

Homeschooling: The Best Choice for K-12 Education

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Education for children is widely recognized as beneficial, but its purpose and control have been disputed for centuries. Parents, whether as teachers or as mere suppliers of “hostages” to the cause of education (Mann, 1872, p. 210), have always sought moral, social and practical skills for their children to succeed in life. The church saw education as a way to teach morality and keep the flock true to the faith. National governments, beginning with cameralist Germany in the 1700s, sought to control education as a means to control society. By 1918 every U.S. state legislature had imitated Germany by mandating state public school attendance. Home and private schools were excepted, but regulated nearly into extinction. Today, as state schools flounder while home and private schools resurge, debate about the effectiveness of each has resumed. Parent-led homeschooling again emerges as the best choice for K-12 education since it meets or exceeds the objectives of parents, the church, and the state.

Public school disenchantment might be traced to a conflict in expectations: are schools for academics only, or are they society's ameliorant, "educating" children in all the skills needed in life? Researchers Brian Ray and Christopher Lubienski, homeschool advocate and critic respectively, agree "school" is only a part of "education." Lubienski notes "an emerging recognition of the difference between 'public education' and 'public schools'" (2003, p. 478). Ray defines academic schooling as a small part of the overall life-education of a child, which also includes the child's philosophy, morals, manners, and usefulness in his or her community (personal communication, March 9, 2010). Even Mark Twain weighed in, "I have never let my

schooling interfere with my education" (Twain, n.d.). It is significant to note that all states have school attendance laws, not school education laws, contrary to popular belief.

Homeschooling parents widely proclaim its academic and educational benefits. The child's peer relationships, spiritual growth and academics can be overseen with an intimate parental knowledge of the child's strengths and weaknesses, allowing the child to mature naturally. Even the US Supreme Court admits the law "...has recognized that natural bonds of affection lead parents to act in the best interests of their children" (*Parham v. J.R.*, 1979), and has repeatedly ruled that the ultimate responsibility for education lies with parents. A parent sees the "whole picture," not just slices of a child's academic, social or moral conditions. Nearly unanimous homeschooler testimony that this natural balance is achieved should be taken more than just anecdotally.

Church interests, though largely disestablished in the last 200 years as a social force, are nevertheless met through homeschooling. Brian Ray found that 94% of adults who had been homeschooled agreed, "My religious beliefs are basically the same as those of my parents," whereas a general survey of adults in their twenties showed only 20% maintained a level of spiritual activity consistent with their high school experiences (Ray, 2007). Spiritual growth, whether through a formal church or simply a parental worldview, is carefully nurtured as the child spends real time with his or her parents in a real world. A growing number of churches of all denominations support homeschooling in this era of declining church attendance.

The state's nebulously defined interests are met or exceeded in at least three ways. First, Brian Ray's 1997 study found that 87% of homeschooled children engage

in play activities with people outside the family, average ten hours per week in contact with non-family adults, and eleven hours with non-sibling children (Ray, 1997, p. 49). Secondly, after noting that "What about socialization?" is the most familiar and puzzling question posed to homeschoolers, Richard Medlin cites work done by L. Shyers in 1992 showing a social problem behavior rate eight times higher for conventionally schooled children than for homeschoolers (Medlin, 2000, p. 115). Lastly, assuming academic acumen is considered a national security, economic, or social concern, homeschoolers score higher than their public or private school counterparts on standardized achievement tests. Ray notes that previous studies usually showed homeschoolers in the 65th to 80th percentile, with results in Table 11 of his newest and largest study in the 86th percentile (Ray, 2010). Legislatures in many states have responded by shifting the burden of proof away from the parents and onto the state when educational neglect accusations are levied.

Despite numerous positive studies, critics of homeschooling continue to express anxieties about socialization and the failure to serve the "common good" of society. Emily Buss questions the appropriateness of both homeschooling and private religious schools in later teen years for socialization reasons (Buss, 2000), while others believe that withdrawal from public schools is detrimental to society (West, 2009, and Reich, 2005). One's opinion on who has educational control of children depends where one draws the line between the rights of the individual and the rights of the corporate state. Proponents of the former tend to rely on fundamental individual rights and liberties to raise one's own child (Fundamental Right to Direct the Upbringing of One's Child, n.d.), whereas the latter focus their arguments along social contract theories (Jacobs, n.d.).

Homeschooling has blossomed in recent decades because it works for all people, their philosophical persuasion notwithstanding. Parents who choose not to delegate the responsibility to educate their child to a private or public school are able to instill their moral, social, and practical skills by closely accommodating the child's personality and needs. Churches are increasingly supportive of homeschooling as children, secure and confident in their faith, become adults and stay in church. The state's security, economic, and social needs are all met or exceeded through homeschooling, with the burden of proof slowly shifting from the parent to the state. It seems that arguments against homeschooling reveal a statist philosophy, whereas homeschool advocates generally adhere to an enlightened laissez-faire view of individual freedom. With all expectations met or exceeded, giving children the best possible start in life, homeschooling is the best choice for a K-12 education.

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