

AN EXAMINATION OF THE LEGAL AND POLICY CONTEXTS GOVERNING ACCESS
TO PUBLIC SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR HOMESCHOOLED STUDENTS
IN WAKE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

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ABSTRACT

Gwen Delaun Roulhac: An Examination of the Legal and Policy Contexts Governing Access to Public School Resources for Homeschooled Students in Wake County, North Carolina
(Under the direction of Dana N. Thompson Dorsey)

Homeschooling continues to experience unprecedented growth across the United States, including in North Carolina. More than 2 million children nationally and over 106,000 children in North Carolina are enrolled in homeschools. North Carolina's original homeschool law had long been interpreted to mean that parents had to provide all academic instruction. North Carolina's homeschool law was revised in 2013 such that parents are authorized to determine additional sources of academic instruction for their homeschooled children. Parents have sought access to public school resources as one such additional source of academic instruction. Homeschoolers' access to public school resources is highly contextualized due to North Carolina's "district discretion" policy.

This qualitative case study aimed to understand how the legal and policy contexts at the state and local levels contributed to the accessibility of public school resources for homeschooled students in Wake County. Data for this study were generated through an analysis of the laws and policies governing homeschooled students' access to public school resources. Additionally, individual interviews with 18 Wake County homeschool educators who had three or more years of homeschooling experience and who had homeschooled or were homeschooling a high school-age child revealed homeschool educators' advocacy on behalf of their children, their interactions with public school administrators, and their selective use of public school resources. The

researcher used social construction to analyze homeschool educators' stories and to draw connections between shifts in policy and policymakers' constructions of homeschoolers as a target group.

The findings suggest that the passage of the revised homeschool law was mostly symbolic. The data also support the idea that the positive or negative constructions different policymakers held about homeschoolers have implications for both policy and practice.

Policymakers as well as public school and homeschool educators and students have a vested interest in the implementation of policies that govern homeschooled students' access to public school resources. Should local education policymakers in Wake County want to fill the policy vacuum that currently exists, the present study offers insights into which resources homeschool educators most desire and the extent to which homeschoolers would like to engage with public schools.

This dissertation is dedicated . . .

To my mother, Edith W. Roulhac, who aspired to be a teacher. . . . I hope she realized that she was the greatest teacher I will ever have. By sharing her love for learning and teaching with me, she let me shine!

To my father, Melvin L. Roulhac, whose demand for excellence always challenged me to achieve my academic goals. . . . I know he would be so proud of me!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background

School choice functions as the cornerstone upon which the structure of schooling in the United States has been, and will continue to be, built. For this dissertation, school choice refers to the educational alternatives, public and nonpublic, available to parents to choose a school other than the geographically assigned local public school. Although the meaning of school choice and the mechanisms for implementation of school choice vary considerably across time and place, school choice has been repeatedly touted as the solution for the protracted educational crisis that stigmatizes public schooling in the U.S. (Finn & Osberg, 2011; Hoxby, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2008). The steady expansion of the number and the variety of schooling choices suggests widespread public agreement that:

If we are going to truly confront the education crisis in this country, nothing should be off the table. Whether we like it or not, there is no one way to educate a child. Take your pick: public school, private school, home school, charter schools, technical schools, college preps, ROTC academies, magnet programs, all-male, all-female, even online-only schools. You name it, I'm for it. (Martin, 2011)

With the diversity of schooling options, hybrid forms of choice such as dual enrollment have also garnered attention as another option from which parents may choose (Dahlquist, York-Barr, & Hendel, 2006; Gaither, 2009a; Kunzman, 2009). In the current school accountability era, parents have been emboldened to withdraw their children from low-performing public schools and to pursue alternative schools that enhance their children's academic achievement and social development. In their pursuit of the best schooling option, some parents choose to eschew conventional schools in favor of homeschooling their children.

Homeschooling has always been part of the education landscape in the United States and, in fact, parent-led instruction was the norm in the early years of the nation (Lee, 2009). It was only in the 19th century that we saw the “establishment of large-scale public and private education systems in the United States” (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013, p. 4) and the rise of compulsory schooling laws in states across the nation. Beginning with Massachusetts’ 1852 compulsory attendance law, states imposed progressively stricter mandates on children’s school attendance. By the turn of the 20th century, widespread acceptance of compulsory schooling resulted in the enrollment of most American children in public and private schools, a pattern which persists today. Yet “beginning in the late 1970s and increasing steadily since then, the home has become a popular educational locus for an ever expanding number of families across an ever widening swath of the U.S. population” (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013, p. 4). The surge in the number of families educating their children at home has led to what some have called a “comeback” for homeschooling.

The rise of “modern” (1970s–present) homeschooling has been swift. What started out as a fringe movement primarily among religious conservatives has quickly become a mainstream movement. Today, homeschools in the United States enroll an estimated 2 million children (Kunzman, 2012; Ray, 2013). Ray (2013) noted that the “parent-led education community has continued to grow in absolute numbers and percentage of the school-age population” (p. 261). The 2 million children enrolled in homeschools represent approximately 3.4% of the school-age (ages 5–17) population in the United States (Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2013). Furthermore, during the period (2003-2012) that the number of children enrolled in homeschools has steadily risen and surpassed the enrollment in public charter schools, the number of children enrolled in private schools has declined (Aud et al., 2013).

Although the majority of homeschooling families identify as White and tend to be Christian, college-educated, two-parent families, homeschoolers represent increasingly diverse groups of individuals from different racial, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Both popular media and statistical reports indicate that growing numbers of Black families are choosing to homeschool their children (Chiles, 2013; Huseman, 2015; Planty et al., 2009; Tenney, 2012). Also contributing to the expansion of the homeschool community are families from multiple faith traditions including Islam and Judaism who are turning to homeschooling in growing numbers (Kunzman, 2009; MacFarquhar, 2008; Ray, 2013). The popularity of homeschooling is evident among families of low, middle, and high income (Ray, 2013). The variety of homeschoolers' demographic backgrounds is notably obvious at homeschool conferences (Ray, 2013) and in the proliferation of national homeschool organizations such as the National Black Home Educators Resource Association, Messianic Homeschoolers, and Home School Association for Military Families.

Researchers have often explored the reasons parents choose homeschooling and have shown that homeschool educators' reasons for choosing to homeschool are as diverse as the community itself (Collom, 2005; Isenberg, 2007; James, 2007; Lips & Feinberg, 2008). Some may choose to homeschool their children "as a form of protest against public education" (Gaither, 2009b, p. 342), while other parents decide to homeschool "not so much because they believe that public schools cannot educate their children but because they believe that they are personally responsible for their child's education" (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007, p. 278). Van Galen (1991) was the first to categorize homeschoolers into two distinct groups—ideologues and pedagogues—based on each group's primary reason for choosing to homeschool. Ideologues, concerned about the social environment of traditional schools, cite their religious

philosophy as their primary motivation. Pedagogues, on the other hand, are concerned about the academic environment of traditional schools and thus choose homeschooling to educate their children according to their own educational philosophy. Studies of Black homeschoolers demonstrated that Black parents were motivated to homeschool as a means of protecting their children, especially their sons, from the harms associated with institutionalized racism (Fields-Smith & Wells Kisura, 2013; Lundy & Mazama, 2014). Much of the research that has been conducted on why parents choose to homeschool their children acknowledges the complex rationales that influence parents' decisions and the shifts in parental motivations over time (Collom, 2005; Jolly, Matthews, & Nester, 2012; Lois, 2013). Their diverse motivations for doing so notwithstanding, parents who actively engage in the school choice process, including those who homeschool, are "ambitious for the future of their children" (Kemerer, 2009, p. 57) and presumably make choices about schools that will secure for their children the best possible education that will meet their children's individual needs.

In providing an individualized education that best meets their children's needs, homeschool educators rely on human and material resources that are located both within and outside the home. A homeschool educator, typically a mother who is not employed outside the home, represents the chief resource necessary for the operation of a homeschool (Collom, 2005). Homeschool educators use a number of material resources to educate their children. The internet serves as a primary resource that enables children to conduct research for their academic assignments and as a secondary resource through which parents may access and purchase prepared curriculum materials (e.g., lesson plans, textbooks, workbooks, assessments). Public libraries and museums also function as resources that homeschool educators frequently utilize (Hanna, 2012; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). Homeschoolers often form co-ops to provide group

instruction in core academic courses, life skills courses, and special interest courses (Gaither, 2009b). Older homeschooled students may also participate in online courses and community college courses (Gaither, 2009b; Hanna, 2012). As such, it is not uncommon for parents to look for and utilize resources outside the home that can supplement the homeschool education resources. In determining the best way to meet their children's educational needs, some parents have sought access to public school resources for their homeschooled children—often with little or no success.

Statement of the Problem

Homeschooling parents have often petitioned the courts for access to select public school resources on a part-time basis in the conspicuous absence of clear-cut state statutes and school district policies governing this dimension of education. The wide-ranging variability in homeschooled students' level of access to public school resources from state to state, and even from district to district within states, creates an unwieldy public atmosphere within which students, parents, homeschool educators, public school educators, policymakers, and lawmakers argue the pros and cons of access. Too often, their arguments are based on "either advocacy-based research or isolated anecdotes" instead of the "careful, well-reasoned research" which should guide governmental policymaking about homeschooling (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013, p. 36). Careful, well-reasoned, empirical research about homeschooling is limited, leaving many questions about homeschoolers unanswered (Jolly, Matthews, & Nester, 2012; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Murphy, 2012). As the number of homeschooled students continues to grow, the issues and concerns of the homeschooling community will undoubtedly increase (Rockholt, 2012).

Only a few states have statutorily addressed the issue of homeschoolers' access to public school resources in a definitive way. Fourteen states have laws that permit homeschooled students to enroll in public school classes on a part-time basis; nine states prohibit such part-time enrollment (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). North Carolina is one of 27 "district discretion" states wherein decisions on homeschoolers' part-time enrollment are left to local school administrators in each school district. North Carolina and 21 other states also rely on local school administrators to determine homeschoolers' degree of access to extracurricular activities offered by the public schools. Twenty-two states require public school districts to make extracurricular activities available to homeschoolers, and only six states prohibit homeschoolers' participation in such activities (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). In North Carolina, where local school administrators determine homeschoolers' level of access to public school curricular and extracurricular resources, the statewide district discretion policy is tantamount to having no policy at all.

Furthermore, most North Carolina school districts do not have written policies that address local homeschoolers' access to public school resources. A few school districts (e.g., Mitchell County Schools and Pitt County Schools) restrict homeschoolers' participation in public school classes and activities. The policies adopted by the school boards in Mitchell County Schools and Pitt County Schools govern central office and school building administrators' decisions and inform homeschool educators' expectations regarding access to public school resources. Unlike Mitchell County Schools and Pitt County Schools, the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) has not adopted a board policy that regulates homeschoolers' participation in the district's classes and extracurricular activities.

Without a written, publicized district policy that sets the parameters for receiving and responding to requests for access to public school resources, community members have little way of knowing about the processes and procedures WCPSS administrators employ to handle such requests from homeschoolers. Also little known is the extent to which Wake County homeschool educators advocate for access to local public school resources. Empirical research is needed to broaden our understanding of the processes that are enacted in the engagement between public school administrators and homeschool educators around the issue of homeschoolers' access to public school resources in a school district with no policy on this issue.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate Wake County homeschool educators' demand for and access to public school resources on a part-time basis. In addition, the study examined the ways in which North Carolina's "district discretion" policy and WCPSS' lack of a written policy support and thwart parents' advocacy for access to select public school resources for their high school-age homeschooled children.

The data collection process incorporated questionnaire responses and individual interviews with homeschool educators to ascertain (a) their interest in having their homeschooled children participate in select public school classes and activities and (b) their experiences with the process employed by WCPSS administrators as they sought access to public school resources. This research will provide information about the types of public school resources Wake County homeschool educators desire and utilize. This study will also shed light on how WCPSS administrators handle requests from homeschool educators for access to public school resources.

Significance of the Study

This research bears significance for a host of policy and practice implications for WCPSS administrators and for policymakers' deliberation on the appropriate role of public education in service to the best interests of all children. This study seeks to inform the contentious policy debate between proponents and opponents of access for homeschooled students in ways that will advance our understanding of the requisite factors public school administrators must consider if they are to craft viable policies regarding homeschooled students' access to public school resources. This study has implications for shaping policy and practice in ways that will impact public school and homeschool educators and students in Wake County and throughout North Carolina. Its potential to illuminate the extent of involvement in public school classes and activities that homeschoolers desire and the capacity of public school districts to provide access to homeschooled students will expand policymakers' knowledge and understanding of the implementation of various policies related to homeschoolers' access. This study, since it is neither advocacy-based research nor an isolated anecdote, can help fill the void where careful, well-reasoned research on homeschooling issues is lacking.

Research Questions

The research questions this study will address are undergirded by the following three propositions:

1. Homeschooled students in North Carolina experience inequitable access to public school resources across the 115 school districts and within individual districts.
2. The 2013 legislation that modified the definition of a homeschool in North Carolina will motivate increased numbers of homeschooling parents to seek education resources provided outside the home, including public school resources.

3. Increased requests from homeschooling parents for access to public school resources will lead to changes in school districts' policies and procedures whereby the availability of public school resources to homeschooled students will be expanded.

Homeschooled students in North Carolina experience inequitable access to public school resources across school districts, because each local board of education may choose whether to permit homeschooled students' participation in curricular and extracurricular activities. For example, Pitt County Board of Education Policy 9.501 indicates: "Non-public . . . school students are excluded from attending or enrolling in any public school course or instructional program or actively participating in extracurricular activities in Pitt County Schools" (2008). Unlike Pitt County Schools' clearly defined policy, several North Carolina school districts' (e.g., Asheville City Schools, Beaufort County Schools, Durham Public Schools, Guilford County Schools) board policies lack statements related to access for students who attend homeschools. According to the North Carolina School Attendance and Student Accounting Manual, "Local boards of education who choose to admit students for a portion of the school day who are enrolled in . . . home schools must develop policies related to the admission and attendance of those students" (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2015, p. 8). The absence of districtwide policies may potentially contribute to inequitable access among homeschoolers within school districts if school administrators make decisions about homeschool students' access on a case-by-case basis.

The recent legislation that modified the definition of a homeschool in North Carolina will likely motivate increased numbers of homeschooling parents to seek academic instruction resources outside the home. It is expected that in addition to grandparents who live outside the household, learning specialists, and tutors, homeschooling parents, emboldened by the new law

which permits them to determine additional sources of academic instruction, will also turn to the local public schools for access to instructional resources (e.g., teachers, classroom facilities, textbooks; North Carolinians for Home Education, 2013). Parents are likely to seek access when they perceive the resources available at their local public school to be of equal or superior value to the resources available in the homeschool environment (Dahlquist, York-Barr, & Hendel, 2006; Lois, 2013). Parents may seek access to resources such as science equipment, textbooks, specialized classes and services for children with special needs, and online charter schools to supplement the homeschool curriculum (Cambre, 2009; Cooper & Sureau, 2007; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Hanna, 2012).

The third proposition is that the increased number of requests for access to public school resources will spur public school administrators to craft or to revise policies and procedures for managing requests from homeschooling parents. These new or updated school district policies, shaped during a time when North Carolina's political context supports a climate of deregulation with fewer restrictions for homeschoolers, may expand the availability of public school resources to homeschooled students. A groundswell of favorable local decisions on issues that impact homeschoolers could potentially incite broader policy changes at the state level.

Four research questions have been developed to frame how North Carolina's statute on homeschooling and the absence of a local school district policy on homeschoolers' access shape the processes through which Wake County homeschool educators petition WCPSS administrators for access to select public school resources and through which WCPSS administrators respond to such petitions. The following questions will guide the process of inquiry for this study:

1. How do North Carolina's current laws and policies support access to public school resources for homeschooled students?
2. How do Wake County homeschool educators (i.e., parents and legal guardians) advocate for their homeschooled students to be the recipients of public school resources?
3. On what basis do Wake County Public School System administrators grant and/or deny requests for homeschooled students to receive access to public school resources?
4. To what extent do Wake County homeschooled students utilize public school resources?

Interpretive Framework

Data for this study were organized and analyzed using a social constructionist lens. Social construction, frequently used to explain education policy phenomena, provides an interpretive framework through which the ongoing shifts in policy related to homeschooling can be examined through textual data sources and the multiplicity of stories told by target audiences. Social construction allows for the systematic investigation of stories, which effectively frames the ebb and flow of the shifts in culture that result in policy changes. Due to its reliance on stories, or narratives, social construction is also often referred to as narrative analysis.

Social construction/narrative analysis bears the strong imprint of the qualitative methodological tradition and is used to advance the notion that no objective reality explains the policymaking process or its outcomes (Jones & McBeth, 2010). Rather than seeking a single answer, the researcher welcomes the multiplicity of stories, especially conflicting stories and stories from marginalized groups (Roe, 1994). Roe (1994), a leader in the application of

narrative analysis to policy issues, has asserted that “narratives are one of the richest vehicles for the multiple and complex meanings that different stakeholders bring to a public issue” (Lejano, p. 103). Each interpretation of stories represents a unique construction of meaning and understanding (Jones & McBeth, 2010). To understand the uniqueness of constructions, the researcher has relied heavily on qualitative methods, where the emphasis on process rather than outcomes helps explain the reasons for observed behaviors (McMillan, 2012).

The social construction/narrative analysis framework is open to multiple data sources, which can be as varied as the narratives themselves. Language and text function as the chief data sources employed in this framework (Roe, 1994). Other data sources include recalled experiences (Hummel, 1991), publicly available archives (Lustick, 1996), interviews (Shenhav, 2005), and newspaper articles (Jones & McBeth, 2010).

Researcher’s Assumptions

The major assumption for the present study is that parents who homeschool their high school-age children encounter challenges not germane to homeschooling a child through the elementary and middle school years. In particular, homeschool educators do not solely possess the expertise in all academic disciplines (e.g., mathematics, science, history, reading, and writing) to meet the curricular needs of their high school-age children. As such, the researcher assumes that most homeschool educators will seek instructional resources, especially for advanced subjects such as chemistry and calculus, outside the home to supplement parent-led instruction for high school-age children.

Researcher’s Background

The researcher acknowledges how she is uniquely situated within the study context. Chiefly, the researcher is an outsider to the homeschooling community. The researcher attended

public schools in North Carolina from kindergarten through twelfth grade. The researcher's former position as an educator in North Carolina's public schools casts her as part of the "establishment" associated with traditional schooling. To the extent that the researcher positively identifies with the schooling establishment, she must work to eliminate bias that advances the desirability of public schools over homeschools from her questions and interpretations. As the researcher seeks to understand more about the context within which public school administrators respond to parental requests for access to public school resources, she does so with the recognition that her lived experiences exert considerable influence on "what . . . [she] think[s] about, value[s], and . . . [is] prone to believe and do" (Goodall, 2000, p. 132).

Delimitations of the Study

Delimitations for this study stem from the researcher's decision to focus on one county in North Carolina and to invite participation from a subset of the homeschooling population. Wake County formed the geographic boundary for the study. As such, the researcher examined the Wake County Public School System's (WCPSS) policies and practices related to homeschoolers' access to public school resources. Further, eligible homeschool educators had to (a) reside in Wake County, (b) have three or more years of experience homeschooling, and (c) have experience homeschooling a high school-age child. WCPSS' policies and practices are not necessarily reflective of the policies and practices in other North Carolina school districts. Likewise, the experiences of homeschooling parents who are residents of Wake County may not mirror the experiences of homeschooling parents in other parts of the state. The findings from this study may not be generalizable to homeschool educators who have not homeschooled a high school-age child and/or who have fewer than three years of experience homeschooling.

Participants' high school-age children, though sometimes present at the time of the interviews, did not participate in any of the interviews for this study. Ranging in age from 13 to 18 years old, participants' high school-age children were likely capable of expressing their opinions on access to public school resources, their desire for access to specific public school resources, and their experiences with participation in public school classes and/or activities. Nonetheless, children, who are unlikely to have had experiences with advocating for access to public school resources, were excluded from the present study. The researcher focused on homeschooling parents, because they have the legal authority to determine additional sources of academic instruction for their homeschooled children. Parents also bear the responsibility for petitioning a public school or school district for access to resources.

This study focused on public school resources for which homeschoolers' access is determined by WCPSS administrators. Administrators determine access to academic classes, elective classes, performance groups, and school-based clubs. The researcher did not explore homeschool educators' desire for their children to participate on public school athletics teams. The rules and regulations governing athletic participation are set by the North Carolina High School Athletic Association and thus not wholly determined by administrators in WCPSS.

Limitations of the Study

In past research on homeschoolers (Cogan, 2010; Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011; Martin-Chang, Gould, & Meuse, 2011), a common limitation has been the small sample size, which manifests as a limitation of the current study, as well. For this study, the researcher conducted individual interviews with 18 homeschool educators. Another limitation is that homeschooling parents who are in favor of homeschooled students' access to public school resources may have

been more likely to participate in this study. Participants' views on the topic of access may not be representative of the views and opinions of the "silent majority."

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout this study:

Access refers to the opportunity for homeschooled students to avail themselves of public school resources and services and to participate in public school activities and courses without burdensome restrictions.

Administrator refers to a person employed by a local education agency whose primary job responsibility is to uphold and administer the policies adopted by the local school board. For purposes of this study, administrators may include superintendents, assistant superintendents, principals, and assistant principals.

Co-op refers to a group of homeschoolers who meet at specified times to provide educational and social activities for their homeschooled children.

Conventional school (synonymous with *traditional school* for purposes of this study) refers to a public school that is configured to serve students of specific grade levels, ranging from pre-Kindergarten through 12th grades. A conventional school is governed by a school district.

Educational choice refers to the decision-making process and the decisions parents make about their children's education such as education philosophy, curriculum, resources, and goals. Educational choice includes but is not limited to school choice.

Homeschool refers to a nonpublic school consisting of the children of not more than two families or households, where the parents or legal guardians or members of either household

determine the scope and sequence of academic instruction, provide academic instruction, and determine additional sources of academic instruction (N.C. Gen. Stat. § 115C-563).

Homeschool educator (synonymous with *homeschooling parent* for purposes of this study) refers to the adult who is primarily responsible for determining the scope and sequence of academic instruction, providing academic instruction, and determining additional sources of academic instruction for the child(ren) enrolled in the homeschool.

Homeschooling (synonymous with *home education* for purposes of this study) refers to the act of providing educational instruction to children in the home wherein the parent or legal guardian is primarily responsible for delivering instruction and determining additional sources of instruction.

Nonpublic schools refer to elementary and secondary schools that are not funded by public tax dollars and for which parents may incur financial costs to participate in the educational offerings, and include nonsectarian, sectarian, and homeschools.

Public schools refer to elementary and secondary schools that are supported by tax revenue and that provide free education to children of a specified community, district, or region.

Resource refers to the human and/or material means of providing education and education services to school-age children. Examples of resources, which may be grouped into several categories, include: (a) curricular resources such as core academic and elective classes (face-to-face, online, and/or hybrid); textbooks; computer labs; tablets or other electronic devices; media centers or libraries; and personnel (e.g., teachers, school psychologists); (b) co-curricular resources such as drama, band, and choral performances; (c) extracurricular resources such as clubs and sports teams; and (d) miscellaneous resources such as meals and transportation.

School choice refers to the educational alternatives, public and nonpublic, available to parents and legal guardians to choose a school other than the geographically assigned local public school.

Summary

Although “frustrated home educators have continually asked the courts to force schools to accept their children on a part-time basis” (Roberts, 2009, p. 203), public school districts in North Carolina may choose to permit or to restrict homeschoolers’ part-time participation in public school classes and activities. Under the state’s “district discretion” policy, most North Carolina school districts, including WCPSS, have not adopted local policies which explicitly outline the degree of access afforded to local homeschoolers. To do so will require public school administrators to grapple with the role of public education in service to all students residing within the geographic boundaries of their school districts.

There is limited understanding among public school administrators and policymakers of the needs of homeschool students with respect to access to public school educational resources. This research will highlight the types of resources homeschool educators most desire for their homeschooled children and the ways in which they advocate for access. The examination of the process of engagement, sans school district policy, between homeschool educators who request access and public school administrators who have the authority to grant or to deny access will increase our understanding of the potential for public schools to provide broader access to homeschoolers. This research will also underscore some of the factors that public school administrators and policymakers might consider when they are developing and revising policies related to homeschoolers’ access to public school resources.

Organization of the Research

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. The introduction to the study in Chapter 1 includes the background statement, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, research questions, interpretive framework, researcher's assumptions, researcher's background, delimitations, limitations, definition of terms, and summary. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature related to school choice, the laws and policies that govern homeschooling, and the demographic shifts in the homeschooling community. The methodology is explicated in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 contains the findings and data analysis, and Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation with a summary of the research findings, implications for policy and practice, and recommendations for additional inquiry.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of homeschooled students' access to public school resources intersects with several key themes in the literature on homeschooling. Choice, particularly school choice, operates as the predominant theme in much of the literature on homeschooling. This literature review traces the evolution of school choice and the various meanings and purposes associated with school choice in recent history. This review also highlights parental motivations for choosing to homeschool their children. The legal and political context for homeschooling is integral to the current study, and thus the literature review examines federal and state laws and local policies that regulate the practice of homeschooling. This review of the literature also captures the demographic shifts in the homeschooling community. In addition, the literature review attends to the types of resources homeschool educators use and the nature of the relationship between public schools and homeschools. Lastly, the review describes social construction/narrative analysis, which is the interpretive framework used in this study. The description of the interpretive framework encompasses its methodological traditions, its general tenets, its historical applications across politics and other disciplines, and its limitations.

Overview of School Choice

School choice is not new, and it is the indigenous nature of choice within the arena of education in the United States that compels widespread participation in the ongoing debate around this controversial issue. Within the U.S. context, the phrase *school choice* has taken on different meanings during the country's distinctive historical periods. In the early years of the nation, school choice was limited to elite Whites who had the resources to homeschool their

children or to pay tuition at private academies. In 1852, Massachusetts passed the first compulsory education law aimed at urging reluctant students from poor families to attend school (Katz, 1975). The effect of such a law, of course, was to curtail individual freedom such that no longer could families choose to reject formal schooling without facing fines or other consequences for nonattendance. By the end of the 19th century, people in most major cities across the country had accepted compulsory schooling (Katz, 1975). However, universal compulsory education did not happen swiftly. Almost seven decades after Massachusetts adopted its compulsory education law, Mississippi became the last state in the Union to pass a law requiring children to attend school for a prescribed period of time, doing so in 1918.

School choice, which offers families options for complying with states' compulsory education laws, has "framed five pivotal moments in American schooling" (Minow, 2011, p. 817). With the first pivotal moment in the 1920s, anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic sentiments among White Protestants in Oregon fueled their demand that all children, especially newcomers, be educated exclusively in public schools. Oregon's Society of Sisters, which operated several Catholic schools, was joined by the Hill Military Academy in challenging the law that, if executed, would cause their businesses to fail. In protecting the property interests of the operators of private and religiously oriented schools, the Supreme Court's decision in *Pierce v. Society of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary* (1925) struck down Oregon's "public schools only" law and supported parental choice for the type of schooling their children would receive (Minow, 2011). The Court's rationale for its decision in this case seemed to hinge on the negative impact that such a "public schools only" law would have on the private sector of the education enterprise. Amid its focus on the proprietary interests of the private education providers, the Court also underscored the importance of liberty:

The fundamental theory of liberty upon which all governments in this Union repose excludes any general power of the state to standardize its children by forcing them to accept instruction from public teachers only. The child is not the mere creature of the state; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations. (*Pierce v. Society of the Sisters*, 1925, p. 535)

This declaration denounced unreasonable state interference and pointed toward family-level liberty whereby “sound public policy . . . affirmatively empower[s] the family institution as the main engine of economic, educational, and civic life” (Witte & Mero, 2008, p. 410).

The Supreme Court’s abolishment of the separate but equal doctrine in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) spurred another major conflict in American schooling that intersected with the burgeoning school choice movement. In ruling that separate schools for Black children and White children were inherently unequal, the Court ostensibly opened new public school choice avenues for Black students to leave their racially isolated, inferior-status schools in pursuit of the better-resourced schools attended by White students. Around this same time, economist Milton Friedman proposed government-funded vouchers as a means of infusing the market principle of competition into the state monopoly on education (Minow, 2011; Siegel-Hawley & Frankenberg, 2010). In defiance of the ruling to desegregate the nation’s schools, White parents exercised their constitutionally protected right to choose a private school for their children, sometimes using state-funded vouchers to pay the school fees (Siegel-Hawley & Frankenberg, 2010). In some instances, schools in the South resisted desegregation by closing public schools, effectively “denying blacks access to schooling altogether” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 60). “Freedom of choice” plans existed in name only and purported to give Black students the option of enrolling in White schools, yet “in what was often an atmosphere of violence, intimidation, and virulent opposition” (Siegel-Hawley & Frankenberg, 2010, p. 333), few Black students chose majority White schools.

While school choice became “tainted as an anti-desegregation tactic” (Minow, 2011, p. 824) in the aftermath of *Brown* (1954), the application of school choice in the 1970s and 1980s emphasized a complete reversal of purpose. In *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* (1968), the Court determined that freedom-of-choice plans were inadequate to achieve school desegregation and insisted:

Rather than further the dismantling of the dual system, the plan has operated simply to burden children and their parents with a responsibility which *Brown II* placed squarely on the School Board. The Board must be required to formulate a new plan and, in light of other courses which appear open to the Board, such as zoning, fashion steps which promise realistically to convert promptly to a system without a ‘white’ school and a ‘Negro’ school, but just schools. (p. 442)

The failure of freedom-of-choice plans to achieve school desegregation forced school boards to seek alternative strategies for complying with the Court’s order “to convert to a unitary system in which racial discrimination would be eliminated root and branch” (*Green v. County School Board of New Kent County*, 1968, p. 438). Tactics such as busing and rezoning, which limited parental and student choice about the schools they would attend, were fraught with controversy and enjoyed limited success in altering the racial imbalance in schools. With the creation of magnet schools, school leaders in urban districts hoped to implement choice policies that would foster racial and socioeconomic integration (Siegel-Hawley & Frankenberg, 2010). By offering specialized curricular programs such as performing arts at magnet schools located in inner-city neighborhoods, school leaders sought to integrate the schools voluntarily by attracting White parents and middle class parents of color (Minow, 2011; Siegel-Hawley & Frankenberg, 2010).

The fourth pivotal moment in American schooling brought school choice full circle. The Supreme Court’s judgment in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* (2002) made it permissible for states to issue vouchers to poor students attending schools that were deemed to be failing schools. With the financial assistance afforded by publicly funded vouchers, students from low-income families

were able to choose public or private schools, including faith-based schools (Minow, 2011). In a drastic departure from the longstanding doctrine of separation of church and state, justices approved a Cleveland, Ohio voucher plan in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* (2002) that caused the wall of separation to come tumbling down. Of the more than 3,700 students who participated in the voucher program, 96% enrolled in religiously affiliated schools (Alexander & Alexander, 2012). The program, which offered public and private, religious, and secular schooling options, was lauded as one that “permits . . . individuals to exercise genuine choice among options . . . [in] a program of true private choice” (*Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, 2002, p. 662-663). This elevation of private choice gave another boost to the school choice movement by making it possible for low-income families in the Cleveland City School District to enroll their children in private schools at public expense.

Accountability and reform are the hallmarks of the fifth pivotal moment in the relationship between American education and school choice. Indeed, with support from federal policies, school choice has quickly ascended as the currently preferred method of school reform. Partly fueled by the No Child Left Behind (2002) legislation that gave parents whose children were enrolled in chronically low-performing schools the option to transfer to another school, the school choice movement has expanded to include an ever-widening array of educational choices. States rushed to amend their charter school laws or to pass new charter-enabling legislation in an effort to secure a portion of the more than \$4 billion available through the Race to the Top program, a 2009 federal program that President Obama’s administration implemented to incentivize the expansion of public charter schools. The proliferation of public and nonpublic options such as magnet schools, charter schools, virtual schools, private schools, boarding schools, and homeschools, as well as vouchers and tuition-tax credits, ensures that parents in

multiple locales have access to a variety of schooling options away from the traditional neighborhood schools (Jolly, Matthews, & Nester, 2012). The idea that parents will vote with their feet to choose the best educational options for their children and thereby spur competition that will lead to educational improvement provides the foundation upon which the school choice reform movement depends (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Lips & Feinberg, 2008; Slaughter-Defoe et al., 2012).

In the extant era of school choice marked by performance-based accountability, charter schools are at the forefront of the reform movement. Minnesota pioneered the first public charter school legislation in 1991 and defined a charter school as a public school with a specialized purpose that is part of the state's system of public education and exempt from many of the statutes and rules applicable to traditional public schools (Larson, 2011). Currently, 42 states and the District of Columbia have enacted charter school legislation (Zgainer & Kerwin, 2015). Charter schools are creations of the individual states that “enacted charter school laws with a goal in mind—student achievement through innovation” (Curtis, 2012, p. 1083) with the added expectation that “traditional schools can benefit from the ideas, methods, and successes of competent charter schools” (Curtis, 2012, p. 1084). “From a legal perspective, charter schools occupy a shadowy terrain between purely ‘public’ and ‘private’ education” (Davis, 2011, p. 8) in that they are publicly funded but often privately managed by independent charter management organizations. The more than 6,700 quasi-public charter schools that serve 2.9 million children disrupt the public education monopoly held by traditional public schools (Zgainer & Kerwin, 2015). Competition for resources—primarily for students and funding—between traditional public schools and public charter schools has spawned waves of litigation in school districts and states throughout the U.S.

Although school choice continues to take on multiple meanings for different people in different contexts, this abbreviated historical overview of school choice demonstrates how the “concept of school choice . . . [has become] rooted in the public consciousness . . . [as] a key part of the general concept of schooling” (Siegel-Hawley & Frankenberg, 2010, p. 332). Jolly, Matthews, and Nester (2012) emphasize that “choice seems to be a logical and overarching theme in homeschooling. Perceptions of a lack of choice in traditional school settings is what many of these parents reported as having pushed them to homeschool in the first place” (p. 130). Fields-Smith and Williams (2009) place homeschooling at the height of family involvement as the most intense educational practice families undertake. Families who choose this intense educational practice do so out of a confluence of motivations including ideological, pedagogical, sociological, and ethnological reasons.

Reasons Parents Choose Homeschooling

The reasons parents choose homeschooling is the most written-about topic in the literature on homeschooling. Most of the research on parental motivations for homeschooling has been qualitative, relying on parents’ own words in interviews and on open-ended survey items (Collom, 2005; Lois, 2013). Multiple studies found that parents chose to homeschool their children for a plethora of reasons including the lack of religious or moral instruction in conventional schools; dissatisfaction with the quality of education offered in conventional schools; dissatisfaction with the services available for gifted or special-needs students in conventional schools; and, for African American parents in particular, concern with racism and the negative stereotypes conventional school structure imposes on their children (Fields-Smith & Wells Kisura, 2013; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Gaither, 2009b; Jolly, Matthews, & Nester, 2012; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Mazama & Lundy, 2012). Furthermore, Gaither (2009b)

indicated that “increasing numbers who opt to homeschool do so as an accessory, hybrid, temporary stop-gap, or out of necessity given their circumstances” (p. 343). Using 351 texts that they determined bore quality scholarship, significance for the field, and distinctive insight, Kunzman and Gaither (2013) compiled a comprehensive review of the homeschooling literature. They featured research which supported the ideas that parents’ rationales for homeschooling cannot be separated from their local contexts (Nemer, 2002) and that parents’ rationales for homeschooling change over time (Spiegler, 2010). These findings, coupled with the tremendous heterogeneity within the homeschool population, make it difficult to compartmentalize homeschoolers based on their stated motivations for choosing homeschooling.

