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HOMESCHOOLING

Homeschooling has risen as an alternate to public education in the United States. Originally confined to fringe religious groups like the Amish, it has turned into a social phenomenon in America, including middle-class suburbanites and urban elites. Additionally, it has become a large commercial market that provides everything from school supplies tailored to the homeschool market to conferences for homeschool teachers.

HOMESCHOOLING STATISTICS

In 1999, and again in 2003, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) did a nationwide study of homeschooling in the United States. In the latter study, the NCES estimated that there are more than one million homeschooled students. Approximately 2.2 percent of all students are homeschooled. That percentage had risen by almost one-third since the 1999 study. The study showed that the vast majority of home-schooled students are white, urban, and from the South. Additionally, the majority of students come from traditional two-parent homes where one parent works and the other stays home. While middle-class parents predominate (defined as household incomes between \$25,000 and \$75,000), lower-class families make up more than one-quarter of homeschooled-students, while just over one-fifth of home-schooled students come from upper-class parents. Likewise, home-schooled parents are fairly well educated, with the majority having a degree or some college level education, though graduate/professional school parents make up the smallest percentage (NCES 2006).

The NCES study also measured not just raw numbers, but included a multivariate approach that showed the likelihood of a given group to homeschool given all other variables being held equal. Here the results were somewhat different. This study showed that lower-class parents were significantly more likely to homeschool their children than either middle- or upper-class parents. Likewise, families with three or more children were more than twice as likely to homeschool as those with fewer children. Also, in a multivariate analysis, rural families were significantly more likely to homeschool than urban families (NCES 2006).

However, it is important to note that homeschooling need not be an all or nothing proposition. Eric Isenberg notes that 21 percent of home-schooled students attend public school part-time, usually going a few hours a week. He also shows that parents who have multiple children may choose not to homeschool all their children, but select one or more to homeschool, sending the others to public school. This percentage is higher than might be imagined; Isenberg states that 55 percent of parents that homeschool with multiple children "sent at least one other child to school" (Isenberg, 2007). Additionally, students may be homeschooled in some grades, but not in others.

However, families that homeschool their children for religious reasons are more likely to homeschool all of their children.

What is clear from this statistical analysis, is while the likelihood of homeschooling is higher for certain groups, there are larger numbers of homeschooling children, a variety of social and ethnic classes, and homeschooling may not be as exclusively relegated to evangelical Christians as is generally believed, particularly if there are private school alternatives available. Thus, homeschooling is not limited to a particular subgroup, but is a widespread phenomenon in the United States.

THE LEGAL ASPECTS OF HOMESCHOOLING

There is no federal law that regulates homeschooling. Section 9506 of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 specifically forbids federal control of homeschooling. Thus, currently all law related to home schools is state based, and therefore laws regarding home school vary greatly from state to state. States are able then to regulate home schooling as they see fit, theoretically even to ban it. However, at this point, all states recognize homeschooling as an educational option.

The most significant legal barrier to home schooling has been compulsory attendance laws. Homeschooling, by definition, demands exemption from compulsory education attendance requirements. States thus must legislate specific exemption for home schooled children. Likewise, states may determine to what degree a home-schooled student may participate in extra-curricular activities like sports, or band, or classes the parents feel inadequately prepared to teach, like foreign language, chemistry or music. In *Swanson v. Guthrie*, the tenth circuit appeals court held that a homeschooled child may be denied access to selected classes if there is a board policy denying all part-time students such access. Additionally, the courts have held that there is no constitutional right to extracurricular activities even for public school students, and therefore may correspondingly exclude home school students as well.

On the other hand, states may exercise their rights to determine the qualifications of homeschool teachers. However, this must also be consistent. If private schools are allowed to employ noncredentialed teachers, then there can be no requirement that homeschool teachers be credentialed. But if a parent does not fulfill the uniform standard of teacher qualifications for a state, then the homeschooling request may be denied. North Dakota has some of the most stringent requirements for homeschool teachers, requiring either a teaching certificate or a bachelor's degree. If the parent has neither of those, but they have a General Educational Development test (GED) or equivalent, they may still teach, but are supervised by a credentialed teacher. They may also qualify by passing the teacher exam. North Dakota, however, is an exception. The majority of states have no qualification requirements for homeschool teachers.

In general, states have been quite accommodating of homeschool students. The Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) rates 25 out of 50 states as having either no regulation or low regulation (meaning parents only have to notify the state that

they intend to homeschool). Another 19 states are rated as having moderate regulation (parents are required to indicate student progress to the state through grades, test scores, portfolios, etc.). Only 6 out of 50 states are considered by the HSLDA as having high regulations. Generally these states require more documentation in terms of attendance and student progress.

