1-1-1999

Reasons for Home Schooling as Cited by Selected Parents in Central Illinois

Douglas A. Taylor

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This research is a product of the graduate program in Educational Administration at Eastern Illinois University. Find out more about the program.

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Date
Reasons for Home Schooling as Cited by
Selected Parents in Central Illinois

BY
Douglas A. Taylor

THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Specialist in Education

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1999
YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

4-19-99
Date

April 13, 1999
Date
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the specific reasons the home-schooling option was chosen by some parents in central Illinois. The number of parents who home school their children has increased significantly in recent years. Understanding the motives behind parents’ decisions can provide important information on the home-schooling movement and these parents’ perceptions about public education. By knowing the reasons the home-schooling option was selected, legislators, public school educators, and parents can initiate any changes that may be warranted.

The study took place in the fall of 1998 utilizing a survey instrument that was developed using information gleaned from current literature on home schooling. The sample population was 233 parents from 39 central Illinois counties who practiced home schooling. Responses to the survey were received from 118 parents with 104 surveys usable for this study (45%).

The findings showed that home-schooling practitioners had many reasons for selecting the home-schooling option. The survey indicated that these reasons included a dissatisfaction with the quality of traditional education. This dissatisfaction included a failure of schools to provide adequate individualization of instruction, the uncaring attitude of some public school teachers and administrators, the adverse effects of peer pressure, and the inability of schools to provide adequate protection from firearms, violence, drugs, or gang activities. Other reasons cited as motivating factors in choosing home schooling included the desire of parents to incorporate religious beliefs into their children’s educational programs, the desire of parents to be involved with their children’s
educational programs, and a desire for home life to be home centered rather than school centered.

The data from this study suggest that many changes should be taken which address the home-schooling movement. The most important recommendation from this study is that state lawmakers should enact legislation that addresses the home-schooling movement in Illinois. Appropriate legislation should include the requirement that every home school register with the local regional office of education. This information should be shared with the local districts as well as home-school researchers. Legislation is also needed that includes mandating local school districts to offer services to the home-schooled children in their district. Inservice opportunities, workshops, and seminars to improve teaching methodology should also be made available to parents. Finally, legislation should be enacted that requires periodic testing of children schooled at home using standardized assessment tests. The results of these tests should be shared with the home-schooling parents and the local school district. Children with significant deficiencies in learning areas could be identified and remedial help offered.
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Chapter 1
Overview of the Problem

Background

One of the fundamental liberties citizens in the United States enjoy is the right of each individual to exercise free choice. It is a right so basic to the American psyche that no thought is given to government interference when Americans think about choosing where to live, what type of job to pursue, or which church, if any, to attend. Another precept that is part of the American psyche is the notion that each child is entitled to a comprehensive, free public education. This precept was so deeply ingrained in the minds of our English ancestors that shortly after the first settlers arrived on the shores of North America, it was required that each settlement provide for the schooling of youth. Later, states across the nation passed mandatory attendance laws which required children to attend school (Menendez, 1997). Mandatory attendance laws did not dictate that attendance must be at public-funded institutions. Rather, these laws prescribed a basic curriculum and left the issue of alternative schooling unresolved. In Illinois, court decisions helped clarify the issue by stating that parents may educate their children in private schools or even at home so long as the children receive an education equal to that of students who attend public schools. People vs. Levisen, 404 Ill. 574, 90 N.E. 2nd 213 (1950).

The concept of freedom of choice, the notion that there should be public-funded free education, and the mandatory attendance laws that regulate compulsory attendance are frequently in conflict. Few issues in education generate as much emotional response as that of home schooling. Critics of home schooling include the National Association of Elementary School Principals (1998) and the National Education Association (1998).
These organizations have adopted resolutions against home schooling because they feel that students who are home schooled receive an inferior education. Practitioners of home schooling disagree with this criticism and cite numerous studies that indicate many homeschooled children's scores on instruments that measure academic achievement, socialization skills, and self-concept were at or above the levels scored by children in traditional schools (Ray, 1997). Home-school practitioners have also cited many other reasons for selecting the home-schooling option, including the opportunity for increased parental involvement, the opportunity for religious instruction, the avoidance of violence prevalent in traditional schools, and the avoidance of adverse peer influence.

Problem

The practice of home schooling has many ramifications. While public taxes are levied to support public education, many parents choose to provide for their children's education at home. Home schooling is permitted by law in all 50 states (Lines, 1996). In Illinois, there are court-created guidelines that home-schooling practitioners are required to follow. These guidelines attempt to insure that each child receives an education comparable to the one available in the public schools. Scoma vs. Chicago Board of Education, 391, F. Supp. 452 (N.D. Ill. 1974). However, Illinois has no specific regulations to insure that each home-schooled child receives an education comparable to the one available in the public schools.

