



Harvard's homeschool haters

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“It’s the state that’s empowering parents to do anything with children. To take them home, to have custody, to make any kind of decision about that.”

No, the subheading is not a twisted thought of the late Joe Stalin or some other power-mad foreign dictator. It was uttered by visiting Harvard law professor James Dwyer, who also believes parent-child relationships exist because “the state confers legal parenthood.”

And it’s not only Dwyer who believes that parents are nothing more than lowly subjects of a totalitarian regime. Elizabeth Bartholet, another Harvard law professor, has a particular disdain for parents who homeschool, claiming that many promote racial segregation and female subservience, question science and “are determined to keep their children from exposure to views that might enable autonomous choice about their future lives.” She calls for “a radical transformation in the homeschooling regime, and a related rethinking of child rights and reframing of constitutional doctrine.” She also “recommends a presumptive ban on homeschooling, with the burden on parents to demonstrate justification for permission to homeschool.”

And most insanely, referring to parents, she says “I think it’s always dangerous to put powerful people in charge of the powerless, and to give the powerful ones total authority.”

All this fear and loathing of mom and dad will culminate in a conference at Harvard in June where serious intellectual types will try to figure out how to best liberate children from their knuckle-dragging progenitors, and force them to attend a government school.

Fortunately, homeschooling parents, who shun traditional schools for many reasons, are not going quietly into submission. Mark Tapson, a Fellow at the David Horowitz Freedom Center, homeschools his kids and intends to do so through college. He and his wife avoid public schools because “the leftist-dominated education system from top to bottom is a toxic mix of incompetence, political indoctrination, bureaucratic indifference, and increasing lawlessness among the students themselves as school authorities refuse to discipline certain demographic groups.”

Homeschooling mother of four, Cato Institute scholar and Harvard alum Kerry McDonald points out that many parents homeschool because their kids were abused at their public school, “whether it’s widespread bullying by peers or, tragically, rampant abuse by teachers and school administrators themselves.”

McDonald also takes great exception to Bartholet’s suggestion that public schooling is necessary because it exposes children to democratic values. Citing a 2017 survey by the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, she writes that “37 percent of Americans could not identify one right protected by the First Amendment of the US Constitution, and more than half of them erroneously believe that undocumented immigrants have no constitutional rights. Worrying about homeschoolers’ civic education when public schools are seemingly floundering in this regard is misguided.”

Coincidentally, at the same time the media caught wind of the anti-parent rants emanating from Harvard, the 2018 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results of the history, geography and civics test for 8th graders were released. Not pretty. The level of proficiency for our conventionally schooled students is scandalous. Less than a quarter are at or above the proficient level in the three subject areas, and only 15 percent are in U.S. history. (The assessment is given predominantly to traditional public schoolers, but some private and charter school students are tested. Worth noting is that Catholic schools did far better on the test than did public schools.)

In fact, the great majority of peer-reviewed studies on homeschooling finds that kids educated by their parents generally outperform their traditionally schooled counterparts in various ways. For example, 78 percent of the studies on academic achievement show a positive effect for homeschooled students. Also 11 of 16 studies on “success into adulthood” show positive outcomes for the homeschooled compared to those in conventional schools, and four of the studies find no significant difference. Only one study reveals an advantage for traditionally schooled students.

But when you have an agenda, facts are secondary, at best. Not surprisingly, the teachers unions are also against homeschooling. The California Teachers Association maintains that allowing parents to homeschool their children without a blessing from the state results in “educational anarchy.” The National Education Association believes that “homeschooling programs based on parental choice cannot provide the student with a comprehensive education experience... Instruction should be by persons who are licensed by the appropriate state education licensure agency, and a curriculum approved by the state department of education should be used.”

According to the latest numbers from the National Center for Education Statistics, about 1.7 million kids are homeschooled in the United States. Much to the consternation of Ivy League elitists, the teachers unions and other big government authoritarians, that number undoubtedly will increase if Covid-19 continues to be a threat for a protracted period – by how much is anyone’s guess. But however many, homeschool parents need to be aware that a (power) hungry wolf is perennially lurking at the door.