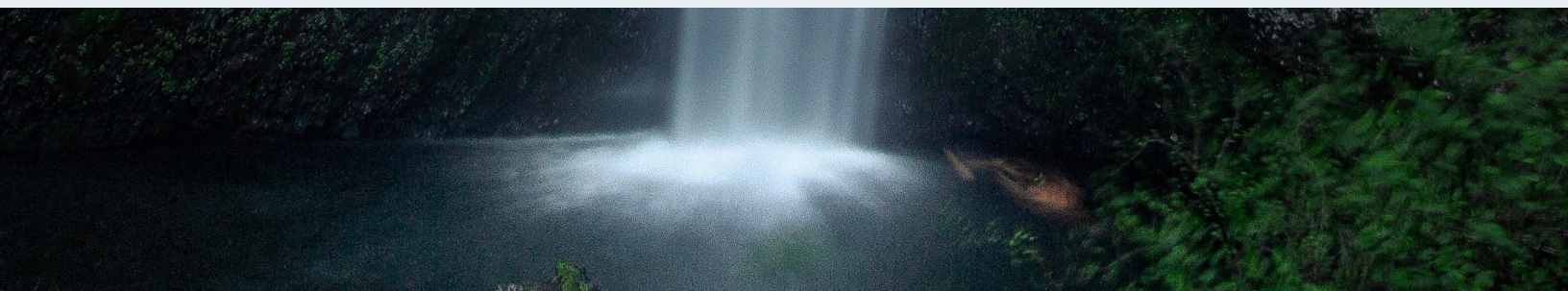




Multnomah Education Service District

Interviews with Homeschooling Families — Winter 2023



Interviews with Homeschooling Families

Introduction and Overview

In the United States, K-12 educational options and requirements vary depending upon the state. While families may not choose whether to educate their children, they may choose where their children are educated, within certain parameters.¹ Homeschooling is an option available across all states, but the requirements for programming vary between states.²

In Oregon families may elect to homeschool their child at any time, and for any duration. When making this decision, families are required to 'notify' their local Education Service District (ESD) upon withdrawing from public or private school, or prior to the start of the child's first grade year.³

As homeschooling is a private option in Oregon, it is not supported with public funds. Resident public districts pay for the maintenance and administration of the homeschool notification system, but do not receive any state or federal funds for students who are enrolled in homeschooling. Families electing to homeschool, are responsible for all educational expenses associated with homeschooling, including curriculum and testing. Special education or other related services are available through their resident district at no charge, but families must register with the resident district to access these resources.

Multnomah ESD provides homeschooling notification for all students living in Multnomah County in accordance with ORS 339.010 and OAR 581-021-0026(4). Initially this system was paper based but in 2017, MESD updated and expanded the system to provide a more comprehensive and user friendly notification process. With this update, MESD expanded outreach to homeschool families to notify them of services such as faster access to homeschool verification reports, testing updates, website resources, and links to homeschool related organizations and homeschool FAQs.

Between the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years, new homeschool registrations increased by 272% or from 446 to 1659 new registrations. During the 2021-22 school year, MESD received notification of 835 new homeschool registrations.

Recognizing that many more people were reaching out for resources and providing notification, MESD sought to learn more about family experiences with homeschooling and opportunities for better support from MESD. To accomplish this, MESD invited all families registered with MESD for homeschooling to participate in a brief survey about their experiences and motivations for

¹ [Pierce v. Society of Sisters :: 268 U.S. 510 \(1925\)](#)

² <https://hslida.org/>

³ ORS 339.010 and OAR 581-021-0026(4)

homeschooling. In total, 680 families participated in the survey, resulting in a 25.3% participation rate. A full report and summary of findings from the Homeschooling Survey can be found [here](#). Based on this initial survey, twenty families were selected for additional focused discussions about homeschooling in Multnomah County. These one-on-one interviews were conducted in August 2022.

MESD Focus Interviews with Homeschooling Families

Purpose of the Interviews

After reviewing the feedback from the April 2022 MESD Homeschool Survey, several trends emerged. These trends included family motivations for homeschooling and their service needs while homeschooling. Survey trends also hinted at the impact of resident school services prior to, during and after homeschooling. To deepen our understanding of those identified trends and the lived experiences of homeschooling families in our region, MESD conducted one-on-one parent interviews with homeschooling families. These interviews focused on the interviewee's priorities, as well as their perceptions of gaps in resources and support.

