

Insights on homeschooling in the new millennium

By SUZANNE KENNEDY

Homeschooling isn't a new phenomenon, but it surely has garnered a lot of attention in the past few years.

Prior to the early 1900s, most children were taught at home or in one-room schoolhouses that may have charged some sort of tuition. Since 1999, the number of homeschoolers in America has grown at a pretty consistent 7 percent annually, saving taxpayers approximately \$24 billion each year.

Ask 10 families why they choose to educate their children at home and you'll get 10 different answers. These include religious or environmental beliefs, discontent with the public school curriculum, a child's educational needs not being met, lifestyle flexibility, and most recently objections to common core and testing. The answer for many is homeschool.

The amount of materials available is astounding and many of them have a religious base. Some parents want to keep their children away from negative influences until they have had more time to instill family values. Some children aren't getting enough attention and may be falling behind, while others may not be challenged enough. In addition,

many learning and behavioral difficulties are best served in an environment other than a classroom.



One of the best side effects of homeschooling is the flexibility of your schedule. Winter vacation? No problem. Want more time to ride your horse or practice the guitar? Done. When a student doesn't have

to constantly wait for others to finish assignments or to get quiet before the teacher can give directions, the school day doesn't have to last that long.

The first question every homeschool parent gets from a non-homeschool family is the one about socialization. How will your kids be socialized? What they are truly asking is how will your children make friends and learn to behave normally around them. Never fear. Most homeschoolers are involved in sports, music, art, clubs, youth groups, etc., so making friends isn't an issue. Plus, they have more opportunities to interact with people of all ages. Many towns have co-ops and organized groups that connect such families. Three local groups are: Holy Angels Catholic Homeschool

Group, Umatilla Morrow Homeschool Group and the Pendleton Homeschool Association (phsa.bcmi.net).

So what does homeschooling look like? It could be nothing you've ever seen before, like unschooling, which is totally child driven. If they are interested in bugs, you go to the library, build a bug collection, visit a museum, read books about bugs, count bugs, read and write poetry about them, and do some experiments. Or, it could be structured like a small classroom with desks, computers, chalkboards and recess time. It can take place at the park, on a field trip, in the car, at the family cabin, on the computer



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or at the library. It can be done in the morning, afternoon or evening with a full-time working dad or a part-time working mom. It could involve all the children in the family, or only one. There just is no typical homeschool family.

Studies show that children who are homeschooled for at least two years consistently score about 20 to 30 percentile points higher than their counterparts across all subjects on standardized tests. They perform better on college entrance exams, have higher graduation rates, and higher GPAs throughout their college careers. When they grow up, they are more likely to own their own business, and be happy and satisfied with their lives. They are more likely to be involved in the community, volunteer their time and even vote.

Surprised? It doesn't matter your race, religion or family income. Homeschoolers hit higher marks whether the family income is \$25,000 or \$90,000, black or white, Christian or atheist. It doesn't matter if the parents have college degrees, what their occupations are, or how much money they spend on homeschooling.

So the next time you see kids at the store in the middle of the day, don't automatically assume the worst. They could be on a field trip!

Suzanne Kennedy is a former middle school teacher who lives in Pendleton with her husband and three children.



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