



Elijah Academy Homeschool Handbook

Answering Homeschool Critics

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Answering Homeschool Critics

Homeschooling is an increasingly common educational method, but homeschoolers still run into plenty of people who think they're nuts (or worse). Arguments against homeschooling are standard fare. There are plenty of education-related organizations and individuals who promote these arguments and seek to restrict the freedom to homeschool in their own self-interest. There are also genuine friends and family members whose concerns are from the best of intentions.

In either case, the arguments against homeschoolers fall into three categories: academic, social, and civic. (Farris 2010) When homeschooling resurfaced in the late 20th century, the academic arguments were first to come along. These were easily proven wrong by early homeschool pioneers blazing the trail with steadfast diligence and some trepidation.¹ The next set of objections related to socialization of the homeschooled children. Although these objections were also proven baseless, all of these old arguments are still around to some degree. A third set of arguments that is also not likely to go away any time soon is based on a fundamental rejection of freedom and parental responsibility to direct their own children's education. Of course, this argument is couched in terms of doing "what's best for the children." As they say, "It takes a village to raise a child." It is a strange argument: you must give charge of your children to those who will, ultimately, take no responsibility for the outcome.

Nobel prize-winning economist, Milton Friedman, sagely pointed out that "*A major source of objection to a free economy is precisely that it ... gives people what they want instead of what a particular group thinks they ought to want. Underlying most arguments against the free market is a lack of belief in freedom itself.*" (Friedman 2002) History has proven that monopolies always fail to produce quality and efficiency. On that note, with regard to the well-being of school children, it is the increasing trends toward centralization and standardization in public schools that should concern us all.

Homeschooling is a market-driven alternative, contributing to innovation and efficiency like all market solutions. Of course, homeschools don't operate in a completely free market – a market devoid of coercion, that is. Most notably, those who choose homeschooling are disadvantaged by being forced to relinquish tax funds to support the schooling establishment. Adding insult to injury, this is the very school system they are actively choosing against as consumers! It is in the best interest of society to recognize this injustice, and stop giving failing public schools favored monopoly status. But economic and political discussion of freeing the education market and encouraging competition with vouchers and tax credits is a topic for a different document and forum.

The point is simply that parents who responsibly set a course for home education will easily prove the critics wrong again and again, despite economic disadvantage. Irresponsible approaches to home education however, need to be rejected and repudiated. If you aren't ready to plan well and work hard at proving the critics wrong by producing results that speak for themselves (literally), then please don't join the ranks of homeschoolers. Your charge is not only to have an answer, but also to deliver results that soundly refute the following standard arguments against homeschooling.

¹ Two examples are Art Robinson (Robinson 1994), and the Colfax Family (Colfax and Colfax 1988).



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Five standard arguments against homeschooling are:

1) Education should be left up to the professionals.

This argument essentially questions the qualifications of parents. But studies have shown that homeschooling can be an effective, even superior method of education that transcends the expected effect of all demographic factors correlated to student performance in school systems. The largest study suggests that 88th percentile is the average achievement level of responsibly homeschooled students. (Smith, *Homeschooling: Outstanding Results on National Tests 2009*) That is, the sample of students in the study did better than 88% of their peers.

We should be careful throwing around such statistics, because we cannot claim that all homeschool students are representative of this sample. Nor do they prove that homeschooling is, of itself, the factor that created the success. First, there may be a “sample bias” present in such studies. These studies are based on homeschoolers who take standardized tests. If all homeschoolers are following similar methods to the tested sample, then we could say that the study is representative of the larger population of homeschoolers. However, there is no way to know that, and it is certain that not all homeschoolers follow a sufficiently responsible approach. Secondly, there is the hidden variable of parental involvement. It is quite possible that any child whose parents are as involved in their education as homeschool parents must be will do as well as homeschoolers do no matter where they go to school. In other words, parental involvement is a key factor in educational success, and homeschooling parents’ are intimately involved by definition. So it may not be the homeschooling itself, but rather hidden variables of involvement and parental oversight. These variables are more often present in the homeschooling environment than in the average school child.

Nonetheless, these statistics are helpful. One thing they conclusively prove is that those who do pursue a responsible course of home education should expect great results. Parents, even parents who are not trained as educators, can be effective home educators. The process of education requires focus and motivation – two character traits that parents, who know their children better than any educator ever will – are well equipped to instill in their children. There are dangers that must be avoided, of course. For one, parents may not be as well-equipped as good professional educators to teach and tutor the subject material. Parents may also tend to be less strict or objective than professional educators who know what kind of progress to expect and specialize in their single grade-level focus. These are limitations that can be overcome with the right approach. And when they are overcome, it works incredibly well. There is a reward for all the time, cost, and effort that the path of homeschooling takes.

2) Inadequate regulations will lead to poor quality.