The interviews were not intended to generate data generalizable to the entire homeschooling population in Multnomah County, but rather to (1) contextualize findings from the Homeschooling Survey, (2) develop new learnings from the stories of interview participants, and (3) highlight the diversity of experiences across homeschooling families. Using MESD's Equity Lens,⁴ interviews were conducted with an intentional focus on families with a child with a disability and/or another historically or presently marginalized identity.

Four questions guided the interviews with homeschooling families:

- What are the experiences of families of students with an IEP/disability 1) prior to homeschooling and 2) while homeschooling?
- What sources of support are homeschooling families accessing? What are the barriers to support experienced by homeschooling families?
- How are homeschooling families identifying curriculum?
- In what ways could MESD better support homeschooling families in our region?

Findings were intended to guide improved and/or expanded homeschooling support and offer further insights to Multnomah County districts and schools that might inform their practices.

⁴ <https://www.multnomahesd.org/board-equity.html>

Methods

One-on-one interviews were conducted with select homeschooling families in Multnomah County. Interview participants were recruited during the administration of the April 2022 Homeschool Survey with 181 homeschooling parents or guardians indicating that they would be willing to participate in a follow up interview.

Interview participants were selected using purposive sampling. Based on survey trends suggesting a child's disability as a factor in many families' decision to start homeschooling, we prioritized families with students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) in order to learn more about their experiences prior to and during homeschooling. In addition, participants were selected to ensure to the extent possible a diverse group of parents and guardians in terms of neighborhood school district and child demographics beyond IEP status, including race, ethnicity, and gender.

Interviews were conducted in August 2022 and were facilitated by MESD's Sr. Research and Data Administrator/Analyst. A second MESD staff member was also present during each interview to take notes and assist with facilitation. Interview questions were developed with input from colleagues in educational services and special education services. Each interview took approximately 30 min to 1 hour to complete. Participants were provided with a \$25 gift card to Amazon or Target as a token of appreciation for their time and insights. To assist with coding interview transcripts, Dedoose was used.

Participants

Of the 21 parents or guardians selected and invited to participate, 11 took part in an interview. All participants were currently homeschooling at least one child when the interview took place. A majority (8 out of 11) participants reported homeschooling one child, one participant reported homeschooling two children, and two participants reported homeschooling three or more children.

# of Children Homeschooled	% of Overall Homeschool Population*	# of Interviewees
One	51%	8
Two	34%	1
Three or more	15%	3

**Based on April 2022 survey*

Most participants (6 out of 11) currently live in neighborhoods served by Portland Public Schools, which is reflective of the number of homeschool students residing in Portland Public.

Two participants live in neighborhoods served by Reynolds School District, and one participant lives in a neighborhood served by each of the following: Centennial School District, Gresham-Barlow School District, and Parkrose School District.

Home District	% of Overall Homeschool Population*	# of Interviewees
Centennial	7%	1
Corbett	2%	0
David Douglas	9%	0
Gresham Barlow	18%	1
Parkrose	3%	1
Portland Public	50%	6
Reynolds	11%	2
Riverdale	0%	0

**As of November 14, 2022; Based on MESD's Homeschool Registration*

Ten out of eleven participants reported homeschooling at least one child having at least one marginalized identity. Most participants (6 out of 11) reported homeschooling at least one child with a disability. The racial and ethnic identities of participants' children varied. One participant reported the racial or ethnic background of their child/children as American Indian/Alaska Native, one as Black or African American, one as Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx, four as Multiracial, three as white, and one preferred not to identify. Two participants reported homeschooling at least one child who identifies as LGBTQ2SIA+. Another two participants reported speaking a language other than English in the home.

Youth Identities	# of Families
Child with disabilities	6
LGBTQ2SIA+	2
English Language Learner/Multilingual	2
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1
Black/African American	1
Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx	1

Multiracial	4
White	3
Race not disclosed	1

Interview Instrument and Protocol

All participants completed a short demographic questionnaire, as well as an electronic consent form. We used a semi-structured interview protocol to guide the individual interviews. The complete interview protocol can be found in [Appendix A](#).

The individual interviews took place via Zoom. Prior to beginning an audio recorded interview, the facilitator reviewed the purpose of the interviews and confirmed that the participant had read and understood the electronic consent form, which included permission to be audio recorded. All interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed for the purposes of data analysis.

