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Home Schooling: From the Extreme to the Mainstream

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Home Schooling: From the Extreme to the Mainstream?

Introduction¹

Over the past decade, home schooling has shed its image as a social or educational aberration.—Jacqueline Luffman, Statistics Canada

During the last 20 years, the general public's familiarity with home schooling has evolved from a level of almost complete ignorance to one of widespread, if largely uninformed, awareness. This evolution was stimulated by, and reflected in, heightened media interest in home schooling. Feature articles on home schooling graced the covers and pages of respective national publications (see Wallace, 1982; Feinstein, 1986; Stecklow, 1994; Maushard, 1996; Benning, 1997; Eisler and Dwyer, 1997; Kantrowitz and Wingert, 1998; Kay, 2001, and Cloud and Morse, 2001) such as *Maclean's*, *The National Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*, while national radio and television broadcasts² also shone a spotlight on home schooling. Consequently, the growth of home schooling has not escaped the attention of leading policymakers in both Canada and the United States. In 1999, for example, then-Texas Governor George W. Bush addressed an audience of 2,000 home schoolers and their parents. Meanwhile, on September 16, 1999, the US Senate passed a resolution designating the week of September 19-25, 1999, as "National Home Education Week." In the Canadian context, some policy-

makers now publicly acknowledge the growing popularity and importance of the home schooling movement.³

Similarly, academic researchers and policy analysts are exhibiting more than a passing interest in home schooling.⁴ In June 2000, for example, the *Peabody Journal of Education* devoted a 300-page issue exclusively to the topic of home schooling (McDowell and Ray, 2000). Such popular, political, and academic attention reflects the reality that, as Patricia Lines, formerly a senior research analyst for the US Department of Education and now a Senior Fellow at the Discovery Institute, concludes, home schooling parents are "reinventing the idea of school" (quoted in Kantrowitz and Wingert, p. 67).

Given the attention bestowed upon this flourishing but poorly understood private education practice, by surveying the available research literature this paper attempts to provide preliminary answers to a series of important questions. These questions include:

- What is home schooling?
- How does government regulate home schooling?
- What is the history of home schooling in North America?

1 The author thanks Jason Clemens, Fred McMahon, and Claudia Rebanks Hepburn for their careful reading and constructive editing of this paper.

2 See, for example, the three-part documentary series aired by National Public Radio, February 26-28, 2001 (<http://www.npr.org/programs/atc/features/2001/feb/010226.cfoa.html>).

3 On March 7, 1997, for example, Pat Atkinson, Saskatchewan's Minister of Education, spoke to a conference of that province's home schooling parents.

4 Relatively little scholarly research has been conducted to-date on Canadian home schooling. Hence, the preponderance of research cited in this paper is of American origin.

- How many children are home schooled?
- What are the socio-demographic characteristics of home schooling families?
- How do home schooled children perform academically?
- What is known about the socialization of home schooled children? And
- What are the public policy implications of this experiment in private education?

The regulation and history of home schooling

Long considered a private matter in North America, education is not even mentioned in the US Constitution. Nor was it a concern for Canada's embryonic federal government. And so by default, education came under the aegis of individual states or provinces. Attitudes to home schooling are therefore highly divergent from state to state and province to province.—Barbara Kay, August 2001

Canadian regulation

According to Statistics Canada:

Home schooling occurs when a child participates in his or her education at home rather than attending a public, private or other type of school. Parents or guardians assume the responsibility of educating their child and may develop their own curriculum guidelines (Luffman, 1998).

Home schooling is legal in all 10 Canadian provinces.⁵ In regulatory terms, each province has its own specific rules governing home schooling; most require that home schooling parents comply with the Education Act in the respective province.⁶ In practice, this means that the provincial government insists only upon the home schooled child receiving “satisfactory” instruction in the home environment. In most provinces, parents must register their home schooled children with their local school or school board. Four provinces (Alberta, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, and Prince Edward Island) require parents to submit an application before being allowed to home school. Alberta is the only province to require testing. Eight provinces issue curriculum guidelines to home schooling parents but these same provinces do not require that the curriculum be government approved. Prior to last year, only Alberta and the Northwest Territories (two of the three Canadian jurisdictions that provide funding to home schooling parents) require the approval of curricula. Last year, however, Manitoba passed legislation prescribing government-sanctioned curricula for home schoolers. No province, however, requires that home schooling parents possess teaching qualifications.

US regulation

The US Government defines home schooling as, “The education of school-aged children at home rather than at a school” (Lines, 1993, p. 1). In 1980, home schooling was *illegal* in 30 states. It has only been *legal* in all 50 states since 1993. However, specific state laws constitute a patchwork of regulations. In practice, there are high regulation,

5 A detailed province-by-province breakdown of home schooling regulations in Canada is provided in Statistics Canada's “A Profile of Home Schooling in Canada.”

