



Homeschool Survey Full Report — Summer 2022





### **Background**

Homeschooling is an educational option in Oregon. Families may choose to homeschool their child at any time during the year and for any duration. Families who choose to homeschool are required to notify their local Education Service Districts (ESD) upon withdrawing from public or private school, in accordance with ORS 339.010 and OAR 581-021-0026(4). Multnomah ESD provides homeschooling registration for students that live in Multnomah County.

As of June 1, 2022, there were approximately 3,700 students registered for homeschooling in Multnomah County. This number is based on the total number of registered homeschool students and may not be completely accurate. By Oregon law, families are required to notify MESD when they start homeschooling, but they are not required to notify MESD when they discontinue homeschooling. Not all homeschool families may be aware of the homeschool notification rules and so there is a potential that the registration numbers are not reflective of all the youth being served by homeschooling. Additionally, while some families update their homeschool registration when their homeschool status changes, some families may not, which may result in an overcount of homeschooling youth in our region.

#### Increasing Homeschool Enrollment During the COVID-19 Pandemic

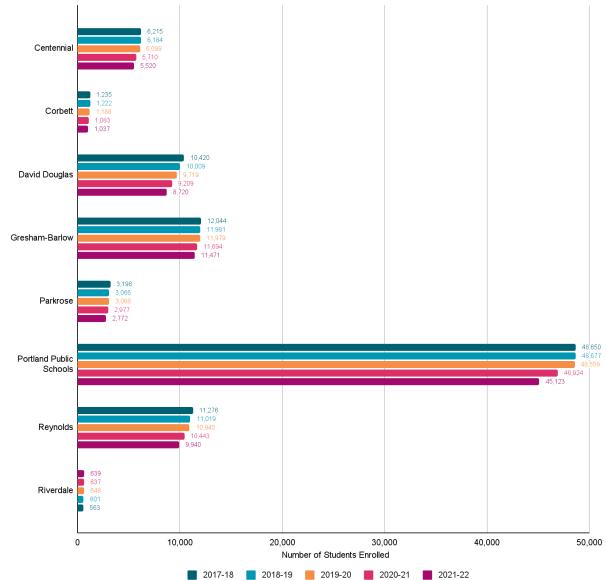
While homeschooling has been an option for parents for many years, the number of families registering for homeschooling in Multnomah County has increased notably since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (Exhibits 2 and 3). This uptick is occurring at the same time as declining enrollment in Multnomah County public schools in general.

In fall 2020, Multnomah County school districts reported a 3.9% drop in enrollment, or a loss of 3,606 students, from the previous year. This was a slightly larger loss by percent than the state as a whole, which reported a 3.7% drop from the previous year. Multnomah County enrollment declined again in fall 2021; a 4.0% drop, or loss of an additional 3,547 students, compared to a 1.4% drop statewide.

The reasons for declining public school enrollment in the region are varied and can not be attributed to one cause. Reasons range from declining birth rates to increases in charter school, private school and homeschool enrollment.







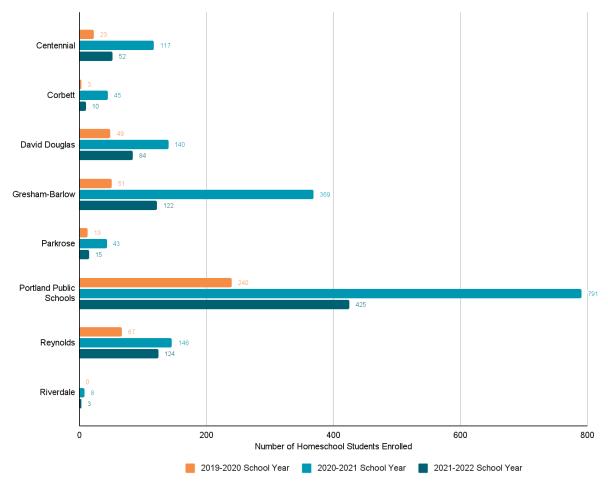
**Exhibit 1. Overall Student Enrollment by District** 

Source: Oregon Department of Education Fall Membership Reports

While district enrollment has declined, homeschool enrollment in Multnomah County has gone up in recent years. Between the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years, new homeschool registrations increased by 272% or from 446 to 1659 new registrations (Exhibits 2 and 3). During the 2021-22 school year, MESD received notification of 835 new homeschool registrations.



