

For Preventing Abuse, Public Schools Are Not a Good Model for Homeschooling

Horrific crimes and violent acts tug at our collective heartstrings. When other humans are harmed, we rightfully feel empathy and anger. We should use these moments as opportunities for reflection and conversation, but we should be careful to not make policy based on emotion.

Some are using the egregious case of alleged child abuse by a California family charged with starving and torturing their children in a so-called private school to call for greater regulation of all homeschooling families.

Most Homeschoolers Are Just Fine

In an Op-Ed article in the *Los Angeles Times*, Rachel Coleman suggests that “abuse in homeschool settings is all too common,” and she recommends strict homeschool regulation. She states: “Force contact with mandatory reporters. States could require annual assessments by a certified teacher and annual doctor’s visits...”

Data shows that homeschoolers excel in academics and in adulthood. To use this outrageous example of abuse to attack homeschooling families and suggest that they need more oversight is reactionary and inappropriate.

The vast majority of the more than two million homeschoolers in the United States live in nurturing homes with caring parents who are overly attentive to their education and well-being. Most children thrive in a homeschooled environment that allows for flexible instruction, tailored curriculum, community immersion, and interest-based learning.

Data shows that homeschoolers excel in academics and in adulthood. U.S. News & World Report reports that a majority of homeschoolers “who go on to college will outperform their peers.”

Glass Houses and Stones

Examples of child abuse should bother us, but we should not target an entire population of families because we are worried about a few bad apples. Crimes against children by public schoolteachers are appallingly common throughout the United States; yet, we don’t stereotype all teachers as potential predators.

In his book, *The Corrupt Classroom*, Lance Izumi of the Pacific Research Institute reports: “In 2014 alone there were 781 reported sex crimes by teachers and other employees. That is an average of 15 students per week who were sexually victimized by school personnel.”

We must do our best to try to protect children while also not infringing on the privacy and freedom of law-abiding citizens. Interestingly, Iowa is one of the states trying to more aggressively regulate homeschoolers. An article in last week's *Des Moines Register* calls for an end to the private homeschooling option, stating: "Licensed educators are mandatory reporters of child abuse, are held to high standards for preparation and professional conduct, must be fingerprinted, and undergo background checks. Yet Iowa allows anyone to 'teach' their own and up to four unrelated children."

But in March 2017, the *Des Moines Register* reported on a case of a long-time Iowa public high school teacher charged with a sex crime against a student. In September, the 61-year-old teacher was sentenced to prison for repeated sexual assault. He had been a licensed Iowa school teacher since 1978.

The larger point is that children are vulnerable and can't always be protected, whether at school or at home. We must do our best to try to protect children while also not infringing on the privacy and freedom of law-abiding citizens. For most children, parents are their best protectors and the ones most able to ensure their well-being. We should be outraged when parents and teachers abuse children, but we should make public policy based on reason, not rage.