6 For example, the British Columbia School Act of 1989 gave parents the statutory right to educate their children at home on the provision that they “provide each school-age child with an educational program.” In Ontario, the Education Act states that a child is exempt from attending school if he or she is receiving “satisfactory instruction at home or elsewhere.”

moderate regulation, and low regulation states. High regulation states may require parents to inform the respective educational authority that they wish to begin to home school, maintain compulsory attendance laws, require that the home school curriculum be approved by the state, conduct periodic visits to the home, administer standardized tests, and require that home schooling parents be certified teachers. (As the Ludwig von Mises Institute's Mark Brandly has explained, this latter requirement is often drawn up by state legislatures beholden to teachers' unions that want to use certification laws to discourage home schooling (Brandly, 1997).) Moderate regulation states may require parents to send notification and provide test scores and/or professional evaluation of the student's progress. Low regulation states do not require parents to initiate any contact with the state. For example, there are 41 states that have no minimum academic standards for parents who home school their children.⁷

History

Throughout history, societies have practiced home schooling (Gordon and Gordon, 1990; and Stevens, 2001). In fact, home schooling (conducted either by parents or private tutors) was widespread throughout North America until the 1870s, when compulsory school attendance and the training of professional educators coalesced to institutionalize education in the physical environment that today we recognize as school. Notable home schooled Americans include, for example, presidents George Washington, John Quincy Adams, Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Other

successful products of American home schooling include inventor Thomas Edison, General Robert E. Lee, civil rights activist Booker T. Washington, writer Mark Twain, and industrialist Andrew Carnegie.

Although home schooling did continue in a limited fashion after the 1870s, it was not until the 1960s that this educational practice received renewed attention and interest from parents and educators. The intellectual roots of the two strains most evident in contemporary North American home schooling are both a generation in length.⁸ The first strain is ideological, and classifiable as the Christian Right. Its philosophical leader is the former missionary Dr. Raymond Moore. In 1969, this then-US Department of Education analyst began researching the institutionalization of children's education. His primary conclusion, disseminated in publications such as *Home Grown Kids* and *Home-Spun Schools*, was that a child's entry into formal education should be delayed until ages 8 to 12.

The second strain of home schooling is pedagogical and traces its theoretical lineage to the libertarian Left, as led by the late teacher and humanist John Holt. During the 1960s, Holt advocated educational decentralization and greater parental autonomy (sometimes known as "laissez-faire home schooling"), more recently referred to as "unschooling."⁹ Holt's thesis is that the most civilized way to educate a child is through home schooling. To propagate his ideas, Holt wrote the highly controversial books *How Children Fail* and *Teach Your Own*; in 1977, he founded the bi-monthly home schooling magazine *Growing Without Schooling*.

7 The evolving regulatory relationship between home schooling parents and government is most recently addressed in Malkin, 2001.

8 In Canada, most home schooling parents do so for religious or pedagogical reasons. See Smith, 1993.

9 Approximately five percent of home schooling follows the unschooling approach, which does not adhere to a structured curricula, allowing students to learn at their own pace and according to their own interests. See Cloud and Morse, pp. 52-3.

Although the contemporary image of home schooling parents depicts a homogeneous, deeply religious, socially conservative sub-group of the population, back in the 1960s and 1970s most home schooling parents were members of the counter-cultural Left, principally advocates of New Age philosophies, ex-hippies, and homesteaders. By the mid-1980s, however, most home schooling parents could be accurately described as part of the Christian Right. Today, 75 percent of American home schoolers are practising Christians (Livni, 2000). However, in terms of religiosity, home schooling is not proving to be the *exclusive* preserve of Christian groups. In fact, “growth in home schooling may be reaching a broader range of... families and values” (Bielick, Chandler, and Broughman, 2001, p. 4; McDowell, Sanchez, and Jones, 2000; Lines, 2000b; and Welner and Welner, 1999). Muslim Americans, for example, are *the* fastest growing sub-group within the home schooling movement. The number of home schooled Muslim Americans is predicted to double every year for the next eight years (Bielick, Chandler, and Broughman, 2001, p. 4; McDowell, Sanchez, and Jones, 2000; Lines, 2000b; and Welner and Welner, 1999).