**Exhibit 2. Homeschool Student Enrollment by District** 



Source: Multnomah Education Service District Homeschool Registration Database

**Exhibit 3. Total New Home School Registrations, Multnomah County** 

	2019-20 School Year	2020 Schoo		202 <sup>2</sup> Schoo	
All Multnomah County Districts	446	1,6	59	83	35
		#	%	#	%
Change from prior year		+1,213	272%	-824	-50%

Source: Multnomah Education Service District Homeschool Registration Database



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While we don't have evidence to indicate whether Multnomah County trends are connected to or reflective of national trends, homeschooling has been growing in popularity nationally over the last several decades. Between the years of 1999 to 2016, the percentage of homeschool students nationally increased from 1.7 to 3.3% (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Since 2020, that number has increased even more with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as many popular national figures including Kirk Cameron¹ and Pete Hegseth² vocalizing support for homeschooling. Recent data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau suggests that national homeschool rates increased during the 2020-21 school year as compared with February 2020, from 5% to 9%. For that same time period, homeschool rates increased for all racial demographic groups with the greatest percentage point change experienced by Black respondents (from 4% to 11%)³.

National studies abound with conflicting conclusions about homeschool's popularity and drivers<sup>4</sup>. As homeschool family demographics continue to diversify, so do motivations for opting into homeschool. Some families find themselves motivated to opt into homeschool for its perceived benefits, such as ability to provide individualized instruction tailored for their students, and ability to organize instructional delivery and schedule. Others are driven by a rejection of the perceived flaws of traditional public school. These include conflicting family and school values, safety concerns, the belief that the traditional school is being unfair, and a concern that their students' individualized needs are unmet.

Traditionally many researchers have found that homeschooling is disproportionately embraced by families identifying as white. However, more recently, complicating the narrative of homeschool as a form of 'white flight' is the rise of homeschooling families of color, in particular African American and Latino/a/x families. Several studies indicate that families described disproportionate outcomes, declining quality of education, and a desire for cultural identity development for African American students as a driver for homeschooling.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> https://www.thehomeschoolawakening.com

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> https://battlefortheamericanmind.com

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/household-pulse-survey/data.html

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> A bibliography of some current research is provided at the end



### **MESD Homeschool Survey**

#### Purpose of the MESD Homeschool Survey

While there has been a plethora of national trend information about homeschooling, little attention has been provided as to why Multnomah County families are opting to homeschool at an increasing rate. This localized data about who is opting into homeschooling and why is important for schools and districts to know in order to improve existing programs and to develop new options to better support students and families, including families who continue to homeschool.

The purpose of the MESD Homeschool Survey was to learn more about the experiences of homeschooling families, their motivations for homeschooling, and what resources they find useful. We were further interested in learning how likely homeschooling families were to return their child(ren) to a previous school or another school placement in the future. For families who indicated that they are no longer homeschooling, we were interested in their reasons for ending homeschooling with their child(ren).

The results of the survey will be used in the following ways. It will:

- Be shared with Multnomah County districts and schools to inform their practices;
- Be used to improve and/or expand homeschool supports provided by MESD;
- Provide guidance for further inquiry; and
- Offer insights for families and community members interested in localized homeschool data.

#### **Survey Instrument**

The survey included up to seven questions, including three demographic questions. The primary questions of interest were three open-ended questions related to motivations for homeschooling and access to resources:

- What was your primary reason for enrolling your student(s) in homeschool?
- What homeschool resources (ex. textbooks, instructional materials, websites, organizations, etc.) have you found useful?

For families who indicated that they are no longer homeschooling:

• What was your primary reason for ending homeschooling?





In addition, families were asked to report the likelihood of their student(s) returning to their previous school or another school placement in the next academic year.

The complete survey instrument can be found in Appendix A.

#### **Survey Administration**

The Homeschool Survey was administered in April 2022. All families currently registered for homeschooling through MESD's homeschool notification system were invited to participate in the survey by email and mail.

