

Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos

Julie Matesen homeschools her three children from left, Ruby, Meredith and Max. 'Our parent/child relationship is stronger now. I've learned so much about my children through homeschooling,' says Matesen

# No bus, no school cafeteria, no social life: The ups and downs of homeschooling

BY LESLIE RAYBURN  
SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

**S**ome kids stay home from school every day — not because they're out sick, but because their home is their school.

Homeschooling is growing in popularity as an educational alternative, with as many as 2 million American kids learning at home instead of in public or private schools.

Parents choose to educate their children at home for academic goals, religious beliefs, social philosophy, personal needs or any variety of issues.

Some families operate like conventional schools, with textbooks, grades and tests.

Other families choose alternative forms of learning, in which the children have control over what is learned and how that learning takes place.

"We have seen the homeschooling movement grow from its alternative schooling and back-to-the-land roots in the late '70s, to its popularity with religious fundamentalists in the '80s, to its current gradual acceptance by 'mainstream' families," Patrick Farenga, publisher of the homeschooling journal, *Growing Without Schooling*, writes.

"Homeschooling is clearly not only growing, but flourishing."

People in Santa Cruz County who are guiding their children through home-



Gardening is one of the subjects Julie Matesen teaches her children.

schooling see both the benefits and drawbacks of the process.

## The benefits of homeschooling:

■ "I love being there to see the light bulb go off," says Donna DeGaglia.

DeGaglia, who has been homeschooling her daughter Cassandra for several years, is enrolled in the Live Oak Home-Study Program.

"I've helped to make it happen," she says. "It's great."

■ "My daughters love being home-

## Class of one

What it's like when your education is designed just for you

BY DAVID KIBRICK  
SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

In the morning like most students, Ian Rickard prepares for another day of school. But rather than learning in a formal classroom, Ian follows his own program of study, aided by resources such as the Santa Cruz Public Library, the Internet and the Discovery Channel.

Ian is participating in a completely independent program of homeschooling, where his parents act as teachers and assignments are based on whatever topics he wants to study.

"It's entirely free-form," Ian says of the program. "The day is varied so much that it's hard to describe a typical day."

Ian's venture into homeschooling began in third grade, when he felt the curriculum wasn't keeping up with his own abilities.

"I was feeling somewhat intellectually repressed, in terms of what I was learning as opposed to what I wanted to learn," Ian says.

"Then my mother proposed homeschooling, and it sounded like a wonderful idea."

On a given day at his home in Santa Cruz, Ian may research a topic of interest on the Internet, go to the library to find additional resources, work out of textbooks, watch James Burke's "Connections," "and, in general, just learn," he says.

Ian prefers this program of independent learning to attending a public or private school.

"I think the problem with mainstream schooling is that there's a single path through it," he says, "and

Please see **HOMESCHOOL** on Page B2

Please see **ONE** on Page B2



# Homeschool

Continued from Page B1

schooled," says Tammy Miller, also with the Live Oak program. "They have the freedom to follow their interests and study what they are truly excited about."

"We've learned to get along better," says Margaret Campodonico of Aptos.

Amy, her fourth-grade daughter, chimes in, "It's brought our family closer."

Julie Matesen, a Live Oak home-school mother of three, agrees. "Our parent/child relationship is stronger now. I've learned so much about my children through homeschooling."

"The public perception that our kids aren't socialized is so untrue," Donna DeGaglia says. "Homeschooling expands their view of who their peers are."

"They learn social skills from a variety of people, not just their own age-group. It's much more reality-based. In the real world, in the work world, you interact with people of all different ages."

"Unless you're a total isolationist, it's impossible not to get other views of the world," Margaret Campodonico says.

"Kids are exposed to different views from their friends, the groups they go to, such as Girl Scouts, 4-H and soccer club."

According to the Home School Association of California, "There are numerous studies comparing the achievement of homeschoolers and school children on a variety of standardized tests."

"Generally, homeschoolers tend to score as well or better than those conventionally schooled."

"Perhaps more useful are the performances of home-schooled students as they enter college."

Home-schooled students are eagerly sought by many selective and highly selective colleges (such as Harvard, Stanford, the University of California colleges, Dartmouth, Cal Tech, John Hopkins, Duke and Reed); they are reported to be more focused and more self-reliant than schooled students, and to adapt better to living on their own."

Bronwyn Davis of Live Oak homeschools her boys for a variety of reasons, one being that she and her husband were bored in school.

"We don't like the cookie cutter approach," she says. "Also we want our children to be self-motivated learners, not dependent on someone else."

"Plus we have ideological differ-

ences with the schools. I want my kids to learn my values, not the school's."

"I don't believe in institutionalizing the child at an early age and creating a separation from the family," says Teri Schmidt, a Soquel home-school mom of two daughters. "In our country, the family unit is falling apart."

"I think it's enriching for kids to be homeschooled," Schmidt adds. "Each child learns differently. Home-schooling gives us the chance to focus on their interests and abilities."

"They have more chances to be creative. The school situation squashes their creativity."

"We want our children to be strong individual thinkers because that's the kind of person that will make changes in this world."