The focus of this study was not to argue for or against home schooling. Rather, the purpose was to examine the reasons why some parents in central Illinois select the home-schooling option. Understanding the motivations behind home schooling could benefit the following groups:
1. School districts who might benefit from guidance in designing programs that appeal to current home-schooling practitioners and potential home-schooling practitioners.

2. Classroom teachers and school officials who want to plan or modify practices cited by home-schooling parents.

3. Legislators who want to encourage, discourage, or regulate the home-schooling environment.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the specific reasons some parents in central Illinois chose the home-schooling option. Conclusions drawn from this study were shared with educators at the local, county, and state level, and with state legislators. By identifying the reasons parents select home schooling, legislatures, public school educators, and parents can initiate any changes that may be warranted.

Important questions this study answered included:

1. To what extent were parents’ choices based upon their perception of the quality of education provided by the local school?

2. To what extent were parents’ choices based upon the presence or absence of religious education?

3. To what extent were parents’ choices based upon the presence of firearms, violence, drugs, or gang activities that are present in some schools?

4. To what extent were parents’ choices based upon the peers with whom their children would be in contact?

5. To what extent were parents’ choices based upon a desire to be the dominant influence in their children’s education?
The answers were tabulated to show by category the major reasons that influenced decisions to home school.

Assumptions

This study focused on the opinions of parents who home school their children within the confines of their home. It was assumed that the survey instrument’s rating scale accurately measured home-schooling practitioners’ attitudes about the benefits of home schooling. An assumption was made that all respondents replied honestly. No judgments were made regarding the legitimacy of the parents’ reasons.

Limitations

This research project had several limitations. This study relied on the self-reported responses of home-schooling practitioners. All statements on the survey were subject to individual interpretation by the respondent. This researcher did not attempt to examine parent reasoning behind any given response.

The return rate was not large enough to make generalizations about the reasons all home-schooling parents in central Illinois chose the home-schooling option. The mistrust some home-schooling parents have for organized education and the potential to have data used for restrictive legislation as to the right to home school may have influenced the way some completed the survey.

Delimitations

The study was limited by the size of the sampling. Secondly, no effort was made to correlate the responses based upon the racial, economic, political, or religious background of the respondents. While these variables may have provided additional information on family income, religious, political persuasion, and race among the home-
schooling population in the sample counties, these factors were outside the scope of this study.

This study was descriptive in nature. This researcher made no attempt to analyze the results experimentally.

Definition of Terms

Central Illinois. The part of Illinois that includes the counties of Alexander, Calhoun, Clark, Clay, Clinton, Crawford, Coles, Cumberland, Douglas, Edgar, Greene, Hamilton, Hancock, Jasper, Jefferson, Jersey, Johnson, Lawrence, Logan, Macon, Macoupin, Marion, Mason, Massac, McDonough, Menard, Monroe, Moultrie, Peoria, Piatt, Pulaski, Randolph, Richland, Shelby, St. Clair, Tazewell, Union, Vermilion, and Washington.

Home schooling. An alternative form of education in which there is individualized instruction of a child or children by the parent. This type of schooling typically occurs at home. The curriculum generally includes instruction in basic academic courses, basic living skills, the fine arts and physical development.

Parent. Father, mother, foster parent or surrogate.

Uniqueness of the Study

The focus of this study was to identify the reasons some parents chose to home school their children. The findings show the major reasons this option was chosen. Information gleaned from the study may be helpful to educators in planning educational programs and to legislators as laws are drafted to regulate home schooling. The information may help to redefine the relationship between home schooling and public education.
Chapter 2

Rationale, Related Literature and Research

Rationale

The number of parents who educate their own children has increased significantly during the last two decades. Lines (1996), a researcher for the U.S. Department of Education, estimated the number of home-schooled children in 1995 at more than 500,000 children. Although this number represents less than 1% of America’s school-aged population, the practice of home schooling is growing. Understanding the motives behind parents’ decision to home school can provide school officials, teachers, parents, and legislators with additional information on the home-schooling movement.

Literature Reviewed

Much of the literature on parents’ motivation for home schooling has been limited to anecdotal comments from home-schooling parents. For the most part, these comments have resulted from in-depth interviews as part of quantitative studies. In general, these responses have supported the conclusion that the major factors contributing to the decision to home school are the parents’ perceptions in several areas. The leading factors have been their perception on the quality of public education, the issue of religious education in the public schools, the public school environment in terms of personal safety, the potential adverse effects of peer relations, and the desire of parents to be the dominant factor in their children’s education.

