Home Schooling Is a Viable Alternative to Public Education


A growing number of families are choosing to educate their children at home. In the following viewpoint Isabel Lyman contends that home schooling is a feasible option for parents who want to ensure a quality education for their children. A variety of home schooling methods and aids are available, she points out, and the freedom afforded by home education presents opportunities for individually tailored instruction, the imparting of religious values, volunteer activities, and creativity. In addition, homeschooled students generally perform well on standardized tests, and the claim that they are poorly socialized is unfounded. Lyman, a mother who homeschools, is the author of The Homeschooling Revolution.

As you read, consider the following questions:

1. According to Lyman, what are the top four reasons that parents choose to homeschool?
2. What kinds of educational approaches are adopted by home schooling parents, according to the author?
3. What research does Lyman cite as proof that homeschoolers learn good social and behavioral skills?

Here are seven of the most frequently asked questions about home education and home educators:

Why do families choose to homeschool?

Dr. Brian Ray of the National Home Education Research Institute offers this on his website: "Increased safety is a main reason for homeschooling (e.g. physical violence, drug and alcohol use, psychological abuse by schools, peer pressure to engage in premarital sexual behaviors)."

In 1996, the Florida Department of Education surveyed 2,245 homeschoolers, and 31 percent of that number returned the survey. Of that group, 42 percent said that dissatisfaction with the public school environment (safety, drugs, adverse peer pressure) was their reason for launching a home education program.

Focusing on homeschooling, my own doctoral dissertation analysis of over 300 newspaper and magazine articles revealed that the top four reasons to bypass conventional schooling were dissatisfaction with the public schools, the desire to freely impart religious values, academic excellence, and the building of stronger family bonds.

Choosing to Homeschool
What types of families choose to homeschool?

Americans of different races, socioeconomic backgrounds, and religions homeschool. Given Americans' penchant for associations, there are national homeschooling support groups for Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Mormons, the disabled, and people of color. For instance, Johnson Obamehinti founded Minority Homeschoolers of Texas. His organization promotes home education among ethnic minorities, such as African-Americans, Asians, Hispanics, Jews, Native Americans, and Anglos with adopted minority children.

The Associated Press reported the findings of a U.S. Department of Education report about the "average" homeschooler [in 2001]. The AP story noted, "They are more likely than other students to live with two or more siblings in a two-parent family, with one parent working outside the home. Parents of homeschoolers are, on average, better educated than other parents—a greater percentage have college degrees—though their incomes are about the same. Like most parents, the vast majority of those who homeschool their children earn less than $50,000, and many earn less than $25,000."

Homeschooling has also attracted the "high-profiled" to its ranks. U.S. Senator Rick Santorum (R-Penn.) and Karen, his wife, are the homeschooling parents of six children. Others include Jason Taylor, who plays in the National Football League, and Christina Aguilera, the pop music entertainer.

The Performance of Homeschoolers

How do homeschoolers fare academically?

One measure is how well they perform on standardized tests, like the Stanford Achievement Test or the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. The National Home Education Research Institute notes, "Repeatedly, across the nation, the home educated score as well as or better than those in conventional schools."

The National Merit Scholarship Corporation selected more than 70 homeschooled high school students as semi-finalists in its 1998 competition. There were 137 homeschooled semifinalists chosen in 1999, and 150 in 2000.

Rebecca Sealfon, a 13-year-old homeschooler from Brooklyn, New York, won the 1997 Scripps Howard National Spelling Bee. David Beihl, also 13, of Saluda, South Carolina, won the 1999 National Geography Bee. Finishing second in the 2000 National Geography Bee, George Thampy, a 12-year-old homeschooler from Maryland Heights, Missouri, won the National Spelling Bee for that same year. Homeschooled students were the top three finishers at the 2000 National Spelling Bee, as were three of the ten finalists in the 2001 National Geography Bee. Of the 248 spellers that competed in the 2001 Scripps Howard National Spelling Bee, 25 were schooled at home.

Homeschoolers have graduated from such prestigious institutions as Yale University Law School, the United States Naval Academy, and Mount Holyoke College.

How many homeschoolers are there?

