

A RUBYLOU AT-HOME LEARNING WHITEPAPER

# The parent is the teacher

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*Why we built RubyLou the hard way*



August 2026  
[learnwithrubylou.com](https://learnwithrubylou.com)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# What this paper is about

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**Homeschooling is America's fastest-growing form of education** (Washington Post, 2023).

Millions of families now teach at home, and for the first time, real public funding — Education Savings Accounts in 18 states — is following them there.

The tools have not kept up. Most families still plan with boxed curricula, spreadsheets, and late-night Facebook groups. Into that gap has rushed a new instinct — "just ask AI" — which we believe is the right impulse pointed at the wrong tool.

This paper explains what home education actually demands of a parent, what the learning evidence honestly says, and why we built RubyLou the way we did. Our organizing conclusion is genuinely freeing:

### RUBYLOU'S FINDING

There is no "best" philosophy you're failing to find. The practices that hold up in research already live inside the philosophies families already love.

The hardest part of homeschooling isn't the teaching — it's carrying it alone. Research shows that when parents are given structured materials and support, their children's gains in the research are 6x larger than when parents are simply encouraged.

**Same parents. Same love. Different support.**

RubyLou translates your chosen philosophy — any blend of 19 traditions — into a weekly plan built on the learning practices the evidence keeps validating: warm recall, spaced practice, mastery pacing, guided discovery, and the 1:1 attention that is every homeschool's structural advantage.

Nothing reaches your week until it has been checked — against the learning science in this paper and by an independent quality review — and your judgment outranks all of it.

Your child never touches a screen.

Your faith or heritage is woven through the curriculum, or a guaranteed secular education is yours.

And the paper ends not with promises but with refusals: a ledger of what we won't claim, because what we leave out is the best evidence that the rest means something.

**The parent is the teacher. RubyLou is everything a homeschool teacher deserves.**

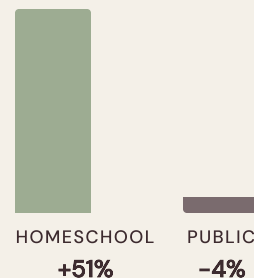
SECTION I

# The Moment: Why RubyLou, Why Now

+51%

homeschool enrollment growth, 2017–2023

*Washington Post analysis of 32 states, 2023*



Homeschooling has become mainstream. Analysis across 32 states found **homeschool enrollment grew 51% between 2017 and 2023** while public school enrollment fell 4% — making it America's fastest-growing form of education (Washington Post, 2023). And it's here to stay: Johns Hopkins' Homeschool Hub reports **growth of 4.9% in 2024–25 — nearly triple the pre-pandemic rate** — with over a third of reporting states at all-time enrollment highs (Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy, 2025).

## WHY FAMILIES CHOOSE HOME EDUCATION

*Percent naming each as one of their reasons — most families name several*



*Source: NCES 2024–113, Table A–7 (2022–23).*

About 1 in 5 homeschool families say a child has special needs their school couldn't meet, and another 15% cite a child's physical or mental health (NCES 2023, via Pew Research Center, 2025). And more than any other reason — more than academics, more than faith — **83% of homeschooling parents name concern about the environment of other schools** as a reason for their choice, and 28% rank it most important (NCES 2024-113, Table A-7).

For the first time, real funding is meaningfully supporting homeschool families. As of August 2026, **21 Education Savings Account programs operate across 18 states**, with fully universal programs in Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, New Hampshire, and West Virginia (EdChoice 2026 ABCs of School Choice). Across the ten universal-choice states alone, private choice programs directed **\$5.75 billion to more than 805,000 students in 2024–25, with participation up roughly 40% year over year** (FutureEd, 2026). Millions of families now have both the legal freedom and the funding to educate at home.

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21

ESA programs across 18 states

*EdChoice ABCs 2026 (advocacy.org.)*

\$5.75B

directed to families, 2024–25

*FutureEd, 2026*

805K+

students, participation up ~40%

*FutureEd, 2026*

The tools available to a homeschooling parent in 2026 are largely the tools of 2010: boxed curricula that are largely "one size fits all", planners that often add more to your plate, compliance spreadsheets, and scrolling Facebook groups at 11 pm for ideas or family community. Into that gap has rushed a new trend — "just ask AI" — which we believe is the right instinct pointed at the wrong tool.

This paper is about the family in that gap: what home education actually asks of a parent, what the learning evidence honestly says, and why we built RubyLou the way we did.

