Like many parents of gifted children who educate at home, I am an accidental homeschooler. When I took my daughter out of school, I had only just started learning about giftedness and had never heard the term twice-exceptional. Having never known a homeschooler, I started homeschooling in crisis mode and found myself piecing together information from both gifted and homeschooling resources.

Homeschooling has become increasingly more acceptable in society, and more parents of gifted children are considering whether homeschooling would better meet the educational needs of their children. This is a complex decision with considerations that encompass not only academics, but also issues such as family dynamics and financial needs.

Could You Be a Homeschooler?
The most fundamental question parents need to ask is whether homeschooling is a good fit for the existing family structure. For example, one spouse will have to cut back or completely stop working outside the home. This choice is unacceptable or impractical for some families while others might see ways to accommodate this change; for example, they create staggered work times so that both spouses can continue their careers or make lifestyle changes that minimize the loss of income. Parents removing children from private school sometimes consider the tuition savings as the homeschooling spouse’s “salary.”

Another question that parents of gifted children wrestle with is whether they are the best teacher for their voracious learners. This is a complex question that deserves some consideration. It is true that certified teachers are supposed to be able to work with a variety of children, but on the other hand, no one knows your child as well as you do. It is also the case that your child’s teacher is unlikely to have received training in gifted education (Webb, Gore, Amend, & DeVries, 2007). Furthermore, homeschoolers are less likely to have a teacher/student relationship with their children.
and are more likely to follow a mentor, facilitator, guide, or model of learning. A parent who has no training in science, for example, can still facilitate her child’s science education by accessing online and physical world resources such as self-paced courses, teacher-led courses, and tutors (Wessling, 2012b).

Another consideration is whether parents have the appropriate relationship with their child for successful homeschooling. Certainly, parents who already have difficult and contentious relationships with their children should consider whether homeschooling would be emotionally healthy, but parents should also consider that homeschooling may help to heal these conflicts in a positive way. Although research is still emerging, anecdotal reports from parents indicate their relationships with their children strengthen over time. This is especially true of homeschooled teens, who seem less likely to exhibit defiant behavior, value of peers’ values over parents’ values, and reject of family time.

**When School Isn’t Working**

When a gifted learner is not thriving in school, parents tend to exhaust all avenues before deciding to homeschool. Rogers (2002) suggested that the right educational program for a gifted child fulfill these criteria:

- Does it provide for academic progress?
- Does it remediate academic weakness?
- Does it enhance psychological adjustment?
- Does it provide for socialization? (p. 94)

When a school environment does not meet a student’s needs, parents can act as their child’s advocate. Working first with the teacher, parents should request a meeting to express their concerns, making it clear that they are there to support the teacher, not to criticize. Parents should be prepared to offer a few concise suggestions on how to teach to their child’s strengths (Wessling, 2012a).

If schoolwork is not challenging enough, parents should try working toward acceleration or cluster grouping. For those administrators opposing acceleration or grade-skipping, there is a large body of empirical evidence for the use of acceleration (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004). Parents can use this information to promote acceleration or cluster grouping in their child’s school.

Cluster grouping often is a strategy that administrators are more comfortable with implementing. Classrooms are organized so that gifted students are grouped together rather than spread across classrooms. NAGC offers information on cluster grouping for parents to share when working with school administrators (see http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=4450).

Sometimes a particular school is not the right fit. In this case, researching other schools in the area, including private schools (which may offer scholarships for gifted learners), may be appropriate. It is important, however, for parents to have a clear picture of their child’s learning preferences and needs. Not all gifted children thrive in a highly competitive school environment; some may need a more relaxed, creative setting. Rogers (2002) provided the “Teacher Inventory of Learning Strengths” to help determine a child’s needs (p. 451).

If the problem is social in nature, parents should keep in mind that their gifted child is not alone. Although gifted children often experience social isolation at school, it can be remedied. Some gifted children just need to know where to go in order to find children like themselves. For example, a thoughtful school counselor or teacher might be able to suggest a club or extracurricular activity with children of similar interests and/or abilities (Webb et al., 2007).

Other gifted children find that a certain school’s social atmosphere is toxic and at this point a change of schools may be in order. It is important that any school under consideration for a gifted child who has experienced social isolation have an anti-bullying policy that is consistently enforced. Many teachers and administrators mistakenly believe that gifted children “have it easy” and may be unwilling to intervene in a bullying situation between a gifted child and a bully they perceive as the underdog (Peterson & Ray, 2006).

**When Homeschooling Might Be the Answer**

All children are sometimes bored at school. All children have friendships that break apart. All children come to school with their own baggage. This is normal. Then there are problems that
require intervention, and it is important for parents of gifted children to distinguish between the two. Occasional boredom at school is normal. If a child comes home daily with repetitive homework and tales of days filled with waiting for the class to catch up to him or her, school is not working. All children deserve the appropriate academic environment to help them reach their potential.