A number of articles have appeared in professional journals that support these conclusions. Jeub (1994) reported that his children are home schooled because it provides an opportunity for one-on-one tutoring as well as enable his children to have positive
socialization experiences. Jeub cited reasons why many other parents take their children out of public schools. These include the school’s teachings on such sensitive issues as premarital sex, same-sex relationships, questioning of authority, and secular religion. Pike (1992) based his choice to home school on his dissatisfaction with public schools. He believed the public schools did not demand enough high-level performance from students. Position papers written by Lyman (1998), Menendez (1997), and Marchant and MacDonald (1994) support these conclusions. They indicate that home schoolers have a variety of reasons for home schooling, but the primary reasons reflect a dissatisfaction with the quality of public education and the absence of religious value transmission in public schools. Lyman (1998) further noted that dissatisfaction with public education is high because American public schools produce illiterate graduates who lack adequate skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. Coupled with this lack of academic skills, she noted that public schools have become crime scenes where teachers and students are assaulted and robbed, homemade bombs are found in lockers, and drugs are sold. In light of these problems, she concluded that many parents have grown impatient waiting for change and have opted for the home-schooling alternative.

**Research Reviewed**

When compared with most educational topics, the research on home schooling is relatively limited. The studies that have been conducted have examined the movement with respect to the number of practitioners, home-schooling statutes and regulations, characteristics of home-schooling families, perceptions influencing parents’ decision to home school, and the purported benefits of home schooling.

These studies have generally addressed home-schooling issues in Alaska, North
Carolina, Ohio, Washington, and a number of other states. Some studies such as surveys of state statutes and regulations have been national in scope and provided the reader with home-schooling regulations and requirements by state. Other studies have focused on the learning outcomes of students who are home schooled. Parents’ motivation to home school has been the topic of several studies.

A survey of the early research studies on home schooling revealed that home-schooling parents cite many different reasons for choosing this option. The wide variety of these reasons, however, seems to fit naturally into two categories. Van Galen (1988) divided home-schooling parents into two groups: ideologues and pedagogues. Ideologues home school their children for two reasons: they have specific values they want to impart and hope to strengthen the parent-child bond. Pedagogues instruct their children at home because of negative reactions toward public school education and feel that they can provide a stronger education at home.

A North Carolina study by Litcher and Schmidt (1991) supports Van Galen’s (1988) conclusions. Their study found that a majority of parents indicated a dissatisfaction with public education. This dissatisfaction included concerns about substandard academic preparation, inefficient teaching, dismay over students’ progress, and issues of morals, values, and drugs and violence.

Mayberry (1988) reported that the parents’ religious beliefs were the primary motivating factor in establishing home schools. She concluded that “home-based education provides an activity directly oriented toward religious and spiritual renewal and toward family integration and control” (p. 40). Other closely associated reasons for home-schooling centered on parents’ desires to avoid many negative characteristics associated
with public schools while supplying the benefits linked to home schools. She concluded that the most home-schooling parents displayed a greater lack of confidence in public schools than did the general population.

Knowles (1988) conducted extensive interviews and studied parent autobiographies in his examination of home-schooling motivations. He found that parents' reason for home schooling was a desire to give their children a stronger home and school environment than they themselves had experienced. He also found that these parents were motivated to furnish a superior learning climate for either an above-average or handicapped child.

Recent dissertations have addressed the home-schooling movement. In a study of home schooling in Illinois, Deroche (1993) found that the most common motivations to home school were religion and dissatisfaction with public schools. Fegley (1993) studied home schooling in Connecticut. He identified several factors that contributed to decisions to home school. He concluded that the primary reasons were dissatisfaction with public schools and its curriculum, protection from the negative influences to which the children would be exposed in public schools, and the belief that home schooling would produce more learning. Burns (1993) studied home-schooling families in Arizona. He found that home-schooling parents lacked confidence in public education. He concluded that home-schooling families believe that educating their children at home is superior to public education because home schooling provides a family-centered learning environment where one-on-one instruction can occur and where a curriculum exists that stresses beliefs, values, and morals consistent with those of the parents.

This study of home schooling in central Illinois provides a basis for comparison
between the conclusions drawn from numerous quantitative studies on parents’
motivations and the motivating factors among the home-schooling population in central
Illinois. It cannot, however, be used to draw conclusions about the parents’ motivations to
home school.
Chapter 3
Design of the Study

General Design

The number of parents who home school their children has increased significantly during the last two decades. Several research studies have been conducted to determine the factors which motivated parents to abandon public education in favor of home schooling. Results from these studies indicate that parents have a variety of reasons for selecting home schooling. This study surveyed the attitudes of home-schooling parents in central Illinois to document their reasons for selecting the home-schooling option.

Important questions this study addressed include:

1. To what extent were parents’ choices based upon their perception of the quality of education provided by the local school?