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## SECTION II

# What homeschooling actually asks of you

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Before the research, the reality. Here is a week that will be familiar to many home educators, assembled from the programs families actually use:

- ✦ **A math program that runs ~140 lessons** a level and warns you that skipping the mixed-review problems "breaks the design."
- ✦ **A literature program that asks for 1 to 3 hours of read-aloud a day** despite your child thriving more with smaller lessons at a higher frequency throughout the week.
- ✦ **A program where lessons can only be shared by siblings within ~3 years of age**, so a family with a 7 year old and a 12 year old runs two full programs at once.
- ✦ **A traditional program with 170 daily lessons per subject and a school day that often stretches past four hours**, where the most common parent adaptation, by the publishers' own instruction, is cutting things out.

#### WHY IT MATTERS

None of these programs knows about the others. None of them knows your child was sick last Tuesday, or that your youngest is currently obsessed with volcanoes, or that your family's whole rhythm changes in new baby season or moving season.

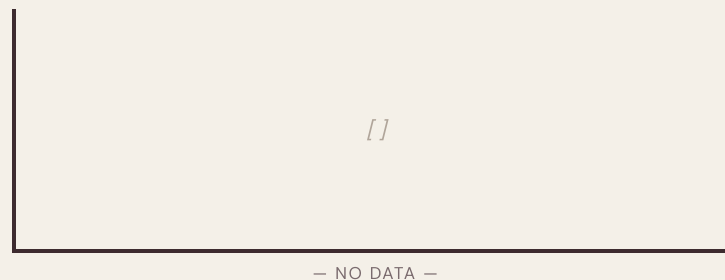
#### **So the parent takes on another burden — and becomes the integration layer:**

- ✦ They translate between 5 different level systems that rarely agree on what "grade 3" means — which often results in even more work on your plate.
- ✦ They pace one child who is racing ahead in math and another who needs a slower, gentler road into reading — often in the same hour, at the same table.
- ✦ They plan the week, teach the week, document the week for their state, and then lie awake wondering whether it was the right week.

The homeschool community's most consistent challenges, across reviews and community forums, are **decision fatigue and exhaustion** — which are not teaching problems. They are planning and support problems.

Here is a telling measure of how overlooked these families are: no federal or peer-reviewed source even measures what homeschooling households spend out of pocket. Not the Bureau of Labor Statistics, not the National Center for Education Statistics, not the academic literature. Every dollar figure in circulation traces to advocacy surveys or curriculum vendors. We checked — and **we'd rather tell you the number doesn't exist than quote one that can't be defended.**

What does homeschooling actually cost families?  
Nobody measures it.



*No federal or peer-reviewed source exists. We checked.*

Not BLS · Not NCES · Not the academic literature

And the philosophy question hangs over all of it. Montessori, Charlotte Mason, Waldorf, Classical, unit studies, eclectic — each with devoted communities, beautiful materials, and confident advocates. Choosing feels enormous, because families are told it is: pick wrong and you've failed your child. **Access makes it even harder.**

The approaches most associated with beauty and depth are, in their school form, among the most expensive in American education — published tuition at leading named Waldorf schools often runs anywhere from ~\$20,000 to nearly \$40,000 a year in the lower grades (individual schools' published prices; no national survey of tuition by philosophy exists). **Putting these traditions' practices directly into a parent's hands is exactly the point.**

This is the person we built RubyLou for. Not a "user."

#### YOU'RE NOT ALONE

A parent doing the work of a school system's planning department, records office, and faculty lounge — alone, for love, usually before anyone else in the house is awake.

### SECTION III



# The hardest part isn't the teaching — it's carrying it alone

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The quiet truth of home education is that it succeeds or struggles with the support the teaching parent has — not their ability. Parents are not the weak link in homeschooling; unsupported parents are simply asked to do everything at once, and it's the alone part, not the teaching part, that wears families down.

Research applying the Professional Quality of Life scale found **elevated burnout among parents schooling at home**, concentrated among those new to it and without support networks (NHERI, 2021 — a COVID-era sample from an advocacy-affiliated source); the broader parental-burnout literature shows the same recurring theme — strain climbs when parents absorb a demanding new role without adequate resources, and support networks buffer it (Frontiers in Psychology, 2023). Practitioners consistently describe the same triad: planning load, uncertainty ("am I doing enough?"), and isolation.

During the pandemic, researchers followed mothers teaching young children at home and found that a mother's confidence in her own teaching was powerfully protective of the thing families care about far more than academics: the relationship itself.

