Should I homeschool?

Over 2 million children are now homeschooled in the United States. On standardized tests, homeschooled children outperform matched peers in the public schools by a wide margin, and they are comparatively more successful in getting admitted to competitive colleges.

Strikingly, homeschooled children do not show the "black/white" test-score gap that is the bane of public and private schools. Likewise, homeschooled children perform equally well regardless of gender.

In light of these ever more widely appreciated facts, perhaps you have considered homeschooling your own children. If you have, a good place to look for assistance would be the Web site of the Home School Legal Defense Fund. But here I simply wish to state the case for homeschooling. Why should you consider it?

From my own experience, I count the following reasons as the most important:

1. It's efficient. A homeschooled child typically finishes in 2-3 hours the work done in an entire day of public schooling. He can spend the rest of the day reading, playing sports, doing hobbies, practicing a musical instrument, and even helping out with chores.

2. It's inexpensive. A mere fraction of the tuition of a typical private school is sufficient to pay for a homeschooler's supplies, books, music lessons, foreign language instruction, gymnastics instruction, pilgrimages -- and a cultural excursion to Paris or Rome.

3. Homeschooling tends to develop good habits of reading. Because of the influence of electronic media (television, radio, iPods, Internet, cell phones, video games), few public school students are now developing good reading habits. In contrast, homeschoolers display almost an opposite trend: on average they read widely and voraciously. Yet reading is the most important single determinant of the quality of a child's education.

4. Homeschooled children more easily become friends with their parents. It's natural of course for children to grow up admiring, respecting, and eventually becoming friends with their parents. But this natural process is frequently blocked when children are sent to common schools, where, because of peer pressure, they are taught to view their parents as overbearing, uncool and unreasonable.

5. Homeschooling requires that the father play the role that he really should play in his children's education. The experience of homeschoolers is that the mother's efforts during the day need to be reinforced by the father's assistance in the evening -- perhaps by his teaching a more rigorous subject, by checking homework. This "reintroduction of the father" into education proves tremendously helpful for children to become serious about their studies.

6. Unity of studying and religious belief. The best education is one in which there is no strict compartmentalization. Homeschooled children are free at any point of the day to consider the relationship between faith and reason, between what they believe as Christians and what they are learning about the world. In contrast, the practice in public schools, where children are effectively taught that there is something "wrong" in speaking publicly about God, does tremendous damage to children, and leads them to suppose that there is no truth in matters of religion.

7. Homeschooling tends to foster a lively patriotism. The reason for this, I think, is that homeschoolers often regard themselves as reasserting, in their own lives, the reality of rights that are prior to the state: the right of parents to educate their own children; the right of religious believers to seek an education which is integrated with their faith. Homeschooling parents will therefore turn to the Founding Fathers as sources of inspiration. Homeschooled children believe what the Founding Fathers taught, and they teach these things to their children as truths that are vitally important to believe.

8. Homeschooled children can enjoy the innocence of childhood longer. Let me put
the point bluntly. If you would prefer that your child not learn about (say) oral sex and condoms, then nowadays you should consider taking your child out of common schools before the third grade (more or less), because by that age there will be children in the class whose parents let them watch sit-coms which regularly deal with such things, and who will talk about them in school.

9. Homeschooled children socialize better. Yes, the truth is actually the opposite of the common criticism, that “homeschooled children do not socialize well.” Homeschooled children learn to deal easily with people of all ages -- babies, parents, friends of parents, and the elderly. They acquire a mature, “adult” mentality from an early age. (I know I'm in a homeschooling household when I sit down to talk with a friend and find that his teenage children actually want to sit with us and listen to our conversation!) In contrast, there is absolutely nothing less well-suited to good “socialization” than placing a child with hundreds of other children who are exactly the same in age. Remember that “homeschooling” has been the norm for nearly all of human history; compulsory education in common schools is a recent phenomenon, dating from about 1850.

What am I advocating then? Am I advocating that all children should be homeschooled? No, the parents' decision about their children's education should be made on a case-by-case basis, and reviewed each year. What suits some children will not suit others. What works in some households will not work in others.

What I am saying is that homeschooling is a very good thing, and that every parent should give it careful consideration as possibly the best option for their child.

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