

# Don't Leave the Homeschoolers at Home

Lola Edwards Gomez



**Lola Edwards Gomez** is a Master of Library Science student at Texas Woman's University. She teaches Bilingual Music and Movement to preschool aged children at Melissa Public Library, and is a member of the Public

Awareness and Advocacy Committee with ALSC. She also homeschooled her two children when they were young.

Homeschooling, an adult-led home-based education, is typically seen as an alternative method of schooling children from preschool to secondary school. There are also “temporary homeschoolers,” a term which includes kids who traditionally attend school but have been learning remotely.<sup>1</sup>

Homeschooled students fall under a wide variety of demographics, including multiple religions, ethnicities, educational backgrounds, and income levels. At its current rate, homeschooling will be the most rapidly growing education sector.<sup>2</sup> It is expected that families will choose to continue homeschooling in years to come, and librarians must be prepared to attract and serve this steadily increasing group to their libraries.

## Homeschooling Is on the Rise

In March 2020, 99% of all public libraries in the United States were closed due to the pandemic.<sup>3</sup> These closures did not stop many libraries from providing important materials and services to the public. They continued to distribute free materials such as craft supplies and STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) kits. They supported online learning by extending library Wi-Fi to reach their parking lots and checked out hotspots to patrons.

In many cases, these services offered educational options while children couldn't attend school. Fast forward to the present, most schools and libraries have reopened. As students and parents are welcomed back into school buildings by teachers and staff, many of America's families have chosen an alternative to traditional schooling.

The popularity of homeschooling has been on the rise over the years and has drastically increased since the onset of the pandemic. In spring 2019, there were 2.5 million homeschool students, and by the 2020-2021 school year, 3.7 million families homeschooled their children.<sup>4</sup> With this rapid increase, libraries need to focus attention and budgets on offering educational programs and resources to this demographic.

## Reaching Out

First, do your research. Find homeschool families and co-ops in the community and discover their needs. Consider holding an open house, connecting with homeschool advisory teams and coordinators, and interviewing homeschooling parents. These connections can assist you in discovering the community you serve and the gaps that must be filled.

Next, seek resources for your library to offer. Providing pertinent resources is essential to serving homeschooled students. The Mid-Continent Public Library (MCPL) system in Kansas City, MO, provides numerous daytime programs and materials for homeschoolers at its thirty-three branches and online.<sup>5</sup> Their library's home page has a section dedicated to

homeschooling resources, which includes a newsletter and live homework help. They have invested in curriculum resources and platforms that provide lesson plans and worksheets, such as Scholastic Teachables, Tumblebooks, Britannica Kids, and National Geographic Kids. Online courses are provided for free through companies such as Gale, Mango Languages, and Universal Class.

MCPL has also created YouTube videos to help families create an effective and comfortable learning environment. As you build your programs and collections, consider the needs of bilingual students. The Texas State Library and Archives Commission website offers links to excellent Spanish-English bilingual resources including books, webinars, and blogs.

## Advocating

Once you've done the preparations, it is time to advocate. Reach out to local public, private, and charter school administration to encourage relationships between the library and schools. Librarians can glean information from school administration regarding tools and resources being used for the school year. School administrators and teachers will know

they and their students have support and resources from their local library.

Also reach out to local businesses and organizations to find ones that provide educational services to children and families. The ALSC Championing Children's Services Toolkit encourages a partnership between libraries and community stakeholders.

"Their engagement and investment in the library give the library relevance. In a time of diminishing funds and increased demands, partnerships are essential to meeting community needs, and to sustaining active and engaging environments for library users."<sup>6</sup> These partnerships can provide resources and benefits to organizations with common goals. Locales such as community centers, tutoring centers, local artists, and other educational organizations can offer courses and demonstrations that will supplement homeschoolers' learning.

While starting or expanding a homeschool initiative might seem daunting to some, the benefits should prove worth the effort. The library can become a second home to these patrons by fostering a love of life-long learning. &

## References

1. Melanie Kletter, "Homeschool Helpers," *School Library Journal* 67 (July 2021): 7.
2. Daniel Hamlin and Paul E. Peterson, "Homeschooling Skyrocketed During the Pandemic, but What Does the Future Hold?" *Education Next* 22 (February 2022): 2.
3. American Library Association, "The State of America's Libraries 2021: A Report from the American Library Association," April 2021, <https://www.ala.org/news/sites/ala.org.news/files/content/State-of-Americas-Libraries-Report-2021.pdf>.
4. Brian Ray, "Homeschooling: The Research," *National Home Education Research Institute*, March 26, 2022, <https://www.nheri.org/research-facts-on-homeschooling/>.
5. Kletter, "Homeschool Helpers," 7.
6. Association for Library Service to Children, "Everyday Advocacy," June 2019, <https://www.ala.org/everyday-advocacy/>.

---

## Index to Advertisers

---

AASL and ALA Editions . . . . . cover 3