**Higher teaching confidence went hand in hand with dramatically less parent-child conflict at the learning table** (correlation  $r = -0.63$ , the strongest signal in the study). And the research is unambiguous about where confidence comes from: not pep talks, but early, supported wins — a first week that actually works (Bandura's mastery-experience research, confirmed in recent intervention meta-analyses). Even further: research tells us exactly what turns a parent's effort into those wins.

$$r = -0.63$$

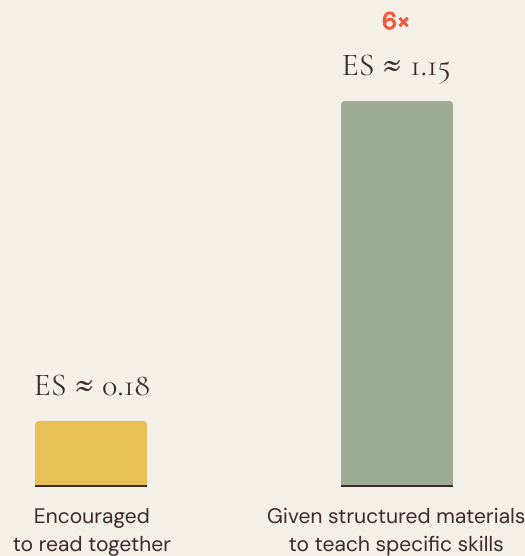
A mother's teaching confidence was the strongest protection against parent-child conflict in the study.

*Pandemic homeschooling study, PMC9221406*

In the family-literacy literature, parents who were simply encouraged to read to their children produced modest gains ( $ES \approx 0.18$ ). Parents given structured materials to teach specific skills produced gains 6× larger ( $ES \approx 1.15$ ; Sénéchal & Young, 2008). **Same parents. Same love. Different support.**



Same parents. Same love. Different support.



*Sénéchal & Young, 2008, family-literacy meta-analysis. Effect sizes from one meta-analysis; sizes vary by study.*

Put plainly: what parents are given to do matters more than who they are.

The finding repeats everywhere we looked — scripted programs delivered by non-specialists (Stockard et al., 2018), dialogic-reading prompts for parents of little ones (Whitehurst et al.; Mol et al., 2008), parent-implemented language programs where well prepared parents performed comparably to clinicians on several outcomes (Roberts & Kaiser, 2011). **Parents can do this — and do it exceptionally well.**

What they've been missing is what every professional teacher gets on day one: prepared materials, a plan, and a colleague down the hall.

RubyLou is designed for this. The planning burden moves to the platform. The uncertainty gets an honest answer. The isolation gets a verified community. Support graduates as the parent finds their footing — with full teaching guides always available one tap away. And the product refuses, structurally, to manufacture the anxiety it exists to relieve: no streaks, no scores, no red warnings anywhere in RubyLou — **because a plan that guiltis a family is a plan that fails one.**

# What the learning evidence actually supports

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We built RubyLou's pedagogy on findings that have survived scrutiny — and our organizing conclusion, after reviewing the literature across all 19 educational philosophies our platform supports, is genuinely freeing for parents:

## RUBYLOU'S FINDING

There is no "best" philosophy you're failing to find. The practices that hold up in research live inside the philosophies families already love.

- ◆ A child telling back what they just heard. An idea revisited a few days later.
- ◆ Moving ahead when she's ready rather than when the calendar says.
- ◆ A parent guiding discovery instead of leaving a child to flounder — or lecturing at them.

These are the working practices the evidence keeps validating, and homeschool traditions have carried them for generations, each in its own voice.

For every other philosophy, the research validates the practices inside it rather than the brand name — which, we'd argue, is the better inheritance anyway.

## Here is what that looks like, practice by practice:

### Your attention is the advantage

1:1 attention is among the largest reliable effects in all of education research — and it is the structural advantage every homeschool already has, every day. We'll size it honestly, because we promised we would: the famous claim that tutoring produces two-standard-deviation miracles never replicated at that magnitude; the best pooled estimate is about 0.37 standard deviations, with the strongest programs approaching 0.5 (Nickow et al., NBER, 2020; Kraft, 2020). That is still

## EVIDENCE

≈0.37 SD

best pooled estimate for tutoring — among the largest reliable effects in education

*Nickow et al., NBER 2020*

remarkable — most interventions in education would kill for it — and unlike a school, you don't have to fund it. You are it. RubyLou's job is to help you spend that advantage well, never to replace it.

### **Telling it back beats reading it again**

One of the most robust findings in cognitive psychology is that recalling something strengthens memory far more than re-reading it (the "testing effect"; meta-analytic  $g \approx 0.6$ , Adesope et al., 2017). Homeschoolers have known this for a century by another name: narration — the child tells back what was read, in her own words, Charlotte Mason's signature practice. Even better, low-stakes recall has been shown to reduce test anxiety, not cause it (Agarwal et al., 2014). RubyLou's weeks are built on warm recall — narration, drawing, teach-back, "tell Dad at dinner" — the full benefit, with zero test apparatus. (The mapping from narration to retrieval practice is our design inference, and we label it as ours.)

