



ARE THE HOME EDUCATED DOING WELL AND, IF SO, WHY?

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There was a time a decade ago when public opinion was rather negative toward home-based education, but things have changed drastically. One reason for the change is the evidence of how the homeschooled are doing academically, socially, and in life in the world of adulthood.

What has grown from nearly nonexistent to about five million in about only 30 years? It could be bacteria, such as the “good” ones in yogurt. But others would answer, It is the roughly 2.4 million K-12 homeschool students, their siblings, and parents this year in the modern-day homeschool movement. Very few, if any, social, pedagogical, philosophical, and lifestyle movements have grown this fast in the United States.

Home educators are from all social and racial/ethnic backgrounds: parents with a 10th-grade education, others with Ph.D.s; 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 son from his birth, and parents who removed their daughter during the seventh grade from an institutional school setting.

Even with the variety of parents, children, and families involved, there was a time a decade or more ago when public opinion was rather negative toward home-based education, but things have changed drastically. One reason for the change is the evidence of how the homeschooled are doing academically, socially, and in life in the world of adulthood.

How Are the Home Educated 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. In repeated studies, home-educated students typically score at the 65th to 80th percentile on nationally normed standardized achievement tests.¹ This is 15 to 30 points higher, on average, than public-school students, whose average is the 50th percentile.

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.

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. On the other hand, public-school students with similarly educated parents score below the national average.

Is Government Control Related to High Academic Achievement?

There is no correlation between the degree of state regulation or control of homeschooling and homeschool students' achievement. 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. Further-

more, 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.

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.

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 school students.² Dr. Medlin reviews other research, showing the positive connection between homeschooling and children's social, emotional, and psychological development.³

Research and the experience of those who know homeschool families find that home-educated students and their parents are very engaged in their communities, including activities such as sports teams, co-operative classes, church activities, and community service. Further, homeschool children typically interact with a broader range of ages (of children and adults) than do most institutional school children.

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.⁴ In some ways, 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. Also, they are involved in community service and community organizations at a higher rate than the average American adult.

Dr. Ray also released in 2015 his findings on the Gen2 Survey study.⁵ It examined adults who were churched while growing up. Many significant findings were revealed. For example, those who were home educated were 2.2 times as likely to be a Christian believer as those who attended Christian schools, and 2.5 times as likely to be a believer as those who were churched and attended public schools. Also, 9% of the homeschooled had engaged in cohabitation/fornication while 22% of the Christian schooled had done so and 34% of the public schooled had done so.

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.⁶ Research findings by others are consistent with those of Ray. For example, Dr. Gary Knowles 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.”⁷ And scholars McCulloch, Slocum, Kolegue, and Montaudo found that the more a person is educated at home, the less cynical he or she will be.⁸

But 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.⁹ The advantages of personal, in-depth teacher-student interaction is hard to beat, whether the field is blacksmithing, mathematics, electronics, or theology.

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.¹⁰ Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach for 27 students per group, home-based education can systemically honor the principle of individuality in children.

Third, providing a safe and challenging learning environment is a goal of every effective teacher, and naturally occurs in a homeschool setting. The children and youth are not distracted by off-based comment by 27 other students (but by only maybe 1 to 10). They children are not pressured to talk about or get involved in casual and premarital sex and drug and alcohol abuse. They are not inundated all day long by music, videos, and literature that is anti-biblical in its very nature. The distractions are fewer and less egregious, by nature and design, in a home-based setting that honors the things of God.

Sociologists consider another example of why the homeschooled are doing so well. 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.

Fifth, home education offers consistently parent-guided social interaction for children and youth. Who becomes the children’s acquaintances and friends is much more likely directed by parents than when children are sent away to institutional schools. Children in institutional schools become more peer-oriented, and suffer the negative effects of this (e.g., undermining of family cohesion, interference with healthy development, causing aggression and anxiety in children and youth, and fostering a hostile and sexualized youth culture),¹¹ than do children who are home educated. Adult/parent-orientation is biblical, and research supports the fact it is also good for children as measured according to many variables.¹²

Finally, children and adults who are and were home educated do well, on average, because their parents have engaged them in biblical education and discipleship. One should expect them to do well. Home-based education uniquely offers an opportunity to benefit the practices, relationships, and environment that lead to academic and personal moral and social success.¹³ And the reasons are many. 📌

Dr. Brian Ray is president of the National Home Education Research Institute (NHRI.org). His Ph.D. is in science education and he has published numerous articles and books, been repeatedly interviewed by major media, served as an expert witness in court cases, and testified to legislatures regarding educational issues. Dr. Ray is a leading international expert in research on homeschooling. He holds a Ph.D. in science education from Oregon State University. Brian and Betsy have been married 36 years and have eight children, all of whom have been homeschooled, and they have six grandchildren.

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Endnotes

- ¹ Several research studies are cited in this review, but the references are far from exhaustive. More complete reviews and bibliographies of research on home education can be found in sources such as the following: (a) Ray, Brian D. (2005). A homeschool research story. In Bruce S. Cooper (Ed.), *Home schooling in full view: A reader*, p. 1-19. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing. (b) Ray, Brian D. (2008, September 24). Bibliography of research on homeschooling: International. Retrieved July 30, 2012 from <http://www.nheri.org/research/bibliography-references-studies-international.html>. (c) Ray, Brian D., & Eagleson, Bruce K. (2008, August 14). State regulation of homeschooling and homeschoolers’ SAT scores. *Journal of Academic Leadership*, 6(3). Retrieved January 23, 2009 from http://www.academicleadership.org/empirical_research/State_Regulation_of_Homeschooling_and_Homeschoolers_SAT_Scores.shtml. (d) Ray, Brian D. (2010, February 3). Academic achievement and demographic traits of homeschool students: A nationwide study. *Academic Leadership Journal*, 8(1). Retrieved February 10, 2010 from http://www.academicleadership.org/empirical_research/Academic_Achievement_and_Demographic_Traits_of_Homeschool_Students_A_Nationwide_Study.shtml.
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- ⁵ Brian D. (2015, January 30). Gen2 Survey: A spiritual and educational survey on Christian millennials. Retrieved March 12, 2015 from <http://www.nheri.org/research/gen2-survey-a-spiritual-and-educational-survey-on-christian-millennials.html>.
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- ⁷ Knowles, J. Gary, & Muchmore, James A. (1995). Yep! We’re grown-up home-school kids--and we’re doing just fine, thank you. *Journal of Research on Christian Education*, 4(1), 35-56; quotes from p. 48-49, 52.
- ⁸ McCulloch, Donald S., Slocum, Sarah, Kolegue, Cadia, & Montaudo, Sarah. (2006, Fall). Cynicism, trust, and internal-external locus of control among home educated students. *Academic Leadership: The Online Journal*, 4(4). Retrieved January 15, 2009 from http://www.academicleadership.org/empirical_research/Cynicism_Trust_and_Internal-External_Locus_of_Control_Among_Home_Educated_Students.shtml.
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- ¹⁰ Ray, Brian D. (2002). Customization through homeschooling. *Educational Leadership*, 59(7), 50-54.
- ¹¹ Neufeld, Gordon, & Maté, Gabor. (2004). *Hold on to your kids: Why parents need to matter more than peers*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books.
- ¹² To keep informed of new research on homeschooling, sign up for Dr. Ray’s free newsletters at <http://www.nheri.org/connect.html>.
- ¹³ Ray, Brian D. (2000). Home schooling: The ameliorator of negative influences on learning? *Peabody Journal of Education*, 75(1 & 2), 71-106.