HOME EDUCATION
REASON AND RESEARCH

Common Questions and Research-Based Answers about Homeschooling

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INTRODUCTION

Homeschooling grew from nearly nonexistent in the 1970s to roughly two million students in grades K to 12 by 2009 (Figure 1). Much of public opinion is very positive toward this private educational practice. However, genuinely curious people and ideological skeptics continue to ask questions about home-based education. Research answers some of these key questions.1

FIGURE 1. GROWTH OF HOMESCHOOLING IN THE UNITED STATES


FIGURE 2. ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, GRADES K TO 12


FIGURE 3. ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, GRADE 8


FIGURE 4. ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF HOMESCHOOL AND STATE-SCHOOL STUDENTS, SUMMARY OF MANY STUDIES

Note: Summary of statistics from many studies, grades K to 12, all subject areas, average test scores.

HOW ARE HOMESCHOOLERS DOING ACADEMICALLY? HOW DO THEY SCORE?

Major nationwide studies such as those by Dr. Brian Ray and Dr. Lawrence Rudner and multiple smaller-scale studies are consistent in their findings (Figure 2 and Figure 3). In repeated studies, home-educated students typically score at the 65th to 80th percentile on nationally normed standardized achievement tests. This is 15 to 30 points higher, on average, than public-school students, whose average is the 50th percentile (Figure 4).
DOES PARENT EDUCATION LEVEL PREDICT STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT?

Home-educated students whose parents are high school graduates (with no additional formal education) are scoring well above the national average on achievement tests (Figure 5 and Figure 6). On the other hand, public-school students with similarly educated parents score below the national average.

DO PARENTS NEED A TEACHING CERTIFICATE TO SUCCESSFULLY HOME EDUCATE?

Repeated studies show that home-educated students generally score above average regardless of whether either parent has ever held a state-issued teaching certificate. While nearly all public-school teachers have government teaching certificates and only about 10 percent of homeschool parents have ever had such certificates, homeschool students consistently outperform public-school students (Figure 7).

IS GOVERNMENT CONTROL RELATED TO HIGH ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT?

There is no correlation between the degree of state regulation or control of homeschooling and homeschooled students’ achievement (Figure 8). Many have argued that the government needs to regulate this form of private education to make sure children learn. No research evidence supports this claim. Home-educated children in states with low regulation score just as well as those in high-regulation states. Regardless of high or low regulation, their scores are above the public-school average. Furthermore, research by Dr. Brian Ray and Dr. Bruce Eagleson found no relationship between the degree of state control over homeschooling and home-educated students’ scores on the SAT college-entrance exam (Figure 9).
WHY ARE THE HOME-EDUCATED DOING SO WELL?

Whether from high- or low-income families, whether their parents have college degrees or not, and regardless of whether their state highly regulates homeschooling, home-educated students typically are performing well above average on achievement tests. There are several reasonable explanations for this.

For example, the one-on-one tutorial method of instruction has been recognized throughout history as very effective and research supports this belief. Second, individualization, customizing curriculum and instruction to each student's strengths, limitations, learning style, and interests, is a proven way to maximize educational progress in general, and especially for special needs students. Also, providing a safe and challenging learning environment is a goal of every effective teacher, and naturally occurs in a homeschool setting.

A final example of why the homeschooled are doing so well is that research shows that social capital (that is generated by relationships, trust, and social norms) and a consistency of values, beliefs, and worldview between teacher and student has a positive effect on student learning. Home-based education uniquely offers an opportunity to benefit the practices, relationships, and environment that lead to academic and personal success.

DOES FAMILY INCOME PREDICT STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT?

For public-school students, household income is correlated strongly with student achievement. That is, public-school students from low-income homes score well below average. Homeschool students, on the other hand, are scoring well above average regardless of their families’ income (Figure 10 and Figure 11).

FIGURE 9. GOVERNMENT (STATE) REGULATION AND HOMESCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT

LOW REGULATION: No state requirements to provide to release contact with the state.

MEDIUM REGULATION: State requires parents to send notification, test scores, and/or professional evaluation of student progress.

HIGH REGULATION: State requires parents to send notification or achievement test scores and/or professional evaluation of student progress.

