooled</th>
<th>California (n)</th>
<th>California (%)</th>
<th>Out of State (n)</th>
<th>Out of State (%)</th>
<th>Total (n)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 6 mo</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 mo- 1 yr</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.40</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 yrs</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15.38</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 yrs</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>37.03</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>61.54</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-7 yrs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-10 yrs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outside services received.

In addition to being homeschooled, children may receive additional outside services. These services may include, but are not limited to speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, and feeding therapy. Within California and out-of-state, 29 (69%) reported they did receive outside services, while 13 (31%) reported that they did not receive services. Of the 29 respondents from California and out-of-state who reported they did receive services, they reported a number of ways that the services were funded. Eleven (37.93%) reported that the district paid for services; 8 (27.58%) stated that they privately paid for services; 6 (20.68%) reported that their insurance covered their services; 2 (6.8%) had a combination of private pay and insurance, and 2 (6.8%) did not specify who paid for their services. Within California, 20 (68.96%) participants reported the received services and 9 (31.03%) reported they did not receive services. Within those
receiving services 10 (50%) reported district funded services, 5 (25%) reported privately paid service, 2 (10%) reported their insurance covered the services, and 2 (10%) reported a combination between private pay and insurance with the remaining 1 (5%) not specifying who paid for their services. Of the out-of-state respondents, 9 (69.23%) reported outside services were received, and 4 (23.07%) reported no outside services were received. Of those receiving services, 4 (44.44%) reported their insurance funded services, 3 (33.33%) reported privately paid services, and 1 (11.11%) stated the school district funded their services, with the remaining 1 (11.11%) not specifying who paid for services (Reference Table 12.)

Table 12

Payment for Outside Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>California (n= 20)</th>
<th>California (% of 20)</th>
<th>Out of State (n=9)</th>
<th>Out of State (% of 9)</th>
<th>Total (n = 29)</th>
<th>Total (% of 29)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School District</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>37.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Pay</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44.44</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Type of teaching style.

After the conclusion of the initial survey, follow-up questions revealed a query about the type of teaching style utilized when homeschooling their child with autism.
Thirty-eight participants gave their contact information, of this number 14 responded with their teaching style. Participants were asked to classify their teaching style into one of five main categories: traditional, unit-study approach, eclectic, unschooling or interest initiate learning, and dual enrollment (homeschool and also go to public school). Of the 14 respondents to this question from both California and out-of-state respondents, 3 (21.42%) used a traditional approach, 1 (7.14%) used a unit-study approach, 1 (7.14%) used an interest initiated approach, 9 (64.29%) reported their approach to be eclectic and zero were dually enrolled. Within the state of California, two (22.22%) participants used the traditional approach to homeschool, one (11.11%) used the unit-study approach, five (55.55%) used eclectic, one (11.11%) used interest initiated, and zero were dually enrolled. Of the out-of-state respondents, 1 (20%) reported they used the traditional approach while the remaining four (80%) reported that they used an eclectic approach.

(Reference Table 13.)

Table 13

Type of Teaching Style

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>California (n)</th>
<th>California (%)</th>
<th>Out of State (n)</th>
<th>Out of State (%)</th>
<th>Total (n)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22.22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit Study</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unschool</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eclectic</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>55.55</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>64.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Who oversees the curriculum.

In the initial survey, participants were asked to identify who oversees the curriculum that they use with their child with autism. Of the 42 respondents in California and out-of-state, 21 (50%) reported that they were supervised by a charter school, 17 (40.48%) reported that the parent him/herself oversaw the curriculum, 3 (7.14%) participants reported that no one oversaw their curriculum, and 1 (2.38%) participant did not respond. Within California, 18 (62.07%) participants reported that a charter school oversaw their curriculum, 9 (31.03%) reported that the parent oversaw his/her child’s curriculum, 1 (3.45%) reported that no one oversaw the curriculum, 1 (3.45%) participant did not respond. Of the out-of-state respondents, 8 (61.54%) of the parents reported that they oversaw his/her child’s curriculum, 3 (23.08%) noted that a charter school supervised the curriculum and 2 (15.38%) cited no one oversaw the curriculum.

After the initial survey closed participants were asked to identify more specifically who supervised their curriculum. 14 respondents from both California and out-of-state replied. Within both California and the out-of-state population, 7 (50%) reported they used an Independent Study Program (ISP) and 7 (50%) reported they used a private school affidavit (PSA). Within California, 6 (66.66%) reported that they used an ISP while 3 (33.33%) stated they used a PSA. Out-of-state respondents reported that 1 (20%) used an ISA and the 4 (80%) used a PSA (Reference Table 14.)
Table 14

*Supervision of Homeschool Curriculum*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supervision of Curriculum</th>
<th>California (n)</th>
<th>California (%)</th>
<th>Out of State (n)</th>
<th>Out of State (%)</th>
<th>Total (n)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISP</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>66.67</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings from Qualitative Data

Within this section, findings will be reported regarding parental rationale for homeschooling, service delivery, parental perspective on benefits of homeschooling a child with autism, and parental perspectives on challenges of homeschooling a child with autism. Additionally, findings will first be presented for California respondents followed by findings from out-of-state respondents. Findings for California and out-of-state were not combined due to the desire for hypotheses and themes to be generalized to the California population and to highlight the variation in responses from the California and out-of-state populations.

Parental Rationale For Homeschooling—California Respondents

Among California respondents, a theme of overall dissatisfaction with the school district emerged from the parental responses regarding main reasons for homeschooling their child with autism. Within the themes of dissatisfaction, subcategories emerged identifying specific areas of dissatisfaction. These subcategories and the number and percentage of parents who noted the areas of dissatisfaction:
1. Concerns with appropriateness of placement, (11, 37.93%)

2. A perceived low level of support from school, (5, 17.24%)

3. Dissatisfaction with quality (i.e., parents more qualified, teacher qualifications and overall poor school quality, (4, 13.73%)

4. Lack of progress, (3, 10.34%)

5. Mistreatment by students and/or staff, (2, 6.9%)

6. Desire for religious and moral based instruction, (2, 6.9%)

7. Multiple reasons, (2) 6.9%

Each of the above mentioned subcategories will be discussed individually below.

Concerns with appropriateness of placement.

Eleven (38%) of California parents cited concerns with their child’s placement as a main reason that they chose to homeschool their child with autism. These concerns included a perceived inability of the school district to provide an appropriate placement, environment, or setting for the child, one parent stated, “Our high school district could not provide an appropriate environment for our son” (Participant 36). Parents also noted that their perception of the least restrictive environment and district’s perception of the least restrictive environment for the student did not align. Some parents concluded that their home was the least restrictive environment for their child: “We decided that home was his least restrictive environment” (Participant 35). They also noted that they did not want to fight with the district about it’s ability to provide least restrictive environments when the time could be spent teaching the student at home. Parents reported that due to the inappropriate school district placement, the needs of their child were not being met.
As noted by one parent (Participant 22), “We tried repeatedly to find him a placement that would match his educational level and found that he fell ‘in the middle’ between high and low functioning children.” In addition, parents in a similar vein, claimed that the school was not a good fit for the student. They perceived that the school districts were unable to offer placements that fit the child’s needs or that available placements were not a fitting placement for their child. Their comments included, “We were not satisfied with the options provided by our district, there did not seem to be a ‘good fit’ for him” (Participant 21) and, “He was treated like a square peg, trying to be shoved into a round hole in the public system” (Participant 31). Overall, such dissatisfaction with the appropriateness of placement ultimately led parents to decide to homeschool their child.

