



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Issues Facing America's Homeschoolers – Part 1

Guest(s): Jeremy Newman & Tim Lambert

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Dr. Dobson: Well, hello everyone. I'm James Dobson and you're listening to the James Dobson Family Institute. We have a program for you today that's going to be highly relevant to families whose lives have been turned upside down by the COVID-19 virus, and of course that's led to the forced stay-at-home orders for millions of people. Schools have been closed of course, and parents have needed another way to educate their children. With that, I want to give you just a little history.

Some of our listeners will know this, and we always have new people every day we have to assume, and so for their benefit I want to go back to the year 1980. I had created a ministry called Focus on the Family three years earlier. My radio program was heard at that time on about 100, I think it was closer to 200 stations. My guest on one significant day was Dr. Ray Moore. It was to change my life and the lives of many of our listeners. Dr. Moore had been a graduate student at USC at the same time that I was, but we had never met. He had come to talk that day about a concept called homeschools. That was new to me, but he opened my eyes to a whole new idea.

When we aired our conversation, there was an immediate avalanche of response from listeners. We received literally tens of thousands of letters and calls from parents wanting to know more. We were a young ministry at that time, so it was overwhelming. Mail came in in bags literally. That was the beginning of the modern homeschools movement, which thrives today, 40 years later.

That brings me to an introduction of my two guests today. They are Tim Lambert, the president of the Texas Homeschool Coalition. Now, he has become a political force in the state of Texas. He was appointed by Governor Rick Perry to serve on a Parental Rights Advisory Committee for Children's Protective Services and many other family related programs. Welcome back, Tim.

Tim Lambert: Thank you, Dr. Dobson. It's an honor to be with you.

Dr. Dobson: My other guest is Jeremy Newman, who's the director of public policy for the Texas Homeschool Coalition. He received his Juris Doctorate from the Oak Brook College of Law. Jeremy, welcome. Glad to have you.

You wrote an article that caught my eye. It was published in the Dallas Morning News. You said that a survey from Real Clear Opinion Research shows that many are planning on making the permanent switch to homeschooling. In that survey, 40% of respondents said that they're now more likely to enroll their students in virtual schools or homeschools once the lockdown ends. Tell us about that.

Jeremy Newman: Yeah, for sure. Well, thanks for having me on first of all. I really think this is an extremely timely and significant topic. For context for the listeners to understand this, right now homeschoolers in America make up somewhere between 2 1/2 and 3% of the student population. The idea of 40% of students, or even a fraction of that, even if it was 5% of students from the public school system shifting over to homeschooling, that is a landslide change in the education system.

I think it's really significant to kind of take a step back and consider kind of the demographic makeup that homeschooling has had over the last few decades and the shift that it's had where it has really expanded and diversified substantially. Like, I mean the fastest growing segment of the homeschool community right now is the black community, for example, and minorities make up somewhere around 40% of the homeschool community. People kind of think back to the origin of it back in the 1980s, and it tended to be people who homeschooled more for religious reasons, and that's certainly still a large portion of people, but it's diversified now to be a really broad spectrum of people across religious lines, political lines, socioeconomic lines.

I think that the data that's coming out now showing that a lot of people who have homeschooled during the coronavirus might stick around, I think that that really speaks to how well received homeschooling has become and the fact that it's not just now that you might know someone who homeschools. That might become a significant portion of the people that you know.

Dr. Dobson: Jeremy I was amazed to learn that 41% of homeschool parents are minorities. 41%! And 26% are Hispanic. How do you explain that?

Jeremy Newman: Yeah, so I think that ... I have a lot of friends actually who homeschool who are Hispanic, and I think that it's partially a cultural thing, frankly. There's a good fit between the Hispanic community and the homeschool community because I think they're a very family value oriented culture. That's kind of the same perspective that a lot of homeschool families bring where it's not just about academics for most homeschool families. Like the reason that homeschool is not purely academics, even if that's one of the driving reasons, there are a lot of benefits that they feel like it brings to their family because they spend more time with their kids and they can train their kids in moral instruction or religious instruction, or it offers them more flexibility in their schedule. It's a very family

value-oriented culture, and so I think that's part of the reason that the Hispanic culture kind of fits well into that and has become a major part of it.

Dr. Dobson: Tim, how did the COVID-19 virus result in these changes in the way homeschooling is viewed?

