

2.04 Million Homeschool Students in the United States in 2010

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Introduction

Although estimates vary widely and the question has been debated by many (e.g., Bielick, 2008; Lines, 1991; Ray, 2005, 2009), the number of children being home educated (i.e., homeschooled) in the United States has clearly risen over the past 30 years.

The purpose of this project was to use a variety of data sources to develop and present an updated estimate of the number of grades K to 12 home-school students in the United States in 2010.

Methods

To get the best possible data, the researcher considered past research, sources of data from state and federal government agencies, and dialogue with researchers and others familiar with the home-school population to discover possible sources of data for this study. Several independent sources of data were targeted. This reliance on multiple sources of information and triangulation or cross-referencing has similarities to the approach taken by Lines (1987).

The data sources used were as follow:

1. Past relevant published research (e.g., from the U.S. Department of Education or the U.S. Census Bureau).
2. Data provided by some of the 50 United States departments of education. The author was able to identify and obtain data from 13 states that collect data on home-school families or students and collate it at the state level (see Appendix).
3. Data provided by five nationwide, private companies or organizations that serve the homeschool population (see Appendix).
4. Surveys (created and posted online by the researcher) of constituents of various selected statewide home-education organizations.
5. Surveys (created and posted online by the researcher) of leaders (e.g., board members) of various selected statewide home-school organizations and of one large and well-known nationwide homeschool organization.

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Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

“Standard statistical methods often provide no way to make accurate estimates about the characteristics of hidden populations ...” (Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004, p. 193), especially if resources (e.g., time and money) are very limited for the research project. “There are countless difficulties in making estimates or gathering information on the home schooling population” (Lines, 1991, p. 2). These facts were given due consideration in advance of this project. In addition, the author relied on his own experience and the experience of many others who had had long-term and personal experience with the homeschool population and community.

The researcher did not rely on a widespread, extensive, or expensive sampling approach (e.g., random digit dialing, mass postal mailings, long-term snowball sampling) involving large sample sizes of potential homeschool households. It was also assumed that state-provided data accurately reflect homeschool populations in each state. The author also assumed that respondents answered survey items honestly.

Definitions

Two operational definitions are important to this study.

Students of grades K through 12 are considered to be ages 5 to 17.

“Underground” refers to homeschool families in which parents choose not to comply with state law requiring registration of homeschooling of their children with the state or a local government education authorities.

Findings

Some findings and experience that lead to assumptions for calculations should be mentioned here. First is the “underground” factor. Based on surveys of those thoroughly familiar with the home-based education community, roughly 10% of homeschool families living in states attempting to control home education via some form of registration are underground. The author’s experience suggests that this 10% figure is conservative.

Second, the 50 states vary regarding the ages of law-mandated compulsory school attendance and reporting for homeschool families. For example, it is ages 5 to 17 in some states versus 7 to 16 in others. For calculation purposes, each age year or grade level was considered to be, on average, 7.7% of the K to 12 homeschool population.

Third, based on data collected for this study and findings from previous research, it was assumed that there are, on average, 2.2 K to 12 students per homeschool family.

Based on data collected from statewide homeschool organizations, there were approximately 2.201 million K-12 homeschool students in the U.S. during the spring of 2010. Information from key personnel in one large and prominent nationwide homeschool organization suggests there were about 2.160 million students at the same time. Data from seven state governments (i.e., AR, GA, MD, NE, NM, NC, and WI) whose data appeared the most valid and reliable suggest there were 1.868 million homeschool students at the same time. If the estimate of Bielick (2008) was accurate and the homeschool population continued to grow at the rate of about 8.3% per annum (as Bielick found for the four years preceding her estimate) then there would have been roughly 1.916 million home-educated students in the spring of 2010.

Data collected for this study, previous research findings, and the experience of the researcher show that there were an estimated 2.040 million (2,040,000) K to 12 homeschool students in the United States in the spring of 2010. The author is highly confident that the true number lies between 1,734,000 and 2,346,000 homeschool students in grades K to 12 in the United States during the spring of 2010.

Conclusion and Discussion

Most indications are that the homeschool population has grown in absolute terms during the past 3 to 5 years. This study shows there were an estimated 2.040 million K to 12 homeschool students in the United States in the spring of 2010, with high confidence that the true number lies between 1.734 million and 2.346 million.