2. To what extent were parents’ choices based upon the presence or absence of religious education?

3. To what extent were parents’ choices based upon the presence of firearms, violence, drugs, or gang activities that are present in some schools?

4. To what extent were parents’ choices based upon the peers with whom their children would be in contact?

5. To what extent were parents’ choices based upon a desire to be the dominant influence in their children’s education?

Sample and Population

The population for this study was 233 parents from 39 central Illinois counties who practice home schooling. All 39 regional superintendents in Regional Offices of
Education Areas III, IV, V, and VI were sent letters requesting the names of homeschooling practitioners who had registered to home school for the 1998-1999 school year (see Appendix A). Seventeen regional superintendents responded. Three declined to cooperate citing reasons of confidentiality as the basis of their refusal. Three regional superintendents requested that the cover letter, survey, and self-addressed stamped envelopes be sent from their offices. Eleven regional superintendents provided the names and addresses of home-schooling practitioners who had registered to home school during the 1998-1999 school year. All 190 home-schooling practitioners listed on these rolls were mailed the cover letter (see Appendix B), the survey instrument (see Appendix C), and a self-addressed stamped envelope in September 1998. An additional 43 cover letters, survey instruments, and self-addressed stamped envelopes were also mailed from three regional offices of education in September 1998.

A second mailing (consisting of a cover letter, the survey instrument, and a self-addressed stamped envelope) was sent to 129 home-schooling practitioners who had not responded to the initial mailing by the deadline. This second mailing was sent in November 1998.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

A survey instrument was developed using information gleaned from current literature on home schooling. A data base of home-schooling parents was then developed using the names on home-schooling registration maintained at the regional offices of education representing 39 counties in central Illinois. A cover letter and the survey instrument were then sent to home-schooling parents along with a self-addressed stamped envelope.
Data Analysis

The survey instrument was based upon a review of related literature. The data for this study were collected using a rating scale to determine the reasons parents selected the home-schooling option. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data collected. The analyses of the data are presented through tables which show parents' responses in percentages.

The rating scale consists of 10 reasons which may influence parents in their decision to home school. The parents were asked to rank order the five most important reasons by assigning a numeral 1 to the most important, numeral 2 to the second most important, numeral 3 to the third most important, and so on. These numerical values were then used to tabulate a score for each of the 10 statements. The instrument was distributed and returned by mail.
Chapter 4
Results of the Study

Overview

The opinion survey was sent to 233 home-schooling practitioners who had registered with their regional office of education. The survey was designed to document the specific reasons the home-schooling option was chosen by some parents in central Illinois. Responses were received from 118 parents with 104 of these responses complete enough to be used for this study. These 104 responses represent a return rate of 45%.

From a list of 10 reasons, the home-schooling practitioners were asked to rank order the five reasons most important in their decision to home school. Additional space was provided for participants to request a copy of the survey results.

This study was designed to answer specific research questions regarding parents’ motivations to home school their children. All 10 statements on the survey instrument corresponded to the research questions.

The first research question addressed parents’ perceptions of the quality of education provided by the local school. Statements on the survey instrument that corresponded to this question were:

1. **Statement 1.** Disagreement with the emphasis on competition in traditional schools.

2. **Statement 4.** Uncaring attitude of public school teachers and administrators.

3. **Statement 6.** Inability of traditional schools to provide adequate individualization of instruction.

4. **Statement 7.** Disagreement with the content taught in traditional schools.
The second research question addressed the issue of the presence or absence of religious education. Statement 5 on the survey instrument—the desire to incorporate one's religious beliefs into the educational program—corresponded to this question.

The third research question addressed the concern for the personal safety of children in traditional schools. Statement 9 on the survey instrument—the inability of traditional schools to provide adequate protection from firearms, violence, drugs, or gang activities—corresponded to this question.

The fourth research question addressed concerns about the adverse effects of peer influence. Statement 8 on the survey instrument—the negative effects of peer pressure in traditional schools—corresponded to this question.

The fifth research question addressed the desire of parents to be the dominant influence in their children's education. Statements on the survey instrument that corresponded to this question were:

1. **Statement 2.** A parental desire to be involved with your children's education.

2. **Statement 3.** The belief that the child was not ready for formal instruction in a traditional school setting.

3. **Statement 10.** A desire for family life to be home centered rather than revolve around school activities and schedules.

For display purposes, all survey statements were given abbreviated labels:

1. Statement 1, a disagreement with the emphasis on competition in traditional schools, was labeled **Competition.**

2. Statement 2, a parental desire to be involved with your children's education, was labeled **Involvement.**
3. Statement 3, the belief that the child was not ready for formal instruction in a traditional school setting, was labeled Not Ready.

