



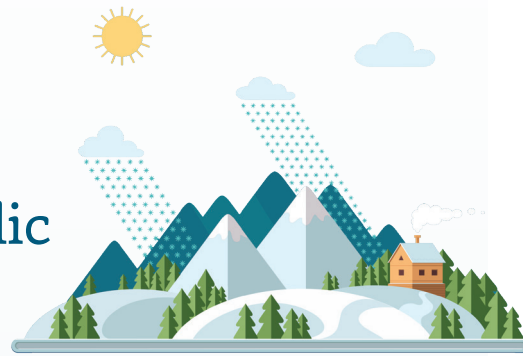
Making homeschooling possible



ANALYSIS



Alaska Study
Criticizes
Homeschooling
But Doesn't Study
Homeschoolers



Can you make recommendations for homeschool regulations based on public school correspondence test results?

That's the question Steven Duvall, HSLDA's director of research, asked about a recent study of Alaska student test scores by researcher Chelsea McCracken, and the co-founder of the Coalition for Responsible Home Education, Rachel Coleman. Their paper appeared in *Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives*.¹

In a detailed analysis² of McCracken and Coleman's study, Duvall noted that the authors faced a problem common to all research projects involving private homeschool data: it's not compiled in an easy-to-access public cache the way public school data often is.

When McCracken and Coleman discovered Alaska state exam data that segmented the scores of public school correspondence program students and the scores of traditional public school students, they decided to treat the correspondence students as private homeschool students.

A look at the data

The data McCracken and Coleman unearthed is interesting and valuable, Duvall said.

But he pointed out that, although the study authors used generally good data analysis, their choice of public school correspondence school students undermines any attempt to apply study conclusions to private homeschooling students.

Taking a look at the regulations governing both types of education, Duvall said it's clear that the group the authors studied—the public school correspondence students—cannot be equated with private homeschoolers.

Alaska's public school correspondence programs are highly regulated and closely overseen by education officials and professionals.

Among other things, correspondence program students must:

- work according to an individual plan that is approved by a certified teacher
- comply with state assessments and local school

district standards

- agree to regular monitoring

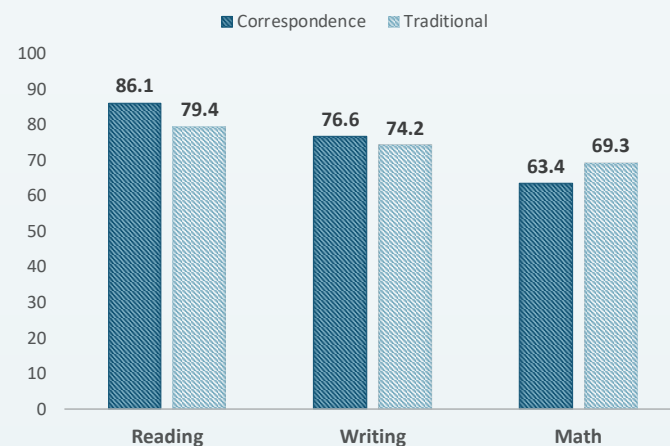
In contrast, Duvall noted, Alaska's four private home-school options “provide parents with greater freedom and flexibility for customizing home learning environments.”

Things to consider when looking at this study, as highlighted by Duvall:

- It “primarily analyzed scores from two tests (i.e., Standards Based Assessment [SBA] and the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination [HSGQE]) that were designed to reflect what students learned during their *public school* experience” (emphasis added).
- McCracken and Coleman analyzed official state test results that were dated, ranging from 2005 to 2014.
- It ignores a large body of research that shows students learn best when they are academically engaged regardless of the location.

It's clear that the group the authors studied—the public school correspondence students—cannot be equated with private homeschoolers.