The growth of home schooling

There has been very rapid growth in home schooling in both Canada and the United States over the past 20 years. In Canada, “with the help of regionally based support groups and national organizations, the home schooling movement has been gaining momentum” (Luffman, 1998); the number of Canadian home schooled children has increased every year during this period. In 1979, just 2,000 Canadian children were home schooled (Statistics Canada data, as cited in Wake, 2000). By 1996, the respective provincial ministries of

education put the number of home schooled children at 17,523, or 0.4 percent of total student enrolment—a 776 percent increase over just 18 years.¹⁰ However, Canada’s home schooling associations claimed a much higher figure—between 30,000 and 40,000, or approximately one percent of total student enrolment. By 1997, the home schooling associations claimed there were approximately 60,000 Canadian home schooled children (Eisler and Dwyer, 1997, p. 64). Today, it is estimated that there are more than 80,000 children being educated in private homes. If accurate, this suggests a doubling of the home schooled population in only a few years (Wake, 2000).

In the United States, various estimates suggest home schooling is growing at a rate of between 11 to 40 percent annually (Ray, 1994; Cloud and Morse, p. 49). In 1985, there were only 50,000 American home schooled children; by 1992, there were 300,000 home schooled children (Gutterson, 1993). In the fall of 1995, the US Department of Education estimated the number of home schooled children at between 500,000 and 750,000 (Lines, 1997, p. 4). In 1999, the US Department of Education estimated that approximately 850,000 students were being home schooled (see Table 1) (Bielick, p. 3).¹¹ However, according to the *Home School Legal Defense Association*, by the fall of 1996 there were 1.2 million home schoolers. Currently, the United States has 50 million students attending 85,000 public schools and 26,000 private schools (U.S. Department of Education, 1996, table 5.). Therefore, home schoolers may comprise approximately 2.4 percent of the school-aged population, although a more recent estimate places the total as high as 1.7 million, or 3.4 percent of the school-age population (Rhodes, 2000). In comparative terms, the collective number of

10 This figure excludes Quebec home schoolers, as the Quebec Ministry of Education does not collect data on home schooling.

11 In comparison, there are currently 500,000 American children attending charter schools and 65,000 receiving school vouchers. See Cloud and Morse, p. 48.

Table 1: Number of Students and Number and Percentage of Home Schooled US Students, Ages 5-17, with a Grade Equivalent of Kindergarten to Grade 12, by selected characteristics.

Characteristic	Number of Students	Number of Home Schooled Students	Percent	Standard Error
<i>Total</i>	50,188,000	850,000	1.7	0.14
Grade equivalent, K-5	24,428,000	428,000	1.8	0.20
Kindergarten	3,790,000	92,000	2.4	0.52
Grades 1-3	12,692,000	199,000	1.6	0.29
Grades 4-5	7,946,000	136,000	1.7	0.28
Grades 6-8	11,788,000	186,000	1.6	0.24
Grades 9-12	13,954,000	235,000	1.7	0.24
<i>Race/ethnicity</i>				
White, non-Hispanic	32,474,000	640,000	2.0	0.19
Black, non-Hispanic	8,047,000	84,000	1.0	0.31
Hispanic	7,043,000	77,000	1.1	0.25
Other	2,623,000	49,000	1.9	0.65
<i>Sex</i>				
Female	24,673,000	434,000	1.8	0.19
Male	25,515,000	417,000	1.6	0.17
<i>Number of children in household</i>				
One child	8,226,000	120,000	1.5	0.24
Two children	19,883,000	207,000	1.0	0.14
Three or more children	22,078,000	523,000	2.4	0.30
<i>Number of parents in household</i>				
Two parents	33,007,000	683,000	2.1	0.21
One parent	15,454,000	142,000	0.9	0.16
Non-parental guardians	1,727,000	25,000	1.4	0.82
<i>Parents' participation in the labour force</i>				
Two parents—one in labour force	9,628,000	444,000	4.6	0.55
Two parents—both in labour force	22,880,000	237,000	1.0	0.17
One parent in labour force	13,907,000	98,000	0.7	0.16
No parent in labour force	3,773,000	71,000	1.9	0.48
<i>Household income</i>				
\$25,000 or less	16,776,000	262,000	1.6	0.27
25,001-50,000	15,220,000	278,000	1.8	0.24
50,001-75,000	8,576,000	162,000	1.9	0.30
75,001 or more	9,615,000	148,000	1.5	0.28
<i>Parents' highest educational attainment</i>				
High school diploma or less	18,334,000	160,000	0.9	0.15
Voc/tech degree or some college	15,177,000	287,000	1.9	0.25
Bachelor's degree	8,269,000	213,000	2.6	0.42
Graduate/professional	8,407,000	190,000	2.3	0.46

Note: Numbers may not add to total due to rounding. Number and percent of home schoolers excludes students who were enrolled in school for more than 25 hours and students who were home schooled due to a temporary illness.

Source: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Parent Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1999*.