### **Little and often beats all at once**

Children learn more from short, frequent visits to a skill than from one long session, and ideas stick when they come back around a little later, then a little later still (distributed practice and spaced retrieval; Cepeda et al.; Rawson & Dunlosky). This finding is also a scheduling mercy: the tutoring literature finds several short sessions a week outperform one long weekly block — which means a real family's interrupted, imperfect week is not a compromise. It's the evidence-based shape. RubyLou builds it in quietly: math and phonics appear across the week in gentle doses, scaled honestly to the hours and days your family actually has, and last week's ideas find their way back into this one.

In mathematics, the evidence favors mixing practice across strands once a skill is introduced (interleaving; randomized classroom trial,  $d \approx 0.83$ ; Rohrer et al., 2020) — our week structure delivers it without you having to think about it.

### **Children move when they're ready**

Classic mastery-learning research shows meaningful gains from advancing on demonstrated understanding rather than a concrete schedule (Kulik & Kulik;  $ES \approx 0.5$ ). The traditional "80% quiz score" gate is a convention, not a finding — so RubyLou implements the principle without the test: a gentle observational check-in with the parent, and a plan that returns to unsettled ideas before building on them. This is also our answer to one of

homeschooling's realest puzzles — the child who is two years ahead in math and taking her time in reading. They get a week that honors both, per subject, never an average. Your judgment is the pacing authority.

### **Reading is taught, and the teaching is known**

Explicit, systematic instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics carries some of the strongest evidence in education (National Reading Panel; phonics  $d \approx 0.41$ , with larger effects for young readers who need the most help). We name the principle deliberately: popular branded methodologies built on it vary in their own direct evidence, so we recommend programs as vehicles of the principle rather than claiming brand-level proof.

### **A little guidance goes a long way**

Guided discovery outperforms unguided discovery, which can underperform direct teaching outright (Alfieri et al., 2011); guided play outperforms free play for academic aims in early childhood (Skene et al., 2022); and the one quasi-controlled study comparing homeschool approaches found structured homeschoolers matching or beating schooled peers while fully unstructured approaches lagged (Martin-Chang et al., 2011 — a small study, which we size honestly below).

#### **THE IMPACT**

Across every literature we reviewed, structure with warmth wins. That is the single most product-shaping finding in this paper.

### **Interest is fuel**

A child's developed personal interest predicts attention, persistence, and mastery-oriented learning (Hidi & Renninger, 2019), and autonomy-supportive teaching is consistently associated with motivation and wellbeing (Howard et al., 2021). RubyLou asks what lights each child up and weaves it through the week — woven in, never pasted on.

### **Nature is a learning environment, not a break from one**

Converging experimental evidence shows time in nature improves attention, self-discipline, engagement, and stress recovery (Kuo, Barnes & Jordan, 2019). Effects are modest and often short-lived — which is exactly why RubyLou schedules nature into the weekly rhythm rather than treating it as a field-trip garnish.

## And one thing the evidence does not support: learning styles

The visual/auditory/kinesthetic "matching" theory has been repeatedly tested and refuted (Pashler et al., 2008; subsequent meta-analytic work), even though most educators and parents still believe it. We honor what your child already knows, keep the load age-appropriate, anchor interest, and choose pictures or words or objects by what the idea demands — for every child.

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### SECTION V

## Your philosophy, your faith, your family's story

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RubyLou supports 19 educational philosophies, blendable by percentage — Charlotte Mason 70% · Classical 30% reads exactly that way in your week. We're often asked which philosophy is best, and Section IV is our honest answer: apart from Montessori's genuinely strong evidence base, philosophies are best understood as coherent value systems — about childhood, beauty, rigor, faith, freedom — whose academic power comes from the working practices they carry.

Charlotte Mason carries narration and rich shared text. Classical carries spaced memory work and chronological knowledge-building. Montessori carries hands-on materials and guided autonomy. Waldorf carries rhythm and deep engagement — and here we practice what we preach about honesty: the strongest comparative study of Waldorf found higher enjoyment and interest in learning alongside lower measured achievement.

Families choosing Waldorf are usually choosing exactly that trade, knowingly; our job is to preserve their choice faithfully and tell the truth about it, not to market it as an achievement strategy.