Fig. 1 | Alaska SBA Pass Rates by Basic Skills



What they found

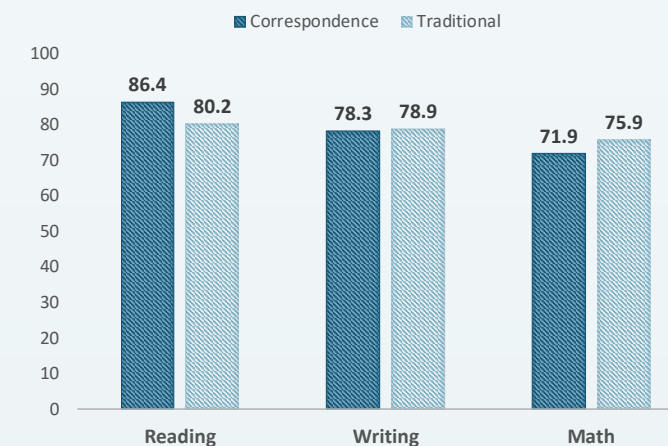
Looking at SBA basic skills scores, McCracken and Coleman found that the public school correspondence program students outperformed their traditional public school peers in reading and writing, but scored slightly lower in math (Figure 1).

In HSGQE basic skills, correspondence students also

scored above traditional students in reading—but nearly equal in writing—and less in math (Figure 2).

Duvall noted the “overall SBA pass rates for correspondence students and traditional school students were, for all practical purposes, the same.” (Figure 3)

Fig. 2 | Alaska HSGQE Pass Rates by Basic Skills



In contrast to the essentially comparable SBA overall pass rates, McCracken and Coleman found a significant difference in overall HSGQE pass rates in favor of the public school correspondence program students over the traditional public school students (Figure 4).

Fig. 3 | Alaska SBA Overall Pass Rates

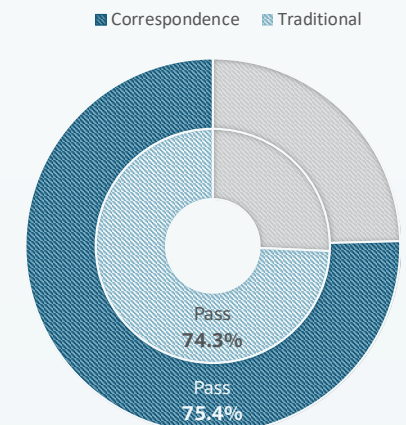
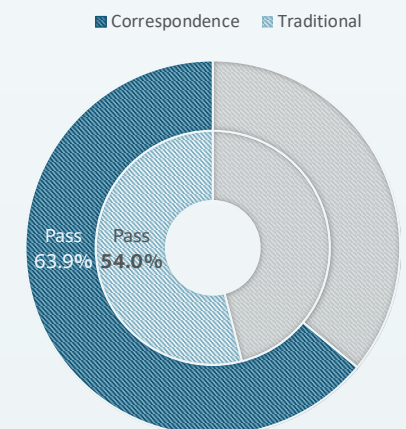


Fig. 4 | Alaska HSGQE Overall Pass Rates

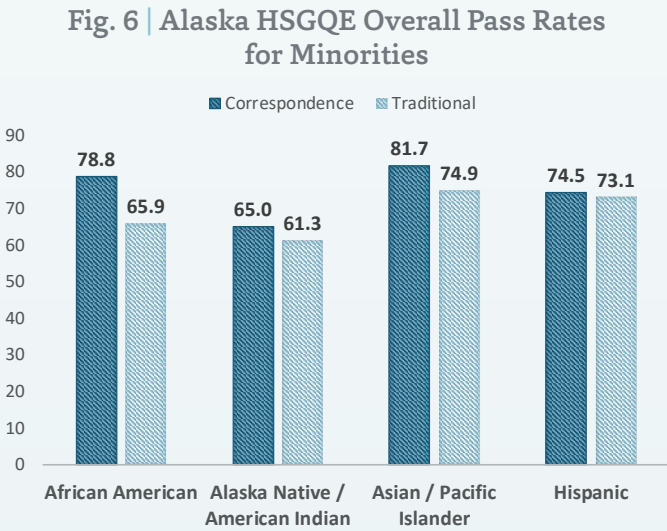
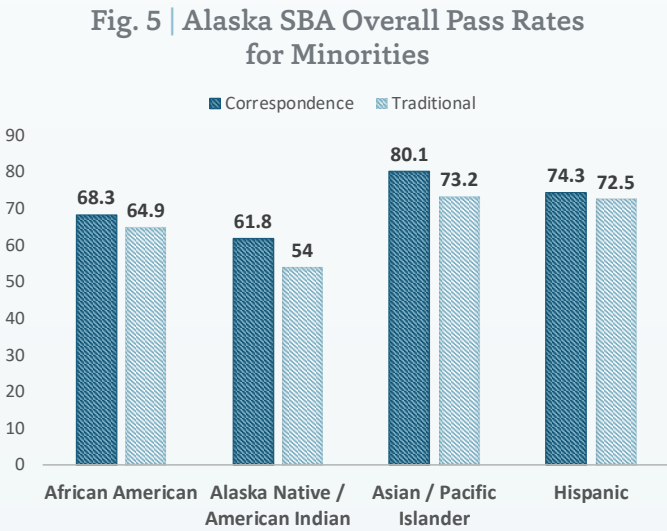