Data Analysis

Transcripts from the individual interviews were uploaded to Dedoose, qualitative data analysis software. In the first cycle of coding, index codes were applied reflecting the interview and research questions. Examples of first-cycle codes include: identifying curriculum, experiences of students with disabilities, sources of support, and recommendations. In the second cycle of coding, more fine-grained codes were applied to subsections of the transcripts. Examples of second-cycle codes include: child-driven learning, recommendations from friends/family, and financial considerations. These codes were reviewed and organized to identify common themes represented across interviews, relationships within and between concepts, and differences in participant narratives.

Key Findings

The findings in this section are meant to provide insights into the experiences of homeschooling families in Multnomah County. Findings are organized based on the four questions that guided our interviews.

It should be noted that, due to the small sample size, the experiences and priorities described in this report may not reflect those of the entire homeschooling population in our region. Participants were selected due to specific characteristics and questions that emerged from the April 2022 Homeschooling Survey.

What are the experiences of families of students with an IEP/disability 1) prior to homeschooling 2) in homeschooling?

In the April 2022 survey, nearly one out of ten respondents to the MESD Homeschool Survey indicated that their child's disability or health condition was a factor in their decision to homeschool. A number of these families also reported a lack of resources and support for their student(s) at their prior schools.

Based on these findings, we prioritized families with students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) when selecting interview participants in order to learn more about their experiences prior to and during homeschooling. Six participants reported homeschooling at least one child with a disability. They offered insights into their own and their child's experiences in public schools, and noted challenges and highlights about what is working for their child in homeschooling.

Experiences with Education Prior to Homeschooling

Accessing IEP Services: Participants reported experiencing difficulties in getting an IEP for their child. Among families with at least one child with an IEP, some noted that the services were not effective for their learners. Others described resistance from teachers and other school staff in providing accommodations outlined in their child's IEP.

"I had to really, really do some fighting at that meeting. And so the whole system is just a big fight. If you have a special education... And I have heard this from so many parents. So many parents say the same thing I do...you've got to fight tooth and nail to get the services your child needs."

"Yeah, even just getting the IEP was a lot of work...And once you get the IEP, you're still being delivered services, pretty much in the same framework that regular education was happening in. And then nobody likes being taken out of class for additional reading support. That just highlights that you're not reading and everyone else is."

"I learned so much about what he's capable of during those two years of the pandemic. I wish I'd known this earlier. I wish some teachers had caught this earlier. Teachers in the public schools knew he had an IEP and they knew that he had some learning disabilities and challenges with math, but they didn't know how to help him. In fact, the SPED teacher said that."

"And when we got to fourth grade, the teacher, she's an older lady and she completely disregarded the IEP. And again, she had no problem talking to me every single day after class with the litany of all the things that [child's name] did wrong that day, but she wasn't making any accommodations. Not even the ones that are legally required."

Student-Teacher Relationships: Participants' comments suggest the critical role that student-teacher relationships play in supporting a child's ability to learn, particularly for students with disabilities. Comments further suggest that the nature of a child's relationship with their teacher may be a factor in a family's decision to begin homeschooling.

"...his teacher was super supportive and would let him, as she put it, would let him turtle along and would kind of tailor the demand to what he was able to do. But with the beginning of third grade, he had a new teacher. It was a wonderful, wonderful teacher, but he didn't have a prior relationship with this teacher. And so, we were having a hard time getting him just to do a single thing during the day."

"It was so hard to watch her falling behind and knowing that some of it is just stubbornness and the other part of it is them not understanding her. And she was starting to be labeled a troublemaker."

"Her second grade teacher was incredibly caring and supportive and kids can tell if the teacher doesn't like them. And [3rd grade teacher's name] sort of liked her, but he definitely didn't like me."

School Staff Responsiveness to Parents: Several participants described situations in which there was a perceived lack of openness or responsiveness among school staff to their insights into how to best support their child. One participant compared her experience after transferring her child from a public to private school, noting that the private school staff seemed to have greater capacity to listen to what she thought her child needed.

"And the para educator wouldn't really talk to me either. And I'm like, 'I'm not expecting a sit down conversation with you every other week or something, but I do have some insight into how my daughter learns and how she behaves and how to remind her to behave properly...'"

"The private school had a smaller classroom size and that was a good choice... Because the classroom size is smaller, even though they don't have the IEPs, they were very open to listening to what I thought... The accommodations I thought he needed."

Well-meaning and Overwhelmed: Participants acknowledged the good intentions of teachers and other school staff. At the same time, they also mentioned systemic barriers to their child's needs being met, such as large class sizes and a lack of educator preparedness to provide accommodations for students with disabilities.