4. Statement 4, the uncaring attitude of public school teachers and administrators, was labeled Uncaring Educators.

5. Statement 5, the desire to incorporate one’s religious beliefs into the educational program, was labeled Religion.

6. Statement 6, the inability of traditional schools to provide adequate individualization of instruction, was labeled Individualization.

7. Statement 7, disagreement with the content taught in traditional schools, was labeled Content.

8. Statement 8, the negative effects of peer pressure in traditional schools, was labeled Peer Influence.

9. Statement 9, the inability of traditional schools to provide adequate protection from firearms, violence, drugs, or gang activities, was labeled Violence.

10. Statement 10, a desire for family life to be home centered rather than revolving around school activities and schedules, was labeled Home Centered.

Results

Tables presented a rank-ordered comparison of parents’ first-choice responses to the 10 survey statements. All values were expressed in percentages.

Table 1 shows the first-choice responses of parents on statements related to their perceptions about the quality of education provided by traditional schools.

The primary concern was the belief that traditional schools lacked the ability to provide adequate individualization of instruction. This concern was shared by 22%
Table 1

First Choice Regarding Parents' Perceptions of Quality of Education – Research Question 1

(N = 104)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individualization</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncaring educators</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(N = 23) of the respondents. The perception that public school teachers and administrators displayed uncaring attitudes was an opinion shared by 16% (N = 17). Disagreement with the content taught in traditional schools was indicated as the motivating factor by 6% (N = 6). One parent selected the statement which expressed a disagreement with the emphasis on competition in traditional schools as the primary reason for home schooling.

When the data from Statements 1, 4, 6, and 7 were combined, 45% (N = 47) of the parents indicated that the quality of education issue was the primary force behind their decision to home school.

Table 2 shows the first-choice responses of parents as these responses related to research questions 2, 3, and 4 and Statements 5, 8, and 9.

On Statement 5, which addressed parents' desire to incorporate one's religious beliefs into the educational program, 15% (N = 16) indicated that religious beliefs was the motivating factor behind their decision to home school. The presence of firearms, violence, drugs, or gang activities in schools (Statement 9) was a determining factor in
Table 2

First Choice Regarding Parents' Perceptions of Religious Education, Violence, and Peer Influence – Research Questions 2, 3 and 4 (N = 104)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer influence</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

choosing the home-school option for 10% (N = 10) of the parents. Parents’ concerns about the adverse effects of peer influence (Statement 8) was the motivating factor for 8% (N = 8).

Table 3 shows the first-choice responses of parents as related to research question 5 which relates to the extent parents’ choices were based upon a desire to be a dominant influence in their children’s education.

Table 3

First Choice Regarding Parents' Desire to be the Dominant Influence in their Children’s Education – Research Question 5 (N = 104)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home centered</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not ready</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parental desire to be the dominant factor in their children’s education was the
determining factor for 22% (N = 23). This research category was composed of data from Statement 2, which addressed a parental desire to be involved in the education of their children; Statement 3, which addressed the belief that the child was not ready for formal instruction in a traditional school setting; and Statement 10, which addressed a desire for family life to be home centered rather than revolve around school activities and schedules.

Table 4 shows the first-choice responses of parents to all 10 statements.

Table 4

First-Choice Responses of Parents to All Statements (N = 104)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individualization</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncaring educators</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer influence</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home centered</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not ready</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The parents' responses indicate that the failure of traditional schools to provide adequate individualization of instruction was the dominant reason parents home school. This reason was selected by 22% of the respondents. Other important reasons included a
desire of parents to be involved in their children’s education (17%), the perception about uncarng educators (16%), religion (15%), and concerns about school safety (10%).

Raw data were analyzed to find the strength of all factors that influenced parental choices. These factors are represented by percentages. Values were assigned for each parent’s response. Each first-choice response was assigned a value of 5, each second choice response was assigned a value of 4, and so on. Statements not rated were assigned a value of 0. The value of each statement was tabulated to find its total value. The total percentage for each statement represents its percentage of the total of all 10 statements. The total value of all responses on all 10 statements equals 100%. The 520 total responses was comprised of the top five ranking from each of the 104 respondents to the survey.

Table 5 shows the percentage of the total responses of parents on statements related to their perceptions about the quality of education provided by local schools.

Table 5

Percentages of Weighted Parents’ Responses to Research Question 1 (N = 520)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individualization</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncaring educators</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The inability of traditional schools to provide adequate individualization of instruction was the most widely selected choice in this category. Seventy-nine parents
selected this statement as one of the motivating factors in their decision to home school.

