

## Homeschooling in America a Viable Option

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### Abstract

Since prayer was banned from the public school systems in 1962 and all religious references have been censored, the American Public School System has become completely secular in nature. Children today face a great deal of peer pressure especially when bad behavior is constantly glamorized in both the media and the press. Because of the lack of quality academics and moral guidance many parents are seeking alternatives to the public school system. In light of the secular culture of public school and the high cost of private school, home schooling has become a logical viable option for many parents. Currently over 1.5 million families in America have chosen to homeschool their children. They have the ability to give individualized academic instruction and raise their children in a safe, traditional Christian environment. This research paper examines the theoretical framework, benefits, history, legal aspects, and faith based opportunities in homeschooling.

### Homeschooling in America a Viable Option

As of 2007, the National Center for Educational Statistics reported that over 1.5 million children are being homeschooled. Because of the sacrifice and challenges a parent would face in homeschooling their children the most obvious question would be, “why have over 1.5 million tax paying citizens made this choice?” There are two very common reasons why this has occurred. First, the public school environment is unsafe and lacks a moral fiber. Second, the government has legislated public school requirements which basically undermine teachers and school officials.

At this point it is important to discuss the most common educational opportunities in America that the public is aware of. The very largest organized way of teaching students in the United States today is through the public school system. This is the easiest choice for parents because their taxes pay for it. Most all supplies to include athletic equipment, desks, lockers and books are supplied by the school. Transportation is also available. Some schools even offer free or reduced breakfast and lunch to their students. The next choice would be parochial schools. Most of these schools are physically attached to a church and may offer discounts for the parishioners in the tuition they will have to pay in order to attend (Linsenbach, 2006).

Secular private schools are popular as well, with the primary goal of getting graduates into the most prestigious colleges and universities. For protestant parents with the financial resources private Christian schooling is another option. Normally there are tuition fees, the parents and students agree to a code of conduct and participation in chapel services is mandatory. The least common would be boarding school. In many cases it is a last resort for troubled youth

who have conduct issues at home and in the community. Being removed from parents and friends and placed in a structured environment a troubled youth may improve his or her emotional stability and learn self-discipline (Linsenbach, 2006).

After reviewing the most common school options available in the United States it would be beneficial to draw two conclusions in relation to the homeschooling movement in America. First, the National Center for Educational Statistics has reported that between 1999 and 2007 homeschooling grew from 850,000 participants to 1,508,000. Second, these statistics prove that home schooling is becoming more appealing to parents and will grow in the future. In order to fully investigate and develop a well-rounded understanding of the many aspects of homeschooling it is important to understand the problems and drawbacks to be found in the public school system.

Many would logically argue that if one is a Christian and he or she believes in, and lives by the teachings of Jesus Christ the public school system would be considered void of any moral teachings. It could also be argued that the public school system is also atheist in nature. This is evident in the fact that evolution is taught as fact and creationism is not allowed to be addressed in the curriculum. Researchers estimate that students will have spent 15000 hours in school by the time they graduate as seniors. The failures and short comings of public education in the United States are alarming to say the very least (Klicka, 2002).

In 1982, President Ronald Reagan ordered an investigation into public education. This was accomplished by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. It is not necessary to take apart the entire report, but it is important to highlight some of the problems the education system faced during this time frame. Two key problems were uncovered by the commission.

First, the students graduating from high school were not competitive in the work force. Second, the rest of the world had caught up with the American system of education and were in the process of passing it by. The report is often recounted and remembered most for the opening statement that reported America education was becoming a bastion of mediocrity which had the potential to do permanent damage to the nation itself. The study concluded that the education system was sub-standard and needed reform (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

As one example the report cited the dramatic decrease in the verbal and mathematical scores seen in the SAT between 1963 and 1980 (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). In comparison to other countries the test results were even worse. It can be argued that it is common knowledge during President Ronald Reagan's presidency he wanted voluntary prayer in schools, tuition credits and the elimination of the Department of Education. Obviously, these ideas were not part of the 38 recommendations made by the 18 members of the commission (Klicka, 2002).

