



## **HOME EDUCATION IN CANADA**

NATIONAL POLL OF HOME-SCHOOLING FAMILIES  
SHOWS STARTLING RESULTS

By Paul D. Faris

As the school bell tolls across Canada every September, 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 Home School Legal Defence Association and 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, 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 per cent response rate); 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.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

*A sketch of the home-educating family.*

The vast majority of home-educated students (96 per cent) live with both parents in families with an average of 3.3 children, where an average of 2.4 students are being taught at home. The majority (85 per cent) of home-educated students are between the ages of five and 13, and are in their elementary years of schooling. About 67 per cent of kids surveyed have been entirely home-educated; 33 per cent of students have experienced some mix of years in the classroom and at home. Home-schooling parents are well-educated: most (84 per cent of mothers and 80 per cent of fathers) have completed secondary school and have received at least some college or university instruction. Home-schooling continues to be, for the most part, a first-generation endeavour, since almost none of these parents were home-educated themselves. Despite their higher-than-average education levels, almost 70 per cent of home-educating families live with an annual household income of less than \$65,000. Two-thirds of the home-schooling households report having only one income earner. In those households reporting two-income earners, most (67 per cent) of second-income earners report less than 15 hours of employment per week. Just over 11 per cent of home-educating mothers and just over five per cent of home-educating fathers hold provincial teaching certification. Most families report a religious preference or denominational affiliation.

## SUPPORT GROUPS

*Do home educators build community and work with one another?*

Participation in home-school support groups is quite popular, as more than 70 per cent of families report affiliating with local or provincial associations. These groups offer support ranging from curricular advice to sports programs to legal protection.

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 per cent report some level of interference by a school board, ministry or social service agency.

## MOTIVATIONS

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

Most parents do not choose to home-school in response to a negative situation, but rather to proactively achieve some combination of moral, social, familial and academic goals (such as teaching certain beliefs and values, encouraging enhanced family interaction and individualizing curriculum). Many, however, do report avoiding such negative aspects of classroom attendance as wasted time, perceived lack of discipline and safety concerns.

## METHODS AND LIFESTYLE

*How do home educators “do education”?*

This study uncovers a wide range of educational choices available to home educators. About half utilize an eclectic mix of various traditional texts and workbooks, another 17 per cent 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 per cent 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. While the majority (58 per cent) of parent participants in this study rate their schooling schedule to be neither very unstructured nor very structured, the rest fall more predominantly into the very structured schedule (36 per cent) than into the very unstructured (six per cent). A similar picture exists for approach to curriculum, with seven per cent very unstructured, 63 per cent moderately structured and 30 per cent very structured. On average, children engage in eight types of activities (some weekly, some occasionally), such as co-operative educational experiences, church programs and field trips, music and swimming lessons, team sports and recreational skating, and summer camps and volunteering. More than a quarter of those surveyed visit the library four or more times a month, with most (87 per cent) going at least once a month. Almost half (45 per cent) report living in homes with over 1,000 books.

More than 50 per cent of the students watch up to two hours of television daily and spend up to an hour each day using the computer recreationally. Only 24 per cent spend more than an hour weekly learning a foreign language, with well over half studying no second language at all. The average

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 or governments.

## ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS

*How do home-educated students compare academically with their peers?*

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 per cent of home-educated students scored above the Canadian norm for both grade equivalency and basic skills.

The average home-educated Canadian student in grades one through eight ranks in the 81<sup>ST</sup> percentile in reading, 76<sup>TH</sup> percentile in language and 74<sup>TH</sup> percentile in mathematics (with the norms for their peers at the 50<sup>TH</sup> percentile). The mean (average) percentile ranks for home-educated students in grades nine through 12 were, in reading 85<sup>TH</sup>, in language 84<sup>TH</sup> and in mathematics 67<sup>TH</sup>.

## LIFE SATISFACTION

*But are they happy?*

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 six, home-educated students score 4.94 compared to an average score of 4.21 for students in a previous study of public-schooled students. While this data will serve as a benchmark for future similar studies, it does indicate a general contentment among the home-educated. 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 among the home-educated than among publicly schooled children.

## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

*Does home education create good citizens?*

The survey included a section to be completed by formerly home-educated adults, with 182 older siblings of those currently being home-educated responding. Virtually all are moving into further education or taking their place in the labour force as productive members of society, and are represented in the areas of agriculture and 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 more than 82 per cent holding one or more volunteer positions in their communities (significantly, more than half of these positions in leadership). More than 60 per cent of these young adults report having voted in the last five years and none report having received any form of social assistance. While this is not a representative sample of all Canadian adults ever home-educated, it does point to a body of citizens that contributes to and participates in their communities.

## PERSUASIVE RESULTS

The growing body of research on home education is becoming increasingly persuasive. Not only do home-educated students seem to be doing well academically, but the newest evidence also suggests that they are becoming responsible, well-socialized citizens who enjoy life. While further research is certainly called for, home education is being recognized as a responsible education choice in Canada. In light of the research to date, home education should be viewed as an acceptable educational option for those families willing and able to undertake it.

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

*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 home-school leaders from across the country. For more information about HSLDA and CCHE, visit [www.hsllda.ca](http://www.hsllda.ca).*

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### SOURCES

Van Pelt, D. (2003) *Home Education in Canada: A Report on the Pan-Canadian Study on Home Education 2003*. Medicine Hat, AB: The Canadian Centre for Home Education.