REASONS FOR HOMESCHOOLING

Homeschooling started in the 1950s as a liberal rebellion against an educational system that was perceived as too institutional and rigid. Parents eager to try more cutting edge educational methods took their children out of the public schools and began educating them at home. Starting in the 1970s through the 1980s with Supreme Court decisions banning school prayer and mandatory bible reading, the homeschooled student body shifted to a more conservative group. It was now religious conservatives who made up the bulk of homeschooling families. While this group still comprises the majority of homeschoolers, homeschooling advocates claim that homeschoolers come from across the political spectrum (though a 2002 study indicated that 75 percent of homeschooling families are conservative Christians).

Homeschool families have been divided into two different categories: Ideological and pedagogical. Ideological homeschool families do so because they believe that public schools do not support their beliefs and values. Often these are conservative Christians who feel the absence of prayer and bible reading, and the teaching of evolution, sex education, and "moral relativism;" makes the public schools hostile to their core beliefs. On the other side are pedagogical homeschooling families. These are families, sometimes with special needs' students, who feel that public schools are not teaching their children appropriately. The problem here is not with content, as it is with ideological homeschoolers, but rather with method. Pedagogical homeschooling families believe they can meet the educational needs of their children more effectively than the public schools. In contrast to the ideological homeschoolers who often follow textbooks quite rigidly, pedagogical homeschool parents will adapt and selectively use material developed by homeschool publishers. These parents often focus on experiential learning, and pedagogical methods can vary daily. It appears that these (pedagogical) parents are growing in number. Studies have suggested that ideological reasons for homeschooling appear to be subsiding in importance for this general population, whereas pedagogical and special needs' reasons are becoming increasingly important motivators for parents' decisions to home school.

Another study on homeschooling divides parental reasons for homeschooling differently. For this study, the reasons of homeschool parents can be mapped between *parent-focused* homeschooling and *partnership-focused* homeschooling. Parent-focused homeschool parents are those who feel an enormous responsibility for their children's education, and thus take the responsibility for themselves. These parents may *go it alone* without getting involved in homeschooling groups. Likewise, these parents are not necessarily negative in regards to public schools; they have a different priority. Partnership-focused homeschool parents are actually in flight from the public school

system. They seek another organization to work with, and have found the public schools wanting. As a result, they have rejected the public school as their partner, and have turned to homeschooling groups for partnerships.

Still, this study does not dispute a religious or value-based motivation for homeschooling. In fact, their study confirms such a belief, though it warns against a single-designation of homeschool families as ideologues. While values do inform parents' decisions to homeschool, the argument is that, just as important, is the parents' conception of their role in their children's education. They hold that religious belief structures are in the end only a part of the explanation, rather than the entirety of it.

The National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES) also measured reasons for homeschooling. Isenberg (2007) compiled a number of studies of homeschooling families. The data with regards to religion was somewhat ambiguous. When asked why they homeschooled, 30 percent of parents who homeschool their children reported religious reasons as the primary cause. On the other hand 48 percent of parents listed educational reasons as their primary impetus to homeschool. Moreover, the number of homeschooled students taking the SAT who report having a religious faith (41.8%), is lower than those in public schools (52.5%). Though the number of homeschool students who report being Baptist is higher (17.7%) than those in public school (10.3%). However, the competition may actually not be from the public school sector as much as from the private school sector. Isenberg concludes: "In small towns, however, private school enrollment does depend on the percentage evangelical Protestant, showing that they substitute private schooling for homeschooling when economies of scale for private schooling can be obtained" (Isenberg 2007). It has also been pointed out that many parents homeschool because of behavioral or special needs issues, particularly with older children. Isenberg notes that those parents who give the reason for homeschooling more than doubles from students age 13 and younger to students age 14 and older. Additionally, when one examines the number of parents who include this reason as significant (though not primary), the number of students who are homeschooled for behavioral and special needs concerns age 14 and above is 48 percent as opposed to younger children, whose parents cite this reason at a level of less than half as often (22%).

Thus, the contrary to popular conception of homeschooling as a fundamentalist or evangelical exodus from the public school system to defend a rightfully imperiled premodern world view is not proven. The data shows that the reasons for homeschooling are far more complex. Certainly, religion is an important factor in a family's choice to homeschool their children, yet there are often other reasons that are more important from the parents' point of view. As public education is increasingly denounced as "a failure;" one of the beneficiaries of this is the homeschooling movement, as parents try to find alternatives to improve their children's education.