A perceived low level of support from the school.

A perceived low level of support from the school district was cited by five (17.24%) California parents as a main reason that they chose to homeschool. Low levels of support included the district not providing what the child needed in terms of support (i.e., teacher: student ratio, aide support for the student) and learning style. As one parent commented, “The school failed to provide our son with appropriate support” (Participant 40). The ability for parents to suggest supports such as modifications to the curriculum and the willingness of the district to do so was also mentioned as part of the concern. One parent commented that their district was unwilling to make the modifications that the parent felt was necessary for the child’s success: “Instead of working with us, the school district and the services agency made it very difficult for us to modify his program as we felt was necessary” (Participant 38). Parents reported that the design of the school and
classroom was not set up for appropriate support such as one-on-one teaching, due to high teacher student ratios. One parent specifically explained, “…that the public school system was not designed to provide one-on-one direct instruction” (Participant 19). Lastly, lowered level of support perceived by parents included low level of expectations and commitment from their district. For example, when discussing the perception that the district had low expectations for the child, a parent stated, “They had no hope for her whatsoever, I knew they were wrong” (Participant 16).

Dissatisfaction with quality.

Additionally, four (13.73%) California parents indicated dissatisfaction with the actual quality of public schools and/or education in the discussion of the main reasons for the decision to homeschool their child. Dissatisfaction with quality within the public school system included the frustration that parents expressed in observing their child struggle within the classroom setting where the teacher and aides did not have the knowledge to work with the child the way the parent would have desired. This dissatisfaction did not indicate that the district was not qualified in the sense of being able to teach certain subject matters, but indicated a perceived sense that the staff had not been thoroughly or properly trained to work with their child in a way that would make the child successful in the classroom setting. In particular, one parents expressed that he/she was more qualified to teach his/her child: “…I knew I could do a better job than they were doing” (Participant 34). These parents also cited that the schools did not understand their child’s disability (i.e., no specific training on autism and the proven intervention methods that are effective), and that public education was inadequate. This inadequacy
appeared to center around the perception that the teachers did not possess the skill set necessary to teach children in general. These parents explained that teachers were not very well trained and that they cannot be expected to teach students with autism when they cannot even teach students who do not have disabilities. One parent summed up their experience with public education system by stating, “In general, public education is highly inadequate on ALL levels” (Participant 18).

Lack of progress.

Lack of progress constituted the reason to homeschool their child for three (10.34%) of the California parents. Parents reported little or no progress was made in the school district program and/or that their child was falling behind academically. Lack of progress as stated by parents was also likened to a concern with teacher quality and the overall ability of the child to learn in the school environment. These parents felt that their child would be able to learn the basic concepts, that were escaping their grasp in school, in the home environment easily. One parent noted their dissatisfaction with their child’s progress in basic skills before they removed the child from the district placement: “He was not able to read, write, basic addition or simple patterns” (Participant 23).

Additionally, these parents noted that their children were not progressing due to the lack of challenging curriculum. They discussed that the school placed the children in the specific classroom and did not review their areas of strengths to create a plan that addressed their strengths and need areas. One parent felt that their child was being left behind in areas they could excel in due to the school’s inability to provide a challenging curriculum: “No academic challenge given in the classroom setting, although he has
above average intelligence” (Participant 41). Finally, the general school environment was mentioned as a possible hindrance to their children’s progress in school. The particular challenges within the public school environment that were noted as barriers to student progress included the set up of the classrooms, the schedule of the daily activities, and the number of children in the school. One parent discussed their child’s inability to focus and progress on lessons in the public school environment and stated, “My child was not progressing in a brick and mortar school environment” (Participant 11).

Mistreatment by students and/or staff.

Two California parents (6.9%) cited mistreatment by staff or other students as their main reason to homeschool their child with autism. As one parent shares, “He was mistreated by the administration and teaching staff at his public school” (Participant 17). The mistreatment included the staff paying less attention to the child or focusing only on the child’s aberrant behaviors within the school day. These parents also noted teasing and alienation by other students or mistreatment that led to leaving the public school system. A parent referenced the inability of the staff to keep their child safe from being teased and bullied as a consequence of the perception of their disability by other students: “Public school system alienated him to much, there was not enough attention available to keep him from being teased” (Participant 30).

Desire for religious and moral based instruction.

An additional two California parents (6.9%) cited that they made the decision to homeschool mainly for religious beliefs including teaching of morals. These families expressed that they were able to provide the moral instruction that they desired without
the influence of the negative factors to which they did not want their child exposed. As one parent explained, “the family decides what is the best function of their time while children acquire guidance” (Participant 18). Another family stated that although they had multiple reasons when they decided to homeschool, their main reason was religion: “We decided to home school for many reasons, mainly religion” (Participant 10).

Multiple reasons.

Two other California (6.9%) participants cited multiple reasons. One cited the ability to provide one-on-one guidance and religion as their two main reasons for homeschooling: “My child needed a lot of one to one guidance. Religious” (Participant 18). This parent in particular shared that it would have been a hassle to negotiate for one-to-one instruction with the school and that he/she could do it at home without the fight with the district: “Skip the middleman and do it yourself for a fraction of time and hassle” (Participant 18). The other parent noted the father’s military enlistment and subsequent constant moving along with the little to no progress made within the public school setting as the main reason for homeschooling: “We are a military family that moves every 1-3 years. Homeschooling enables our son to have a consistent teacher” (Participant 42). Furthermore, this participant has a high education level with a Master’s degree and is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) who believed that she could implement applied behavior analytic concepts to everyday teaching as well as “one-to-one precision teaching” (Participant 42). As previously mentioned, her son’s lack of progress within the school district placement further confirmed her decision to homeschool: “My son made
little to no progress in any of the skill domains on his IEPs during the three years he was in public school, he regressed in some areas” (Participant 42).

Parental Rationale for Homeschooling-Out-of-State Respondents

Of the 11 surveys gathered from out-of state respondents, four (30.77%) decided to homeschool their child with autism due the fact they homeschooled additional children and considered themselves to be a “homeschooling family”: “We already home schooled our two typical children, we believe we can give our children an atmosphere of love and acceptance at home that would be hard to reproduce in another setting” (Participant 26).

Another participant furthered the notion of the “homeschooling family” by citing, “I previously decided to homeschool all our children when the oldest was small. If I had not been homeschooling when the disabled child began attending school I would have chosen to homeschool him to teach him life skills” (Participant 25). Of note, this rationale did not emerge for California parents.