FIGURE 10. FAMILY INCOME AND ACHIEVEMENT BASIC BATTERY TEST SCORE, GRADES K-12

Note: Copyright © 2009 by Brian D. Ray.
Homeschooling is relatively inexpensive (Figure 12). who might have been in tax-funded schools. By the taxpayers on behalf of home-educated students university schools of education do not need to be funded for items such as new or expanded school buildings and research and teaching done by professors in. Educational costs. In addition, large capital expenditures for items such as new or expanded school buildings and research and teaching done by professors in university schools of education do not need to be funded by the taxpayers on behalf of home-educated students who might have been in tax-funded schools. Homeschooling is relatively inexpensive (Figure 12).

Advocates of state-controlled schooling often claim that homeschooling somehow takes money away from public school systems. Researchers Dr. John Wenders and Dr. Andrea Clements carefully addressed this point. They found that home-educated students actually represent a ‘cost savings’ to public schools. Drs. Wenders and Clements state, “The bottom line is that home- and private schooling is a ‘win-win’ arrangement for both taxpayers and individual public school districts.” Furthermore, the academics explained the following: “Finally, in addition to being logically flawed, the argument that students who fail to enroll in public schools are a ‘cost’ implies that public schools are somehow entitled, as a property right, to every child and are being deprived of something that is their due. This is eminent domain in the extreme.”

WHAT ABOUT SOCIALIZATION?

Regarding homeschooling, many ask, What about socialization? The term “socialization” is usually not well-defined and often refers to a perceived negative that home-educated students are not attending institutional classroom schools with same-age peers for 13 to 17 years of their lives and experiencing the peer pressure and collective milieu found in those settings. Multiple researchers and their studies find, however, the home educated to be developing as well or better socially, emotionally, and psychologically than institutionally schooled children and youth. For example, scholar Dr. Larry Shyers’ well-designed study found a key significant difference between the institutionally schooled and home-educated students: the home educated had lower problem behavior scores interacting with peers than did the institutional school students. Research finds that homeschool students and their parents are very engaged in their communities, including activities such as sports teams, co-operative classes, church activities, and community service (Figure 13). Further, homeschool children typically interact with a broader range of ages (of children and adults) than do most institutional school children.

WHAT DOES THE HOMESCHOOL POPULATION AFFECT THE TAXPAYER?

As with other forms of private education, home education receives no government money and reduces the burden on taxpayers. If there were 2 million homeschool students in the United States in 2009 and the direct per-pupil expenditure was $10,200, then the homeschool community saved American taxpayers $20.4 billion by educating their own children and absorbing their own educational costs. In addition, large capital expenditures for items such as new or expanded school buildings and research and teaching done by professors in university schools of education do not need to be funded by the taxpayers on behalf of home-educated students who might have been in tax-funded schools. Homeschooling is relatively inexpensive (Figure 12).
BUT HOW WILL THEY DO IN THE "REAL WORLD" OF ADULTHOOD?

Dr. Ray studied over 7,000 adults in the United States who had been home educated.11 Those who were home educated are like other adults who further their education in college or otherwise, develop careers, marry, and have children. But in other ways, they are notably different. For example, this study found those who had been homeschooled are more civically engaged than other adults, shown by the fact that they vote, attend public meetings, write or telephone editors and public officials, participate in protests and boycotts, contribute money to political candidates, parties, and causes, and work for political candidates, parties, and causes at a higher rate than do their American adult peers (Figure 14). Also, they are involved in community service and community organizations at a higher rate than the average American adult (Figure 15).

FIGURE 14.
CIVIC INVOLVEMENT OF ADULTS WHO WERE HOME EDUCATED

Positive findings such as these are emerging in face of unsupported claims such as one that a professor made that the home educated will not be as decent, civil, or respectful as state-schooled students.12 Research findings by others are consistent with those of Ray. For example, Dr. Gary Knoailes and Dr. James Muchmore found the following: “Respect for individual differences and a concern for others, for instance, were values shared by all of them… Moreover, these adults did not appear to exhibit characteristics that imply that they were disadvantaged as a result of their home education experiences, as critics of home education suggest.”13 And scholars McCulloch, Stocum, Koleague, and Montaudo found that the more a person is educated at home, the less cynical he or she will be.14

WHO CHOOSES HOME EDUCATION?