So RubyLou's promise is precise: we translate your philosophy into evidence-based practice. Whatever you choose, your weeks are built on the practices above, expressed in your philosophy's voice and forms. The philosophy is yours. The learning science is standard.

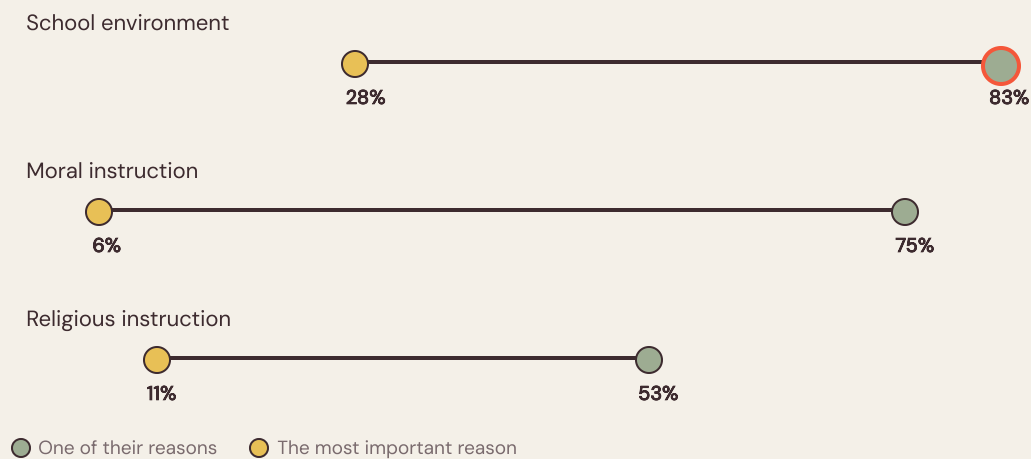
The same architecture carries a family's deeper identity — and this is where we think the industry has quietly failed families for decades.

The federal data here is worth sitting with: just over half of homeschooling parents (53%) list religious instruction as one of their reasons for homeschooling, three-quarters (75%) cite moral instruction, and for 11% religion is the single most important reason (NCES 2024-113, 2022-23 data).

Read that honestly and you see a community the market's binary shelf has underserved in both directions: most families want values and character woven through education, many want their faith tradition present, and only a minority want it to be the organizing principle of every subject.

#### A REASON VS. THE MOST IMPORTANT REASON

*How naming a reason differs from ranking it first*



Source: NCES 2024-113, Table A-7 (2022-23)

Yet **faith-centered families have long faced an all-or-nothing shelf**: fully devotional curriculum or fully secular, with the deepest fault lines (origins and the age of the earth divide Christian homeschool publishers more sharply than they divide Christian from secular families) forcing an identity purchase at every subject. **RubyLou refuses the binary** — and the idea you have to pick just one. By this point, we hope you see our commitment to choice in your family's home learning — and fluidity in how that evolves.

Faith, for families who hold one, is a lens across the whole of education — so we weave a family's tradition through each philosophy's own natural forms: the morning basket in a Charlotte Mason home, the church-history spine in a Classical one, the atrium tradition

alongside Montessori. At the handful of genuine decision points — origins chief among them — the family decides, explicitly, once, and their whole curriculum honors it.

And the mirror commitment, stated as plainly: families who want a secular education get a guaranteed one — mainstream science by default, no unlabeled worldview content, ever. That guarantee is a product contract we can test in code, not a marketing posture.

Heritage works the same way. Our design rule is that a heritage element must occupy and advance a real curricular slot — your family's history entering the history spine as primary narrative, heritage language in copywork, geometry in traditional pattern art — because research and common sense agree that identity woven into learning motivates, while tokenism decorates (culturally sustaining pedagogy literature; Dee & Penner, 2017, with honest school-based caveats; the home-language literacy literature adds a happy note — heritage-language reading at home strengthens the heritage language without detectable cost to English).

And for families whose life is defined by movement — especially military families — this architecture matters in a harder way.

#### MILITARY FAMILIES

Here is something most people don't know: homeschool law changes at the state line, and nothing protects a homeschooling family at a military move. The Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children applies only to public school systems — homeschooled children are not covered at all.

A family can comply perfectly in a state that asks for almost no records and arrive, mid-year, in one that reviews a portfolio every semester — or in California, whose filing window is October 1–15 and closed months ago.

A plan that travels — state rules re-checked on every move, documentation kept in the shape the next state will ask for, the family's faith and heritage and rhythm carried along intact — isn't a convenience for these families. It is the difference between continuity and starting over.

