

## New Research

### “Unschooling” Kids Do Just Fine in College

Children used to self-directed learning and intellectual freedom can handle the strictures of college

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[Unschooling](#)—child-directed learning—is “the final and most extreme frontier in the broader cultural shift toward 'child-centred' parenting,” [says the \*Globe and Mail\*](#). Unlike more traditional homeschooling, in which parents “try to replicate the formal curriculum of the school system in the home,” [says \*University Affairs\*](#), unschooling “encourages kids to do pretty much whatever they want with their time.”

The idea is that children are, by default, keen learners. If something strikes their passions, the thinking goes, kids will pursue it to the end, picking up intellectual skills and self-motivation as they go.

The question that's always posed to unschooling is whether kids who learn in this way are set up to succeed when confronted by the structured, organized, hierarchical society that awaits. According to new research, [described by Luba Vangelova for KQED](#), it seems that—contrary to what skeptics might assume—unschooled kids do just fine when transitioning to more traditional colleges.

[In a survey](#), psychologists [Peter Gray](#) and [Gina Riley](#) found that of 232 families who unschooled their kids, 83 percent of the children went on to study at a post-secondary institution:

Almost half of those had either completed a bachelor's degree or higher, or were currently enrolled in such a program; they attended (or had graduated from) a wide range of colleges, from Ivy League universities to state universities and smaller liberal-arts colleges.

According to KQED, though the path from unschooling to college isn't as streamlined as for kids who go to regular school, it isn't that difficult to tread, either. Aside from a few administrative hurdles, unschooled students didn't face immediate barriers in college.

Getting into college was typically a fairly smooth process for this group; they adjusted to the academics fairly easily, quickly picking up skills such as class note-taking or essay composition; and most felt at a distinct advantage due to their high self-motivation and capacity for self-direction.

Kids who are unschooled pretty much by definition won't get as broad of a baseline education as kids in the traditional school system, though. Unschooling lends itself to deep dives, to kids getting passionately and heavily invested in a sphere of innate interest. One of the main critiques of unschooling, [says \*University Affairs\*](#), is that experiential learning doesn't lend itself to the broad range of intellectual pursuits available to the human race. And, [says KQED](#), unschooled kids did report having trouble with math and, as a group, disproportionately favored careers in the “creative arts.”

Many of the unschooled kids, however, did follow their passions into technical fields: “half of the men and about 20 percent of the women,” [says KQED](#), went in to fields that required a substantial background in science, technology or math.