

HOME SCHOOLING WORKS—Pass it on!

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*A transcript of the opening remarks by
Michael Farris, Esq. & Lawrence M. Rudner, Ph.D.*

Michael Farris:

Good morning. My name is Mike Farris. I'm the president of the Home School Legal Defense Association. HSLDA was founded in 1983 to protect the interest and to advance the cause of home schooling throughout the nation. We are now a 65,000-member organization with families represented in every state of the Union as well as a few foreign countries.

Home School Legal Defense Association gave a grant to Dr. Larry Rudner to study the demographic characteristics and achievement levels of home schooled students. Dr. Rudner is the Director of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation, College of Library and Information Services, University of Maryland. For those of you that don't know, ERIC is the Lexis/Nexis of education. It is the primary source for locating educational resources in the world. Dr. Rudner, a leading statistician and measurement expert, is responsible for the assessment, evaluation, educational research, and statistics components of that large, federally funded project.

We have always known that home school students do well. Yet countless public school administrators harass home school families, and HSLDA has had to work hard to prevent oppressive laws aimed at home schooling. We wanted an impartial, high quality study that would withstand anyone's professional scrutiny. With such a report, we hoped to be able to clearly and undeniably state that home schooling works.

Dr. Rudner has produced such a report. He's had his draft report reviewed by three of the top educational researchers in the country. His final report was then accepted into the very prestigious peer-reviewed online journal, *Educational Policy Analysis Archives*. The results were as we had hoped for and expected, and we can now clearly and undeniably tell you that home schooling works.

The study that we're releasing this morning differs from some of the prior evaluations on the success of home schooling in some important ways. Other large

studies have been criticized for self-selection bias. That is, home school parents knew the results of their children's achievement tests before they agreed to participate in the study. In this study, however, Dr. Rudner collected the demographic information before anyone knew the student test results since the tests and the survey instrument were collected simultaneously. This dramatically reduces the incidence of self-selection bias.

Secondly, this study was peer reviewed, as I have mentioned, by other top experts in the testing and measurement community before it was released.

Third, it's the largest study ever done. Over 20,000 student results were evaluated. The previous largest study, which included cross tabulation of demographic results, evaluated approximately 5,000 students.

Fourth, unlike prior large studies, this study involved a single test instrument, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. This is one of the recognized, nationally normed examinations that is used in a significant percentage of public schools around the country.

Finally, despite these differences in analysis, the results of the study reveal a consistent pattern with the growing body of research on home education. Home education is producing a very high level of academic achievement. To tell you exactly how high, I will now turn to Dr. Larry Rudner for his comments.

Dr. Lawrence Rudner:

As a grant, this was a wonderful opportunity to conduct research on a topic where there is a great deal of interest and very little scientific literature. The terms of the grant were clear. I would report what I find—good or bad. We agreed that my primary emphasis will be to produce a statistically sound report. As I will explain later, I was actually conservative in my approach.

The bottom line of the study is that the 20,000 home school students I studied were doing extremely well in terms of their scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Depending upon the grade and subject, the median scores for home school students on the ITBS were in 75th to 85th percentiles when compared using public school norms. For those that like the bell curve, this is three-quarters to one standard deviation above the mean. This is exceptional. The national average when the test was normed was, by definition, the 50th percentile. Most public school

districts' averages do not deviate by more than a few percentile points from this value.

I looked at year-to-year gains. The national public school average is about 13 scale score points. The gain for home school students was about 16 points—year after year. Thus, the gap between home school students and public school students in terms of their ITBS scores widens every year.

I compared the test scores of home school students with that of students in Catholic/private schools. Again, the typical home [school] student did remarkably well. Using Catholic/private school norms, most median scaled scores were in the 65th to 75th percentile range.

One way to look at the magnitude of the difference between home school and public school students is examine grade equivalent scores. Grade equivalent scores are frequently misunderstood. A grade equivalent score of 6.3 in reading for a nine-year-old in third grade clearly indicates that the third grader is doing quite well. It does *not* mean that the third grader belongs in sixth grade. It only means that he can *read* as well as a sixth grader. The scaling of the ITBS is unique in that the third graders in the norming group took the same scaling test as the sixth graders. Thus, with the ITBS, one can say that our third grader can read the material on the scaling test as well as a sixth grader.

On this grade equivalent scale, the median home school test performance is one grade equivalent above that of the national average. By eighth grade, the median performance is almost four grade equivalents above students nationwide.