Seven (53.85%) participants cited a dissatisfaction with the school district as their main reason. This dissatisfaction included lowered expectations for their child with autism, no satisfaction with the level of attention given, and the quality of education received. As noted by one respondent, “My son would not do well sitting in a room with 20-30 other kids. He would have trouble keeping up. He would be made fun of. Also, I do not want the public school system to determine the values my son will learn” (Participant 15).
Factors Which Influence the Decision to Return to School-California

Three subcategories emerged within the parental responses to the question about if their child would return to a school district placement. These subcategories were: yes, possible, and no/never. Within each area a detailed analysis of the parent comments for each category is made. Please note that information on California respondents is presented first with out-of-state respondents reported at the end of each subcategory within this section.

Yes, my child will return to school.

Participants who reported that their child would return to school were a minority within California. Four (13.79%) of 29 parents stated that their child would return to a school district placement. Within this response, categories emerged as to the reasons why they would be sending their child back to school. One such category was the desire to increase their children’s self-esteem. These parents noted that the lack of social structure within the home environment and the inability for the child to make consistent same-aged peers with whom they could have daily interactions led them to the decision that homeschooling may not be beneficial for their self-esteem. One parent explained: “I feel that he needs the social structure of school. Also, I think his self-esteem will go up if he feels like he can be schooled like a ‘normal’ kid ” (Participant 14). The changing social structure of the family was given as another reason children would return to school. For instance, a change in family dynamics, including an illness, made the family consider sending their child back to school: “When he reached puberty, [with] my menopause and my husband’s cancer we realized we could not handle him at home anymore” (Participant
28). One parent reported that his/her child missed the school setting: “He is asking for the classroom setting; he misses the routine of school” (Participant 41); and another parent reported that his/her skills were not adequate for the advanced curriculum his/her child would encounter in high school: “I feel that I cannot specialize enough at the high school level to adequately prepare my children for college” (Participant 38).

Possible, my child may return to school.

Among California respondents, 13 (44.83%) parents stated that they may send their child back to the school setting. These parents noted that the decision would be dependent on several factors including: student’s improvement of skill acquisition, child’s recovery, child’s developmental level increasing, child’s desire, and the school district. The skill ability of the child was a factor noted by several parents. They stated that if the child was able to keep up with peers and to fit in within the skill level of the children in the public schools, they may send the child back. One parent noted, “If she [is] able to speak like other children, we will consider public schooling. She has an excellent self esteem and I will not have public school children ruin it for her” (Participant 16). These participants also stated that the decision should be partially left up to the child, with the parent neither pushing their child away from a school placement or pushing them towards it. One parent articulated this notion by stating, “I would not put him back in school, unless he decided he was ready to go back” (Participant 8); while a second parent stated, “Will depend on her development and desire to go to school” (Participant 6). Another parent stated that “recovery” was important when deciding to send the child back to school. “Recovery” was noted as no longer having the diagnosis of
an autism spectrum disorder. This one parent made the comment: “Only if he recovers to a level in which we believe he could benefit from school and peers” (Participant 37).

No, my child will never return to school.

The remaining 12 (41.37%) California parents stated that they would never send their child back to school. Overall the reason for this decision was that the placement desired was not available in the current school district. The availability within a district for the proper school setting was very important to these parents. If parents knew that there were only certain settings available within their district and these did not meet their child’s needs (i.e., a classroom for emotional disturbance, instead of autism or an inclusive setting) they felt there was no reason to entertain the idea of sending their child back to school. As one parent noted, “District only has emotionally disturbed classroom in two-high crime high schools” (Participant 36). Additional participants cited that the district was not able to meet their child’s educational needs in the setting that was typical of a school in that district. One reason they believed that the school district was not able to meet the child’s needs was the number of children in a typical classroom. As one parent stated, “Public school system cannot meet the child’s educational goals or needs, there is NO WAY my child with autism could maintain socially acceptable behavior while being in the middle of 30 other students” (Participant 19).

Additional parents stated that the public school system was not healthy for any child. These parents noted the specific concerns with teachers, staff, student : teacher ratio, and the general environment of school (i.e., schedule, lack of appropriate peer models). One parent made the statement, “I don’t believe that public school is a healthy
place for any child and especially a child with autism” (Participant 32). Moreover, one parent discussed the idea of mediocrity when noting their decision not to send their child back to school. This parent compared their home environment to a healthy meal and school to an unhealthy fast food meal that a person would not want to feed their child every day of their life: “I am not that desperate yet to succumb to such mediocrity. Would you feed your children on a daily diet of Mc Donald’s when you could have a healthful home cooked meal? Then why would you do public education when you could do better?” (Participant 18). Finally, parents noted that they were happy at home and the system they had worked there, “He does well at home so the old saying goes if it ain’t broke don’t fix it” (Participant 2).

Factors Which Influence the Decision to Return to School-Out-of-State Respondents

When out-of-state participants were asked if they would send their child back to a school district placement, the three subcategories were the same as within California: yes, possible, and no/never. It is noteworthy that 11 (84.46%) of participants stated that they would never send their child back to school; 1 (7.69%) stated that their child would return to a public school placement, and 1 (7.69%) said that their child possibly would return to a school district placement. Parents who stated they would never send their child back to the school district noted that “school district is useless” (participant 9) and “I am not going to put him back in school, he is doing much better at home” (participant 33).

Parental Perceptions of Quality of Education within Home Setting-California

Participants were asked to comment on the quality of their child’s education within the home setting. Generally, comments centered around positive aspects of the
child’s homeschool education in relation to the quality of education that they believed they provided. Three themes about quality emerged from this analysis: consistency, parental qualifications, and the ability to individualize their child’s education. When discussing the idea of consistency, parents discussed the notion that because they will always be in their child’s life they believed that they have provided a high quality education. One parent noted the level of instructional quality was more consistent within the home environment than it was in the school environment: “I am able to provide a consistent level of quality that is not always available over grades with a variety of teachers” (Participant 38). Participants also referenced their expertise as parents when discussing the quality of their child’s program. Parents expressed that they knew their child best, including their child’s abilities, rate of acquisition on new skills, and motivating factors that increased success with learning. Knowledge of these factors contribute to providing a quality education for their child. As a parent stated, “No one knows our children more than we do, and no one wants them to succeed in life more than we do. To that end, we are tireless in finding any resource or opportunity that will help them learn in a way that is meaningful to them” (Participant 19). Two parents noted that the ability to individualize their child’s education was an indicator of the quality of their child’s educational program. In other words, parents believed that by having the time and resources to individualize their child’s education, including the ability to tailor lessons to the interests of the child, they are providing more quality than could be provided within the school setting. As one parent shared: “I am able to build on my child’s strengths and
interests” (Participant 24) and, “We provide an excellent education that is truly individualized to his needs” (Participant 37).

Parental Perceptions of Quality of Education within Home Setting- Out-of-State

Out-of-state respondents were asked to comment on the perceived quality of their child’s education within the home setting. It is noted that a limited number of comments were provided by the out-of-state respondents in regards to the quality of their child’s education. One parent commented, “I do my best to help him do his best and I do not believe he would get a better education anywhere else” (Participant 25). Lastly, one parent cited in comparison to the public school, “My child is able to study a large variety of things that he would not be able to learn about in public school” (Participant 15).