Table 2: Number and Percentage of Home Schooled US Students by Reason for Home Schooling

Reason for Home Schooling	Number of Home Schooled Students	Percent	Standard Error
Better education at home	415,000	48.9	3.79
Religious reasons	327,000	38.4	4.44
Poor learning environment at school	218,000	25.6	3.44
Family reasons	143,000	16.8	2.79
Develop character/morality	128,000	15.1	3.39
Object to what school teaches	103,000	12.1	2.11
School does not challenge child	98,000	11.6	2.39
Other problems with available schools	98,000	11.5	2.20
Student behaviour problems at school	76,000	9.0	2.40
Child has special needs/disability	69,000	8.2	1.89
Transportation/convenience	23,000	2.7	1.48
Child not old enough to enter school	15,000	1.8	1.13
Cannot afford private school	15,000	1.7	0.77
Parent's career	12,000	1.5	0.80
Could not get into desired school	12,000	1.5	0.99
Other reasons*	189,000	22.2	2.90

*Parents home school their children for many reasons that are often unique to their family situation. Some of the "other reasons" parents gave for home schooling in the Parent-NHES: 1999 study were: It was the child's choice; to allow parents more control over what their children were learning; flexibility; and parents wanted year-round schooling.

Note: Standard error excludes students who were enrolled in school for more than 25 hours and students who were home schooled due to a temporary illness. Percents do not add to 100 percent because respondents could choose more than one reason.

Source: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Parent Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1999.

copies. The online bookseller, Amazon.com, currently lists more than 200 home schooling books in its catalogue.

Why is home schooling growing so fast? Although parents home school their children for a myriad of reasons, the principal stimulus is dissatisfaction with public education, as shown in table 2.

Clearly, "home schooling is... the bellwether for a mushrooming disaffection with the public education system" (Kay, 2001). As an American home schooling parent recently commented:

Not every home schooler is part of a middle-class Christian Republican family. The decision to home school is not made solely on the basis of conservative political or religious views. Many people make this decision because of the difficulties with our current school system, [or] because their children have differing learning styles (Cleaveland, 2001).

children being home schooled in the United States today exceeds the individual public school enrollment of 41 of the 50 states (Ray, 1997a).

As a reflection of the growth in home schooling, the US Census Bureau now includes home schooling-related questions in its survey. Such growth has stimulated a significant demand for intellectual and practical resources for those interested in the theory and practice of home schooling. Consequently, *Practical Home Schooling* magazine regularly sells over 100,000 copies, while its publisher, Mary Pride, has authored *The Big Book of Home Learning*, which has sold 250,000

Claudia Rebanks Hepburn, The Fraser Institute's Director of Education Policy, summarized the state of public education in Canada as follows:

Canadian education is not just inefficient but seriously inadequate... Dropout rates, literacy levels, and academic achievement are signals of the dismal state of Canadian education today. Indicators published by the OECD show that 27 percent of Canadian adolescents drop out of high school—a higher rate than any other OECD country. Of those young adults who have completed high school in the past decade, 33 percent are insufficiently

literate to cope in contemporary society... Public opinion polls show that confidence in the education system is at a 30-year low. Tangible proof of this is the growing number of children withdrawn by their parents each year from government schools: the percentage of families choosing independent (private) schools has doubled over the past 25 years, while the popularity of home schooling is unprecedented and growing rapidly (Hepburn, 1999, p. 4).

When asked to rate their public schools, 45 percent of Americans give only a C, D, or F grade (Gallup and Elam, 1988, p. 36). Unfortunately, “many public schools—and their baleful unions and wretched bureaucrats, their rigid rules and we-know-best manner—have done a lot to hurt themselves” (Cloud and Morse, p. 48). Despite large increases in government spending on public education over the past generation, the outputs of American public education are increasingly disappointing. Alarming, for example, American graduates are frequently illiterate; hence the need for America’s private sector firms to spend billions of dollars annually on employee literacy programs (Schargel, 1993, p. 67).

What, then, are the specific comparative advantages of home schooling, at least as perceived by those who choose to educate their children in this manner? There are a variety of reasons provided by home schooling parents in both Canada and the United States and the most common to both countries may be summarized as follows:

- The opportunity to impart a particular set of values and beliefs.
- Higher academic performance through one-on-one instruction.
- The opportunity to develop closer and stronger parent-child relationships.
- The opportunity for the child to experience high-quality interaction with peers and adults.
- The lack of discipline in public schools.
- The opportunity to escape negative peer pressure (e.g., drugs, alcohol, and premarital sex) through controlled and positive peer social interactions.
- The unaffordability of private schools, and
- A physically safer environment in which to learn.

