Latest Statistics:
Canadian Home Education

Home education in Canada is still a first-generation endeavour as most home educating parents were not home educated themselves.

As the school bell tolls across Canada, 60,000 to 80,000 children in this country do not join their peers but receive their education outside of the classroom. Teaching and learning at home has always been legal in this country, yet the practice continues to be regarded by some with curiosity and even skepticism. Occasionally concerns are voiced about a child’s socialization and the parents’ ability to provide a comprehensive, balanced education.

At the Canadian Centre for Home Education, we have also wondered: As we move into a new century, who is it that chooses home education and why? Are the students getting a “good” education? How might we know? Are they happy with their lives? Do we have any idea of how they fare later on in “the real world”?

To answer these questions, in 2003, the Canadian Centre for Home Education distributed 5,800 questionnaire packages to home-educating families in every province and territory, and invited parents to participate by completing a 16-page survey and have their children write a Canadian Achievement Test (CAT-3). We received 1,648 English and French replies, which included responses for over 3,800 students (a healthy 30% response rate) and 1,080 CAT-3 tests were completed and analyzed. In 2004 the Canadian Centre for Home Education along with Home School Legal Defence Association released “Home Education in Canada: A Report on the Pan-Canadian Study on Home Education 2003”—the first study of its kind in a decade. In this summary, we present a selection of what our respondents have told us about home education in Canada.

1 Portions of this summary were originally published in the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada Review, Fall/Winter 2006.
Demographics:
What are the characteristics?

The vast majority of home-educated students (96%) live with both parents in families with an average of 3.3 children, where an average of 2.4 students are being educated at home. The majority (85%) of home-educated students are between the ages of 5 and 13, and are in their elementary years of schooling. About 67% of kids surveyed have been entirely home educated; 33% of students have experienced some mix of years in the classroom and at home. Homeschooling parents are well educated: most (84% of mothers and 80% of fathers) have completed some college or university instruction. Homeschooling continues to be, for the most part, a first-generation endeavour, since almost none of these parents were home educated themselves.

67% of kids surveyed have been entirely home educated;
33% of students have experienced some mix of years in the classroom and at home.

Children in home-educating families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Mother (Freq)</th>
<th>Mother (%)</th>
<th>Father (Freq)</th>
<th>Father (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some High School</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Diploma/Certificate</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Undergraduate University Studies</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Degree</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Master's Studies</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's Degree</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Doctoral Studies</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Degree</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>.9</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1,628</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>1,596</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Economics: Is homeschooling only for the wealthy?

Despite their higher than average education levels, almost 70% of home-educating families live with an annual household income of less than $65,000. Two-thirds of the homeschooling households report only one income earner. In those households reporting two income earners, most (67%) of second income earners report less than 15 hours of employment per week. Just over 11% of home-educating mothers and just over 5% of home-educating fathers hold provincial teaching certification. The vast majority of families report a religious preference or denominational affiliation.

Motivations: Why do parents begin to home educate in the first place?

For most parents, the initial motivation to keep their children at home is based more on achievement than avoidance. That is, most parents do not choose to homeschool in response to a negative situation, but rather to proactively achieve some combination of moral, social, familial, and academic goals (such as teaching within a framework of certain beliefs and values, encouraging enhanced family interaction, and individualizing curriculum). Many, however, do report avoiding such negative aspects of classroom and school attendance as wasted time, perceived lack of discipline, and safety concerns.
Reasons to Home Educate

Other
Desire for child-centred education
Better prepare children for jobs/careers
Desire to develop particular gifts in child
Individualize learning environment
Believe parents should educate children
Encouraged by results in other home-educating families
Individualized learning plan or curriculum
Closely guide child's social interaction
Desire more sibling-sibling contact
Flexibility for a unique family life
Ability to accomplish more academically
Ability to teach from a particular worldview
Enhance family relationships
More directly influence moral environment
Desire more parent-child contact
Ability to teach child particular beliefs and values

Inconvenient access to the public school system
Frustration with private school
Inconvenient access to a private school
Inability to afford tuition
Poor teachers
Lack of appropriate curriculum in schools
Use of drugs and alcohol in school system
Physical safety of child
Sexual safety of child
Frustration with a public school
Violence in schools
Psychological safety of child
Emotional safety of child
Lack of discipline in schools
Less wasted time for children

Physical Needs
Learning Needs
Emotional Needs
Support Groups: Do home educators build community and work with one another?

