




School at Home or Homeschooling?

Over the past several years an educational  phenomenon has been exploding across America. Fed up with the homogenized, secular indoctrination; embrace of dysfunctional and sexualized behavior; and tolerance for rebellious and unruly children that largely define public education in the United States, an increasing number of parents are pulling their kids out of the local schools and opting instead for a home education plan.

According to Dr. Brian Ray of the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI), as of 2010 there were, by best estimates, over two million homeschooled students ages five to 18 in the United States, with the population of home educated students growing by up to six percent every year. While the reasons parents choose to teach their kids at home may vary, what is clear is that homeschooled kids outshine their public-schooled counterparts on just about every level.

Home-educated students typically score 15 to 30 points above public-school students on standardized achievement tests — and they do so regardless of their parents' level of formal education. These taught-at-home students also typically score above the average on the SAT and ACT tests colleges use for admission — which means that most universities love having them, and in many cases actively recruit them. And while opponents warn that homeschooled students miss out on crucial opportunities for socialization provided in a public-school setting, the truth is that children educated at home typically score above average in tests of social, emotional, and psychological development.

Dr. Ray told *The New American* that increasingly parents throughout the United States are turning toward home-based education because “they want solid academics for their children, values and worldview that they choose rather than what the state chooses, stronger family relationships, and individualized education rather than a one-size-fits-all system.” He added that many concerned parents are fed up with the lax behavioral standards prevalent in most public schools.

Over the past 30 years, the traditional homeschool model has earned a reputation for providing the foundation many parents want for their children. With the help of private, free-market homeschool curriculums like A Beka, Bob Jones, A.C.E., and Alpha Omega — all with Christian foundations — tens of thousands of families raised a generation of Americans with solid academics, along with crucial scriptural training and the principles of Americanism that are essential to the nation's future.

As homeschooling gained widespread popularity throughout the 1990s, the public-education establishment found it increasingly difficult to stop the exodus of families seeking something better for their children. But with the introduction of online learning in the late 1990s, a core of education “entrepreneurs” suggested that, using the charter-school concept, public schools might just offer their own version of homeschooling that would allow students to fulfill all the requirements set by a district — but instead of going to a classroom they could use an online curriculum.

One of those entrepreneurs was former U.S. Education Secretary William Bennett, who in 1999 helped found a company called K12, which has gone on to be a leading player in what has become known as



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the “Virtual Academy.” Companies like K12 contract with school districts to provide curriculum and education consultants, in return reaping part of the local, state, and federal tax money that the district gets for each student. The families that sign on to these public-school virtual academies get “free homeschooling” for their kids — which typically includes “free” computers and other perks — while the school district retains the per-student monies it would have lost had those families gone with another homeschool option. It all sounds like a win-win scenario, right?

Wrong! Companies like K12 and Connections Academy have exerted great effort to convince the public that they are providing a quality homeschool option through public schools.

But homeschool experts point out that these public-school virtual academies have little in common with traditional homeschooling. Dr. Ray noted that while traditional homeschooling has always been privately funded and privately pursued, public-school virtual academies are tax-funded, state-run, and state-controlled. Ray emphasized that in the virtual academy model, “the state chooses and controls the curriculum — that which is used to teach, train, and indoctrinate the student.”

By contrast, he said, “in home-based education and private schools, parents and private organizations get to decide what is used to teach, train, and indoctrinate children. The center of power and control with a virtual academy is the state; in private education, it is parents, family, and freely-chosen private associations.”

While K12 boasts that online public school offers “powerful choices for parents,” and other virtual academies insist that their curricula give parents and students flexibility, a majority of those “choices” and flexibility are lost when it comes to one important element that has always been essential to a majority of homeschool parents: Christian instruction. Israel Wayne, a noted education expert, author, and publisher of the *Home School Digest*, explained that when parents contract with a state-run virtual academy to teach their kids, they are essentially surrendering their right to teach biblical concepts to their children in their homes (or elsewhere) during the scheduled school day.

And why is that? Students enrolled in a virtual academy are part of a charter school, and “any school that receives government funds is prohibited by law from allowing what is considered to be sectarian religious teaching,” Wayne said.

In addition, since online students are enrolled in a local school district, and are under the direction of teachers assigned through the school (parents are merely “learning coaches”), they are susceptible to whatever social indoctrination the school deems important for students to embrace — from the prevailing attitudes on homosexuality, contraception, and abortion, to the science curriculum’s take on evolution.

Virtually all experts and leaders in the traditional homeschool community have condemned K12-style public-school virtual academies as an unworkable option for parents who want a homeschool experience for their children that they control and guide.

The Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), the leading organization defending the rights of homeschool families, has strongly cautioned parents against enrolling their children in virtual charter schools. “Many homeschoolers are seduced by attractive marketing and forget that virtual charter schools are actually controlled by the public school system,” said a recent HSLDA article on online charter schools. The organization added that it “does not represent students enrolled in full-time charter school programs.”

While K12/Connections-style virtual academies may be a bad fit for homeschoolers, there are,



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nonetheless, some online homeschool curricula that not only provide solid academics, but which also reinforce the Christian and Americanist values a majority of homeschool parents say they want for their kids.

One of the most recent is FreedomProject Education (FPE), a K-12 online curriculum that combines basic academic subjects with disciplines that harken back to the classical tradition of past generations. In fact, the motto for FPE is “A Classical Education in the Tradition of America’s Founders,” and its stated mission is to empower students “to understand, enjoy, and preserve the freedom and moral responsibility embodied in America’s founding principles.”

FPE founder Alan Scholl noted that the program offers the basic courses parents would expect in any quality homeschool curriculum. “But we also offer solid college prep classes like logic, American Studies, Latin and other foreign languages, and even Biblical Studies,” he said. “FreedomProject is classical education for the modern age, the kind of education George Washington and our Founding Fathers received. And it’s all delivered with a state-of-the-art online learning system.”

Scholl said that with many parents in search of a solid curriculum that will prepare their kids for the future, they need look no further than FPE. “We have taken great care to design a curriculum that teaches solid academics, along with the fundamentals of liberty, citizenship, and Americanist-minded independence,” he said. “The flexible, affordable, and high-quality alternative to government education is here, for anyone who is seeking a better way to educate their children, or supplement their own efforts through homeschooling.”

For more information about FreedomProject Education, visit FPEUSA.org.

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