"You don't have to arrange your entire life around the school schedule," says Nikoletta Yukich from Live Oak.

"Also homeschooling gives my child the chance to be a kid, which I think is very important. In the schools, the academics are too early. Three hours of work and only 20 minutes of play is inappropriate for a kindergarten child."

"Parents know their child better than anyone else," Priscilla Smart, teacher-coordinator of the Live Oak Home-Study Program, points out.

"Who better to teach them?"

## The drawbacks of home-schooling:

Lack of personal time is a disadvantage many home-schooling parents cite.

"Parents have to be committed and willing to put in the time," says Priscilla Smart.

"It's a lot of work," Margaret Campodonico says.

"The first couple years are especially hard," Nikoletta Yukich says.

Many people can't afford to homeschool, as both parents (or a single parent) are working fulltime.

"Kids who are homeschooled may not be getting some of the necessary social skills needed in life," Lucy McAlister, a Watsonville kindergarten teacher, worries.

"In kindergarten one of the most important things we do is teach the children how to get along with each other. This is a very important life skill."

"Also, teachers are held to certain standards. What standards are the parents held to?"

"It can be a problem if a home-schooling family doesn't have outside resources," Julie Matesen says.

"I think it's important for my children to be exposed to different experiences, different people."

"I've seen families who don't have experiences outside of themselves, they are very insular."

"It's harder for these children to integrate into society if they're exposed only to their parents' views."

"Parents should expose the child to other ideas so that the child can make choices."

"Many places don't enjoy the advantages we have here in Santa Cruz," Nikoletta Yukich says.

"There are so many options, lots of flexibility. I can see the disadvantages if there aren't good support programs for home study."

"These programs are places where my kids can meet people and make friends."

"I resent people saying that teachers squash creativity," says Craig Stanfield, an elementary school teacher in Watsonville.

"I encourage it in my class. Most of my students come from families where their creativity hasn't been developed or encouraged. Many get more stimulation in my classroom than at home."

"In the public schools, the child is exposed to many different teachers," says retired high school principal Ray Rayburn.

"They enjoy the different strengths of all these teachers. With home-schooling, you are only exposed to your parents, the same teacher over and over."

"The parents' strengths are perpetuated, but also the same weaknesses, biases and prejudices are passed on without question, without other viewpoints being offered."

"The schools are still the only places that allow people to experience the diversity of our culture," says Art Pearl, retired education professor from UC Santa Cruz. "It's the only place where we can prepare them for a democratic society."

"It's our responsibility to make the schools better. Instead of escaping, we need to help fix the schools."

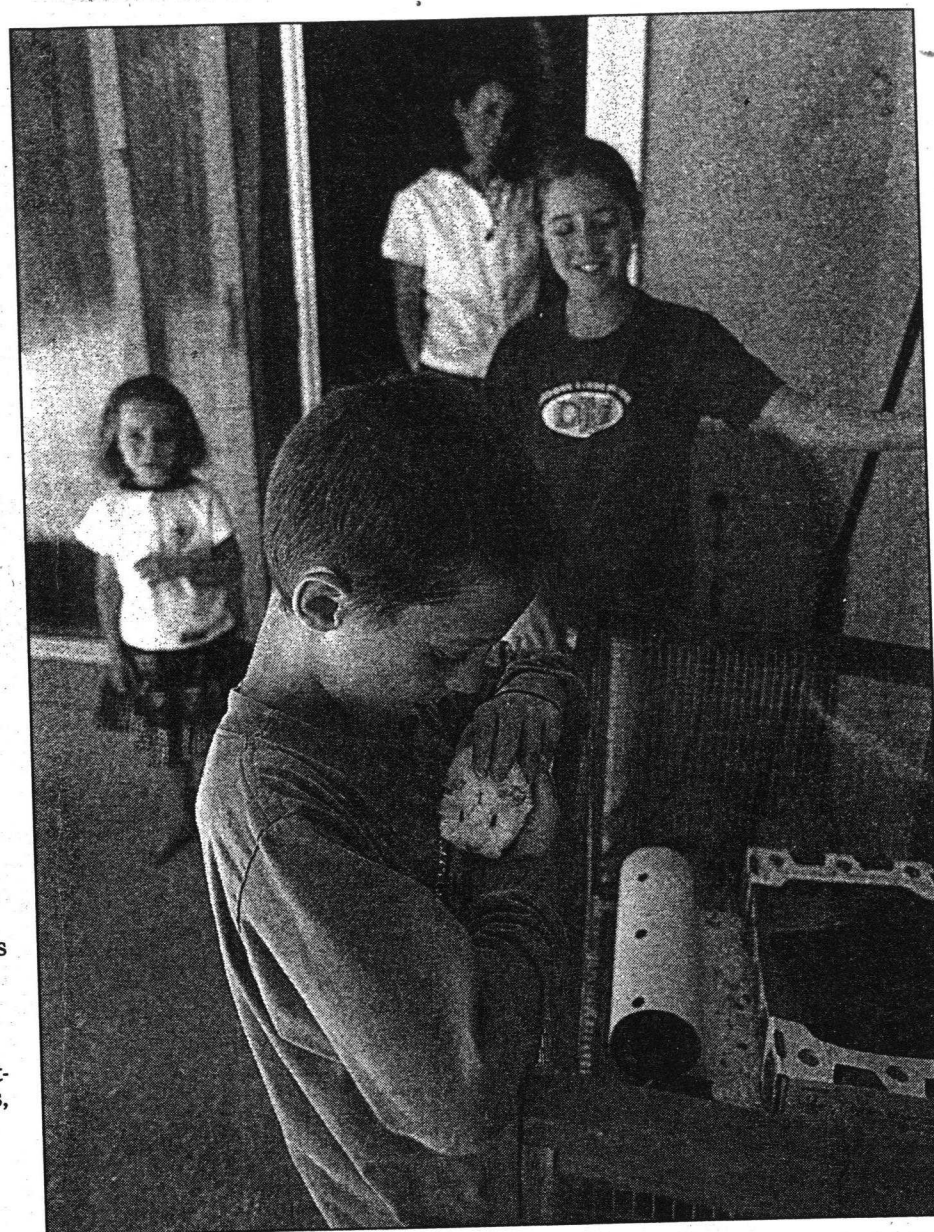
What is the future of homeschooling?

