

# Homeschooling in Alberta:

The Choices, Contexts, and Consequences of a Developing System

Presentation to the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta

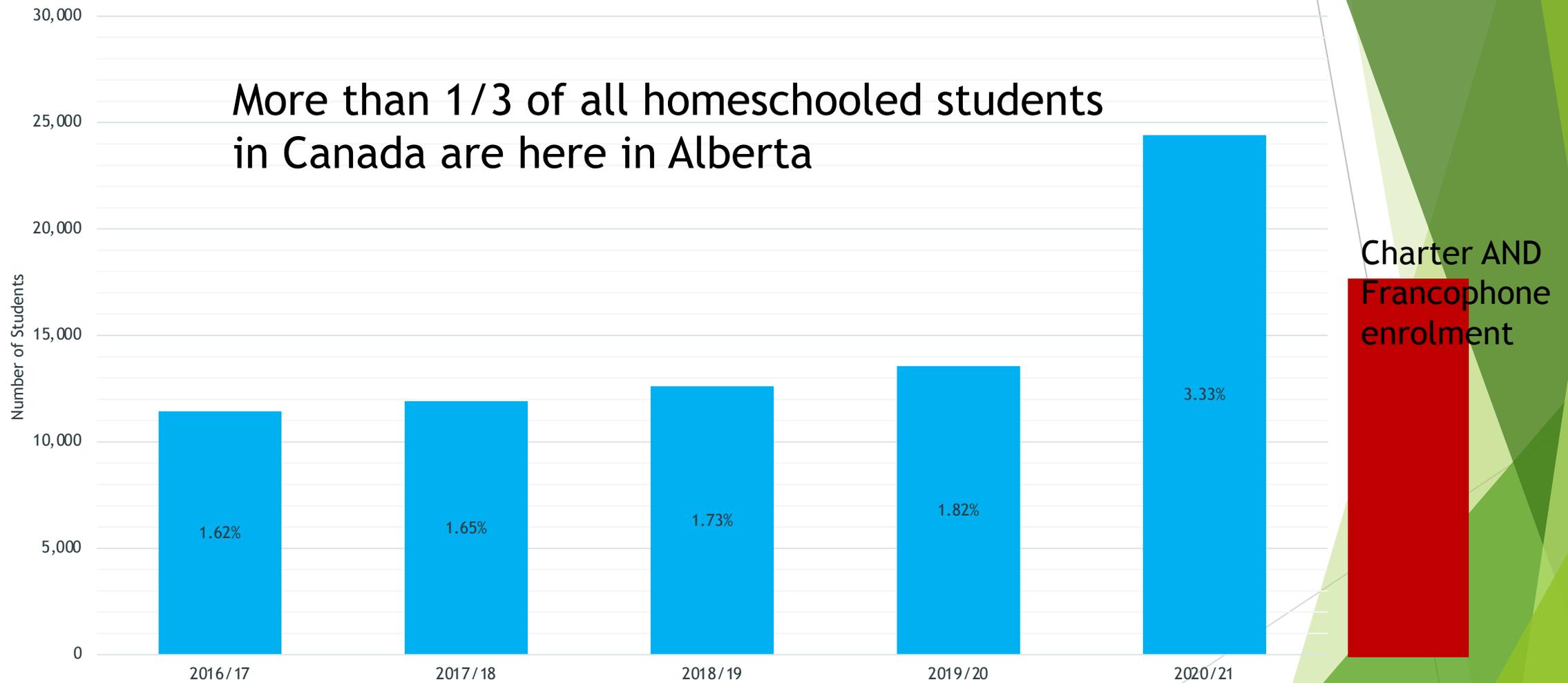
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# What is homeschooling?

- ▶ “Homeschooling is an alternative method of learning that takes place outside the public or private/independent school environment. Parents choosing homeschooling have the primary responsibility of managing, delivering and supervising their children’s courses and programs of learning” (Statistics Canada, 2019).
- ▶ Fulfills compulsory school attendance requirements for youth in Alberta

# Homeschool Student Population in Alberta



# Social and Legal Foundations of Homeschooling

## 1960s

- ▶ Christian right promoted homeschooling that emphasized religious teachings from a Christian perspective within a structured environment that taught the basics and promoted the authority of the family.
- ▶ Counter-cultural left viewed “unschooling” as an anti-establishment educational strategy for their children.

## 1980s

- ▶ Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA)—a powerful conservative Christian advocacy organization orchestrated a number of legislative and judicial victories on behalf of Christian families and in support of their parental rights to choose homeschooling.
- ▶ Establishment of Alberta Home Education Association (AHEA) and the Alberta Homeschooling Association (AHSA).

# Why do parents choose homeschooling?

## Religious Motives

- ▶ Emphasize religious (particularly Christian) teachings, values, beliefs, and morals.
- ▶ Typically follow conventional learning routines found in institutional schooling with a formal curriculum, schedules, and instructional authority (parent).
- ▶ Alberta Home Education Association states they “value parents as having the God-given right and responsibility to direct the education of their children” (AHEA, 2021a)

## Pedagogical or Academic Reasons

- ▶ Parents may want to provide more personalized attention and tailored forms of pedagogy that focus on a child’s learning style or interests.
- ▶ Parents may also choose to homeschool due to a child’s special needs, whether it be it a learning disability, a medical or psychological condition, or giftedness.