“Among other interesting findings of the McCracken and Coleman (2020) study,” Duvall pointed out, “were that the pass rates for non-White students, students with disabilities, and students from low-income homes were positively impacted by the Alaska correspondence study program.” (Figures 5, 6, & 7)

He added: “These findings about minority correspondence students are insightful and signal the need for more research because they . . . likely indicate how impactful minority parents are at improving their children’s academic performance.”

A missing perspective

Duvall pointed out why a large chunk of research—mostly ignored by McCracken and Coleman—is important. Referencing several of these studies, he said they showed that homeschoolers tend to “experience more intense instruction than do the public school students.”



What does intense instruction look like? Duvall said it is determined by active academic engagement (AAE) levels, which is the amount of time during a lesson a student spends doing things like:

- reading aloud or silently
- writing or talking about the lesson
- working on math problems
- typing on a keyboard

And why is intense instruction so important? Many studies have shown a parallel relationship between AAE and academic gains. They tend to rise and fall together.

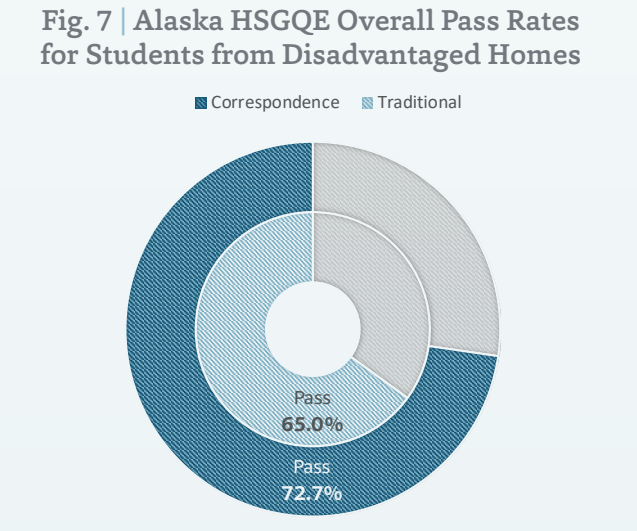
When researchers analyzed data from these studies, Duvall said that they found “the homeschool students had made more gains because they experienced much higher levels of AAE during instruction—even though none of the parents involved were trained teachers” (emphasis added).

This seemed to indicate, Duvall added, that “the intensity of the instruction . . . was responsible for the students’ academic gains as opposed to their instructional settings.”

Valid conclusions & leaping to conclusions

Duvall recognized that McCracken and Coleman have “brought helpful insight regarding the positive impacts that Alaska correspondence programs have on overall state exam pass rates for students,” especially “for minority students, students with disabilities, and students from low-income homes.”

However, by extrapolating these results as a stand-in for homeschool performance, the authors claim that they have evidence of the need for new homeschool regulation. By digging deeper into the specific demographics,



McCracken and Coleman suggest that their study unveiled what they believe are concerning trends for three particular groups.