Tim Lambert: Dr. Dobson, I think that there are about 55 million public school- or school-aged students. I just read an article this morning about the mom who said she had never considered it, she didn't think she could do it, but like many families, they were forced to try to do this. Her experience I think is indicative of what we've just been talking about, which is that they had to figure out what to do, they had more time to spend together as a family, they tried different curriculum approaches, and they found that their children were doing really well and it was great for their family. I think this is one of those situations where many people said they would never do this but were forced, because of the circumstances, to at least give it a try.

I've even seen an article where public school teachers who were working with students online were talking about how many of their students were thriving as a result of this new approach. I think it was one of those things where many people thought, "I couldn't do this. I don't want to do this," but they were forced to try to do something and they found it was a really good fit for their students.

Dr. Dobson: Tim, why have you chosen to spend your life promoting and helping homeschool families?

Tim Lambert: My family and I, Dr. Dobson, I heard that radio program that you talked about with Dr. Ray Moore in 1980.

Dr. Dobson: You're kidding me. That was 40 years ago. You heard it?

Tim Lambert: Yes, and I went home. I heard it on the radio. I went home to my wife, because we wanted to raise our children to be able to pass along our faith in the education of our children. I went home to my wife and I said, "You know what, honey? I think we need to homeschool." Of course, as many women do, she said, "Oh, we?" She understood that I was volunteering her, but our goal was to pass on the value system and the faith tradition that we have in raising up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. That was our primary motivation.

In the 1980s, when you were homeschooling, there was a lot of attacks. The state of Texas said you can't do that. It's illegal. The attacks were basically parents were not qualified. You're not a professional educator. We were kind of forced into defending our right to do what we believe God was calling us to do. The organization developed out of that need, and we have seen God's hand

over these last 30-plus years in giving parents the right to raise their children as they see fit.

Dr. Dobson: Well, the battle that you talk about was going on everywhere.

Tim Lambert: Yes.

Dr. Dobson: All over the country, and it wasn't at all clear that homeschool parents would be allowed to do this, was it?

Tim Lambert: That is correct. In fact, in those days many of us were underground. Local school districts were prosecuting people. The attorney general of Texas said he did not believe parents were qualified to raise their children, much less teach them at home. Eventually we filed a class action suit that went to the Texas Supreme Court and became a landmark decision, the Leeper versus Arlington case, saying that parents do have a right to raise their kids, including teaching them at home.

Dr. Dobson: Jeremy, let's go back to your childhood. You were in fact homeschooled, weren't you?

Jeremy Newman: I was, yeah. Myself and my five siblings, all of us were, and then I have two sons now who aren't school-age yet, but that's definitely our plan is to homeschool them. We were homeschooled here in Texas, and I just – like - it was normal to me and it was a great experience.

Dr. Dobson: As you look back on it, do you have any regrets that you didn't go to school with the other kids?

Jeremy Newman: I really don't. I had a lot of friends, even who lived on the street, like people I spent a lot of time with who were in public school and I really never ... It's not like I contemplated and felt like it was worth it. It's like it actually never really occurred to me that I was missing out on something because it just felt very normal.

I'm sure you've heard this before that socialization is the big question everybody asks. To me, it just normally means that the person doesn't understand how homeschooling works, because there were tons of outlets that we had to go spend time with other people, with other kids, with other homeschool kids even. It was all very normal, and no, I don't have any regrets at all.

Dr. Dobson: There are even more outlets for socialization today, aren't there?

Jeremy Newman: Yeah. The interesting thing is that if you look at the research on that topic, it actually indicates that homeschool students do better. Like from a socialization angle, they do better. They're more politically tolerant. They're more politically engaged. They spend more time helping out their community.

I actually think it makes sense if you take a step back and look at it, because one of the kind of inescapable issues you run into in the public school system is you spend all day every day associating only with people who are exactly your age, and that's not really normal and I don't think it really teaches you how to associate with people in the real world as well.

Dr. Dobson: Yeah. Well, there is still an awful lot of opposition to what you guys are doing, isn't there? I've just been reading some vicious comments about homeschooling. They got it all wrong on every count. What are you experiencing in that regard?