"...when you've got kids that are on either end of the spectrum, there's very little room for them... And I don't blame the teachers. I think they are doing the best they can. But my sons, both of them kind of fell through the cracks."

"And even the few times there were some successes, they would push him to do more. It was

like, 'Let's just do one more question.' And he'd answer it. And then they'd be like, 'Okay, let's do another.' And everyone was really well meaning, but the way it was being done, CDL was being done, it was just a disaster for him."

"One of the things that I've definitely noticed is that a lot of the people who do sort of wash out of the public school system are the IEP kids... It's really hard. And I know it's really hard because their class size is just what it is. And the older teachers struggle with thinking about doing it a different way when they've done it the same way for so long."

"Well, unfortunately for that teacher, she had done special education, so they put all of the kids [with IEPs] in there. It's like, oh my God, you can't do a regular class and then have all your problem kids in one place. They overwhelmed the woman. "

Experiences Homeschooling

Adapting Instruction for Learner: Participants described ways in which homeschooling created opportunities for their child(ren) to receive educational instruction adapted to their unique learning needs. A couple participants also provided examples of providing targeted instruction to address gaps in their child's learning.

"Right now I'm attending a workshop on homeschooling that's taught from the PDA perspective, which is the profile of autism he has, and different approaches that work for that."

"He was the first to be diagnosed with ADHD. And for him sitting still did not happen. He was a very experiential learner, very hands on. And he also was very emotional, very sensitive and had a lot of trouble sleeping at night. So he did not wake up until 10:00 or 11:00 on a regular basis."

"He needed to learn the basics: addition, subtraction, multiplication, division. All of that had been missed in public school. So part of the anxiety is a kid like mine, if they miss that and they're still moving through the grades, they're trying to play catch up and... It's just impossible if you don't have those basic building blocks. He's got those now."

Barriers to Accessing IEP Services: No participant reported that they were currently accessing IEP services through a local public school. Participants' reasons for not accessing accommodation varied, including a perceived lack of effectiveness of services offered, a perceived lack of openness to providing services to homeschooling families, and limited flexibility in how services are provided. One participant also noted receiving supportive services through a culturally relevant mental health provider.

"They reached out at one point, just to offer additional services. But again, the services they are offering weren't helping. They were making things worse... Everyone was doing the best

they could in the framework they had, but the methods they have aren't effective for our learner."

"I did [stay in touch with her IEP team] in the first month or two [of homeschooling], but it wasn't specifically stated, but it seemed very clear that it's like, 'If you are withdrawn from school, we have no resources to spend on you.'"

"So he does have a current IEP. And the school did offer even as a homeschool student for him to have some services, which to this point I have declined. But I would say that is not because I don't want them. It's because the schedule is so rigid. We don't school on the school calendar. And it's kind of one of those, you either have to be part of the program or not part of the program. You can't just disappear for a month when you're not doing school for a month or you're traveling for a month instead. And that is super limiting."

What sources of support are homeschooling families accessing? What are the barriers to support experienced by homeschooling families?

The findings from the interviews will be used to improve and/or expand on homeschooling supports provided by MESD. It was, therefore, important for us to learn what supports homeschooling families are currently accessing, where supports are being accessed, and where there might be gaps or barriers in order to identify supports that will supplement, rather than supplant, what is already available.

Sources of Support

Interview participants mentioned a number of different resources that they access for support in homeschooling. The table below shows the frequency and combination of sources mentioned by interview participants.

Table 1. Sources of Support by Interview Participant

Sources of Support	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11
Friends/Family		X	X			X	X			X	X
Village Home Education Resource Center	X				X			X		X	X
Homeschooling Communities	X		X							X	X
Local Public School						X		X	X		X
Online Communities	X		X		X				X		
Online Resources/blogs	X				X	X					X
Supportive Services (ex. Community-based orgs)						X	X				X
Religious-based Communities			X							X	

Note: P1 = Interview Participant 1, P2 = Interview Participant 2, etc.

Friends and Family: The most frequently mentioned resource was friends and family. Participants spoke about receiving curriculum recommendations, implementing lesson plans together, and how friends and family have served as a source of encouragement and emotional support.