Most recently, the safety issue in particular has spurred public interest in home schooling. This reflects both the fact that, for example, one in four American public school students has been a victim of violence at or near her school (cited in Richman, 1994, p. 111), and the heightened interest in safer schooling immediately following the April 1999 tragedy at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado (and subsequent copycat incidents in both Canada and the United States) (see, for example, Sink, 1999). In a *Newsweek* poll, 63 percent of adult Americans said it was very or somewhat likely that a shooting incident could happen at their local schools.¹²

This surge in interest in home schooling is also greatly facilitated by new technology, specifically the growth of the Internet. Among home schooling families, access to the Internet is well above average. In 1996, 86 percent of American home schooling families owned a computer and used it for educational purposes. At that time, nationally, only one in three families had a computer. Today, between 93 and 94 percent of home schoolers have access to a computer; by comparison, as of June 2000, only about half of all American households had Internet access (Heuer, 2000). Such technology allows 71.1 percent of home schooling parents to individualize their educa-

12 Polling conducted April 21-22, 1999, as reported in Bai, 1999, p. 27.

tional curriculum to suit their child's specific needs (Ray, 1997b, p. 8).

As in the United States, recent Canadian experience suggests that, "Cheaper computers, computer programs, easy access to the Internet and the increased amount of educational material available online are encouraging more parents to keep their children at home rather than sending them to school" (Wake, 2000). Clearly, "the Internet is especially bringing home schoolers together...(as) contrary to the isolated image of the home schooler, the Net provides contacts all over the world" (Gooderham, 1996).

The Internet's ability to facilitate educational inquiry is being subsidized by British Columbia's Ministry of Education. Since 1996, a provincial program, known as E-Bus, has provided each school board with approximately \$4,000 per interested home schooling family so that the school board may, in turn, provide each of these families with a computer, a CD-ROM, Internet access, a selection of software, and ongoing on-line assistance. In return, the students must demonstrate that they are performing at the level of their classroom peers and submit their work to an on-line instructor for grading. Also in 1996, the Alberta government initiated a program linking home schooled children with public school teachers through the Internet, fax, and telephone communications.

The socio-demographic characteristics of home schooling families

Both Canadian and American home schooling generally attracts two types of families: ideologues and pedagogues. The ideologues are usually, but not exclusively, religious conserva-

tives, while the pedagogues are preoccupied with improving their child's academic and social environment (Van Galen, 1991). Interestingly, a 1990 Canadian survey found that, although only 25 percent of home schooling parents claimed no religious or spiritual commitment at all, partisan allegiance was evenly divided among the three major political parties (Priesnitz, 1990).¹³

Regardless of type, however, "In terms of demographics, home school students are not a cross-section of the public" (Rudner, 1999). Some research indicates that the average American home schooling family earns an above average income. The median income of \$52,000 (1997) for home schooling households compares very favourably with the median income of \$37,581 (1997) of all American households (Rudner, 1999). However, other recent data "indicates that the household income of home schoolers... is the same as the household income of non-home schoolers. The same percentage of home schooled and non-home schooled students lived in households with annual incomes of \$50,000 or less (64 percent)" (Bielick, *et al.*, p. 8). Home schooling parents have above-average levels of education. Among American parents who home school, 81 percent have studied beyond high school compared with 63 percent of parents nationwide (Bielick, *et al.*, p. 9; Cook, 1999).

Importantly, home schooling families are almost exclusively two-parent families. After all, "In order to home school, parents may need to dedicate a significant amount of time to schooling their children. Because of the time required, home schooling usually involves two parents—one who participates in the labor force and one who home schools." (Bielick, *et al.*, p. 8). Lawrence Rudner found that 97 percent are married couples compared to only 72 percent of American families

¹³ At that time, the Progressive Conservatives, the Liberals, and the New Democratic Party comprised the three major federal political parties.

with school-age children (Rudner, 1999). The Parent Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program found 80 percent of home schooled children living in two-parent families compared to 66 percent for non-home schoolers. Furthermore, 87.7 percent of home schooling mothers do not work outside the home (Ray, 1997b). Overall, 52 percent of home schooled children are raised in two-parent families where only one parent works outside the home compared to 19 percent for non-home schooled children (Bielick, *et al.*, p. 8). The average size of a home schooling family is also above average—62 percent of home schooling families have three or more children compared to 44 percent of non-home schooled families, while 56 percent of all American families with school age children have only one or two children.

How do home schooled children perform academically?