The benefits of homeschooling in this case are clear: In homeschool, a gifted child can be challenged appropriately in every area. Unlike in a school, where it is difficult to accommodate a child’s asynchronous abilities, homeschooling is perfectly designed for asynchronous development. Gifted homeschoolers, for example, can sign a child up for an online calculus class while working at grade level in language arts. Unusual interests, such as Greek mythology or astrophysics, can be pursued rather than following standard school curriculum.

Parents who homeschool their gifted children often start because they see their children showing signs of distress brought on by the school environment. Although homeschooling is not a cure for depression, it can remove some of the stressors in a child’s life and allow parent and child to address the issues in a healthy way. Modern schools have a tendency to go for “quick-fix” solutions rather than working on the root of the problem; parents homeschooling children with significant mental health concerns are able to create healthy environments rather than solving the problem by masking the symptoms (Keith, n.d.).

Finally, it’s easy for parents to ascribe our children’s lack of friends to natural introversion, when the fact is that even introverted gifted children benefit from having friends (Webb et al., 2007). If a child has no friends at school, school may seem like a hostile place. If the place where a child spends most of her time feels hostile, it is time to find a new environment. Again, although research on the subject is scant, parents’ anecdotal evidence points to homeschooling as a socially positive change for gifted children in crisis (Wessling, 2012b). Gifted homeschoolers are able to respond to their children’s individual needs while facilitating appropriate social interaction through cooperative learning, classes outside the home, extracurricular activities, and homeschool play groups.

**Taking the First Step**

Making a bold choice is not an easy endeavor—and homeschooling can be a bold choice. However, each day that a child remains in a harmful school environment is a day that could have been gained back by making such a choice.

Homeschooled often regret the long time they spent making the decision to homeschool. They look back and realize that in choosing to homeschool, they did not close off the old paths—instead, they opened new ones. Homeschool is one of the most flexible of educational options: Many homeschoolers cycle between school and homeschool as their children’s needs grow and change (Wessling, 2012b).

**Successful Homeschooling**

Whether a homeschooler delibera for months before starting or simply decides not to return her child to school after winter break, homeschooling is an ongoing learning experience for all parents. The process of learning how to be a homeschooler has been coined deschooling. A standard rule of thumb is that a child can be expected to take one month for each year of schooling before he or she is fully integrated into a homeschooling learning style, although this varies widely depending on the child’s personality and school experiences.

Takahashi (2008) suggested that parents first start by taking four steps that will make them feel ready to embark on this new journey. These steps are:

- Research your state’s homeschooling requirements. Although homeschooling is legal in all 50 states, each state sets its own policies and standards.
- **Legally withdraw your child from his or her current school.** Again, the process for doing this varies from state to state.
- **Find or establish a support system.** This is an important step that can determine homeschool success or failure.
- **Do some reading and keep notes on what you have learned.** Knowing how others have done it can offer some measure of confidence to new homeschoolers. (p. 2)

The most important thing to remember is that the most successful homeschooling, unlike traditional schooling, is based on child-led learning (Albert, 2003). Without buy-in from their children, parents will find themselves facing a wall of opposition more insurmountable than they ever faced during their child’s schooling. Whereas school curriculum is planned and followed more or less on a schedule, most homeschoolers find that flexibility and following their children’s interests are more important for homeschooling success.

But what exactly is homeschooling success? Without grades and teacher reports, how do homeschoolers know whether their children are thriving? How do they know whether their child is progressing rapidly enough, and most importantly, whether they are preparing their child appropriately for college?

Proof of the success of homeschooling is all around us. Homeschoolers are not only being accepted to good universities, they are thriving in our top universities. MIT’s youngest-ever professor, Erik Demaine, was a homeschooler (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003).

Aside from gaining comfort from the past successes of other homeschoolers, homeschooling parents learn how to measure success on their own terms. Some reject standards and curriculum, opting to follow their child’s lead in all ways, including when to declare a homeschooling “success.” Some find their comfort zone in following curriculum and enrolling their child in structured classes in person and online.
allowing for outside validation of their child’s achievements. Some opt out of testing; others take stock with periodic standardized exams.

Good homeschooling is also a community effort. Even more than in school, success in homeschooling relies on having a support system, both for the home educator and for the child as a growing learner. As the popularity of homeschooling grows, so do the opportunities to meet and bond with other homeschoolers. As new homeschoolers build their community, they gain a wider perspective on their child’s development and abilities.

Homeschooling, in essence, is what each homeschooling family makes of it. Each homeschool is built around the parents’ values, the child’s abilities and interests, and the community they live in. Knowing that homeschoolers have graduated from Harvard, teach at MIT, and have even made it to the Supreme Court is reassuring, but each homeschool will be a unique venture always in a state of creation and recreation as the child grows and the family’s understanding of home education deepens.

I started this article by describing how I became a reluctant homeschooler. Six years into this journey, reluctance is simply a part of my history. I wake up every day with the expectation that my children will enjoy learning and the knowledge that if they don’t enjoy it, we have the power to change what we’re doing. In the beginning, I reluctantly let my daughter drag me into homeschooling. Now, like so many other formerly reluctant homeschoolers, I know that we made the right choice.

My only lingering question about homeschooling: What took me so long?

**References**


**Author’s Note**