The year 2007 is that for which the U.S. Department of Education last estimated the number of home-education students (Bielick, 2008). The U.S. Census Bureau (2010, and earlier) indicates that the population of all children ages 5 to 17 grew by about 2.11% from 2007 to 2010. At the same time, the U.S. Department of Education (2009) indicates that enrollment in schools (including pre-K and excluding homeschool students) grew by about only 0.59% from spring of 2007 to spring of 2010. On the other hand, there is some reliable evidence that was gathered during this study, from both state departments of education and private homeschool organizations, that the homeschool population grew by about 7% (or more) from spring of 2007 to spring of 2010. The preceding information suggests that the number of homeschool children grew in terms of the percentage of all school-age children, as well as in absolute terms, during the past 3 to 5 years.

Another way to consider this topic is the percentage of the school-age population in the United States that is home educated. If the school-age population (ages 5 to 17, grades K to 12) was 54.117 million in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008) and there were 2.040 million home-educated students, then approximately 3.8% of U.S. K-12

students were homeschooled in the spring of 2010. For some context regarding percentage of the student population, Bielick (2008) – and it should be carefully noted that she used different methods from those used in this study – found that about 2.9% of the school-age population was homeschooled in the spring of 2007.

In another vein, it is uncertain what effect nationwide economic hard times are having on the percentage of families that might choose home-based education. Difficult economic times might cause more parents to decide they need two incomes. If so, more families would find it difficult to have one parent available to homeschool the children. On the other hand, if fewer jobs are available nationwide then it might be more likely that one parent could be at home to conduct home-based education. Further, if the economy is down in general, families have less monetary resources available after taxes, including those they pay for state (public) schools, and therefore less to put toward tuition in private schools. Thus, homeschooling might increase as a percentage of private-education choice. Future research might address this intriguing issue.

Finally, many, including this author, expect to observe a notable surge in the number of children being homeschooled in the next 5 to 10 years. The rise would be in terms of both absolute numbers and percentage of the K to 12 student population. This increase would be in part because of the reasonable possibility that a large number of those individuals who were being home educated in the 1990s may begin to homeschool their own school-age children (see, e.g., Ray, 2004) and the continued successes of home-educated students (e.g., Ray, 2010).

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<http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2006/>;
; http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/cb06-

[ff11-2.html](#);

<http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/population.html>;

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Appendix

Data Sources

No information that was personally identifiable was provided by any source.

The 13 states from which government-provided data were obtained are Arkansas (AR), Florida

(FL), Georgia (GA), Maine (ME), Maryland (MD), New Mexico (NM), Nebraska (NE), Nevada (NV), North Carolina (NC), Oregon (OR), Pennsylvania (PA), Washington (WA), and Wisconsin (WI). Data were gathered from sources such as pages or documents within or personnel working with the following agencies and their websites:

<http://arkansased.org>,
<http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org>,
www.gadoe.org,
<http://www.maine.gov>,
<http://msde.state.md.us>,
<http://www.education.ne.gov>,
<http://nde.doe.nv.gov>,
<http://www.ncdnpe.org>,
<http://www.ode.state.or.us>,
<http://www.portal.state.pa.us>,
<http://www.k12.wa.us>, and
<http://dpi.wi.gov>.

Data about the states' compulsory school attendance laws and ages were gathered from personnel within the state governments and <http://www.hslda.org/laws/>.

The five well-known private companies or organizations that serve the homeschool population nationwide were comprised of two magazines/websites, a curriculum, achievement testing, and overall homeschool support organization, an

advocacy and support organization, and a marketing firm.

The surveys created and posted online by the researcher for constituents of various selected statewide homeschool organizations asked questions that addressed things such as their affiliation or membership with various homeschool organizations, enrollment of children in government-run school-at-home programs, and whether their state requires the registration with the state of home-educated children and whether they comply.

The surveys created and posted online by the researcher for leaders (e.g., board members) of various selected statewide homeschool organizations and of one large and well-known nationwide homeschool organization asked questions that addressed things such as the size (e.g., number of households) of the organization's constituent list, the percentage of the households that are currently homeschooling, and growth rate of homeschooling.

end

Revised (i.e., added one phrase to the last sentence of the "Conclusion and Discussion" section), January 11, 2011.

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