No exact figures exist, but there is a general consensus that homeschoolers comprise at least one percent of the school-aged population of 50 million children. [In 2001] the Department of Education estimated the number at
850,000, based on its telephone survey of 57,278 households. Sarah E. Durkee, legislative assistant for the National Center for Home Education, says that the number of homeschooled children in the United States is approximately 1.9 million. [The writer of this viewpoint], in her book *The Homeschooling Revolution*, estimates that the number was between 893,217 and 990,817 for the 1998-1999 school year. These figures were calculated by contacting state education agencies and, alternatively, homeschool advocacy groups when the state itself did not collect such data.

**Legal Questions**

*Is homeschooling legal?*

The National Homeschool Association notes that “homeschooling is legally permitted in all fifty states, but laws and regulations are much more favorable in some states than others.” For example, states such as Oklahoma are considered friendly toward homeschooling in that parents are not required to initiate contact with state authorities to begin teaching their children at home. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, however, is heavily regulated (approval of curriculum, submission of students’ work, etc.). Seasoned veterans typically encourage homeschooling parents to become familiar with their state's laws before creating a homeschool. This information can be obtained by contacting the head of a local homeschooling support group or state department of education officials.

The favorable legal climate does not mean that skirmishes don't occur. Dean Tong, author of *Elusive Innocence: Survival Guide for the Falsely Accused* (2002) ... says that a smattering of homeschoolers have had to fight false charges of child abuse. He describes them as the "more impoverished homeschoolers" who are "easier pickings for Child Protection Services." The book taps homeschoolers as a "high-risk" group for being accused of child abuse.

"Based on the phone consultations I've had with (these) homeschoolers, most have been charged in Juvenile-Dependency court with neglect, failure to protect, emotional and psychological abuse, and failure to thrive," reports Tong. Relative to homeschoolers, he says that these unfounded charges are usually made by nosy neighbors who believe children should receive a more formal classroom education. Tong advises parents tossed into this Kafka-like nightmare to immediately "hush-up and retain competent counsel."

**Homeschooling Techniques**

*Are there different methods of homeschooling?*

Families may decide to purchase a prepackaged curriculum or textbooks from publishers like A Beka Home School or Saxon Publishers. Others may choose to enroll their children in correspondence programs, like the Calvert School of Maryland, the Christian Liberty Academy of Illinois, or the Clonlara School of Michigan.

Some families opt for a less-structured approach and rely on homemade materials, borrow heavily from local libraries, or craft more innovative projects, like raising rabbits or building homes for the needy, earning Boy Scout merit badges, or taking a cyber class. Tutors may be sought to teach particular skills, such as a foreign language or a musical instrument. Homeschooled children may participate in homeschool learning cooperatives where they can join a choir, take part in a quilting bee, or do a biology lab.
Many home educators increase their learning by attending conferences, subscribing to magazines (like *Homeschooling Today*), or networking through email chains and Internet chat rooms.

Linda Dobson, author of *The First Year of Homeschooling Your Child* (2001), offers this advice about methodology: "Homeschooling gives a family the greatest gift it can receive—time. There's enough time to try many different educational approaches to find the one that best serves your child's needs and learning styles. There is also enough time for your child to play, imagine, dream, and explore."

*What about socialization?*

This question, as David Boaz of the Cato Institute has observed, is "everybody's favorite" one. Defining socialization is, at best, an arbitrary exercise. Modern schools are filled with students who routinely exhibit cruel, immoral, and, sometimes, criminal behavior. The point of homeschooling may very well be to avoid the company of such miscreants. The burden, however, still seems to fall upon the parents of the homeschooled to make their case. To that end, two studies debunk the myth that homeschoolers are social misfits.

In 1992, Larry Shyers of the University of Florida defended a doctoral dissertation in which he challenged the notion that youngsters at home "lag" in social development. In his study, 8- to 10-year-old children were videotaped at play. Their behavior was observed by trained counselors who did not know which children attended conventional schools and which were homeschooled. The study found no significant difference between the two groups of children in self-concept or assertiveness, which was measured by social development tests. But the videotapes showed that youngsters taught at home by their parents had fewer behavior problems.

Professor A. Bruce Arai, of Wilfrid Laurier University in Canada, wrote a peer-reviewed scholarly analysis titled "Homeschooling and the Redefinition of Citizenship." In his paper, he argues that compulsory schooling cannot be the primary agent for citizenship education. Arai found that homeschooled students "are keen to integrate into the wider society" by noting the high participation levels of homeschoolers in volunteer work and other activities outside the home.

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**Further Readings**

**Books**


- Kieran Egan. *Getting It Wrong from the Beginning: Our Progressivist Inheritance from Robert Spencer, John*


**Periodicals**