Perceived Benefits to Homeschooling a Child with Autism- California Respondents

Within the following section the benefits to homeschooling a child with autism will be examined for respondents from California. Out-of-state responses are analyzed in a subsequent section. Subcategories emerged with regards to the overall benefits and included: flexibility within the day and curriculum; ability to individualize education to their child’s needs; one-on-one teaching methods for their child; ability to control environmental distractions; and socialization and family dynamics.

Flexibility in the use of time and decision making.

Flexibility was the most commonly noted benefit to homeschooling. Parents stated that homeschooling allowed them the ability to educate throughout the day in a variety of settings; thereby creating a more cohesive and flexible learning environment. One parent stated, “We can go anywhere to have a lesson, in nature or museums. I can
teach him any time of day which allows him to have adequate amount of sleep each night” (Participant 24). Another parent noted, “I have homeschooled on airplanes, in hotel rooms, on the weekend” (Participant 41) and a third one cited, “[My] child is fully aware that learning is not a 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. proposition and that leaning is how we live” (Participant 19). Additionally, the ability to create a holistic educational environment which incorporated other therapies within the school day was noted as a benefit to homeschooling. For instance, parents were able to carry over speech and language therapy throughout the day, had time for appointments which may have been difficult to schedule, and had the time to research more therapeutic options for their child. A parent stated, “More time for a holistic education, i.e. music, theater and art” (Participant 38). Parents believed that the ability to control the teaching methods and modify the curriculum added to the flexibility of homeschooling. They noted that they were able to teach what they decided was important for their child, rather than rely on the school to teach them what the school decided was important for them to learn. One parent cited, “I am able to teach anything I feel is right for our child” (Participant 24) while another parent noted, “Parent has control over the teaching techniques and curricula utilized” (Participant 42).

Ability to individualized education.

Parents also reported the ability to individualize their child’s education as a benefit to homeschooling. Parents had the ability to work on their child’s strengths and interests as well as on areas of need in order to keep the child motivated. One parent noted, “Extra attention possible to specific interest of the child” (Participant 38) and
another stated, “You can teach any subject using what the child is interest in or perseverating on, interest is Godzilla, look up Tokyo, add and subtract number of monsters, practice writing the monster names, etc.” (Participant 31). The ability to work at an appropriate pace is noted as a benefit to individualizing their child’s education as one parent cited, “We can go as quickly or as slowly as we need in each subject” (Participant 8). Allowing their child more time on a difficult subject or not holding the child back on a subject which he/she excelled at were both noted as benefits within individualization: “More time to explore and learn concepts” (Participant 30), and, “I can work with my son at his current academic, developmental and emotional level” (Participant 34) and, “We can work at our own pace” (Participant 36). One parent noted, “[My] child with autism is learning at developmentally appropriately levels in a developmentally appropriately way” (Participant 19).

One-on-one education.

The ability to provide one-on-one education, specifically attention and help, to the child with autism was another perceived benefit to homeschooling. A previously stated, the majority of parents who homeschooled had no additional children in their household, which allowed them to provide more attention, hence a one-on-one educational environment. Specific benefits noted in this specific area included the ability for parents to focus on reinforcement of the child’s positive behaviors and the notion that the child had a full-time tutor instead of a larger teacher : student ratio within a classroom setting. For example, one parent described that with homeschooling, “[My] child is likely to receive more 1:1 instruction” (Participant 42). A second parent stated that “he essentially
has a full time tutor” (Participant 17), while another noted that the, “1:1 instruction helps with attention, ensure constant positive reinforcement for successes” (Participant 27).

Environmental control.

The ability to control the environment by providing less distractions and increased safety was another benefit reported by the California parents surveyed. The ability to control the environment was noted in several different manners. One parent shared that they can provide a “calm environment” (Participant 32) for their child. Which included, the ability to take breaks within the day, adjust the lighting for optimal learning for the child, play soft music, adjust the temperature, and allow the child to be in comfortable clothes. A second parent cited that the home environment is free of the distractions present in the typical classroom setting: these distractions could include additional children present, recess bells, and extracurricular activities “My child can get the academics he needs without the sensory distractions of the classroom” (Participant 11). The ability of the child to control his/her environment when necessary was also cited as a benefit. Parents noted the importance of allowing the child to make the environmental modification necessary for his/her own success while homeschooling. One parent stated, “[My] child is able to control her environment much more readily, in an home education environment and is able to take breaks as needed” (Participant 19). Finally, another environmental control and modification noted by parents was providing a safe environment form bulling and drugs: “[My] son can learn at his own pace, in a quite, safe environment. He can also be safe from bullies, drugs etc” (Participant 36).
Socialization and family dynamics.

Parents reported social factors and family relationships as additional benefits of homeschooling. They noted that they could provide more successful peer relationships while homeschooling by hand-choosing peers that would be a good match for their child. As one parent noted, “Being able to choose his peer situations is an advantage” (Participant 17), and another explained “[The] ability to provide potentially more successful interactions with peers, select play dates with kids that already enjoy his company” (Participant 27). Parents also stated that homeschooling allowed them to provide guidance and model good social behaviors for their child, “Children acquire guidance and good social behaviors from adults, instead of learning poor ones” (Participant 18). They reported increased parent motivation and relatedness to the teaching role, “Parents are first and best teachers” (Participant 35). Increased family time was noted as another benefit to homeschooling, “Time with dad instead of a text book” (Participant 18) and, “Lots of social and play time” (Participant 18).

Perceived Benefits to Homeschooling a Child with Autism-Out-of-State Respondents

The 13 out-of-State respondents noted benefits including the ability to individualize the child’s education and flexibility with curriculum as benefits: as two parents shared, “I can tailor the curriculum specifically to my children, and speed up or slow down as the child needs” (Participant 26), and “I can teach things, he is interested in and make it a learning activity” (Participant 15). Environmental control was noted as a second benefit, “Much higher academic achievement without the distractions and interruptions that she found miserable in the classroom” (Participant 6). Socialization and
family dynamics were also noted as benefits to homeschooling, “Christian views taught, no peer pressure, kids influenced by our values and morals” (Participant 1). Overall, the benefits to homeschooling a child with autism were similar between California and out-of-state with considerable overlap.

Perceived Challenges to Homeschooling a Child with Autism-California Respondents

Parents reported several challenges to homeschooling a child with autism: lack of socialization; financial difficulties; homeschooling as a time consuming process; little to no break for the parent; stigmatization from others, and lack of educational tools. Please note that California respondents will be reported first with out-of-state respondents reported in a separate section.

Socialization.

