

Revisiting Homeschooling in Hard Times

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Recently, Kathy Green of Homeschoolers of Maine asked me to revisit this article for the current season. I had forgotten about this piece, written over a decade ago. I've left the original article intact in most places, and updated it to include the current climate we are living in. Homeschooling will not be an easy choice for many families, but it will be an essential one. It's important to offer these families all the support we can from within the homeschool community because they will not likely find it outside, beyond this community.

Part I - An Introduction

When I wrote this article back in 2009, mandatory vaccination and the Covid-19 crisis weren't even on the radar in the homeschooling community. We were just struggling to survive an economic downturn. I believe the following statement is as true now, as it was when I wrote it, though.

Homeschooling is undoubtedly a growing trend in education. Trends, however, tend to change with the tide of popular culture. As our economy continues in this downturn, I wonder if homeschooling will be strong enough to maintain itself, becoming more than just a trend.

While the downturn in the economy was my initial catalyst for writing, and I wondered if homeschooling was strong enough to sustain as a viable educational option, I no longer wonder. It has become the only option for many families at this time.

Today's homeschoolers have ridden on the waves of the pioneers. We've become complacent and assume that it has always been and will always be as easy as it is right now.

This was true in the late '90s and the early part of the 2000s. Today, I think we have returned to a time when we recognize the sacrifice that pioneering homeschool families made, that many families are about to make again, for the safety of their children.

There is, however, a cost to homeschooling. It isn't just one option for many families, it is the only option.

This is as true now as it was a decade ago, and as true as it was back in the early 80s when homeschooling families first started becoming recognized in Maine.

There is more involved than just the monetary cost of the curriculum and extra curricula lessons. For many families, the cost is much higher. It can mean sacrificing family ties because relatives don't understand. It may even mean sacrificing ties in the Christian community, as churches (especially those with their own schools) do not understand. Families may have to sacrifice luxuries that they've grown to consider necessities. It may mean giving up internet at home all together or downgrading from fiber-optics to DSL. *(Originally, I had suggested downgrading from DSL to dial-up. There have been many advances in a short period of ten years.)* It may mean that there is no cable, or that the family has only

one car instead of two. It may even mean downsizing the family home. There are families who are willing to sacrifice, but what about those who haven't had to? Will the turn in the economy change their minds? Will families be willing to make further sacrifices to be able to continue to home educate?

Many families who were previously unwilling to make this sacrifice are now being faced with a bigger challenge. Are they willing to sacrifice the mental and physical well-being of their children in institutional educational settings, or are they willing to adjust their lifestyle for their family's greater good?

My fear is that there will be families who think it simply can no longer be done, and that the sacrifice just isn't worth it. After all, public education is free, and then both parents can work. It seems easier to sacrifice our children to the government schools than to sacrifice the conveniences we enjoy daily.

This is no longer my fear. My fear now is that parents who don't want to sacrifice their children's health and well-being in the institutional educational settings will feel that they have no real choice.

There are others I know that will sacrifice without hesitation or second thought. I know this because they already are. Weekly, I encounter families in difficult situations who are, against all odds, continuing to home educate.

This was true a decade ago, and I believe it will continue to be true in increasing numbers in the days ahead.

There are growing numbers of single parents who are joining the ranks of seasoned homeschooling families. There are parents with limited incomes who are doing it. They are being discouraged from it on all fronts including family, friends and other Christians. Everyone promotes the easy path. Put the children into the government schools, and get a job. I'm not sure they understand the reality of what they are recommending. Take a wife whose husband has been incarcerated as an example. Their family has been torn apart and its stability threatened. Put their children into the public school system, and send mom to work 8 – 10 hours a day. The result is a recipe for disaster, not just for the children, but for the entire family unit. When mom comes home at the end of the day, she is too exhausted to provide for the most basic needs of her family. What would it really cost to support that family through their difficult season? What would it teach the children to see others sacrificing to help their mother?

This is as true today as it was a decade ago.

As with most all things, often those who could benefit the most from homeschooling have the least amount of resources available to them. Based on my own years of experience, if you are a family in a difficult situation, homeschooling may be the thing that makes the difficult time a little easier to bear. Count the cost, but also weigh it against the worth. It can be done.

Homeschoolers of Maine is here to support families through the transition from the culturally accepted norm of institutional instruction to a different educational paradigm, one where the parents are in charge of their children's education and well-being. If you feel led to home educate, but aren't sure where to begin, please reach out to the leaders of HOME. We're here to help!

Part II - 10 Ways to Cut Homeschooling Costs

Homeschoolers cannot expect to be exempt from the downturn in the economy, and the rising cost of everything. However, here are 10 simple ways to help your family cut the cost of homeschooling:

1. Buy used curriculum instead of new.
2. Borrow movies from the library, your church or friends, rather than renting them. I'll update this and add, cut out streaming services.
3. Plan activities that you can walk to instead of driving, or if driving is essential, carpool.
4. Look for free field trips and activities.
5. Find free curriculum on the internet to use.
6. Barter for extra curricula lessons, rather than paying for them.
7. Don't try to keep up with everyone else in your homeschool group. Find what works for your family, and stick with that. *Consider cutting back on cellphone services, streaming services and etc. Look for everything that is non-essential and reduce or remove it from the budget, freeing up those funds for essential.*
8. Buy whole foods (rather than pre-packaged) and cook from scratch. Incorporate this into your homeschooling under health and life skills. Not only will it save money, but your family will be healthier.
9. Use the local library. Newspapers, magazine subscriptions, and books are available for free. Many libraries also offer free Internet access.
10. Try it before you buy it. Borrow curriculum and try it out before you invest in it. What you may think is awesome may not work for your children. You may find that you don't like it as well as you thought you would. If you've already bought it and don't like it, adapt it. Find ways to make it work for you and your children.

Give away or loan out the curriculum you aren't using, or no longer need. There is a blessing in giving and helping others that does not go unrewarded. It's also a great lesson for your children. No matter how little you think you have, there is always someone who has less.

When making the decision to sacrifice in order to be able to homeschool, remember, "Less is more." Let this be a guiding principle.

If you need additional ideas, please feel free to reach out and ask. After 18 years of homeschooling as a single mom, I'm very creative in how to provide for a child's education, with a minimal financial investment.

Raylene M. Hunt is an early childhood educator by profession and is a veteran homeschooling, single mom, who has graduated two students, soon to be 20 and 29. She lives in Camden, Maine where she continues to have an active role in the local homeschool community, providing support and encouragement to those who think homeschooling isn't possible. If you need encouragement or ideas, you can contact her at maggieraye@gmail.com.