The weighted value of the failure of schools to provide adequate individualization of instruction was 15%. The feeling that public school teachers and administrators demonstrate an uncaring attitude was the opinion of 48 parents. The weighted value for the statement regarding uncaring educators was 9%. Forty-seven parents selected a disagreement with the content taught in public schools as one of the factors influencing their choice to home school. The weighted value of this statement is 9%. A disagreement with the emphasis on competition in traditional schools was one of the deciding factors for 20 parents. The weighted value of Statement 1 was 4%. Parents selected statements which addressed issues on quality of education 194 times. The combined weighted value of their choices represented 37% of the total value of all statements.

Table 6 shows the percentages of the total responses of parents as they relate to research questions 2, 3, and 4.

Table 6

Percentages of Weighted Parents’ Responses to Research Questions 2, 3, and 4 (N = 520)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer influence</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The statement that addressed parents’ desire to incorporate one’s religious beliefs into the educational program was selected as a motivating factor by 54 parents. The
weighted value of a desire to incorporate religious beliefs into the educational program was 10% of the total value of all statements. Fifty-four parents indicated that the presence of firearms, violence, drugs, or gang activities in local schools was a factor influencing their decision to home school. The weighted value of this statement represented 10% of the total value of all statements. Concerns about the adverse effects of peers was a factor in the decision-making process of 80 parents. The weighted value of peer influence represented 15% of the total value of all statements.

Table 7 shows the percentage of total responses of parents as they relate to research question 5.

Table 7

Percentages of Weighted Parents’ Responses to Research Question 5 (N = 520)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home centered</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not ready</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parental desire to be the dominant factor in their children’s education was selected 138 times. This category is composed of data from Statement 2, which addressed a parental desire to be involved in the education of their children; Statement 3, which addressed the belief that the child was not ready for formal instruction in a traditional school setting; and Statement 10, which addressed a desire for family life to be home centered rather than revolve around school activities and schedules. A desire to be the dominant influence in their children’s education has a weighted value of 27% of the total
value of all statements.

Table 8 shows the number of times each statement was selected.

Table 8

Percentages of Weighted Parents’ Responses to All Statements (N = 520)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individualization</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncaring educators</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer influence</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
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<td>14</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows that the statements most widely selected included peer influence (N = 80), individualization of instruction (N = 79), involvement (N = 68), home centered (N = 56), and religion (N = 54). Since each response was weighted based upon the parents’ ranking of their five most important reasons, the most important factors influencing parental decisions do not correspond exactly with the most widely selected statements. Table 8 shows the weighted value of each statement. The most important Motivating factors were: peer influence (15%), individualization of instruction (15%),
involvement (13%), home centered (11%), religion (10%), and violence (10%).
Chapter 5

Summary, Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the specific reasons the home-schooling option was chosen by some parents in central Illinois. Understanding the motives behind parents' decisions to home school can provide important information on the home-schooling movement. This information can be used by public school teachers and administrators as a guide to plan or modify current practices. By knowing the reasons some parents selected the home-schooling option, legislators may want to initiate legislation to encourage, discourage, or regulate home schooling.

The specific research questions addressed by this study are as follow:

1. To what extent were parents' choices based upon their perception of the quality of education provided by the local school?

2. To what extent were parents' choices based upon the presence or absence of religious education.

3. To what extent were parents' choices based upon the presence of firearms, violence, drugs, or gang activities which are present in some schools?

4. To what extent were parents' choices based upon the peers with whom their children would be in contact?

5. To what extent were parents' choices based upon a desire to be the dominant influence in their children's education?

The researcher focused on the opinions of home-schooling practitioners from 39 central Illinois counties. From a list of 10 reasons, parents were asked to rank order the
five reasons most important in their decision to home school. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data collected on each research question. Data were interpreted based upon the first-choice responses of parents and were reported in relation to percentage of parents selecting each statement. Data were also analyzed based upon a weighted value given to each response. The total percentage for each statement represented its percentage of the total of all 10 statements. The total value of all responses on all statements was equal to 100%.

Findings

The findings of this study indicate that parents’ primary reasons for home schooling was their concern about the quality of public education. Selections by parents in this category represented 45% of their first-choice responses. The statement which received the most responses in this category was the perception that traditional schools fail to provide adequate individualization of instruction. A desire by parents to be the dominant influence in their children’s education received 22% of the first-choice responses. The statement which received the most responses in this category was the parents’ desire to be involved in their children’s education (17%). Other research question categories included religion (15%); concerns about firearms, violence, drugs, or gang activities (10%); and concerns about the adverse effects of peer influence (8%).