When discussing socialization as a concern, parents noted that they often had to seek out social opportunities that used to be readily available within the school environment. One parent noted that the size of their family as a struggle in socialization, “Because we do not have a large family with a lot of children, we have to plan for social interaction with peers” (Participant 24). A second parent noted that the family members are the only ones with whom his/her child has social interaction. “No socialization for him outside of parent” (Participant 22). The ability to provide appropriate models was noted as important however, parents believed that their child would benefit from socialization with other peers. Since parents needed to look for the appropriate peer first and then spend time creating and facilitating the play date and social interaction. They further stated, “Arranging for appropriate and effective social opportunities can be
difficult” (Participant 42). Aside from finding the social opportunities, parents noted that providing the “right” type of socialization is difficult. The right type of socialization include appropriate peer modeling where other children would teach the social rules and norms and the child with autism could learn to pick up on the subtle social cues. One parent said, “We find ourselves worried that he is getting the ‘right’ type of socialization”.

Finally, parents realized that within the school day in the school district setting multiple opportunities for socialization occurred during recess, sharing regular classroom activities, and other group activities that are unable duplicate at home: “It is tough to duplicate all the little social opportunities that take place in a typical classroom environment” (Participant 40).

Financial difficulties.

In addition, parents reported financial difficulties including surviving on a one-parent income and overall expenses, as results to homeschooling. The extra time it takes to homeschooling combined with the fact that the child is home all day make it difficult to impossible for both parents to work. When the parent is not able to work the loss of income is inevitable. One parent stated, “Financially it is difficult because one parent cannot work” (Participant 37), and while another noted, “It replaces a full-time job for mom” (Participant 17). Another parent discussed this same notion while also noting how this affected his/her own career; “I have to put my own career on hold” (Participant 7). Another participant discussed the overall financial expenses of homeschooling: “It can be expensive” (Participant 42). Buying the necessary program materials, especially when
using the traditional model of homeschooling, can add extra expenses to the family budget.

Time constraints.

Time constraints especially the time it took to teach and subsequently less free time for the parent, were listed as additional challenges to homeschooling. A parent cited that homeschooling became his/her life. The time and energy it takes to plan for and execute activities combined with the desire to provide their child with a quality education resulted in the parents spending the majority of their time thinking about homeschooling. Moreover, due to the children having autism, there appeared to be added pressure to take the time to research and learn about effective types of interventions when teaching their child in order for their child to be successful and learn. One parent stated, “It is a huge commitment of time and becomes your lifestyle” (Participant 21). Being around the child all day and being the sole teacher required patience. One parent shared, “It requires a lot more work and patience on the part of the parent” (Participant 8). The feeling of being overwhelmed having little time for oneself, and not getting a break away from the child are also noted challenges with homeschooling. Comments in support of these challenges are; “Sometimes I feel overwhelmed” (Participant 16), “I have little time to myself” (Participant 11), while another said, “Mom’s breaks are FEW and far between” (Participant 19).

Homeschooling stigma.

The stigma of homeschooling a child with autism was an additional reported challenge for families. Parents noted how outsiders did not have the knowledge of
homeschooling and would often think that what they were doing was not what was best for the child. A parent stated that family members and friends were ones who questioned and harassed their choice about homeschooling more than anyone else, including the school system. She said, “The constant harassment by those that believe that the modern day form of public education is how education has always been done and thus is the only way” (Participant 18).

Inadequate educational environment and tools.

Lastly, the challenge to provide a structured environment and the necessary equipment and tools for learning were reported by parents. The home environment is typically less structured than the school environment. When making the home environment double as the school environment, finding the right balance of structure was noted as a challenge. One parent stated, “It can be hard to provide a structured environment” (Participant 10). Another parent noted the challenge of “not having the equipment or tools to better their education and abilities” (Participant 23). Materials also noted as being very expensive, as well as not easy to find or were only available to larger institutions (i.e., a large smart board which connects to the computer).

Perceived Challenges to Homeschooling a Child with Autism-Out-of-State Respondents.

Similar to the California respondents, out-of-state respondents perceived challenges to homeschooling a child with autism as; limited availability of socialization; financial difficulties; little to no break for the parent; and the stigma of homeschooling. It is noted, in contrast to California five out-of-state respondents reported no challenges to homeschooling a child with autism.
Limited availability of socialization.

Out-of-state respondents reported the limited availability of socialization as a challenge to homeschooling a child with autism. One parent commented the following: “Although there are classes available for homeschoolers, these are 1x per week for 45 minutes he does not have the ability to build relationships in such a short time” (Participant 14).

Financial difficulties.

Like California respondents, out-of-state respondents concluded that homeschooling a child with autism creates financial difficulties for the family including the overall cost of homeschooling and the loss of income. Two parents reported: “a lot of out-of-pocket costs” (Participant 15) and, “mommy took a 120,000 cut in pay to become a stay-at-home homeschool mom, I committed professional suicide” (Participant 6).

Little to no break for the parent.

As with the California respondents, out-of-state respondents reported little to know free time for the parent in charge of homeschooling. Comments included, “I don’t get breaks as often as I need them” (Participant 1) and, “It is stressful caring for a special needs child around the clock, in public school I would get a break from dealing with him” (Participant 25).

Stigma of homeschooling.

Lastly, parents of the out-of-state respondents reported the stigma of homeschooling as a challenge to homeschooling a child with autism citing feeling like an “outsider” (Participant 5) in regards to educating at home. Another parent: “worries about
people trying to get involved or talk us out of it (homeschooling)” (Participant 2) including family members and school professional.

Perceived Challenges to Homeschooling a Child with Autism-Out-of-State Respondents

The eleven out-of-state respondents reported similar challenges to those reported by California respondents. These parents specifically noted; difficulty with socialization, financial burdens, and time constraints as their challenges to homeschooling a child with autism. One parent stated that when homeschooled, “He does not have the ability to build relationships” (Participant 14); while another parent stated that their child’s and parent’s relationships both were limited from homeschooling, “Both daughter and mom miss some social relationships” (Participant 6). Another parent believed that children with special needs who are homeschooled are treated differently by peers: “I feel that special needs homeschoolers at least in our local group, are ghettoized” (Participant 3).

Participants also noted that financial difficulties are a concern and parents have to put their own careers on hold for their child: “I committed professional suicide” (Participant 6). Time constraints are consistent across parents with one stating that getting time away is difficult, “I don’t get breaks, as often as I need them” (Participant 1). Another parent stated that they are the one responsible for their child’s education and, “If [they] don’t do it, it doesn’t get done” (Participant 26).

Parental Recommendations for Homeschooling

Regarding parental recommendations of homeschooling to other families of children with autism, responses for all 42 participants (California and Out-of-State) ranged from highly recommended to noting that homeschooling was a very personal
decision. Within these broad categories of responses, several themes emerged surrounding parent recommendations, and include: the notion that parents are the best teachers; the amount of personal choice that goes into the decision; the belief that families get to know the child better when they homeschool; and the idea that the decision to homeschool is dependent on the particular situation of the parents and families. Parents who felt that they would recommend homeschooling to other families gave more specific reasons; such as, “saving” their child from the school process. As one parent mentioned, “ABSOLUTELY, homeschooling saved him from the dumbing down process” (Participant 41). Another parent reported that they would recommend homeschooling as parents are the best teachers of their child. This parent shared that no matter what the knowledge of other individuals in the school environment, they would never match the abilities of the parents to be their child’s best teacher. “Every child with autism is different and no one knows your child like you do….NO ONE, no matter what degree they have or how many initials follow their name” (Participant 1).