“The best resource I have is a neighbor who has been homeschooling from the very beginning. She was a cheerleader on the side. She was instrumental in helping me. Just having somebody else say, “You’ve got this, you can do it. Of course this is hard.” She was a cheerleader all along. You can also find that online, but I had her. So I was really lucky. One of her children is also the same age as my son. We had a friend built in and we were able to do some schooling together. That was also huge because my son is super social and I was really worried about the social part.”

Homeschool Resource Groups: Participants also mentioned homeschooling communities and resources specific to homeschooling families, namely the [Village Home Education Resource Center](#). Village Home offers online and local in-person classes to supplement at-home homeschooling plans, and also aims to foster community connections through regular social events for families.

In addition to Village Home, participants spoke about accessing homeschooling hiking groups, joining Park Days for homeschooling families, and involvement in a swim team, girl scout troop, OMSI programs, and book clubs specifically for homeschooling youth. While some of these

activities are geared towards children, participants noted the value of also being able to network and meet other parents in these spaces. Additionally, Several participants referenced engagement with online homeschooling groups, such as Facebook groups for Portland homeschoolers, secular homeschoolers, and Portland Unschoolers.

“We also are a part of the OMSI homeschool program. So they take all of their science classes there and that has been amazing. A lot of the parents that I network with there, they are who I hear all of everything else like, ‘Oh, have you tried out this website for reading? Have you tried out this place for math?’”

Local Schools: Several participants shared ways in which their local public school or district is a source of support for them in homeschooling. A couple participants mentioned that they’ve accessed their district’s website to learn about curriculum standards and to get lesson plan ideas. Others shared that their child has been able to engage in sports and other afterschool activities through their child’s former public school.

“I also know that you can go online and you can find Portland Public Schools. What is it? The standards, what each grade is supposed to be learning and meeting, the standards. Not everybody knows that’s out there. That’s super helpful.”

“Well, for the social part. He’s a sports kid. So tons of afterschool sports and that’s how it turned out we had the social connection. We were able to continue with his sports team for basketball.”

Barriers to Support

All of the interview participants named at least one barrier to accessing support that they’ve experienced. Common barriers related to the identities of participants and/or their child(ren), and participants’ experiences with their local public school.

Family Demographics: Participants described ways in which their identities and/or their child’s identities have impacted their ability to access support. One participant shared that the lack of racial diversity in the homeschooling community can be a barrier to finding community. Others noted that it can be challenging for families who are not Christian, families with older children, and families with neurodiverse children to find community among homeschooling families.

“Anytime we see a BIPOC family, we’re like, ‘Oh my God,’ we gravitate to one another. We want to build that community and we are friends with them. We got to stick together. And it’s empowering, too, because then you just also don’t feel so alone in this because you can also feel alone in this as a family of color because there’s a lack of diversity in the homeschool world just as much as there is in the public school world.”

Lack of Information and Inclusion from Public Schools: Participants spoke about how a lack of information limited their ability to access resources provided by their local schools including sports, supplemental classes, and before or after school activities. Some participants also described feeling unwelcome by school staff and administrators.

"I don't know if the public school has something where she could go in for some kind of music class or anything like that... But we just don't know how to connect with them or how to find out about those things. And if they'd even work with us."

"The athletic directors or whomever, they haven't been responsive which makes it really hard. And the information posted isn't always up to date or clear so that it just was really difficult, but we figured it out."

"We have no idea if there's any support available to us from his public school, just because we're not a part of it. I do know a couple of parents who went through charters to get some of their Village Home classes paid for and that they do charter schooling online... But the public school system itself, it's not at all obvious that you guys want anything to do with us."

How are homeschooling families identifying curriculum?

Responses to the April 2022 MESD Homeschooling Survey suggest that homeschooling families use a wide range of resources to facilitate their child's/children's education. A total of 444 survey participants offered 337 unique resources that they considered to be useful.

These responses raised questions about how homeschooling families in our region are identifying curriculum, as well as what considerations influence their curriculum-related decisions. Interview participants offered insights into their processes for identifying curriculum. They noted specific considerations tied to their child's identities and/or family values, financial considerations, and considerations related to the interests and learning styles of their child/children.

Insights into Homeschooling Families' Processes for Identifying Curriculum

Trial and Error: Interview participants described a process of "trial and error" when it comes to identifying curriculum. They mentioned testing out educational materials or curricula until they find something that aligns with their child's interests and/or learning preferences.

"And then with math, it was again, having talked to people over many years, we have probably six different types of math curriculum. And we've tried them with various kids over the years just to see if any of it sticks."

