



Obama's Education Secretary "Concerned" About Homeschooling

The opening shot in a widely anticipated establishment crackdown on educational freedom may have been fired last week. Speaking at a breakfast with reporters, Obama's controversial Education Secretary, pro-Common Core activist John King (shown), said he was "concerned" that some home-educated children were not getting the "breadth of instructional experience" they would get at a traditional school. While the senior Obama bureaucrat acknowledged that many homeschool families are doing it well, he also repeated the debunked smear that homeschooled children lack opportunities for socialization. Experts and critics, though, promptly lambasted King for his naive or malicious comments, suggesting that, if anything, he ought to be far more concerned about children in public schools. Some experts even offered to help educate Obama's education chief on the issue.



Secretary King's controversial remarks about home education were made during an event hosted by the *Christian Science Monitor*. While the *Monitor's* website did not report about the home-education comments, several other outlets, including Politico, did so. According to Politico, King said he was "concerned" that homeschooled students are not "getting the range of options that are good for all kids." He also claimed to worry that "students who are homeschooled are not getting kind of the rapid instructional experience they would get in school," unless parents are "very intentional about it." He said the "school experience" includes building relationships with "peers, teachers and mentors," something that he claimed was "difficult to achieve in homeschooling unless parents focus on it."

More of his anti-homeschooling comments were reported by the *Washington Examiner*. "I worry that in a lot of cases students who are homeschooled are not getting the kind of the breadth of instruction experience they would get in school, they're also not getting the opportunity to build relationships with peers unless their parents are very intentional about it," King was quoted as saying in response to a question about home education. "And they're often not getting those relationships with teachers and mentors other than their parents. I do worry whether home school students are getting the range of opportunities we hope for for all kids."

Despite his supposed concerns, King did concede that he was aware of some homeschooling families who were "doing it incredibly well." He also said he knew of home-educated students in college who had "very tremendous academic success." Also, he noted that research showed homeschooling was growing in popularity. Estimates suggest as many as four percent of American children are



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on September 28, 2016

homeschooled. The number is estimated at close to 2.5 million. For now, at least, King even acknowledged that education decisions are a matter for families to decide. “Obviously, it’s up to families if they want to take a homeschool approach,” he was quoted as saying in media reports. Legally, that is, of course, true — thanks to the hard work of many activists, lawyers, and parents, homeschooling is legal in all 50 states. It is also increasingly mainstream.

While homeschooling experts and advocates appreciated that King was willing to acknowledge many facts about the success and popularity of home education, they also expressed concerns about King’s supposed concerns. One of the leading experts in the field, President Brian D. Ray, Ph.D., of the [National Home Education Research Institute](#) (NHERI), countered much of the narrative pushed by King. In an interview with *The New American*, Ray explained that home-educated students actually have far more options than children in traditional schools.

“What he is saying is just factually incorrect,” Ray said. He pointed to all the options homeschooling families have, including home-education co-ops created by parents to join forces, free and paid tutoring services, mentorships, classes at local libraries, “everything imaginable.”

“It’s just not true,” said Ray in response to a question about whether socialization options were more limited for home-educated children. “But even if it were true, why is he [Secretary King] worried about it when we know from 30 years of research that homeschoolers do significantly better academically and socially than those in institutional schools?” Indeed, Ray, who also serves as editor-in-chief of the academic refereed journal *Home School Researcher*, said there was massive amounts of evidence showing that homeschoolers perform better on essentially every metric — a fact that is increasingly being recognized across America and around the world, and certainly by colleges that are actively recruiting homeschoolers.

There are two possibilities to explain King’s dim view of the options available to home-educated children, Ray said. “His comments are based on either a very minimal and skewed understanding of home education, or he is purposely not learning about homeschooling and misrepresenting what happens in homeschooling,” the researcher explained in a phone interview. “And I’m trying to be generous here. The reality is, if you’re in public school, in elementary school, you basically get the same teacher every day for the whole year. In middle school, you get different teachers for a little while each day, and you generally do not develop deep relationships with those teachers.”

By contrast, with home education, the possibilities for children and relationships with adults and other children are basically endless. “Most homeschooled parents have their children engaged with a variety of adults — scouts, sports, soccer teams, co-ops, and on and on,” Dr. Ray continued. “It’s a rare homeschooled student that doesn’t have interactions with a broad range of adults and children. King’s also implying that students need to be with 28 other children of their age all day to grow up to be good adults. That is simply untrue.”