Yet another participant attested that parents do not truly know homeschooling until they experience it firsthand: “A period of homeschooling will open your eyes to your particular child’s abilities, and sources of stress, conflict, maybe healing” (Participant 6). Several parents stated that the decision to homeschool is highly individual and was dependent on several other factors other than the child’s best interest. Other parents, “It is a highly individual decision and each family has to come to the right conclusion for their child’s needs” (Participant 7). One parent discussed the notion of patience again by stating that the parent would need to be very patient and it would
depend on their overall demeanor: “It would depend on the parents’ temperament” (Participant 38). Another parent mentioned that the family situation as a whole needs to be considered, “Truly depends on the child, the family situation ‘do both parents have to work? Are there siblings?’ and the ability of the homeschool teacher to find and provide appropriate curriculum” (Participant 27).

Summary

A total of 42 surveys were completed for the current research study, 29 from the state of California and 13 from out-of-state. According to the quantitative data analysis, the average parent who is homeschooling a child with autism in the state of California is a married, Caucasian mother with a bachelors degree with no additional children in the home. The average child is a male diagnosed with autism and who is approximately ten-and-a-half years old. He was in a school district placement one to three years prior to being homeschooled and has been homeschooled for three to five years. An eclectic approach to education was most commonly used by parents homeschooling their child with autism. This approach utilizes several methods of teaching including the traditional teaching approach, unit studies and interest initiated learning. The curriculum most often was overseen by an independent study provider and the children most often received outside services including speech therapy and occupational therapy paid for by the school district.

In review of the qualitative findings, parents in California and out-of-state chose to homeschool their child due to an overall dissatisfaction with the school district. The sub-categories included of dissatisfaction with the school district included, concerns with
appropriateness of placement, a perceived low level of support from the school district, dissatisfaction with quality (parents more qualified, teacher qualifications and overall school quality), lack of progress, mistreatment by students and/or staff and religious reasons. Parents reported that their child could possibly return to a school district placement dependent on the child’s improvement of skills and the district’s ability to meet the child’s needs. Parents rated the quality of the child’s homeschooling education as very good.

Perceived benefits to homeschooling included: flexibility, the ability to provide an individualized education using one-on-one instruction; the ability to control the environment to meet the needs of the child; and the ability to custom tailor socialization. Challenges included: a lack of socialization; financial restraints on the family when one parent is unable to work due to the responsibility of homeschooling; little to no free time for the primary parent homeschooling; the stigma of homeschooling, and the lack of environmental and educational tools available. The majority of the parent stated that they would recommended homeschooling a child with autism, however, they noted it could be a very personal decision.
Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Summary of the Study

The current study utilized survey research to explore the factors that influence a family’s decision to homeschool their child with autism within the state of California. A review of the literature was conducted to examine the history of homeschooling, including the growth in popularity; relevant legislation and case law; reasons why parents homeschool; types of homeschooling; the benefits, challenges, and outcomes to homeschooling; and an overview of the current literature of homeschooling children with special needs, including those with autism. This review revealed that the research on homeschooling children with special needs, specifically those with autism, is scarce and relies on anecdotal data, mostly parental reports, rather than on peer-reviewed research.

The exploratory mixed methods design (Holland, Chait, & Taylor, 1989) highlighted in Chapter 3, utilized research methods to allow the researchers to gather both qualitative and quantitative data in regards to the research questions. The findings were based on 29 respondents from California and 13 from out-of-state and included a general overview of the demographics of the families who currently homeschool a child with autism, including: geographic representation; parental education level; primary teacher; number of children in the family who are homeschooled; child’s age; child’s diagnosis; length of time in a school district placement; length of time homeschooled, and outside services received. In addition, themes emerged from through an inductive analysis of data surrounding the reasons parents chose to homeschool, the overall parental perceptions of
homeschooling their child, including the quality of their child’s education as a homeschooled student, and the benefits and challenges of homeschooling.

Discussion

The following discussion is presented in relation to each of the five original research questions and their relation to the significant findings of the current study.

1. What major themes emerge around the reasons for homeschooling?

The current study analyzed the reasons that parents chose to homeschool their child with special needs, in particular a child with autism. The study found that parental rationale was based on: concerns with the appropriateness of their child’s placement; a perceived low level of support from the school district; a dissatisfaction with the quality of the teachers and/or school; child’s lack of progress; mistreatment by students and/or staff, including teasing and alienation; and the desire to teach religious values. The overall theme throughout parental rationale was a general dissatisfaction with the school district.

Within the current study and available literature, an overlap is observed within the areas of dissatisfaction within the school environment and with religion. However, the primary reasons parents gave were significantly different between parents of children without special needs who homeschool, parents of children with special needs who homeschool, and parents of children with autism who homeschool. The current study found the most frequently reported reason to homeschool their child with autism was concerns with the appropriateness of their child’s placement. Previous literature on the primary reasons parents chose to homeschool in general indicated the
desire to provide religious-based moral instruction to their children as often being the primary reason (Walsh, 2001). Additionally, parents may have chosen to homeschool due to concerns with the school environment (NCES, 2007), a dissatisfaction with the academic instruction within the schools (Lange & Liu, 1999), and the desire for additional family time due to parental travel (Cate, 2009). In one particular study exploring homeschooling a child due to special needs or giftedness, the participating parents cite dissatisfaction with conventional schooling, the school failing parental expectations, and the decision that home was a more suitable environment as reasons behind the decision to homeschool (Duffey, 2000). Although no direct comparison can be made, it is interesting to note these differences in the primary reason parents chose to homeschool between the sub-groups of parents that homeschool children.

2. What do demographic factors (i.e., child gender, parental education level, supervision level) “look like” in families that homeschool children with autism?

Demographic information that was collected from parents about themselves and their children revealed an overall pictures of what homeschooling families “look like” in relation to their demographic information. In terms of geographical representation within California, the study represented 18 out of the 58 counties (31.03%) and out-of-state respondents represented 11 states within the country. The majority of parents held a Bachelors degree with some differences within California (majority with Bachelor degrees) and out-of-state (majority with some college). The range of education was the completion of high school up to a PhD. The primary homeschooling teacher was a mother, both within California and out-of-state with two homeschooling fathers from
California and zero homeschooling fathers from out-of-state. The number of children homeschooled within the family averaged zero both within California and out-of-state, with a range of 0-3 additional children. Fourteen participants responded to additional demographic information. Based on these 14 respondents the majority within California and out-of-state were Caucasian. Within California all reported their ethnicity to be Caucasian while one out-of-state participant reported their ethnicity to be African American. Of the 14 respondents the majority reported that they were married within California and out-of-state. Within California the majority reported being married while out-of-state reported an even number being married and divorced with one domestic partnership reported. Within the 14 respondents who answered additional demographic information, the majority reported that they had a total of 1-3 children in their family both within California and out-of-state. The range for the number of children in the family was 0-6.