Despite the acknowledged complexities and overlap, studies on homeschoolers have consistently identified five main categories into which parental motivations for homeschooling typically fit. The *ideologues* form one such category (Van Galen, 1991). Ideologues choose homeschooling for religious reasons and make up the group that is, for much of the public, the most closely, even stereotypically, associated with the homeschooling movement. Parents who choose homeschooling to provide moral instruction and/or to develop their children’s character/morality have also been grouped with the ideological homeschoolers (Isenberg, 2007). Those who cite religious reasons still make up the majority of homeschoolers, but the number of parents who choose homeschooling for religious reasons may be subsiding (Collom, 2005; Jolly, Matthews, & Nester, 2012; Murphy, 2012). Parents who choose to homeschool for academic reasons make up the category known as the *pedagogues* (Van Galen, 1991). These parents homeschool their children because they believe they can provide their children a better education than conventional schools can. Referring to what they regard as the poor learning environment in schools and the lack of academic rigor, pedagogues are motivated to homeschool their

children to provide a better learning environment and a curriculum that meets their children's academic needs (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Jolly, Matthews, & Nester, 2012).

Parents also choose homeschooling for *socio-relational* reasons (Lois, 2013). Mayberry and Knowles (1989) found that parents' desire to keep the family close was a common reason for homeschooling among both ideologues and pedagogues. Similarly, both ideologically oriented and pedagogically oriented homeschooling parents express dissatisfaction with the social environment in public schools. Parents who choose homeschooling for socio-relational reasons avoid conventional schools due to their concerns about negative peer influences. Data from the 2012 National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES) showed that the parents of 91% of homeschooled children selected concern about the environment of other schools as an important reason for the decision to homeschool. Further, based on the response to the question "Did your family choose to homeschool this child because you are concerned about the school environment, such as safety, drugs, or negative peer pressure?" parents of 25% of homeschooled children identified concern about school environment as the most important rationale for homeschooling. In this nationally representative sample, 19% and 16% of parents of homeschooled children regarded dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools and desire to provide religious instruction, respectively, as the most important reasons for homeschooling (Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2013).

Homeschooling parents of children with physical, mental health, and/or behavioral challenges as well as parents whose children are academically advanced choose homeschooling to accommodate their children's "*special needs*" (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Jolly, Matthews, & Nester, 2012; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). In the 2012 NHES survey, 15% of homeschooling parents identified their child's physical or mental health problem as an important

reason for homeschooling; 17% reported that their child's other special needs were an important reason for their decision (Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2013). In some instances, parents turn to homeschooling after they have determined that the resources available in conventional schools are insufficient to meet their children's needs (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Jolly, Matthews, & Nester, 2012).

Scholars have recently presented *ethnological* reasons for homeschooling as another motivational category, one that is unique to Black homeschoolers (Fields-Smith, 2015; Fields-Smith & Wells Kisura, 2013; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Lundy & Mazama, 2014; Mazama & Lundy, 2012). In a study on the determinants of parental motivations, Collom (2005) found that "homeschoolers of color are more likely to be motivated by their criticism of the public schools" (p. 326). A few studies have focused exclusively on Black homeschoolers and have documented how parents' negative experiences with public and private schools motivated them to homeschool their children (Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Mazama & Lundy, 2012). According to Mazama and Lundy (2012), those parents who seek to shield their children from institutional and individual racism perpetuated against Black children in conventional schools are described as *racial protectionists*. Beyond protecting their children from racism, Black parents proactively choose homeschooling to teach their children about Black history and culture, something parents perceive as lacking in conventional schools' curricula (Fields-Smith, 2015; Lundy & Mazama, 2014).

Researchers continue to look for new dimensions of parental motivations for homeschooling. Lois (2013), one such researcher, has proposed a different typology for understanding parental motivations for homeschooling. In her binary classification system, homeschoolers are *first-choicers* or *second-choicers*. First-choicers choose homeschooling

because it is their favored educational option, whereas second-choicers choose homeschooling when their preferred educational option is unavailable (Lois, 2013). When applied to homeschoolers, this typology intersects with the aforementioned five main categories. Lois (2013) provided an example of the intersection:

Many first-choice homeschoolers were ideologues, but . . . [ideologues were] also found . . . among the second-choicers, who would have preferred to send their children to private Christian school but could not afford the tuition. Likewise, . . . some pedagogues . . . were first-choicers, and others . . . thought their children’s educational needs would be better served in the right school setting. (p. 47)

While the first-choicers were satisfied with their decision to homeschool, many second-choice homeschoolers sought educational alternatives for their children (Lois, 2013).

Labels aside, rarely do parents point to a single factor for their decision to homeschool their children (Mazama & Lundy, 2012). Increasingly, parents choose homeschooling because it makes sense for their families (Gaither, 2009a). As family circumstances change, the motivations for homeschooling also change. Examples of family circumstances that may necessitate homeschooling, perhaps on a temporary basis, include a parent’s or student’s career or involvement in time-consuming activities (e.g., acting or sports) that demand heavy travel and flexible scheduling or a prolonged illness that prevents a child from attending school regularly (Gaither, 2009a; Gaither, 2009b; Hanna, 2012). Moreover, the reasons parents persist in homeschooling often differ from their initial reasons for choosing to homeschool their children.

Legal Status and Policy Context for Homeschooling

“Education is a well-recognized right” (Tanimura, 2012, p. 428)—indeed, so well-recognized that it is worth noting the remarkable fact that education is not in the Constitution of the United States as a specific function of the federal government. The framers of the U.S. Constitution afforded maximum latitude to the states for crafting their own education systems.

As such, parents who have made the choice about where they will live have already exercised the “most . . . important form of choice in American elementary and secondary schooling” (Hoxby, 2003, p. 301). Parents of school-age children often make residential decisions based on the perceived quality of the local schools (Berends & Zottola, 2009; Holme, 2002; Hoxby, 2003). Homeschooling parents, even those who do not intend to patronize local conventional schools, also experience the impact of their residential decisions on their ability to educate their children. Homeschooling is legal in all 50 states (Lips & Feinberg, 2008); however, no consensus statute governs the implementation of homeschooling regulations across the states. This section of the literature review offers a broad overview of the national context for homeschooling in general and a summary of the homeschooling law and policies specific to North Carolina and Wake County.

Legal status and policy context in the United States. The Constitution of the United States remains conspicuously silent about education and, via the 10th Amendment, foists the responsibility for the provision of education onto the individual states. In its landmark school funding decision, the Supreme Court reminded litigants that “Education, of course, is not among the rights afforded explicit protection under our Federal Constitution” (*San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, 1973, p. 35). Just as students have no federal fundamental right to education, parents do not have a fundamental right to educate their children at home. Nevertheless, several precedent-setting Supreme Court decisions have laid the foundation for modern-day school choice and outlined both governmental and parental responsibilities in the face of multiple educational options. Three such cases that continue to hold significant sway in the advancement of the rhetoric about school choice and to lend support to homeschooling

proponents' arguments include *Meyer v. Nebraska* (1923), *Pierce v. Society of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary* (1925), and *Wisconsin v. Yoder* (1972).

Meyer v. Nebraska (1923), which ultimately concerned itself with liberty, came to the fore as a result of the xenophobic climate in the U.S. during and immediately after World War I. The court considered a private school instructor's conviction for teaching the German language to an elementary-age student in violation of Nebraska law and deliberated on the nature of individual liberty guaranteed by the Constitution. In overturning the lower court's ban on teaching a language other than English to young children, the *Meyer* (1923) court affirmed the supremacy of the acquisition of useful knowledge and parents' right to choose the type of education their children receive. On both matters, the court opined:

The American people have always regarded education and acquisition of knowledge as matters of supreme importance. . . . Corresponding to the right of control, it is the natural duty of the parent to give his children education . . . ; and nearly all the states . . . enforce this obligation by compulsory laws. (*Meyer v. Nebraska*, 1923, p. 400)

This ruling made clear that neither the state nor parents has absolute authority over education.

The state has the power to require school attendance and to establish and approve the curriculum in the public schools; however, the state cannot arbitrarily prohibit parents from teaching their children German or any other useful subject. Homeschooling proponents have focused on the court's declaration of parental control over children's education to argue for their right to educate their children as they see fit.

Just two years after the *Meyer* (1923) decision, the Supreme Court once again upheld parental authority to direct their children's upbringing in a case that dealt largely with the economics of school choice. We have a "rich history of private and religious education in this country" (Simon, 2010, p. 424), and the court's decision in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* (1925) ensured that the U.S. would continue to do so. The court was called to intervene when the

educational philosophy of a group of Oregonians that essentially “ignored the variety of American life and reflected an unacceptable cultural bias by imposing uniform services upon a diverse clientele” (Katz, 1975, p. 12) threatened to dismantle the property held by private school corporations. In the ruling, which promoted the idea of competition (an idea that is central to the current-day justification for school choice), the Court affirmed (a) private school corporations’ right to property that the government cannot take away, and (b) parents’ right to choose the type of education their children receive. A landmark case that arguably expanded accessibility to private and faith-based schooling, *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* (1925), nevertheless, made it clear that the state ultimately has the right to regulate schooling (Kunzman, 2012). Though not absolute, the state has extensive power to “regulate *all* [emphasis added] schools, to inspect, supervise and examine them, their teachers and pupils; to require that *all* [emphasis added] children of proper age attend some school, that teachers shall be of good moral character and patriotic disposition, that certain studies plainly essential to good citizenship must be taught” (*Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 1925, p. 534). In light of the state’s power to regulate all schools and to require all school-age children to attend school, all schools from which a family may choose—including homeschools—fall under the purview of state control. Parents have successfully used this federal case to press for homeschool options such that states now have regulations regarding homeschooling as a feature of school choice.

The state’s interest in compulsory education is high, because education is necessary to prepare individuals to participate fully in American society as self-sufficient citizens. And yet in *Wisconsin v. Yoder* (1972), the court instituted an exception to the compulsory attendance law. In this case, Amish parents refused to send their children to public school after their children completed 8th grade and thus were in violation of the Wisconsin state law that demanded

compulsory attendance for all students up to age 16. The children were ages 14 and 15 at the time their parents ended their public school education. The parents maintained that sending their children to high school would endanger the continuation of the Amish way of life characterized by separation from modern society and closeness to God. Chief Justice Burger delivered the court's finding that the state's interest in compulsory education does not outweigh the parents' right to free exercise of religion as guaranteed under the First Amendment. Further, the Amish continued their children's education by providing for them a vocational education that prepared them for agrarian life among the Amish. Although there has been no constitutional law that has made a decisive ruling on homeschooling, the *Yoder* (1972) court endorsed the home education Amish parents provided to their children as sufficient preparation for life as productive citizens (Moran, 2011). Of the Supreme Court cases most often cited by homeschooling advocates, *Yoder* (1972) comes the closest to addressing homeschooling specifically as a viable educational option (McMullen, 2002).

The Constitution's stance on education notwithstanding, many state constitutions, including North Carolina's, regard access to the education provided by the public schools as a fundamental right (Black, 2010; Plecnik, 2007; Roberts, 2009). All states have adopted language within their state constitutions that establishes a foundation for the organization, supervision, and maintenance of a system of free public schools. As a result of the United States' decentralized approach to education, the laws and regulations that constitute educational opportunity and implementation across the country vary from state to state and represent an amalgam of common and unique features. Several states' constitutions commonly refer to the "general diffusion of knowledge" and speak of the "advantages and opportunities" education conveys. North Carolina is one of 18 states whose constitutional language characterizes education as a democratic

imperative and thus elevates the role of education in the preservation of the rights and liberties of the people (Hunter, 2011). Further, states have codified their obligation to provide all resident, school-age children “equality of educational opportunity” through a public education system that is “efficient,” “thorough,” and “as nearly uniform as practicable” (Hunter, 2011). All states allow school-age children to be exempt from the public education system and to be educated by other means as delineated in the states’ constitutional and legislative frameworks. “Given that education is considered a core governmental purpose that cannot be delegated without assurances that the public interest is being served,” state governments determine the legality and scope of all alternative schooling options, including homeschooling (Kemerer, 2009, p. 55).

Kunzman and Gaither (2013) characterized the literature on state statutory law regarding the permissibility of homeschooling as “confusing and intimidating [, filled with] descriptive . . . scholarship [that attempts to] bring . . . order to the dizzying array of state statutes and court decisions” (p. 25). Homeschooling, which hitherto had been widely practiced throughout the states, came under fire during the 1920s era of compulsory attendance and was considered a criminal offense in many states. To comply with the new compulsory attendance laws and to avoid fines, jail sentences, and removal of their children, most would-be homeschoolers enrolled their children in conventional public and private schools. And, as Gaither (2008) put forward:

Until the late 1970s when homeschooling quickly morphed from being a rare and isolated experience to a fairly common one, state legislatures had not paid much attention to their aging compulsory education statutes. The new homeschoolers, looking for wiggle-room, did. What they found surprised them. State laws, while nearly identical in many respects, dealt with domestic education in different ways. . . . [States] differed markedly over the specificity of their rules governing non-public school instruction and over establishing who was in charge of it all. Some were very vague. (pp. 179-180)

Many states with vague laws rewrote their statutes and included explicit language that permitted homeschooling; even so, state-to-state variability in homeschooling regulations continues to be the norm.

By 1993, homeschooling was recognized in all U.S. states as a legal alternative to public schooling that satisfied the states' compulsory attendance laws (Somerville, 2001). A few early-adopter states (e.g., Indiana in 1904 and Illinois in 1950) legalized homeschooling in the years prior to homeschooling's re-emergence as a contemporary education phenomenon. Thirty-two states adopted homeschool statutes during the ten-year period from 1982 to 1991. Still other states, such as California, never passed a homeschool statute. In California, Texas, and six other states, homeschools operate under the states' private school laws. Thirteen states offer multiple legal avenues for homeschooling. For example, in Tennessee and Florida, homeschoolers may elect to operate under the general homeschool statute or under the "umbrella" of a private school. In addition to the private school umbrella, multiple-option states' regulations outline how homeschools may operate through means such as homeschool associations (e.g., in South Carolina), correspondence programs (e.g., in Alaska), private tutors (e.g., in Colorado), and religious exemptions (e.g., in Virginia; Coalition for Responsible Home Education, 2015).

The patchwork of statutes and provisions that governs multiple aspects of homeschooling such as the supervising authority, notification, educator qualifications, recordkeeping, and assessment diverge widely across states and even within states (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). Oversight for homeschooling typically rests with either the state department of education or local school districts, and 39 states require parents to notify department of education officials or local school superintendents of their intent to operate a homeschool (Coalition for Responsible Home Education, 2015). According to the Coalition for Responsible Home Education (CRHE, 2015),

the majority of states require annual notice while parents in 10 states must file a one-time notice of intent when they initiate homeschooling. The other 11 states do not impose any notification requirement upon homeschooling parents. Only 11 states stipulate that parents who homeschool their children hold a high school diploma, its equivalent, or higher education; Washington is the only state to require education beyond high school for home educators (CRHE, 2015). In a few states, homeschooling statutes call for parents to maintain attendance, immunization, and assessment records for homeschooled children, but rarely do states mandate that parents submit records to state or local authorities (CRHE, 2015). Twenty-six states have no assessment requirements for homeschooled students. Non-uniform assessment requirements in the remaining 24 states typically rely on standardized tests or portfolio reviews and often give parents the option to choose which type of assessment they want to administer to their children. Although homeschooled children may be required to participate in assessments on an annual basis or at specific grade levels, state regulations are often lax in that no minimum score on standardized tests is required and assessment results are primarily for parents' information only (CRHE, 2015).

The same divergent pattern evident throughout the homeschool statutes can also be seen in states' stances on homeschooled students' access to public school resources. Only a few states spell out the degree of access afforded to homeschooled students for such resources as part-time enrollment in public school courses, use of curricular materials, participation in co-curricular and extracurricular activities, and testing and related services for homeschooled children with special needs. In states like Wisconsin, statewide regulations specify that part-time enrollment is contingent on space and stipulate partial funding for part-time students. Some states, for example Hawaii, enlist a statewide ban on homeschoolers' part-time enrollment. The majority of

states remain silent on the topic of access and leave the decision to local education administrators. Usually, states defer to the school districts which exercise district discretion to permit or to restrict homeschooled students' access (CRHE, 2015; International Center for Home Education Research [ICHER], 2014).

A few notable statutes are useful for demonstrating the manner in which various states have addressed the issue of access for homeschooled students. According to Illinois law, school districts must accept homeschooled children with disabilities for part-time enrollment (105 Ill. Comp. Stat. § 5/14-6.01). Nevada's statute directs public schools to allow homeschooled students to participate in school-based testing including the PSAT and the National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test and to "ensure that the homeschooled children who reside in the school district have adequate notice of the availability of information concerning such examinations on the Internet website of the school district" (Nev. Rev. Stat. § 392.700.11). Pennsylvania statute and West Virginia code both charge local public school superintendents to lend textbooks, curriculum materials, and teaching resources to home educators (24 Pa. Stat. § 13-1327.1(f); W. Va. Code § 18-8-1c-3). As these examples attest, states employ variable approaches to homeschoolers' access to specific public school resources.

Legal status and policy context in North Carolina. North Carolina's Constitution declares, "The people have a right to the privilege of education, and it is the duty of the State to guard and maintain that right" (N.C. Const., art. I, § 15). The precepts that support the state's recognition of education as a fundamental right are outlined in Article IX and are stated here in part:

Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools, libraries, and the means of education shall forever be encouraged. The General Assembly shall provide by taxation and otherwise for a general and uniform system of free public schools, which shall be maintained at least nine

months in every year, and wherein equal opportunities shall be provided for all students. The General Assembly shall provide that every child of appropriate age and of sufficient mental and physical ability shall attend the public schools, unless educated by other means. (N.C. Const., art. IX, § 1-3)

The state constitution lays the groundwork for all children in North Carolina to receive equal educational opportunities via state-supported public schools, but it also leaves the door open for children to be educated by other means.

The North Carolina Supreme Court ushered in a watershed moment with its momentous decision in *Leandro v. State of North Carolina* (1997), wherein the Court affirmed the constitutional guarantee of education and described qualitatively what it means for all children to receive a sound basic education. Plaintiffs in the case were students, parents, and educators from school districts in Hoke, Halifax, Robeson, Cumberland, and Vance counties. They contended that the State of North Carolina and the State Board of Education deprived children in their districts of their constitutionally protected right to education and sought a remedy of increased state funding for education in their local districts. The plaintiffs from these five low-wealth, mostly rural school districts were joined by plaintiff-intervenors from wealthier, urban school districts in Asheville City and Buncombe, Durham, Forsyth, Mecklenburg, and Wake counties. Plaintiff-intervenors also argued that they needed additional state aid to meet the educational needs of the disproportionately high number of exceptional children enrolled in their school districts. Thus, both parties raised the question of adequacy, or how much money and other resource inputs is enough to ensure each student receives an education that adequately prepares him/her to meet predetermined outcomes. The court established the qualitative threshold for a constitutionally adequate education and deferred to the state's legislative body for determining which educational resources would best "ensure that each child of the state receives a sound basic education" (*Leandro*, 1997, p. 354-355).

In *Leandro* (1997), the court acted in its duty to “determine the meaning of the requirements of our Constitution” and unanimously ruled that “the right to education provided in the state constitution is a right to a sound basic education. An education that does not serve the purpose of preparing students to participate and compete in the society in which they live and work is devoid of substance and is constitutionally inadequate” (p. 345-346). Chief Justice Mitchell employed the phrase “sound basic education” more than 20 times in the *Leandro* (1997) disposition; however, the “words lack inherent meaning. Rather, the level of education that . . . [the phrase] reflect[s] is entirely dependent on the court defining and applying them” (Black, 2010, p. 1367). The North Carolina Supreme Court substantially further clarified that a sound basic education is:

one that will provide the student with at least: (1) sufficient ability to read, write, and speak the English language and a sufficient knowledge of fundamental mathematics and physical science to enable the student to function in a complex and rapidly changing society; (2) sufficient fundamental knowledge of geography, history, and basic economic and political systems to enable the student to make informed choices with regard to issues that affect the student personally or affect the student’s community, state, and nation; (3) sufficient academic and vocational skills to enable the student to successfully engage in post-secondary education or vocational training; and (4) sufficient academic and vocational skills to enable the student to compete on an equal basis with others in further formal education or gainful employment in contemporary society. (*Leandro*, 1997, p. 347)

And, with those words, all children residing in North Carolina unequivocally have a constitutional right to a sound basic education that prepares them for their future in a dynamic society. This right accrues to children regardless of their school district or the school they attend. Archer (2014) reasoned that the right to a sound basic education also extends to homeschooled students, because Article I, Section 15 of the North Carolina Constitution “does not make any distinction between students who are educated in public schools versus students who are educated outside of public schools” (p. 266). The court-established *Leandro* (1997) right is

based on the a priori fundamental right to education guaranteed to all North Carolina residents, and thus *Leandro* “applies to all students within the state” (Archer, 2014, p. 266).

The framers of the Constitution acknowledged the state’s duty to maintain and to guard North Carolinians’ right to education, and they appointed the General Assembly to the task of providing a system of free public schools throughout the state and ensuring that all children are educated in the public schools or by other means (art. I, § 15; art. IX, § 3). The General Assembly is also charged with enacting the laws that undergird the administration of the public school system. The *Leandro* (1997) Court reiterated the General Assembly’s obligation to the people of the state, averring that the legislative process would serve as the best vehicle for soliciting the public’s input on important educational issues such as curricula, academic standards, and performance standards. Even as the court called education the province of the legislative branch, the judicial and executive branches have worked in concert with the state’s lawmakers to address the breadth of educational issues that has arisen.

On the controversial issue of homeschooling, all three branches have contributed to the current legal status of homeschooling in North Carolina, starting with the judicial decision in *Larry Delconte v. State of North Carolina* (1985). Larry Delconte, his wife Michelle, and their four children moved to Harnett County, North Carolina, in 1981. Prior to coming to North Carolina, the Delcontes had been homeschooling their children in New York with the assistance of local public school administrators. Following their move to North Carolina, they sought to continue homeschooling their two school-aged children; however, their request to have their home education program approved as a nonpublic school was denied. Larry Delconte was charged with violating the state’s compulsory attendance laws, which a lower court determined prohibited homeschooling. The Supreme Court of North Carolina rejected the notion that

Delconte's homeschool violated attendance laws and found that his home instruction qualified as a nonpublic school. The Court cited Sections 556-558 and 560, Article 39, Chapter 115C of the North Carolina General Statutes which "require qualified nonpublic schools to maintain certain annual attendance and disease immunization records, to operate on a certain regular schedule, to be subject to certain health and safety inspections, to administer certain standardized tests and to maintain records of the test results, and to provide information concerning its operation to appropriate state officials" (*Delconte*, 1985, p. 390). In addition to meeting all of the aforementioned qualifications, Delconte's homeschool received no funding from the state, which is one of the characteristics that distinguishes a qualified nonpublic school according to Section 115C-555.

Ultimately, the Court discovered no constitutional or statutory prohibition of homeschooling and concluded that attendance at a "qualified nonpublic school" met the state's compulsory attendance law (*Delconte*, 1985). Moreover, the Court syllogized that the legislature intended "to loosen, rather than tighten, the standards for nonpublic education in North Carolina. It would be anomalous to hold that these recent statutes were designed to prohibit home instruction when the legislature obviously intended them to make it easier, not harder, for children to be educated in nonpublic school settings" (*Delconte*, 1985, p. 400). The North Carolina Supreme Court referenced both *Pierce* (1925) and *Yoder* (1972) as barometers for their decision, submitting that "the United States Supreme Court seems to consider the right of parents to guide both the religious future and the education generally of their children to be fundamental" (*Delconte*, 1985, p. 401). Justices also, though, invoked the *parens patriae* doctrine and "recognize[d] that the state has a compelling interest in seeing that children are educated" (*Delconte*, 1985, p. 401-402). Having determined that the Delcontes could legally

continue to guide their children's education through their home education program, the court footnoted, "We express no opinion on whether it would be good public policy for North Carolina" (*Delconte*, 1985, p. 403). Questions about homeschool regulations were left to the General Assembly as a matter of public policy for how best to protect parents' right to direct the upbringing of their children, students' right to the privilege of education, and the state's interest in an educated citizenry.

Homeschooling in North Carolina is governed by the provisions of the 1988 homeschooling law and the 2013 revision to the law that expanded the definition of a homeschool. These provisions are described in Chapter 115C, Article 39, Part 3 of the North Carolina General Statutes. For 25 years, a homeschool in North Carolina was defined as "a nonpublic school in which one or more children of not more than two families or households *receive academic instruction from parents* [emphasis added] or legal guardians, or a member of either household." Homeschoolers in North Carolina won a major legislative victory in 2013 when the General Assembly amended the law defining "home schools" in North Carolina as such: "a nonpublic school consisting of the children of not more than two families or households, where the *parents* or legal guardians or members of either household determine the scope and sequence of academic instruction, provide academic instruction, and *determine additional sources of academic instruction* [emphasis added]" (N.C. Gen. Stat. § 115C-563). This broadened definition of a homeschool permits homeschool educators (e.g., parents) to determine additional sources of academic instruction. Education officials had long interpreted the original definition of a homeschool to mean that parents were legally required to provide all academic instruction in all subjects to their homeschooled children. In keeping with the legislative purpose the Court cited in the *Delconte* (1985) decision, the amended definition of a homeschool is

intended to “make it easier, not harder, for children to be educated in nonpublic school settings.”

The new law means homeschooling parents are no longer obligated to provide all academic instruction for all subjects, and they are at liberty to choose who will provide additional academic instruction for their children.

The Division of Non-Public Education (DNPE), under the umbrella of the North Carolina Department of Administration (DOA), administers the homeschooling law. The DNPE is unique to North Carolina. In most states, departments of public instruction and/or local school districts oversee homeschooling practice to ensure parents comply with regulations. Before the 1970s, local school boards and the state Department of Public Instruction (DPI) bore responsibility for private education in North Carolina (Young, 2005). For almost 20 years (1979-1998), the governor served as the supervising authority for DNPE, during which time homeschools came under DNPE’s jurisdiction. Since 1998, DNPE has been housed with the DOA. A 2005 proposal from the governor’s office to move DNPE to DPI was quickly withdrawn amid strong opposition from the non-public school community (DNPE, 2014). And, so, North Carolina’s homeschools operate independently of the authority of the public education system.

Information regarding homeschools on the DNPE website is organized under five main headings—registration, reference, high school graduation requirements, driver eligibility certificate, and frequently asked questions—and includes requirements and recommendations for homeschooling in North Carolina. Parents in North Carolina who wish to homeschool their children who are between the ages of 7 and 16 must send to DNPE a one-time Notice of Intent to Operate a Home School (NOI). The NOI may be submitted via regular U.S. mail or via the electronic form on the DNPE website. The electronic form is only available during regular business hours (7:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m). Parents may optionally enter their telephone number on

the NOI. The submission of the electronic form requires that parents provide their email address. All other fields on the form are required per North Carolina statute. The statutorily mandated information for filing a NOI includes the county wherein the home is located, the name of the homeschool, the home mailing address, the name of the school owner, the name of the chief administrator, the names of all adults providing instruction, the month and year the school will begin operating, the election to operate as a religious or as a non-religious homeschool, and student enrollment information. The student enrollment section allows parents to enter the number of children of each gender and age (between the ages of 6 and 17) who will be enrolled in the homeschool. Within two days after submitting the NOI, parents must provide DNPE with diploma evidence for each instructor named on the NOI. Instructions for doing so are sent via email once the NOI is received by DNPE (DNPE, 2014).

North Carolina is among the minority of states wherein the minimum educational requirement for the parent instructor is a high school diploma or its equivalent. DNPE requires the chief administrator (i.e., the parent who files the NOI and is primarily responsible for the minor children during the hours when said children would otherwise be attending a conventional school) to provide proof of educational attainment for all individuals who will instruct the homeschooled children. Documents such as high school diploma, General Equivalency Diploma (GED), high school or college transcript, and professional license suffice as proof of appropriate educational credentials for serving as a homeschool instructor (DNPE, 2014).

For each student, homeschool educators must maintain disease immunization, attendance, and achievement records that are subject to inspection on an annual basis by officials from the DNPE. All records must be maintained for a period of one year. Homeschool students, including students with disabilities, must participate annually in a national standardized

assessment that measures the areas of English grammar, reading, spelling, and mathematics. Although exceptions to the testing requirement are not permitted, “North Carolina home school law does not mandate that the student achieve a certain minimum score on the nationally standardized test in order for the parent/guardian to be legally permitted to continue to home school that student during the following (or any future) school year” (DNPE, 2014). The Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) classifies states according to its four-tiered rating scale, which describes states as having “high,” “moderate,” “low,” or “no” regulations for homeschooling. Taken together, North Carolina’s regulations for homeschooling merit a rating of “moderate” on HSLDA’s scale (Howell & Sheran, 2008; Lips & Feinberg, 2008).

Although public schools cannot be required to admit homeschooled students on a part-time basis, North Carolina school districts exercise their discretion to determine the level of access afforded to homeschooled students (ICHER, 2014; Lukasik, 1996). District discretion results in some districts prohibiting access for homeschooled students (e.g., Pitt County Schools) and other districts allowing limited access on a case-by-case basis (e.g., Durham Public Schools). Other school districts (e.g., Iredell-Statesville Schools) invite homeschoolers to participate in public school offerings. Iredell-Statesville Schools opened the “iAcademy” in the 2013-2014 academic year and recruited homeschooled students to enroll in two or more online courses offered through the North Carolina Virtual Public School. In addition to the online courses, the school district established a classroom where homeschooled students participating in the iAcademy classes could come for additional help from a distance learning advisor and subject-area teachers. Twenty-three homeschooled students participated in the inaugural year of the program, and the school district hoped to double the number of students in the 2014-2015 school year (Preston, 2014). In North Carolina, students who enroll for two or more classes per

semester offered by a public school are classified as public school students. No statute in North Carolina permits students to be dually enrolled as nonpublic school students and public school students (North Carolinians for Home Education, 2014).

In accordance with current statutes and policies in North Carolina, homeschooled students are repeatedly denied access to public school resources with the logic that a student who has chosen an alternative education provider outside the public schools must forgo access to participation in courses and activities provided by the public schools (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Plecnik, 2007; Roberts, 2009). Recently, public school advocates helped to defeat legislation which would have granted North Carolina homeschooled students tuition-free enrollment in courses offered through the North Carolina Virtual Public School (NCVPS/Equal Access to Education, SB 510, 2015). Nevertheless, North Carolina lawmakers have exhibited keen interest in the issue of homeschoolers' access to public school resources. In a 2009 proposal, a legislative study committee was charged with investigating the effects of allowing homeschoolers to participate in public school extracurricular activities such as clubs, band, and drama (Home Schoolers in Public School Program/Study, NC SB 1012, 2009). At the request of the Joint Legislative Program Evaluation Oversight Committee, members of the Program Evaluation Division (PED) visited the Douglas County School District (DCSD) in Colorado in June 2013 with the expressed purpose of examining the district's implementation of school choice options and evaluating how the Colorado district's approach to school choice might inform education policymaking in North Carolina. Increased enrichment services to home education programs was one strategy DCSD implemented to broaden school choice options. Soon after the PED presented its final report to the Joint Legislative Program Evaluation Oversight Committee, the North Carolina Senate drafted a bill to establish a three-year open

enrollment pilot program. Up to five school districts and/or charter schools could participate in the proposed pilot program whereby districts or schools would provide up to 90 hours per semester of instruction to homeschooled students and receive one half the average per pupil allotment for each participating homeschooled student (Open Enrollment/Homeschool Pilot, Bill Draft 2013-MKz-150A, 2014). Although the aforementioned pieces of legislation were not enacted, they highlight the multiplicity of policy implications inherent in the issue of homeschooled students' access to public school resources.

Demographic Shifts

The population of homeschooled students in the U.S. has grown exponentially, and all statistical reports indicate that the number of students who are being educated at home continues to increase (Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Mazama & Lundy, 2012). Beginning in 1999 and every four years thereafter, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has used its National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES) data to release estimates of the number of homeschooled students in the U.S. Each report has documented the rise in the numbers of homeschooled students and in the proportion of homeschooled students relative to the overall school-age population. From 1999 to 2003, the number of homeschooled students jumped from 850,000 or 1.7% of the school-age population (Bielick, Chandler, & Broughman, 2001) to 1.1 million or 2.2% of the school-age population (Princiotta & Bielick, 2006). Based on the 2007 NHES data, Bielick (2008) estimated that 1.5 million children were enrolled in homeschools and represented 2.9% of the entire student population. According to preliminary results from the latest NHES report, 1.77 million school-age children, representative of 3.4% of the school-age population in the U.S., were enrolled in

homeschools during the 2011-2012 academic year (Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2013). From 1999 to 2011, the number of students enrolled in homeschools more than doubled.

In states (e.g., Pennsylvania and Maryland) that have recently recorded a decline in the number of homeschooled children, the apparent decline has been attributed to the numbers of homeschooled students who attend schools (e.g., traditional public schools, public charter schools, private schools) outside of their homeschools on a part-time basis. These part-time homeschoolers, who may still receive the majority of their education in the home, are counted as public school students under certain conditions. Dependent upon state and local regulations, homeschoolers who are dually enrolled in their homeschools and in public school classes may be classified as public school students and included in per-pupil funding enrollment reports. In such reports, it is often the case that a homeschooled student enrolled in one public school class counts as .25 pupil, and a homeschooled student enrolled in two public school classes counts as .50 pupil (Farris & Smith, 2016).

Official figures on the homeschool population are probably an underestimate. Noted homeschool researcher Brian Ray (2014) estimated that 2.2 million students are currently homeschooled in the U.S. and suggested an annual growth rate of 2% to 8% for the homeschooling population. The underground status of some homeschooling families who wish to remain relatively undetected by government agencies and the decentralized nature of homeschooling render it impossible to calculate the exact number of homeschooled students. As was stated earlier, 11 states do not require that parents who wish to educate their children at home notify state or local education officials of their intent to operate homeschools. Thirty-nine states require written notice of intent to operate a homeschool, but most states do not track the number of students enrolled in homeschools. Among states that require a written notice of

intent, 10 states only require a one-time notice when the homeschool is initially established while the other 29 states require annual notification (Coalition for Responsible Home Education, 2015). States also vary in terms of which agencies are responsible for receiving the notifications, such that depending on their state of residence, parents who intend to homeschool their children must notify the local school district, the state department of education, or some other designated authority. Data on the number of homeschools maintained at the local or state levels usually do not include the number of children enrolled in each school.

The expansion of homeschooling makes it unlikely that generalizations about the typical homeschooling family will reflect the demographic diversity within the homeschooling population (Kunzman, 2009). Even so, several characteristics of the homeschooling population have remained consistent during the period for which NHES data have been collected and reported. Homeschooled students are more likely than non-homeschooled students to live in a two-parent household. While 65% of non-homeschooled students live in two-parent households, 81% of homeschooled students do (Bielick, Chandler, & Broughman, 2001; Princiotta & Bielick, 2006). More than half of homeschooled students live in a two-parent household with one parent in the labor force (Princiotta & Bielick, 2006). Among two-parent households, it is usually the case that fathers participate in the labor force and mothers assume primary responsibility for educating the children in the home (Collom, 2005). A higher percentage of homeschooled students come from families with three or more children than do non-homeschooled students, 62% compared to 43% (Princiotta & Bielick, 2006). Data collected over multiple cycles reveal little change in homeschooling families' composition and rate of participation in the labor force; however, NHES data bear out several other demographic shifts within the growing homeschool population.

The diversity among homeschooling families has expanded to include growing numbers of racial and ethnic minorities as well as families of diverse religious backgrounds.

