

Why Educate
AT HOME

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One of the most difficult interview questions to answer honestly is: “What’s something you believe to be true, yet very few people agree with you?” My go-to, hypothetical answer has always been, “That students thrive best when educated at home.” And since home education continues to produce stellar results, the “...yet very few people agree with you” part of the question has become less and less applicable. Home education, in general, no longer carries the stigma of past decades. In 2018, [Business Insider](#) argued that homeschooling could be the “smartest way to teach kids in the 21st century,” citing the successes of home educated students when compared to brick and mortar school kids in college and beyond. Home education was becoming mainstream, or at least less marginal, even before it became ubiquitous during the last months of the 2020 school year. While many are now forced to educate at home, the fact is, there has never been a better time in the history of the world to educate at home than right now. I don’t only mean in terms of school closures and social distancing, rather, I’m referring more to the countless opportunities home educators currently have at their disposal.

For most of history, only the very wealthy could afford a private, home education for their children. Tutors were sometimes procured, or, in some cases, children were sent to distant lands to study under learned masters. This sort of outsourced education—or, bespoke tutoring as a recent [Vanity Fair](#) article calls it—due to the tremendous financial cost, has only normally been accessible to the upper echelons of society. They often pursue the liberal (free) arts (skills), rather than learning a trade or some domestic occupation. And while it is true that any acquisition of knowledge or skill is indeed education, a classical or liberal education, as we think of it today, was for a long time completely out of reach for the vast majority of people.

In this country, public schooling was largely preceded by private education of two broad types:

Village schools

One-room schoolhouses where a teacher was hired by the families of a community to teach basic skills to the children.

At Home

Especially in the early days of America, children were educated at home by their parents. In both situations, a classical education was the standard by which one was deemed “educated”. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln, to name just a few, were educated privately at home. Liberal, that is, freely chosen, education was in the hands of the parents, whether collectively as in the village schools with a teacher who could be voted out, for example, or individually as in the colonial or pioneering homeschools. Although limited in terms of resources when compared with today’s situation, these educational types produced nearly all of the great statesmen and most important figures in America’s early history. However, the free choice to pursue a classical education or not, just like most freedoms, would subsequently come under attack.

The modern invention of compulsory schooling, such as we are all accustomed to today, arrived when the Prussian system of education was adopted in the US. This system demanded that children be schooled by the State rather than privately. The homeschooling families and one-room schoolhouses that had served the needs of American children since its founding were gradually and forcibly uncoupled of their duties. The large majority of Americans were compelled to attend the State-run institutions erected in nearly every neighborhood across the nation. There could no longer be any truly “liberal” pursuits once schooling was forced upon students from the outside. Brick and mortar schools were fashioned in the mold of the Industrial Revolution and worked like factories churning out controlled commodities in the place of free-thinking individuals. This was the new normal for well over a century.

But that is not the end of the story. If the current pandemic has taught us anything about education, it is that these institutional, brick and mortar schools—from local kindergartens to elite universities—are not equipped to adapt and thrive in such a crisis. No amount of funding or training will ever be able to change the fact that brick and mortar schools were made for schooling children outside the home and outside the family. Therefore, they will never make the necessary adjustments to prosper in home education, which is neither their ultimate goal nor their constitution. They expect to simply make do in some cases with a day school/online-hybrid option and expect thereafter to either return to their natural modus operandi, when they are allowed to do so, or they will perish.



In any case, this presents an untenable situation for many families who depend upon two incomes. Since parents are having to figure out how to adjust to their children learning at home part or full time—possibly giving up work and income that could be attained were the children in school—more and more parents are asking themselves, “Is there an easier way to do this”? And if the children are going to be distance learning anyway, is there a preferable curriculum to the one offered by the local school? The situation is obliging parents to take a more active role in the education of their children, and they will likely find better ways of doing it—ways more conducive to the individual families’ needs and values. In the midst of this, what we are now experiencing, I believe, is a return to the pre-public school forms just mentioned. The Coronavirus pandemic has only revealed what has been just below the surface, and this is great news for parents, who are increasingly empowered in the educational choices for their children.

There are now a number of options that have much in common with the private village schools, home-schools and the outsourced studies with qualified instructors. There are online programs which offer students the chance to learn alongside peers with a teacher guiding the virtual village's children. Like the village schools of the past, basic skills are entrusted to a knowledgeable teacher who can instruct the children online while the parents attend to their daily duties. One of the best things is that you have the opportunity to select a school that is aligned with your values. No longer are you hedged in geography and thereby compelled to send your kids to the teachers who happen to work at the brick and mortar school in your neighborhood. This option is ideal for families with one or both of the parents working from home, since there is much flexibility and minimal meeting time required. Not to mention, as with all the home education options, there is no commute. Although the children learn in the safety and comfort of their homes, they are taught by teachers who are specifically trained in both the subject matter and the methods of elementary education via distance learning.

Hybrid courses are also an option. There are a number of subscription services where you can view videos of lessons conducted by expert teachers and you can access them when it is convenient for you. Often, you can submit assignments at your own pace, too. This option is likely ideal for tackling subjects that you would like to outsource but would rather not commit to a full online course.

I would encourage anyone considering home education to proceed wholeheartedly. Of course, there are obstacles and challenges in any worthy endeavor, but we are in a unique position to build upon the pioneering work of generations. The trails that lead to educational success have been blazed by others who traversed the wilderness and established colonies in new orchards. Technology has opened even more doors of opportunity. In sum, there has never been a better time to decide that the time is now.



JORDAN ALMANZAR, PHD

Director of Public and Alumni Relations
Kolbe Academy

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