Indeed, King omits the fact that the modern understanding of “school” is a relatively recent phenomenon. “He just slapped in the face the large majority of Americans who lived in this country from colonial times up until about 1900,” Ray explained about King’s comments. “It was not until then that most of them were in institutional schools for several hours a day for most months. Institutional schooling for the masses was not the norm until 1900 or even later. So he’s just ignoring history. He is ignoring the reality of history in America — we had creators, inventors, artists, authors, homemakers, businessmen and women, farmers, and all kinds of successful people socially, emotionally, and intellectually without the institutional schools that he seems to be promoting.”



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Perhaps more importantly, even the briefest examination of the federal government's own data shows that, if anything, King ought to be much more concerned about the victims of government education. One in five do not graduate high-school. Less than a third of students in eighth grade can read proficiently, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress. In places such as Washington, D.C., more than two-thirds of residents over the age of 15 — virtually all of them victims of expensive government schools — are functionally illiterate, according to a State Education Agency report. Decades ago, the National Commission on Excellence in Education noted that if a foreign power had imposed the education regime then existing in the United States, Americans might have considered it an "act of war." It is even worse today.

And yet, King claims to be worried about the one group of students — homeschooled children — that is consistently at the top of the charts socially and academically. According to NHERI, home-educated students typically score 15 to 30 percentile points above public-school students on the government's own standardized tests. And they save taxpayers tens of billions of dollars per year doing it.

Ray also touched on the absurdity of it all. "His comments, his veiled worries, raise the question: Compared to homeschooling, is he happy with the illiteracy rate coming out of schools, the drug abuse rates, the suicide rates, the rate at which public school students vote, and are interested in learning and reading real books?" Ray wondered. "If he's not happy with most of that — and I'm guessing he's not — what is his point in bringing up a tiny minority of homeschoolers who he thinks might not be doing very well."

"Furthermore, is he implying that, if that tiny minority of homeschoolers were put in public schools, the public schools guarantee that they would do better?" Ray asked. "I face that in court all the time as an expert witness — the idea that if a child is below average on something, that he or she would be better in a public school. It's simply not true."

The [data](#) backs him up. "We have over 30 years of research showing that homeschoolers do better socially and academically," Ray said. "Look at how public school students are faring — not very well. Even if somebody wanted to argue that homeschoolers should be more controlled by government, there's no evidence that more regulation improves outcomes. This kind of commenting is really irresponsible. It feeds into the idea that if only government would get more involved and control private schooling, such as Catholic schools, agnostic independent schools, and homeschooling, they could guarantee that all the children could do well academically and socially. That's very misleading."

Other experts also slammed King's remarks. "While Secretary King had some good things to say about homeschooling, I'm disappointed that his comments imply that public schoolers have a wider range of options in education, which is simply not true," [said](#) Home School Legal Defense Association co-founder and Chairman Michael Farris. "Homeschoolers are far outperforming their public schooled peers, largely due to the fact that parents know what works best for their child instead of implementing an outdated, one-size-fits-all approach that Secretary King appears to favor." HSLDA said it reached out to King in an effort to introduce him to homeschool leaders, parents, and students.

Whether King's attack is the opening salvo in an upcoming coordinated attack on homeschooling remains to be seen. What is clear, though, is that homeschoolers are doing far better than government-schooled children on every objective metric — and that is probably what has King and others more concerned than anything else. Fortunately, home educators have become an immensely influential political force in recent years and decades. And so, any effort to curtail educational freedom and rights is likely to be met with massive, organized, and fierce resistance.



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Instead of being “concerned” about the best educated young Americans, there are many real, legitimate concerns. A far more important concern, for example, is that an unconstitutional bureaucracy is trying to hijack control of education in America from parents and local communities — further damaging millions of kids in the process. Another real concern is that, as [this writer and veteran educator Dr. Sam Blumenfeld show](#) in their book *Crimes of the Educators*, government “education” is permanently handicapping millions of young Americans, including through the use of ineffective “reading” methods debunked as quackery in the 1800s.

With all those real concerns, again, King has no business being “concerned” about home educators. Congress should do its duty by defunding and abolishing the unconstitutional Department of Education he leads as soon as possible.

Photo of Education Secretary John King: AP Images

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