Homeschooling has long been associated as a trend among White, conservative Christians, and yet data reveal that the homeschooling population is more heterogeneous today than at any prior time. In 1999, 2003, and 2007, three-quarters of the homeschooling population consistently identified as White (Princiotta & Bielick, 2006; Planty et. al, 2009). From 2007 to 2011, the percentage of homeschoolers who identified as White dropped precipitously from 77% to 68% (Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2013). Much of this change in the racial/ethnic composition of the homeschooling population can be attributed to the dramatic increase in the percentage of homeschoolers who are Hispanic, up from 9% in 2007 to 15% in 2011. During this same time interval, the percentage of Black homeschoolers doubled from 4% to 8% of the homeschooling population (Planty et. al, 2009). Data on the percentage of homeschoolers who identified as Asian or Pacific Islander were collected for the first time in 2011. For the 2011-2012 academic year, 4% of homeschoolers were Asian or Pacific Islander. Another 5% of homeschoolers identified their race as Other (Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2013).

Similar to the racial and ethnic diversification among the homeschooling population, religious diversity has increased in recent years, as well. Collom (2005) suggested that the conservative Christian base of the homeschooling movement may be subsiding as parents choose to homeschool for a number of reasons unrelated to a desire to offer religious instruction to their children. Defying the stereotypes associated with the typical homeschooling family, growing numbers of Orthodox Jews, Roman Catholics, and Muslims are choosing to homeschool (Gaither, 2009a; Gaither, 2009b; Romanowski, 2006).

Demographic growth in North Carolina. Similar to the national growth trends in the population of homeschooled students, North Carolina has experienced a steady rise in the number of students enrolled in homeschools. For the first time in North Carolina, the 2013-2014 academic year saw the homeschool enrollment surpass enrollment in the state's private schools. Nearly 100,000 students are currently enrolled in homeschools in North Carolina, a figure which represents a 27% increase from 2012 (Hui, 2014a). The recent surge in homeschool growth in North Carolina is due, in part, to parents' opposition to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards in math and language arts (Hui, 2014a). The North Carolina Division of Non-Public Education (DNPE) publishes an annual homeschool statistical summary. The homeschool statistical year begins on July 1 and ends on June 30. DNPE data are available beginning with the 1988-1989 statistical year. The summary provides data on the number of homeschools in each county as well as the number and percentage of homeschools by type (i.e., religious or independent). The report also lists the estimated enrollment by county and by student age. The estimated enrollment figures are based on random homeschool enrollment sampling and the actual number of registered homeschools in operation during each statistical year.

Data for the last six school years for which data are available (Table 1) show the rise in both the number of homeschools and in the number of students enrolled in homeschools in the state. Incremental growth of approximately 2,000 additional homeschools per year from 2009 to 2012 gave way to a rapid acceleration in the number of homeschools in operation in the 2012-2013, 2013-2014, and 2014-2015 school years. From 2013-2015, approximately 14,000 new homeschools began operations in North Carolina. Giving credence to the national trend toward parents choosing to homeschool their children for reasons other than to offer religious instruction, the percentage of homeschools in North Carolina that operate as religious schools

continues to decline. At its height during the 1988-1989 school year, 78.3% of homeschools in North Carolina were categorized as religious schools. In 2014-2015, that percentage had fallen to 61.2. In concert with the increased numbers of new homeschools, the drop in the percentage of homeschools that operate as religious schools demonstrates the climb in the number of independent type homeschools in North Carolina.

Table 1

North Carolina Home School Statistics, 2009-2015

School Year	Number of Homeschools	Homeschools by Type: Percentage Independent	Homeschools by Type: Percentage Religious	Estimated Number of Students Enrolled in Homeschools
2014-2015	67,804	38.8%	61.2%	106,853
2013-2014	60,950	37.7%	62.3%	98,172
2012-2013	53,347	36.6%	63.4%	87,978
2011-2012	47,977	35.6%	64.4%	79,693
2010-2011	45,524	34.7%	65.3%	83,609
2009-2010	43,316	34.4%	65.6%	81,509

Source: North Carolina Division of Non-Public Education

Types of Resources Homeschool Educators Use

The principal resource necessary for the establishment and operation of a homeschool is the parent who serves as the main teacher for the children enrolled in the homeschool. As numerous studies have documented, mothers fill the role of teacher in the overwhelming majority of homeschool settings (Carpenter & Gann, 2015; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Lois, 2013). In most homeschools, mothers manage the day-to-day operations of the homeschool instructional program and are responsible for planning, delivering, and assessing instruction. Few homeschool educators are or have ever been certified by the state to teach. Homeschool educators invest personal resources such as their time, energy, knowledge, and skills to help their children learn (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Murphy, 2012). Through their participation in the paid labor force, fathers most often provide the financial support that enables the family to educate the children at home (Gaither, 2009a; Lois, 2013).

The home itself as an educational space functions as an essential resource for homeschooling (Gaither, 2009b). Yet, homeschoolers are not confined to the home. Homeschoolers have embraced the idea that learning can take place in multiple locales including libraries, museums, stores, and family-owned businesses (Hanna, 2012; Murphy, 2012). Hanna (2012) found that some homeschoolers utilize field trips and extended travel as an integral part of their instructional program. Community spaces wherein they participate in volunteer service act as additional sites for homeschooled students' learning experiences (Ray, 2014). Parents reach outside their homes to other people who may assist them in educating their children. Many homeschool educators join homeschool support groups to access a network of people for social interaction and instructional information (Hanna, 2012). Similarly, the homeschool co-op represents an avenue parents pursue, especially as children reach the high school years, to provide both social interaction and academic instruction to their children (Hanna, 2012; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Lois, 2013). Parents sometimes hire outside teachers and tutors for specific subjects such as calculus or music (Lois, 2013).

From the limited number of studies that focus on homeschooling practice, researchers consistently find that homeschool educators employ diverse sets of resources to educate their children (Hanna, 2012; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Murphy, 2012). The word "eclectic" is often applied to homeschoolers' approach to the selection and the use of curriculum materials (Carpenter & Gann, 2015; Hanna, 2012). In addition to self-prepared curricular materials, parents use published curricula, sometimes referred to as "school in a box" (Hanna, 2012). As Kunzman (2009) pointed out, the growth in the homeschool curricula industry has turned it into a billion-dollar-a-year industry such that parents have a wide range of choices for religious and secular curriculum materials. Textbooks and workbooks are commonly used instructional

resources (Hanna, 2012). Researchers have noted the prevalence of computers, the internet, and online courses as curricular tools among homeschooling families (Hanna, 2012; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Murphy, 2012).

Private schools, local public schools, and school districts are also sources of educational materials for homeschooled students. According to the 2003 NHES data, 16.8% and 22.6% of homeschooling parents reported using private school and public school resources, respectively (Princiotta & Bielick, 2006). Homeschool educators tap into conventional schools for such resources as testing services, select classes, and textbooks (Mayberry, Knowles, Ray, & Marlow, 1995). The homeschooling parents in Hanna's (2012) study utilized science equipment, maps, calculators, and projectors from their local public school districts. Lois (2013) found that parents took advantage of public school resources when they "felt their ability to provide certain skills was limited, such as when teaching required a group of children (e.g., orchestra), expensive equipment (e.g., biology lab), or specialized talents (e.g., dance)" (p. 12). Utilizing public school facilities was popular, because it was the least expensive option when compared to hiring outside tutors and specialists or paying tuition for online classes (Lois, 2013).

Relationship Between Public Schools and Homeschools

The nature of the relationship between public schools and homeschools varies widely across time and location (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). A number of studies have explored various aspects of the relationship between public school and homeschool communities and revealed both the challenges and the opportunities public school administrators and homeschool educators inherently face in determining the nature and the scope of such a relationship (Dahlquist, York-Barr, & Hendel, 2006; Johnson, 2013; Lines, 2000; Lukasik, 1996). Researchers have described homeschooling as the ultimate in educational privatization (Cooper

& Sureau, 2007; Kunzman, 2009, 2012); however, many homeschool educators advocate for the opportunity to choose participation in select public school activities and programs (Plecnik, 2007). A small number of doctoral dissertations, including two studies conducted in North Carolina's neighboring states of Virginia and Tennessee, have focused on the state and local policy implications that arise amid the arguments for and against access to public school resources for homeschooled students.

The challenges associated with public school and homeschool interactions have been born through the mutual lack of understanding and knowledge each group holds about the other. The relationship between public schooling and homeschooling has been described as tense (Romanowski, 2001) and contentious (Ray, 2013). Words such as *clash* (Johnson, 2013) and *attack* (Cooper & Sureau, 2007) have been used to characterize instances of conflict during the ensuing legal battles that ultimately resulted in the legalization of homeschooling in all 50 states. The legalization of homeschooling did not dispel the stereotypes and the myths about homeschoolers held by those in the public school community (Carpenter & Gann, 2015; Romanowski, 2001, 2006). Public educators' perceived disdain for homeschoolers has been tied to ideas that parents chose to homeschool to hide child abuse or neglect and that parents are not competent to educate their children. Having endured what Cooper and Sureau (2007) call "a history of persecution by public authorities" (p. 113), it is little wonder that some homeschoolers refuse to engage in any relationship with public schools. Freedom from government regulation is at the heart of homeschooling. Those homeschoolers who believe that acceptance of public school resources leads to government regulations that interfere with their ability to direct their children's education "are chagrined at how easily . . . [other homeschoolers] accept public school offering[s]" (Johnson, 2013, p. 305). Unwilling to take a side in this conflict within the

homeschooling community, HSLDA and North Carolinians for Home Education (NCHE) maintain a neutral stance on whether homeschooling families should pursue opportunities to take advantage of public school resources.

Both public schools and homeschools have the goal to maximize learning opportunities for all students and may be best able to do so by working together (Lukasik, 1996). Romanowski (2001) discourages public schools from viewing homeschools as competitors as the first step in forging a productive relationship with homeschools. According to Gaither (2009b), the homeschooling movement “might offer public education one of its most plausible reform paradigms” (p. 344). Other researchers concur that the motivated, involved parents characteristic of the homeschooling population hold the key to successful school reform (Lee, 2009; Slaughter-Defoe, Myers, Stevenson, Arrington, & Johnson, 2012). Johnson (2013) noted, “Although numerous instances of cooperation between government and home education exist, the relationship between them will continue to be problematic, complicated, and at times even confrontational” (p. 306).

In his dissertation study, Rowland (2005) conducted a policy analysis of the 132 school districts in Virginia to draw out the policies’ commonalities and differences for regulating homeschooled students’ access to public school resources. Similar to North Carolina, schools and school districts in Virginia have the discretion to permit or to refuse access to public school courses and activities for homeschooled students. Rowland’s study also sought to solicit public school leaders’ perceptions on homeschooled students’ part-time enrollment in public school classes and participation in athletics programs. He found that public school administrators were consistently satisfied with the policy adopted by the district in which they served. Those administrators in districts that denied access to homeschooled students supported the policy and

underscored their support for public schools and the students enrolled in public schools. Those administrators in districts that granted access to homeschooled students expressed pleasure in their ability to make courses available to students that the homeschooling parents may not have been able to provide. All of the administrators were in favor of a statewide policy that would consistently govern homeschooled students' access—that is, as long as the policy matched their opinions on the issue.

Rockholt's (2012) case study examined homeschooled students' participation in extracurricular activities outside of the public school system and parents' desire for their children to have access to public school extracurricular activities. She conducted her study in Tennessee, a state that allows homeschooled students to participate only in public school athletics and denies access to other extracurricular activities such as art or science clubs and labs. With the stated goal of informing policymakers of the potential need for an inclusive policy, she set out to gauge the level of parental knowledge concerning options for participation in public school activities that are available to homeschooled students in neighboring states and parents' willingness to advocate for such access in Tennessee. Through individual and focus group interviews, homeschooling parents weighed in on current and future legislation concerning homeschooled students in their state and indicated a desire for increased access to public school resources for their children.

Throughout the country, "Homeschooling has challenged the roots of traditional public education [such that] local and state educational leaders [have been compelled] to alter their approaches and policies" (Cooper & Sureau, 2007, p. 111). In most places, the relationship between homeschools and public schools seems to be moving toward cooperation (Ray, 2013). The development of hybrid programs, the creation of homeschool and public school partnerships,

the admission of homeschooled students to public schools on a part-time basis as well as the public schools' provision of online resources to homeschooled students (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Plecnik, 2007) led Murphy (2012) to conclude about homeschooling "that the concept is not quite as simple as it appears on the surface. Indeed, if anything, the concept has become fuzzier over recent years" (p. 4). The proliferation of such hybrid forms of education will ensure that the "fuzziness" remains and perhaps intensifies as public school educators and parents negotiate their role in and their accountability for providing educational resources that enable students to obtain the benefits of a sound basic education (*Leandro, 1997*).

Origins and Development of Social Construction/Narrative Analysis

Both literary theory and narratology form the theoretical foundation for narrative analysis (Jones & McBeth, 2010; Roe, 1994); the origins for social construction, less clearly stated in the literature, likely derive from phenomenology and social theory (Hacking, 1999). Narrative analysis and social construction associate in a symbiotic relationship whereby narratives, or stories, told by one or more persons to other person(s) inform humans' interpretations and understandings of themselves, other social beings, and the social contexts within which they exist. As people concretize their experiences, they do so not in a vacuum but in relationship with other people in a give-and-take manner such that the blended experiences form a new category or inform a pre-existing category of knowledge and experience (Herzog & Claunch, 1997). The structure and characteristics of narrative are explicitly developed in the narrative analysis/social construction framework to ascribe meaning to events and to determine the methods for communicating ideas to others. Closely aligned with this mode of theorizing, discourse theory posits that all actions and practices are socially meaningful and that their meanings, shaped by social and political struggles, are situated in specific historical periods (Fischer, 2003).

A few key principles define the basis for narrative analysis/social construction. The framework's most basic tenet involves the central ideas that (a) all reality is socially constructed, and (b) stories mirror people's lived realities. From this basic position, proponents of the framework have outlined principles related to the utility of narrative analysis/social construction for political analysis as well as the types, structures, and characteristics of narratives. True to the nature of the narrative analysis/social construction framework, almost every aspect has been contested including the viability of the framework for political analysis (Roe, 1989), social constructions about particular groups of people (Schneider & Ingram, 1993), and the definition applied to narratives (Jones & McBeth, 2010).

Definitions for *narrative* range from the simplistic to the elaborate. According to Herzog and Claunch (1997), stories are simply "a form of knowledge through which public administrators can expand their worlds and modify their definitions of reality" (p. 374). Drawing on past research for their expansive definition, Jones and McBeth (2010) stipulate that for a narrative to be a narrative it must possess narrative's minimum qualifications of setting, plot, characters, conflict, and resolution. Regardless of the definition applied to narrative, there seems to be widespread agreement with Roe (1989) that narrative policy analysis is "intended only for those policy problems recognizably so complex and uncertain that stories and scenarios of necessity become the way these problems are articulated; the absence of adequate statistical, methodological, or legal specification does not permit otherwise" (p. 267). As the ambiguity in a policy problem increases, so, too, does the need for a storyline to address persistent uncertainties (Roe, 1994). The storylines advanced by multiple, often competing, actors may take on various forms and serve different purposes.

The central hypotheses that govern the application of narrative analysis/social construction are embedded in the essential questions and attendant answers that are associated with the framework. To employ this framework, analysts must ask and answer a number of questions about the policy event under discussion: Who are the key actors? What stories are they likely to tell? What meanings are the policymakers putting forward? What story is not being heard? How is the dominant story being maintained? How are the stories situated in current and past contexts? What role is the media playing? Answering some of these questions sheds light on how instrumental narratives are in shaping major policymaking controversies and why narratives are resistant to change even when conflicting empirical data is available (Roe, 1994).

Types of narratives. *Grand narratives* draw upon symbols and coded meanings that are common to the majority of people within a specific cultural group and convey the values and normative beliefs among members of that particular group (Shenhav, 2005). These types of stories, often spanning multiple temporal periods, rely on participants' prior knowledge for full comprehension of the messages being conveyed (Shenhav, 2005). In policy analysis, *dominant narratives* are those stories told by the group who wins the policy debate. These narratives, advanced by the dominant group, reinforce the unequal power dynamics that inhere in any politically charged event (Roe, 1994). *Counter-narratives* compete for space on the narrative agenda. As the name implies, these narratives run counter to the dominant narrative in trying to tell a "better story" that will shift the balance of power in favor of the particular group supporting the counter-narrative's claims (Roe, 1994). Analysts use *metanarratives* to tell a story about the stories that polarize a controversial issue. Where no middle ground exists, the metanarrative essentially works to create a new story developed from the arguments of the opposing groups. Sometimes no metanarrative can be created, and, at other times, multiple metanarratives may be

entered into the controversy as different analysts may come up with different metanarratives (Roe, 1994). *Nonstories* share some features of stories (e.g., characters, conflict) but bear little resemblance to the typical, unifying structure of stories. Nonstories, or anti-stories, attempt to debunk the dominant narrative by offering a point-by-point critique yet do not advance an alternative story and so fall short of silencing the dominant story (Roe, 1989).

In his seminal work, Roe (1994) proposes a four-step process for narrative analysis/social construction analysts; he calls this approach “High Theory” and acknowledges that the steps of narrative policy analysis are themselves a narrative (p. 16). He writes that analysts must first identify the policy narratives that conform to the traditional structure of stories and, further, select the ones that dominate the controversy. Then, analysts need to identify the policy narratives that run counter to the dominant narrative (counter-narratives) and that do not conform to the traditional story structure (nonstories). Analysts would then compare the two sets of narratives to generate a metanarrative. The final act for the analyst in this four-step process is to determine if and how the newly-created metanarrative is more amenable to policymaking and decision making.

Target groups. The social construction of target groups plays a critical role in understanding narrative political analysis. Schneider and Ingram (1993) posit that policy actors can be categorized into four distinct types of target populations with significant implications for their relative power in the policymaking process. They contend that the “social construction of target populations has a powerful influence on public officials and shapes both the policy agenda and the actual design of policy” (p. 334). Not only are public officials influenced by the social constructions of target groups, but so is every citizen influenced by the positive and/or negative messages they hear about other populations and about their own group. Policy, too, sends

powerful messages about which populations are worthy of benefits or burdens from government. While some social constructions about target populations may be contested, other social constructions remain fixed over time (similar to the idea that narratives are resistant to change). It is also the case that just as different analysts may craft different metanarratives, different policy officials may hold different constructions of the same group of people.

In effect, social constructions and power together create groups that Schneider and Ingram (1993) label Advantaged, Contenders, Dependents, and Deviants. The four groups form a quadrant whereby the Advantaged (e.g., elderly, scientists) have strong power and are positively constructed, the Contenders (e.g., big unions, minorities) have strong power and are negatively constructed, the Dependents (e.g., children, disabled) have weak power and are positively constructed, and the Deviants (e.g., criminals, members of gangs) have weak power and are negatively constructed. Based on this model, policymakers experience great political pressure to enact policies that will confer the greatest benefits to the Advantaged group and that will confer the fewest benefits and greatest burdens to the Deviants. This arrangement is often supported by the general consensus of the public as the benefits that accrue to the Advantaged group are constructed to be beneficial to the whole of society, and consensus also condones the heft of burdens onto the Deviants, having constructed them as the group least deserving of governmental benefits. While the Dependents are judged to be worthy of governmental benefits, their limited power makes it unlikely that governmental policies will direct tremendous resources toward this group. Constructed as undeserving, Contenders often experience limited benefits from policy.

Limitations of the framework. The defining feature of narrative analysis/social construction, and perhaps even its greatest strength, also imposes limitations on the usefulness of

the framework. Narrative analysis/social construction contends that no objective reality exists. In so doing, the framework is open to multiple interpretations of people's lived experiences. In concerning itself with the nuanced telling of stories, the framework does not focus too heavily on the events leading up to the interpretations. As Roe (1994) mentions, the question becomes less "What happened?" and more "What's the story?" To the extent that analytic objectivity is desired, this framework offers little (Lustick, 1996; Roe, 1994).

Another limitation concerns the infinite number of stories and story structures that could potentially have some bearing on the policy process under consideration. Stories are being generated continually, which means that analysts can never amass all of the stories (nor would they need or want to do so). Therein lies another limitation—that of selection bias. Analysts, much like the historians in Lustick's (1996) investigation of historians' selection of historical records, choose which stories to listen to, to repeat, and to analyze. The stories analysts choose undoubtedly influence the types of metanarratives that can be generated. Analysts could employ what Lustick (1996) calls "self-consciousness" (p. 614) in their selection of stories as an explicit check on the types of stories that have garnered their attention. This sort of explicit check might also call analysts' attention to the nonstories that may carry significance for the policy problem under consideration.

The nonstories have potentially been designated as such as a result of storytellers' differential access to power (Roe, 1989). Groups such as the Dependents (as mentioned in Schneider and Ingram, 1993) possess little power to move their narrative onto the policy agenda; their voices may be drowned out by the Advantaged group who possess the greatest amount of power and are constructed favorably, making it such that policymakers and the general public typically care about the stories the Advantaged group puts forward.

And, finally, narrative analysis/social construction works in an almost tautological, nested system wherein analysts tell stories about the stories. Likewise, the policies that are adopted tell stories based on others' stories. "Thus, narrative policy analysis is not completely free of its own kind of storytelling" (Roe, 1989, p. 267).

Summary of the Literature

Homeschooling is the fastest-growing segment of education in the United States, having outpaced student enrollment in the much-talked-about charter schools, and is in need of a robust body of literature and scholarship that can keep up with the fast pace of change in the homeschooled population (Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Mazama & Lundy, 2012). The paucity of research on homeschooled students is magnified when unique considerations for subgroups such as ethnic minorities, non-Christians, and students with special needs are factored into the homeschooled demographic. Homeschoolers increasingly refuse to be confined to a single choice. Having made the choice to homeschool their children, they also seek opportunities to choose from an array of public school offerings that will complement the core curriculum offered in the homeschool. Homeschool educators have a history of swift and strong reaction when they feel their right to choose is being stifled by overly restrictive laws and policies. Families are motivated to homeschool for deeply personal reasons and will seek help from outside sources including public schools when they determine their situations warrant such assistance. Legal and policy issues abound in the complex arena of homeschooled students' access to public school resources. These issues, in the absence of viable policies, will become increasingly complicated as greater numbers of families make the decision to homeschool while pressuring public schools to concede in offering their homeschooled students selective access to public school resources. Narrative analysis/social construction provides an interpretive

framework which enables the researcher to analyze the stories told by competing groups in a way that will yield unique constructions of meaning and understanding.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In the first two chapters of this dissertation, the researcher provided an overview of the legal and political context for homeschooling in North Carolina. The researcher also highlighted the variegated nature of homeschooled students' access to public school resources in a "district discretion" state. Few school districts in North Carolina have adopted a board policy that expressly permits or prohibits homeschoolers' participation in select public school classes and activities. Most school districts, like the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS), lack board policies and procedures that clearly describe the level of access afforded to homeschoolers and that direct public school administrators' handling of requests, respectively. The preceding chapter also included a description of social construction/narrative analysis, the interpretive framework upon which this investigation's analysis is based.

Research Questions

This third chapter traces the researcher's methodological steps for data collection and data analysis. Herein the researcher lays out the blueprint for the study including the identification of the research design, the rationale for its use, an explanation of the data collection methods, and a description of the types of data collected. The researcher also discusses the research setting and the participant sample, which are essential elements in the structure of the current study. The chapter concludes with an explication of the selected data analysis techniques and the relevant aspects of the researcher's positionality. On the whole, the methods outlined in this chapter were undertaken to obtain evidence that addresses the following research questions:

1. How do North Carolina's current laws and policies support access to public school resources for homeschooled students?
2. How do Wake County homeschool educators (i.e., parents and legal guardians) advocate for their homeschooled students to be the recipients of public school resources?
3. On what basis do Wake County Public School System administrators grant and/or deny requests for homeschooled students to receive access to public school resources?
4. To what extent do Wake County homeschooled students utilize public school resources?

Rationale for Case Study Design

This study seeks to apply a qualitative case study design to an empirical investigation of the impacts of state laws and local policies and procedures on the ways in which Wake County homeschool educators are able to advocate for access to public school resources for their homeschooled children and on WCPSS administrators' decisions regarding parents' requests. The case study, commonly used in education research, is used to contribute to our knowledge of complex social phenomena (Yin, 2009). Case study research involves the selection of a case that can be bounded within specified parameters such as geographic location, time, and group of people. Thick description of the people and events that are the focus of the case study illustrate the holistic, meaningful characteristics of real-life events (Creswell, 2013; Geertz, 1973; Yin, 2009). In this way, the use of a case study design allows for in-depth examination and the presentation of in-depth understanding of the topic (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2011). According to Yin (2009), "case studies are the preferred method when (a) 'how' or 'why' questions are

being posed, (b) the investigator has little control over events, and (c) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context” (p. 2).

This study meets the three conditions for when to use the case study approach. The research questions addressed in this study fit into the “how” category such that this inquiry seeks answers that are both exploratory and explanatory in nature. By tracing the operational links between state laws and local policies and procedures governing homeschools and homeschooled students’ utilization of public school resources, the desired outcomes provide details of an exploratory nature for what is going on in this dimension of education as well as details of an explanatory nature for why Wake County homeschooled students are able or not able to utilize public school resources. The other two qualifiers in Yin’s description of when the case study method is preferred apply to this study, as well. The topic for this study on the ways current laws and policies shape homeschooled students’ access to public school resources fits the description of a contemporary phenomenon. In seeking to understand this phenomenon in its real-life context, the researcher had little control over the behavioral events relevant to this study.

The researcher relied on the strength of case study research as an “all-encompassing method” (Yin, 2009, p. 18) in her effort to address the high degree of contextual variability among homeschoolers’ experiences related to accessing select public school resources. The phenomenon of homeschoolers’ access to public school resources is a complex one, made all the more variegated by the fact that North Carolina’s regulations on homeschooling promote district discretion for the determination of homeschooled students’ eligibility for part-time public school enrollment and public school extracurricular participation. “District discretion” means that each of the 115 North Carolina public school districts may choose whether to adopt a local policy and, if adopted, determine the contours of such a policy. In districts without a board policy, it is not

known what level of access is afforded to homeschooled students. This high degree of variability from district to district and perhaps even within an individual school district unquestioningly leads to a situation wherein the variables of interest significantly outnumber the data points (Yin, 2009). In keeping with Yin's technical definition of case study, the researcher utilized multiple sources of evidence in the data collection phase of this study. In particular, this study incorporated five of the six major data sources Yin (2009) identified as commonly used in case study research. The five sources of evidence used in the current study are listed here in order of most utilized to least utilized: interviews, documentation, archival records, direct observations, and physical artifacts.

Data Collection

Prior to engaging in the collection of questionnaire and interview data, the researcher conducted a policy analysis to determine North Carolina's policy environment for homeschooling. Key documents for the policy analysis included North Carolina's Constitution, North Carolina's amended and original homeschool laws, other North Carolina statutes relevant to education, and the case law summary for *Delconte v. State of North Carolina* (1985). *Delconte* (1985) is the North Carolina landmark case wherein the court determined that educating children at home did not constitute a violation of North Carolina's compulsory attendance statutes. All of the aforementioned documents are accessible online. The researcher explored school districts' websites to locate school board policies pertaining to access for homeschooled students using various search terms such as "homeschool," "home school," "non-public," "equal access," "part-time enrollment," and "visiting student." The school districts' board policies were assessed to determine the degree to which the policies contain exclusive or inclusive language regarding homeschoolers' access. Exclusive language is that which bars

homeschooled students' participation in public school curricular and/or extracurricular activities. Inclusive language is that which allows for homeschooled students' participation in the aforementioned public school activities (Dahlquist, York-Barr, & Hendel, 2006).

The researcher reviewed additional online documents on the Division of Non-Public Education (DNPE) and North Carolinians for Home Education (NCHE) websites. DNPE, one division within the state government's Department of Administration (DOA), bears responsibility for the oversight of homeschools and private schools in North Carolina. NCHE is a statewide organization whose members advocate for the freedom to homeschool. Documents located on the "Home School Requirements, Reminders and Recommendations" section of the DNPE website as well as the documents contained in the "Law & Government Relations" section of the NCHE website provided additional data for the analysis of North Carolina's policies on homeschooling.

Subsequent to the policy analysis phase of the study, the researcher endeavored to recruit study participants. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill reviewed and approved the study in February 2015 (Appendix A). In the same month, the researcher submitted the WCPSS Standard Application for Research Study to the district's Data and Accountability Department. The researcher's expressed intent had been to interview six WCPSS administrators regarding their experiences with homeschool educators' requests for access and/or homeschooled students' utilization of public school resources. In April 2015, the Data and Accountability Department approved the research (Appendix B) in a circumscribed manner and provided one set of written responses to the questions in the interview protocol (Appendix C). The written responses (Appendix D) were prepared by the district's Director of Counseling. To augment the information contained in the written responses, the

researcher submitted two public records requests to the WCPSS Communications Department via the school district's online form. The terms of the first request for public records asked for a former WCPSS school counselor's September 2011 incoming and outgoing email messages containing the word "test." The second request sought incoming and outgoing email messages containing the word "homeschool" for seven WCPSS employees who were high school principals in August 2012 and August 2014. The four selected schools were high-performing, non-magnet schools in the WCPSS. One of the schools had the same principal in the years for which records were requested.

The researcher contacted DNPE officials by telephone and conducted an in-person visit to the DNPE offices in Raleigh.

To solicit homeschool educators' participation in the study, the researcher distributed a participant recruitment letter (Appendix E) and a flyer (Appendix F) via email to 35 Wake County homeschool support groups and two community organizations known to offer academic programs to homeschooled students (see Appendix G for the list of groups and organizations). Leaders for the homeschool support groups and the community organizations were asked to share the recruitment email with homeschooling parents in their respective networks. The email included a hyperlink to a demographic questionnaire (Appendix H) which queried respondents about the religious/independent status of their homeschool; the length of time their children had been enrolled in homeschool and public school; the primary reason for homeschooling their children; the resources used to homeschool their children; the number and ages of homeschooled children; racial background; marital status; and annual household income. The questionnaire also provided space for respondents to indicate their willingness to be contacted about participation in an interview. Demographic data were collected via Qualtrics.

The researcher contacted questionnaire respondents via telephone and email to review the consent form and to schedule individual interviews. Eighteen homeschooling parents participated in individual interviews from June to September 2015. The majority of the interviews were face-to-face, conducted in participants' homes, in bookstores, and in coffee shops per each participant's request. Three interviews were conducted by telephone. The interviews were the most intensive data collection technique employed for this study. The researcher engaged participants in semi-structured interviews scheduled for approximately 90 minutes each. Although there is nothing "magical or absolute about this time frame" (Seidman, 2013, p. 24), it was selected with the rationale that "an hour carries with it the consciousness of a standard unit of time that can have participants 'watching the clock.' Two hours seems too long to sit at one time" (Seidman, 2013, p. 23). Furthermore, the time parameter for the interviews was necessary so participants were informed of their time commitment and so the researcher could schedule multiple interviews (Seidman, 2013).

Interviewing the research participants was a dynamic process, because "qualitative researchers have an active role in producing the data they record through the questions they ask and the social interactions in which they take part" (Glesne, 2011, p. 47). In the process of co-producing the data for this study, the researcher controlled the general structure of the interview while still allowing ample opportunity for participants to shape the content of the interview (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; McMillan, 2012). The semi-structured interview format granted the researcher the latitude to probe for additional details and to ask follow-up clarifying questions, which enhanced the quality of the conversation with each research participant. The interview protocol for homeschool educators (Appendix I) functioned as a guide for the collection of comparable interview data from multiple participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Yin, 2009).

Although each interview was focused on the stated purpose of the research, the protocol was designed to gather data on participants' experiences related to the study topic as well as participants' commentary on the issue of homeschoolers' access to public school resources within participants' specific contexts (Yin, 2009).

During each interview, the researcher transitioned from the informal chit-chat necessary for building rapport to the interview questions by asking each participant to talk about their family. Such a broad initial question encouraged respondents to be open and expansive in their responses and to become comfortable talking about their experiences (Glesne, 2011; McMillan, 2012). Based on participants' descriptions of their family, the researcher used the protocol flexibly to gather data for the other 21 open-ended questions in the protocol. In face-to-face interviews, the researcher's observation of participants' nonverbal responses aided in the flexible implementation of an altered order for asking the questions and even in the wording of questions themselves. The observational advantage was not available during telephone interviews, and, as a result, the protocol was not implemented as flexibly (McMillan, 2012).

Interviews were audio recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed. The researcher also recorded hand-written notes during the taped interviews to capture particularly salient points. During the interviews, the researcher referred to the hand-written notes to revisit topics about which she wanted participants to elaborate. At the participant's request, one interview was not audio recorded. The researcher's hand-written notes during the interview and typed summary following the interview captured the gist of the interview. One participant requested that the audio recording be temporarily stopped as she recounted an emotionally stressful experience. The researcher honored the participant's request to disable the recording

device and re-started the audio recording once the participant indicated verbally that it was okay to do so.

Research Setting

This case study is bounded geographically within one North Carolina county. The researcher elected to focus on a single case to preserve the richness of the empirical data gathered from similarly situated participants. Creswell (2013) cautions that the “study of more than one case dilutes the overall analysis; the more cases an individual studies, the less the depth in any single case” (p.101). What follows are the researcher’s reasons for selecting Wake County as the setting for this research. Wake County, the second most populous county in North Carolina, has the highest number of homeschools in the state and accounts for nearly 10% of the state’s homeschool enrollment. According to the DNPE (2015), an estimated 10,407 children were enrolled in 6,359 Wake County homeschools for the 2014-2015 academic year.

NCHE divides the state into nine regions and provides information about regional homeschool support groups for each area of the state. Region 5, which includes Wake County, is the NCHE region with the highest number of regional associations in support of homeschoolers. Other counties in NCHE Region 5 include Alamance, Caswell, Durham, Franklin, Granville, Halifax, Johnston, Nash, Northampton, Orange, Person, Vance, Warren, and Wilson. The 61 associations in Region 5 are religious and secular and operate in both online and face-to-face formats. Support groups for homeschoolers of color are also included in the list of associations. Although the support groups are listed under the “Region 5” banner, more than half of them serve homeschoolers residing in Wake County. The high number of associations and the diversity the associations represent suggest that homeschoolers in this region are actively involved in the homeschooling community. As described in the previous section, the primary

recruitment strategy for study participants involved email solicitation sent to the leaders of homeschool support groups. The high number of associations provided the means to recruit potential participants for this study. By contacting the leaders of the associations, the researcher increased the likelihood of gaining access to members of the associations who took an interest in the research study.

To the extent that parental petition for access to public school resources occurs when there is a deficit of the desired resource(s) in the homeschool environment, parents can be expected to seek resources from a provider with the perceived capacity to deliver the desired resource(s). WCPSS provides a wide range of resources (e.g., advanced classes in multiple disciplines, robotics programs, band) to its enrolled students that may not be available to students in smaller, less-resourced school districts. WCPSS is the largest school district in the state with a 2015-2016 academic year enrollment exceeding 157,000 students. Of the 171 schools that make up WCPSS, 25 are high schools. Comprehensive traditional and specialized magnet high schools offer advanced academics such as International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement courses as well as career and technical education courses in fields such as engineering and health science. High school students enrolled in WCPSS also have access to “rigorous arts classes” (Wake County Public School System, 2015). The availability of such resources factored into the researcher’s decision to focus on Wake County and WCPSS.

Wake County’s geographic and racial diversity also contributed to its desirability as the site for the present study. The county has a mix of urban (e.g., Raleigh), suburban (e.g., Cary and Apex), and rural (e.g., Zebulon and Wendell) areas. As listed in Table 2, the racial make-up of Wake County’s estimated 998,691 residents closely matches the demographics of North Carolina’s 9.9 million residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

Table 2

Wake County and North Carolina Percentage Population by Race

	Wake County	North Carolina
White	69.0%	71.5%
Black	21.3%	22.1%
Hispanic/Latino	10.0%	9.0%
Asian	6.1%	2.6%
American Indian	0.8%	1.6%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.1%
Two or More Races	2.3%	2.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2014)

Participant Sample

The demographic questionnaire was available online between May and July 2015.