Parents and guardians are only required to notify MESD when their child begins homeschooling. They are not required to update MESD when their child's home school enrollment status changes. Due to limitations in reporting events of youth returning to public/private schools, moving outside of the county, etc., MESD's database includes families who are no longer homeschooling in addition to currently homeschooling families.

A paper survey was mailed to families, along with a self-addressed and stamped envelope. Families who provided email addresses upon notifying MESD of their decision to homeschool were sent an electronic version of the survey.

#### **Participation Rate**

In total, 2,687 families were invited to participate in the survey. The breakdown by survey type is as follows:

- 318 families received just paper surveys
- 14 families received just electronic surveys
- 2,355 families received both paper and electronic surveys

680 families participated in the survey, resulting in a response rate of 25.3%. More families participated in the electronic version of the survey than the paper version (525 and 155, respectively).

# **Participant Characteristics**

About 35% of survey participants reported homeschooling just one student. In addition, about one-third of survey participants reported homeschooling two or more students. Families who are no longer homeschooling made up another third of survey participants.

How many school-aged children (K through 12th grade) are you currently homeschooling?

35%

23%

20%

None

1 student

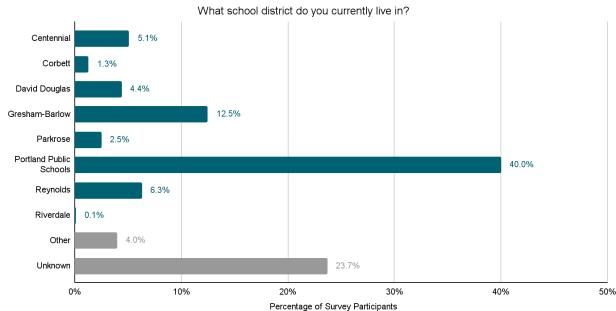
2 students

3 or more students

Exhibit 4. Number of Students Homeschooled by Survey Participants

The distribution of survey participants by school district is similar to that of the overall enrollment of Multnomah County school districts. About 40% of participants reported currently living within the enrollment boundaries of Portland Public Schools. The district with the second largest percentage of survey participants was Gresham-Barlow School District (12.5%), followed by Reynolds School District (6.3%).





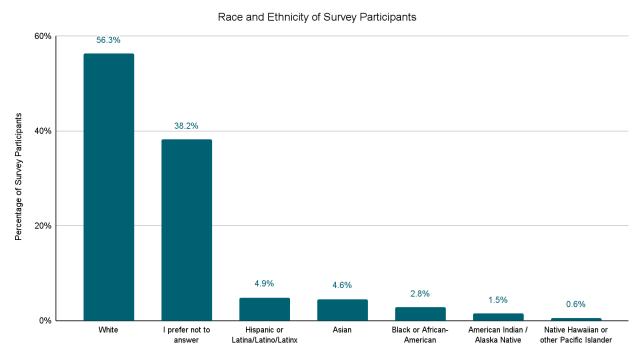




Survey participants were asked to report their race and/or ethnicity. They were not asked to report the racial and/or ethnic identities of their child(ren).

About 14% of participants identified as a person of color. A majority of survey participants (56.3%) identified as White. This includes participants who identified as White alone and White in combination with one or more other races or ethnicities. Nearly four out of ten participants chose not to respond to the race and ethnicity question in the survey.

**Exhibit 6. Survey Participants by Race and Ethnicity** 



Note: Participants were able to select more than one response option. Categories are not mutually exclusive.



# **Reasons for Homeschooling**

A total of 678 participants provided responses to the open-ended question "What was your primary reason for enrolling your student(s) in homeschool?". Responses were coded using a quantitative coding method in order to identify patterns in survey responses. Through this process, the following eight primary categories were identified:

- COVID-19 Pandemic/Comprehensive Distance Learning (CDL)
- Special Needs of the Child
- School Climate
- Curriculum Content
- Values, Religion, Politics
- Family Lifestyle
- Pedagogical Approach
- School Systems

For most primary categories, several subcategories were identified. Exhibit 7 provides a summary of response counts and percentages for each primary category and subcategory, along with sample quotes for each subcategory. While a response may be classified under more than one subcategory, a response was counted only once for each primary category. In addition, a response may have been classified under more than one primary category. This is because families reported multiple reasons for choosing to homeschool their child(ren).