While the first academic argument against homeschooling questions the qualifications of parents, this argument questions the motivations of parents with regard to academics. And what a strange premise that is, since parents have every incentive to seek out effective standards and provide their children with a quality education. Are there people who take advantage of homeschooling laws and abuse their children? Surely, but that is a different question altogether from the outcomes of responsible homeschooling. In this time of standardization, homeschoolers can stick out if they don’t exactly follow the sequence through each stage of learning, but parents who stick with a long-term



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plan for a comprehensive education based on sound philosophy of education should have every expectation of doing well. The concern should lie with the public schooling system which is making wholesale changes in new and unproven ways at a national level, and hasn't produced good results for decades. Centralization and monopoly always lead to poor quality. Competition and deregulation always lead to better quality. Economic laws point us in the direction of trusting that free-market educational alternatives are a good thing.

3) Homeschoolers will be un-socialized.

Veteran homeschoolers have all become weary of hearing the "what about socialization?" question. It's so backwards it's a little funny. (Smith, Homeschooling: Socialization Not a Problem 2009) Yes, there are homeschoolers who live out in the woods and don't get into town much. But, for the majority of homeschoolers, not being in a peer-segregated classroom makes them more willing to talk to others outside of their age group, including adults.

There are so many opportunities for socialization that the modern homeschool parent has to say "no" to some of them. There just isn't time to take every opportunity that comes along for community sports, volunteer activities, book groups, educational co-ops, church youth groups, etc.

Homeschoolers have additional flexibility and tend to excel at extracurricular activities, community service, independent study projects, extensive book reading lists, internships, and work experiences that are highly valued as social indicators on college entrance and scholarship applications.

4) Your child should stay in public school to help the system out.

This argument has two versions. First, there is the academic one - that your homeschool children would improve the average score of the school system if they participated. But is this argument made with your best interest in mind? Perhaps proponents of this argument really do believe that your children would improve the average scores and prestige of the system they have a stake in. Then their advice for you is of selfish motivation. But your responsibility is to your children, not their pride and certainly not the "system." Furthermore, it isn't a guarantee that your children will actually improve the average. Either way, it is a bad argument on their part.

The second version of this argument has a Christian flavor. In this scenario, the way your children will improve the system is by being "salt and light" and converting their peers. This is the same basic argument, and it strokes the same element of pride - pride that your children are exceptional beyond their years and their peers. The answer to this must start with humility and sound reasoning. Your goal to have your children make a positive impact on the world is a good one. And while we are called to redeem the time, life is not a sprint.

Even mature high school students are not ready to solve the world's problems unaided. Nor will your children be best prepared for impacting the world in the long term in a school where actual damage is being done. Again, your responsibility is to your children and to other individuals secondarily, not to an ambiguous "system." Psalm chapter 1 promises that your children will be blessed if they "walk not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the way of the sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful." That's a pretty good description of what goes on inside many schools. In such a case, is it your responsibility to risk your children's education to help the prestige of this nebulous "system"?



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5) Homeschool should be illegal.

...because it will develop parallel societies of religious or social extremism without common standards of citizenship and community.

And thus we arrive at the most extreme and most dangerous of all arguments against homeschooling based on a lack of belief in freedom itself. As Michael Farris, founder of Home School Legal Defense (HSLDA) points out, this argument is the most dangerous, because it is true. (Farris 2010) Parents ARE opting out of the school system in droves, and “parallel societies” ARE being created. These parents really don’t teach their children things that align with the norm. They don’t even believe common standards are the goal. Rather, they believe correct standards are the goal. Of course these students are not a danger to citizenship and community. The prison system is not full of pathological homeschoolers. Rather, it is filled to capacity with fully socialized public school kids.

The fundamental question is whether parental decision-making is a delegation of power from the proverbial “village” to parents, or is it a God-given right? Naturally, it is the latter, and governments are instituted among men to protect these natural rights. Those who put the state’s interests above the family’s interests seek to suppress, not protect, freedom. It is a true despot that decries the absence of regulation, and declares that absolute and universal public schooling should be required. Those who would deprive parents of their right to instruct their children and choose the educational venue they see as best should be ashamed of themselves. But their elitist mentality knows no shame.

This last argument does have one flaw. That is, perhaps they give too much credit to parents’ ability to arbitrarily influence the beliefs of their children. After all, there is no guarantee that your children will agree with your principles in all matters. Legalistic sects of Christianity are a perfect illustration. When the subjective commandments of man are taught in place of the sound doctrine which resonates with our created natures, the result is often rejection and rebellion at some point. Unfortunately, many of children of legalistic parents reject truth as well as the error of their experience. So, perhaps it isn’t the legalistic parents whose children are the worry after all. Perhaps it is the children who come out of old-fashioned, spirit-filled home schools equipped in all ways and motivated to make an impact on the world. These parents may have led the child to truth, but it is the child’s own relationship with Christ that makes them effective. And that is something that despots and radicals should be afraid of. These children are just not normal. They’re exceptional.

The above responses are, perhaps, not the usual lighthearted defenses of homeschooling. The decision to homeschool is a serious one. It is not enough to have a glib answer or statistic to reinforce your decision (although these statistics are certainly encouraging, and we do applaud your decision to teach your own).

The ultimate proof is not the words you answer with, but the living evidence you will present when your children are not just learning, but - by every measure - thriving in their pursuit of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. You will probably have to answer critics of homeschooling for the rest of your life, and will tire of them. Your mission is to personally contribute to the discredit of these objections by preparing your children well for the work that God has for them on this earth.



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