Data analysis used weighted values for each response. The results were similar to those obtained from an analysis of first-choice selections. Weighted value analysis revealed that the parental concerns about the quality of education in traditional schools received the highest percentage of responses. Parents selected statements which addressed this issue 194 times. The weighted value of their choices represented 37% of the total value of all
statements. The second highest percentage of responses was received on statements that addressed the desire of parents to be the dominant influence in their children's education. Parents selected statements that addressed this issue 138 times. The weighted value of their choices represented 27% of the total value of all statements. Other categories included concerns about peer influence (15%) and religion (10%); and concerns about firearms, violence, drugs, or gang activities (10%).

Conclusions

Based on the results of this study, the researcher drew five important conclusions. The first of these was that many home-schooling practitioners were dissatisfied with traditional schools. This dissatisfaction encompassed a number of curricular and non-curricular areas. The quality of education was one of these areas. Unsolicited comments written on the survey instruments provided evidence of a number of closely related reasons for this dissatisfaction. Parents cited examples of rude behaviors by teachers toward parents or students, large class sizes, unchallenged gifted children, failure to meet the needs of learning impaired students, and a lack of adequate skill development in the fundamental learning areas such as reading and math. Other parents discussed aspects of the school environment as factors that influenced their decisions. Fear for their children's safety at school was cited by many parents and included comments about disruptive student behaviors, harassment, disrespectful behavior toward adults and other students, obscene language, smoking, and drug usage. Some parents cited negative peer influence as a factor that influenced their choice. A few mentioned the pressure of competition as a negative aspect of education in the public school setting. The data compiled from the returned survey instruments indicated that religion was an important factor which
influenced the home-schooling decision. The absence of religious guidance and the perception that schools neglected to provide moral and value training provided the basis of most of the unsolicited comments written on the survey instruments.

The second conclusion drawn from this study related to the desire of parents to be the dominant influence in their children’s education. Several written comments supported this choice. From these comments it can be concluded that many decisions to home school were based upon the desire of the parents to provide an unhurried, structured, close-knit learning environment where academic skills can be developed in a one-on-one nurturing atmosphere; and where they can also provide their children with moral training and guidance while strengthening the bond between parent and child.

The third conclusion drawn from this study was based on the quantitative data as well as the unsolicited comments provided by many parents. Of the 118 parents who responded to the survey, 52 provided comments about their reasons for home schooling. Many of the comments addressed the quality of education issue. A significant majority of these faulted local schools as reasons for home schooling. Most did not cite any advantages they expected their children to receive as a result of being home schooled. A few comments were also received which cited the advantages of home schooling. The conclusion drawn from this observation is that some home schooling was undertaken as a reaction against perceived shortcomings in the public school system, while other parents took a more proactive approach. These parents home school because they were committed to providing their children with the best education possible.

A fourth conclusion was drawn from this study. When all the reasons for home schooling were examined, dilemmas were encountered. Some parents indicated an
unhappiness with public education because the pace at which skill mastery occurs was too slow, while others complained that the pace was too fast. Some were unhappy because school rules were too strict, while others complained that the rules were too lenient. Additional dilemmas were encountered in the areas of religion, sex education, and creationism and evolution. When these and other issues were examined, meeting the needs of all parents seemed an impossibility.

The fifth conclusion drawn from this study relates to the political ramifications the home-schooling movement has for regional superintendents of schools. Registering to home school is a voluntary action by home-schooling parents. The reluctance of some regional superintendents of schools to share the names and addresses of registered home-schooling parents with home-schooling researchers impedes researchers in their quest to more completely study the home-schooling movement.

Recommendations

Three important recommendations flow from the findings of this study. The first of these recommendations is that state lawmakers enact legislation to address the issue of home schooling. Appropriate legislation could benefit both the home-schooling families and the local school districts. One law would require home-schooled children to be tested periodically with a standardized assessment test. The test would be given in another location outside the home. These results would be shared with the local school district and the home-schooling parent. This requirement would benefit parents by providing them with a way of measuring their children’s academic progress. The local district would benefit because it can measure the academic progress of children living in the district who are taught at home. Children with significant deficiencies in learning areas could be
identified and remedial help offered.

Another law would address the matter of registration. At the present time, home schools that register with their regional offices of education do so voluntarily. Since some families register while others do not, local school officials may not know the names of all home-schooled children in their district. Legislation requiring every home school to register offers a way for local school officials to identify home-schooling families in their district. Legislation should also be enacted that mandates local school districts to offer services to home-school parents in their district. This legislation might allow homeschooling parents to participate in school inservice programs, workshops, and seminars which could help them develop their teaching methodology. Other legislation should be enacted that mandates local school districts to offer services to home-school children living in their district.