(Honesty notes we keep: military families homeschool at a meaningfully higher rate than civilian families, but we won't repeat the popular "twice the rate" claim — estimates range from about 9% to 13% depending on the survey, and the Defense Department's own 2024 spouse survey says 9%. And their stated reasons look much like everyone else's — faith, safety, fit for the child — so we won't pretend mobility is why they choose this life. It's why their tools have to travel.)



## Why "just ask a chatbot" fails a homeschool

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Generic AI assistants are extraordinary generalists and unreliable specialists. In high-precision domains, freeform chatbots have shown hallucination rates of 58–82% on legal questions (Dahl et al., Stanford, 2024 — legal-domain figures, not education ones, and rates have fallen with newer models, but the structural point stands: where correctness has structure, free generation invents).

Closer to home, a 2025 evaluation found AI tutors pedagogically weak even when factually fluent — giving answers away, failing to spot a child's actual mistake (ACL BEA Workshop, 2025).

A homeschool plan is precisely the artifact that punishes "winging it". It must be legally aware (your state's hours and subjects, not a national average of them), consistent over time (chapter 7 follows chapter 6; the child who mastered it last month shouldn't re-drill it), philosophically faithful (a "Charlotte Mason week" of worksheets is a category error), and materially real (books that exist, supplies you own).

A chat window holds none of that. It doesn't remember your February, doesn't know Colorado's statute from Connecticut's, and will confidently assign a book that was never written.

# How RubyLou actually works

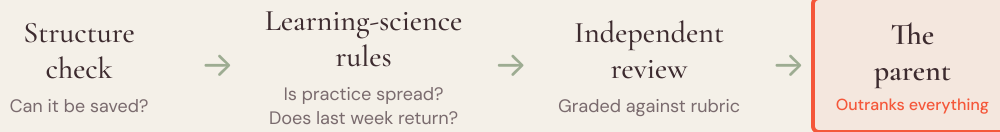
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RubyLou treats AI the way aviation treats autopilot: powerful, bounded, and never the final authority.

## In practice:

1. **It starts from your family, not a prompt.** A structured intake captures your philosophy (chosen directly, blended with sliders, or discovered through a guided quiz), each child's profile (level by subject, interests, anything you choose to share about how your child learns — from a fixed list you control, never medical records), any curriculum you already own and love (RubyLou plans around a kept Saxon or Sonlight, respecting how those programs actually pace, rather than pretending they don't exist), and your honest capacity: hours, days, confidence. Your week jam packed with obligations matters. So does the season when you move — or decide to take your little ones on vacation.
2. **Nothing reaches your week unchecked.** Weekly plans draw on a curated library of real books, methods, and materials — not the open internet. Before you ever see a week, it has passed three inspections, in order:
  - ◆ A structural check — an inadequate plan cannot even be saved, let alone shown to a family.
  - ◆ A set of rule checks drawn directly from the learning science in this paper — is practice spread across the week? Does last week's idea return?
  - ◆ An independent automated quality review, graded against a published teaching rubric whose criteria carry their evidence citations inside them. We even audit the auditor: we regularly feed the reviewer deliberately flawed weeks to prove it catches them, because a judge that never convicts is decoration. Every published quality claim in this paper corresponds to a rule our engine demonstrably enforces on graded example weeks.

BEFORE A WEEK REACHES YOUR FAMILY



3. **A discerning human still outranks everything.** Generated weeks are graded by hand against the rubric during development; when human judgment and the automated judge disagree, the human wins and the rubric is amended. The system inherits taste; it doesn't vote on it.
4. **Plans are living, not printed.** RubyLou generates a rolling window of upcoming weeks — never a whole year in advance — so the plan can absorb what actually happened: the narration that clicked, the math that needs another lap, the week the whole family had the flu. Gentle check-ins feed adjustments. You can accept, edit, swap, or skip any block, without having to go back to the drawing board.
5. **Your child never touches a screen to use it.** RubyLou is parent-facing by architecture, not by settings toggle — no child accounts, no child logins, no child-facing screens, ever.

Notice how alone we are in this: the major digital homeschool programs put the child at the device by design — animated lessons, on-screen activities, independent progression through recorded lectures.

We went the other way, for reasons that survive the skeptics on both sides of the screen-time debate. We do not claim screens damage children's brains; the honest reading is that the alarming headline correlations are contested and small (Orben & Przybylski, 2019; Odgers).