"As the average family becomes more aware of it, I think the variety of people coming into homeschooling will increase," predicts Jasmin Gerer, who works for AFT, Santa Cruz's Home-School Program.

"It is no longer seen as far-out. Rather, it is becoming more mainstream."

There are many resources to help home schooling families: Web sites, books, magazines, conferences and local support groups.

Most Santa Cruz County school districts offer programs to help sup-



Max holds one of the latest additions to his home-schooling project.

Dan Coyro/Sentinel

port the home-schooling family.

## Web sites:

The Homeschool Association of California: [www.hsc.org](http://www.hsc.org)  
The American Homeschool Association: [www.home-ed-press.com](http://www.home-ed-press.com)

California newsletter with links: [www.Homefires.com](http://www.Homefires.com)

## Books:

"The Homeschool Handbook" by Mary Griffith  
"Homeschooling Book of Answers"

by Linda Dobson  
"Teach Your Own" by John Holt  
"Homeschooling for Excellence" by David and Micki Colfax  
Leslie Rayburn has worked in public schools for eight years and has worked as a teacher/consultant with the Live Oak Home-Study Program

# One: In a class by himself

Continued from Page B1

everyone has to take that path and learn the exact same things."

Ian's home-schooling program "allowed me to learn what I wanted to learn, along with what I needed to learn," he says.

He's been able to concentrate on areas of his own interest, especially mathematics.

"In general, I know a lot more about computers and mathematics than someone else at my point in public education would," he claims.

For example, he has taught himself multiple computer languages and graphic design.

"I was able to learn some components of three-dimensional math (normally a topic covered in calculus) in 'elementary school,' so that I could use 3-D graphics programs," Ian recounts.

Ian's home-schooling program has changed over the years. "When I first started homeschool through about the eighth grade, my mom was definitely the teacher," he says.

"There was plenty of time to work on things that interested me, but she made sure I covered the basics in areas I wasn't particularly interested in, such as spelling."

As Ian progressed, her role as teacher diminished, and Ian began to create his own curriculum.

"She's become more a guidance counselor, advising me on what

classes I should take at Cabrillo and what academic areas I need to study to make my education more complete," Ian says.

Despite the advantage of focusing on his major interests, Ian admits that homeschooling can become imbalanced if a student lets it.

At first, Ian said, "I naively concentrated on the math and didn't make any effort to learn about other topics. Over the past several years, however, I have been concentrating on filling in the gaps."

Lab sciences became a problem. "Obviously, having a chemistry lab in your home can be dangerous," Ian says.

Physical education was difficult to maintain, although Ian tries to make up for it through bicycling and other activities.

"I'm probably not as physically fit as your average public school student," he says. "But I wouldn't say I'm unfit."

Homeschooling has also had an impact on his social life.

"Being homeschooled has definitely impacted my teenage social development," he says. "It has caused me to become somewhat of a hermit. But I'm trying to compensate for that."

"If I had used a formal home-schooling program, or just made an effort, I could have had much more of a social life."

He is occasionally tempted to "go back to public school for a month or

two, just to catch up on the social environment. But I don't feel that I've lost too much in terms of a classic education."

Ian has finished a calculus course at Cabrillo College in preparation for attending college full-time next year.

"(The college classes) are a lot less sliced-up," he says. "There's not so much repetition, and you can get a lot more done in the same amount of time."

He contrasts that with high school, which he feels has to cater to too many levels of ability at once, which results in a lot of repetition.

"The other kids get bored and fall asleep, and then they might miss something they did need to know," he says.

Ian sees homeschooling as a viable alternative to standard public or private education.

The independent nature of his homeschooling means that Ian does not have official high school transcripts. But he has achieved high-end scores on both the SAT I and SAT II Achievement Tests, which he believes will allow him to apply to college by examination alone.

"Some of the lab sciences I feel slightly inadequate in," he says. "But the test scores don't represent that."

He cautions that for students with average SAT scores, the lack of transcripts can be an obstacle when applying to college.