Home schooled students receive a more varied education than does a child who is conventionally schooled.—Isabel Lyman, Cato Institute

As student testing is not compulsory in all states and provinces, test data may not be fully representative of overall student performance. Nonetheless, according to the US Department of Education, “Virtually all the available data show that the group of home schooled children who are tested is above average” (Lines, 1995). Such impressive results have been observable for at least 15 years. An analysis of SAT scores since 1985 in Washington State, for example, finds that home schooled children score consistently above average (Lyman, p. 14). Dr. Howard Richman and his colleagues found that the home schooled in Pennsylvania score, on average, at the 86th percentile in reading and at the 73rd percentile in math (Richman, Girten, and Snyder, 1992).

From coast to coast, and from border to border, home schooled students in the United States surpass the national averages on both of the major college-entrance tests, the ACT and the SAT. For the third consecutive year, home schooled students outperformed public school students on the ACT. The ACT exam includes curriculum-based achievement tests in English, mathematics, reading, and science. From 1998 to 2000, home schoolers averaged 22.7 on the ACT, compared to a national average of 21 (the ACT test has a scale of 1-36) (*The Washington Times*, 2000a). Home schoolers averaged 1,083 on the SAT, compared with a national average score of 1,016.

The most recent and most comprehensive study of American home schooling was led by leading statistician and measurement expert, Dr. Lawrence Rudner of the University of Maryland. The study measured 20,760 home schooled students in all 50 states (Rudner, 1999). Rudner concluded that, “Those parents choosing to make a commitment to home schooling are able to provide a very successful academic environment.” For example, “In every subject and at every grade level of the [tests], home schooled students scored significantly higher than their public and private school counterparts.” Home schoolers’ average score fell between the 82nd and the 92nd percentile in reading and reached the 85th percentile in math. Overall, test scores for home schoolers fell between the 75th and 85th percentiles. Public school students scored at the 50th percentile, while private school students’ scores ranged from the 65th to the 75th percentile.

Interestingly, having at least one parent who is a certified teacher has no significant effect on the achievement levels of home schooled students. The test scores of students whose parents had ever held a teaching certificate were only three percentile points higher than those whose parents had not—in the 88th percentile versus the 85th percentile. However, the children of university graduates perform significantly better than do

children whose parents do not have a degree. However, regardless of whether their mothers held a degree or did not complete high school, the children's scores remained between the 80th and 90th percentile. By contrast, in 8th grade math, public school students whose parents are college graduates score at the 63rd percentile, whereas students whose parents have less than a high school diploma score at the 28th percentile. Students taught at home by mothers who never finished high school scored a full 55 percentile points higher than public school students from families with comparable education levels (Ray, 1997a). According to Rudner, "The mean performance of home school students whose parents do not have a college degree is much higher than the mean performance of students in public schools."

Almost one-quarter (24.5 percent) of home schooled students perform one or more grades *above* their age-level peers in public *and* private schools. Grade 1 to 4 home school students perform one grade level higher than their public- and private-school peers. By Grade 8, the average home schooled student performs *four* grade levels above the national average (Ray, 1997a). One may contrast this with the American *public* school system where advancement between grades, under a system of so-called "social promotion," is primarily a function of age rather than of aptitude.

Students who have been home schooled throughout their entire academic lives have higher SAT scores than students who have attended other educational programs. The SAT scores improve from the 59th percentile for those home schooled for only one year to the 92nd percentile for those home schooled for seven years (Ray, 1997a).

There are achievement differences among home schooled students when classified by family income, race, gender, amount of money spent on education, parental education (as alluded to earlier), and television viewing. However, these dif-

ferences are far less dramatic than those observed among public school students. For example, regardless of family income, home schooled students score between the 82nd and 92nd percentiles on the SAT (Ray, 1997a). Overall, the empirical evidence clearly demonstrates that:

Home education may be conducive to eliminating the potential negative effects of certain background factors. Low family income, low parental educational attainment, parents not having formal training as teachers, race or ethnicity of the student, gender of the student, not having a computer in the home, infrequent usage of public services (e.g., public libraries), a child commencing formal education relatively later in life, relatively small amounts of time spent in formal educational activities, and a child having a large (or small) number of siblings seem to have less influence on the academic achievement of the home educated. More specifically, in home education, educational attainment of parents, gender of student, and income of family may have weaker relationships to academic achievement than they do in public schools (Ray, 1997a, chapter 4).

Although there is far less Canadian research data to examine, the academic performance of Canadian home schooled students appears to be comparable to the American experience. In the largest study to date of Canadian home schooling, Dr. Brian D. Ray found home schooling students scoring, on average, at the 80th percentile in reading, at the 76th percentile in language, and at the 79th percentile in mathematics. The Canadian average for all public and privately educated students is the 50th percentile. Ray's study also found that students whose parents are certified teachers perform no better than other students and that neither parental income nor parents' educational background has a significant impact on student performance (Ray, 1994).