Our argument is simpler and sturdier: displacement, and no added benefit. The strongest evidence in early learning attaches to real people, real books, and real materials — young children demonstrably learn less from a screen than from the same demonstration live (the well-replicated "transfer deficit"), shared reading with a parent carries real effect sizes precisely because of the conversation wrapped

around it (and studies of device-based books find the talk shifts to the device and away from the story; Munzer et al., 2019), and fully screen-delivered schooling has shown no advantage and measured deficits.

≈180

days of math learning lost per year —  
students in fully screen-delivered virtual charter schools.

*National study; CREDO, 2015*

In its February 2026 policy statement, the American Academy of Pediatrics reframed screen-time limits as secondary to content quality and to what screen use displaces — sleep, play, physical activity, and reading — while still offering time ranges for families who want them, and noting plainly that infants do not learn from digital media (AAP, Digital Ecosystems, Children, and Adolescents, Pediatrics, 2026; WHO still recommends no screen time under age two and under an hour daily for ages 2–4).

RubyLou's answer requires no moderation dashboard: the screen stays in the parent's hands, and the child's education happens in books, materials, nature, and conversation. One further consequence we consider a feature: a child who never has an account has no child data to protect, breach, or subpoena — an entire category of edtech risk simply does not exist here.

6. **The paperwork is handled with the same care as the curriculum.** Behind the education sits a verified state-compliance database and, for ESA families, a per-state expense-rules database in which every record carries a "last verified" date, primary-source citations, and a scheduled re-verification ritual — with uncertain categorizations flagged for review rather than optimistically approved. Every curriculum arrives with structured documentation — course of study, learning objectives, materials lists — in the shape state programs actually ask families to keep. You submit to your state yourself; RubyLou organizes and never overreaches.

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## SECTION VIII

# On outcomes, honestly

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Widely cited studies place homeschooled students far above national averages — and those studies have real methodological problems: self-selected samples, skewed demographics, uncontrolled comparisons (NHERI, 2010, with the CRHE critique; we decline to repeat the percentile claims).

Careful reviews find that family background explains most of the raw advantage, and that homeschooling's measured academic effect, properly controlled, is modest (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020). Within that literature, one result stands out: structured homeschooling was associated with achievement equal to or better than matched schooled peers, while fully unstructured approaches underperformed (Martin-Chang, Gould & Meuse, 2011 — a single small study, roughly 37 homeschooled children, which is why we call it clarifying rather than conclusive).

We find it clarifying because structure — gentle, philosophy-faithful, capacity-honest structure — is precisely the thing RubyLou exists to make effortless. The evidence doesn't say homeschooling is magic. It says homeschooling done with structure and support works. Building that structure and support is the whole company.

#### A NOTE ON HONESTY

For the roughly 1 in 5 families whose child has needs a school couldn't meet, there is no causal evidence that homeschooling itself produces better outcomes — the testimonials are moving and the selection bias is real, and we will not pretend otherwise.

What is evidence-based are specific supports: movement built into the day, short chunked sessions, visual structure, systematic explicit reading instruction, and genuine acceleration for advanced learners (which research finds safe, effective, and — for twice-exceptional kids — too rarely offered). Those supports are built into RubyLou's weeks as ordinary branches of an ordinary plan, not as a "special needs mode."

## What we don't claim

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Most education technology whitepapers end with promises. Ours ends with refusals, because the ledger of what we won't say is the best evidence that the rest of this paper means something.

RubyLou does not claim:

- ◆ that homeschoolers score "15–30 percentile points higher" — advocacy statistics from self-selected samples.
- ◆ that any philosophy raises achievement by being matched to your family — unproven, including for the philosophies we love.
- ◆ that we match your child's "learning style" — refuted.
- ◆ that our reading support is "Orton-Gillingham-based" — we teach the evidence-backed principle — explicit, systematic, structured literacy — and decline the brand claim the research doesn't support.
- ◆ that screens damage children's brains or cause attention disorders — contested; our screen position doesn't need it.
- ◆ that faith-based curriculum improves academics — no credible evidence, and faith deserves better than a borrowed test score.
- ◆ that homeschooling is proven better for neurodivergent children — the evidence is testimonial; the specific supports we build in are what's evidence-based.
- ◆ that RubyLou itself is proven to raise test scores — we are new; our founding families' documented progress will be our first honest evidence, and we've designed the product to capture it without ever testing a child.

Every claim we do make in this paper traces to a source we've named, at the strength we've stated, re-verified on a schedule. When the evidence is thin, we say thin. When it's ours by inference, we label the inference. That discipline is enforced inside the product by the same machinery that checks the curriculum — and it is, we believe, the single clearest difference between RubyLou and everything else wearing the words "research-based."

