

Hard-Won Homeschooling Freedoms Are Under Threat and Must Be Defended

Homeschoolers today have it easy. Many of us were in diapers when, in 1977, educator John Holt created *Growing Without Schooling*, the first newsletter to connect and encourage homeschooling families. Holt and other social reformers provided the support and facilitated the networks that would ultimately lead to homeschooling becoming legally recognized in all U.S. states by 1993.

I sometimes wonder about the courage it took those earlier homeschooling parents to remove their children from school before it was fully legal, to chart an alternative education path for their children when they were often the only ones on that road. I sometimes wonder if I would have had the same courage.

Homeschooling Is Going Mainstream

Now, homeschooling is a legitimate education option with the number of homeschoolers hovering around two million nationwide. With expanding numbers come increased diversity as families of all races, classes, religions, ethnicities, ideologies, and academic philosophies tailor homeschooling to their distinct needs and lifestyles. For example, the number of African Americans choosing to homeschool continues to accelerate, often propelled by concerns of institutional racism in schools, and Muslim Americans are reported to be one of the fastest-growing homeschooling demographics.

As homeschooling has become widely accepted and more reflective of our pluralistic society, it is easy to become complacent. Most of us no longer worry about truancy officers knocking on our doors or wonder where we will need to move next to find a community more accepting of family-centered education. We happily play outside on a spring weekday morning without fear that passersby will worry why our children aren't in school. We choose from a vast assortment of pedagogical approaches, selecting styles that best suit the needs of our children—not school personnel.

We may forget what a recent privilege all of this is. Our freedom to homeschool as we choose is owed in large part to those courageous parents who came before us. Their choice, and their activism, made our homeschooling choice possible and pleasant.

But the Freedom Is Precarious

Our modern homeschooling freedoms also come with the responsibility to protect those freedoms. While we may not have had to fight to secure our homeschooling rights, we should certainly fight to keep them. As homeschooling moves from the marginal to the

mainstream, it can trigger state efforts to curb freedoms, heighten regulations, and increase oversight.

Whether or not we would have had the courage to create these homeschooling freedoms we now enjoy, we must have the courage to keep them.

We are seeing this effort mount in California, as the egregious case of alleged abuse by the Turpin family has led to recent legislative efforts to crack-down on homeschooling in the state. Current proposed legislation aims to rein in homeschooling families and require government monitoring, including forming an advisory committee to investigate, and potentially “reform,” homeschooling. As NPR reports: “That could be anything from home inspections to credentialing teachers to setting specific curriculums.”

Now is the time for those of us homeschooling today to show our gratitude to those who came before us by continuing their fight. It is up to us to preserve our homeschooling freedoms from government encroachment so that we may continue to live a life free of school and school-like thinking.

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