The second recommendation relates to the first recommendation. An effort should be made to establish a dialogue between local school districts and the home-schooling families living in those districts. Home-schooling parents and local school officials should have as a goal the development of open communication and cooperation. One goal should be an exchange of information on the reasons the home-school option was chosen by individual families and ways in which the public school might address these reasons. The dialogue between school and family could also include the availability of resources at the school to home-schooling families. These resources could include texts, library books, kits, or other resources that have educational value. Finally, instructional services could be made accessible to home-schooling families. These services might include allowing a home-schooled child to attend school for specific classes and receive the rest of his or her
instruction at home.

The third recommendation is that additional research is needed on the homeschooling movement. A comprehensive study of home schooling in Illinois should include a detailed analysis of the reasons this option is chosen; an analysis of the demographic characteristics of home-school families; the home learning environment with an analysis of data on instructional time, teaching methodology, and curriculum; and an analysis of data on the cognitive, psycho-motor, and affective development of home-schooled children. A comprehensive study of home schooling in Illinois would have benefits in a number of areas. Lawmakers would have additional information needed when considering whether to encourage, discourage or regulate the home school. Local school officials would have the information necessary to establish a productive, cooperative dialogue with the local homeschool population. Home-schooling parents would have detailed information on the home schooling and can use this information in their role as home educators.
References


Dissertation Abstracts International, 54, 54-12A.


Dissertation Abstracts International, 54, 54-03A.


People vs. Levisen, 404 Ill. 574, 90 N.E. 2nd 213 (1950).


Appendix A
Letter to Superintendents

41930 North 170 East Road
Rankin, IL 60960
September 15, 1998

The Honorable «FirstName» «LastName»
Regional Superintendent of Schools
«Address1»
«City», «State» «PostalCode»

Dear Superintendent «LastName»:

I am a post-graduate student at Eastern Illinois University working on my Field Study Experience as part of the requirements for obtaining an Educational Specialist degree in Educational Administration. The nature of my field study is an opinion survey of home-school practitioners in central Illinois.

I am building a data base on home-school practitioners. I discussed my task with Mr. Jim Trask, the Regional Superintendent of Schools for Vermilion County, and inquired as to the legality of his office furnishing me the names of home-school practitioners who registered with his office for the 1998-1999 school year. His office consulted with the legal affairs office of the Illinois State Board of Education. Their opinion on the matter is that registering to home school is legally the same as registering as a private school. The name and address therefore becomes public knowledge.

I would greatly appreciate it if you would take a few minutes of your time and furnish me the names and addresses of home-school practitioners from your region who have registered with your office for the 1998-1999 school year.

The conclusions drawn from my study will be shared with the Illinois State Board of Education, state legislators, Regional Offices of Education, home-schooling parents, and home-schooling support groups.

Thank you,

Douglas A. Taylor
Appendix B
Letter to Home-schooling Parents
41930 North 170 East Road
Rankin, IL 60960
October 8, 1998

Dear «Title» «LastName»:

I am a post-graduate student at Eastern Illinois University working on my Field Study Experience as part of the requirements for obtaining an Educational Specialist degree in Educational Administration. The nature of my field study experience is an opinion survey of 233 home-school practitioners in central Illinois who have registered as home schools with their regional office of education. As a registered home-schooling parent your reasons for home schooling are very important. Please take a few minutes to fill out the enclosed survey and return it to me in the self-addressed stamped envelope by October 20, 1998. Your responses will remain confidential.

The results of this study will be sent to the Illinois State Board of Education, state legislators, Regional Offices of Education, and home-schooling support groups. Please follow the directions at the top of the survey.

Please place the survey in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope and return to me by October 20, 1998.

Thank you,

Douglas Taylor
Appendix C

Survey Instrument

The following checklist, consisting of 10 frequently mentioned reasons parents choose to home school their children, has been compiled based on a review of the literature concerning home schooling.

Directions: Please rank order the top five reasons which you felt were important in your decision to home school your child (children). Rank these by assigning a numeral 1 to the most important reason, a numeral 2 to the second most important reason, a numeral 3 to the third most important reason, and so on. In order to compile the data accurately only rank the top five reasons.

___ 1. A disagreement with the emphasis on competition in traditional schools.

___ 2. A parental desire to be involved with your children’s education.

___ 3. The belief that the child was not ready for formal instruction in a traditional school setting.

___ 4. The uncaring attitude of public school teachers and administrators.

___ 5. The desire to incorporate one’s religious beliefs into the educational program.

___ 6. The inability of traditional schools to provide adequate individualization of instruction.

___ 7. Disagreement with the content taught in traditional schools.

___ 8. The negative effects of peer pressure in traditional schools.

___ 9. The inability of traditional schools to provide adequate protection from drugs, firearms, violence, or gang activities.

___ 10. A desire for family life to be home centered rather than revolving around school activities and schedules.

Comments

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Name/Address if you would like a copy of the survey results.

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________