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Johnna Willis

Cedarville University, jwillis@cedarville.edu

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Johnna Willis

A Homeschool Survey

Parents in America possess freedoms in way they choose to raise their child. One of these freedoms is the opportunity to choose how their child is educated. Today, the three main options for education are government or public schools, private schools, or homeschooling. In the past thirty years, the number of families choosing to homeschool has increased dramatically. The parents' option to homeschool has changed throughout history, but today in the United States children are homeschooled in a variety of ways for several reasons. Factors influencing the homeschooling system in America today include the history of home education, the motivation to pull children out of public school, and the states' variations homeschool opportunities.

The history of home education in America goes back to the birth of the nation but has developed over time. Homeschooling has been an option for centuries but has only been prevalent in America for a few decades. Joseph Murphy says in his book *Homeschooling in America* that homeschooling was the primary source of education before there were public schools. Therefore, many of the founders of our country were homeschooled. However, once public schools established across the country, homeschooling became less popular. The public educational system took about seventy years within the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to spread state to state. Homeschooling then seemed "old-fashioned" and less normal. It didn't take off again until the late 1900's when complaints were made about the public-school system (Murphy, 2014, p 31).

Many think homeschooling became popular once again as the result of conservative parents keeping their children out of the public-school system. However, *Homeschool: An American History* says otherwise. "In the 1960s most conservative efforts were aimed at keeping public school values consistent with their own" (Gaither, pg 107). Instead of pulling their kids out of school, conservative families were attempting to change the schools they already attended. Years passed by and the schools wouldn't typically change to the standards parents desired for their children. Many parents believed although the schools could provide their children with adequate education, the parents or tutors at home could provide excellent education and a better environment. This began the slow rise of homeschooling numbers in America until it reached the 1.77 million children recorded in 2012 (*Homeschool Statistics*, 2016).

The parents of those 1.77 million children had issues with public school other than just if the education was adequate. The National Standards of Education Statistics (NSES) program

conducted a study in the 2011-2012 school year asking parents why they decided to homeschool. The most common answer was a quarter of the parents told the NSES that they were concerned about the environment at the local schools, 19% felt like the academics would be more appropriate for their child (or children) if the parents chose the materials, 16% said they wanted to homeschool due to religious reasons, and 40% gave a variety of other reasons such as special needs and frequent relocation (*Statistics About Nonpublic Education in the United States*, 2015).

Liza Rivero talks about this issue as well. In her chapter *Reasons for Homeschooling* she answers the question “Why homeschool?” with, “Because it allows children to learn at their own pace... it provides a safe learning environment... it strengthens and nurtures families... [and] because all children’s needs are worthy of special attention” (Rivero, 37-41) and based on the NSES program, this is a solid answer.

These reasons might be plenty enough for some states to accept a parent’s decision to homeschool. Some states require even less. Mitchell Stevens, who has done extensive research on homeschooling and reports most of it in his book *Kingdom of Children*, found a difference in the reports state by state. “Home education is legal throughout the United States, but states vary widely in the extent to which they require homeschool parents and their children to report to educational authorities” (Stevens, pg 13).

The Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) mapped out the states that are the easiest and most difficult in which families can homeschool. Regulations vary by region. High regulation states (5 states, all in New England) are required to turn in to the state the student's test scores, teacher certification, house tests, and get their curriculum approved by the state. Moderate level regulation (19 states nationwide, including Hawaii) requires turning in to the state the student's test scores. Low regulation states (15 states, mostly in the south and the west) just requires informing the state of the student no longer attending local schools. Some states (11 states nationwide, including Alaska) have no regulations (*Homeschool Statistics*, 2016)

Throughout these demographics homeschooling regulations aren’t the only things that vary. Every state offers different opportunities to homeschoolers. Parents who choose to educate their children at home also have various opinions as to how they want to homeschool. Some of these education forms are solely at home with different curriculum and some involve meeting in groups or meeting in a virtual classroom.

One popular form of education used in homeschool settings is classical education. Many private schools nationwide also offer classical education programs due to the focus on the

trivium. The trivium consists of three stages of learning: the grammar stage (elementary), the dialectic or logic stage (junior high), and the rhetorical or speaking stage (high school).

Lisa Rivero speaks about her knowledge of classical education in *The Homeschooling Option*, “The three stages of learning—the trivium—do seem to follow many children’s intellectual development. When used with flexibility and adaptation for the individual child, classical homeschooling is a good fit for many families and students, and it offers a reassuring educational plan and structure that sets the tone for lifelong learning” (Rivero, p 86).

Though classical subjects may be popular, another form of homeschooling follows the same pattern and curriculum as a public school. Some parents check and see what their child would be doing if they were in public school and educate them with the same books. This can be difficult, but it has been done.

Other parents do not want to use the same books as a public school, but they do want the children to be working on the same curriculum as others their age with teachers. Nationwide there are groups of homeschoolers who meet in “cooperation groups” or “co-op.” These groups typically consist of several homeschool families in a region. “Co-op” groups can go on field trips together, have book clubs, have PE classes, and other specialty classes. The bulk of work is done at home by each individual family, but once or twice a week the children can interact with classmates in these regular homeschool groups.

Another form of homeschool that is rapidly expanding is online education. Online education programs can be full enrollment or by the subject. Some programs are on the computer but not using internet such as disc-based programs. Hybrid courses have self-taught and digital materials, but other courses are fully online. Public schools across the country also have systems that can be accessed online with government funding (*Online Elementary School Glossary*, 2016).

Online education probably didn’t occur as a future option for children when the Founding Fathers discussed education for America’s children, but they also probably never realized how large the public schools would become after two hundred years. The change in home education in the past century has made it a reasonable option for families today. These changes, along with reasons to homeschool and the government’s variety of homeschooling methods, are some of the main reasons why homeschooling has become so popular today. Children around America spend days walking the hallways of “co-op” groups and houses rather than with several hundred other students in the local public school. This number of students today, influenced greatly by the past, will also be students who change the world for the future.

Resources

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