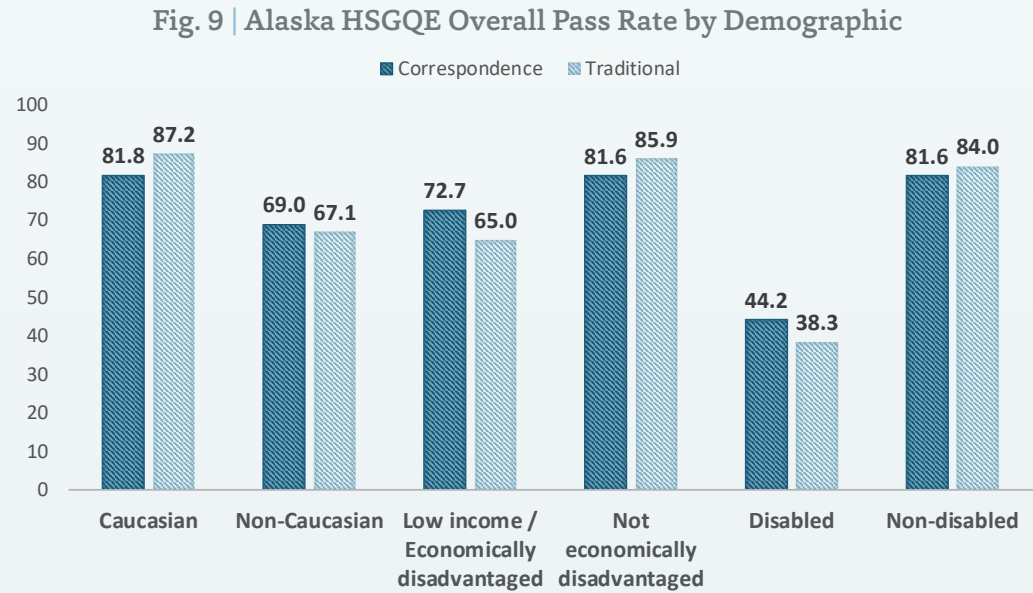
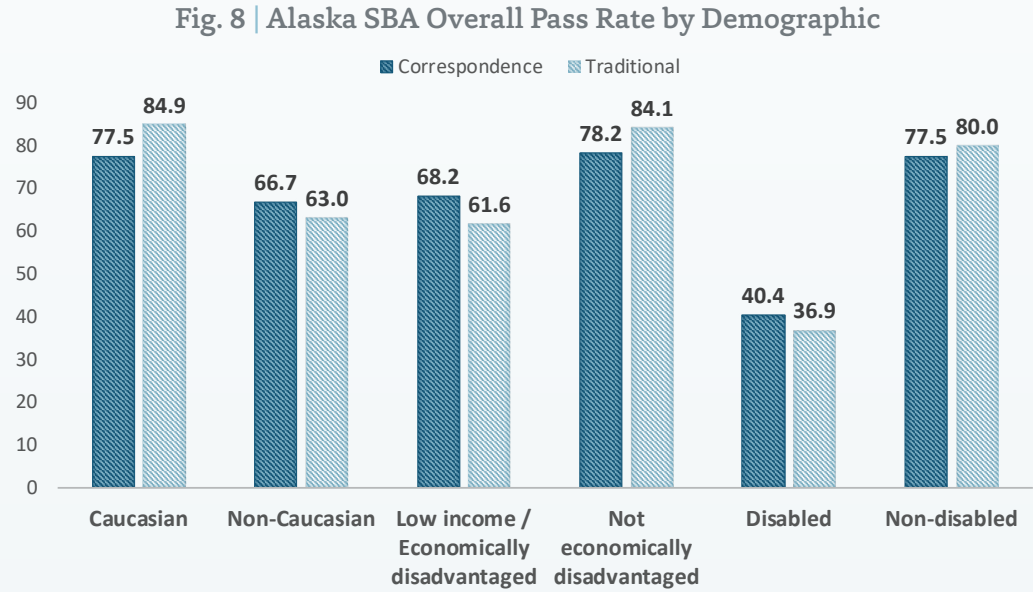
“Our findings have important implications for home-schooling policy,” they wrote. “Homeschooling may in fact have a negative impact on the academic achievement of children who are Caucasian, economically stable, or non-disabled, and . . . may be a disadvantageous educational choice for [them].”