Home educators are from all social and racial/ethnic backgrounds: parents with a 10th-grade education, others with Ph.Ds; the wealthy and the less well-off; agnostics, Christians, humanists, Jews, Mormons, Muslims, and New Age devotees; families with eight children and those with one; married couples and single parents; those in the inner city and those in the wilderness of Alaska; sales clerks, public schoolteachers, doctors, and plumbers; and parents who never stopped being the main and daily educators of their children. Furthermore, every year the variety of home educators broadens and expands. Research published by the U.S. Department of Education, for example, discovered that 23 percent of home-educated students in the spring of 2003 were black/non-Hispanic, Hispanic, or “other,” while families from such minority groups were much rarer in homeschool groups about a decade earlier (Figure 16).15

FIGURE 15.
COMMUNITY SERVICE AND ACTIVITY OF ADULTS WHO WERE HOME EDUCATED

FIGURE 16.
RACE/ETHNICITY OF HOMESCHOOLERS AND ALL STUDENTS, K-12, 2003

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WHY DO PEOPLE HOME EDUCATE THEIR CHILDREN?

Homeschooling has re-emerged and continued to grow for the past 30 years. Parents (and youth) give many reasons for this trend. Those reasons, however, can be grouped plainly into six categories (Figure 17). The reasons are to (a) customize or individualize each child’s education, (b) accomplish more academically than in an institutional school, (c) provide a safe learning environment, (d) offer consistently parent-guided social interaction, (e) enhance strong family ties, and (f) transmit the values, beliefs, and worldview of the parents rather than those of the public-school system or of others.

FIGURE 17. REASONS PARENTS AND YOUTH CHOOSE TO HOMESCHOOL

- Individualize / Customize the Education
- Accomplish More Academically
- Strong Family
- Guided Healthy Social Interaction
- Safety: Physical, Drugs, Alcohol, Sexual, Psychological
- Values, Beliefs, Worldview (e.g., big issues in life, philosophy, faith, religion)

Consistent with this categorization of reasons for home-based education, research recently published by the U.S. Department of Education reported the reasons parents give for homeschooling. The findings also show that 36 percent of parents state the most important reason was “to provide religious or moral instruction” (Figure 18). For an additional 21 percent, the most important reason was “concern about the school environment” and for 17 percent it was “dissatisfaction with the academic instruction available at other schools.”

The fundamental reasons for choosing and practicing parent-led home-based education (otherwise known as homeschooling) have been rather stable through the roughly 30-year history of the movement. Regardless of background, the reasons are basic regarding what home-educating parents think is important in the education and upbringing of their children. An increasing number and percentage of parents are concluding that it is a parent’s job to be the main educators and mentors in their children’s lives, and that it is not the job of other adults, the government, or their children’s peers.

Further, based on research findings and their own experience, an increasing number of parents are concluding that they can do a better job of educating and bringing up their children than government-run institutional classrooms and school systems. Research consistently shows that home-educated students are doing well academically, in their social, emotional, and psychological development, and into occupations, civic engagement, community activities, and family life in their adult years. The homeschool population has grown remarkably for 30 years, and most indications are that it will continue to grow into at least the near future.

FIGURE 18. MOST-IMPORTANT REASONS FOR HOME EDUCATING

- Child has Other Special Needs
- Interested in a non-Traditional Approach to Education
- Concern about the School Environment
- Other Reasons

ENDNOTES / REFERENCES


3. Same references as for Endnote 2.


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian D. Ray is an internationally-known scholar and president of the nonprofit National Home Education Research Institute in Oregon, U.S.A. (www.nheri.org). He earned his Ph.D. in science education from Oregon State University, M.S. in zoology from Ohio University, and B.S. in Biology from the University of Puget Sound. He has been a professor of science and education at the undergraduate and graduate levels, has been a classroom teacher in both public and private schools, and has taught homeschool students. Dr. Ray does research and speaking internationally and provides expert testimony to legislators and in courts that focus on homeschooling (home-based education, home education, home schooling) research and pedagogy.