The international evidence on the academic performance of home schooled students is equally encouraging. For example, a recently completed three-year study conducted by researchers at England's University of Durham found that home schooled students noticeably out-performed their public school peers in both literacy and mathematics (Livni, 2000). The fact that home schooling appears to improve academic performance regardless of geographic location and political jurisdiction has stimulated interest around the world. The United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, and Switzerland are among a host of developed nations with rapidly growing home schooling movements (Billups, 2000).

Importantly, in the United States 69 percent of home schooled children plan to pursue a post-secondary education (Ray, 1997b). In the absence of school transcripts, etc., home schooled applicants are increasingly presented with the option of submitting to admissions offices any standardized test scores, letters of recommendation, and a portfolio of their written work. Also, many home schooled students are writing the General Educational Development tests, a high school equivalency exam, in order to demonstrate their academic progress to the 75 percent of American universities accepting such students.

In recent years, home schooled students are gaining admission and scholarships to the most prestigious universities. Over 700 post-secondary institutions across the United States, including Harvard University, Yale University, Stanford University, MIT, Rice University, and the Citadel, have admitted home schooled students (Leung, 2000). September 2000 saw the opening of Patrick Henry College, in Virginia, the first university established especially for home schooled children. The *National Center for Home Education* estimates that one million home schooled students will enroll in post-secondary institutions over the next decade (*The Washington Times*, 2000b). This is unsurprising considering that, "Home schoolers

bring certain skills—motivation, curiosity, the capacity to be responsible for their education—that high schools don't induce very well" (Jon Reider, Stanford University admissions official, quoted in Clowes, 2000).

To the north, an increasing number of Canadian universities and colleges are accepting home schooled students. These include the University of Toronto, York University, Dalhousie University, the University of Saskatchewan, and St. Francis Xavier University. Many of these post-secondary institutions require some type of standardized testing, be it provincial examinations or SATs, before offering admission.

The socialization of home schooled children

I have never let my schooling interfere with my education.—Mark Twain

In 1999, the National Education Association (NEA), the largest public sector teachers' union in the United States, declared that, "The NEA believes that home schooling cannot provide the student with a comprehensive education experience." The preponderance of social science research clearly refutes this assertion.

Contrary to the concerns of the educational establishment, the typical home schooled child participates in a wide variety of extracurricular activities. The average home schooled student is regularly involved in 5.2 social activities outside the home, including afternoon and weekend programs with public school students (e.g., sports, scouts, church groups, ballet, Little League, neighbourhood play, part-time employment, and voluntary work), and day-time field trips and cooperative programs with groups of other home schooled students (Mattox, 1999). Ninety-eight percent of home schooled students are involved in two or more outside functions on a weekly basis (Farris, 1997). This reflects, in part, the fact that

home schooled children watch much less television than their public school peers. Of all home schooled children, 65 percent watch one hour or less of television per day, compared to 25 percent nationally. On average, 40 percent of American fourth-graders watch over three hours of television a day, but among home schooled children, only 1.6 percent consumes comparable amounts of television (Rudner, 1999).

In 1992, Prof. Larry Shyers assessed whether or not home schooled children suffer from retarded social development. His research observed children in free play and group interaction activities. Shyers found that public school children had significantly more problem behaviours than did the home schooled. Possibly this is because the primary models of behaviour for the home schooled are their parents, rather than their peers. Shyers also concluded that there was no significant difference between home schooled and non-home schooled children in terms of either self-concept development or assertiveness (Shyers, 1992).

Commenting on his ongoing investigation into the long-term effects of home schooling, education policy researcher J. Gary Knowles pronounced, "I have found no evidence that these adults were even moderately disadvantaged... Two thirds of them were married, the norm for adults their age, and none were unemployed or any on any form of welfare assistance" (Knowles, 1991). According to Prof. Thomas C. Smedley's personal interaction and communications research, home schooled students are more mature and better socialized than are those sent to either public or private school (Smedley, 1992). Data has also been collected suggesting that home schooled students are friendlier than their public school peers, as well as more independent of peer values as they grow older. Research by Dr. Raymond Moore has indicated that the home schooled are happier, better adjusted, more thoughtful, competent, and sociable children (Moore, 1986).

The list of benefits to the home-schooled appears to exceed even its academic and social advantages. For example, Prof. John Taylor (1986) found that the home schooled have significantly higher self-esteem than those in public schools. According to Prof. Mona Delahooke (1986), the home schooled are less peer dependent than private school students, and the home schooled are as well adjusted, socially and emotionally, as their private school agemates. Prof. Linda Montgomery (1989) found that home schooled students are as involved in out-of-school and extracurricular activities that predict leadership in adulthood as are those in the comparison private school (who are more involved than those in public schools).