Demographic information on the characteristics of the children gave insight into gender, age, diagnosis, length of time in a school district placement and length of time homeschooled. The average gender reported was male both within California and out-of-state. Within California there were 26 males with 3 females and out-of-state reported 12 males and 1 female. The mean age from California and out-of-state was 10 years with a range of 5-22 years. Within California the mean age was 10 years, 6 months with a range of 6-22 years while the out-of-state mean was 9 years with a range of 5-13 years. The most common diagnosis was Autism both within California and out-of-state. Within California the most common diagnosis was Autism, while out-of-state reported the most
common diagnosis as Asperger syndrome. The average length of time children were in a school district placement before being homeschooled was 1-3 years within California and out-of-state; however, it is interesting to note that within the out-of-state respondents the majority of children were never in a school district placement. The average length of time homeschooled within California and out-of-state was 3-5 years with a range of less than 6 months to 7-10 years.

3. What was the overall parental perception of homeschooling a child with autism (i.e., parental recommendations for homeschooling, quality of their child’s program)?

The current study found varying themes in regards to an overall parental perception of homeschooling a child with autism. Families noted that it was a very personal decision and depended on the temperament of the parent and the child, and the family structure (i.e., do both parents need to work, are there other siblings). When discussing the overall quality of their child’s program, parents noted that their child’s education was generally of good quality or very good quality and related this level of quality to many different factors. These factors included the parent being the child’s first and best teacher, dedication of the parents to further their child’s education, and the willingness of the parent to do whatever it took to make their child successful.

4. What are the themes that emerge with regards to the benefits of homeschooling a child with autism from the parental perspective?

Previous literature from Lange (1999) and Reich (2002) suggested that the major benefits to homeschooling for families in general are: control over curriculum, flexibility in schedule, such as take breaks, sleeping in, eating snacks and meals throughout the day,
scheduling appointments during normal school hours, and taking vacation during the off season when most children are in school, ability to custom-tailor their child’s education; and control of environmental structure; such as temperature, light changes, background noise, and pace of instruction. More specifically, research on the benefits to homeschooling children with special needs include: a comprehensive curriculum, socialization, practice in real life skills, ability to address health concerns, individualized education, and time for outside therapies (Mulvey, n.d.). Benefits of homeschooling children with autism is anecdotal in nature and cite the following as benefits: safety, one-on-one instruction, the ability to adapt the environment, flexibility in scheduling, socialization, specific interests added into the child’s work, and the focus on self-help skills.

The current study’s analyses of parental perceptions of benefits to homeschooling children with autism yielded similar results to the most frequently cited benefit of flexibility, including flexibility to tailor the curriculum to a child’s specific needs and flexibility in the time for teaching to occur. Previous research on the benefits to homeschooling children with special needs also indentified flexibility within the curriculum and the child’s schedule (Wagner, 2001). Participants in the current study noted the increased ability to schedule many additional therapies that their child with autism receives, such as speech therapy and occupational therapy, along with church functions and outside applied behavior analysis programs, run by the family or an outside agency. It is interesting to note that although flexibility is given as a benefit across all levels of homeschooling (e.g., general homeschooling, homeschooling children with
special needs, homeschooling children with autism), it was the most commonly reported benefit among children with autism who are homeschooled.

The ability to individualize the curriculum is another benefit seen across all homeschooling populations (Wagner, 2001). In the current study, parents reported that they individualized the curriculum by taking their child into the community, including visiting museums and airplanes, and by working on lessons when the mood was right and the child could best engage in the material. Participants in the current study also, stated that they were the one teaching their child and as an added benefit to this they believed that they would know when their child was struggling with a topic right away and be able to make the modifications as soon as the area of need was identified. This was noted as a benefit as many parents reported that the school did not understand their child’s disability and would often wait for a problem before addressing it. One-on-one teaching was also noted as a benefit within the homeschooling a child with special needs population and within the current study. Previous research on general homeschooling did not reference the ability for one-to-one education as a benefit.

Additionally, environmental control was noted as a benefit to homeschooling in the current study. Parents noted the ability to change the lighting, minimize environmental distractions, and create a safe learning environment for their child. Benefits relating to socialization and family dynamics were listed. Parents noted that being able to spend more time with their family as a whole was another important factor in their decision to homeschool. The ability to provide socialization with a variety of age
ranges was recognized by parents as a more specific benefit to homeschooling their child with autism.

5. What are the themes that emerge with regards to the challenges of homeschooling a child with autism from the parental perspective?

The challenges to homeschooling in general were noted in available literature as having access to social interaction and extracurricular activities, having little to no free time, financial difficulties, and a total customization of the child’s education program which lacks diversity in ideas and people. Challenges to homeschooling children with special needs were finding adequate space in which to teach, the cost involved in homeschooling and the parents need to have knowledge of a wide variety of subjects. No anecdotal challenges were noted for homeschooling children with autism. The diversity seen between the homeschooling population in general and the special needs homeschooling population is note worthy, with finances as one of the only consistent challenge. According to the evidence found in the current study, the challenges seen in the homeschooling children with autism population include: lack of socialization; financial difficulties; the process is time consuming; little to no break for the parent; stigma from outsiders; and lack of education tools.

Limitations

The limitations of the current study include a small sample size (n=42) making the study unable to be generalized beyond the sample population within the state of California and across other states. Due to the snowball sampling method used, the researchers could not determine the number of surveys sent out and therefore were unable
to calculate a return rate, and the researchers were also unable to control if all participants would be from California. Due to the nature of survey research itself, self-reporting, and the choice to participate in the survey, a bias may have occurred within participants (i.e., a tendency towards those who feel homeschooling is a viable option and are more voracious in their desire to connect with the overall homeschool community). Had the researchers randomly selected the participants the results may have varied. In addition, after the close of the survey, five follow-up questions were asked of participants. Due to the number (n=38) of participants who gave their contact information and the response rate of those who replied to the follow up questions (n=14), information related to parental ethnicity, parental marital status, number of children in the household, type of teaching followed, and specific supervision level, were not available for all participants.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Ongoing qualitative research is needed to explore the factors involving a parental decision to homeschool a child with autism for example, a separate study within the state of California and nationally.

2. A detailed analysis can be conducted in order to explore the child’s placement within the school district (i.e., self-contained classroom, general education, push in or pull out services) prior to homeschooling to address implications for future practice.
3. Further research is needed to examine the experiences of children being homeschooled with autism once they reach college age or adulthood. How do children with autism who were homeschooled fare in relation to their same-aged peers when getting jobs or going to college?

4. What studies can explore factors contribute to the transition from homeschool back to the public school environment for children with autism?

5. Lastly, another research question involves the rise in the rates of autism and the rise in rates of children who are homeschooled, are these related?

Implications for Future Practice

A number of implications for practice emerged from the analysis of the data collected for the current study. The recurring theme of the inability of parents to find an appropriate placement, setting or environment for their child within the school district, may suggest a need to re-evaluate how school districts provided least restrictive environment (LRE) for children with autism. In other words are the options that are currently in place the best fit for children with autism? This theme also creates the opportunity for school districts to examine homeschooling as a viable education option for children with autism, providing the necessary support and resources to families within the district to homeschool.