"So, yeah, sometimes it's like, 'Try this, see if it sparks interest.' If it doesn't, we can just toss it out."

"I did some searching. I did some of the low picking fruit and I said, well, look, here's Khan. What's the other one? IXL. We looked at some of them just to say, there's this, and she tested all those, and was like, oh God, no. These are just terrible."

"...it's still a lot of time invested. And I know a lot of these have samples, but you don't really know until you try it. So it's a lot of trial and error, and that is expensive."

"At co-op, they had a curriculum exchange or just free boxes of curriculum, and so I picked up quite a few things for free out of there and had a chance to try them, and if they didn't work, just drop them back in the box, and if they did work, use them for free."

Recommendations from Friends, Family, and Homeschooling Communities: Participants mentioned using recommendations from friends, family, and homeschooling communities to build their curriculum. Other sources mentioned by participants include online resources, such as homeschooling blogs; and curriculum and standards from their child's former school.

"And I think even now I still talk to people. Like the program I mentioned that I'm looking at doing with. It's actually my two high schoolers. It's a program that friends recommended."

"The Facebook homeschool groups, especially the secular eclectic academic one that is focused on curriculum was really helpful."

"Oh, my brother shared this, he put her on something called Generation Genius, which is a computer science thing, and she just loves it."

"...actually a lot of our family. They are teachers and they will always share with me and my partner like, 'Oh, for Spanish, a lot of students are really liking this program.'"

Child-Driven Learning: A couple interview participants described their approach as unschooling with their child's interests primarily driving what is learned and how. The term 'unschooling' was coined in the 1970's by John Holt. Holt advocated for child-directed learning and placing less emphasis on testing.⁵

While not identifying as unschoolers, other participants noted at least some of their curricula being identified based on what their child asked for.

"We're doing probably what could be closest described as unschooling, but we do a little bit of reading and a little bit of math instruction. We have to change it up frequently, to kind of keep some novelty with it. But yeah, it has to be really low demand, low perceived demand. And to do that best is just to make it interest-based versus curriculum-based."

⁵ <https://time.com/6151375/black-families-homeschooling/>

“Doing it without a curriculum, especially was important, for me, because I do believe in a child's right to follow their instincts and just follow their interests.”

“I also asked her...she would say, "I'm really bad at this," or "I really want to know this". And again, she's not the kind of unschooling kid where she would just suddenly teach herself something. No. It was me. It was parent-driven. But certainly, listening to her.”

Considerations Influencing Curriculum-related Decisions

Interview participants noted a variety of considerations that influence their curriculum-related decisions. These considerations include identity-related considerations, such as considerations related to their child's racial or cultural identity, disability, and/or religion; financial considerations; and considerations stemming from their child's interests or learning style.

Identity-related Considerations: Interview participants described different ways that their child's identities and/or family values play a role in choosing learning resources and curricula. Parents emphasized the importance of culturally specific curricula and educational materials with diverse representation. Parents of students with disabilities also highlighted curricula, instructional strategies, and other resources that they had found to support their child's learning needs. One interview participant mentioned the challenges of finding secular or non-religious-based curriculum.

“So I'm Latina and my partner's Black. And so it is very important for us for our kids to grow up also learning about different cultures, different African American figures, different Central American countries, not just Mexico.”

“And then the other piece that's really hard... in searching for curriculum was... weeding out all the ones that were religious based...The other thing is a lot you have to read them very carefully for whitewashing.”

“Teachers Pay Teachers, they have a lot of Black created curriculum on... There was one that was on a history of hip hop...I just Googled on [Teachers Pay Teachers] Black providers...not only to support Black teachers, but also to see what's being put out there.”

“There's a program called all about reading and all about spelling, both of which are supposed to be really good for people with dyslexia”

“I knew I needed support with math with him because he's so far behind. I was able to find a tutor who specializes in working with kids with dyscalculia. She turned out to be amazing.”

Financial Considerations: Interview participants noted the cost of educational materials as a factor in their curriculum-related decisions.

"I think at first I went to the thrift store and I looked for what I could find used cheap because price was a big issue. I looked online, and in kindergarten there was one...that they gave you a free sampling of their worksheets, and so we used those a lot just because I didn't have a lot of money for it. Then I went on Amazon and I looked for what I could find the cheapest..."

"... before Willamette [Connections Academy], just finding the resources that wasn't going to cost us a ton of money. Really Willamette was the one thing that is basically a public access, because otherwise you're paying your own money for the resources."