The successful socialization of home schooled children is aided immeasurably by the fact that each province and every state has at least one home school association. In fact, 85 percent of home schoolers either belong to a home school association or plan to join one (Lyman, 2000). Importantly, "Home school associations offer students the chance to interact with other home schoolers whether on the Internet, in study groups or for field trips. Some home schooling associations offer shared facilities, such as a library or gymnasium, and some have organized athletic teams and competitions for students" (Raycroft, 2000). Most such associations provide newsletters, curriculum advice, legal counsel, and networking opportunities, as well as sponsor conferences and organize yearbooks. Some even administer graduation ceremonies.

Conclusion

Home schooling, initially off the radar screen... has in the 30 years of its modern revival become a completely mainstream alternative to institutional schooling of any kind, public or private. No longer monolithic, easily accessibly, adaptable and responsive to its consumers... home schooling is the still extreme but rapidly

assimilating cultural prototype for inevitable reforms to public education in the coming decades, already in vigorous germination in the form of school voucher programs and charter schools (Kay, 2001).

This paper has established that home schooling is a thriving educational movement both in Canada and the United States. It has also empirically demonstrated that the academic *and* socialization outcomes for the average home schooled child are superior to those experienced by the average public school student. Consequently, does the rise of home schooling provide any implications for education policy in North America?

There is one overriding lesson for policymakers to learn from this survey of home schooling. As home schooling researcher Isabel Lyman pithily described the American experience: "Home schooling has produced literate students with minimal government interference at a fraction of the cost of any government program" (Lyman, 1998). A breakdown of the respective American costs produces a startling comparison. For example:

The parents spent, on average, \$546 per child per year for home education (and the median was \$400). State schools spent an average of \$5,325 per student (pre-kindergarten through the 12th grade) during school year 1993-94 (US Department of Education, 1996). This cost in state schools did not include construction, equipment and debt financing... It is clear that the direct costs of public (state-run) schooling in the United States are at least 975 percent (or about 10 times as much) of what the home education families in this study spent on educational materials and services (Ray, 1997a, ch. 4).

Most tellingly, perhaps, the \$546 spent per home schooled student produces an average 85th percentile ranking on test scores; the \$5,325 spent per public school student produces an average 50th percentile ranking.

In fact, both in Canada and the United States, most home schooling families "have achieved their goals... without a dime of government funding" (Lyman, 1998). In British Columbia, public and private schools do receive a government grant for each registered home schooled child but, in most cases and in most jurisdictions, home schooling families are not dependent on public, tax-funded resources. Furthermore, home schooling families may be saving their fellow taxpayers significant sums of money. For example, according to a study conducted in Oregon, home schoolers save that state's taxpayers \$31 million annually (Ray, 1993). Overall, it may be argued that home schoolers serve "as models of economy and effectiveness" (Audain, 1987). Such realities suggest that both Canadian and American policymakers should consider whether or not home schooling parents, whose property taxes subsidize public schools, merit a reduction in those taxes.

It is also the case that while, in many jurisdictions, home schooling has been largely deregulated, "further deregulation would make parents' task easier" (Lyman, 1998). After all, a comparison of home schooled students' performance in highly regulated, moderately regulated, and unregulated American jurisdictions found no statistical difference. That is, the degree of government regulation has no significant effect on the academic performance of home schooled children. It was found that whether a given state imposes a high or low degree of regulation, home schooled students' average test scores are at the 86th percentile (Ray, 1997b).

It appears that there may be growing recognition of this reality. Hence, the American home schooling community triumphed politically when it successfully lobbied the US Congress to abandon plans to require that parents acquire certification as teachers before being allowed to home school their children. According to Hudson Institute senior fellow Chester E. Finn, Jr., this was an im-

pressive demonstration that, "Americans are becoming fussy consumers rather than trusting captives of a state monopoly. They've declared their independence and are taking matters into their own hands" (Finn, quoted in Kantrowitz and Wingert, 1998, p. 67). A majority of the public is also aware that an alternative instrument for the delivery of education may be available. A 1998 *Newsweek* poll, for example, found 59 percent of Americans agreeing that home schooled students are at least as well educated as public school students (Kantrowitz and Wingert, 1998).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child declares that, "Parents have the prior right to determine the form of their children's education... the State's right to intervene in the education process is limited to ensuring that the children's right to education is fulfilled." If Canadian and American policymakers, often so enthusiastic to comply with the aforementioned international organization's latest edict, are seriously committed to the meaning of this universal declaration, government interference in the area of home schooling will be limited. Although home schooling is neither desirable nor possible for all families, it has proven itself to be a relatively inexpensive and successful private alternative to public (and costly formal private) education. As such, it merits both the respect of regulators and the further attention of researchers.

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