

Homeschool Regulation: The Revenge Of

The Failures *[Excerpts]*

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In their never-ending effort to "help" homeschoolers, public school bureaucrats periodically try to increase homeschooling regulations. This makes K-12 education perhaps a unique endeavor: it's a field in which the failures regularly, and astonishingly, insist that they should be able to regulate the successful.

Never mind that homeschoolers consistently outperform children institutionalized in government schools or that the longer a child is institutionalized in a government school the worse he does in relation to homeschooled children. Never mind, also, that international surveys of academic performance show that in the course of 12 years government schools manage to turn perfectly capable children into world-class dullards. No, the same education bureaucrats who consume an annual cash flow of roughly \$600 billion to achieve previously unknown levels of semi-literacy and illiteracy among otherwise normal American children feel compelled from time to time to abandon their diligent pursuit of intellectual mediocrity to offer proposals for regulating homeschool parents.

The latest outbreak of education bureaucrat compassion comes from Mississippi.... Superintendent Hank Bounds, is working at creating a panel of homeschool parents to determine whether homeschool families should be further regulated. Why does the estimable Superintendent Bounds think that homeschooled children would benefit from more attention from Mississippi's crack team of government educators? Well, because he worries that some parents might take their children out of government schools and then fail to educate them. As Bounds inarticulately put it in a November news conference:

"...[Y]ou must realize we all have this moral and ethical responsibility to deal with those situations where clearly it's nothing more than a child abuse situation when parents pull their children out of school, say they're being homeschooled just because parents ... don't want to be involved in the education of their children...."

Subsequently, the editorial staff of Jackson's Clarion-Ledger came to Bounds' aid by translating this gibberish into English. Evidently, Bounds and his Clarion-Ledger cheerleaders think that Mississippi parents are

removing their children from Mississippi's government schools just so that they can deny them an education at home.

Interestingly, neither Bounds nor the Clarion-Ledger point to any evidence that this is a significant problem in Mississippi or anywhere else. In fact, a little reflection would indicate that this expression of "concern" is more than a little disingenuous. After all, if you really don't want your children to be educated, the most effective strategy is to institutionalize them in one of Superintendent Bounds' government schools. That obviously requires much less effort than keeping them at home.

Moreover, if Bounds really wants to characterize a failure to educate as "child abuse," then what is to be said of him and his bureaucrats who are responsible for a school system in which a catastrophic failure to educate is the norm? According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP, often known as "The Nation's Report Card," Bounds' bureaucrats have failed Mississippi's children and taxpayers as follows:

1. Reading: 82 percent of Mississippi's fourth-graders cannot read at grade level, with 52 percent not being able to read at even a basic level. By eighth grade, 82 percent of Mississippi's children still cannot read at grade level, with 40 percent being unable to read at even a basic level.
2. Mathematics: 81 percent of fourth-graders are below grade level in math, with 31 percent lacking even a basic grasp of mathematics. By eighth grade, math illiteracy is burgeoning in Mississippi: 86 percent of students are below grade level in math, with 48 percent lacking even a basic understanding of mathematics.
3. Science: 88 percent of fourth-graders are below grade level, with 55 percent lacking even a basic knowledge of science. By eighth grade, 86 percent of Mississippi's children are below grade level, with an amazing 60 percent lacking a basic grasp of the subject.

Lest anyone be under the impression that the NAEP has unusually high academic standards, testimony before the Board of Governors for the NAEP indicates, for example, that the "advanced" mathematics questions for the eighth-grade NAEP are at best comparable to fifth grade questions in Singapore's math curriculum. So, while the NAEP may not require high levels of academic competence, it does highlight Mississippi schools' systematic failure to educate.

And just where does the performance of Superintendent Bounds' Mississippi education bureaucracy put Mississippi's children nationally? Dead last in fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math (tied with Alabama), and third

from last in fourth-grade math and eighth-grade reading. Note that Bounds' schools manage to produce these prodigious levels of academic failure by spending roughly \$7,000 per student per year, an amount that would pay tuition at many, many excellent private schools. One shudders to think what Bounds' "educators" might accomplish with even more money.

(Bruce N. Shortt, Ph.D., "Homeschool regulation: The revenge of the failures," World Net Daily, 1/4/07).

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