On average, children engage in eight types of activities outside of the home (some weekly, some occasionally), such as co-operative educational experiences, church programs and field trips, music and swimming lessons, team sports and recreational skating, summer camps, and volunteering.

Participation in homeschool support groups is quite popular, as over 70% of families report affiliating with local or provincial associations. These groups offer support ranging from curricular advice to legal protection, from field trips to collaborative educational experiences.

The vast majority of Canadian home-educating families have never experienced any legal difficulty. This suggests an entrenchment of home education into the accepted methods of educational alternatives. However, 10% report some level of interference by a school board, ministry, or social service agency.

Methods and Lifestyle: How do home educators “do education”?

The study uncovered a wide range of educational choices available and practiced by home educators. About half utilize an eclectic mix of various traditional texts and workbooks, another 17% use a comprehensive textbook approach, while the rest report following a more child-initiated approach to studies. Almost all students have primarily their mother involved in their instruction, while 60% report their fathers’ participation as well. Instructional roles in home education appear to have expanded over the past decade to include adults other than the parents, as children’s involvement in group and out-of-home activities increases. The majority (58%) of parent participants in this study rate their schooling schedule to be neither very unstructured nor very structured. The remainder of participants report a very structured schedule (36%) or a very unstructured schedule (6%). A similar picture exists for approach to curriculum, with 7% very unstructured, 63% moderately structured, and 30% very structured. On average, children engage in eight types of activities outside of the
home (some weekly, some occasionally), such as co-operative educational experiences, church programs and field trips, music and swimming lessons, team sports and recreational skating, summer camps, and volunteering. Over a quarter of those surveyed visit the library four or more times a month, with most (87%) going at least once a month. Almost half (45%) report living in homes with over 1,000 books!

The average (median) amount of money spent per child, per year, to home educate is $700 and, unlike those in some independent or private school settings, most families receive no financial support or funding from their broader church, family, or educational communities.
Academic Achievements: How do home educated students compare academically with their peers?

Over 94% of home-educated students scored above the Canadian norm for both grade equivalency and basic skills.

Many home educators are philosophically opposed to standardized testing (possibly the reason for a lower participation rate in this segment of the study), yet 1,080 home-educated students did participate in the standardized testing option—an ample sample size for further statistical analysis. The Canadian Achievement Test (CAT 3) was administered at home by the parents in the students’ usual educational setting and the tests were processed by the Canadian Test Centre in Markham, Ontario, with results sent directly to the CCHE researcher. Over 94% of home-educated students scored above the Canadian norm for both grade equivalency and basic skills.

The average home-educated Canadian student in Grades 1 through 8 ranks in the 81st percentile in reading, 76th percentile in language, and 74th percentile in mathematics. The mean (average) percentile ranks for home-educated students in Grades 9 through 12 were, in reading 85th, in language 84th, and in mathematics 67th. (For their non home-educated peers the norm is a ranking at the 50th percentile; that is, the average classroom student performs at a level higher than half of his or her peers and at a level lower than half) Home education appears to produce students of equivalent, if not, above-average academic achievement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAT-3 Homeschool Percentile</th>
<th>Grade 9 (National Average)</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>75%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Computation &amp; Number Concepts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language/Writing Conventions</td>
<td></td>
<td>74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td></td>
<td>68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td></td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td></td>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many variables in a survey of this magnitude are examined to understand what factors might be associated with basic reading, language, and mathematic percentile rankings. For example, is there any correlation between academic achievement and whether both parents are earning income?