The most common reasons stated for enrolling students in homeschooling were: COVID-19 Pandemic/CDL (37%), Special Needs of the Child (20%), and Pedagogical Approach (16%).

#### COVID-19 Pandemic and Comprehensive Distance Learning (CDL)

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact students, families, and schools across the country. This showed up in participant responses with COVID-19 and the impacts of the pandemic being the most frequently reported reason families shared for starting to homeschool their child(ren).

Nearly half (49%) of those who indicated the pandemic as a primary reason for starting to homeschool were still homeschooling at least one child at the time that they completed the survey.

Participants expressed concerns about the health and safety of their child(ren), as well as more vulnerable members of their households. Some families said that they chose to start



homeschooling to avoid distance or online learning. In addition, families mentioned a desire to provide stability for their child(ren) through homeschooling during a time of periodic school closures and changing requirements. A number of families specifically stated a preference for not 'masking' their child(ren) as their reason for starting to homeschool.

#### Special Needs of the Child

About 20% of families provided a reason related to the special needs of their child(ren) for why they started to homeschool. More specifically, families noted mental health concerns, their child's/children's behavior at school, and a need for their child(ren) to be more academically challenged as reasons for homeschooling.

Nearly one out of ten respondents indicated that their child's disability or health condition was a factor in their decision to homeschool. A number of these families reported a lack of resources and support for their student(s) at their prior schools.

#### **Pedagogical Approach**

Pedagogical approach, or a desire for more control over how their child is taught, was another common reason for homeschooling offered by survey participants. About 12% of respondents specifically mentioned being able to provide more individualized learning opportunities for their child(ren) and allowing their child(ren) to advance at their own pace as a driving factor in choosing to homeschool. Families also mentioned wanting to teach their child(ren) how to think critically and to incorporate more hands-on learning into their children(s) day.

**Exhibit 7. Reasons for Homeschooling** 

Category and Subcategories	Count	% of Total	Sample Quote
COVID-19 Pandemic / Comprehensive Distance Learning	253	37%	The pandemic prompted us to move to homeschool.
Special Needs of the Child	136	20%	
Child's needs not met in public school setting - general	26	4%	Public School is unable to meet her needs





Category and Subcategories	Count	% of Total	Sample Quote
Disability/Health/ Learning challenges	63	9%	Public school was a poor fit for our neurodivergent elder child. He has autism, pathological demand avoidance profile, and the special education supports were totally inappropriate for his needs.
Behavioral difficulties/ Behavioral support needs	6	1%	Student was not able to participate in regular school classrooms because of behavioral issues.
Mental Health/Social/ Emotional Difficulties	24	4%	Anxiety and panic attacks at public school.
Need for more challenge	29	4%	My child is above grade level and needed more of a challenge.
Emerging bilingual students	1	0%	My children didn't speak English, so it was hard for them to study online. Therefore, we transferred them to home schooling and took lessons from an English teacher.
Child asked to be homeschooled	7	1%	It was what my son asked for after third grade.
<b>School Climate</b>	72	11%	
School Climate-general	1	0%	School Climate.
Racism/Bias/ Discrimination	4	1%	A heightened awareness of how global racial polarization (anti-Black racism specifically) is and has ALWAYS adversely affected the outcomes for our Black children. Especially within the volatile learning environment manufactured by the system of Public Schooling! Including but not limited to the school to prison pipeline.
School Safety/ Bullying/Belonging	43	6%	Safety risks in public school such as increase in school shootings and violence and then COVID-19.
Learning Environment	18	3%	Academically, it was difficult for her to focus with the constant disruptions of some of the same students. The halls were completely chaotic and overall the apathy toward positive relationships and respect shown by students and some staff enforced the idea that I could provide a much calmer and studious behavior environment for my own child.
Peer influences	9	1%	To not be influenced by bad crowds.
Student-Teacher Relationships	11	2%	Certain school staff members were making my son's learning experience less than desirable and I want him to love learning, so I pulled him out of that environment.
Curriculum Content	72	11%	
Desire to have more control over curriculum and materials	73	11%	They have always been homeschooled because of the curriculum used in public schools.
Values, Religion, Politics	44	6%	
Political and social values	35	5%	The curriculum includes CRT (Critical Race Theory) and health education and does not align with our families beliefs and views.





