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ationwide Study Confirms Homeschool Academic Achievement

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Each year, the homeschool movement graduates at least 100,000 students. Due to the fact that both the United States government and homeschool advocates agree that homeschooling has been growing at around 7% per annum for the past decade, it is not surprising that homeschooling is gaining increased attention. Consequently, many people have been asking questions about homeschooling, usually with a focus on either the academic or social abilities of homeschool graduates.

As an organization advocating on behalf of homeschoolers, Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) long ago committed itself to demonstrating that homeschooling should be viewed as a mainstream educational alternative.

We strongly believe that homeschooling is a thriving education movement capable of producing millions of academically and socially able students who will have a tremendously positive effect on society.

Despite much resistance from outside the homeschool movement, whether from teachers unions, politicians, school administrators, judges, social service workers, or even family members, over the past few decades homeschoolers have slowly but surely won acceptance as a mainstream education alternative. This has been due in part to the commissioning of research which demonstrates the academic success of the average homeschooler.

The last piece of major research looking at homeschool academic achievement was completed in 1998 by Dr. Lawrence Rudner. Rudner, a professor at the ERIC Clearinghouse, which is part of the University of Maryland, surveyed over 20,000 homeschooled students. His study, titled *Home Schooling Works*, discovered that homeschoolers (on average) scored about 30 percentile points higher than the national average on standardized achievement tests.

This research and several other studies supporting the claims of homeschoolers have helped the homeschool cause tremendously. Today, you would be hard pressed to find an opponent of homeschooling who says that homeschoolers, on average, are poor academic achievers.

There is one problem, however. Rudner's research was conducted over a decade ago. Without another look at the level of academic achievement among homeschooled students, critics could begin to say that research on homeschool achievement is outdated and no longer relevant.

Recognizing this problem, HSLDA commissioned Dr. Brian Ray, an internationally recognized scholar and president of the non-profit National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI), to collect data for the 2007-08 academic year for a new study which would build upon 25 years of homeschool academic scholarship conducted by Ray himself, Rudner, and many others.

Drawing from 15 independent testing services, the *Progress Report 2009: Homeschool Academic Achievement and Demographics* included 11,739 homeschooled students from all 50 states who took three well-known tests—*California Achievement Test*, *Iowa Tests of Basic Skills*, and *Stanford Achievement Test* for the 2007–08 academic year. The *Progress Report* is the most comprehensive homeschool academic study ever completed.

The Results

Overall the study showed significant advances in homeschool academic achievement as well as revealing that issues such as student gender, parents' education level, and family income had little bearing on the results of homeschooled students.

National Average Percentile Scores		
Subtest	Homeschool	Public School
Reading	89	50
Language	84	50
Math	84	50
Science	86	50
Social Studies	84	50
Core ^a	88	50
Composite ^b	86	50
a. Core is a combination of Reading, Language, and Math. b. Composite is a combination of all subtests that the student took on the test.		

There was little difference between the results of homeschooled boys and girls on core scores.

Boys—87th percentile

Girls—88th percentile

Household income had little impact on the results of homeschooled students.

\$34,999 or less—85th percentile

\$35,000–\$49,999—86th percentile

\$50,000–\$69,999—86th percentile

\$70,000 or more—89th percentile

The education level of the parents made a noticeable difference, but the homeschooled children of non-college educated parents still scored in the 83rd percentile, which is well above the national average.

Neither parent has a college degree—83rd percentile
One parent has a college degree—86th percentile
Both parents have a college degree—90th percentile

Whether either parent was a certified teacher did not matter.

Certified (i.e., either parent ever certified)—87th percentile
Not certified (i.e., neither parent ever certified)—88th percentile

Parental spending on home education made little difference.

Spent \$600 or more on the student—89th percentile
Spent under \$600 on the student—86th percentile

The extent of government regulation on homeschoolers did not affect the results.

Low state regulation—87th percentile
Medium state regulation—88th percentile
High state regulation—87th percentile

HSLDA defines the extent of government regulation this way:

States with low regulation: No state requirement for parents to initiate any contact or State requires parental notification only.

States with moderate regulation: State requires parents to send notification, test scores, and/or professional evaluation of student progress.

State with high regulation: State requires parents to send notification or achievement test scores and/or professional evaluation, plus other requirements (e.g. curriculum approval by the state, teacher qualification of parents, or home visits by state officials).

The question HSLDA regularly puts before state legislatures is, “If government regulation does not improve the results of homeschoolers why is it necessary?”

In short, the results found in the new study are consistent with 25 years of research, which show that as a group homeschoolers consistently perform above average academically. The *Progress Report* also shows that, even as the numbers and diversity of homeschoolers have grown tremendously over the past 10 years, homeschoolers have actually increased the already sizeable gap in academic achievement between themselves and their public school counterparts—moving from about 30 percentile points higher in the Rudner study (1998) to 37 percentile points higher in the *Progress Report* (2009).

As mentioned earlier, the achievement gaps that are well-documented in public school between boys and girls, parents with lower incomes, and parents with lower levels of education are not found among homeschoolers. While it is not possible to draw a definitive conclusion, it does appear from all the existing research that homeschooling equalizes every student upwards. Homeschoolers are actually achieving every day what the public schools claim are their goals—to narrow achievement gaps and to educate each child to a high level.

Of course, an education movement which consistently shows that children can be educated to a standard significantly above the average public school student at a fraction of the cost—the average spent by participants in the *Progress Report* was about \$500 per child per year as opposed to the public school average of nearly \$10,000 per child per year—will inevitably draw attention from the K-12 public

education industry.

Answering the Critics

This particular study is the most comprehensive ever undertaken. It attempts to build upon and improve on the previous research. One criticism of the Rudner study was that it only drew students from one large testing service. Although there was no reason to believe that homeschoolers participating with that service were automatically non-representative of the broader homeschool community, HSLDA decided to answer this criticism by using 15 independent testing services for this new study. There can be no doubt that homeschoolers from all walks of life and backgrounds participated in the *Progress Report*.

While it is true that not every homeschooler in America was part of this study, it is also true that the *Progress Report* provides clear evidence of the success of homeschool programs.

The reason is that all social science studies are based on samples. The goal is to make the sample as representative as possible because then more confident conclusions can be drawn about the larger population. Those conclusions are then validated when other studies find the same or similar results.

Critics tend to focus on this narrow point and maintain that they will not be satisfied until every homeschooler is submitted to a test. This is not a reasonable request because not all homeschoolers take standardized achievement tests. In fact, while the majority of homeschool parents do indeed test their children simply to track their progress and also to provide them with the experience of test-taking, it is far from a comprehensive and universal practice among homeschoolers.

The best researchers can do is provide a sample of homeschooling families and compare the results of their children to those of public school students, in order to give the most accurate picture of how homeschoolers in general are faring academically.

The concern that the only families who chose to participate are the most successful homeschoolers can be alleviated by the fact that the overwhelming majority of parents did not know their children's test results before agreeing to participate in the study.

HSLDA believes that this study along with the several that have been done in the past are clear evidence that homeschoolers are succeeding academically.

Final Thought

Homeschooling is making great strides and hundreds of thousands of parents across America are showing every day what can be achieved when parents exercise their right to homeschool and make tremendous sacrifices to provide their children with the best education available.

Other Resources

[Read the full report.](#)

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