It is also well known in education circles that the first school system developed in Massachusetts was designed to make sure that children understood and could read the Bible. Public school prayer was abolished in 1962, but had endured prior to that time for over 200 years. William Bennett has written extensively about the moral decline in America since prayer in school was deemed unconstitutional. The biblical principles the nation was founded upon have been completely removed from the American public school system. Moral and biblical principles have been replaced by humanism. Horace Mann and especially John Dewey had very negative effects on moral and biblically based education (Klicka, 2002).

Basically, Mann took education away from the family and placed it into the hands of the government. The Humanist Manifesto was written by John Dewey. This book could be considered a blue print for censorship of all moral and religious teaching. Dewey did not believe in God, he held and espoused a naturalistic view of life. The humanist philosophy of education has led to a number of serious problems in modern public education. Apart from the academic problems in modern public schools, the moral crisis is far worse. Students are faced with mounting peer pressure; the statistics in regards to alcohol consumption, drug use, illicit sex and gang violence are disturbing (Klicka, 2002).

For example, the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse surveyed 38 school districts in Texas in order to study teen alcohol consumption. The study concluded that 76% of high school students had tried alcohol. Approximately 65% of underage drinkers receive alcohol from family and friends. It was reported in 2004 that 16% of Texas middle school students had consumed alcohol. The most common illicit drug used by students is marijuana. In 2004 the survey reported that 30% of students in grade 7-12 had experimented with marijuana (The Preventive Recourse Center Region Three Texas, 2011). While the moral decay continues to consume the public school system, the government's attempts to improve academic performance are also a failure as evident by the No Child Left Behind Act.

### **No Child Left Behind**

In the millennium no public education dialog would be complete without discussing No Child Left Behind. One inference that could be drawn from the rise of homeschooling is that over 1.5 million parents have given No Child Left Behind an "F" and have decided to take matters into their own hands by pursuing the option of homeschooling. It is important to

understand why many believe No Child Left Behind is a failure. No Child Left Behind is based on accountability. If a school does not reach certain bureaucratic standards they will be sanctioned. But this philosophy is deeply flawed in a variety of aspects. The biggest flaw is accountability through standardized testing (Bracey, 2003).

Students no longer learn critical thinking skills; instead they must memorize facts to pass standardized state exams such as the Texas TAKS tests. Many schools have cut foreign language and art programs because of a lack of funding; No Child Left Behind has always faced budget problems. From a teaching perspective shortages are prevalent because of extremely high requirements for entry into the teaching field. Wolk (2008), revealed some very interesting facts in regards to current teacher qualifications as it relates to No Child Left Behind. Many college graduates are not attracted to teaching because of low wages and poor working conditions. He also goes on to explain that 50% of teachers quit within the first five years of employment. It is very difficult to attract science and math majors to enter the teaching field.

Other than low wages and poor working conditions, math and science teachers, are in many instances relegated to work at low performing schools. Wolk also goes on to point out that in the United States 40% of middle school students are taught science by a teacher who does not have a major or a minor in science. By mandating reading and writing proficiency in 2013, the author believes No Child Left Behind will once again be a dismal failure. In the end, No Child Left Behind has created an environment that is restrictive and punitive in nature which in turn destroys morale on all levels.

When parents experience the moral and academic short coming of the public schools system and do not have the finances to pursue the private school alternative they are left with one viable option and that option is homeschooling. It can be argued that no one is more qualified to teach their own children than the parents themselves. This notion is rooted in biblical teachings. The best reference is Proverbs 22:6, “Train up a child in a way that he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it.” When parents decide to pursue homeschooling the task can seem overwhelming. This is best laid to rest in Proverbs 16:9, “A man’s heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.” This brings us to the focus of the remainder of the paper which will be examined in a five step process:

1. A theoretical framework for homeschooling.
2. The benefits of homeschooling.
3. A short history of homeschooling.
4. The legal aspects of homeschooling.
5. Faith based opportunities in homeschooling.