Category and Subcategories	Count	% of Total	Sample Quote
Religion	15	2%	To share our Christian beliefs and worldview with our children.
Family Lifestyle	82	12%	
Better for family	6	1%	It fits our family's needs better.
Peers were homeschooling	2	0%	Most of the families we know were homeschooling at that time; and we were encouraged to do the same.
More family time	28	4%	Seeing my kids more, my kids have a better relationship with each other.
Ability to travel and live somewhere else	11	2%	I was homeschooling in Puerto Rico where my family and I lived. I preferred to continue doing it here so my kids continue with the language Spanish.
Flexibility/schedule	40	6%	So we can have family time and outings together. My husband's work schedule would have limited them to seeing each other a few hours a week otherwise.
Private school is cost prohibitive	4	1%	We cannot afford private school and felt homeschooling was the most attractive option.
Parent's personal reasons	12	2%	I started homeschooling because of the pandemic, but I continued because I loved it. I really enjoyed it.
Pedagogical Approach	109	16%	
Desire for more control over how child is taught	5	1%	I don't agree with how traditional schooling is structured and implemented.
Quality of education	12	2%	Higher quality of education.
Bilingual school not available	1	0%	Unavailable bilingual schools in my district.
Individualized Learning	83	12%	To individualize lessons based on strengths and areas to work on, and to better focus on each child's learning as they are an individual.
Development of critical-thinking skills	6	1%	We believe that in homeschooling we'll be better able to support the development of our kids' critical thinking skills and the cultivation of their curiosity than will a public school experience.
Experiential, hands-on learning, outside time	10	1%	Too much busy work and not enough hands-on learning.
School Systems	42	6%	
General dissatisfaction with public schools	14	2%	Didn't like our local school.
School Leadership/ Lack of trust in education system	11	2%	Don't trust curriculum or the schools.



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Category and Subcategories	Count	% of Total	Sample Quote
Transportation	1	0%	Unable to get our child to and from school due to work schedules. Also no bus service due to the proximity to Hollydale Elementary. But also too far for my 5 year old to walk on her own.
Class sizes/ Understaffed schools	13	2%	We thought one on one would be better than being in a large class with one teacher.
Another option not available (magnet school, private school, etc.)	3	0%	Wanting to enroll him in an alternative "magnet" program that had a waitlist.
Testing	4	1%	Standardized testing is increasing, and kids and staff are forced to comply with whatever comes down from the top.
Other Reasons	3	0%	Birthday is end of September and would have started "late" or been the youngest

Note: Participant responses could have been classified into more than one category and subcategory.



# **Homeschooling Resources**

Survey participants were asked to share what homeschool resources they found useful. Responses suggest that homeschooling families use a wide range of resources to facilitate their child's/children's education.

A total of 444 people responded to the question and offered 337 unique resources. Exhibit 8 outlines the ten most frequently mentioned resources.

In addition to specific curricula and instructional materials, homeschooling families shared that they value and make use of a number of public resources, including public libraries, parks and community centers. The Oregon Museum of Science and Industry (OMSI) was also mentioned frequently as a valued resource.

Exhibit 8. Top Ten Most Frequently Reported 'Useful' Homeschooling Resources among Survey Participants

Resource	Description	Count
Public Library	Survey participants reporting using the library for access to books, kits, Kanopy, tutoring options, and book clubs	
Khan Academy	Practice exercises and instructional videos for math, science, computing, history, art history, economics, and more	41
The Good and the Beautiful	Homeschool curriculum for multiple subjects and grade levels	36
OMSI / Oregon Homeschool Science Club	The Oregon Museum of Science and Industry (OMSI) offers science learning experiences through its museum exhibitions and public programs. The Oregon Homeschool Science Club is a 24-week long science course that takes place at OMSI with classes taught by OMSI science educators.	28
Outschool	Interactive online classes covering a range of topics	28
Abeka	Homeschool curriculum for multiple subjects and grade levels	27
Online school/ Other online classes		25
Singapore Math	Math curriculum and other instructional materials based in the Singapore math method	22
Facebook Groups / Other online parent support groups		20
Village Home Education Resource Center	Offers online and local in-person classes to supplement at-home homeschooling plans	18