Respondents who wanted to participate in an individual interview elected to provide their name and contact information in the last item on the questionnaire form. Not everyone who completed the questionnaire met the predetermined criteria for participation in the individual interview phase of the study.

For the individual interview phase of the study, the researcher implemented a sampling frame designed to select participants who could provide the best data for answering the research questions (McMillan, 2012). For this qualitative study, the researcher utilized purposeful sampling procedures. Purposeful sampling involved the selection of participants who were particularly knowledgeable about the phenomenon the researcher intended to study. The “information-rich” individuals selected for the study were able to communicate effectively about their experiences with the phenomenon so that the researcher could learn from them (Creswell, 2013; Krathwohl & Smith, 2005; McMillan, 2012). Criterion sampling, a common type of purposeful sampling, was used for this study. The researcher first established the criteria for

eligible study participants and then sought individuals who possessed those characteristics (McMillan, 2012). Through the use of criterion sampling in the present study, the researcher sought a sample of parents who: (a) resided in Wake County, (b) had a minimum of three years of homeschooling experience, and (c) were homeschooling or had homeschooled at least one high school-age student. The homeschooling parents who fit those criteria were more likely to produce greater depth and breadth of information regarding their desire and their experiences in advocating for access to public school resources than homeschooling parents with fewer years of experience and/or those parents who were homeschooling or had homeschooled elementary and/or middle school-age children exclusively.

The criterion that participants have a minimum three years of experience with homeschooling was fundamental for gathering the evidence needed for this study. The researcher employed the years of experience criterion as a proxy for individuals' commitment to homeschooling. Lois (2013) and Isenberg (2007) have documented the high degree of attrition in homeschooling. Four of the 16 participants in Lois's study quit homeschooling during the intervening six years between their initial study involvement in 2002 and the follow-up interview in 2008 (Lois, 2013). Using data from the National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES), Isenberg (2007) noted, "There is a large quit rate in homeschooling after the first year; only 63% of homeschooled students continue to the 2nd year" (p. 398). Novice homeschoolers would not be expected to have acquired the substantial body of experiences that the experienced homeschoolers possessed for discussing their past and present experiences with homeschooling their children. Glesne (2011) characterized questions that ask participants about the past and present as rich ground for "stories, descriptions, and interviewer probes" (p.106). Homeschoolers with three or more years of experience would have started homeschooling prior

to the May 2013 passage of North Carolina's new homeschooling law and would be able to discuss any changes or impacts the new law had on their ability to advocate for educational resources for their children.

Experience with homeschooling a high school-age student was an essential criterion for the home educators who participated in this study. Researchers have documented the trend among older homeschooled students, especially in their teen years, toward educational networks outside the home (Gaither, 2009a, 2009b; Hanna, 2012). These educational networks sometimes include co-ops and traditional schools where homeschooled students may learn advanced academic subjects like calculus, chemistry, and world languages from content-area experts and participate in activities such as sports and clubs with their peers (Gaither, 2009a, 2009b; Isenberg, 2007; Lukasik, 1996). To the extent that homeschoolers in Wake County follow a similar trend, parents who were homeschooling or who had homeschooled high school-age students had likely considered the availability of educational networks outside the homeschool and the degree of access to public school resources available to their children.

In light of Collom's (2005) claim that homeschoolers are a difficult demographic group to study due to the decentralized nature of homeschooling and homeschoolers' reluctance to participate in research studies by outside agencies, the researcher anticipated that the initial pool of participants would be small; she addressed the limited sample size through the use of snowball sampling (McMillan, 2012). Snowball sampling, also known as chain sampling, allowed the researcher to increase the participant pool based on participants' extended networks. In the present study, homeschooling parents had firsthand knowledge of other homeschooling families. The initial group of study participants was able to recommend to the researcher additional participants who fit the criteria for the study. Rather than specify the number of participants that

would be interviewed for this study, the researcher continued the implementation of snowball sampling in the latter stage of each parent interview (Appendix I, Question 21) until a sufficient number of participants had been interviewed. In essence, the researcher conducted interviews with homeschooling parents to the point of saturation, or until no new information with bearing on the study was forthcoming (Creswell, 2013; McMillan, 2012).

The researcher spoke via telephone and in person with the recently promoted DNPE Director David Mills who has been employed with the Division for 29 years. He previously served as the Division's Education Consultant. Mills' long tenure with the Division bespeaks of his deep knowledge of the North Carolina context for homeschooling as it relates to the laws and policies governing homeschools and of the North Carolina homeschooling community as it relates to parental advocacy for specific services. Based on his years of experience with the DNPE and with the homeschooling community, Mills was uniquely positioned to offer insights and opinions on the topic under consideration.

Protection of the Participants

The researcher prioritized the protection of the research participants before, during, and after the data collection phase of the study. Prior to data collection, the researcher considered the risk, though minimal, for homeschool educators to experience emotional distress during the interviews. For example, one of the interview questions dealt with parents' reasons for choosing to homeschool their children. As the literature review in Chapter 2 enumerated, many parents chose to homeschool for deeply personal reasons (e.g., to provide one-on-one services for a child with special needs, to protect a child from bullying, to escape or avoid negative experiences with school personnel). To minimize participants' emotional distress with discussing their decision-making processes that led them to homeschool their children, the researcher established a

friendly, professional rapport in the early stage of each interview (Seidman, 2013). The researcher was transparent in answering any questions participants asked, and she offered an explanation of her professional and personal interest in conducting research with homeschoolers. The researcher also assured participants that they could decline to answer any question with which they were uncomfortable and/or withdraw from the study at any time. Oft-repeated in the literature on homeschooling is the notion of a high propensity among some homeschoolers to avoid participating in research studies, especially those involving “government” surveys, for fear that such participation might incite unwanted external surveillance (Kunzman, 2012; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). To quell such fears among participants in this study, the researcher pledged to deal with some demographic data in aggregate form only and to restrict geographic specificity to Wake County in writing about individual participants. Furthermore, the researcher used initials for all names in the interview transcripts and selected pseudonyms that will be used to refer to individual participants in reporting the study’s findings (Seidman, 2013).

Data Collection Instruments

The researcher constructed and administered two types of instruments, namely, the questionnaire and the interview protocol. The researcher estimated that respondents would be able to complete the 13-item questionnaire, composed of both selection items and supply items, in less than 15 minutes. The interview protocols designed for WCPSS administrators and for homeschooling parents consisted of 15 and 22 open-ended questions, respectively. Both instruments were designed to collect data that were vital to the research project, but the questionnaire was particularly useful for obtaining sensitive information such as respondents’ race and income information (Colton & Covert, 2007).

In addition to brainstorming for ideas, the researcher relied on the literature review, the policy analysis, and a class research project for developing the items in the questionnaire and interview protocols (Colton & Covert, 2007). In conducting the literature review, the researcher examined numerous articles that had been written about homeschooling and culled ideas, examples, and specific items that could be adapted for this study's data collection instruments. Early findings in the policy analysis phase of this study generated more questions than answers such that the researcher engaged in the *repetitive why* process, described by Colton & Covert (2007) as a process used to "filter from generalities to specifics" (p. 112). Colton & Covert (2007) elaborated on the repetitive why process:

The first step is to state your assumption, hypothesis, problem, or understanding of the situation. Next, ask a *why* question. Why do I want to know this? Why is this the current situation? Why does this process work this way? After answering the initial why, ask it again of your answer. Repeat this process several times in order to focus on a specific aspect of the phenomenon you are interested in understanding. (pp. 112-113)

Asking a series of why questions helped determine the appropriate questions to include in the interview protocols. Months before embarking on this dissertation, the researcher conducted a research project with parents who homeschooled their children until their children reached grade 11, the point at which the children became eligible for enrollment at the local middle college high school. The middle college high school, a public school located on a community college campus, attracted students in grades 11 and 12 who wanted to take high school and college classes. In crafting items for the instruments used in the current study, the researcher referred to the notes she took during the telephone interviews with parents and to the written research report she submitted in fulfillment of a course requirement. The researcher was aided in the item-revision process by consultation with university advisors who possessed content area and methodological expertise.

Data Analysis Methods

Before entering the field, the researcher developed an integrated work plan that served as a guide for completing the multiple steps involved in preparing for, conducting, and representing the dissertation research. No single task was cast as a discrete part of the research process. The integrated work plan operated as a visual reminder of the interrelatedness of all tasks, and thus data collection and data analysis were carried out concurrently (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2011). The current study produced copious data which required ongoing analysis. At every stage, the researcher engaged in “principled choice” to determine the most appropriate analytic strategies for the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Glesne, 2011).

The researcher used the Qualtrics survey software to collect responses to the questionnaire. Demographic data from the questionnaire were downloaded into an Excel file and used to generate descriptive statistics. Subsequently, the researcher used these data to summarize the features of the sample and to compare the sample to the characteristics of the homeschooling population in North Carolina and in the U.S.

With the goal of turning the data into a “story that is meaningful and useful to others,” the researcher immersed herself in the data (Galman, 2013, p. 22). The researcher approached data analysis as an iterative process whereby the researcher spent significant time “working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 159). The researcher reviewed field notes and interview transcriptions on an ongoing basis during and after data collection. Through a process of reading and re-reading interview data, initial codes were assigned to segments of the

data. According to Galman (2013), coding involves using a notation system to “make sense of our data by finding patterns, questions, connections, [and] links to our research questions” (p. 33). The researcher assigned a different color to each of the four research questions and then color-coded text passages within the interview transcripts based on specific passages’ relevance to the research questions. Once the initial coding and color-coding were complete, the researcher re-read the interview transcripts and listened to the corresponding audio recordings simultaneously. This allowed the researcher to hear participants’ voices, to visualize their faces, and ultimately to absorb the data in a deeper way.

Multiple interviews with participants yielded extensive textual data on which the researcher conducted further analysis. Analysis is commonly regarded as a process for data reduction (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). With an overwhelming amount of data to analyze, it is impossible to ignore the imperative of data reduction, but coding in this study also functioned as a mechanism for data complication. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) explained that coding can be “used to expand and tease out the data, in order to formulate new questions and levels of interpretation” (p. 30). The researcher assigned additional codes and subcodes and looked for emerging patterns and case themes among the data (Glesne, 2011). Through the process of refining the categories into which data were organized, the researcher paid close attention to the vocabulary participants used to describe their experiences and to surprising anecdotes that did not fit the overall pattern seen in the data. Doing so afforded the researcher the opportunity to think about participants’ experiences in their own terms without superimposing her own meanings (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

Interpretive Framework

Through both deductive and inductive reasoning, data were organized and analyzed through a social constructionist lens. Policy situations that are characterized by uncertainty, complexity, and polarization such that even the acknowledged experts do not know the best course of action to take are ones for which social construction/narrative analysis provides the best frame (Roe, 1994). Homeschoolers' access to public school resources is one such complex policy situation. This high level of complexity is illustrated by the fact that the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), recognized as the preeminent advocacy organization for homeschooling families, takes a neutral stance on legislation that would broaden homeschoolers' access to public school resources.

Narrative analysis/social construction came to be applied more directly to policy beginning in the 1970s and 1980s with people's growing interest in what happens in the black box of policymaking (Lejano, 2013). Social construction/narrative analysis provided a mechanism through which the researcher could generate explanations for past and current policy decisions as well as predict future policy outcomes related to homeschooled students' access to public school resources in Wake County, North Carolina. In adherence to the qualitative methodological tradition, the researcher advanced the notion that no objective explanation accounts for the policy and procedural decisions regarding homeschoolers' access (Jones & McBeth, 2010). With an emphasis on process rather than outcomes, the researcher listened to participants' subjective renderings of their experiences and the meanings they attached to those experiences. Their stories clearly highlighted that "people are aware of what is said about them, thought about them, done to them. They think about and conceptualize themselves" (Hacking, 1999, pp. 31-32). The policymaking process that informs the field of education, with its value-

laden emphasis on people, relationships, knowledge conveyance, and production of “good” citizens, seems perfectly suited to the narrative analysis/social construction framework.

Researcher Positionality

No qualitative study can be purely objective, because the researcher is central to the collection of data and its analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Glesne, 2011). The decisions the researcher makes about all aspects of the research project—from the study topic to the research location to the frames of analysis—are “positioned” and based on the “cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics that we bring to research” (Creswell, 2009, p. 215). The researcher must reflect on the questions Goodall (2000) posed: “How do you *write* who you are? How do you build confidence among readers about the choices that you have made in the field? Or in your personal and professional interpretations of events, episodes, contexts, and others?” (p. 132). One way to build confidence among readers and to produce good qualitative research where objectivity is “neither possible, nor desirable” (Glesne, 2011, p. 152) is by “discovering—and revealing—the influences that shape who you are and what you think about, value, and are prone to believe and do” (Goodall, 2000, p. 132).

For this dissertation research, the researcher made no supposition of objectivity and acknowledged that multiple facets of her identity influenced how she was situated within the study context. The researcher identifies as a Black, college-educated, middle-age woman with years of professional experience as an educator in public schools. And, what’s more, “each of us [researcher and participants alike] live at the complex and shifting intersections of identity categories” (Glesne, 2011, p. 154). The confluence of the researcher’s and the participants’ lived

experiences endowed each researcher-participant interaction with its own unique character. As qualitative researchers generally do, the researcher entered the project with certain assumptions about the participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The researcher assumed that participants would bear identity markers—college-educated, middle-age, women, years of experience as educators (though not necessarily in public schools)—similar to the researcher’s in areas other than race. Seidman (2013) pointed out that “researchers and participants of different racial . . . backgrounds face difficulties in establishing an effective interviewing relationship. It is especially complex for Whites and African Americans to interview each other” (p. 101). In light of Seidman’s observation and the researcher’s assumption that participants would be White, the researcher initiated rapport-building in pre-interview communications with participants via email and telephone. The researcher thanked participants for their interest in the study, stressed to them their importance to the research endeavor, and expressed enthusiasm for the opportunity to meet them.

The researcher entered the project as an outsider in that she had almost no experience with homeschooling, and she did so with the recognition that participants wanted, and deserved, to know who she was and the reasons for her interest in the said topic. The researcher’s self-disclosure, primarily about her professional background, offered participants some insight into the researcher’s motivations for the research.

The researcher’s former position as an educator in the public schools system cast her as part of the “establishment,” which may have impacted participants’ perceptions of her and her expressed interest in homeschooling. The researcher’s interest in the topic was also driven by her future career plans in educational administration wherein she may be called upon to make recommendations or decisions regarding homeschoolers’ access to public school resources. The

researcher is a product of North Carolina's public schools, and to the extent that she identified with the "establishment," she worked to eliminate personal bias that advanced the desirability of public schools over homeschools from her questions and interpretations. The researcher, by the very nature of her study's design, intimated her belief that public schools have something to offer that homeschoolers want or need and that homeschoolers have attempted to access public school resources. To balance this view, the researcher also sought participants who expressed no interest in accessing resources offered by the public schools.

Similar to counseling, the act of interviewing another person necessitates the ability and willingness to be fully present with another. The researcher's professional preparation and practice as a counselor contributed to her strength as an interviewer. The researcher was able to be a good listener, adeptly attend to participants, comfortably tolerate silences, and honor participants' emotional expressions (Glesne, 2011; Seidman, 2013). Giving participants an opportunity to share information about which the researcher did not ask and to make any final observations before the conclusion of the interview represented the hallmark of the researcher's interview style. The concluding, open-ended "Is there anything else you'd like to share" question acknowledges that participants know something valuable about which the researcher did not know or think to ask. Although the researcher controlled the general structure of the interview, she intentionally established participants as the experts and assumed the role of learner for herself. The researcher's awareness and consideration of her positionality before entering the field and throughout the research process prepared her to engage with participants in a self-reflexive mode and enabled her to write a more honest account of participants' experiences than if she had failed to acknowledge her own subjective renderings of every aspect of the study she has designed.

Summary

This study investigated the impact that laws and policies governing homeschooling practice in Wake County, North Carolina, has on homeschoolers' access to and utilization of select public school resources. Chapter 3 provided a detailed explication of the research methods used in this investigation.

Chapter 4 presents the results for this study, bringing together findings from the policy analysis, the public records requests, the questionnaire, and the interviews to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

Up to this point in the dissertation, the researcher has focused on the legal and political status of homeschooling, reviewed relevant literature, and described the study's methodology. In addition, Chapters 2 and 3 contained information about social construction/narrative analysis and the intended application of this interpretive framework to the data collected for this study. The purpose of this research was to investigate the extent to which Wake County homeschool educators advocate for and utilize public school resources under the current laws and policies governing this dimension of education. North Carolina's homeschool law was modified in 2013 and granted homeschool educators the right to determine additional sources of academic instruction for their homeschooled children. Despite the recent change to the state's homeschooling law, North Carolina maintains its "district discretion" policy which means that individual school districts may employ disparate policies or lack any policy regarding homeschooled students' access to public school resources.

Chapter 4 displays the data collected for this qualitative study. The evidence from individual interviews and multiple documents addresses the following research questions:

1. How do North Carolina's current laws and policies support access to public school resources for homeschooled students?
2. How do Wake County homeschool educators (i.e., parents and legal guardians) advocate for their homeschooled students to be the recipients of public school resources?

3. On what basis do Wake County Public School System administrators grant and/or deny requests for homeschooled students to receive access to public school resources?
4. To what extent do Wake County homeschooled students utilize public school resources?

To a lesser extent, archival records, direct observations, and physical artifacts also contribute to the pool of data used to answer the research questions. Data are organized in a fashion to present an overview of North Carolina school districts' policies concerning homeschool students' access to public school resources, respondent and participant demographics, participants' stories of their experiences with homeschooling, and responses to each of the research questions.

Homeschoolers' Variable Access to Public School Resources Per District Policy

One proposition that guided the development of this research was that homeschooled students in North Carolina experience inequitable access to public school resources across the 115 school districts and within individual districts, especially in school districts with no policy to guide different administrators' decisions. The findings from the policy review substantiated this proposition. To be expected in a "district discretion" state, homeschool students' access to public school resources varied based on their residentially assigned school district. Restrictive language was found in the policies for these 10 school districts: Ashe County Schools, Buncombe County Schools, Cleveland County Schools, Hickory Public Schools, Johnston County Schools, Mitchell County Schools, Orange County Schools, Pitt County Schools, Rockingham County Schools, and Rowan-Salisbury School System. With varying degrees of detail, six school districts adopted policies that included provisions for homeschool students to participate in public school classes and/or activities. Districts with inclusive policies included

Alamance-Burlington School System, Currituck County Schools, Polk County Schools, Randolph County Schools, Rutherford County Schools, and Transylvania County Schools. The researcher found no policy language addressing homeschool students' access in the remaining school districts' policy manuals.

With a few notable exceptions, school districts' policies on access for homeschoolers contained similar language. Notably different, Ashe County Schools excluded homeschool students from school-sponsored activities as outlined in Policy 5240 which read:

Students who attend . . . home schools are eligible to participate in non-school sponsored activities held on school campuses. Non-school sponsored activities would be those activities/programs that are made available to Ashe County students by some other agency/entity in which funding is provided from sources other than the school system. (2002)

The policy also rendered homeschool students ineligible for participation in any programs or services not required by law. Several districts' policies matched the language of the Buncombe County Schools policy that "Enrollment of a student from a home school to Buncombe County Schools will be on a full-time basis. Extra-curricular activities are available only to a student enrolled in Buncombe County Schools" (2003). Eight districts' policies insisted on "full-time" enrollment for participation in classes and extracurricular activities. The Hickory Public Schools board policy explained the rationale for the district's full-time-only enrollment policy as being in the best interests of students: "It is the opinion of the Board that the curricular and instructional needs of students in the Hickory Public Schools require full time enrollment" (2010). Several adopted policies referenced North Carolina General Statute 115C-563 and recognized parents' statutory right to select the type of school their children attend. For example, the Johnston County Schools policy acknowledged parental choice and then proceeded to outline the district's position on the topic of access for homeschool students:

North Carolina General Statutes permit parents to educate their children in educational environments that are not traditional public schools. However, in order to best utilize Johnston County Board of Education Public School funds, facilities and resources, enrollment and attendance in classes or use of any educational services, including co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, shall only be for student(s) enrolled fulltime in the Johnston County Schools. Participation in any Johnston County Schools-sponsored class, class-related activity, course, or instructional program is reserved for students enrolled in Johnston County Schools on a full-time basis. These activities include but are not limited to instructional opportunities (both in person and through the use of media or the internet), competitions, tutorials, class performances or recitals, field trips, or guest speakers.

The Johnston County Schools policy offered the highest degree of specificity regarding which resources were unavailable to students who were not enrolled in the school district.

Additionally, that school district's policy stood out for the mention of the utilization of public school funds and resources for the benefit of enrolled students only.

Only a handful of school districts have adopted policies that support access for homeschool students. The inclusive language in those six districts' policies allowed homeschool students to enroll for a minimum of one-half of the school day so that the districts "may collect state ADM [Average Daily Membership] reimbursement" (Currituck County Schools, 2015). Homeschool students were not permitted to enroll for less than one-half of the school day in any of the districts. The Polk County Schools policy specified that dual enrollment was only open to high school students, whereas in Randolph and Rutherford counties, both middle and high school students were eligible for part-time enrollment. Middle school students in Rutherford County who were homeschooled could satisfy the half-day enrollment requirement through online and/or face-to-face instruction. Although the Randolph County Schools policy clearly indicated that homeschool students would be assigned to cultural arts and vocational classes on a space-available basis, the language in the policy characterized education as a shared responsibility:

Recognizing the right of parents to educate their children at home, the Board will maintain a cooperative relationship with parents of home school students. This

relationship will focus on providing appropriate educational experiences for all students residing in the Randolph County School District. (2000)

The Rutherford County Schools policy, adopted in August 2014, was also exceptionally inclusive of all children in the district and stated:

The Rutherford County Board of Education (“Board”) seeks to provide high quality educational opportunities, experiences, and services to children throughout Rutherford County. Toward that end, the Board authorizes and provides for the limited dual enrollment of private, parochial, and home school students in middle and high schools operated by the school district. (2015)

In addition to the option for homeschool students to enroll part-time in public schools, Currituck County Schools extended its district resources to assist students not enrolled in the district’s schools, providing, “As a courtesy, Currituck County Schools may provide test administration of college board tests (PSAT/AP) to non-Currituck County School students” (2015). The inclusive policies permitted homeschool students to avail themselves of a number of educational resources and services as long as students adhered to the conditions outlined in the policies.

In its adoption of a policy that addressed the issue of homeschool students’ participation in classes or activities offered by the district, Orange County Schools enjoined, “This policy shall be implemented to prevent any discriminating practices” (2010). This policy statement invoked the notion that the potential exists for individual administrators’ decisions to render access inequitably to different homeschool students within an individual school district. The overwhelming majority of North Carolina school districts have no policy to guide administrators’ practices regarding access to public school resources for homeschool students. The nature of administrators’ practices in school districts that do not have a policy is yet unknown.

Respondent and Participant Demographics

The questionnaire (Appendix H) used in this study was designed to collect demographic data about respondents so as to enable the researcher to see the similarities among respondents

and to compare the respondents' characteristics to those of the broader homeschooling community. Another purpose for the questionnaire was to invite respondents to provide their contact information and become participants in the interview phase of the study. The target population for this study was Wake County homeschooling parents with three or more years of experience with homeschooling who had homeschooled or were currently homeschooling a high school-age child. Nineteen respondents completed the questionnaire; three respondents started but did not finish the questionnaire, answering only the first two questions. An additional seven homeschool educators contacted the researcher via email to indicate their willingness to participate in the research, but they did not meet the eligibility criteria for the target population. In addition to expressing their desire to participate in the study, the five homeschool educators whose children had not reached high school age and the two homeschool educators who lived outside Wake County shared their opinions on homeschoolers' access to public school resources in their email messages.

Respondents' homeschooling experiences. The questionnaire captured basic, factual information regarding respondents' homeschooling experiences and household demographics. Fourteen respondents elected to have their homeschools operate as independent schools, and five respondents operated their homeschools as religious schools. The majority (74%) of respondents had nine or more years of homeschooling experience. Four respondents had three to five years of experience, and one respondent had between six to eight years homeschooling experience. Respondents were almost evenly split in their responses to the question, "Has/have your child/children who is/are currently homeschooled ever attended a public school?" Ten responded "yes," while the other nine indicated that their children had never attended a public school.

Respondents' household demographics. The majority (79%) of respondents provided answers to the questions about marital status, racial background, and household income. All respondents self-reported that they were married. Three respondents selected “prefer not to answer” for the racial background question. One respondent chose both African American/Black and Caucasian/White, and the other 15 respondents identified as Caucasian/White. Four respondents preferred not to answer the annual household income question. Two respondents reported annual household income in the previous 12 months in the range of \$50,001-\$75,000; eight respondents' household income fell in the \$75,001-\$100,000 range; and five respondents reported annual income of \$100,001 or more.

Respondents' reasons for homeschooling. Respondents were asked about their primary reason for homeschooling their children and chose among five options as presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Participants' Primary Reason for Homeschooling, 2015

Primary Reason for Homeschooling	Number	Percent
Religious or moral beliefs/concerns	2	11
Concerns about the quality of academic instruction at other schools	5	26
Concerns about the social atmosphere at other schools	4	21
Concerns about child's special needs being met in other schools	4	21
Other	4	21

Two respondents cited religious or moral beliefs/concerns, and five respondents started homeschooling primarily to assuage their concerns about the quality of academic instruction at other schools. Two other categories, namely “concerns about the social atmosphere at other schools” and “concerns about child's special needs being met in other schools,” were each selected by four respondents. The four respondents who selected “Other” explained their primary reason for homeschooling, which included personal education philosophy and children's

health issues. One respondent described the primary reason for homeschooling as a “composite” relating to “too much socialization, too little emphasis on academics, and too much alienation from parents' values” in other schools. Another respondent wrote, “It has varied with each child.” Of the 40 children enrolled in respondents’ homeschools at the time questionnaire data were collected, 24 were high school age. Including those who had graduated or who were no longer enrolled in the homeschool, the total number of children respondents had homeschooled/were homeschooling was 63.

Respondents’ use of educational resources. Respondents utilized a number of educational resources to homeschool their children. All 19 respondents used the public libraries, 15 used online courses, 11 used local community centers, five used tutors, and two used special education teachers. Additional resources that respondents mentioned included co-op classes, museum classes, college/university classes and programs, parks and recreation programs, and professional teachers (i.e., teachers with discipline-specific expertise who had experience teaching in public and/or private schools).

Interview participants’ demographics. In response to the last questionnaire item, 16 respondents provided their contact information, and 14 of them participated in an individual interview. As a result of snowball sampling, the researcher conducted individual interviews with another four participants who did not complete the questionnaire. Demographic characteristics for the participant sample are listed in Table 4. All names are pseudonyms.

Table 4

Demographic Characteristics for Participant Sample, 2015

Name	Marital Status	Race	Number of Children	Children Ever Enrolled in Public School	Children with Special Needs	Professional Teaching Background
Amaryllis	Married	White	4	Yes	Yes	No
Blossom	Married	Black/White	5	Yes	Yes	No
Camellia	Married	White	2	Yes	Yes	No
Chrys	Married	White	10	No	---	Yes
Dahlia	Married	White	3	Yes	Yes	Yes
Daisy	Married	White	3	Yes	Yes	No
Erica	Married	White	4	No	No	No
Heather	Married	White	2	Yes	Yes	Yes
Holly	Married	White	2	No	No	Yes
Iris	Married	White	4	No	Yes	No
Jasmine	Married	White	3	Yes	No	Yes
Lily	Married	White	3	Yes	Yes	Yes
Petunia	Married	White	2	No	No	No
Rose	Married	White	2	Yes	Yes	Yes
Scarlet	Married	White	2	Yes	Yes	No
Violet	Married	Black	5	Yes	No	No
Yarrow	Married	---	2	Yes	Yes	No
Zinnia	Married	White	3	Yes	Yes	Yes

For the most part, the demographic characteristics of the participant sample were consistent with the characteristics generally associated with homeschooling families as reported through the NHES program. As is the norm among homeschool families, all of the participants in this study were part of a two-parent household. Traditionally, mothers have served as the primary educators in homeschooling families, and the fathers have occupied a position in the paid workforce. This pattern held true for most, but not all, of the families in this study. Yarrow, the only father to participate in this study, is the primary homeschool educator while his wife participates in the paid workforce. Lily worked part-time during the years that she was homeschooling her children. Just like the national statistics on homeschoolers' family composition, 61% of the homeschooling families in this study have three or more children. The sample for this study has a higher percentage of White participants (89%) than is representative

of the racial distribution in the national homeschooling population. The other 11% of this sample is made up of one Black homeschool educator and one biracial homeschool educator. As parents have frequently pointed to their children's special needs as a reason for their decision to homeschool, it is worth noting that 66% of the homeschool educators in the sample indicated that one or more of their children have special needs. In this research, the category "children with special needs" refers to children who are academically advanced and/or who have health problems and/or learning disabilities. Only five of the 18 participants, or 28%, have exclusively homeschooled all of their children. Atypical of the homeschooling population where few homeschool educators are certified as teachers, 44% of the participants in this research study have a professional background in teaching.

Homeschooling Experiences of Interview Participants

The length of the interviews ranged from 31 minutes to 163 minutes, with a mean interview time of 70 minutes. The median interview time was 60 minutes. The individual interviews provided the researcher with the opportunity to hear participants' stories as relayed through their recounted experiences with educating their children. Zinnia's adult son, Watson, participated in the interview with his mother and shared his experiences of being a homeschooled student during his high school years. During the interviews, participants shared stories of their common and unique experiences with homeschooling. The data presented in this section offer a refined description of the participants that helps to crystallize their motivations for homeschooling. In addition, data will be presented that reflect participants' opinions about homeschooling, which in turn will set the stage for later data analysis related to the research questions.

Reasons participants chose homeschooling. Participants first heard about homeschooling from a number of different sources including radio broadcasts, magazine articles in the pediatrician's office, and self-help books on parenting. Unlike most participants, Dahlia had heard about homeschooling long before she was an adult. She recalled:

I suppose growing up I would have liked to have been homeschooled in some ways. In the schools I attended, things moved through the curriculum quite slowly; but when I was growing up that [homeschooling] was not an option. There was compulsory school attendance, and the parent had to be a licensed teacher or tutor in the state of Illinois. And this was not an option, and my parents were not interested in homeschooling at all.

At the time she made the decision to homeschool, Camellia said, "I had heard by this time about homeschooling, but I had never met anyone who had homeschooled in person." Scarlet and Iris, on the other hand, first learned about homeschooling from family and friends who were already homeschooling their own children.

The decision to homeschool was a tough one for some homeschoolers like Scarlet, who said, "I was petrified and did not know how to teach, because I am not, I was not educated to be a teacher. I did not think that I would be able to handle teaching a child, but it turns out that I could." Lily, who was educated to be a teacher, recalled feeling "really afraid that I could not teach them to read. I can teach AP Biology and Physics, but I just can't teach someone phonics. This is just beyond me. Homeschooling was an option that I went into with truly fear and trembling." Heather disclosed that her professional teaching background gave her confidence such that "I did not feel incompetent about being able to teach my children. I am the type of person I can read something and as long as I have a way to be able to explain it to them, I feel confident to be able to do that. I was okay with it. It just happened really quickly, but I did not have a chance to prepare myself for it." Violet described the decision to homeschool as "scary" and recalled asking herself, "Am I going to mess my kids up? Is this the right thing?" She and

many of the participants in this research indicated that they continue to ask “Is this the right thing?” in their year-to-year evaluation of homeschooling as the right choice for their families.

Similar to the homeschoolers in other research samples, the participants in this research chose homeschooling for a host of ideological and pedagogical reasons. Moreover, their motivations to persist with homeschooling varied from year to year as family circumstances changed. Asked to describe her decision-making process that led her to homeschool her children, Blossom discussed the overlapping reasons for her decision:

Over the years, I ended up homeschooling for all kinds of reasons. But when I started, my daughter was in a fantastic private school, and we simply couldn't afford it; but that wasn't the main reason that we homeschooled. I think it was really that I had a lot of family and friends that were homeschooling, and they were raving how wonderful it was to be close to your kids and be able to be more involved in their lives. They really inspired me in the possibility that I could inspire my child to learn. The one thing that stuck in my head that was said to me a long time ago was the goal early on is to inspire the love of learning and not kill it, and that is probably why I started. We are also Christian conservative, and that probably played a role in it, too. The bottom line was I really wanted her to get a quality education all the way around.

All of the participants stressed the importance of providing a high quality education for their children. Explaining her reason for homeschooling, Jasmine said that her experience as an elementary teacher had shown her that “The kids in the middle are the ones that get lost, and my kids are in the middle.” Jasmine worried that her children, whom she described as being in the academic middle, would be ignored in a traditional classroom setting with children of mixed academic achievement levels where the teacher's attention was drawn to meeting the needs of high-achieving students and low-achieving students. Those parents whose children had special needs counted meeting their children's special needs as the primary reason for homeschooling. Amaryllis spoke of her son, now a 20-year old college student: “He was homeschooled all the way through. He has learning disabilities, which made me even more determined to keep him at

home.” Yarrow shared that he also viewed homeschooling as the best option for meeting his daughter’s educational needs:

When our oldest child was in first grade, she had to draw a picture of what she wanted to do next year. She drew a picture of her sitting at her desk, and under it was “I want to be doing harder work.” So, we, in first grade, tried to see what we could do. The program for gifted and talented or accelerated readers was virtually nonexistent in her elementary school, and we pulled her out and did it ourselves.

Other parents in the sample also embraced the “do it yourself” approach in their rationales for homeschooling. For example, Amaryllis said about her decision to homeschool, “I am kind of a rebel. I like to do things myself. I like to be self-sufficient. I canned and froze and made clothes and made bread and all those kinds of things that gave me a sense of independence, so I think it fit in with that, as well.” Also a self-described rebel, Petunia pursued a non-traditional education for her children, because “I wanted to influence my children with my own worldview and with our family values. I wanted my family to be the center of our corporate lives. I did not want the peer group and the school system being the center of our corporate lives.” Just as Petunia explained how her desire for shaping her family’s lifestyle influenced her decision to homeschool, several other participants talked about homeschooling’s impact on their families’ lifestyles.

Homeschooling as school choice. Seven participants discussed their view of homeschooling itself as a “lifestyle.” During the opening phase of the interview as the researcher was explaining the purpose of the research, Iris emphatically interjected, “It is not just school choice; it is a lifestyle. It is a lifestyle to homeschool, and so it is much bigger than just school choice.” Zinnia expressed a similar understanding of homeschooling: “We really look at homeschooling as a lifestyle as much as an educational thing. As a lifestyle choice, you decide that you are learning all the time, and you are as well as them.” Holly added, “We school

everywhere. But we make the learning a part of their life experience.” Camellia said that when her daughter applied to college, “In one of her college essays she said it is really hard as a homeschooler to differentiate between home and school, because your life is your education and so everything is connected in that way.” Participants’ similar understanding of the connectedness of home and school made homeschooling, for them, an all-encompassing endeavor.

Zinnia, who seemed intrigued that the researcher framed homeschooling under the banner of school choice, observed:

In the other areas of home education that I know very much, you make a decision and you stick with it. It was interesting to me that you spoke of school choice, because in the Triangle area particularly and similar extent across North Carolina maybe school choice is so important and that seems to mean temporary choice. It doesn’t mean make a decision and that is the next 12 years of your student’s life. It can be even less than a year of choice, and if it doesn’t work out, you make. . . . Now as an educator or when I taught training, consistency of educational philosophy or consistency of educational approach was considered really important.