Tim Lambert: Well, Dr. Dobson, it's interesting how this all started. Just a few months ago, Harvard University announced that they were going to do a summit on homeschooling. It was an invitation only event and they were only inviting people who had a public record of opposing homeschooling, demanding that the state should regulate homeschooling. In fact, the Harvard Law professor who was leading that charge argued that homeschooling should be presumptively banned, in other words that people couldn't homeschool unless they were given permission by the government.

The interesting thing, Dr. Dobson, as we look at that, back in the 80s and the 90s, the argument was really over: could parents do this? Could they really educate their children? That's not her approach at all. Her argument is that homeschooling has grown because it's been unregulated, and she basically says the problem is evangelical Christians who want to raise their children with their value system and that these kids will not have an opportunity to be exposed to other value systems. I think that is just typical...this attack is coming from the left. They are really upset that you would get a whole - millions of students will not have the opportunity to be indoctrinated in the leftist agenda that many of the public schools promote.

Dr. Dobson: How about standardized testing? What does it show in regard to the quality of what's going on at home?

Tim Lambert: This whole issue of does home education work is settled. Back in the 80s and 90s we didn't have a lot of data, but the data is now clear that homeschoolers score 15 to 30 points above the national average across the board. You see colleges today that are competing for homeschool graduates because these students are not only academic leaders, but they are leaders from a social standpoint as well. That data is clear.

Jeremy Newman: If I can kind of expound on this point, I really think this is kind of incredible to understand when you realize this is a Harvard Law professor who's pushing this narrative. I really don't think it's too much to say that the way she has spun this is somewhere between academic ignorance and academic malfeasance. It's just - it's kind of ridiculous when you actually look at the data. If you look at the efficiency of the two different systems we're talking about here, public school versus homeschool students, homeschoolers spend on average about \$600 per

year, right? Public school students spend on average about \$11,000 per student per year. Okay, so that's a really substantial difference. Then you go measure the outcomes on the tail end and figure out how well are you actually educating these students, and Tim just mentioned that homeschoolers score across the board about 15 to 30 percentile points above their public schools peers. Despite spending somewhere around a 20th of the amount of money that is spent in the public school, they're outperforming by a significant margin.

Here's maybe the most significant thing about it is that that remains true across almost any type of demographic group you can imagine that you would think might affect those outcomes. If the homeschool student, they come from a low income family or if they come from a family where the parents have PhDs versus GEDs, like none of that stuff makes a difference in whether or not the homeschool students outperformed public school students. It remains true across all of those demographic changes. It just kind of astounds me that you'd have a Harvard Law professor coming out making claims like this and clearly either ignoring or being totally unaware of the data.

She talks about it like homeschooling is run by some type of religious cult, which also clearly means that she hasn't looked at any type of recent data on the subject, because 34% of the people who choose to homeschool do it because they say they have a concern about the public school environment, like drugs or safety or peer pressure, things like that. As a single issue motivator, that's the biggest one. She's kind of spun this narrative that's not just a little wrong, it's completely wrong.

Dr. Dobson: Yeah. I saw that same study you just quoted. 34% cited concern with the school environment, safety and so on. 17% cited dissatisfaction with the academic instruction of the schools, and 21% cited a desire to provide moral and religious instruction. If it were me, that would still be at the top of the list.

Jeremy Newman: That is true for a lot of us. I think the incredible thing to me is Jeremy's kind of laid out the problem that this professor has laid out, but all of the groups that are coming together against this, really their problem with homeschoolers is really that they don't have control from an indoctrination standpoint of these children. I think that is really kind of indicative of that leftist mindset that we have to try to remake our culture from a leftist agenda standpoint.

Dr. Dobson: Well, let me ask you guys to speak directly to, we'll say, the mom who's out there who has never heard this concept before, or if she has, she is worried about whether or not she can do it. Do you have to be a college graduate? Do you have an IQ of 140? Are there qualifications that a mother or a father have to have in order to be able to homeschool their kids?

Tim Lambert: Let me respond to that and just say that the regulations, homeschooling is available in all 50 States, but education is regulated at the state level, so the requirements to homeschool vary according to the state. This is different. All the other studies on education show that there's a direct correlation between

student performance and the academic education of the parents or the economic success of the parents. That is not true among homeschooling, and we believe the reason for that is because if you've got a parent who is dedicated to doing what is best for their children, they can do this.