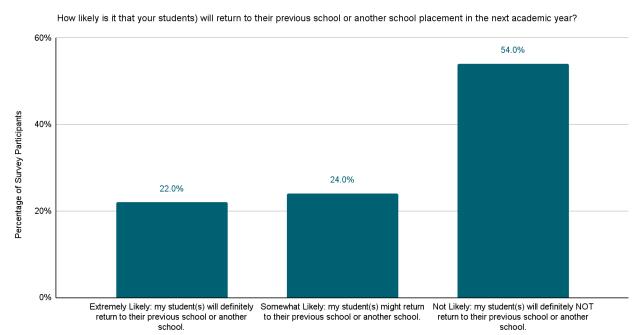


# Likelihood of Returning to Previous School or Another School Placement

Survey participants were asked to indicate the likelihood of their student returning to their previous school or another school placement in the next academic year. A total of 433 participants responded to this question, with a majority of respondents (54%) indicating that it is **not likely** that their student(s) will end homeschooling within the next year.

About one out of four respondents said that it is **somewhat likely** that their student(s) will return to their previous school or another school and another 22% said that it is **extremely likely**.

Exhibit 9. Survey Participants' Reported Likelihood of their Student(s) Returning to their Previous School or Another School Placement





### **Reasons for Ending Homeschooling**

A total of 212 survey participants indicated that they are no longer homeschooling their child(ren). Of those participants who are no longer homeschooling, 185 responded to the question 'What was your primary reason for ending homeschooling?'.

A majority of the reasons provided by families for ending homeschooling were related to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as vaccines being available for youth and cases being down in the community. Other reasons for ending homeschooling included:

- Enrollment in an Alternative Educational Option (charter school, private school, etc.)
- **Curriculum and Instruction:** not able to keep up with creating meaningful curriculum, challenges with behavior management at home, etc.
- Special Needs of Child: need for socialization, supportive services related to a
  disability, etc.
- Family Lifestyle: parent or guardian needing to work, moved locations, etc.

A summary of response counts and percentages for each primary category and subcategory, along with sample quotes for each subcategory can be found in the table below (Exhibit 10). While a response may be classified under more than one subcategory, a response was counted only once for each primary category. In addition, a response may have been classified under more than one primary category. This is because some families reported multiple reasons for ending homeschooling.

**Exhibit 10. Reasons for Ending Homeschooling** 

Category and Subcategories	Count	% of Total	Sample Quote
COVID-19/Pandemic	98	53%	
COVID-19 Vaccine/Masking requirements/Covid less of a concern	38	21%	They were able to get vaccinated, community covid cases decreased, and we felt comfortable from a public health perspective sending them back in person.
Returned to school	4	2%	Back to school.
School re-opened for in-person learning	62	34%	In-person school opened again.





Category and Subcategories	Count	% of Total	Sample Quote
Schools more organized	2	1%	Vaccinations and schools getting better organized and able to handle kids at school.
Never meant to be a long-term solution	6	3%	I knew going in that it would be temporary.
Enrolled in an Alternative Schooling Option	28	15%	
Enrolled in a dual credit program (ex. PCC Gateway to College Program)	5	3%	My children were old enough to attend early college and we chose that route at age 16 for each of them.
Enrolled in charter school	8	4%	We enrolled in a great online learning charter school.
Enrolled in private school	12	6%	Identified a private school that had a strong educational philosophy.
Found a school to attend- unspecified	6	3%	Found a suitable school for child.
Curriculum and Instruction	12	6%	Was not able to keep up with creating a meaningful curriculum.
Special Needs of the Child	39	21%	
Disability/supportive services	3	2%	During homeschooling time, it became clear that his ADHD was not conducive to independent or self-study.
Social-emotional needs of child/Need for socialization	26	14%	Too difficult, kids need social time w/ other kids.
Child asked to return	14	8%	He said he was ready to go back!
Concerns about child's needs resolved	5	3%	We homeschooled our child briefly because they were having problems with depression and anxiety. School was a major source of stress at that time, so we homeschooled them to eliminate that source of stress. Now that they are in a better place mentally, they have returned to school.
Family Lifestyle	27	15%	
Moved	7	4%	Moving back to the city.
Family schedule/ Parent needing to work	12	6%	We both needed to work temporarily.
Health/mental health of family	3	2%	Chronic illness in a parent.