Zinnia’s comments underscored participants’ differentiation between “school choice” and “lifestyle” as descriptors for the practice of homeschooling. Whereas the category of “school choice” seemed narrow and fleeting, participants used “lifestyle” to reflect their commitment to homeschooling as a way of educating their children *and* living their lives. As such, perhaps it should not have surprised the researcher that several participants chose to bring their other children home after initially starting to homeschool to meet the needs of one child. Camellia, for example, shared, “We started at home schooling for my older daughter. We realized that my younger daughter is really social and was doing really well in school, and we thought maybe we’ll leave her. Then, we were like no, if we actually think that it is a benefit then let’s homeschool both of them.” That Camellia withdrew both of her children from public schools,

despite the fact that her younger daughter was succeeding in the traditional school setting, further demonstrated participants' categorization of homeschooling as a lifestyle.

Homeschooling through high school. Participants in this study were undoubtedly committed to homeschooling, and yet many participants revealed a shift in their motivations to continue homeschooling as their children reached high school age. Blossom, the only participant who had quit homeschooling, explained why she enrolled her youngest two children in a public school, "My . . . kids have just about every type of special needs or disability you can imagine from A to Z. I kind of joke and say that I qualify as a special needs teacher at this point. Pretty burned out, and it is one of the reasons why I am done after 12 years." Several other participants intimated that they had considered quitting homeschooling in favor of enrolling their children in traditional schools for high school. Daisy said, "I had always thought we would put them back in high school." Lily, too, commented, "I always thought when they get to high school, they will go back to school and I will get back in and make money for college." At one time, Erica thought she might return to the paid workforce after her husband became disabled. Recalling that time, she shared:

I wanted to put my two youngest in public school, because my husband is disabled with Parkinson's, and it looked like I might have to go back to work for a while. And at that point, I was like, okay, my youngest daughter was going to be going into public high school, my other one was going into middle school. Let's put them in school now rather than try to do it in the middle. They objected, and they said, "We are not going to school." I don't know if they hear the worst about school from their friends, but no they were not going, and it was more than I could do to fight them for that.

Interestingly, as some parents' motivations for homeschooling during the high school years waned, their children's desire to continue with homeschooling seemed high. And, in fact, several participants credited their children's decisions for their continuance with homeschooling. Iris was clear that "the only reason that I am homeschooling high school is when my daughter

got in the 8th grade, I said, ‘What do you think? Do you want to go to school?’ ‘Oh no, I want to stay home.’ So there was no question. I was like, okay.” Yarrow reasoned:

We never planned on doing this through high school necessarily, but that is the direction that it has gone. And my daughter has said, “I do not want to go to school; I am having fun the way we can do it. We are doing it now, and I will work hard.” As long as she continues to work hard, and her grades are good, and she meets the standards, we will continue to do it.

Daisy and Zinnia also sought their children’s input. Daisy said about homeschooling, “This was the road that I chose through middle school—the road I want. I let the decisions of my kids for high school, because once they hit high school that is their road.” Zinnia reported:

My parenting philosophy is such that when they get to high school they have the option. You either choose to work with me in our educational environment and carry on in a positive, friendly manner although you are a teenager, or else you choose an alternative. And at this point, all three of them have chosen to stay at home and carry on.

Although he said, “I don’t have a memory of sitting down and making that decision,” Zinnia’s son Watson expressed his satisfaction with homeschooling through high school:

I really did like the freedom, and a significant part of it was that the way that she [Zinnia] believes in doing education. I had an educational philosophy myself, and I was allowed and expected to have feelings about my education. That is harder. . . . I mean it is not impossible, but it is not expected that public school students think about why they are doing that form of education and what they are getting out of it.

In these instances, the children’s school choice decisions allowed families to maintain their lifestyle as homeschoolers.

Return to traditional schools. In contrast to those who chose to continue with homeschooling for high school, a few participants talked about the decisions they and their children made to enroll in traditional schools. Much like the initial decision to homeschool, the decision to enroll in traditional schools was uniquely multi-faceted for each family. Rose’s daughter, who had just graduated from high school, laughed as she overheard her mother telling the researcher:

I homeschooled her through middle school and high school. When she got to high school, she was very happy homeschooling, and we were very happy to have her. We had gotten two exchange students, and exchange students by law had to go to public school. And I asked her if she wanted to go to public school, and she said no. And I said, well, give it a try. And I kind of pushed her out of the nest at that point. And I said that if you don't like it, you can come home your senior year, but this is the ideal time for you to try because you already have two kids that you know that are going to that school and you can rely on each other.

Amaryllis was a first-choicer, someone for whom homeschooling was the preferred educational option for educating all of her children. She conceded to her daughter's expressed desire to attend public school and proclaimed:

With the exception of the oldest, I have homeschooled everyone all the way through. The oldest was not cooperative in homeschool in high school. She has a tendency to want to do things the difficult way, so we took her to the magnet fair. She stood there with her head down and her arms crossed and wouldn't engage with anyone. She did not think we were really going to send her.

Amaryllis's oldest daughter attended a large public high school for ninth and tenth grades and later transferred to a magnet high school for her junior and senior years of high school. Chrys's children also wanted to go to public school, but she dissuaded them from leaving the homeschool:

Some of my younger kids have had the desire to go to high school, because that is what everyone else is doing. And my second kid kind of wanted to do that, but we told her . . . you know you won't have any time. Once you go to high school, you won't have any time to do all the things that you want to do. It is a lot busier, and you are gone all day, then you are doing homework all night, and you will not get to work and make money like you do and things like that. And I felt that she was a little bit more swayed by peers, and I was a little worried about that . . . that she does not have a strong enough independence to be able to handle necessarily being thrust into an environment where not everybody has the same standards. And she realized that I don't want to do that. So then I am kind of having that same battle with the one that just turned 15. It is funny, because she is not really wanting to go to public school; she just wants to go somewhere more exciting.

Although she expressed a willingness to “find some more excitement” for her daughter, Chrys indicated that she does not plan to capitulate to her 15-year-old’s desire to attend public high school.

Research Questions

Whereas the foregoing sections provided respondent and participant demographics and preliminary analysis for how participants were situated in the study context, this section of the chapter addresses each research question. The research questions will be addressed through qualitative analyses of relevant laws and policies, documents, and interview data. Social construction will be used to frame the analyses.

Research Question 1. Spice-line is an online moderated group that provides information to homeschooling families in the Triangle area. A homeschool educator recently posted to Spice-line, “I’d like to know how common it is for homeschool students to participate in public school sports and music. Are there laws regarding it? And is there wisdom that can be shared regarding it?” A group member responded to the Spice-line query, “This is a mixed bag!” The “mixed bag” descriptor can be aptly applied to the findings related to Research Question 1 in this study. And, while participation in sports is outside the scope of this research, this first research question concerned the laws and the policies that regulate homeschooled students’ access to music and other public school resources in North Carolina. Analyses were conducted to determine the extent to which the North Carolina Constitution, the North Carolina homeschool law, and WCPSS policies support access.

As was explained in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, the federal Constitution says nothing about education, and so attention must be focused on the state’s laws and local policies for guidance on how education benefits accrue to school-age children in North Carolina. The North

Carolina Constitution establishes education as a fundamental right; state law guarantees each child the opportunity to receive a sound, basic education (*Leandro*, 1997). The state's homeschool law protects parents' right to educate their children at home. The WCPSS policy manual outlines the Board-adopted policies, regulations, and procedures that direct the school district's legal functions. Yet for all the rhetoric in these extensive documents, none contains explicit language that specifically addresses the degree of access to public school resources homeschooled students may expect. Without explicit language that prohibits or guarantees access, the aforementioned laws and policies are open to interpretation. The participants in this study offered their interpretations regarding the level of access that may be allowable under current statutes and policies.

Interpretation of the homeschool law. As they opined about the current homeschool law, participants did so by comparing the intended meaning of the 2013 homeschool legislation to the predominant interpretations associated with the original homeschool law. Referring to the old homeschool law, Scarlet sighed, "When we were homeschooling, the homeschooling law in the state was odd." To Blossom and other participants, the old law was odd because "there was a lot of gray area of interpretation in homeschool law, and I think that made everyone feel uncomfortable." That "gray area" gave way to a number of different interpretations by education officials and homeschool educators. The researcher met with Division of Non-Public Education (DNPE) Director David Mills in his office located on the second floor of the North Carolina Department of Administration Building in Raleigh. He did not offer opinions on the homeschool law, but he indicated that one of the main functions of the DNPE is "keeping the law the way it is written." To the extent that all laws are subject to interpretation, "keeping the law" involved interpretations for how the law would be applied to homeschool educators.

Regarding the way the original law was written, Lily acknowledged that some homeschool educators felt uncomfortable with the literal interpretation of the law:

Because the way the Director of the Non-Public Instruction [*sic*] had interpreted the homeschool law was that if you are homeschooling, the parent must provide all of the homeschooling instruction. And my college roommate that sucks at math, she said, “Are they telling me that my dad that is an engineer and teaches at the community college can’t teach my son calculus?” and I said, “Pretty much.”

The definition of a homeschool in the original law stipulated that homeschooled students were to receive academic instruction from parents or legal guardians, or in cases where two families homeschooled their children together, members of either household could provide academic instruction. Zinnia understood that the law “was sort of saying you can educate your own child, but only if you do it like this.” Other participants also couched their understanding of the old law in terms of the limitations the law placed upon homeschool educators. Erica said, “We knew it wasn’t allowed—the way the law used to be—we were not allowed to send them outside for the core classes.” Camellia interpreted the law similarly: “So the law used to say that for the main subjects you had to do it yourself.” Erica and Camellia’s references to “core classes” and “main subjects” likely derived from the use of the phrase “academic instruction” in the original definition of a homeschool. Participants used terms like “academic instruction,” “core classes,” and “main subjects” interchangeably to refer to reading, writing, English, math, science, and history. Disciplines such as visual art, music, and physical education were not counted among the “core” or “main” disciplines. Amaryllis didn’t distinguish between academic and non-academic subjects as she shared that “the prevailing interpretation of the law was that you could only have someone teach your child one day a week outside of the home.” Chrys spoke assuredly, “It is against the law in North Carolina. You cannot use public access. You can’t use public resources. You can’t go to public schools and say, ‘Hey, can my kid be in choir?’” The

literal interpretation of the law left little room for homeschool educators to seek outside instructors for non-academic courses and no room for instructors outside of the homeschool to teach core, academic courses. Despite participants' consensus admission that they were responsible for providing academic instruction to the children enrolled in their individual homeschools, most skirted the literal interpretation of the law's requirements with what they regarded as sensible rationalizations.

All but one of the participants talked about their refusal to follow the letter of the law, choosing instead to secure outside instructors when they deemed it necessary to meet their children's educational needs. With the 2013 revision to the definition of a homeschool, law finally caught up to practice, which was a recurrent theme in the interviews, reminding the researcher of Justice Thurgood Marshall's words, "You do what you think is right and let the law catch up." For the most part, participants were pleased with the change in the homeschool law; however, their somewhat muted reactions to the broadened opportunities promised by the new law surprised the researcher. About the new law, Scarlet said, "For me, it really didn't make any difference." Through continued conversations with participants, the researcher realized that most participants were already determining additional sources of academic instruction prior to the passage of the new law. Lily and Blossom used the phrase "don't ask, don't tell" to refer to the common practice among their fellow homeschool educators of finding academic instructional resources outside the homeschool. Participants explained that they did what they thought was right for their children. Chrys, who closely followed the proposed legislation until it became law, mused:

That is the way that I had always worked. I had just said I am going to go and find the resources that I want to find, you know, and I did not feel that there was a problem with that. So it was nice when it became official, but it wasn't like I felt that there was anything wrong with me finding a math teacher to teach once a week to my child. I

recognize that I was still responsible. I was just accessing resources to help with what we needed.

Blossom, like most participants, worked outside the limits of the old law to provide instructional resources for her children, but the passage of the new law, she said,

gave me peace of mind knowing I was following the law. Up until that law went into effect, I think it was a travesty to limit the homeschoolers wanting to seek outside help, especially in high school when the average parent can't meet all their needs. I am very glad that law was changed. I think it was to benefit us, and it appears that way.

Participants appreciated the flexibility in the revised definition of a homeschool that put them on a stronger footing to utilize grandparents and private tutors as instructors and to enroll their children in online and museum courses.

Access per local policy. According to David Mills of DNPE, the issue of homeschoolers' access to public school resources comes up from time to time, but DNPE does not keep any statistics on such inquiries. Answers to frequently asked questions about homeschooling in North Carolina have been compiled in the 30-page *Home School Guidebook*, which can be downloaded from the DNPE website. The guidebook's section on academics contained information on the use of "outside of the household" professional educators and guidelines for accessing outside instructional resources. The guidebook further specified that the legal definition of a homeschool makes it permissible for homeschooled students to enroll part-time in traditional schools with the caveat that "it is permissible if the local conventional school (public or private) . . . officials allow such part-time arrangements" (North Carolina Department of Administration, 2015, p. 13). The guidebook explained district discretion and advised homeschoolers interested in public school courses:

Each local education agency (LEA) may have different policies relating to the enrollment of homeschool students in one or more public school courses. Please inquire of the LEA about their policies on enrolling a home school student in one or more courses and how

the student will be classified by the system (as either a visiting student or a public school student of the LEA). (North Carolina Department of Administration, 2015, p. 14)

Accordingly, homeschool students' participation in courses is determined based on each school district's policy and any accompanying procedures that detail the policy's implementation.

In response to the question about WCPSS policies on part-time enrollment for homeschooled students, the district's Director of Counseling provided, "Policies are aligned with state legislation and provide resources that are required by that legislation." Currently, the only resource required by state legislation is driver education. According to N.C. Gen. Stat. § 115C-215:

In accordance with criteria and standards approved by the State Board of Education, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction shall organize and administer a standardized program of driver education to be offered at the public high schools of this State for all physically and mentally qualified persons who (i) are older than 14 years and six months, (ii) are approved by the principal of the school, pursuant to rules adopted by the State Board of Education, (iii) are enrolled in a public or private high school within the State or are receiving instruction through a home school as provided by Part 3 of Article 39 of Chapter 115C of the General Statutes, and (iv) have not previously enrolled in the program.

Seven other participants shared Lily's sentiment, which was, "We have always been able to take driver's ed in the public school." In that sense, the 2013 change to the homeschool law did not impact the availability of driver education to children attending homeschools. While public school districts are required to provide driver education to qualified homeschool students, parents may be assessed a fee up to \$65 upon registration. According to the information on the WCPSS website, driver education is provided by a private contractor to all qualified students residing in Wake County for a fee of \$65.

Five participants were equally confident in the availability of psychoeducational testing to homeschool students. Comments from Lily and Zinnia included, "Everybody has agreed that the homeschoolers are allowed to have psychoeducational testing done through the public school

system” and “I know you are entitled to get special testing,” respectively. Amaryllis, Camellia, and Heather articulated similar understandings of students’ universal entitlement to educational evaluation for special needs; however, Camellia ventured, “I don’t think most homeschool parents know that.” Lily attested, “The law originally said that homeschoolers are entitled to services at the public school. You should have been able to get speech therapy and occupational therapy if it was provided.” According to Chapter 115C Article 9 of the North Carolina General Statutes, “Each local educational agency, in providing for the education of children with disabilities within its jurisdiction, must comply with IDEA” (§115C-107.6). Information on the DNPE website indicates that public schools are not required by state law to provide services to homeschooled special needs children; however, “as a recipient of federal funding, public schools are required by federal law to provide them in certain (but not all) cases” (DNPE, 2014). For example, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools posted a notification of services message on its website, informing parents, in part, that:

The Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) has a duty under federal legislation entitled the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) to seek out and evaluate students suspected of having educational disabilities and provide appropriate services. . . . CMS, in consultation with and after soliciting suggestions from private and home school directors, made the decision to continue serving students with Speech-Language as a primary disability during the 2015-2016 school year. . . . In addition, the EC [Exceptional Children’s] Program will purchase a variety of research-based educational materials with any remaining funds that private and home schools can request as needed to support students with disabilities in their programs. (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, 2015)

DNPE urges parents to contact the local school boards to find out which, if any, services are provided to homeschooled students with special needs. In Wake County, according to the WCPSS Director of Counseling, “Homeschooled students are not . . . provided Special Education services through the local LEA.”

Unlike driver education and psychoeducational testing, homeschoolers have not always been able to participate fully in North Carolina Virtual Public School (NCVPS) courses. Prior to the amendment to the homeschool law, a DNPE-produced flyer on the extended education opportunities for homeschool students advertised nine NCVPS course options, including Psychology, Accounting, and SAT Prep, and noted that “core subjects (reading, spelling, grammar, and math) should be taught by home school parent or guardian according to North Carolina General Statutes.” While enrollment in NCVPS courses is fee-based for non-public students, the current homeschool law broadened access to core and additional elective courses for homeschool students. The cost of each course for non-public students ranges from \$310 to \$640, because the “NCVPS funding formula passed by the NC General Assembly for public schools does not cover the cost of enrollments for home or private school students” (North Carolina Virtual Public School, 2015). The WCPSS Director of Counseling posited, “NCVPS is accessible to home schooled students in WCPSS, but not via the local LEA. Homeschooled students are not permitted to be dually enrolled in the WCPSS per policy 5534.” The regulations and procedures associated with WCPSS Policy 5534, which is entitled “Dual Enrollment for Academic Enrichment Classes,” stipulate that students must be currently enrolled in a WCPSS middle or high school to take NCVPS courses through the LEA. Participants’ understanding of the accessibility of NCVPS courses matched Yarrow’s: “I know that they have developed an online learning portal, but as I understand it, if we are not enrolled in public school, we don’t have access to it.”

Online educational options appear to be increasing in North Carolina. In addition to NCVPS, North Carolina opened its first online public school in the 2015-2016 academic year. The researcher attended an informational webinar hosted by a North Carolina Virtual Academy

(NCVA) representative in June 2015, during which the representative admitted that there had been a high amount of interest from homeschooling families but declared, “NCVA is not homeschooling.” NCVA uses the K12 curriculum, a curriculum which is also sold directly to individual families on a per-course basis. Four participants expressed familiarity with K12 curricular resources and had utilized K12 courses to homeschool their children. Heather and Lily spoke at length about their frustrations with the inaccessibility of part-time enrollment in K12 courses offered through NCVA. Heather intoned:

North Carolina created a partnership with the K12 program, but you are considered a public school student if you do K12 in North Carolina. So you have to actually close your homeschool if you do the K12 program. You are not allowed to consider yourself a homeschooler if your child participates in K12, so they still are restricting you. You can’t have a child that you homeschool that has access to K12. So that still limits a lot of families.

Eligibility for participation in the tuition-free K12 courses is contingent upon students’ full-time enrollment in NCVA. Trying to make sense of the rules governing participation in online courses, Lily remarked:

Florida Virtual School, which is a public school in Florida, you can sign up in North Carolina and maintain your homeschooling status as long as you are going to an out-of-state virtual public school, which is asinine to me. K12 does the virtual school in North Carolina, and the restrictions on how many courses you can take . . . or if you enroll you give up homeschool status, and that is really difficult for parents to wrap their brain around. Here is the difference—you live in North Carolina . . . you sign up for anything that is managed by the State Department of Public Instruction, you cannot also be a homeschooler. They draw the line. You can go anywhere else to any other provider, and you can be a homeschooler, and even that was a little cloudy.

Perhaps adding to the “cloudiness” is the option for homeschool students in some school districts (e.g., Cabarrus County Schools, Iredell-Statesville Schools) to enroll in two online courses per semester (four courses per year). The LEAs count students who choose this option as public school students and may garner state funding per part-time student. In this case, school district-

provided online courses supplement homeschool instruction, and parents continue to provide and/or determine additional sources of academic instruction.

Legal allowances and limitations. With its “mixed bag” of allowances and limitations, participants regarded some aspects of the current homeschool law favorably and found other aspects of the law disadvantageous to homeschoolers. All of the participants weighed in on the new law, except Scarlet, who said, “I am not sure what they changed. I don’t really recall, because I went by the guidelines from when I started. I am not really sure how they changed it, because they did not really send me notification.” Daisy provided her general assessment of the homeschool law this way: “North Carolina is kind of lax with homeschool, very lax.” The law’s perceived laxity prompted Violet to proclaim, “North Carolina has one of the best homeschool laws in the U.S.” She viewed education as the parent’s responsibility and appreciated North Carolina’s implementation of limited accountability measures to education officials outside of the homeschool. She explained that it would cause her stress to present her whole curriculum to outside officials, a requirement for homeschoolers in other states. Like Violet, several other participants based their judgement of North Carolina’s homeschool law on their understandings of the laws that govern homeschooling in other states. In a typology similar to HSLDA’s classification of states as having high, moderate, low, or no homeschool regulations, Zinnia said, “I see homeschool law in three sections. So there are three levels of states—easy, moderate, and hard. New York is a hard state whereas both Connecticut and North Carolina are easy states.” Watson agreed, saying, “New York’s laws about homeschooling are pretty strict, by far the most strict of anywhere that we have homeschooled. In Connecticut, we had a moderate amount of contact with the school system.” Petunia, too, was somewhat aware of the differences in homeschooling regulations in New York and shared this remembered interaction:

Because some school systems like in New York, and I don't know if it is still true. . . . About six years ago we were visiting some family in New York, and I talked to a homeschool lady. . . . Hardly anybody . . . they did not have a lot of homeschoolers in that town. Well, one of the reasons she said is they tell you what you have to do. You have to do what they have to do in school. Well, what the heck?

Petunia said she was unwilling to give up control of her homeschool or to have the school system tell her what she should teach her children. Erica was bothered that

in other states, they have the law where the homeschools are under the public school, so we could easily be under Wake County for our administration right now. So other places have portfolio reviews. You go to your local school and say this is what I have accomplished in the last six months. And they either bless it, or, if they feel you are not doing the right thing, they can say you can't homeschool your child anymore; you have to put them in school.

The freedom to choose their children's curriculum and instructors made North Carolina's homeschool law particularly attractive to both Petunia and Erica.

Just as participants had heard about or experienced states with stricter homeschool laws, they had also heard about states where homeschoolers' access to public school resources seemed substantially wider than in North Carolina. Chrys voiced her desire for greater access to public school courses, "Colorado, Idaho, Utah—they all have laws that say you can take up to two classes, and I have all kinds of homeschool friends that do that. And I am like ooohhh, I wish I could do that." Heather echoed the voices of newcomers to the state:

There are families that move here from other states and are like, "We were doing this, this, and this through our local school, and we come here and we can't do that." People view that as North Carolina is supposed to be on the cutting edge of things, but this area is so different. I think that as a whole, they could be more supportive of homeschoolers over all in the state. There are states that you would view as not being as advanced as North Carolina who go further with their support of homeschool families, and you would think that we would do more.

Rose's words encapsulated the potential trade-offs that might accompany homeschoolers' increased access to public school resources:

We don't have a lot of regulations. I know a lot of states have full access. You can go to any class that you wish. You can go to after-school activities, but they also have a lot more regulations and hoops to jump through as homeschoolers. In North Carolina, we kind of like that we are left alone to do things as we see fit.

The idea that striving for greater access to public school resources could come with greater regulations for homeschool educators was described as a “slippery slope” by Daisy and Violet. The uncertainty around the potential consequences of expanded access likely contributes to national and local homeschool advocacy organizations’ neutral stance on the topic. Perhaps their silence has spoken volumes. As Daisy pronounced, “Homeschoolers have the ear of the legislature. There is a huge lobby there. Because they want the vote and with our state leaning conservative, they have a lot of power. Nothing is going to happen that homeschoolers don’t want.” The political landscape in North Carolina was changing in 2013 as a Republican governor assumed office and Republican legislators achieved a supermajority in the General Assembly. This shift in political power undoubtedly impacted the timing of the proposed change to the homeschool law and the swift ease with which it passed.

By Daisy’s assertion as well as by various incidents that have been retold on homeschool advocacy organizations’ websites (e.g., North Carolinians for Home Education, Homeschool Alliance of North Carolina, Inc.), homeschoolers appear to hold the power to influence the adoption of pro-homeschool legislation and to sway education officials toward magnanimous interpretations of homeschool laws and policies. Although the statewide lobbying groups have remained silent on homeschoolers’ access to public school resources, they were vocal proponents in getting the 1988 homeschool legislation passed, and leaders from NCHE took the lead in changing the homeschool law in 2013. At the signing of Senate Bill 189, which amended the definition of a homeschool in North Carolina, a number of homeschooled students were on hand to witness the signing, and NCHE board member Spencer Mason was pictured with Governor

Pat McCrory. A few months after the homeschool law was changed, DNPE Director David Mills announced plans to visit a small number of homeschools for the purpose of inspecting homeschool records in accordance with the law. Less than two weeks after his announcement, “David Mills announced that he had decided not to carry out his plans. Mr. Mills . . . had received calls from homeschoolers expressing their dismay concerning the plan” (McClain, 2013, para. 5). Kevin McClain, NCHE President, encouraged his fellow homeschool educators to study the law, and he advocated an understanding of the proposed inspections of homeschool records as a legitimate public service. He pointed out that “NC home educators are fortunate to have a Division of Non-Public Education, staffed with public officials who understand and respect a family's right to educational freedom. We are also fortunate that DNPE officials have never sought to implement the full force the law authorizes” (McClain, 2013, para. 7). These examples show that not only did homeschool educators play a significant role in setting the policy agenda, they also used their influence to prevent DNPE officials from fully implementing the law. In the social construction framework, homeschoolers would be classified as having strong power.

Social construction of homeschool educators. Participants’ stories of their lived experiences with homeschooling revealed the complexity and uncertainty inherent in the laws and policies that determine who gets what. Social construction can be applied to an analysis of what the current law granted and did not grant to homeschoolers. In keeping with a number of bills introduced in the 2013 legislative session that were designed to increase parental choice, the revision to the homeschool law granted wider latitude to homeschool educators to direct their children’s education. Participants’ underwhelming response to the change in the homeschool law resulted from the fact that they operated in a social context within which they and other

homeschool educators they knew were already determining and using additional sources of academic instruction. It may have been inevitable, but not essential, that the law change to match the reality of many homeschool educators' practices. Comments from Lily and Holly highlighted the tremendous imbalance in the ratio of homeschool educators to state education officials. Lily said, "I have seen homeschooling since there was 10 of us to when there is roughly 10,000 in this county, and it grew by something ridiculous like 30 or 40% over the last two years." Holly mentioned, "The North Carolina Department [*sic*] of Non-Public Education has maybe three people that work there, and they can't track everybody. They send out all these intimidating letters, and I am like, really, seriously. Okay, I will have my shot records and scores in house. I am like, come on." The three people at DNPE to whom Holly referred include the director and two education consultants. Any attempt by DNPE's small staff to "track everybody" would be futile. Homeschool educators recognized that their sheer numbers conferred to them a tremendous degree of power that made it impossible for the DNPE to enforce the fullness of the homeschool law.

Having won the policy debate that resulted in the expansion of the definition of a homeschool, homeschool educators told their own stories that added to the grand narrative homeschoolers tell about themselves. As is customary in the telling of a grand narrative, homeschool educators used coded meanings, highly recognizable to members of the homeschool community, to communicate their values and beliefs. Amaryllis related one part of the grand narrative:

I think we did a really good job, the best job that we could have with him [our son]. Sure, we could have put more money into it and tried to get more tutors, but I think he is a well-balanced adult. He recognizes he has strengths and weaknesses. He has passion. He is caring. He is considerate. He is a thoughtful person.

Similarly, Erica said, “I personally don’t know of any parents who homeschool their children and don’t do a good job. Most parents care so much about their child, and they are putting out so much effort.” Their familiar recitations about the successful homeschooled student and the tireless homeschool educator served to signify the superiority of the homeschool environment over public school for meeting some students’ needs. Amaryllis did not subscribe to the idea that more money equated to better educational opportunities, significant in the homeschool community where most families operate on one income. Amaryllis’s personal account also stressed the importance of non-academic qualities which she was able to teach in the homeschool environment.

The law did not grant homeschoolers unilateral access to public school resources; however, neither did the law close the door on the possibility for homeschoolers to take advantage of public school resources. Even so, the clear divide per statute between DNPE and DPI fueled what some homeschool educators referred to as their “outsider” status. Heather explained:

We deal with the North Carolina Department [*sic*] of Non-Public Education. It is a total separate department. It is not a Department of Education. It is a totally different department. It is Non-Public Education. So it is a whole separate division. So they make a big distinction. And I think too with North Carolina having a whole separate division for homeschoolers outside the whole education division that makes it look like, okay well, they [homeschoolers] are not a part of the Department of Education. They are on the outside of that. It is on the outskirts of people’s radar.

Heather used repetition to emphasize the apparent width of the separation between students who are educated under the authority of the State Department of Education and students who are educated under the authority of the Division of Non-Public Education. She ended with a question born of mild frustration: “Okay, so why is it such a big deal?” Based on the advocacy

efforts by NCHE, the collective will of the homeschool community to this point has been to maintain its separation from DPI.

Within the policy environment, the positive and negative connotations that different policymakers associate with homeschoolers work to cultivate different social constructions of homeschoolers as a target group and to influence policymakers' decisions. Accordingly, the benefits homeschoolers derive from policy decisions are shaped by how policymakers view them. Policymakers who hold a positive connotation of homeschoolers view them as deserving of benefits while policymakers who hold a negative connotation regard homeschoolers as undeserving of policy's largesse. As the previously mentioned examples illustrated, North Carolina homeschoolers wielded a relatively high amount of power. They have primarily used their power to keep policies that called for increased regulation of homeschooling off the legislative agenda. The Legislative Watch section of the NCHE website stated that "NCHE monitors both state and national legislation that may restrict our right to homeschool with the help of our legislative liaison in Raleigh and volunteers" (North Carolinians for Home Education, 2016). Following the passage of the 1988 homeschool law, North Carolina homeschoolers had not pushed for pro-homeschool legislation until the recent ushering in in North Carolina of a "house of representatives, a senate and a governor who seem to be homeschool friendly" (Mason, 2013, para. 7). Their power, coupled with state policymakers' positive connotations, positioned homeschoolers as advantaged. Their advantaged status resulted in the unanimous vote (in both the House and the Senate) to amend the definition of a homeschool without attaching additional homeschooling regulations to the legislation. Homeschoolers' advantaged status also garnered high-profile public support to champion their cause in the way pre-existing regulations would be implemented. As previously mentioned,

homeschoolers quickly thwarted the DNPE administrator's plan to visit homeschools, and they did so with the vocal backing of North Carolina Lieutenant Governor Dan Forest who condemned the proposed home visits as a potential violation of homeschool families' privacy rights. He pledged to "work with colleagues in the next legislative session to clarify the law" (Christensen, 2013).

The stories participants told revealed their understandings not only of themselves but also of how others viewed them. A few participants indicated that WCPSS administrators held a negative connotation of homeschoolers. In turn, homeschoolers were constructed as contenders in regards to local policymaking. Daisy said, "We are the enemy as far as a lot are concerned" when she described how public school administrators regarded homeschoolers. Erica also perceived that WCPSS administrators held a negative connotation of homeschoolers and pondered the source of such: "And I don't understand why. I don't understand where this feeling of homeschoolers are the enemy that I get from Wake County is coming from. I don't know that it is coming from the teachers so much." Both the social construction label "contender" and participants' use of the word "enemy" conveyed the idea that public school administrators and homeschool educators were opponents engaged in a battle for which there would be a victor and a loser. Holly offered a response to Erica's implicit question:

For a long time they [WCPSS teachers and administrators] resented homeschoolers. And I have heard a lot of teachers say it or administrators say it, that they felt for a while it was the most involved parents and the well-educated children were the ones being pulled out. They resented us for taking away the parent and the child who kept the test scores up.

Holly suggested that those feelings of resentment fostered a "you made this choice, live in your bed" inclination among WCPSS administrators. Parents who withdrew their children from public schools in order to homeschool them were no longer entitled to receive public school

resources. Administrators construed homeschoolers as undeserving, or certainly as less deserving than students enrolled in WCPSS, of access to public school resources. As such, local policy conferred no benefits on homeschoolers. Be that as it may, WCPSS administrators have chosen the middle position along the continuum of potential policy stances school districts might adopt. At one end of the policy continuum, WCPSS could have elected to enact policy that prohibited homeschool students' access to public school resources. At the other end of the policy continuum, they could have chosen to implement a pro-access policy. The decision to operate without an adopted policy on the issue of homeschoolers' access left open the possibility of access and the probability of homeschool educators' requests for access.

Research Question 2. The second research question concerned the ways in which homeschool educators advocated for their children to receive public school resources. Based on participants' reasons for homeschooling, the decision to homeschool was itself an act of advocacy on behalf of their children. Many participants then took additional steps to seek education resources outside the homeschool environment. As they advocated for access to public school resources, they did so in a policy context wherein the path to the desired resources was not clearly marked.

Advocating for public school students to receive public school resources. A clear pattern emerged across multiple interviews with homeschool educators, revealing that parents' advocacy for access to public school resources on behalf of their children started before parents officially began homeschooling. Of the 13 participants whose children ever attended public schools, seven recounted their efforts to secure educational resources to meet their children's needs while their children were enrolled in public schools. Participants utilized public school choice options and enrolled their children in neighborhood schools and magnet schools. Each

told stories of the challenges their children experienced in the public school environment and the ways in which they sought to champion their children's success in school. Camellia, Rose, and Scarlet each tried switching their children to a different school; however, as Rose said, their children "did not fare any better" in the new schools. Participants did not immediately view homeschooling as the way to resolve the problems their children were experiencing. Heather explained:

I just thought that public school is where he was supposed to be. I was very active with my children. I would volunteer a lot in their classrooms. I actually taught in the schools where they attended and only taught in those schools. And so it ended up that I was very involved, and I think that was one of the reasons that they were as successful as they were, because we would come home and we would work on their assignments. Anything they would not understand, I would re-explain to them and make sure that they understood what they needed to move forward. We did it, because that is what I thought we were supposed to be doing.

Even after her daughter's health "crashed," Heather continued, "I went in to meet with the principal, the school counselor, the school nurse, and her teachers. I requested to meet with them to help to find out how we could come to an arrangement that she could be in school." Heather advocated for both of her children to receive the appropriate resources that would allow them to remain in school. She worked with the school-based team to secure homebound services for her daughter. Homebound instruction provides temporary support to students until they can return to school. Only after it was determined that homebound services would not adequately meet her daughter's needs did Heather and the school-based team reach the consensus that homeschooling represented a better educational option. Heather described coming to that realization: "It wasn't until I got backed into a corner and that was my only choice. Once I did it, my only regret with homeschooling is that I did not start sooner. I wish I had done it much sooner." Rose, too, reached the point where she saw homeschooling as her only choice to help her son. She recalled:

My son was struggling, and we tried many different routes in the public school system to help him, and it was not going well at all. We tried to get him an IEP [Individualized Education Program]. It took all year long to get all that testing done. We worked a lot with the school counselor. We worked a lot with IEPs, and he was in the behavioral programs. For a while, he was in special ed, and I got furious with that because he was very bright. Above average academically and below average behaviorally and emotionally. . . . He continued to go downhill, and the schools started to fight me on it. At this point, he was a “problem” and not something they wanted to deal with, and so I mentioned homeschooling. It wasn’t something that I wanted to do, but I was doing it anyway.

Before she withdrew him from public school, Rose reasoned that she was practically homeschooling her son, because she frequently had to pick him up early from school. She did not want to homeschool; however, she felt she had no choice, because the resources that had been provided to her son did not enable him to succeed in school.

Camellia, Scarlet, and Yarrow described their unsuccessful attempts to find the right resources to meet the needs of their academically advanced children. Camellia spent a significant amount of time volunteering at her daughter’s school and knew that her daughter

had a lot of problem with being challenged there. I think you may hear a lot about little boys when they are bored they get in trouble; she was a little girl who when bored would get in trouble, and that is not a good cycle to be in. So by the time she was in fourth grade there, her teachers, who were so nice and so supportive, we tried to come up with other things. Finally, “She already knows this, and she can just read at her desk.” She was reading underneath her desk while kids were doing other stuff. So that was kind of an isolating experience for her. So, I joined all these different educational groups trying to figure out what I could do, because I did not know anything. My mother was a teacher, and she was like, “Okay, let’s figure out what to do.”

