

Testimony on House Bill 2108, related to homeschooling

By **Brian D. Ray, Ph.D.**

Resident of Salem, Oregon March 8, 2017

Honorable Madams, Sirs, and Fellow Citizens,

Thank you for allowing me to address you regarding HB 2108.

My name is Brian Ray. I hold a Ph.D. in science education from Oregon State University, an M.S. in zoology from Ohio University, a B.S. in biology from the University of Puget Sound, and a teaching degree from Oregon State University. I am a former classroom teacher in public and private schools and professor of education. I have been doing original research and following the research of others on homeschooling for about 33 years. I am regularly interviewed by state, national, and international media, testify in courts and legislatures, and present research at professional meetings.

There are four main reasons why HB 2108 is a good idea and should be promoted and passed.

First, there is no empirical or research-based reason for the State mandating that students in this form of private education, homeschooling, be registered or administered achievement tests. Two major nationwide studies, that included Oregon, have been done. (One of these studies involved over 5,000 students and the other over 11,000 students. Both were done by me and both were published in academic journals.) The data showed no correlation between the degree of State control or regulation of homeschooling and homeschool students' test scores.

That is, evidence shows that mandating registration and/or testing has no effect on these children's learning. That is, there is not even a correlation or pattern of association. There must be at least a correlation for anyone to claim there might be a cause-and-effect relationship between state regulation and test scores. There is not even a correlation.

Citizens in 11 states have more choice and freedom than do Oregonians. Oregon should be a pro-choice state in terms of educational freedom.

Second, homeschool students in Oregon and across the nation score, on average, 15 to 30 percentile points higher than public school students (Murphy, 2012; Ray, 2013). Study after study for 30 years by others and myself show this. And there are many important reasons why they do, or do not, do so well.

Homeschool students do not score above average because the State controls them more or less. They do not score above average because the State requires them to be registered, or not. They do not score above average because their parents have or have not been State-certified teachers. They do not score above average because they have high or low incomes. They do not score well because homeschooling families get any tax dollars from their neighbors or the State. They do not score perform above average because their skin is white, brown, or black.

However, homeschoolers do very well, on average, because

- (a) they get an individualized or customized education,
- (b) plenty of curriculum materials and learning co-operatives are available to them,
- (c) they get a lot of one-on-one instruction,
- (d) they have fewer distractions than in an institutional school,

- (e) they experience a very small class size,
- (f) their schooling time includes a high proportion of academic engaged time,
- (g) they can master the knowledge and skills before moving on instead of moving on because the material must get covered by the end of May,
- (h) there is a lot of social capital involved in their education, and
- (i) they have teachers who love them so much they will teach for free, no salary.

The third reason that HB 2108 is a good idea is that it is **fairer and more equitable** than the current law regarding homeschooling. The current law penalizes parents and children who are involved in private home-based education. It penalizes them if they score below a certain percentile by potentially forcing the child to attend a public or private institutional school. It treats the parent and the child as failures and blames the homeschooling. If a public school student scores below 15th percentile – and about 15 percent of them do – the teacher, school, parent, and child are not all blamed and the student is not forced by the State to attend private school or be homeschooled. (Nor are private school students and parents treated this way.)

Likewise, the State does not control and regulate the registration, teaching, learning, and test scores of private education in the form of Catholic, Christian, Lutheran, New Age, and secular or atheist private schools and their students, parents, and teachers. Homeschooling is also private education and does not take tax dollars and should not be under the control of or be accountable to the State. The current homeschool law is discriminatory, biased, and unfair.

Finally, the **fourth reason** is that there is intense national debate by scholars, educators, and policymakers about the wisdom and effectiveness of using test scores to control and try to improve teaching and learning in public schools. These people, based on mountains and decades of research, cannot even come to solid and valid conclusions about using tests to regulate public schools that are funded by billions of taxpayers' dollars. With that ambiguity and constant debate in mind, it makes even less sense – actually, no sense – to try to use registration, testing, and test scores to control and regulate private homeschoolers. There is no research to suggest such is a good idea and, furthermore, homeschoolers do not take a penny of money from their neighbor-taxpayers.

Also, I want to alert you to **an important misleading allegation** about homeschool parents. There is an organization and some individuals who have claimed that homeschooling must be controlled or regulated more because some parents who homeschool, or claim they are homeschooling, do evil things to their children. This claim is related to abuse and child fatalities. First, the limited data that exist on this show that legally homeschooled students have 40% fewer fatalities than the national average (*Homeschool Child Fatalities Fewer Than The National Average*, 2017). In addition, an organization (Coalition for Responsible Home Education, that operates Homeschooling's Invisible Children) that claims there is a problem with homeschooling and abuse, admitted in their own paper that they found no statistically significant difference between general public and homeschool (with homeschooling very loosely defined) fatality rates (Ray, 2016). Further, one of the only two studies ever done on this topic found that those who were homeschooled were significantly less likely to have been sexually abused as minors than were those who were public schooled (Ray, 2015).

In conclusion, HB 2108 should be promoted and passed for several very good reasons.

- First, it is based on research, and no research contradicts it.
- Second, homeschooling students do well academically for several obvious and sound reasons and not because some law requires them to be registered and tested.

- Third, this law is much fairer and equitable than the current situation. Oregon homeschools today are treated by the State of Oregon as a second-class educational choice and this is done in a biased and discriminatory way with absolutely no basis. Homeschooling law should not be used as a pre-emptive dragnet to try to catch parents doing bad things to or educationally neglecting their children; further, this does not work.
- Finally, the public-school world in Oregon and across the nation has no sound agreement on the value of achievement testing to control learning in tax-funded public schools. It makes no sense at all, and there is no research base to support the idea of using testing to control and regulate the private form of education called homeschooling, that costs Oregon taxpayers nothing and saves them many millions of dollars – \$366 million or more – every year.

Here are a few more reasons why HB 2018 is a good idea:

1. Homeschool families save Oregon taxpayers and estimated \$366 million or more per year. The more students who are homeschooled, the less taxes have to be raised.
2. If Oregon ESDs (Education Service Districts) are freed from monitoring and controlling private homeschooling education, the more taxes will be saved.
3. The more children who are homeschooled, the more likely it is that more Oregon children will have higher achievement test scores and more success in life.

I welcome you to communicate with me about any my testimony. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

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