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## SECTION X

# What we're promising

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We promise:

- ◆ A plan that knows your philosophy and your child.
- ◆ Learning science as the load-bearing structure of every week, whatever your philosophy.
- ◆ Guardrails that make "AI-generated" mean inspected, not improvised.
- ◆ A childhood of books, materials, and conversation with zero added screen time.
- ◆ Your faith or heritage woven through the curriculum, or a guaranteed secular one — your call, honored exactly.
- ◆ Compliance and ESA records kept calmly and verifiably.
- ◆ Support that builds your confidence the way confidence is actually built — through supported wins.
- ◆ A community that's been background-checked.
- ◆ A product that will never shame your family with a streak, a score, or a red badge.

### THE PARENT IS THE TEACHER

RubyLou is the staff room, the planning period, the records office, and the colleague down the hall — everything a teacher deserves, in service of the one classroom that has always outperformed its resources: a home where someone loves the student.



# The record behind every claim

Washington Post (2023) — homeschool growth, 32 states.

Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy, Homeschool Hub (2025) — 2024–25 growth.

NCES 2023 via Pew Research Center (2025) — homeschool reasons incl. special needs.

NCES 2024–113, Table A–7 (PFI–NHES:2023) — reasons for homeschooling incl. religious/moral instruction and school–environment shares.

EdChoice, 2026 ABCs of School Choice (a school–choice advocacy organization) — ESA program counts and fully universal states.

FutureEd (2026) — choice spending & participation.

NHERI (2021) — ProQOL burnout [*advocacy-affiliated, COVID-era sample, labeled*].

Frontiers in Psychology (2023) — parental burnout & support.

Dutch pandemic homeschooling study (PMC9221406) — teaching self-efficacy & parent–child conflict.

Sénéchal & Young (2008) — structured family literacy.

Nickow, Oreopoulos & Quan, NBER (2020) + Kraft (2020) — tutoring effects.

Stockard et al. (2018) — Direct Instruction meta-analysis.

Whitehurst et al.; Mol et al. (2008) — dialogic reading.

Roberts & Kaiser (2011) — parent-implemented language intervention.

Bandura; Täschner et al. (2025) — self-efficacy/mastery experiences.

Adesope et al. (2017) — retrieval practice meta-analysis.

Agarwal et al. (2014) — retrieval & test anxiety.

Cepeda et al.; Rawson & Dunlosky — spacing/successive relearning.

Rohrer et al. (2020) — math interleaving RCT.

Kulik & Kulik — mastery learning.

National Reading Panel / Ehri — phonics & phonemic awareness.

Alfieri et al. (2011) — guided vs unguided discovery.

Skene et al. (2022) — guided play.

Martin–Chang, Gould & Meuse (2011) — structured vs unstructured homeschooling [*small study, labeled*].

Randolph et al., Campbell Systematic Reviews (2023) + lottery studies — Montessori.

Austrian PISA matched study — Waldorf engagement/achievement trade.

Hidi & Renninger (2019) — interest development.

Howard et al. (2021) — self-determination theory.

Kuo, Barnes & Jordan (2019) — nature and learning.

Pashler et al. (2008) — learning-styles refutation.

Dee & Penner (2017) — culturally relevant curriculum [*school-based; caveats stated*].

Home-language literacy literature — heritage language without cost to English.

Dahl et al., Stanford (2024) — LLM hallucination, legal domain.

ACL BEA Workshop (2025) — AI tutor pedagogy.

CREDO (2015) — online charter outcomes [*national study, not peer-reviewed*].

Munzer et al. (2019) — electronic books & parent–child talk.

Transfer–deficit literature (Barr; Anderson; Kirkorian; Troseth).

Orben & Przybylski (2019); Odgers — screen-time skeptic literature.

AAP, Digital Ecosystems, Children, and Adolescents, Pediatrics 157(2) (2026) — screen guidance.

WHO (2019) — early-childhood screen guidance.

Named-school Waldorf tuition compilation, accessed August 2026 [*individual schools' published prices; not a survey*].

Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, Art. II(16) & III(b), with MIC3 Advisory Opinions.

COMPASS Act, S.4783 / H.R.9351 (introduced June 2026; not passed).

Cal. Educ. Code §33190 — filing window.

COMAR 13A.10.01.01 — Maryland portfolio review.

2024 DoD Active Duty Spouse Survey (OPA 2025–086) and Census Household Pulse-derived estimates — military homeschool rate range.

A Nation Empowered (2015); Steenbergen–Hu & Moon (2011); LeBeau et al. (2025) — acceleration & twice-exceptional access.

Kunzman & Gaither (2020) — homeschool research review.

CRHE — outcomes–research critique.