Camellia sought help from education professionals in and outside the school. She saw the inadequacy of the available resources to meet her daughter’s academic needs start to negatively impact her daughter’s behavior and so eventually chose homeschooling. Scarlet said she spent “three years fighting with the school system” on her daughter’s behalf before she concluded that the “public school system or any school system, not just public but private, were not going to be able to instruct her in a way that would be beneficial to her.” Similarly, Yarrow talked “with our

first grade teachers about what else could be offered through the public school framework, because [his daughter] had read everything they gave her already. And the answer was, ‘Realistically not a lot.’” In these instances, parents sought avenues to have their children receive a public education. Despite their advocacy, however, the resources available in their children’s schools did not satisfy the identified needs.

The dominant story portrays homeschoolers as those who have rejected traditional schools due to parents’ religious convictions and desire to shield their children from the negative social environment of traditional schools. With the expressed intentions of doing what was best for their children, many of the homeschool educators in this study advocated for their children’s needs to be met in traditional schools before making the decision to homeschool. Although Heather had started homeschooling as a last resort, she still had to contend with disapproving comments. She recalled:

There was a mom that I ran into outside of school, and she was just, “I cannot believe you pulled your kids out of school.” Someone actually commented to me because my children always did well on their EOGs [end-of-grade tests]. . . . I actually had someone comment to me that I was actually hurting their school, because my children scored well, and by pulling them out of school that was causing harm to the school and I was actually making things more difficult for their school. And I was like, “I am sorry you feel that way, but I need to do what is best for my kids and that is how it is.”

Erica faced similar criticism for her decision to homeschool, saying:

I have only had two people ever say anything negative to me. My neighbor was very disappointed. Our oldest two girls were very good friends, and she was very disappointed when we were homeschooling. She said that you parents that are homeschooling are not sharing yourself with all the other kids in the school system. She really felt that we needed to be a part of the school for all the kids. She was very pro-school district, and she really felt like as homeschoolers we were not contributing to the full school. I don’t think that has ever been the intent.

Lily shared herself with the students in the school system and described herself as a “high volunteer working on the PTA [Parent Teacher Association].” Lily’s intentions to provide the

best educational environment to meet her son's needs put her at odds with those who criticized her decision to withdraw her son from public school. In addition to members of the school community who actively discouraged her from homeschooling, Lily's family also tried to talk her out of her decision to homeschool. She recalled how incredulous she felt when she had to defend her decision to her mother. She described the conversation:

My mother said, "I don't believe you can do this." I said, "I used to teach 127 children a day advanced math and science topics, and I am not sure why you think I can't handle third grade." She said, "I just I don't know. I think they need to be in school." It took my family two years to say that I wasn't ruining my children.

The nonstory of parents' concerted efforts to keep their children in traditional schools cannot be captured merely in the statistics on the percentage of parents who cite educating a child with special needs as their primary reason for homeschooling. By definition, the nonstory has not been widely shared with the general public as evidenced by the reactions parents' decisions to homeschool elicited from members of their communities. Participants' stories showed that a subset of the sample were second-choicers who had a clear preference for educating their children through the public school system.

Advocating for homeschool students to receive public school resources. After they started homeschooling, participants requested access to specific public school resources for a number of reasons. Those participants who had not requested any specific resources from the public school system nevertheless discussed why they had considered requesting access. It is not surprising that the WCPSS Director of Counseling reported that the reason parents provided to WCPSS administrators for seeking public school resources was to "access resources that are not available via homeschooling." During the individual interviews, participants elaborated on their reasons for seeking and/or considering access to specific resources through the public school system. Yarrow enumerated a couple of the common reasons:

Once you get to the high school level you really, really need help, and it is not cheap to pay for courses for students. No parent can be an expert in everything. Realistically no family contains all the disciplines you need to know to successfully get a kid through high school.

For most of the participants, homeschooling a high school-age child brought unique challenges that were mostly centered around preparing for college. Reflecting on the challenges associated with her high school-age children that she had not dealt with when her children were younger, one participant identified:

The whole specter of getting into college. . . . You start thinking in middle school really about college. Maybe I am still a traditionalist. I am in that era where a college education really got you something, and everything I read is that college graduates, even if they are not working in the field that they got a degree in, generally have a better potential to earn a living. And, so, college was always a goal for me and my kids, and they have always been encouraged to do that.

Amaryllis's use of the word "specter" captured the worry that parents expressed in being able to provide rigorous instruction in subjects that were beyond their capability, to compile a high school transcript, and to research colleges' requirements for admission. Petunia, too, indicated that she usually did not mind the learning curve as she entered each new phase of homeschooling with her children, but she dreaded the thought that she might figure out too late that she had not done something that would have helped her children gain admission to college. Iris sighed, "I signed on to be a teacher, not a guidance counselor."

In addition to the desire for subject-matter experts who would teach certain courses or provide college-planning information, parents sought or considered access to public school courses because of the concomitant benefits of group interaction. Parents wanted their children to have the experience of being in a classroom setting with several other same-age peers for academic and social benefits. Yarrow summed it up:

I think with the discovery process, it is helpful to be in a room with others so you can bounce ideas off of each other and get excited together and work together to figure things

out. Most homeschoolers want the kids to be able to function in society, and getting together a group of people to let them do that in an academic setting has always been, and I think will continue to be, a little bit of a challenge.

Some courses like band and orchestra, participants pointed out, require multiple people. Erica recalled how the youth orchestra at her church fizzled out as the children got older and graduated. Erica's children played piano; however, she believed, "there is definitely something to playing with other people that you don't get when you play an individual instrument like piano." The option to participate in public school courses also held the possibility of greater exposure to diverse groups of people. Camellia remarked, "Homeschoolers are great, but it is a unique population. Having more exposure to a bigger group would be nice." Erica had successfully homeschooled her children from the beginning, but she regretted that "my kids have not been able to form some relationships with as many racially diverse kids as I would like."

According to Camellia, the desire to protect their children from the negative effects of "academic skepticism" was another reason some parents sought access to public school courses, especially advanced level courses. Zinnia admitted, "When we were doing APs, a lot of our reasoning for doing APs was to justify the transcript. From my perspective, it is not reasonable to expect a college admissions person to take at face value my grading of my son; and, therefore, you justify it with whatever means you have got." Her son's scores on five AP exams were submitted to colleges to corroborate the appropriateness of the grades she had assigned him. Camellia worried about the heightened scrutiny college admissions officers would heap on her daughter's homeschool academic record. She said:

It is really hard to translate what we do into terms like a traditional public school curriculum. The biggest thing that homeschoolers know is that when you apply to college, if you are a homeschooler, they just throw out your grades. Mommy grades are a joke. The concept of "mommy grades" is a big reason that people choose Middle College High School or other things like that.

“Other things like that” included part-time access to public school resources as a way to legitimize students’ homeschool grades.

Fourteen participants mentioned the high financial cost associated with high school courses taught by outside of the household instructors. Those with multiple children explained that it was sometimes cost prohibitive to enroll all of their children in courses simultaneously.

Amaryllis spoke of her family’s financial limitations:

Being a single-income family, we did not have the money to pay for music. My younger daughter who is also really good at drama and dance and singing, she has never been able to be a part of a choir. Well, actually she did when she was little. There was a community choir that was homeschool. But since then that is something we have not been able to do financially and that is something that I feel would be good, and I would feel okay relinquishing.

To curb the financial strain of art and music lessons, Chrys said, “I was able to trade sewing for part of the tuition fee.” Blossom, who tried to access related services for her special needs children, informed the researcher, “We have paid a lot of money privately for our kids for dyslexia, reading therapy, and speech therapy.” Although the majority of participants talked about the costliness of homeschooling, only nine of the 18 mentioned their perpetual financial investment in public education. Daisy surmised, “I would think the public schools would help me a little bit. I do pay the tax dollars, and I don’t expect any of those tax dollars back. I would gladly give it whether I had children or not, because I think public school is important.” When Rose’s request was denied, she said, “I was very upset with that, because I am still paying taxes. I am actually helping you out, because I am taking one of your problem students out of the classroom. I felt like I should have as much access as I desired, because I was paying the same taxes as everyone else.” Daisy and Rose were both surprised when their requests for access were not granted, because they believed that they, as contributors to the tax base, were entitled to

public school resources. Between laughs, Yarrow good-humoredly said, “I would like tax credits for what I spend on school supplies and teachers. I don’t expect it, but, boy, that would be nice.”

The types of resources parents wanted to access via the public schools were as diverse as their reasons for seeking or considering access in the first place. By far, individual courses taught by public school teachers was the resource that parents most often cited as desirable. Even if they no longer desired access, all participants indicated that they had at one time considered the benefits of being able to access courses. Participants most wanted access to courses in lab science, math, writing, foreign language, music (band and chorus), and art. One participant was interested in vocational courses. Advanced Placement (AP) and other advanced-level courses were also mentioned. Participants who sought lab sciences through the public schools did so, like Heather, because “it is very challenging to find secular-based curriculum—especially for the sciences.” Testing was the second most-often cited resource that parents wanted, and a greater number of participants actively advocated for access to testing than for any other resource. Homeschool educators sought assistance from WCPSS for psychoeducational evaluation of children for special education services and for administration of college preparation tests such as PSAT and AP exams. Special education services (e.g., speech therapy) and college planning information provided by the district’s speech-language pathologists and school counselors, respectively, would offer parents the expertise they could not access within the homeschool. Homeschool educators also wanted their children to be able to join the team clubs at the local public schools so that they could compete in debate, Science Olympiad, and robotics, for example. A couple of participants spoke of the need for space for hosting group classes. Heather reasoned that if “churches can request to use school space,” then homeschoolers could

also request to use school space during non-school hours. One participant sought access to discarded textbooks.

With the thought of which resources they wanted to access, participants approached advocacy in both indirect and direct ways. Parents' indirect advocacy strategies included familiarizing themselves with the law, informing others about the law, conducting online research via school and district websites, consulting with members of homeschool groups (e.g., Spice-line), and participating in this research study. Direct advocacy involved homeschool educators' contact with WCPSS administrators to petition them for access to specific resources. Homeschool educators initiated contact with WCPSS administrators via phone, email, and in-person communication. Direct advocacy efforts were usually preceded by indirect advocacy. Although several participants relayed stories about the advocacy efforts of their homeschooling friends, family members, and colleagues, this study focused only on advocacy enacted by the participants themselves.

Unique among the participants in this study, Rose attempted to acquire discarded materials from the public school district. She told the researcher:

I remember calling the school and finding out that they had a cast-off area where they put outdated text books and desks they no longer needed during renovations. I called that warehouse, and they said if my child is not in the public school that I could not have them. Now if he was enrolled, then they would give him a book, because the public schools don't even use books anymore, but since he was not enrolled, I did not have access to any of that. So it was the warehouse people that told me that originally.

Rose, who had attempted to keep her son enrolled in the public school system, said that when she withdrew him, "I was told quite strongly that once you are out of the system, you can't deal with us at all." Rose explained that she didn't persist in advocating for resources from the public school system, because "just hearing the stories and my own experience and from the warehouse I just figured it was closed. I kind of got into my routine not using anything from a public

school.” Other homeschoolers’ stories of their failed attempts to access public school resources matched her experience and led Rose to conclude that access for homeschoolers was wholly unavailable. As she adjusted to her role as homeschool educator, she developed and implemented an academic plan that did not involve public school resources.

During the time that she homeschooled in Connecticut, Zinnia utilized textbooks provided by the local public school. She reflected on that time:

I developed a relationship with my local school. We had a good relationship with them, and we got some services. We got a lot of free material that we could borrow and then give back, which was books and textbooks. We would go annually. We would discuss my plan and what resources we would like, and [the assistant superintendent for public school district] would provide them. We gave them back what we didn’t like, and what we liked, we used. Basically, we were not financially in a strong situation to buy curriculum. You can spend enormous amounts of money on curriculum even from used places, and financially that wasn’t possible. So, we borrowed from the school district.

A professional educator herself, Zinnia described her advocacy efforts that resulted in borrowed materials from the public school as “worthwhile.” She looked into the possibility of her children participating in the school band shortly after she and her family moved to North Carolina, but she ultimately decided that the school-based band program was not the best fit for her family’s schedule. When it was time to register her oldest son for AP exams, she had already completed the necessary legwork. She described the multiple steps she took to find opportunities for her son to take AP exams during the test administrations in the public schools:

There are many different books on how to homeschool high school, and I am an information gatherer. I read a lot of materials, and several recommended finding your local educational authority and asking them. Homeschool to College is a big network, and if you send out the question there, they will recommend that you find a guidance counselor and go talk to them at the local school. So, I found all the telephone numbers. I had been through it when we were looking into band when we had just moved in here, and I had numbers to a lot of the schools. I already had school numbers, and I knew which were friendly and which were not. It was a lot of work. Actually walking into the office is quite a good thing as opposed to calling. You often get an answering machine or sent to an extension message and they don’t get back.

Prior to contacting the local schools, Zinnia engaged in a number of activities to ready herself for direct advocacy. She read, consulted other homeschool educators through online discussion boards, and created a database of schools' phone numbers and addresses. Once she contacted the schools, she discovered which were "friendly" and likely to assist her with her request. Going through it for the first time with her oldest son, Zinnia said she felt "blindsided by much of the process, much of the time"; however, she has since advised new homeschoolers to "start at their base school and if that works out that is great. If it doesn't work out, if you have got another one that you think might be more effective, give it a try." The key ingredient in her recipe for accessing the requested resources seemed to be persistence. After all, she said that her son took five AP exams at an equal number of different school sites. Other participants who advocated for access to AP test administration through WCPSS described the process as "extremely difficult" and "really weird."

Daisy recollected advocating for her college-bound junior to take the PSAT at his residentially assigned base high school. She started by going to the College Board website to learn how to sign up for the PSAT. Information on the College Board website directed her to contact the local public high school where the test was scheduled to be administered. She chronicled her experience:

I went to my son's friend's mother, and she said [the high school] just handed out a brochure that said homeschoolers need to bring identification and here is the flyer. So I called up [the high school] and said, "I am a homeschooler, and I would like to sign my son up to come to your school." "Oh, I am sorry, we are not going to do that." "But I have a flyer that said you are going to do it this year." "Oh, we just got a memo from Wake County saying that we are not able to do any homeschoolers at all." I said, "What??" I was like, "What do I do?" and she gave me a lady that I spoke to. I called up the College Board, and I said that I need to take the PSAT. They said, "Oh, we have a huge list of schools," and they start naming off all the schools. And I say, "These are all public," and they say, "Yeah." . . . "Well, Wake County has just shut down the homeschoolers, and you cannot just show up and take the PSAT." So, I called up the Wake County person who was on the memo, and I said that I am in a jam, because I

cannot sign up for the test, because I have to sign up for the test through a school. She said, “We are not a test service for homeschoolers.” So, I called back to the College Board, and they said, “We have private schools.” I was like, “Why are the private schools going to help me?”

Even though her son and other homeschool students took the PSAT at a local private school that year, Daisy continued to advocate for homeschoolers’ access to testing in the public schools. She said, “I even sent a letter to the paper saying this is wrong, because the students have no way of taking it. I never got a response.” Regarding the PSAT, Violet said she felt like she was on her own and needed more information. Shaking her head, she said simply, “We didn’t do the PSAT.” Toward the end of the interview, Iris said hopefully, “I have to call [about the] PSAT this summer, so I will find out what kind of response I get.”

Like Zinnia, Blossom moved from the Northeast to North Carolina and immediately sought access to speech therapy for her son with a certain assuredness of the response she would get. She was confident that the services her son had been receiving through a public school district in New York would be maintained in North Carolina. Before she came to Wake County, the public school educators with whom she’d been working instructed her to “just take the IEP to the public schools, and they will carry on the services because they have to.” Blossom learned, “Well, that wasn’t true.” Here she described how she campaigned for access:

[The] million dollar question of who to call. That is not an easy question. I think I may have just looked up the Wake County Schools’ phone number and probably went through a series of people to find out that I had to go to the school, the home base school that my son was assigned to, and then I called [the school] and set up an appointment to have an evaluation done by their speech therapist.

Blossom described herself as “angry” with the outcome that stemmed from the speech therapist’s evaluation and explained why she ended her campaign for access to speech therapy services through WCPSS. She said:

The woman did an evaluation, and it was a joke. No one could understand my son talking except for me, and I only understood him 50% of the time. Yet she claimed that he didn't meet the need for services, which was, like I said, a joke. I was given an opportunity to appeal, but you are talking about a mom that was overwhelmed with four kids at the time that I was homeschooling and that intimidated me. My gut was telling me that there was no way I am going to convince the big Wake County School System to take my son in for services.

Although she may have considered submitting the speech evaluation and IEP that had been completed for her son while she lived in New York as part of the documentation for the appeals process, she was not confident that she would achieve the outcome she wanted. She implied that she felt small as an individual in comparison to the school district, the “big Wake County School System.”

Participants' stories of advocating for public school resources highlighted the power differential inherent in many of their interactions with public school administrators. Homeschoolers as a group with the backing of NCHE were construed as advantaged, ably achieving favorable outcomes in policy adoption and policy implementation at the state level. In the stories participants told related to their advocacy at the local level, they acted as individuals. Their individual voices carried less weight than the collective voice of NCHE. Furthermore, in the shift from the statewide policy context to the local policy context, the key actors changed—from NCHE and state government elected officials to individual homeschool educators and WCPSS administrators. Whereas Mason (2013) described elected officials as homeschool friendly and referred to DNPE with “everybody there is homeschool friendly” (Mason, 2015, para. 1), Camellia said of WCPSS, “I do get the feeling that Wake County is very homeschooler unfriendly.” Zinnia indicated that through her contact with administrators in several schools she knew which administrators were homeschool friendly and which were not. This different social context with different power dynamics and different connotations produced different outcomes.

As their stories demonstrated, homeschool educators did not often achieve their desired outcomes through their advocacy efforts at the local level.

Choosing not to advocate for access to public school resources. Nine participants—namely Amaryllis, Chrys, Dahlia, Erica, Iris, Jasmine, Petunia, Violet, and Yarrow—had not advocated for their homeschooled children to be the recipients of public school resources. As evidenced by the number of interview questions related to the process of requesting access to specific public school resources, the researcher, at the outset of the study, expected participants to be engaged in and/or to have experience with robust advocacy activity. The researcher’s initial puzzlement that half of the participants had not sought access to public school resources for their homeschooled children was quickly answered by participants’ explanations for their inaction. Participants’ reasons for not asking for access included the belief that it was illegal, the presumption that the response from the school would deny access, the calculation that the individual effort required outweighed the potential benefits, and the lack of interest in public school resources.

Four participants believed that law or policy prohibited homeschool students from participating in public school classes and activities. Iris offered, “My understanding is that in the state of North Carolina you could not access the extracurricular resources. You were not in a state that allowed that.” The researcher explained that North Carolina is a district discretion state, which prompted Iris to respond, “I wonder if anyone else in Wake has really tried, because I have just been hesitant to do it because I didn’t think you could.” Dahlia, too, said, “As far as I know, we are not allowed. I would go over and ask if I could.” Dahlia expressed her willingness to seek access to public school resources as long as she would not violate the law in doing so. In mild disbelief, Erica said:

We never did, because we knew it wasn't allowed. I am surprised that it wasn't a law that Wake County couldn't, because that is what we have always been told. I haven't known anybody that has done it. I guess if someone had said, "We are managing to get into this," word would spread, and I haven't heard of anybody who has done it.

For Erica, not only did she believe that it was against the law for homeschoolers to participate in public school classes and extracurricular activities, but she surmised that "word would spread" if anyone had, in fact, been able to gain access.

Although she had advocated for services from the public school system, Blossom hypothesized about those who chose not to advocate, "I think the homeschoolers in this area for the most part do not try to approach the public schools, because the word is out—they don't want anything to do with us." To the extent that the "word" being shared in homeschool groups involved homeschoolers' stories of repeated denials to their requests for access, other homeschool educators may have abstained from making any requests of their own, because they assumed the answer would be "no." While several participants figured the answer to their requests for access to public school resources would be unequivocally "no," Amaryllis did not share that same understanding. Although she knew that certain public school resources might be available to homeschool students, that knowledge did not alter her assessment that the potential benefits of access did not merit the effort. Amaryllis said:

I know that homeschoolers can do things like take AP tests, but you have to call and find the school that's willing to take you and sometimes they are not . . . blah, blah, blah, blah. I know also that some people have pursued special services for kids like speech. My husband and I kind of talked about doing that with our son, but the path is not clear on how to do that, and I wasn't convinced that I would get benefit from it. I realize there are great schools and there are schools that are not so good, and there are parts of every school that is good and parts of every school that is bad, but I just didn't see how they could enrich my life. Why go through the hassle if you are going to end up with just a bunch of headaches? It just wasn't worth it. I knew enough people that had pulled their kids out that were supposed to have been getting services who weren't getting services. And I thought, where am I gonna rank? So, how much good is it going to do me to get on this endless list?

The “hassle” of finding out the process for requesting access, submitting the request, and then possibly being placed at the bottom of a long waitlist to receive services deterred Amaryllis from advocating for such. She did not subscribe to the idea of an absolute “no” to her hypothetical request; however, the description of what she imagined would be the outcome of her request amounted to the same result—an inability to access resources via the public school.

As reported by Violet and Jasmine, homeschool educators’ and students’ disinterest in public school resources also contributed to the lack of advocacy. Their disinterest stemmed primarily from the fact that these homeschool educators satisfactorily utilized avenues other than the public school system and found resources within and outside the homeschool to meet their children’s needs. Before the scheduled interview, Violet alerted the researcher, “The public schools have nothing I’d want.” Jasmine granted:

I don’t think my girls are interested in the band or anything like that, but some other kids might be. My girls take piano lessons and dance already. And they have the theater group, and my one daughter is taking art. So we are covering a lot of the extracurricular stuff that they would be getting anyway.

As she was transitioning her children out of public schools, Lily advocated briefly for future access to evaluation and speech therapy services. She indicated that “at that point I didn’t even want them to go and be tested, but I just wanted to make sure.” After homeschooling her children for several years without accessing any public school resources, Lily concluded:

I don’t see anything that you are doing that I can’t do at home at the same or better level. Even the AP classes. . . . There are some AP classes in some schools that are phenomenal, and if that were available, I might want my child to do it. But me personally, I could never justify. . . . I didn’t see that we were not doing it better.

Lily developed a somewhat conflicted disinterest in accessing public school resources. She hinted at her possible interest in a phenomenal AP class but then quickly retracted her statement.

The choice not to make an appeal to WCPSS administrators for access to public school resources cloaked participants' assessment of their power relative to the power of the school or school district. Some participants believed public school administrators had a legal mandate to deny parents' requests for access, and others believed public school administrators would use their authority to deny requests. In either case, as measured against the authority held by the public school administrators, several homeschool educators regarded their own power as too limited to be effective in successfully advocating for public school resources. Speaking of the authority she held as the administrator and teacher for her homeschooled children, Violet reckoned, "I don't think a lot of people realize what authority they have." She discussed her refusal to seek access to public school resources as a way to maintain her authority to direct her children's education. She said, "The mentality of the school is that the child belongs to us." She was unwilling to use public school resources because she thought that to do so would be to cede power over to the public schools.

Research Question 3. Sixteen public school districts in North Carolina have adopted policies that definitively address the specific issue of homeschoolers' enrollment in public school courses and/or participation in public school extracurricular activities. In light of the fact that no such policy had been adopted in WCPSS, one goal of this research was to answer the question: On what basis do Wake County Public School System administrators grant and/or deny requests for homeschooled students to receive access to public school resources? To answer this question, the researcher focused on the factors WCPSS administrators considered in their decision-making process. Limited data were available. Findings based on a WCPSS administrator's written responses to the interview protocol questions, the relevant results from

one of the researcher's public records requests, and the experiences of homeschool educators will be reported in this section.

According to the WCPSS Director of Counseling, parents are informed about the availability of public school resources “through the NC Department [*sic*] of Non-Public Education (NCDNPE) website: www.ncdnpe.org.” To be sure, the information on the DNPE website directed homeschooling parents to contact the local school district to inquire about its policies on this issue. The Director of Counseling also referred to the *Home School Guidebook* as a source of information for parents seeking access and indicated that the appropriate steps parents would need to take to initiate a request for access to public school resources for their homeschooled children are “dependent upon the requested service.” Information regarding three services for which participants in this study advocated and/or utilized was included in the guidebook. As discussed previously in this chapter, online courses through NCVPS are fee-based for homeschool students. The guidebook provided a link to the NCVPS course registration website. Rose sought access to textbooks from the public schools, a resource for which the guidebook served notice that “Government (state, federal or local) does not provide funding for North Carolina home schools. The chief administrators of the home school must pay for and purchase all textbook and/or curriculum directly from private companies” (North Carolina Department of Administration, p. 16). Information in the guidebook spelled out the procedure for parents to request a Driver Eligibility Certificate and stipulated that “Driver Education is available only through two sources: 1. The local public high school that student would be enrolled [*sic*]. 2. A local professional North Carolina Division of Motor Vehicles approved driver training program” (North Carolina Department of Administration, p. 20). Aside from these three services, *Home School Guidebook* did not provide additional specification for

how homeschooling parents would request other resources (e.g., testing services, speech therapy) from the public schools. When homeschool educators requested access to specific resources, WCPSS administrators informed parents of the decision via face-to-face communication, email, or telephone.

Participants' experiences and results from the public records request elucidated some of the factors that may have impacted administrators' decisions on whether to grant or to withhold access to College Board test administration for the PSAT and AP exams. Indicative of the variability associated with access in the absence of a policy, Camellia's request for test administration services was approved one year and denied the next year. Camellia recalled:

She [my daughter] wanted to take AP tests, and the first year I found the name of somebody who was the coordinator who would let us sign up. He ran a website, and mostly it was for students that the test was not being offered at their school. They were allowed to take it at a different school, and we were allowed to use that. So, we did that for one year and that was really easy and that worked. Then the next year, she wanted to take another one and what we heard from this fellow was that Wake County Public School Board had decided that they were not going to allow homeschoolers to take any tests of any kind.

At the time her request was denied, Camellia described the situation as "tough," because she didn't know what to do. Years after her request for AP testing was denied, she maintained, "I don't know why. I don't have any idea why." During the interview, the researcher speculated that the number of students whose parents were seeking access that year outpaced the schools' capacity to accommodate them. To that, Camellia responded, "I doubt they [the schools] were inundated, because the vast majority of homeschoolers send their kids back to school for high school because of stuff like this. So by the time that your kid is ready to take the AP test, there are a lot fewer, a lot fewer." Camellia acknowledged that the primary audience for the test sign-up website seemed to be WCPSS-enrolled students who needed to take an AP exam at a school other than their assigned school. She proffered, "his sign-up was not for homeschoolers, it was

just for people.” With that statement, she suggested that “people” was inclusive of everyone, regardless of the school where they were enrolled or their classification as homeschool or public school students, who needed to locate an AP test administration site. Whether a school site planned to offer a specific AP exam likely accounted for the mixed responses Scarlet received. She shared, “I contacted high school principals, and some of them were highly uncooperative and some of them were okay as far as cooperative. And a lot of the schools, I guess at least the ones that I looked at don’t offer the same tests. I don’t think they all have the PSAT either. It depended on the school.” It stood to reason that administrators in schools that were not offering a specific AP exam to enrolled public school students were not going to approve a request for a homeschool student to take that AP exam. In that sense, whether a specific AP exam was already being administered at a school site impacted administrators’ decisions in some instances.

A number of email messages with the subject “PSAT & AP testing for Home-schoolers” highlighted the reasoning WCPSS administrators cited for disallowing homeschool students’ participation in PSAT and AP testing at the district’s schools. One educator’s response to the decision suggested that the issue of homeschoolers’ access to testing had come up frequently. She wrote, “Woo hooo....finally got an official word....see below!” The forwarded email “below” that she referenced contained a memo from the Testing and Evaluation Services Office as well as the communication between administrators that resulted in the eventual decision. Embedded in the string of email messages was this inquiry from a parent, “Are you still the contact person for homeschoolers who wish to take the PSAT? If so, I now have two students who would like to take the test on Wednesday, October 12. What is the current charge and when is the deadline to pay?” The parent’s use of the words “still” and “current” implied that she, like Camellia, had been able to access PSAT administration services in the past and was unaware of

the change in practice that restricted homeschoolers' use of such public school services. This email from a building-level administrator sent to a central office administrator made it clear that this parent was not the only homeschooling parent making such requests:

We are getting an increasing number of requests from parents of home-schooled students requesting permission to take the PSAT at our school in October. Due to an incident we had with a home-schooled student taking an AP test this past spring, we would like to only test our own students and not include home-schooled students. This practice is in keeping with how we work with NCVPS students in that we only support our current students as far as enrollment into these courses. Is there a district policy/practice that would prohibit us from denying home-schoolers the opportunity to take the PSAT at our school?

Based on the content of this message, several factors may have come into play. This administrator did not signal that the school had reached the upper limit of its capacity to support homeschool students with PSAT test administration, but she expressed concern about the increasing number of requests which equated to an increasing number of students the school would need to accommodate. The administrator also mentioned an apparently negative "incident" involving a homeschool student. The avoidance of any such future incidents was part of the rationale for halting homeschoolers' participation. The administrator also referenced district practice and policy and showed her clear interest in adherence to district policy and in consistency with district practice. The logic behind the policy that governed homeschool students' access to NCVPS courses via the school district, she adduced, could apply to homeschoolers' access to testing resources, as well.

It may have been the case that district practice substituted as the rule of law in matters such as this where no district policy set forth official guidelines. Even so, one central office administrator replied, "I don't even know where to begin in answering this question." The answer to the building-level administrator's question came later the same day:

We do not test students who are not enrolled in the school district. Our responsibility/obligation is to only test students enrolled in our LEA. This includes charters, home schooled, private schools, etc. that do not provide the tests. Further, we do not provide this as a service for others. Instead, they are able to contact NC State at <https://center.ncsu.edu/nc/course/view.php?id=351> and pay for the administration of whatever tests they need including EOC, EOG, etc. If AP is not offered, then the parents will need to contact College Board directly to find out how to make arrangements for testing. As for the PSAT, our contract with the College Board only covers our own enrolled students. Our fees are based on our enrollment. We do not test any other students. Again, we are not a “testing service.”

The multi-faceted rationale the Testing and Evaluation Services Office provided for not testing students outside of those enrolled in the district included professional obligation and contractual obligation. Professional obligation to “our own enrolled students” trumped all other reasons for not testing outside students. Also of concern were the financial terms of the district’s contract with the College Board for administering the PSAT to WCPSS students.

One of the participants retold part of her advocacy story wherein the decision to deny access bore the imprint of the district’s professional obligation to enrolled students and financial considerations. In strikingly similar fashion to Blossom’s experience, Lily unsuccessfully attempted to access speech therapy services for her son. The school administrator with whom she spoke granted a provisional approval in saying that her first-grade son could utilize speech therapy services if the evaluation by the school’s speech-language pathologist indicated a need for services. Lily said she didn’t understand the evaluation results because

a private person who I couldn’t afford definitely thought he needed it. He said “dis,” “dat,” and “da oder.” The girl at the public school said he does not qualify. I said, “What is the benchmark here, because he definitely is in first grade and can’t say ‘th’s’ or ‘w’s.’” She said, “We don’t try to change cultural pronunciations.” “Do you hear me say ‘dis,’ ‘dat,’ and ‘da oder’? This is not cultural. The boy can’t speak.”

Although Lily and a private speech-language pathologist were convinced that Lily’s son needed speech therapy, he did not qualify for services through WCPSS. Lily shared a brief encounter

she had with a teacher at the school before she ceased her efforts to acquire services through the public school:

Finally, one of the teachers said that they really don't have enough money to take everybody, so they make these decisions. There was a little boy who I had worked with as a volunteer. He was unintelligible, and he did not get but one hour a week, but he needed one hour a day if he needed shoes on his feet. She said they just don't have enough time and money, so this is what they are telling you.

The teacher pointed to the limited personnel and financial resources that made it difficult for enrolled students to receive services as the primary reason that Lily's request for services was effectively denied. Blossom even rationalized that the school administrator's denial of her request mostly resulted from "the overpopulation in the public schools. The last thing that they want to do is pull in another child from the outside."

Other participants, too, viewed WCPSS's finite resources as the primary driver of homeschooled students' limited access to public school resources. About the "already overtasked" school system, Blossom continued, "every school looks differently on their homeschoolers in their area. We are not always well received, and certainly the doors are not wide open calling us." Daisy and Zinnia each allowed, "I know they are stretched for resources" and "they have a lot to cope with," respectively. Lily recalled, "A few years ago, they [WCPSS] were so overwhelmed with private and homeschool requests that they actually hired a psychologist that only worked with those populations." Lily alluded to a time when high demand for evaluation services that could help determine children's need for special education resources outpaced the school district's capacity to provide the requested services. Although WCPSS may have expended the financial resources to hire an additional psychologist to serve students not enrolled in the district's schools, Holly demurred:

They don't have the money, the funding, the teachers, the bodies to bring in one additional student that they are technically not [teaching]. . . . We are paying money to

the system somewhere. I don't know where it is going, but it is not going to the local high school. And for the local high school to bring us in and not get any more money or head count for it is not fair. And I respect that.

Like Holly, Iris thought, "What am I adding to their burden, because they have their own students?" Participants' comments showed how they legitimated administrators' decisions to limit access to public school resources to those students enrolled in the public schools.

Rather than seeing homeschoolers' requests for access and participation in public school activities as burdensome, Daisy and Heather imagined that granting homeschoolers access to public school resources had the potential to be mutually beneficial. Daisy proposed, "I really think public school and homeschoolers could actually benefit from one another. I think it would be more of a community and that would be really good for both groups to work together."

Heather provided an example of how the mutual benefits might result:

I know when I was involved in the school system, if there was not enough interest then they couldn't offer it to anybody. If you have to pick and choose what you have to offer because of lack of interest and you open it up, you might be able to offer more. So you not only benefit the homeschoolers because you are able to offer things, you benefit the base population as well. Sometimes there is demand for things that they would not have enough to be able to do anyhow. If you have 20 kids that you need to participate on a team, and you say hey, we have 15 . . . we have room for five homeschool students to come in. You get the other five, and you are able to have the team. And you benefit both sides.

In this alternative conception of the use of finite resources, participants suggested a basis upon which WCPSS administrators might decide to grant homeschoolers' requests for access.

Research Question 4. Homeschool educators incorporated a number of outside instructional, co-curricular, and extracurricular resources to educate their children at home. The fourth research question concerned the extent to which those outside resources were ones offered through the public school system. For herself and for the 20 homeschooling families with whom she had a relationship, Zinnia acknowledged that "there are some things that are much easier

about going to public high school. All of the classes are there, and they are provided by somebody else. You don't have to think about it, you simply go." As she talked about the teenagers who had been homeschooled through the elementary and middle grades much like her own sons, Zinnia estimated that "75% of them went to high school." As the previous sections demonstrated, parents of children who did not return to traditional schools on a full-time basis sometimes sought access to public school resources. About WCPSS administrators, Holly suggested that "they are realizing that the homeschoolers are just a part of the community. They have the right to do these things, and when they call, we have to let them do these things. But, we don't have to let them do any more than those things. They are not willing to put us on anything else." The findings in this section reveal which resources participants were able to access via the public schools.

North Carolina statute guarantees homeschool students access to driver education through the local public high school. All participants readily expressed their awareness of the availability of driver education through WCPSS. Eight participants enrolled their children in the driver education program via WCPSS. Although the current structure for driver education requires all students to submit the \$65 registration fee, Jasmine remembered, "My daughter was homeschooled when she took driver's ed, and there was no charge to me at all. She actually took her classes at the high school down the street, and the driver's ed training on the road. . . . Actually I think she did that with another homeschool girl, but she took the classes with the group of public school kids."

