This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our Subscriber Agreement and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit www.djreprints.com.

https://www.wsj.com/opinion/why-send-a-child-to-public-school-45a3a2c2

OPINION COMMENTARY Follow

Why Send a Child to Public School?

The common query about home schooling should be flipped.

By Brian D. Ray
Sept. 2, 2026 12:39 pm ET

Why home-school your children? The question should be flipped. Why *not* continue the schooling you started with your children at birth? Is there compelling evidence for sending one's child to institutional school rather than continuing parent-directed, home-based education?

Podcasters call home schooling "trickle-down stupidity," and teachers unions warn against it. But home schooling has surged to more than three million students nationwide—roughly twice the national Catholic-school enrollment.

For most of history, home-based education was normal. Parents and other adults took on the tasks of teaching children language, morals, practical skills, religion, reading, trades and habits needed for adult life. Mass institutional schooling is comparatively recent. Yet today we treat it as the default and ask home-school parents to defend their choice.

Why not reverse the burden of proof? Our May systematic review covers four decades of home-school research. Fifteen of 24 studies of academic achievement—62%—reported positive outcomes for home-school students compared with institutionally schooled students. Sixteen of 25 studies—64%—on social and emotional development found positive outcomes for the home educated. Thirteen of 24 studies—54%—examining later adult

outcomes found positive results. Most of the other studies found no differences.

These studies don't prove home schooling causes every advantage. It is difficult to control for all variables. But the evidence doesn't support the presumption that children need institutional schooling for sound academic or social development.

Other evidence should also raise questions. The 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress found about 7 in 10 eighth-grade public-school students scored below NAEP Proficient in mathematics and reading. Nearly 1 in 5 American 15-year-olds report being bullied at least several times a month, and 13% don't feel safe in hallways, cafeterias, restrooms or other places at school. Research shows that 11.7% of Americans report experiencing at least one form of school-employee sexual misconduct during K-12.

Consider what a caring, attentive home-education environment naturally makes possible: more adult-child conversation; curriculum fitted to a child's strengths, weaknesses and interests; greater flexibility; more time to read and pursue subjects deeply; stronger family interaction; and more contact with people of different ages.

We shouldn't be surprised children do well in such an environment. Parents have already spent years teaching preschoolers to speak, ask questions, count and understand the world. Why would we think that at age 5 this process should stop?

If educators and policymakers want children to receive the best education possible, they should treat home education as the default option—not an eccentric one. Why not home-school?

Mr. Ray is president of the National Home Education Research Institute.

Children listen to a home school lesson in Turner, Maine, April 6, 2022. RUSS DILLINGHAM/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Further Reading

OPINION **Florida, Vaccines and Religious Liberty**

Mamdani Clashes With Teachers Union, Citing Fiscal Constraints

A West Point for Space? Trump Calls for New Academy to Train Space Personnel

OPINION **Parents, Know Your Rights as School Begins**

OPINION **Jason Arday and What's Wrong With DEI**

Videos