### **Theoretical Framework**

No matter what school environment a child is in, whether it is public school, homeschool or any of the others already mentioned there are some fundamental issues each has in common. First and foremost each child is an individual; it will take a good teacher to understand this and adjust their strategies in order for the child to progress in his or her studies. However, this is very difficult to accomplish, especially in the public school system. Today, it can be argued that public school learning consists primarily of rote memorization in order to pass state mandated



standardized tests. The teacher has no freedom to change the curriculum or even pursue much creativity in the classroom (Klicka, 2002).

Modern pedagogy is designed for teaching large groups utilizing classroom management techniques which focus on staying on the task at hand. The great philosopher Socrates taught through verbal discourse which is referred to as the Socratic Method. Quintilian believed that it was the responsibility of the teacher to bring out the full capabilities of the student. Even John Locke acknowledged no two children are exactly alike in learning knowledge. Rousseau has always been known to be one of the biggest exponents of individualized instruction. Perhaps the greatest testament to the value and potential of homeschooling takes place at home during the child's early years (Klicka, 2002).

During the first few years at home, children learn a great deal of knowledge by what could be described as social conversation. Social conversation is the interaction between child and caregiver, for example the child learns to walk, they learn to speak and develop social skills. Conversational learning in the early years may also have a direct effect on the development of gifted students. Many believe these superior students are born that way but that may not be the case. It may be a byproduct of caregivers devoting themselves to their children from the earliest years. Winifred Stoner is a good example of this, by age three she could write and by eight she could speak five different languages. Historians believe that Stoner's development was due in large part to the teaching and constant companionship of her mother during her infant development stages (Thomas, 1998).

Obviously, it is difficult to manage large groups of children in a traditional classroom. Homeschooling can allow a child to learn at his or her own pace; the curriculum can be built around the child's academic needs. The great philosophers have extolled the virtues of individualized instruction and in the public school system this is impossible. Conversational learning is very effective in the earliest years but there is no reason this conversational approach could not be tailored for teaching school children. Once the parent decides to commit to homeschooling they will find there are many benefits to this form of education. Step two will examine those benefits (Thomas, 1998).

### **Benefits of Homeschooling**

John Stuart Mill was homeschooled and he spoke of the control the government had over education and his belief was their goal was control and obedience to the state. Mill's ideas are open for debate, however one thing is certain, homeschooling liberates parents from government sponsored education. The greatest benefit of homeschooling is individualized instruction. Many parents will find homeschooling a very cost effective education. Homeschooling is comparable to private schooling in the fact that the curriculum can be modeled after any private school in the country. Some schools charge up to and over \$7000.00 a year in tuition, while the Calvert program is available for much less and it comes complete with grading and counseling (Calvert school, 2011).

This is one example of the freedom a homeschooling parent has at their disposal. School authorities are no longer in charge; the child is safe at home away from peer pressure. Homeschooling allows for more family time to build lasting bonds and the opportunity to teach traditional values and moral principles. The famous theologian Martin Luther expressed concern

that the scriptures should be the most important subject in school. Children are born helpless, ignorant and unskilled but they have a desire to learn, they seek approval and want to do things on their own (Klicka, 2002).

No one is better qualified to teach the child than the parent themselves. This is clearly evident in Deuteronomy 6:6-7, “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” Perhaps the greatest qualification a parent can have is love and knowledge of what is best for their individual child. Parents can teach his or her child family values, strive to build character through their own example, and work towards academic excellence by designing a one on one specific curriculum to meet the needs of the child. At this point the next step in understanding homeschooling is to learn where the movement originated and where it is today, that will be step number three.

### **A Short History of Homeschooling**

In colonial America education was the responsibility of the family. The primary concern of this education was to teach reading, writing, and basic math. Most students worked with their parents to learn a trade and be able to make a living. The key text book used by the colonist was the Bible. The Bible was used as a blue print for successful living. Noah Webster was an important author during this time period and families used his books along with the Bible in teaching their children. Many famous individuals received the majority of their initial education at home to include presidents, governors, scientist, college presidents, generals, artists, businessmen and famous women. It would be beneficial to mention the most famous

homeschoolers as a testament to the potential of homeschooling. The list includes, George Washington, Thomas Edison, Mozart, Patrick Henry and Ansel Adams.