While McCracken and Coleman may have identified some trends about the effect of Alaska’s public school correspondence program on students in these demographics, Duvall is quick to point out that their “effort to generalize their findings from public correspondence programs to private homeschools is not valid” because it goes “beyond the scope of their study.” (Figures 8 & 9)

Observations that invite more research

Duvall synthesized several opportunities for further research:

- 1.) For findings to be applicable to homeschools and homeschool policy, research studies should:
 - study actual private homeschoolers who are complying with their state’s homeschool law.
 - only make generalizations for the same state homeschool options as those being studied.
- 2.) By including “private homeschool students in future research studies,” researchers could “make a valuable contribution to the homeschool literature by illuminating the impact that the intensity of private homeschool instruction has on homeschool student outcomes.”



3.) McCracken and Coleman’s findings that non-Caucasian students, students with disabilities, and students from low-income homes had higher pass rates in correspondence programs than in traditional public schools invites additional research. Looking at the impact of correspondence programs “could show that parental involvement, as opposed to the locus of learning, is a key factor in supporting such positive learning outcomes,” Duvall said.

Their “effort to generalize their findings from public correspondence programs to private homeschools is not valid” because it goes “beyond the scope of their study.”

4.) Duvall challenged researchers “to focus on the intensity of instruction that occurs in homeschools as opposed to where the instruction takes place, because doing so would likely provide a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of homeschool instruction.”

- Active academic engagement is a valuable measure for estimating this.
- Researchers could start with replicating studies comparing AAE in homeschooling versus in traditional public school settings.
- They could ask and explore questions like this:
Is the intensity of homeschool instructional

environments consistent across different subjects, student age ranges, number of students, and parent educational levels?

Biggest takeaways for homeschooling parents?

There’s lots of encouragement and helpful insights parents can glean from considering Duvall’s analysis of the Alaska study.

When looking at research, it’s a good idea to do the following:

- **Always check:** Is the research comparing apples to apples?
- **Ask:** Is the research only comparing the effect of where education takes place or is it looking at the amount and effect of intense instruction?
- **Find the criteria:** How does the research determine that students are “homeschooled”?

When thinking about your family’s own homeschool journey, you can leverage the power of active academic engagement!

As your child’s parent, you know what ignites their passion for learning—resulting in that crucial AAE.

Study after study has validated families’ experience that the fully customizable nature of private homeschooling gives kids the opportunity to learn, grow, and mature at their own pace.³ And research is showing that as adults they become committed and involved members of their communities and more tolerant than their public schooled peers.⁴

At HSLDA, we’ve seen the way educational freedom fuels the success of private homeschooling for hundreds of thousands of families. For nearly 40 years, we’ve been dedicated to advancing and protecting that freedom. And we’re committed to continue making homeschooling possible in the decades ahead. ¶



To read the full analysis, visit hsllda.org/DuvallAlaska2020Study



ENDNOTES

¹ McCracken, Chelsea and Rachel Coleman. 2020. “A Meaningful Measure of Homeschool Academic Achievement: Statistical Analysis of Standardized Test Performance in Alaska Public Correspondence Schools” *Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives* 9 (1): 207–252. <https://www.othereducation.org/index.php/OE/article/view/258> ¶.

² Duvall, Steven F. “Does the Study about Alaska Public Correspondence Schools (McCracken and Coleman, 2020) Apply to Private Homeschools?” *HSLDA*, December 7, 2020. <https://hsllda.org/docs/librariesprovider2/public/research/2020-hsllda-complete-duvall-alaska-study-analysis.pdf> ¶.

³ Ray, Brian D. 2017. “A Systematic Review of the Empirical Research on Selected Aspects of Homeschooling as a School Choice.” *Journal of School Choice: International Research and Reform* 11 (4): 604–621. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15582159.2017.1395638> ¶.

⁴ Cheng, Albert. 2014. “Does Homeschooling or Private Schooling Promote Political Intolerance? Evidence from a Christian University.” *Journal of School Choice, International Research and Reform*, 8 (1): 49–68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15582159.2014.875411> ¶.