HOMESCHOOL OUTCOMES

Studies that follow homeschooling outcomes are methodologically difficult to undertake due to the lack of consistent requirements by the state to track homeschooled students.

The question that is often asked is how successful is homeschooling as compared to conventional schooling in terms of student achievement? Brian Ray's study of homeschool outcomes tried systematically to examine the test data on homeschool students (Ray 2004). Several states require homeschool students to participate in state standardized tests. Ray's examination of the data showed that homeschooled students generally scored as well, or better than their conventionally schooled counterparts. Ray is quick to point out, however, that one cannot draw conclusions about homeschooling per se, but rather that a number of factors, including low teacher to student ratios, teaching to the test, and high levels of parental involvement, may be significant factors as well. Controlling for these factors, homeschool students may not perform significantly better than conventionally schooled students.

In terms of social effects, homeschool students appear not to lag behind their conventional peers. Psychological testing of homeschooled children shows a self-concept generally at, or above the norm. While homeschool students appear less peer-focused than non-homeschool students, a study of their level of socialization showed that they had a great deal of peer interaction through homeschooling organizations, community groups, and churches. Studies of homeschooled children found no negative psychological indications that can be directly traced to the homeschooling environment.

THE HOMESCHOOL MARKET

Homeschooling is not a task that can be taken on without preparation. The homeschooling parent knows that they need resources and materials in order to teach the variety of topics that are a part of a well-rounded education. To this end there has arisen an entire new market to provide these materials to willing and wanting parents. Broadly, two curriculum options are available for parents who homeschool: Complete curriculum and learning resources.

There are complete curricula that start at over \$500 but provide lessons in math, reading, history, and so forth. Companies market these in a variety of ways. From A Beka Home School, which offers a choice of traditional and accredited programs "designed to provide an excellent Christian education for those who teach their child at home;" to Clonlara School, with its holistic emphasis on the child and its affirmation that "Clonlara School is welcoming: We do not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, color, gender, nationality or ethnic origin in administration of our educational and/or admissions policies;" Clonlara likewise touts accreditation for homeschoolers who sign-up with them. For those looking for accreditation, and thus an easier entry for their children into college, the costs of programs like these can run upwards of \$1000 per year, including materials.

There are also resource vendors who are willing to sell workbooks, hands-on supplies, games, and other teaching materials. Many of these books are the same products that regular classroom teachers use to supplement their district curriculum from publishers well known to public school teachers like Teacher Created Resources, and Frank Schaffer Publications. Other texts are more specifically designed for those attempting to integrate religious instruction into their material, with books and materials from publishers like Alpha Omega Publication, and Bob Jones University Press. What is perhaps most interesting is the cost of these products. Individual workbooks often cost around \$20 and *subject packs* like those offered by Bob Jones University Press can cost in the hundreds of dollars.

Thus, the homeschool market is a growing and profitable industry, which is buoyed by local conferences where vendors are able to display their wares, and online communities in which home school parents are able to share their insights and recommendations regarding different curriculum choices. In fact, some homeschool organizations have turned to on-line tutoring and communication as a way of supporting homeschool teachers, as well as providing avenues for students to discuss educational topics with one another. Web sites like Jubilee Academy offer an on-line educational experience where students can take courses over the internet. As on-line education becomes more feasible at the adult level, homeschool organizations are likewise seeing their value as a way of creating more value in the homeschool market. This has particular appeal to those parents who wish to homeschool their children in the higher grades, but do not have the specialized knowledge to teach subjects like World History or Calculus.

CONCLUSION

The homeschool world is still very small. Estimates put homeschooling at two to three percent of the education populace. Still, in the United States this translates to over a million homeschool students. As we have seen, those who homeschool do so from a variety of social and economic backgrounds, and do so for a variety of reasons. There is no doubt that fundamentalists and evangelicals make up a large percentage of those who homeschool, but increasingly homeschooling is seen as a viable option by those who are not necessarily inclined towards a more conservative religious ideology. The percentage of homeschool parents who listed religion as their primary reason actually declined from 1999 to 2003. As the public school system is increasingly under attack as ineffective or worse, parents from a variety of backgrounds are seeing homeschooling as a workable alternative. The homeschool market is addressing the needs of these parents, and with the increasing power of the Internet, on-line courses may soon become a staple of homeschooling life.

See also Separation of Church and State.

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