Child's Interests and/or Learning Style: Almost all interview participants mentioned taking into account their child's interests and/or learning styles when choosing curriculum.

"Just seeing a lot of the sites, going on hikes, things like that. It was a lot more hands on experiences for them. And service projects and things like that. So very, very hands on because especially my son, that's what he needed."

"Marine biology is not something that a fifth grader is doing in Portland Public Schools, but we're going to do it because he's excited about it. I have in the back of my mind, this thought of when he does go back to school, I'm not exactly sure how this is going to work, but I'm not going to worry about it for the moment."

"I thought creatively in terms of, well, she likes to cook. Okay. People say, "Oh, you teach math through cooking," I didn't actually find that was true, but it gave me a hook to start thinking how else do we do math?"

Recommendations from Homeschooling Families

When asked about what MESD could do to better support homeschooling families in our region, participants offered a number of suggestions including: greater access to information, support with identifying curriculum, access to public school resources, and social and skill-building opportunities for families, among others.

Parent Recommendation 1: Access to Information

All participants indicated a need for more communication and improved access to information relevant to homeschooling families. Participants noted a desire for more readily available information relating to processes and guidelines, resources in the community, and approaches to homeschooling.

Participants asked for a centralized location for information, such as [MESD's website](#). Another participant suggested an email notification from MESD confirming receipt of registration and providing resources and other information about where families can access updated and

ongoing support. One participant further emphasized the importance of accessible and translated communication materials.

Processes and Guidelines: Participants expressed needing information about processes and guidelines. Specifically, participants shared that the following information would be helpful:

- Homeschooling registration requirements for families
- What public school resources (ex. Classes, extracurricular programs, IEP services, etc.) are available to homeschooling families and how to access them (ex. Contact information, schedules, etc.)
- Testing requirements, timelines, and where to get testing done
- How to transition your child back to public school, including who to contact, any requirements that need to be met, and what families can do now to ensure that transitioning back is an option for their child in the future
- Graduation/diploma options

Other Resources: Participants expressed an interest in more information about what resources are available to homeschooling families in the community, such as programs offered through community-based organizations, libraries, OMSI, etc.

Approaches to Homeschooling: A couple participants mentioned that information about different approaches to homeschooling (ex. Unschooling, democratic schools, etc.) could be helpful to families getting started. Another participant suggested clearly defining the differences between homeschooling and charter schools.

Parent Recommendation 2: Curriculum Supports

Participants indicated needing assistance with identifying and paying for curriculum. They also mentioned an interest in finding ways to obtain used curriculum (ex. Curriculum swaps).

Parent Recommendation 3: Access to Public School Resources⁶

In addition to wanting more information about what public school resources are available to homeschooling families, participants noted a desire for expanded access to public school resources, such as access to school libraries and assistive technology for students with disabilities.

Recommendation 4: Meet-ups and Skill-building for Families

A few participants suggested that meet-ups or parent nights for homeschooling families would be helpful in creating a space where they could ask questions, get ideas about what is working or has worked for other families in the past, and build connections with other homeschooling

⁶ Please see note under Next Steps: Communication.

families. Participants also noted opportunities for skill-building, such as organizational skills, how to set a homeschooling schedule, math instruction, and approaches to supporting learners with disabilities.

Recommendation 5: Other Recommendations

Other recommendations from participants included: tutoring and other activities for students, support with access to technology (ex. Chromebooks), testing resources, and a high school diploma program for homeschooled students that would enable students to receive a high school diploma for education completed through homeschooling.

For the most part, districts and states across the country do not issue high school diplomas for homeschooled students. Legislation in Pennsylvania, however, offers students multiple paths to a state-recognized diploma,⁷ and homeschoolers in North Dakota may be issued a diploma through a child's school district of residence.⁸

Next Steps

Increase Communication with Families:

A clear trend, based on the recommendations of parents (noted above) is a need to increase visibility and access to homeschool information. Some of the resources requested are currently available. In other cases, the requests are counter to current Oregon homeschool regulations. For example, parents expressed concern about access to public school resources such as athletics and assistive technology (note Parent Recommendation 3: Access to Public School Resources). In many cases these are already available, although with some restrictions. Oregon law currently allows students who are homeschooled to participate in interscholastic activities, such as athletics, music, and speech, at their resident school. School districts may, in addition, adopt policies to allow homeschooled students to take academic courses. IEP teams within districts are further obligated by Oregon law to consider providing special education and related services to a child with a disability in conjunction with homeschooling; however, the decision of whether or not to provide services is an IEP team decision.⁹

It is important to note that school districts do not receive funding for students who are homeschooled. School districts may receive partial funding for a homeschooling student who takes academic courses at their resident school. However there is currently no public funding source for supports and services provided to homeschooled students.