Access to other resources via the public schools, such as testing, was not nearly as clear-cut. With a little less certainty than they expressed about their knowledge of the availability of driver education, participants chimed in with a response akin to Camellia's: "I believe that it is

possible that we have the right to have, like, the psychological testing.” Despite an awareness of the availability of psychoeducational evaluation services through WCPSS, a couple of participants were hesitant to utilize this public school resource partly from fear of being told that they could no longer homeschool their special-needs children. Amaryllis took a different stance:

I think I probably could have had [my son] tested through the schools and get him identified, but there was a part of me that didn’t really want to do that. I mean in some ways as a homeschool parent when you get your kid tested, you are like, “Why am I paying someone to tell me what is wrong when I know what is wrong?” I need someone, I will pay someone to help me figure out what the solution is, but it is very hard to find those people.

She contended that she did not want to label her son. The label would have highlighted what was “wrong” at a time when she was interested in finding out the right strategies for helping her son succeed academically. Twelve participants indicated that one or more of their children had special needs; however, only two participants talked about their homeschooled children utilizing evaluation services offered through WCPSS. Blossom and Lily were both granted access to evaluation services for their children; however, when the WCPSS speech-language pathologist presented the evaluation results, neither of their children qualified for speech therapy services. In consideration of the circumscribed manner in which participants’ homeschooled children utilized WCPSS evaluation services, it followed that none of them received special education services via the public schools.

Homeschool students’ utilization of PSAT and AP test administration in WCPSS was also limited. In several instances when homeschool educators planned for their children to take the PSAT and/or select AP exams with students enrolled in WCPSS, decisions by WCPSS administrators curtailed their opportunity to do so. In September 2011, WCPSS administrators announced, “There have been some significant changes to the way the PSAT is being handled for the 2011-12 school year.” Included in the email bearing the announcement about the significant

changes was the memo addressing the issue of the provision of PSAT and AP test administration to homeschool students. That year, Daisy and other homeschool educators were turned away by the WCPSS administrator's clarification, "We are not a testing service." During at least some of the years prior to 2011-2012, homeschool students had been permitted to take the PSAT and AP exams in the public schools. When that option was no longer available, parents turned to private schools in Wake County. Holly shared her experience:

I have found the private schools to be very receptive to working with the homeschoolers, more so than the public. So, when I do testing, we usually go to [name of private school], because [name of public high school] has in the past given us a hard time. Something changed last year, and they finally started accepting homeschoolers for AP testing. We did AP testing there.

When WCPSS administrators reinstated the option for homeschool students to participate in AP testing with the local public schools, Holly took advantage of it. She knew that "something changed" that allowed her child to take AP exams at the public school; however, the reasons for the change were unknown. Perhaps unaware of the change within WCPSS, several homeschool educators continued to use test administration services offered by private schools. Daisy expressed appreciation for the generosity of the private school administrators, saying, "They could not be more helpful. We have paid no money to [name of private school]." Camellia sought help with testing from a charter school in a nearby county and stated, "My daughter had to take the AP Chemistry test in the janitor's closet at [name of charter school]. She was the only one, but they ordered the test for her. And they found a place for her to take it, which happened to be the janitor's closet, but they were willing to work with her because they knew she needed that." Charter schools are public schools, but they function as their own LEA and operate under a different set of rules than traditional public schools. Even without any of its own students to test, the charter school administrators made provisions for Camellia's daughter to complete the

AP exam, which was needed as an additional measure of academic preparation for her college admissions application. Parents also reported that administrators in neighboring Chatham County Schools and Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools permitted their children to take College Board tests.

On the whole, participants' children have scarcely utilized public school resources. Questions on the WCPSS administrator interview protocol dealt with homeschool students' utilization of public school resources. In response to those questions, the Director of Counseling supplied, "This is difficult to measure, as state legislation does not currently allow access to public school resources." Camellia also offered her opinion on homeschool students' under-utilization of public school resources:

We have been sort of trained over the years that there are not resources, so don't look for them. Don't expect them. So we may have altered our expectations. Now we are self-sufficient within our homeschool community, but we may have had to learn to do that. If I had started and it was more accessible, it might have been different, and it might make me feel better about the public high schools. If my kids did want to go, I might have felt a little more positive about it.

While state legislation does not prohibit homeschool students' access to public school resources, homeschool educators in Wake County still may have learned not to expect resources from the public schools. District discretion in the state allows each school district, via its policies and/or practices, to determine the level of access homeschool educators can expect. The inaccessibility of resources through WCPSS led Camellia and other homeschoolers to pursue alternative providers for the services they needed to educate their children. The self-sufficiency she described was evident in participants' revelations of the plethora of resources they have utilized.

The fourth research question for this study intended "public school resources" to refer specifically to WCPSS resources; however, participants' use of resources tangential to public school resources provided a broader view of access to public school resources outside WCPSS.

Just as Camellia's daughter utilized a public charter school for test administration, Heather's children also took advantage of charter school resources. Heather said, "There are a couple of charter schools in [Wake County], and one school has after-school. They don't do electives as part of their school day so they have these things that they call after school clubs, and they actually open those up to homeschoolers." As yet another example of the utilization of public school resources, Lily enrolled her son in a pilot program at the North Carolina School of Science and Math, a public residential high school located in Durham. Through the pilot program, her son took an online chemistry class which required campus visits to complete labs. Yarrow and Dahlia utilized the state-adopted academic standards to plan their homeschool curriculum. They both described the benefits they derived by reviewing the public schools' standards. Yarrow said, "I printed out most of the grade appropriate areas for Common Core in North Carolina just to see how we normed with it and to see what I was missing. We use that to ensure we don't leave any gaps." Dahlia added, "I download the core curriculum standards from the Department of Public Instruction website. They are very, very detailed, so I look through these. And I was looking through one of the standards this afternoon and I was thinking, 'Oh yeah, I better make sure I get that filled in.'" These standards, publicly available on the NCDPI website, represented an important resource for these homeschool educators.

None of the participants reported that their children enrolled in courses part-time in WCPSS; however, 11 of 18 participants (61% of the sample) indicated that their children had taken courses through the Career and College Promise (CCP) program. CCP resulted from the legislatively authorized collaboration between the State Board of Education and the North Carolina Community College System. CCP provides eligible high school students the opportunity to enroll in tuition-free community college courses and count the credits earned

toward both high school and college graduation requirements. Petunia, whose children were not yet 16 years old and thus ineligible for CCP, looked ahead:

As my kids [start] getting higher up in high school, maybe their senior year or junior year . . . I am going to get them in the higher level science and math courses, because I think what we are going to do is dual enrollment at the community colleges. So, we are going to be able to meet that need. There are those three really good community colleges, and I think that is how we will fill the gap.

Petunia mentioned “three really good community colleges” as potential avenues for enrolling her children in advanced science and math courses. She and other participants discussed the permissiveness of the CCP program, allowing for students to enroll in any community college in North Carolina. Participants faced challenges with getting their children enrolled in courses at Wake Technical Community College (Wake Tech) because the desired courses were often oversubscribed. So popular was this option among homeschoolers that Amaryllis called CCP registration at Wake Tech a “cattle stampede.” Scarlet described the challenges and the successes of her daughter’s utilization of CCP courses:

We did utilize being able to take college classes. That was another nightmare to navigate, but you can take college courses during high school and get dual credit. So it was a public avenue I guess, but it was not a public high school-type avenue. I had the little epiphany that Wake Tech is the absolute worst to try to dual enroll your child. It was like Black Friday, and it was a line 20 miles long it felt to get in and get no classes. They fill the classes with obviously paying students and degreed students first, and you get the dregs and by the time you got through that line and they really didn’t offer what you needed, we ended up getting almost nothing through them. And I got the epiphany while suffering through this that I was going to look elsewhere, because there is no constraint on what community college you go to because you don’t have to go to the one in your community. It seems simple now that I say it out loud, but at the time it doesn’t occur to you. I went to Nash Community College which is a half hour ride, and it was wonderful. They had everything that my daughter needed. They helped with registration, and she got 19 credits before she started [college].

Scarlet’s daughter took one class at Wake Tech before turning to Nash Community College for the bulk of her CCP classes. Durham Technical Community College, also utilized by participants’ children, rounded out the “three really good colleges” to which Petunia referred.

Because they could hardly use WCPSS resources, participants searched for equivalent or proximal resources using other channels in the community. As a consensus, the participants repeated Heather's words that "it can be overwhelming the amount of opportunities that you have, which is great," and each impressed upon the researcher that Wake County is unique among North Carolina counties in its diverse array of public community resources. Participants indicated that publicly supported educational resources are amply available. Holly advised, "I do think that the parent of a child that is educated at home has to be resourceful. You have to be willing to step out of your comfort zone to find the resources in your community to help nurture your child's passions or curiosities." The litany of public community resources participants had utilized included classes and programs offered by local museums, universities, and parks and recreation services. Camellia suggested:

There are resources because of the population that takes the pressure off of the public schools about maybe who has to deliver that, but maybe in a less populous county. . . . I pretty quickly learned one of the hardest things about being a homeschool parent was learning how to say no to activities, because there are so many great ones that you just have to learn how to draw the line. There is just so much, so much to do and so we learned to kind of scale it back a little bit.

Rather than struggling to find adequate educational resources, Camellia spoke of having to be selective in the activities in which she involved her children. She also hinted at the differential amount of pressure that might be placed on public schools to provide educational resources based on the size of the county's population. In a populous county like Wake that is teeming with community resources, the public schools may feel less pressure to provide access to resources that would assist homeschool educators and students. Lily expressed a similar opinion: "I would be way more of an advocate in interacting with the public school in counties with lower homeschool populations and fewer environmental and cultural resources."

Summary

This chapter presented a detailed description of the respondents and participants as well as findings for each of the four research questions. The change to North Carolina's homeschool law clearly spelled out the authority homeschool educators have to determine additional sources of academic instruction, but it did nothing to diminish the "gray area" concerning homeschool students' access to public school resources. Despite the 2011 email edict that temporarily suspended access to College Board test administration services, to date WCPSS has not adopted a policy that clearly establishes the parameters for homeschoolers' utilization of public school resources. Of the 18 participants in this research study, an equal number of participants advocated as chose not to advocate for access to public school resources. Even as they advocated for access, homeschool educators acknowledged the constraints under which WCPSS administrators worked to provide resources for children enrolled in the school district. Other than the resources required by law (i.e., driver education and psychoeducation evaluation), WCPSS administrators curtailed access for homeschooled students, and thus homeschoolers did not widely utilize public school resources. In several instances, homeschool educators turned to alternative providers of educational resources including public charter schools and community colleges. The application of social construction as the interpretive frame stressed that policymakers' positive or negative view of homeschoolers impacted the policy benefits or burdens homeschoolers experienced.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

After explaining the findings in Chapter 4, this chapter contains the conclusions and implications from the research study. The first section of this chapter provides a brief overview of the research study, including the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the methodology. In the succeeding sections of this concluding chapter, the researcher discusses the significance of the findings from this research and the relevant implications for policy and practice. The researcher's recommendations for future research and final thoughts round out the dissertation.

Overview of the Research Study

The purpose of this research study was to understand how North Carolina's laws as well as state and local policies enable Wake County homeschoolers to utilize select public school resources. The law defining a homeschool in North Carolina was amended in May 2013 to permit parents to determine additional sources of academic instruction for their homeschooled children. Homeschool students' access to public school resources is largely determined by administrators in each local education agency (LEA). In particular, this research study sought to illuminate how North Carolina's "district discretion" policy was operationalized in a large, mostly urban school district with no board-adopted policy that uniformly granted or prohibited homeschoolers' access. In examining the legal and policy contexts that govern access to public school resources for Wake County homeschooled students, the researcher traced the links between legal and policy allowances and homeschool educators' advocacy efforts. In turn, the

connections between WCPSS administrators' responses to homeschool educators' requests and homeschooled students' utilization of public school resources were also examined.

The first three chapters of this dissertation established why and how the research study was conducted. Chapter 1 outlined the research problem and the reasons for undertaking this research. The void of clear-cut policies on the issue of homeschool students' access to public school resources was identified as the focus of this research study. The first chapter also posited that homeschool students receive inequitable access to public school resources between districts and even within districts, and that the 2013 change to the homeschool law would lead to the adoption of additional policies addressing the issue. The literature review in Chapter 2 described the demographic changes in the homeschool community and elaborated on salient themes related to homeschooling. In addition, through a review of other states' homeschooling statutes, the literature review showed the similarities and differences between the national legal and policy context for homeschooling and North Carolina's laws and policies governing such. Chapter 2 also introduced and explained the key tenets of social construction, the interpretive framework for this research study. Chapter 3 contained the qualitative methodology for conducting this case study research. The chapter detailed the procedures for both data collection and data analysis, which were used to address the following research questions:

1. How do North Carolina's current laws and policies support access to public school resources for homeschooled students?
2. How do Wake County homeschool educators (i.e., parents and legal guardians) advocate for their homeschooled students to be the recipients of public school resources?

3. On what basis do Wake County Public School System administrators grant and/or deny requests for homeschooled students to receive access to public school resources?
4. To what extent do Wake County homeschooled students utilize public school resources?

Chapter 4 presented the findings and the attendant analysis for the research study. The results obtained from the policy analysis illustrated the veracity of the proposition that homeschoolers experience disparate access to public school resources in North Carolina. Detailed demographics revealed the characteristics of the questionnaire respondents and the interview participants. Data from documents and interviews informed the responses to each of the four research questions. Social construction was the interpretive lens through which the data were analyzed.

Discussion of the Research Findings

This section contains a discussion of the research findings and is organized around the main section headings from Chapter 4 wherein the data were presented. Findings for each research question will also be discussed in the context of the literature.

Homeschoolers' variable access to public school resources per district policy.

Homeschoolers' access to public school resources may be more variable than the researcher can reasonably know, because the great majority (86%) of school districts in North Carolina have not adopted a board policy to govern this area of education. Up to now, the boards of education in 16 school districts have adopted such policies. Eleven LEAs adopted policies related to homeschoolers' participation in public school classes and extracurricular activities from 1989 until 2010. The remaining five LEAs that have implemented policies regarding homeschool

students' access did so in May 2013 or later, with two districts (i.e., Buncombe and Johnston) restricting homeschoolers' access and three districts (i.e., Alamance-Burlington, Currituck, and Rutherford) opting to provide resources to homeschoolers on a part-time basis. The change in the legal definition of a homeschool in North Carolina may have influenced administrators in these five school districts to adopt policies expressing the districts' stances on the issue.

In the previous chapter, the researcher discussed the connection between Republican-controlled state government and the adoption of the pro-homeschool legal amendment. In looking at the party affiliations for members of the House and Senate representing the five counties which recently (May 2013 or later) adopted policies related to homeschool students' access to public school resources, similar politically based connections may help explain the variance in districts' policies. Elected state officials for Buncombe and Johnston counties comprise members from both Republican and Democratic political parties. In Buncombe County, four Democrats and one Republican represent the county at the state level. In Johnston County, five Republicans and one Democrat represent the county in the General Assembly. As was just mentioned, school districts in these "mixed party" counties enacted policies to bar homeschoolers' access to public school resources. On the other hand, the political picture in Alamance, Currituck, and Rutherford counties, where school districts' newly adopted policies expanded homeschoolers' access, shows that all seats are held by Republicans.

Many districts, including WCPSS, indicated on their websites that local boards of education were currently revising their policy manuals to "incorporate the Policies to Lead the Schools (PLS) system published by the North Carolina School Boards Association" (Wake County Public School System, 2016). The PLS system is a subscription service that annually provides new policies and revisions to existing policies that "reflect changes in legal

requirements or educational trends” (North Carolina School Boards Association, 2016). Some districts expected that the revision process would take several months while WCPSS anticipated that the process would take several years to complete. The evidence gathered for this research study did not substantiate this study’s third proposition (discussed in Chapter 1) that school districts would have adopted pro-access policies following the change to the homeschool law. However, to the extent that the North Carolina School Boards Association may have identified homeschooling as an educational trend worthy of inclusion in the PLS system, districts’ revised policy manuals may include policies on homeschoolers’ access to public school resources. Furthermore, in light of the findings from this research study, the researcher now expects that any policy decision enacted by WCPSS administrators would further restrict homeschool students’ access to public school resources. This assessment of the district’s future policy action is in keeping with past and current practices which have hampered homeschoolers’ ability to utilize public school resources. Additionally, Wake County’s representation in the House and Senate is evenly divided between Republican and Democratic elected officials (eight affiliated with each party). Of the 11 Wake County members of the House of Representatives, six are Democrats and five are Republicans. On the Senate side, Wake County has three Senate Republicans and two Senate Democrats. This “mixed party” political context in Wake County contributes to the implausibility that WCPSS administrators will move to broaden access for homeschooled students.

The words and phrases used in school districts’ policies, especially in the policies that restrict access, importantly connote expectations for the nature of interactions between public school administrators and homeschool educators. The language in the now-suspended

Alamance-Burlington School System (ABSS) policy 3050 conveyed a negative tone that is largely, albeit surprisingly, absent in districts' current restrictive policies. Policy 3050 stated:

ABSS does not permit students who are enrolled in home schools or non-public schools to enroll in ABSS for a portion of the day, except for students with disabilities as required by state or federal law or as approved by the school principal and the Executive Director of Exceptional Children's Services following administrative procedures established by the Superintendent. Children who are enrolled in home schools or non-public schools are not eligible to participate in ABSS extracurricular activities. (para. 2)

Phrases such as “does not permit,” “are not eligible,” and “following administrative procedures” carried a sense of obstruction. Marginal compliance with legislative mandates characterizes the resistive stance, the most exclusive stance on the continuum from exclusive to inclusive policy stances, according to Dahlquist, York-Barr, and Hendel (2006). Several other districts' policies, like the former ABSS policy, were essentially resistive in offering to provide required services exclusively to special needs children only because federal and state laws require it. However, many of these resistive policies contained language that struck a positive tone. Although the policies did not make public school resources available to homeschoolers, the way the policies were written sounds helpful and supportive. First, several districts' policies affirmed parents' legal authority to choose schools—including homeschools—for their children. Going beyond the legal authority, the language in some policies conveyed respect for parents' decisions about their children's education. For example, Rockingham County Schools' policy stated, “The board believes that the curricular and instructional needs of . . . students are best served by full-time enrollment in the school chosen by the parent” (2000). Then, in positive language, the policies outlined the availability of public school resources reserved for students enrolled full-time in the public schools.

Although there has not been widespread adoption of policies that grant homeschool students access to public school resources, three school districts have adopted inclusive stances

since the new homeschool definition was signed into law. It may be the case that leaders in school districts with new inclusive policies, much like some of the participants in this research study who expressed that the new homeschool law brought them peace of mind, felt that they were on more solid footing with state law in offering homeschool students the opportunity to enroll in public school classes. In a letter dated December 8, 2015, the ABSS superintendent informed families of an “exciting new development in our policies regarding homeschool students residing in the Alamance-Burlington School District.” Statements in the letter revealed that homeschool students are now eligible to enroll in online courses offered through the ABSS Virtual Learning Academy. The courses are offered free of charge, but students must enroll in a minimum of two courses per semester. ABSS administrators’ willingness to make online courses available to students enrolled in homeschools was likely a business, as much as an educational, decision. Indeed, the superintendent’s letter focused on the variety of curricular options including honors and Advanced Placement classes available from multiple vendors.

Dahlquist, York-Barr, and Hendel (2006) explained:

The specific reasons for adopting inclusive policies and practices dictate the extent and substance of the interactions. For example, if an inclusive stance is adopted to increase revenue through dual or reenrollment, practices would be aimed at communicating and making easily available a range of revenue-generating curricular and extracurricular opportunities. If an inclusive stance is adopted to increase the quality and variety of educational experiences for homeschool children, nonreimbursable resources such as use of media resources or consultation would also be made available. If an inclusive stance is adopted in an effort to build a more inclusive local community, even greater efforts would be extended by school personnel to communicate about school activities, events, initiatives, and service projects and to intentionally invite participation by homeschool families in the larger school community. (p. 376)

According to the superintendent’s letter, an information session was held in January 2016 to make families aware of the ABSS curricular options for homeschool students. Like other districts with inclusive policies, ABSS stipulated the minimum number of course enrollments to

enable the district to collect state funding for each part-time student. Only Currituck County Schools' policy explicitly referred to ADM (average daily membership, which is typically used to calculate school funding) for part-time students; however, generating revenue seemed to be a key motivator for other districts, as well. Unlike any of the other districts with inclusive stances, Currituck County Schools' policy also addressed the provision of College Board testing, a non-reimbursable service, to students not enrolled in the school district. In this way, Currituck County Schools administrators gave the impression that they were concerned with the educational opportunities available to homeschool children beyond revenue-generating curricular options.

Respondent and participant demographics. For the most part, demographic data for respondents and participants in this research study matched demographic data from national samples of homeschoolers. However, two demographic indicators—related to the role of religion in the decision to homeschool and parents' professional teaching backgrounds—differed significantly from the researcher's expectations. Researchers have documented the decline in the percentage of parents who cited religious concerns as the primary reason for choosing to homeschool (Collom, 2005; Murphy, 2012). North Carolina Division of Non-Public Education (2014) statistics revealed the drop in the percentage of North Carolina homeschool educators who elected to operate their homeschools as the religious type. Still, the differences between national and North Carolina samples compared to the sample for this research study merited further discussion. Whereas 16% of homeschool educators in a national sample cited religious or moral concerns as the primary reason for homeschooling (Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2013), only 11% of the respondents in this research study did. More surprising, study participants' decisions to operate their homeschools as independent (74%) or religious (26%) resembled the inverse of

the North Carolina statewide percentages where 38% elected independent status and 61% elected religious status (North Carolina Division of Non-Public Education, 2014). Attention to these differences provoked the researcher's consideration of how the Wake County homeschoolers in this research study may be unlike homeschoolers in other regions in North Carolina. Although few Wake County homeschoolers in this study identified religion as a primary reason for homeschooling or elected to operate their homeschools as religious, religious concerns may have figured more heavily in the decision-making processes for homeschoolers in other parts of North Carolina (e.g., coastal region, mountain region). Urbanicity may be another factor. Wake County is one of six mostly urban counties in a state dominated by rural counties (of North Carolina's 100 counties, 80 are classified as rural, 14 are classified as suburban; Rural Center, 2015). It is to be expected that cultural, educational, and political differences abound between urban and rural areas in North Carolina.

Unlike previous studies where approximately 25% of homeschool educators were licensed teachers (Collom, 2005; Rudner, 1999), almost half (44%) of the participants in this research study had a professional background in teaching. Homeschool educators with teaching experience likely have an understanding of public schools that other homeschool educators do not possess. Additionally, most (72%) of the participants had at some point enrolled at least one of their children in the public schools system. Comparable data for North Carolina and U.S. homeschool educators were unavailable. In enrolling their children in public schools, participants in this study interacted with public school administrators, teachers, school counselors, and other educators, which informed their understanding of what the public schools could offer their children. Whereas parents have sometimes judged the quality of schools based exclusively on what they have heard about schools through their social networks (Holme, 2002),

many participants in this research study relied on their professional and personal experiences with public schools as well as what they heard from fellow homeschoolers to evaluate schools. These demographic features—professional teaching background and enrollment of one or more children in public schools—of the participant sample may have impacted their advocacy decisions, as will be discussed later.

Homeschooling experiences of interview participants. In many aspects, the homeschooling experiences of participants in this study paralleled homeschool educators' experiences recorded in previous literature. Though not always unique to the participants in this research study, several elements of participants' stories stood out as important findings. As noted in the literature review, parents' pursuit of the best educational options for their children is the basic premise upon which school choice operates (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Lips & Feinberg, 2008; Slaughter-Defoe et al., 2012). As stated in Chapter 4, all participants sought to provide the best educational options to their children by incorporating a number of available resources inside and outside the homeschool environment. For some participants, this included public school resources. Interestingly, those homeschool educators who described themselves as “rebels” and who expressed a “do it yourself” attitude avoided public school resources. At the same time, they and several other participants regularly evaluated whether homeschooling continued to be a good fit for their families. Under the surface of their evaluations lay the idea that their children would return to or enroll for the first time in public schools if parents deemed it appropriate. What these parents viewed as striving for the best educational resources among the available options, Zinnia likened to the growing trend of homeschoolers' temporary commitment to homeschooling (Gaither, 2009a). Evidenced by their three or more years of homeschooling experience, participants in this research study were

arguably committed to the practice of homeschooling as the right educational choice for their children. However, homeschool educators were willing to consider alternatives to homeschooling, including enrollment in public school, if their family circumstances warranted it.

Much of the literature reviewed for this research study pointed to a variety of reasons that parents cited for their choices to begin and to continue homeschooling their children (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Lois, 2013). Noticeably, the active role of children in the decision-making processes was absent from the literature. However, participants in this research study told stories wherein their children's stated preferences figured heavily into parents' decisions to continue with homeschooling. High school-age children, in particular, seemed to hold tremendous decision-making power regarding their education. Based on participants' stories, parents honored and supported students' decisions in all but two instances. Although children made decisions to continue with homeschooling or to enroll in public schools, homeschool educators usually did not indicate the rationales for their children's decisions. It was not apparent from parents' stories what knowledge homeschooled children had about alternative educational options. In addition, it was unclear whether homeschooled children learned about public schools as an alternative educational option from their parents, from their friends who were enrolled in public schools, from their own limited interactions with public schools, or some combination of these. This research study focused on homeschool educators who had the legal authority to make schooling decisions for their children; however, it may be important to learn about homeschooled children's knowledge of schooling options and the extent to which such knowledge impacts children's school decisions. The results from this research study showed that children's choices about their high school education ultimately became their families' decisions.

Research Question 1. A number of education statutes and school district policies were analyzed to gain an understanding of how North Carolina’s current laws and policies support access to public school resources for homeschooled students. Not surprisingly, answers to the first research question are heavily contextualized and depend on policies and practices enacted at the local level. At the state level, the abundance of straightforward, descriptive statutes clearly establishes education as a fundamental right (N.C. Const., art. IX, § 1-3), promises all children in the state access to a sound basic education (*Leandro*, 1997), and authorizes parents to educate their children at home (*Delconte*, 1985). Yet the policies do not converge in a way that eliminates the gray area surrounding the issue of Wake County homeschoolers’ access to public school resources.

Based on the study’s findings, the researcher has determined that the 2013 law that amended the definition of a homeschool in North Carolina was mostly symbolic. According to Fieschi (2006), “the primary aim of such legislation appears to be reassurance” (para. 1). While the new law did not confer on homeschoolers any substantive benefits, it did bring a sense of reassurance to homeschoolers that they were acting within the bounds of law when they selected and utilized outside sources of academic instruction to educate their homeschooled children. Fieschi (2006) rightly asserted:

Symbolism is an intrinsic part of the law and one could argue that all legislation is at least partly symbolic. Legislation that is mostly symbolic prompts us to re-examine the law as a trigger for, and shaper of, political debate and a creator of constituencies. . . . Some argue that symbolic legislation fails because in most cases it cannot achieve its own objectives—either because legislation is the wrong instrument for the job or because the legislation does not reassure as it is supposed to. But legislating often has multiple aims, and while the stated or perceived primary aims of a law may not always be fully achieved, the legislation may have important secondary impacts. (para. 3 and 4)

After the passage of the legislation, homeschool educators continued to ask questions regarding who were acceptable providers of academic instruction, suggesting that perhaps the legislation

did not reassure as it was supposed to. In particular, homeschool educators wondered about the risks they associated with utilizing public school resources. Homeschoolers' questions prompted Mason, a longtime North Carolinians for Home Education (NCHE) leader and the current Law and Policy Director for the homeschool advocacy organization, to write a June 2015 article addressing the "confusion about the status of homeschool students who take public school virtual classes" (para. 1). The law was aimed at increasing the flexibility for homeschool educators to choose educational resources, but its "secondary impact" may have been to increase the flexibility for education providers, such as the North Carolina Virtual Public School (NCVPS), to offer an expanded array of services to homeschool students. In this way, public coffers stand to gain, because homeschoolers who take advantage of the increased offerings available through NCVPS must pay tuition for each course. As written, the homeschool law does not limit the number of "outside the homeschool" courses in which a homeschool student may enroll. The open-ended way in which the law was written and adopted was intentional. Homeschoolers who had a say in drafting the new definition of a homeschool wanted to ensure that the legislation would maintain the spirit of homeschooling, which is to say freedom from governmental interference. For legislators, it was essential that the law be open-ended not only to incur the goodwill of homeschoolers but also because the Division of Non-Public Education (DNPE), the governmental division that supervises homeschools, lacks the capacity to monitor the course-taking behavior for more than 100,000 homeschooled students across the state.

In that most homeschool educators were seeking, selecting, and using additional sources of academic instruction prior to the passage of legislation granting them the right to do so, the new law brought few material effects. The symbolic effects of the new homeschool law work to reinforce the idea that homeschoolers are an important constituency in the current political

climate in North Carolina and to contribute to the broader policy debate regarding the benefits and/or burdens homeschoolers receive from the recently adopted policy as well as any future policies. Adopted policy operates in a feed-forward manner whereby the consequences of policy shape political culture and impact future policies (Pierce et al., 2014). In the third proposition in this research study, the researcher expected that the new homeschool law would have created an environment wherein local policy actors would have adopted or amended policies to provide expanded access to public school resources. Although limited evidence of this sort of policy change was found, homeschoolers' socially constructed advantaged status among current elected officials points toward future laws and policies that bestow benefits upon and limit burdens for homeschool educators. That is, as long as the balance sheet of political power at the state level remains unaltered. On the other hand, given that homeschoolers have been constructed by public school administrators as contenders, homeschoolers may garner few benefits from any policy adopted and implemented at the school district level. In the social construction framework,

when too many benefits are provided to advantaged groups, to the point that their social construction begins to shift from "deserving and entitled" to "getting more than they deserve," "greedy," or "wasteful," they may be reconstructed in the public's mind to fit the contender category (powerful but not well regarded). Overt benefits to contenders are risky and policymakers need to conceal them. (Schneider & Ingram, 2005, p. 639)

This conceptualization of the way in which a target group's social construction may change perhaps explains why the new homeschool law offered few tangible benefits and why WCPSS has not adopted a policy to address homeschoolers' access to public school resources.

Homeschool educators and, by extension, homeschool students, may be viewed by public school administrators as already well-resourced. After all, the participants in this research study were college-educated, part of two-parent families, and capable of foregoing full-time paid employment to educate their children. Without a policy, public school administrators may

choose to provide select resources to homeschoolers (on a case-by-case basis) in a manner that avoids overt recognition. Now that the research study has been conducted, it is clear that in order to predict outcomes resulting from the passage of the new homeschool law, the researcher needed to know more about the environmental conditions, the identification of positions, how power was being leveraged, and the impact of bargaining activity. The apparent valuation of local control suggests that greater understanding of the environmental conditions in each school could funnel up to provide a clearer, though more nuanced, image of the district.

Homeschoolers in North Carolina operate outside the authority of the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). Their separation from the public education system has been codified into law such that the DNPE director, or his staff, is defined as the “duly authorized representative of the state” in homeschool matters (N.C. Gen. Stat. § 115C-563). Given that they are governed by DNPE, homeschoolers have a legitimate outsider status that may hurt their appeals for access to public school resources. Participants in this research study related stories of how they had successfully utilized public school resources during the time they homeschooled in other states. In the other states, homeschoolers were supervised by public school administrators, and public school administrators likely felt a sense of responsibility and obligation to the homeschoolers under their jurisdiction. The relationships that participants were able to forge with public school administrators in other states during annual curriculum review meetings may not be as easily accomplished in North Carolina. Whereas participants described their relationships with public school administrators in other states as “good,” they focused on the negative aspects of their limited relationship with WCPSS administrators. Rather than homeschool educators and public school administrators being enemies as participants suggested, the concerted findings from the individual interviews and the WCPSS interview protocol

responses depict homeschoolers and public school administrators as strangers to each other. The depiction of them as strangers seems more fitting for a number of reasons. First, the notion of “enemies” suggests knowledge of the opposing group and engagement in a struggle. The evidence does not support the idea that homeschool educators and public school administrators had significantly meaningful knowledge of each other. What’s more, the two groups showed little to no engagement with each other, in a struggle or otherwise. The researcher conceived of homeschool educators and public school administrators as strangers, because they were largely unacquainted with each other. Homeschoolers were outsiders to the public education community just as those in public education were outsiders to the homeschool community. In addition, strangers may co-exist in a space without any overt interaction. In this conception of the groups as strangers, public school administrators have almost no duty to homeschooled students who are outside their community.

Unlike public school administrators, the members of North Carolina’s General Assembly have a constitutional obligation to ensure that homeschool students—indeed, all students—in North Carolina receive a sound basic education (*Leandro*, 1997). According to Archer (2014), “North Carolina’s homeschooling laws are not sufficient to ensure each homeschooled child’s constitutional right to the opportunity to receive a sound basic education, and thus, the State is failing in its duty” (p. 255). As a corrective, Archer (2014) proposed stricter guidelines for homeschools including “more state oversight regarding the curriculum parents or guardians use . . . and . . . expanded testing requirements” (p. 295). She acknowledged that these recommendations were expensive and ran counter to the general objective of homeschooling. Based on the findings in this research study, the researcher proposes an alternative to Archer’s recommendations—that state and local governments work collaboratively to provide for

homeschoolers' access to public school educational resources. The costs associated with such a proposal are outside the scope of the present research study; however, the proposal falls in line with the general objective of homeschooling under the new definition of a homeschool in North Carolina. Contrary to Archer's (2014) assertion that "homeschooling parents or guardians have little incentive to teach the tested material" (p. 299), participants in this research study actively sought to provide their homeschooled children a sound basic education by providing instruction and by determining additional sources of academic instruction. In doing so, homeschool educators, focused as they were on the latter qualitative descriptions of the state's definition of a sound basic education, attended to securing the educational resources that would enable their children to succeed in postsecondary education and contemporary society (*Leandro*, 1997).

Bearing in mind the focus of the first research question, the researcher surmises that North Carolina's laws and policies do not *support* homeschool students' access to public school resources. In saying this, the researcher is emphasizing qualitative descriptions of the word "support" to mean "add strength to or preserve" (Dictionary.com). The current homeschool law leaves the door open for access to public school resources without leading or guiding the way toward access for those who want and need such guidance. North Carolina's adherence to "district discretion" thrusts homeschoolers in most areas of the state into a policy vacuum. In Wake County, homeschool educators experienced frustrations—emotional and material—due to the vacuous policy context at the local level. Without enabling homeschool educators to easily access needed educational resources, the promise of a sound basic education for their children rings hollow. From a social construction point of view, children are viewed positively but have little power and thus are constructed as dependents. The *Leandro* (1997) decision focused on

children's constitutional right to a sound basic education, and as is often the case with policies focused on the rights of children,

officials want to appear to be aligned with their interests; but [children's] lack of political power makes it difficult to direct resources toward them. Symbolic policies permit elected leaders to show great concern but relieve them of the need to allocate resources. Policies in this area tend to be left to lower levels of government or to the private sector. (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, p. 338)

In the case of homeschool educators in Wake County, WCPSS represents the lower level of government to which many have turned for the allocation of educational resources. The failure of the current laws and policies to support access to public school resources for homeschooled children has driven homeschool educators to pursue resources in avenues other than the public schools.

Research Question 2. The second research question dealt with homeschool educators' advocacy for access to public school resources. One of the propositions of this research study shared the thought that the new homeschool law would inspire a flurry of advocacy activity among an increased number of homeschool educators. Results from this study suggested that homeschool educators did not alter their advocacy behavior as a result of the change in the law. Furthermore, half of the participants did not advocate for access to public school resources at any time before or after the passage of the 2013 homeschool law. Thus, nine participants' stories provided answers for how Wake County homeschool educators (i.e., parents and legal guardians) advocated for their homeschooled students to be the recipients of public school resources.