The first compulsory school attendance policies were enacted in Massachusetts in 1852. By the 1900's most all states had mandatory attendance policies. The homeschooling movement faded away until a revival began in the 1970's and has grown by leaps and bounds since then. According to the National Home Education Research Institute homeschoolers scored in the top 85 percentile of national standardized tests and from a social perspective 98% of students are involved in at least two or more outside activities to include sports, church groups, music and other community involvement. Homeschooling is legal in America and is protected by the first and 14th amendments to the constitution (Klicka, 2002). There are some regulations and state legal issues that must be addressed in step number four.

### **Legal Issues & Regulations in Homeschooling**

While homeschooling is a right of every parent in the United States of America there are certain regulations and laws mandated by each individual state and they normally fall into three categories, (a) private school laws, (b) equivalency laws, and (c) homeschooling laws. State regulations and laws are divided into eight categories:

1. Age of compulsory attendance.
2. Required curriculum.
3. Parental competency and education.
4. Required testing.
5. Number of days to be spent in school.

6. Record keeping.
7. Letter of intent to homeschool.
8. Registration with Department of Education or superintendent.

Georgia for example has been known to have the strictest homeschooling laws and regulations in the nation of the eight criteria listed above; seven regulations must be met with only the curriculum category being left out. However, in Idaho no regulations need be met except the compulsory attendance criteria of ages 7-16 (Whitehead, 1993).

It is recommended that families join the Homeschool Legal Defense Association. They are a non-profit Christian based advocate for participants in homeschooling. This organization has a wealth of knowledge in regards to legal issues confronting homeschoolers and they also offer a variety of resources. Once the parent has established a theoretical framework, recognized the benefits, understands the history and is familiar with the legal aspects of homeschooling they are ready to embrace the faith based opportunities available which is the last step.

### **Faith Based Benefits of Homeschooling**

It is the responsibility of the parent to raise and educate their children. It is best summed in Mathew 22:37 “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with your soul and with your entire mind.” Parents are also responsible for watching out for the children’s welfare and protecting them from the peer pressures of alcohol consumption, drug use, sexual promiscuity and violent behavior. This is clear in the scriptures, Proverbs 13:20 says, “He who walks with wise men, will be wise but a companion of fools will suffer harm.”

The secular philosophy of the public school system teaches man's law. However, they are not exposed to God's law. This is addressed in Romans 12:2, "Be not conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Homeschooling allows the parent to take complete responsibility for his or her child's academic and moral upbringing which is founded in scripture, Ephesians 6:4 "Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

### **Conclusion**

Since the removal of prayer from the public school system and the censorship of Biblical ideals, humanism has become the modern philosophy taught today to America's youth. This has led to a loss of moral values among youth today as evident by alcohol consumption, drug use, sexual promiscuity and violent behavior. Government sponsored academic intervention programs have created a test driven environment which has left students poorly prepared for higher education or the work place when they graduate. Many great thinkers and philosophers have presented theories that center around individualized instruction for maximum learning. While many believe that prodigies are born, it could be argued they were trained from the earliest ages by parents and caregivers for academic success.

Children learn a great deal during their formative years from parental interaction which is referred to as social conversation. This social conversation can be harnessed and developed to teach their children through the school years. Homeschooling is legal in all states and there are currently over 1.5 million participants in America today. The parent has the freedom to develop an individualized curriculum best suited to the student's learning style and most of all they can learn traditional Christian values in a safe loving environment free from peer pressure.

The opportunities and the future of homeschooling can best be summed up from a verse in John, “I have no greater joy than this, to hear my children walking in truth.” Homeschooling provides the perfect opportunity for parents to create an environment that not only produces academic well-being, but spiritual well-being as well. Teaching academics and morality is the responsibility of the parent.

Perhaps a parent’s greatest responsibility in their child’s life is summed up in Deuteronomy 6:6-7 “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts, impress them on your children.” In the end, it is up to the parents to choose what schooling option they think is best for their child. It may be public school or private school but, if they decide on homeschooling the parent should always remember that children are natural learners and parents should be inherent teachers for their own children. Because of these two factors homeschooling is a very viable option in American education today.

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