⁷https://web.archive.org/web/20150905112348/http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/home_education_and_private_tutoring/20311/diplomas/974322

⁸<https://www.nd.gov/dpi/parentscommunity/parents/home-education/home-education-frequently-asked-questions>

⁹ <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/learning-options/HomeSchool/Pages/infofordistricts.aspx>

Families also shared a desire for acknowledgement of their homeschool notification/registration. This is something that already exists, as it is required by law. However, the request from parents highlights that current practice may not be sufficient.

Next Step Action Items:

- Send twice annual “acknowledgements” of homeschool status to families via email and in paper form. Currently this occurs at registration and at the beginning of every school year.
- Provide a “welcome” or FAQ packet with registration acknowledgements that includes an overview of resources and basic information about homeschool rights and responsibilities.

Information/Resource Sessions:

Families shared a desire for access to more resources, including curriculum.

Next Step Action Items:

- Host annual information and resources sessions in the fall that include information about some homeschool advocacy and support providers; Oregon legal rights and requirements; curriculum swaps and curriculum highlights.

Increase Feedback Loop:

Next Step Action Items:

- Send out the general feedback surveys annually in the spring and conduct focus groups interviews every two years.

Learn More

To learn more about homeschool resources at MESD, please visit
www.multnomahesd.org/homeschool

Questions about this report should be directed to **Amanda Shannahan**, Senior Research and Data Analyst or Christine Otto, Senior Educational Services Administrator

Appendix A. Interview Protocol

Introduction: Hello and welcome. Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. My name is Amanda Shannahan and I will be facilitating our conversation. Assisting me is _____. The purpose of our conversation is to learn more about your experience with homeschooling, what motivated you to start homeschooling, and what kinds of support could be useful to you and other homeschooling families in Multnomah County.

Thank you for completing the consent form ahead of time. Do you have any questions about anything that was included in the consent form?

Before we get into the questions, could you please fill out a short demographic questionnaire. I will put the link to the questionnaire in the chat.

Please keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions I'm about to ask. We are really just interested in your opinions and your perspectives on your own experiences. You don't have to answer every question. Also, feel free to return to a question or add to a previous answer if something comes up for you.

_____ will be taking notes to help us remember what you said. We will also be recording the audio from our session because we don't want to miss any of your comments. If you happen to share a name, that's ok. No names or other identifying information will be included in any reports.

Do you have any questions for me?
Ok, let's get started.

<Start Recording>

Warm-up question: Can you please share how long you've been homeschooling and what you like most about homeschooling your child/children?

With the next set of questions, we'd like to learn more about how you got started with homeschooling.

- How did you make the decision to start homeschooling your child?
 - Were there any key people or a particular experience that influenced your decision to homeschool?

We're also interested in learning more about your teaching practices and what practices you've found useful in supporting your child's learning.

- How would you describe your approach to teaching?
 - What kinds of activities, lessons, practices have you found useful in supporting your child's learning?
 - Can you describe a lesson that your child really enjoyed?
 - **[follow-up for families who have experience in public schools]** How do these practices compare to your child's experiences in previous public school settings?
 - What skills do you use on a regular basis as a teacher?
 - Is there anything that you've found useful in building your skills as a teacher?
 - Can you talk about your process for identifying curriculum?

MESD is interested in exploring ways that we can support homeschooling families in our region.

- Can you describe any challenges that you've experienced in homeschooling?
 - How can MESD better support homeschooling families in our region?
 - Are there any trainings or workshops that would be valuable to you?

Lastly, we'd like to learn a little bit about your connection to community and supports to help us better understand what kinds of communities and supports already exist for homeschooling families (and also where there might be gaps).

- To what extent would you consider yourself a part of a homeschooling community?
 - Can you describe this community?
 - In what ways has this community supported or benefited you?

Is there anything that we didn't ask that you'd like to share?

Before we wrap up, we have one final question...

- Do you intend to continue homeschooling? And, if not, what can your child's school do to best support their transition back to public school?

Thank you so much, again, for speaking with us today and sharing about your experience. If you have any questions or if you'd like to share some additional thoughts, please feel free to contact me.