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Category and Subcategories	Count	% of Total	Sample Quote
Family structure	3	2%	I am a single parent. It's too much to handle alone.
Not a good fit for family- other	3	2%	Not a good fit for our family.
Other Reasons	2	1%	

Note: Participant responses could have been classified into more than one category and subcategory.





### **Further Discussion**

The reasons families gave for homeschooling their child(ren) varied considerably. The most frequently reported reason provided was the COVID-19 pandemic, including related impacts of the pandemic such as Comprehensive Distance Learning and mask requirements in schools. It is without a doubt that COVID-19 has had a significant impact on students, families, and schools and that the pandemic continues to disrupt our educational systems. At the same time, with the pandemic moving towards endemic, it may be more useful to focus on the other reasons that families provided for choosing to homeschool. These findings may provide district leadership with information that they can use to make their schools more responsive to the needs of both homeschool and traditional school populations.

In particular, the percentage of families reporting to have chosen homeschooling because their child's individual needs were not being met in a mainstream school setting suggests opportunities for districts to modify and improve their programs to better meet the needs of students with disabilities, health conditions, mental health challenges, academic acceleration, etc.. More information may be needed to better understand how students' needs have not been met in order to inform programmatic changes.

Families' motivations for homeschooling related to pedagogical approach may also provide insight into the kinds of instructional methods that families value. Survey participants specifically mentioned individualized instruction as a reason for homeschooling, suggesting that families believe they can provide greater opportunities for personalized learning at home than what would be available in a mainstream school. Instructional methods that offer choice and encourage students to pursue their own interests, for example, could be considered by school districts, along with methods that facilitate students learning at their own pace.

Ultimately, homeschooling supports choice and enables families to pursue the educational format that best aligns with their values, their family lifestyle, and the needs of their child(ren). The information provided by families about what resources they have found useful may support districts and MESD in helping to ensure all families, including those who choose to homeschool, have access to quality educational resources.

To further explore some of these areas, MESD anticipates conducting one-on-one interviews in August 2022 with families who expressed interest in participating in a more in depth conversation. Additional analysis of this topic will be published after those interviews.



# Appendix A. Survey Instrument

### **Homeschool Survey**

1.	homeschooling?
	☐ 1 student
	☐ 2 students
	☐ 3 or more students
	□ None
	If you answered 'None', what was your primary reason for ending homeschooling?
2.	What was your primary reason for enrolling your student(s) in homeschool?
3.	What homeschool resources (ex. textbooks, instructional materials, websites, organizations, etc.) have you found useful?
4.	How likely is it that your student(s) will return to their previous school or another school placement in the next academic year?
	Extremely likely: my student(s) will definitely return to their previous school or another school.
	☐ Somewhat likely: my student(s) might return to their previous school or another school.
	□ Not likely: my student(s) <u>will definitely NOT return</u> to their previous school or another school.
	*Optional* Please explain your response to Question 4.



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5.	Which school district do you curre  Centennial	ntly live in? □ PPS		
	☐ Corbett	□ Reynolds		
	□ David Douglas	□ Riverdale		
	☐ Gresham-Barlow			
	☐ Parkrose			
	☐ Other (please specify)			
6.	*Optional* What is your race or et	hnicity? Please check all that apply.		
	☐ American Indian/ Alaska N	ative		
	☐ Asian			
	☐ Black or African American			
	☐ Hispanic or Latino/Latina/L	atinx		
	□ Native Hawaiian or other F	Pacific Islander		
	☐ White			
	□ I prefer not to answer			
	☐ Something else (please sp	ecify)		





#### Resources

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