Statistical analysis reveals that no difference can be found between the academic percentile ranking of those students whose parents hold teaching certificates compared to those whose parents do not. Similarly, no difference is found between those students who have one or both parents generating income, nor is a difference found between those students whose programs are very unstructured and those that are very structured. However, scores do seem to be different when other factors are analyzed, such as parental motivation to homeschool, family income, educational approach and curriculum, father’s participation, and cognitive limitations of the student. The interaction between variables and academic scores is complex and, for the most part, cannot be claimed to be causal. A cursory glance at the research reveals this sampling of findings:

- The higher the number and variety of activities in which homeschooled students participate (but not necessarily the hours spent doing them), the higher are their academic scores.
- As minutes spent in general interest reading increase, the percentile rankings in reading and language increase.
- If both parents report participating in a student’s instruction, the percentile rankings for academic achievement are significantly higher.
- Reading and language percentile ranks drop as television viewing increases.
- Students with cognitive limitations show lower scores than other homeschoolers, yet on the average they still score above the Canadian norm (50th percentile).

Further analysis of these factors and how they might influence or be related to academic achievement will help parents and students make informed decisions about lifestyles and education delivery.
Civic Engagement: But does home education create good citizens?

Of 226 responses (as some volunteer in more than one position), 49.1% were participants, 46% were in leadership, and 4.9% were in other positions.

The survey included a section to be completed by formerly home-educated adults, and 182 older siblings of those currently being home-educated responded. Virtually all are moving into further education or taking their place in the labour force as productive members of society, and are involved in a wide variety of areas including agriculture, education, service, technical industries, and business. The average age of this group of young adult respondents is just under 21, yet they volunteer at a high rate, with over 82% holding one or more volunteer positions in their communities (significantly, more than half of these positions are leadership positions). When asked if they had voted in a municipal, provincial or federal election within the last 5 years, 60.3% responded affirmatively. Considering that 16.2% of the respondents were 17 or 18 years of age and may not have had opportunity to vote yet, this is closer to a 72% voter participation rate. In addition, none report having received any form of social assistance. While this is not a representative sample of all Canadian adults ever home educated, the findings point to a body of citizens that contributes to and participates in their communities.


In addition to testing academic achievement, this study is the first known to collect data using Huebner’s Student Life Satisfaction Scale (1991) to capture the home-educated students’ own subjective sense of well-being. Of a possible average life satisfaction score of 6, home-educated students score 4.94 compared to an average score of 4.21 for students in a previous study of public-schooled students. This score indicates a general contentment among the home educated, and will serve as a benchmark for future study. Similar results were found for formerly home-educated students as seen below. Students who base their happiness more on positive relationships with parents than on peer relationships, physical appearance, or schooling, score higher in life satisfaction; this might explain some of the higher life satisfaction scores of the home educated students.

**Satisfaction with Life**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Groups</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>30</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult formerly home-educated students (2003)</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American College Students (1985)</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American College Students (1991)</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American College Students (1991)</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French-Canadian College Students (1989) Men</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French-Canadian College Students (1989) Women</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older American Adults (1991)</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older French-Canadian Adults (1989) Men</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older French-Canadian Adults (1989) Women</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurses and Health Workers (1990)</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Home Education In Canada

The author and researcher, Deani Van Pelt, is currently a PhD Candidate at the University of Western Ontario and an Assistant Professor in the Department of Education at Redeemer University College. She and her husband, Michael Van Pelt, live with their three children in Ancaster, Ontario.

The Canadian Centre for Home Education (CCHE) was formed in order to fill the void on a national scale for the need to do quality research in the area of home education and to train volunteer homeschool leaders from across the country. CCHE is a charitable organization.

Home School Legal Defence Association (HSLDA) is a nonprofit advocacy organization established to defend and advance the constitutional right of parents to direct the education of their children and to protect family freedoms.

For more information about HSLDA and CCHE visit www.hslda.ca.

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