Other major findings:

- Almost one-quarter of home school students are enrolled one or more grades above their age-level peers in public and private schools.
- Students who have been home schooled their entire academic life have higher scholastic achievement test scores than students who have attended other educational programs.
- There are no meaningful differences [in achievement] by gender, whether the student is enrolled in a full-service curriculum, or whether a parent holds a state-issued teaching certificate.
- There are significant achievement differences among home school students when classified by amount of money spent on education, family income, parent education, and television viewing. The direction of these

differences are as expected, and parallel that of the public school students.

In terms of demographics, home school students are *not* a cross-section of the American public:

- Home school parents have more formal education than parents in the general population; 88% of home school parents continued their education beyond high school, compared to 50% for the nation as a whole.
- The median income for home school families is \$52,000; this is significantly higher than the median income of all families with children in the United States, which is about \$36,000.
- Also significant to note is that almost all home school students are in married couple families.
- Most home school mothers do not participate in the labor force; almost all home school fathers do work.
- Home school students watch less television than students nationwide; 65% of home school students watch one hour or less per day, compared to 25% nationally.
- The median amount of money spent [annually] on educational materials by home school families is about \$400 per home school student.
- Last, the distribution of home school students by grade in grades 1-6 is consistent with that of the public school population. Proportionally fewer home school students are enrolled at the high school level.

All these comparisons between home school and students nationwide must be interpreted with a great deal of caution. This was not a controlled experiment. Students were not randomly assigned public, private, or home schools. As a result, the achievement differences between the groups do not control for background differences in home school than the general U.S. population, and more importantly, [the achievement difference] cannot be attributed to the type of school the child attends. We do not know, for example, that if we took these home school students and put them in public schools, that they wouldn't do just as well.

I should add that this level of achievement is consistent with other studies, as Mr. Farris has pointed out. The most significant other study was done by the American College Testing Program. In their annual report, they reported the average ACT composite scores for home school students as 22.8 which is 0.38

standard deviations above the national average. In other words, the typical home school student is scoring in the 65th percentile of potential college aspirants.

The superior performance of home school students on achievement tests can easily be misinterpreted. This study does not demonstrate home schooling is superior to public or private school. It should not be cited as evidence that our public schools are failing. It doesn't indicate that children will perform better academically if they're home schooled. The design of this study and the data do not warrant such claims. All the comparisons of the home school students with the general population, and with the private school population in this report fail to consider the myriad of differences between home school and public school students. We have no information of what the achievement levels of home school would be had they been enrolled in public or private school. The study only shows that those parents choosing to make a commitment to home schooling are able to provide a very successful academic environment.

Michael Farris:

I'd like to follow up on what Dr. Rudner just said to emphasize some points. Over the years, we have been involved in many programs and press conferences where we have touted the success of home schooled students compared to public school students. Our purpose in this is not to say that we're better than public schools, although some people have interpreted it in that way. Because there's a fundamental difference between classroom instruction, where one teacher has 20, 25, 30 students and where a parent is conducting one-on-one instruction. In fact, our opinion is that the key to the difference between home schooling and public schooling is the difference between one-on-one instruction and group instruction. One-on-one instruction, just by its nature, is more efficient than group instruction in many respects.

But what we are saying, what we believe the Dr. Rudner study supports, is that home schooling works. And it works well enough for this to be a valid and viable option among those options that parents should have to choose from. That legally, we have satisfied the legitimate interest of any government in wanting to make sure that students have an opportunity to learn. And we think that this report clearly demonstrates that in a way that is significant, a way that is positive. We have upbeat, positive educational results. We think we should have the continued freedom to be able to home school our children.

Dr. Lawrence Rudner:

Before we go into the chatroom, I'd like to make one observation from my point of view. While I fully agree there's a fundamental difference between one-on-one and one-on-thirty education—and our public school teachers have an enormous responsibility and capability there—I think the real lesson from this report is that parent involvement really affects education. It's consistent with all the literature. I'm viewing home schooling as the pinnacle of parent involvement.

Michael Farris:

Dr. Rudner, I certainly agree with that analysis. The parents who do choose to home school—we simply say their success is demonstrated, regardless of whether they're a certified teacher or not, across all the various significant barriers that have been thrown at us legally over the years. Those really don't serve as a criterion for determining who succeeds and who doesn't succeed. All kinds of families with all kinds of backgrounds successfully home school their children. We think they should have the right. We're not against saying public schools are better or worse, we're just simply saying this form of educational choice works.

And with that, we'd be glad to turn to those of you that are collectively assembled online and answer any questions that you have.

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