As you just pointed out, Dr. Dobson, there's a tremendous amount of resources available today that we didn't have back in the 80s and the 90s, curriculum online and groups and all that sort of stuff. Any parent that wants to do this can do this. We have a website, a national website called homeeducator.com. That has all sorts of lesson plans and curriculum samples for people to use to get started. We have links there to state organizations like ours in all these other 50 States that can help people with the legal requirements.

Dr. Dobson: Most areas have parent co-op organizations where you work together to provide homeschooling, right?

Tim Lambert: Exactly. There's that sort of thing. There's also a number of groups who have what we used to call university model schools where they go to some place together as a group three days a week or two days a week and then they homeschool the other days. There's just a plethora of information and options out there.

I remember my wife, she had trepidation about whether she could do this. Every mother thinks "I'm in danger of ruining my children's future." That's the reason we used to do standardized tests every year, and it always amazed her that our kids were making tremendous academic progress. This is very, very doable for any parent who wants to.

Dr. Dobson: I remember in the early days, this was such a revolutionary idea that if parents wanted to homeschool, they had to fight their own family. Their mothers and fathers and grandmothers and grandfathers and neighbors were just aghast that anybody would try this. That's not quite the case today, is it?

Tim Lambert: No, it's not. As Jeremy pointed out, a lot of people know people who homeschool. We tell people when we talk about our experience that there are a lot of families who have that sort of resistance, not to the level that we used to see it. But I tell folks that when you get your kids in junior high or high school and other families have kids in the public schools, there begins to be a seat change. Those other family members can see the difference. I've heard you talk about this, Dr. Dobson. You can tell the difference in kids who have been homeschooled. They're more mature. They're articulate. They're polite and just a tremendous difference there.

Dr. Dobson: Well, I've said this many times. Let me say it again. We used to have visits from parents, both those who had children in public schools and those who were homeschooling. These groups would come in for field trips, so I had an opportunity to observe the difference between those who came in from public

schools and those who came from homeschooling. There's a world of difference in terms of interest in what we were saying or what they were being exposed to, and the conversations between adults and children. The homeschool children looked in your face and responded to you. Many of those in public schools were bored and they wandered off if they could. That's a generalization. It wasn't always true, but I'm telling you I saw a difference.

Tim Lambert:

Dr. Dobson, one of the things that we do in Texas is we bring kids to Austin capital during a legislative session. We call it a capital day, and we bring these kids in with their families. We teach them about the legislative process, and we have them go lobby on a bill, go talk to legislators, and we do that for several reasons. One is it's a great civics course to teach these kids and their families how the government works, but it's also a PR event. I tell these families that when you go into some of these legislative offices, you're going to be the first real live homeschooler that some of these people have ever met. The question we never get is, what about socialization? Because all these legislators are blown away by these young people in the way that they're able to present themselves and articulate the issues.

Dr. Dobson:

Yeah. They are not sequestered, except during the virus. They have many contacts. In fact, many local schools will provide athletic events for homeschoolers. They can play football or basketball or whatever. It's not a weird experience and it doesn't produce weird kids. Mom, you can do this.

I'm looking at the clock here and our time is gone, so I'm going to have to truncate the program. Let me just say that we've been talking to Tim Lambert, who's president of the Texas Homeschool Coalition, and to Jeremy Newman, who's the director of public policy for the Texas Homeschool Coalition.

Gentlemen, there's so much more here that I want to talk to you about, and parents who are interested in homeschooling I know are hanging on to every word, so we're going to continue this discussion. You stay right where you are. I'm going to ask you some more questions next time. I just want to thank you for being here and for being with us. This has been very helpful and we'll pick it up next time.

Roger Marsh:

I'm Roger Marsh, and I hope you've enjoyed the first part of this meaningful conversation here on Family Talk. Dr. Dobson's guests have been Tim Lambert and Jeremy Newman from the Texas Homeschool Coalition. Learn more about their mission and some of the articles discussed today by visiting our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org. Go to drjamesdobson.org and then tap onto the broadcast tab at the top of the page. Be sure to tune in again tomorrow for the second half of Dr. Dobson's pertinent discussion with these two passionate men. They'll encourage parents homeschooling for the first time and also emphasize the mom and dad's role in the home as well. That's coming up on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.

Dr. Dobson:

Well, thank you everyone for tuning in to our program today. You may know that Family Talk is a listener supported program, and we remain on the air by your generosity, literally. If you can help us financially, we would certainly appreciate it. God's blessings to you all.