Reflection

In reflection upon the findings from current study, parents who homeschool a child with autism are an underrepresented population within the homeschool and education community. Further research is necessary to truly understand and analyze this
specific population of homeschooling parents and their children. Since the current study had a small sample size, the researchers are unable to determine if there is an increased rate of children with autism who are homeschooled. Additional research is needed to determine if the rise in homeschooling rate and the apparent rise in autism has created an increased number of children with autism who are homeschooled. The researchers found the current participant population to be very willing and able to give valuable information in all aspects of homeschooling a child with autism. Many of the families who completed the survey expressed gratitude towards the researchers for conducting such research and allowing their voice be heard. In conclusion, parents noted that the time that they spent homeschooling their children today would better prepare the children for their future. As one parent shared:

“Teaching our children and giving them daily living tools today will help them to become adults living life to the best of their abilities” (Participant 23)
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Consent Form
Consent to Participate in Research

Title: A Descriptive Analysis on Homeschooling Children with Autism

Our names are Sarah Johnson and Jessica Knuth and we are graduate students at California State University, Sacramento in the Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, School Psychology and Deaf Studies, College of Education. We are currently working on our MA thesis with our faculty sponsor, Dr. Jean Gonsier-Gerdin, and have created a research project in order to analyze homeschooling for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). We would appreciate your participation in this research study.

The following information is provided to help you decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that your participation in the present study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time. You should also know that all responses are completely confidential and no names will be reported in the write-up of this study.

The purpose of the current study is to gain insight into the reasons that parents/guardians have for homeschooling children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and the process of homeschooling a child with ASD.

Data for this qualitative study will be collected through surveys filled out either online or using a paper survey. As part of the data process, we will ask for your contact information and your permission to ask follow-up questions and to clarify responses if needed. At no time will any identifying information, including names, be used in the write-up.

Please do not hesitate to ask questions about the study before choosing to return your survey or after you have returned the survey. Your name, the district where you live, and any other revealing details will be kept confidential and not revealed in any way nor will they be associated with the research findings. Only the researchers will know any identifying characteristics and a participant code will be placed on each survey and correspond to the number at the top of this letter.

Participating in the study will take between 30 and 45 minutes of your time to completely fill out the survey. You may also enter to win a $50 gift card of your choice upon completion of the survey. Benefits of the study include increasing our knowledge of the reasons that parents/guardians have for homeschooling their children with ASD and how homeschooling children with ASD is conducted. This may benefit other parents who are deciding to homeschool their children with ASD. In addition, it may provide California school districts and regional centers with information to better provide services to children with ASD who are homeschooled.
By returning the enclosed survey you are aware of the nature and purpose of the current study and the procedures to be used and consent to your survey being included in the current research. If you choose to return the survey and later feel you would not like your information to be included you may contact the researchers and give your participant number located at the top of this letter to be removed from the study. If you have any questions please feel free to contact (see contact information below). Thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Sarah A. Johnson
Jessica Knuth

Contact Information:
Sarah at (916) 825-2143
Jessica at (916) 792-9209
Dr. Gonsier-Gerdin at (916) 278-4619 or jgonsier@saclink.csus.edu
or by email at: autismhomeschoolsurvey@gmail.com.
APPENDIX B

Homeschool Survey
Survey of Home Schooling Children with Autism

Please answer the following questions as honestly and accurately as possible.

I. Demographic Information

1. What is your child’s age? _____________________________________________

2. What grade is your child in? _________________________________________

3. What is your child’s gender? _________________________________________

4. What school district do you live in? __________________________________

5. Do you hold a teaching credential?  YES   NO

6. What is your educational training/overall education level? _______________

7. What is your child’s primary disability? _________________________________

II. Information about Home Schooling

8. How long have you home schooled your child with disabilities? _____________

9. How long was your child in a school district program? _____________________

10. Does your child have an IEP? _________________________________________

11. How long have they had an IEP (age/grade level)? _______________________

12. Who oversees your curriculum? ________________________________________

13. How did you find the person/institution that oversee the curriculum? ________

_______________________________________________________________________

14. Do you have other children you home school? _____________________________

    If so, How many and what is their age and grade level? ____________________

15. How did you come to the decision to home school your child with disabilities? What are your main reasons for homeschooling…..?______________________________________
16. Do you plan on placing your child back in the school system?  YES  NO
   If so when? _______________________________________________________
   Why or Why not? __________________________________________________

17. Does your child receive other (speech, OT) services?  YES  NO
   If YES, do they receive those services through the district?  YES  NO

18. If your child receives services through the school district, how did you get those services?
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

19. If your child DOES NOT receive services through the school district, how do they receive those services? Does the district pay for these services?
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

20. What are the advantages of home schooling? ____________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
21. What are the disadvantages of home schooling? 
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

22. Overall, how would you rate the quality of your child’s education?
Not very good  Good  Very Good  Excellent

Comments:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

23. Would you recommend home schooling to other parents of children with Autism?
Why or Why not?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

24.* How did you hear about this survey? __________________________________________________________________________

25.* Please use the following space for additional comments.______________________________________________________________
Thank you for your participation!

As a token of our appreciation you will be entered into a drawing to receive a $50 gift card of your choice. Please enter your contact information below and check the corresponding box.

If you would be willing to have the researchers contact you for follow-up questions or clarification of responses, please provide your contact information (name and phone number or email address) below and mark the box stating, “Enter me in the drawing and contact me if you have questions”. If you would like to only be entered into the drawing please enter your contact information (name and phone number or email address) and mark the box, “Only enter me in the drawing”. Your information will be kept strictly confidential. If at any time you have questions please feel free to contact the researchers. Thank you!

By entering my contact information below I am consenting to the researchers contacting me for clarification of responses and/or follow-up questions regarding responses to this survey and be entered into the drawing.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

- Enter me into the drawing AND contact me if you have questions.

- ONLY enter me into the drawing.

* Please note that questions marked with an * were added to the survey in January and all participants did not complete these questions.
APPENDIX C

Additional Demographic Questions
Additional Demographic Questions

1) What is your ethnicity?

2) Are you a two-parent household? If no please explain.

3) What is the total number of children in your household (including both those homeschooled and those who attend public/private school)?

4) What approach to homeschooling do you most closely resemble out of the following choices:
   
   A) Traditional- I teach, you learn
   
   B) Unit Study Approach
   
   C) Child's interest initiated, also called "unschooling"
   
   D) Eclectic Education- a combination of the other approaches
   
   E) Dually enrolled in a public or private school and homeschooling

5) What specifically is the level of supervision with your homeschooling curriculum?

   A) Private school Affidavit, you are your own private school
   
   B) ISP, Independent Study Program, supervised by a credentialed teacher or homeschool agency
REFERENCES


California Education Codes 48224, 51745, 33190 and 48222.


*Everything you need to know about homeschooling*. Retrieved on March 27, 2010 at http://knol.google.com/k/homeschool#