Scholars have grouped homeschoolers according to a variety of descriptive dimensions (Lois, 2013; Mazama & Lundy, 2012; Van Galen, 1991). The categorization of homeschoolers that stood out most strongly among participants in this study and that differentiated between those participants who advocated for public school resources and those who did not advocate

was Lois's (2013) dichotomy of first-choicers and second-choicers. The participant sample was comprised of seven first-choicers and 11 second-choicers. Among the first-choicers, one participant advocated for public school resources; the rest (85%) of the first-choicers did not advocate. In the group of second-choicers, three participants did not advocate, but the majority (73%) of the second-choicers did pursue access to public school resources. These results coincide with the descriptions for the groups wherein second-choicers were less content with homeschooling and more frequently sought access to resources outside the home, including public school resources (Lois, 2013).

As participants endeavored to advocate for public school resources, they did so with an awareness of what others said and thought about homeschoolers, thereby believing that they were negatively constructed by public school administrators and by the general public (Hacking, 1999). It may not have been the case that all public school administrators held a negative connotation of homeschoolers, because as Schneider and Ingram (1993) pressed, "social constructions are often conflicting and subject to contention" (p. 335). Homeschoolers' belief that public school administrators generally viewed them in a negative light likely informed homeschoolers' perceptions of the low likelihood that their advocacy efforts would pay off and may have impacted their persistence in seeking resources. In instances where they were denied access to requested public school resources, homeschool educators did not often persist in appealing a second time or to a different administrator for resources. They reasoned that their energy could be better expended in other ways that were more likely to bring educational benefits to their children. Zinnia exhibited a willingness to persist in advocating for resources that was not matched by other participants' level of persistence. She engaged in a lengthy, multi-step process before successfully accessing the requested public school resources. For the most

part, participants' advocacy efforts were futile or resulted in limited benefits brought about through great or sustained effort. Ironically, one of the major reasons homeschoolers advocated for access to resources from public school administrators, who they believed viewed them negatively, was to minimize the negative impression of homeschoolers that college admissions officers may have formed. Homeschool educators expected college admissions officers to regard homeschoolers as untrustworthy, and thus homeschool educators advocated for access to resources (e.g., advanced classes, AP exams) that could vouch for their credibility.

Indeed, advocacy was one strategy homeschool educators employed to “fight . . . the stigma of homeschooling” (Lois, 2013, p. 69). Like the homeschooling mothers in Lois's (2013) work, participants in this research study were stigmatized by the general public. Herein, “general public” refers to the individuals, including homeschool educators' family members, who voiced their doubtful opinions about the decisions homeschool educators made regarding their children's education. Lois (2013) wrote that “non-homeschooling strangers, friends, and family members . . . frequently criticized homeschoolers for keeping their children out of conventional schools, often implying—and sometimes stating outright—that they were irresponsible mothers for doing so” (p. 69). The experiences homeschool educators shared with the researcher ran counter to some of the negative perceptions the general public held about homeschoolers. In fact, participants in this research study responded to others' negative views in much the same way as the homeschoolers in Lois's (2013) study who “avowed their decision to homeschool and denied that it was irresponsible” (p. 70). In their myopic assessment of parents' decisions to homeschool their children, members of the general public apparently did not take into account that “choices are exercised not by free agents or autonomous actors, but by people who are compromised and constrained by the social context” (Haney López, 1994, p. 47). The

findings in Chapter 4 detailed the ways in which participants faced constrained situations that necessitated homeschooling for the academic benefit of their children whose needs were not being met in conventional schools. Homeschoolers' justification to their critics was that "choosing the right academic fit was highly *responsible* parenting" (Lois, 2013, p. 74). Homeschoolers' justification of their decisions supported the researcher's earlier assertion that choosing to homeschool represented an act of advocacy.

Having made the decision to homeschool, parents showed that they wanted to use their advocacy to engage in more than just school choice. Their advocacy efforts pointed toward their engagement in *educational choice*. Participants' recounted experiences revealed how homeschool educators' advocacy intersected with educational choice, a burgeoning dimension of choice that goes beyond school choice and reflects parents' desire to provide customized educational experiences. Rather than choosing from pre-established schools, parents sought to meld homeschool and public school resources to create personalized education plans designed to meet each child's individual needs. Participants' willingness to seek resources from WCPSS discredited those who assumed that homeschoolers wanted to keep their children away from conventional public schools. Furthermore, seeking outside resources was analogous to an overt admission from parents that neither the public school nor the homeschool could exclusively provide all of the educational resources needed.

Research Question 3. It stands to reason that the bases on which WCPSS administrators granted and/or denied requests for homeschooled students to receive access to public school resources were more complex than what the data related to this research question revealed. The brevity of the responses from the district's director of counseling suggested a limited relationship between the public school administrator and homeschoolers. As discussed in Chapter 4,

homeschool educators provided indirect evidence that pointed to some of the rationales for public school administrators' decisions. For example, participants attributed the inaccessibility of speech therapy services to WCPSS' strained resources. In the case of specific subjects for AP exam administration, sometimes the requested resource was not being offered to enrolled students. It is worth noting that other than the resources that LEAs were mandated to provide (e.g., driver education, psychoeducational evaluation), most of the requests from the homeschoolers involved in this study were denied.

Taken together, the responses the researcher received from the district's director of counseling regarding WCPSS administrators' role in responding to homeschoolers' requests for access and the information on the DNPE website regarding access to public school resources elucidate why homeschool educators didn't persist in seeking public school resources and/or chose not to advocate for public school resources at all. The advice from DNPE and WCPSS operates in a "ping-pong" fashion such that homeschool educators' pursuit of seemingly nonexistent access to public school resources may seem pointless. DNPE advises homeschooling parents to contact the LEA to inquire about the district's policies on allowing homeschool students to utilize public school resources. Through its representative, WCPSS, in turn, refers parents to the DNPE website for information on the availability of public school resources. Such cyclic advice would certainly stymie homeschool educators' efforts and perhaps relieve WCPSS administrators of handling requests and providing the rationales for their decisions.

Interestingly but not surprisingly, the direct impetus for WCPSS's clearest, most direct response related to homeschool students' use of public school resources was a question raised by a WCPSS building-level administrator. Although homeschool educators expressed that they did

not understand why their requests for access had been denied, the internal email communication offered multiple reasons for administrators' refusal to offer test administration services to homeschool students. The chief reason involved the lack of responsibility/obligation that WCPSS administrators felt for students not enrolled in the school district. In that line of thinking, WCPSS administrators did not owe homeschool educators access to any particular resource nor did WCPSS administrators owe homeschoolers an explanation for any decision related to accessing public school resources.

WCPSS administrators' decisions to withhold access to public school resources are perhaps tied to a tactical waiting game. The current research study, like most studies of homeschoolers, focused on homeschool educators with a demonstrated commitment to the practice; however, the majority of homeschool students eventually return to conventional schools (Isenberg, 2007; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). Knowing this, public school administrators may be reluctant to provide access to public school resources until such time as homeschool students (re)enroll in the public schools. At this time, it is unclear what impact, if any, wider provision of public school resources might have on the high attrition rate among homeschoolers.

Research Question 4. All participants in this research study readily acknowledged the necessity for resources outside the homeschool to meet their children's academic needs. Like the homeschooling parents from multiple studies cited in the literature review (Hanna, 2012; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Lois, 2013), participants relied on many outside material and human instructional resources from a wide range of education providers. They utilized resources from both private and public providers, but relatively few public school resources. Their limited use of public school resources was due to public school administrators' decisions as well as homeschool educators' personal choices to abstain from using available public school resources.

Fear drove homeschoolers' hesitancy to take full advantage of available public school resources. Homeschool educators whose children had special needs worried that public school educators would "label" their homeschooled children based on test results and that public school administrators would revoke parents' right to homeschool their children. Eight participants used the word "fear" a total of 16 times throughout the interviews. Participants used the words "afraid" and "scared" 12 times each. In almost every case, homeschool educators used these words to express their own or their homeschool colleagues' emotions regarding the potentially negative consequences of utilizing resources offered through the public schools. Other homeschool educators sought to avoid the imposition of strict regulations that they feared would accompany access to public school resources. Homeschool educators' refusal to utilize public school resources was indicative of the distrust they felt toward public school administrators. This refusal and distrust represented a critical component of the discussion about access, because simply making public school resources available and making parents aware of the resources' availability did not guarantee that homeschool educators would participate in the offerings (Mayberry et al., 1995).

Homeschool educators were incredibly resourceful in "finding ways to gather additional resources for their instructional programs while preserving the autonomy of their home school" (Mayberry et al., 1995, p. 78). Several participants talked about the benefits they derived from homeschooling in Wake County, a large county with a large homeschool population. Its size contributed to the abundance of community resources available to Wake County homeschoolers. The limited way in which participants used public school resources meant that "the most important potential resources reside[d] outside the public school" (Murphy, 2012, p. 113). Homeschool educators in this research study principally utilized resources outside WCPSS.

Participants indicated that in doing so, they exerted minimal pressure on WCPSS to provide academic courses, testing services, and other desired instructional resources. Because parents had discovered and created alternative ways of securing the needed educational resources, they had little motivation to demand resources from WCPSS, which may explain why WCPSS has not adopted a policy to address homeschoolers' access to public school resources.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Under the banner of school choice, the rapid growth in the number of North Carolina families choosing to homeschool their children has led to the revival of an age-old practice on such a large scale that the issues impacting the homeschool community cannot be ignored by education policymakers. Public school administrators, too, must respond to homeschool educators' concerns. Policy and practice in Wake County must work in tandem to confront the inescapable drops in expected public school enrollment and to serve the needs of all students.

The 2013 revision to the North Carolina homeschool law was intended to resolve the multiple, conflicting interpretations associated with the original homeschool law. Both the original and the revised homeschool laws call on primary homeschool educators (typically parents) to provide academic instruction to their homeschooled children. The new definition of a homeschool legally authorizes parents to determine additional sources of academic instruction, thereby giving parents broad prerogative in selecting and utilizing outside instructional resources. The new law neither names nor prohibits public schools, or any other specific resource, as additional sources of academic instruction to which homeschool educators might turn. Now that homeschool educators can confidently seek outside resources, the question becomes: When is homeschooling no longer homeschooling because of access to and utilization of the public schools? The current legal definition of a North Carolina homeschool makes it

difficult to answer this question. Johnson (2013) made it clear that his use of the word *homeschooling* referred to “private, parent-led teaching at home rather than to public, government-funded schooling at home” (p. 300). Language in the board policies of school districts that permit homeschool students to dual enroll in the public schools frequently refer to two courses per semester. Two courses per semester may be regarded as the standard number of public school courses such that students are classified as half-time public school students while parents maintain their status as homeschoolers. Another question that can be raised involves “government-funded schooling at home.” Would utilizing public school resources without paying tuition mean that homeschool educators were in violation of North Carolina statute which delineates a nonpublic school as one that does not receive funding from the state? This is no small matter and was the crux of the *Delconte* (1985) argument for establishing home-based instruction as a nonpublic school. The researcher’s purpose herein does not lie in definitively answering the questions; rather, the questions are raised as potential topics for ongoing discussion regarding the implications associated with implementation of the current homeschool law.

Education policymakers and public school administrators must look to the critical juncture where the private and public characteristics of education collide. The collision fuels the contentious arguments over the use of public and private resources for homeschooling. From an economic standpoint, education is

neither purely private nor public. Rather, it is a “mixed” good because it provides benefits both private and public. Its benefits accrue both to individuals, with the quality and amount of education they attain, and to all of society, with improved democratic functioning and economic productivity even for members not participating directly in the educational process. (Levin, 2009)

The positive externalities produced by the education process convey benefits to individuals (private) and to society at large (public) which are especially useful in a democracy that is reliant on its populace for its continuance. In a pluralistic society, the family represents the first and most important educator for each child, and parents “should be afforded maximum de facto latitude in directing the upbringing of children” (Witte & Mero, 2008, p. 410). The implications for policymakers and public school administrators entail how to make opportunities available for parents to “choose the type of school and educational strategies they believe would maximize their child’s development” (Levin, 2009, p. 20). As mentioned previously, the availability of such opportunities is more akin to educational choice, an outgrowth of school choice.

Data from the National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES) indicate that the majority of students in the U.S. attend traditional public schools, but the overall enrollment trend is away from assigned public schools (Grady & Bielick, 2010). Students who are not enrolling in assigned public schools are enrolling in schools of choice—including homeschools—in growing numbers. This national enrollment pattern is evident in Wake County. For each of the last two years, 1,000 fewer students than projected have enrolled in WCPSS. In 2014, WCPSS “saw the smallest annual enrollment growth since 1990” (Hui, 2014b, para. 9). Preliminary numbers for 2015 show that “charter, private and home schools added more students over the past two years than the Wake school system did” (Hui, 2015, para. 2). During the same two-year period (2014 and 2015), the district’s enrollment share of school-age children in Wake County dropped from 82.5% to 81.2%. Thus far, school district representatives have downplayed the significance of these changes. Hui (2015) credited WCPSS’ chief communications officer with saying that many of the students who leave the district eventually return. Barrett (2003), a former superintendent in Arizona, penned a column about his experiences with what he called

“public education flight” (p. 30). The column appeared in *School Administrator*, a monthly magazine for public school superintendents that “provides big-picture perspectives and collegial advice on a broad range of topics specific to K-12 education and the leadership of public school districts” (American Association of School Administrators, 2016). In his column, one of more than 80 pieces published in the magazine that dealt with homeschooling, Barrett (2003) told his colleagues that he was surprised when students who left the public education system did not return. The departure of large numbers of students prompted him to examine the role that public education should play in the lives of all children residing in the school district and to begin a public school/homeschool partnership program. The strategy that worked in the Arizona school district may not be the right strategy for WCPSS. However, the results from this research study suggest that WCPSS administrators proactively monitor the data related to enrollment loss to avoid the surprise that could come if the district’s market share of the county’s students dips below 80%. While district officials may be counting on students coming back to WCPSS, it is worth noting that only one study participant had re-enrolled her children in a conventional school, and she chose a charter school.

As stated throughout this dissertation, WCPSS is without a policy on homeschoolers’ access to public school resources. This research study helped to shed light on some of the implications related to adopting a policy should public school administrators choose to do so. First, the writers of any policy that attempts to establish the conditions for and to advance a course of action related to homeschoolers’ access must consider the needs of both public school and homeschool students to avoid disadvantaging one group of students to preserve the interests of the other student group. Homeschool educators whose children were enrolled in public schools prior to choosing an alternative education setting can tell public school educators what

worked and did not work in public schools, and they may also be able to provide information about what education strategies were effective at home. In this way, homeschool educators can serve as key sources of data. Data that show the demand for public school resources are also needed. Public school administrators, as well as DNPE staff, should maintain data on the number of homeschoolers who request public school resources and the types of resources they would like to access. A few LEAs have adopted pro-access policies. Public school administrators in those districts could share information related to the implementation of the policies and the number of homeschool students taking advantage of the public schools' offerings.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The educational landscape around the issues of choice constantly changes. This examination of the legal and policy contexts governing access to public school resources for homeschool students in Wake County, North Carolina provided a snapshot of the dynamic educational landscape, which sometimes shifted in meaningful ways during the course of conducting this research. Additional research is needed on this topic that will enable educators and policymakers to (1) comprehend the legal and policy environment within which public school administrators engage with homeschool educators on the issue of access to public school resources and (2) take responsive and proactive steps to effectively and responsibly deliver education resources to students. A follow-up study should be conducted to determine what impact, if any, the 2013 revision to the homeschool law made on North Carolina homeschool educators' use of instructional resources. Such a study would go a long way in highlighting the symbolic and the material effects of the legislation.

A significant limitation of the current study is that sparse data were available from public school administrators. The brief, single set of written responses from the WCPSS' director of counseling lacked the details that could expand the understanding of the context within which public school administrators make decisions regarding homeschoolers' access to public school resources. The researcher did not have the opportunity to check for the director's understanding of the questions in the interview protocol or to ask clarifying questions related to the written responses. Future research that incorporates public school administrators' active participation in individual interviews, focus groups, and/or surveys could provide rich information to illuminate the nature of their interactions with homeschool educators and their public school colleagues on the issue of access.

The participant sample was small and did not reflect the diversity within the homeschool population. Demographically speaking, the 18 participants in this research study were homogeneous. Future research with homeschoolers should incorporate the experiences of a proportionate number of Black, Latino, and Asian homeschoolers. The voices of homeschooling fathers would also be an important contribution to this line of inquiry. Missing from the current research study are the perspectives of low-income homeschoolers. To the extent that access to public school resources is particularly attractive to some homeschool educators because it is the least expensive option (e.g., enrollment in local public school courses is cheaper than enrollment in online courses or hiring a tutor), low-income homeschoolers could amplify homeschoolers' calls for access.

This study focused on homeschool educators' access to public school resources via WCPSS. Participants discussed utilizing resources available through local charter schools, which are also publicly funded. In that charter schools are not subject to the same rules and

regulations that govern traditional public schools, the policies and practices that guide charter school administrators' provision of resources to homeschool students may be worth investigation in a future study.

The researcher purposely limited this research study to experienced homeschool educators in Wake County who had homeschooled or were homeschooling a high school-age child. The experienced homeschool educators in this research study drew a distinction between experienced homeschoolers and new homeschoolers (those with no more than two years of experience). New homeschoolers, they contended, were more willing to let someone else teach their children. A future research study conducted with homeschool educators with little and extensive experience could provide some evidence of the differences in how homeschool educators, based on their years of experience with homeschooling, appropriate public school and other outside resources for educating their homeschooled children. Although this study focused on resources used for educating high school-age students, it would be interesting to know if there is demand among homeschool educators for access to specific public school resources that would be used to educate their elementary and middle school-age children. Finally, the characteristics (e.g., geographic diversity, comparatively wealthy public school system) which distinguished Wake County as an ideal location for this research study really set the county apart from other North Carolina counties. A statewide survey of homeschool educators from other parts of the piedmont region as well as the coastal and mountain regions of North Carolina could enhance this current study by providing a fuller profile of the status of homeschool educators' access to public school resources.

The chosen locale for this research study meant that the researcher closely examined the laws and policies of one state—North Carolina—that govern homeschool students' access to

public school resources. A future research study that compares laws and policies across the country regarding access to public school resources for homeschool students would augment our understanding of the multiple approaches state governments have undertaken to address this issue. Regional differences brought forward as a result of this type of future research could situate the findings from this research study in the broader legal and policy environment. Such a comparative study might also reveal some states' innovative legislation that could be a model for education policymakers throughout the United States.

Conclusion

The aim of this research study was to examine North Carolina's legal and policy contexts for their support of Wake County homeschooled students' access to public school resources. The researcher sought to provide information that would be valuable to policymakers, public school administrators, and homeschool educators. The information regarding the public school resources homeschool educators wanted to access and the process of engagement between homeschool educators and public school administrators in a school district without a policy may inform future policy and practice decisions. The findings demonstrate that North Carolina's laws and policies provide limited support for homeschooled students to utilize public school resources beyond those required by law.

The 2013 adoption of the revised definition of a homeschool in North Carolina was symbolic, but not without meaning. Passage of the new law signified the primacy of parents' role in determining the school setting, the curriculum, and the instructors for educating their children. If North Carolina's homeschooled students comprised a single school district, they would represent the third largest school district in the state with only WCPSS and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools enrolling higher numbers of students. Homeschool educators' advocacy

for access to select public school resources was emblematic of the expansive nature of choice. Showing how educational choice may eclipse the narrower notion of school choice, many homeschooling parents embraced an eclectic educational approach and willingly sought and utilized education resources from a variety of sources.

North Carolina's elected leaders must continue to empower parents to make educational decisions in the best interests of their children. At the same time, members of the General Assembly have the imperative to fulfill their constitutional duty to ensure that all children in North Carolina receive a sound basic education (*Leandro*, 1997). As relevant now as when it was first written:

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. It [education] is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities. . . . It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. (*Brown v. Board*, 1954, p. 493)

Education, the “most important function of state and local governments,” constitutes a collective obligation. State nor local government can unilaterally fulfill this imperative duty. Similarly, most homeschool educators cannot solely provide all of the academic resources their children need. To the extent that school districts represent extensions of local government, the documented trend toward cooperation between homeschools and public schools in other states and in a few counties in North Carolina suggests leaders’ recognition of this. Working together, a few members of North Carolina’s education community—homeschool educators and public school educators—have looked toward expanding opportunities and doing what is in the best interest of all students.

APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD LETTER OF EXEMPTION



THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL

OFFICE OF HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS
Medical School Building 52
Mason Farm Road
CB #7097
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-7097
(919) 968-3113
Web site: ohre.unc.edu
Federalwide Assurance (FWA) #4801

To: Gwen Roulhac
School of Education Deans Office

From: Office of Human Research Ethics

Date: 2/12/2015

RE: Notice of IRB Exemption

Exemption Category: 2.Survey, interview, public observation

Study #: 14-3349

Study Title: Factors Influencing Public School Officials' Policy and Procedural Decisions
Regarding Access to Public School Resources for Homeschooled Students in Wake County, North Carolina

This submission has been reviewed by the Office of Human Research Ethics and was determined to be exempt from further review according to the regulatory category cited above under 45 CFR 46.101(b).

Study Description:

Purpose: The researcher plans to investigate the extent to which state law and/or local policy guidelines and local procedural considerations impact public school administrators' decisions regarding access to public school resources for homeschooled students in Wake County, North Carolina.

Participants: North Carolina Department of Non-Public Education (DNPE) officials, North Carolinians for Home Education (NCHE) regional directors, Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) district-level and school-level administrators, and homeschooling parents who reside in Wake County, North Carolina

Procedures (methods): A questionnaire containing demographic questions, Likert-scale items, and open-ended questions will be disseminated via electronic mail and postal mail to determine potential interviewees. During phone and/or in-person interviews, three interview protocols will be used to guide semi-structured interviews with the different sets of participants. The interview protocols for the DNPE and NCHE officials, for the public school administrators, and for the parents consist of 9, 15, and 15 questions, respectively.

Investigator's Responsibilities:

If your study protocol changes in such a way that exempt status would no longer apply, you should contact the above IRB before making the changes. There is no need to inform the IRB about changes in study personnel. However, be aware that you are responsible for ensuring that all members of the

research team who interact with subjects or their identifiable data complete the required human subjects training, typically completing the relevant CITI modules.

The IRB will maintain records for this study for 3 years, at which time you will be contacted about the status of the study.

The current data security level determination is Level II. Any changes in the data security level need to be discussed with the relevant IT official. If data security level II and III, consult with your IT official to develop a data security plan. Data security is ultimately the responsibility of the Principal Investigator.

Please be aware that approval may still be required from other relevant authorities or "gatekeepers" (e.g., school principals, facility directors, custodians of records), even though the project has determined to be exempt. .

CC:

Dana Thompson Dorsey, School of Education Deans Office

APPENDIX B: WAKE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM DATA & ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE LETTER OF APPROVAL FOR RESEARCH



WAKE COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

DATA AND ACCOUNTABILITY
Matthew Lenard
Director, Data Strategy and Analytics
PHONE: [REDACTED]
EMAIL: [REDACTED]@WCPSS.NET

April 3, 2015

Gwen Roulhac
Post Office Box
[REDACTED] NC,
[REDACTED]

RE: Application No. 1142

Dear Ms. Roulhac,

Your appeal to conduct research in the Wake County Public School System has been approved. We wish you well in conducting your study, "Factors Influencing Public School Officials' Policy and Procedural Decisions Regarding Access to Public School Resources for Homeschooled Students in Wake County, North Carolina."

This letter serves as evidence of project approval and you are free to share it with relevant staff and supervisors as needed. We will provide you with one set of written responses to your survey, which will be completed by the district's Director of Counseling and Student Services. Our committee expects to share those responses with you this month.

Remember that in accordance with WCPSS Board Policy 2550, approved research must at all times be conducted in a manner that is consistent with your original application and you must provide us with interim and final results as they become available. Please refer to the following link to read more about the district's policies, rules, and procedures: <http://webarchive.wcpss.net/policy-files/series/policies/2550-bp.html>.

In any future correspondence with us, please refer to your application number (1142). We look forward to learning about your findings.

Let us know if you have any questions as you conduct your research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Lenard".

Matthew Lenard

Research Review Committee

**APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
FOR WAKE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM ADMINISTRATORS**

1. Briefly describe your role in _____ (name of school district or school).
2. I would like to gain a sense of your familiarity with the context for homeschooling in North Carolina. Explain your understanding of:
 - a. the legal status of homeschooling in NC
 - b. the policy context associated with homeschooling in NC.
3. To what extent does the district's/school's policy support access to public school resources for homeschooled students?
4. What district/school procedure(s) govern part-time enrollment for homeschooled students? Consider part-time enrollment in classes taught in the local school and in online classes taught by a North Carolina Virtual Public School (NCVPS) teacher.
5. What district/school procedure(s) govern access to other public school resources (e.g. textbooks, athletics, testing, exceptional children's services, etc.) for homeschooled students?
6. What are the appropriate steps parents would need to take to initiate a request for access to public school resources for their homeschooled children?
7. How are parents informed of the availability of public school resources?
8. How are parents informed of the appropriate steps they need to take to initiate a request for access to public school resources for their homeschooled children?
9. What process do district/school personnel employ to make decisions regarding such parental requests for access?

10. What is the procedure for informing parents of the district's/school's decision regarding requests for access?
11. What reasons do parents provide for requesting access to public school resources for their homeschooled children?
12. To what extent do parents wish to involve their homeschooled children in activities utilizing public school resources?
13. What public school resources are homeschooled students currently utilizing or have utilized in the past?
14. To what extent have homeschooled students utilized each of the following public school resources:

Athletics? Classes? Online courses? Transportation? School Lunch? Extracurricular Clubs? Performing Arts (e.g. Band, Chorus, Theater)? Counseling? School Psychologist/Testing/Exceptional Children's Services? Other services?
15. What else would you like to share with me about access to public school resources for homeschooled students?

APPENDIX D: WAKE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM DIRECTOR OF COUNSELING RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW PROTOCOL



**WAKE COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM**

DATA AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Matthew Lenard

Director, Data Strategy and Analytics

PHONE: [REDACTED]

EMAIL: [REDACTED] WCPSS.NET

April 13, 2015

Gwen Roulhac

Post Office Box [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] NC, [REDACTED]

(919) [REDACTED]

RE: Application No. 1142

Dear Ms. Roulhac,

We shared your survey questions with the district's Director of Counseling, whose responses are below.

-
1. Director of Counseling
 2. I am aware of the legal status of homeschooling and the associated policies.
 3. Policies are aligned with state legislation and provide resources that are required by that legislation.
 4. NCVPS is accessible to home schooled students in WCPSS, but not via the local LEA. Homeschooled students are not permitted to be dually enrolled in the WCPSS per policy 5534.
 5. State legislation does not provide access to textbooks nor athletics for homeschooled students. Homeschooled students are not required to take NC standardized assessments nor are they provided Special Education services through the local LEA.
 6. This information is provided through the homeschooling parent guidebook and is dependent upon the requested service.
 7. Through the NC Department of Non-Public Education (NCDNPE) website: www.ncdnpe.org.
 8. Same as #6 and #7.
 9. Decisions are based on state legislation and WCPSS Board Policy.
 10. Direct communication with the parent, either by email, phone call, or face to face.
 11. To access resources that are not available via homeschooling.
 12. This is difficult to measure, as state legislation does not currently allow access to public school resources.
 13. State legislation does not currently permit access to public school resources.
 14. See #13.
 15. Information regarding homeschooling in NC is best researched at www.ncdnpe.org.
-

Sincerely,

Matthew Lenard

Research Review Committee

APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER

MONTH DAY, 2015

School of Education
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Dear Homeschool Educator:

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program in the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I am conducting research for my dissertation under the supervision of my UNC faculty advisor, Dr. Dana Thompson Dorsey. I would like to invite you to participate in my study about homeschooled students' access to select public school resources such as classes, performing arts groups, and clubs. You are eligible to participate in this study, because you are a Wake County homeschool educator. You are eligible to participate in the interview phase of this study, because you additionally have homeschooled your child(ren) for at least three years and homeschooled at least one high school-aged child.

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will involve the submission of an electronic questionnaire requiring approximately 10-15 minutes to complete and one individual interview lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. You may access the brief questionnaire by clicking this link: [Homeschool Educator Questionnaire](#). The interview may be conducted in person or via telephone. I would like to audio record your responses during the interview so that I may later transcribe the interview. I will then use your responses to inform my understanding of homeschool educators' use of resources in educating their children.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. I hope you will choose to participate. If you'd like to participate and/or have any questions about this study, please contact me at *****@live.unc.edu or 919-4**-1***.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Gwen D. Roulhac

APPENDIX F: RECRUITMENT FLYER FOR STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Please consider participating in this research on
homeschooled students' access to participate in select
public school resources-
academic classes, band, clubs, etc.



About this Research

I am seeking individuals' participation in a research study regarding access to select public school resources for homeschooled students. The goal of this study is to illuminate the level of access, if any, to public school resources that homeschool educators desire and the capacity for the local school district to provide access to the desired resources. The results of this study will help to show the extent to which North Carolina laws and local school district policies and procedures support equal access for homeschooled students.

Eligibility to Participate

- Have homeschooled one or more child(ren) for at least three years
- Have homeschooled/be currently homeschooling one or more high school-age child(ren)
- Reside in Wake County, North Carolina

Contact Information

Gwen Roulhac, MAT, M.Ed.
Principal Investigator
(919) 4**-1***
*****@live.unc.edu

Dana Thompson Dorsey, J.D., PhD
Faculty Advisor
(919) 8**-5***
*****@unc.edu

The principal investigator for this study, Gwen Roulhac, is a student researcher in the Doctor in Education, Educational Leadership program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. This research has been approved by the UNC-CH Institutional Review Board.

APPENDIX G: WAKE COUNTY HOMESCHOOL SUPPORT GROUPS AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Homeschool Support Groups

ACE Academy- Alternative Christian Educators
ARCH- Raleigh Association of Roman Catholic Homeschoolers
Black Families of the S. Raleigh Suburbs
Caring and Sharing
Cary Homeschoolers
Circle of Grace
Classical Conversations Holly Springs
Colonial Homeschoolers
Dayspring
East NC Early Homeschoolers
Five in a Row
Fuquay Varina Homeschoolers
Generations Homeschool Support Group
Gifted Home Scholars in NC
HARC: Homeschool Academic Resource Center
HEART: Homeschool Enrichment thru Activities, Relationships, and Truth
HERO High School Co-op
Holly Springs Homeschoolers
Homeschool Explorers
Homeschool360.com
Homeschoolers of Color
Lighthouse Christian Homeschool Association
North Raleigh Homeschooling Support Group
North Wake Homeschoolers
North Wake Teen Homeschoolers
Pursuing Excellence and Continually Educating
Secular Homeschoolers of NC
South East Middlers at Home
Spice-line
STARS: Southeast Triangle Area Resources and Support for Homeschoolers
Steadfast Home Educators
Tapestry of Grace Co-op
TORCH: Traditions of Roman Catholic Homeschoolers
Wake Forest Homeschool Families
Wake Homeschool Connections

Community Organizations

Carolina Center for Educational Excellence
North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences

APPENDIX H: HOMESCHOOL EDUCATOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Homeschool Educator Questionnaire†

With the 2013 passage of Senate Bill 189, the definition of a homeschool in North Carolina was expanded to permit homeschool educators (e.g. parents) to determine the scope and sequence of academic instruction, provide academic instruction, and determine additional sources of academic instruction. This questionnaire asks about some of your homeschooling practices, including the sources of academic instruction you use to educate your child/children.

I would appreciate your taking the time to complete the following questionnaire. It should take approximately 10-15 minutes of your time. Your responses are voluntary and will be confidential. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Gwen Roulhac at *****@live.unc.edu or 919-4**-1***.

Thank you,

Gwen Roulhac

For how many years have you homeschooled your child/children?

This is my first

year
homeschooling my 1-2 3-5 6-8 9 or more years
child/children.

☐☐☐☐☐

Has/have your child/children who is/are currently homeschooled ever attended a public school?

☐

Yes

☐

No

***For how many years did your child/children attend a public school? If more than one child attended a public school during the same academic year, please count that as one year.**

☐

Less than 1 year

☐

1-2 years

☐

3-5 years

☐

6-8 years

☐

9 or more years

What is your primary reason for homeschooling your child/children?

☐

Religious or moral beliefs/concerns

☐

Concerns about the quality of academic instruction at other schools

☐

Concerns about the social atmosphere at other schools

- ☐ Concerns about child's special needs being met in other schools
- ☐ Other

What resources, if any, outside of your home school have you used to homeschool your child/children? Select all that apply.

- ☐ Local community center
- ☐ Local public library
- ☐ Online course
- ☐ Special education teacher
- ☐ Tutor or tutoring agency
- ☐ Other

How many children are currently enrolled in your home school?

- ☐ 1 child
- ☐ 2 children
- ☐ 3 children
- ☐ 4 children
- ☐ 5 or more children

Of the children currently enrolled in your home school, how many fit into each age group below?

- ☐ Ages 7-9
- ☐ Ages 10-12
- ☐ Ages 13-15
- ☐ Ages 16-18

Including the children who are currently enrolled in your home school, how many children have you homeschooled? The total number of children you have homeschooled may include children who have graduated and/or children who now attend other schools.

What is your racial background? You may select more than one response.

- ☐ African American / Black
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Caucasian / White
- ☐ Hawaiian / Pacific Islander

- ☐ Hispanic / Latino
- ☐ Native American / American Indian
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

What is your marital status?

- ☐ Married
- ☐ Separated
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Single
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

Which category best fits your annual household income for the last 12 months?

- ☐ \$0-25,000
- ☐ \$25,001-50,000
- ☐ \$50,001-75,000
- ☐ \$75,001-100,000
- ☐ \$100,001 or more
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

Under which status did you elect to have your home school operate?

- ☐ As a religious school
- ☐ As an independent school
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

Please provide your name and contact information if you are willing to be contacted about participation in an individual interview regarding your opinions on homeschooled students' access to public school resources (e.g. classes, extracurricular activities). Interview participants should meet the following criteria: 1) reside in Wake County; 2) have three or more years experience homeschooling their child/children; and 3) have experience homeschooling a high school-aged child.

†Qualtrics Survey Software was used to create, distribute, and collect responses for this questionnaire.

*Note: The second question in the questionnaire employed “skip logic” such that participants who answered “no” to the question were not presented the third question regarding the number of years their child/children attended public school.

APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR HOMESCHOOL EDUCATORS/PARENTS

1. Tell me about your family.
2. Describe your decision-making process that led you to homeschool your child.
3. What curricular resources did you use/are you using to educate your child?
4. What community resources did you use/are you using to educate your child?
5. Describe any challenges you have experienced that are unique to educating a high school age child.
6. How have you responded to/handled those unique challenges?
7. Describe which public school resources you know/believe to be available to your child.
8. How did you learn about the availability of these resources?
9. In what ways will access to public school resources benefit your child?
10. In what ways do you believe the local public school policy on access for homeschooled students will help and/or hinder your advocacy efforts?
11. During the time that he/she has been homeschooled, which, if any, public school resources have you requested be made available to your child?
12. Explain the process you used to request access to these resources.
13. How did you learn about the process you needed to use to request access to public school resources?
14. Explain your experience of the school/school district's response to your request.

Consider time lapse between request and response, communication methods (e.g. written, electronic, phone, etc.), nature of any directives/next steps.

15. During the time that he/she has been homeschooled, which, if any, public school resources has your child used?
16. Which, if any, public school resources is your child currently using?
17. If applicable, how satisfied are you with the quality of the public school resources your child is currently using or has used in the past?
18. How satisfied are you with the degree of access to public school resources currently afforded to your child?
19. If access to public school resources for homeschooled students was broadened, what resources, to which you do not currently have access, would you want to utilize?
20. What is your opinion of the 2013 change to North Carolina's homeschool law?
21. I would like to interview additional homeschooling parents who might be interested in participating in my research. Please share the flyer and/or my contact information with homeschool educators you know.
22. What else would you like to share?

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