

Testimony in support of SB 809

by Dorothy Karman

Board member, the Oregon Christian Home Education Association Network

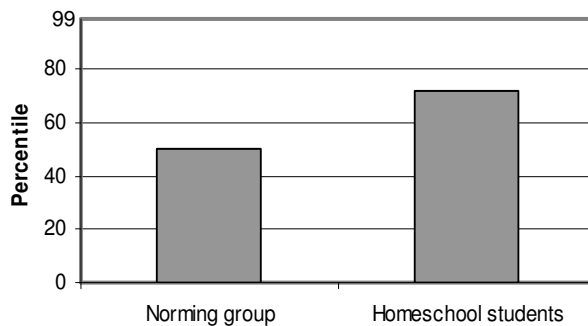
SB 809 removes testing requirements for most homeschoolers. (Those homeschool students desiring to participate in interscholastic activities continue to take tests to qualify for participation.) SB 809 also retains notification requirements for all homeschoolers.

Homeschoolers in Oregon have been taking standardized achievement tests since 1986 and the results have consistently shown that the average homeschooler scores 20 percentile points higher than the norm.

Usually for ease of visually representing homeschool achievement in research reports, the results of standardized achievement tests for homeschoolers are reported as a median score compared to the median norm. For example:

Chart 1:

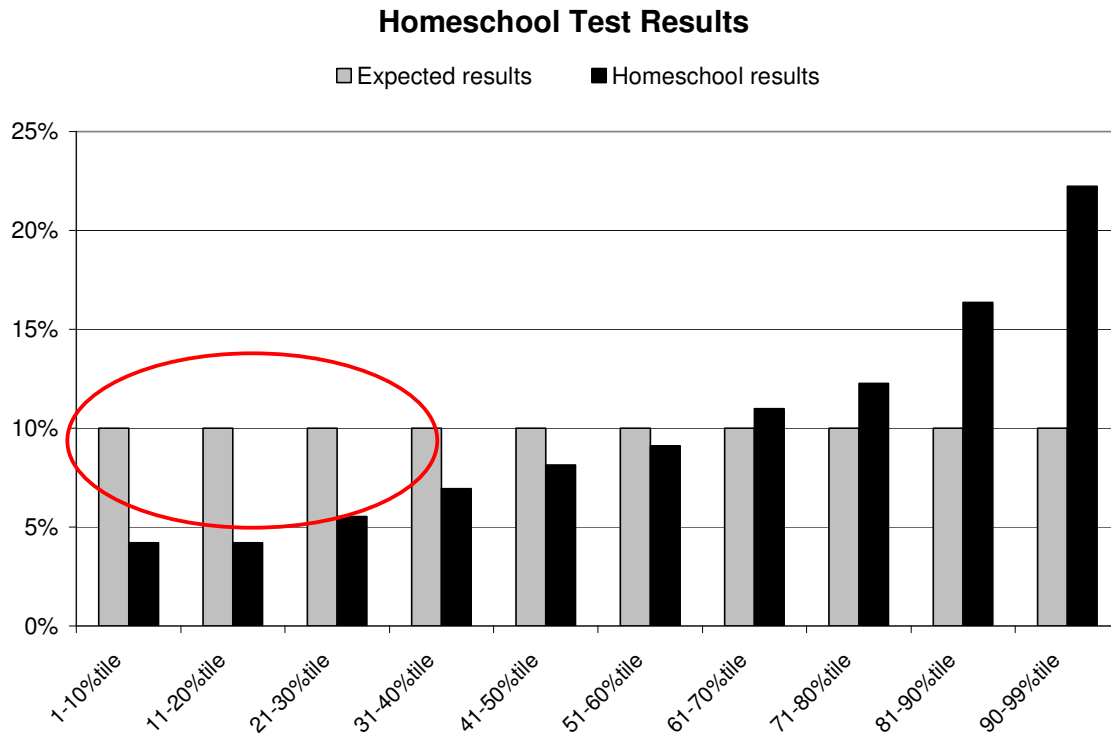
Median score on standardized achievement tests



Source: Oregon Department of Education, Homeschool test scores for 1998, <http://www.ode.state.or.us/teachlearn/specialty/home/1998/scores98.pdf>

While this is an informative way to display that on average homeschool students are doing very well, looking at the data in detail is even more revealing.

Chart 2:



Source: Oregon Department of Education, Homeschool test scores for 1998,
<http://www.ode.state.or.us/teachlearn/specialty/home/1998/scores98.pdf>

The grey bars indicate the percentage of students expected to fall within the percentile ranges on a nationally-normed standardized test.

The black bars indicate the percentage of Oregon homeschool students that fell within the percentile ranges on the tests. As you can see, the trend for homeschoolers is toward scoring at the high end of the tests.

But a more intriguing question raises itself: Where are the homeschool students we would expect to be scoring in the lower percentiles (indicated by the oval in the diagram)? They obviously scored higher than one would expect from a group of students taking the test. This seems to indicate that, as an educational methodology, homeschooling improves learning for all students, but especially for the ones on the lower half of the chart.

The students on the low end of the chart are the ones for whom the tests are high stake. If they don't make the 15th percentile, they are in jeopardy of being sent to a classroom for their education. They will be moving from a one-on-one teaching situation where the teacher cares passionately about their success to a classroom of 25 to 30 students where even the most caring and compassionate teacher does not have enough time to meet everyone's needs. So under the current testing system for homeschool students, the students in most need of one-on-one attention are those at risk of being sent to a classroom situation.

Additionally, a snap-shot test like standardized testing for any student whether low achieving or high achieving cannot indicate which method of education will be best for that child. Pick any one of the students in the test sample above and look at his or her test score. It is as impossible to tell if the student is doing better or worse than he would in a classroom as it would be to give a classroom student a standardized achievement test to determine whether or not he or she should homeschool.

You have received written testimony from two of our committee members, Deborah Keller and Joyce Padilla. Their testimony highlights the absurdity of testing homeschoolers with standardized achievement tests on both ends of the achievement spectrum.

Deborah Keller states, homeschool testing is “an exercise in futility: Our 11-year-old son tested above 12th grade level two years ago. We are currently evaluating whether to enroll him in homeschool college. There is no academic reason for him to take 5th grade test this year.”

I include Joyce Padilla’s testimony in full because it highlights the problem of achievement testing for those on the low end of the spectrum:

“Having homeschooled children (foster and adopted) that come from a family of drug and alcohol abuse, learning is most often at a slower pace due to drug & alcohol influences on their development. These children can learn and do learn, but process slower or differently than the norm. Testing at the grade level associated with their chronological age is often a challenge for them. For example, age-wise the child would be taking the 8th grade test, but is academically at a 5/6th grade level due to his special needs. To mandate a given test (whether 3rd, 5th, 8th, or 10th) to a child of this nature only sends the message that they are a failure when indeed they are the ones who have overcome so much.”

Joyce sums up the best method of evaluating our children’s progress:

“As a parent, I see the progress that this child is making and his love for learning. Each year he moves further ahead. The standardized achievement testing is not a valid means of determining his academic progress and I ask that you release us from the mandated testing for the sake of the children.”

As a board member of OCEANetwork, I echo Joyce’s plea: release homeschool students from mandated testing for the sake of the children.

Thank you for your consideration of SB 809.

Respectfully submitted,
Dorothy Karman
The Oregon Christian Home Education Association Network