

# Bargain Basement

*Home-schooling is a relatively inexpensive and successful alternative to public schools.*

**By Patrick Basham**

There has been very rapid growth in home-schooling in both Canada and the United States over the past 20 years. In 1979, just 2,000 Canadian children were home schooled. By 1996, the respective provincial ministries put the number of home-schooled children at 17,523, or 0.4% of total student enrolment — a 776% increase over just 18 years.

Canada's home-schooling associations claimed a much higher figure — between 30,000 and 40,000, or approximately 1% of total student enrolment. Today, they estimate 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.

In the largest study to date of Canadian home-schooling, Dr. Brian Ray found Canadian home-schoolers, on average, at the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile in reading, at the 76<sup>th</sup> percentile in language, and at the 79<sup>th</sup> percentile in mathematics. (The Canadian median for all public and privately-educated students is the 50<sup>th</sup> 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.

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.

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.

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, (e.g., sports, Scouts, church groups, ballet, neighbourhood play, part-time employment, and voluntary work), and daytime field trips and programs with other home-schooled students.

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% watch one hour or less of television per day, compared to 25% nationally. On average, 40% of American grade four students watch over three hours of television a day, but among home-schooled children, only 1.6% consume comparable amounts of television.

In 1992, Professor 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.

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 was unemployed or on any form of welfare assistance."

According to Professor 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.

Data have 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.

The list of benefits to the home-schooled appears to exceed even its academic and social advantages. For example, Professor John Taylor found that the home-schooled have significantly higher self-esteem than those in public schools.

According to Professor Mona Delahooke, the home-schooled are less peer dependent than private schools students, and the home-schooled are as well adjusted, socially and emotionally, as their private school agetates.

Professor Linda Montgomery 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).

There is one over-riding lesson for policy-makers to learn from this survey of home-schooling. As home-schooling researcher Isabel Lyman states: "Home schooling has produced literate students with minimal governmental interference at a fraction of the cost of any government program."

In BC, public and private schools do receive a government grant for each registered home-schooled child, but in most jurisdictions, home-schooling families are not dependent on public, tax-funded resources.

Home-schooling families may be saving their fellow taxpayers significant sums of money. Perhaps policy-makers should consider whether or not home-schooling parents, whose property taxes subsidize public schools, merit a reduction in those taxes.

*(Adapted with permission from "Home Schooling: From the Extreme to the Mainstream," published by The Fraser Institute, [www.fraserinstitute.ca](http://www.fraserinstitute.ca). Mr. Basham is Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute.)*