# Why do parents choose homeschooling?

## Dissatisfaction with Traditional Schools

- ▶ Parental discontent about the school environment can take on many forms. Concerns for child safety and wellbeing, bullying, and harmful peer pressures like drugs, alcohol, premarital sex, and consumerism can motivate parents to home school.
- ▶ Dissatisfaction with the rigidity of school rules and school bureaucracy as well as standardized educational practices like standardized testing.
- ▶ Negative experiences of parents as a student in school.

## Maintenance of the Family Unit

- ▶ Way to strengthen family bonds and parent-child relationships.
- ▶ Feelings of parental responsibility for their child's education.

# Why do parents choose homeschooling?

## Situational Pragmatics

- ▶ Because of family circumstance, parents may chose homeschooling not for ideological but pragmatic reasons, such as other time-intensive activities like athletics, drama, or the Arts, or because the family travels internationally for work or lifestyle.
- ▶ In some Northern communities in Alberta homeschooling at times has been the only route for some families due to remote location.
- ▶ Major social disruptions, such as the Covid-19 pandemic .

# Approaches to homeschooling in Alberta

- ▶ Supervised homeschooling
- ▶ Non-supervised homeschooling
- ▶ Structured homeschooling
- ▶ Non-structured homeschooling
- ▶ Homeschooling cooperatives
- ▶ Shared responsibility programs

# Structured homeschooling

The degree of structure in any home education program should be considered in terms of both *content* (curricular content) and *process* (learning processes). There are 4 different scenarios in terms of the structure of a home education program:

1. Structured process and structured content
2. Structured process and unstructured content
3. Structured content and unstructured process
4. Unstructured content and unstructured process (Neuman & Guterman, 2017b)

# Non-structured homeschooling

- ▶ Lacks the routines, schedules, curriculum, and learning objectives found in a structured learning environment.
- ▶ *“Unschooling”*

“Unschoolers do not send their children to school and they do not do at home the kinds of things that are done at school. More specifically, they do not establish a curriculum for their children, they do not require their children to do particular assignments for the purpose of education, and they do not test their children to measure progress. Instead, they allow their children freedom to pursue their own interests and to learn, in their own ways.”  
(Gray & Riley, 2013, p. 7)

# Supervised homeschooling

- ▶ A supervised program is overseen by a willing school authority (either a public, separate or Francophone school board or an accredited private school).
- ▶ Even with supervision, parents are responsible for all aspects of the educational program.
- ▶ Homeschoolers may choose to follow the provincial curriculum or they may choose not to.
- ▶ If the provincial curriculum is not followed, the supervising parent must provide a detailed account of the educational program to be delivered.
- ▶ A school board that is supervising a home education program is responsible for offering assistance and advice to parents and conduct two formal evaluations each year to assess student progress. (Government of Alberta, 2021b)

# Subcontracting homeschool supervision: The case of Trinity Christian School and Wisdom Home School Society of Alberta

- ▶ Trinity Christian School was a very small private school that subcontracted the homeschool programs it supervised to a third-party contractor, Wisdom Home School Society.
- ▶ Trinity had typically about 13 students enrolled, but it was responsible for nearly 3,500 home school students in which the supervision was subcontracted to a third-party provider that legally had “no relationship” with Alberta Education but yet was receiving \$5.5 million per year in provincial funding.
- ▶ In 2016, AB Education recommended that the Ministry of Education cancel Trinity’s accreditation and registration because the private school authority “failed to appropriately supervise its home education program” and “has failed to demonstrate accountability for funding received from the government of Alberta” (Alberta Education, 2016, p. 7).

# Non-supervised homeschooling

- ▶ Since 2020, deregulations in Alberta have permitted homeschooling that is not supervised by a school authority.
- ▶ Unregulated homeschooling creates more parental choice, but at what costs to students?

# Homeschooling cooperatives

- ▶ These can range from support groups that offer mutual support or timetabled groups of homeschoolers that meet up regularly, or organized cooperatives that replicate traditional schooling in many ways since families meet together in a rented space to conduct classes in groups that are taught by parents, or on occasion, by hired experts.

# Blended/Shared Responsibility Program

- ▶ An educational program that combines both teacher-directed and parent-directed home-based schooling.

# Homeschooler outcomes: Academic achievement

- ▶ Throughout the scholarly literature, it is consistently concluded that homeschooling does not have much of an effect on student achievement after controlling for family background variables.
- ▶ Homeschooling tends to improve student's verbal skills and reduce math skills (Coleman, 2014b; Kunzman & Gaither, 2020; Quaish, 2007).
- ▶ Clear evidence that “strongly suggest that the children who are being taught at home in a structured environment score significantly higher than the children receiving unstructured home schooling” (Martin-Chang et al, 2011, p. 200).
- ▶ Homeschool students in Alberta may encounter difficulties when transitioning to post-secondary.

# Homeschooler outcomes: Socialization

- ▶ When children do not attend school, they may be deprived of important opportunities to interact and develop social skills, values, and responsibilities (Medlin, 2000; Reich 2002).
- ▶ Homeschooling parents believe they are providing a better form of socialization within the family setting, and through other activities outside the home such as religious, sporting, extracurricular, cocurricular, volunteer, and work.
- ▶ Homeschooler socialization is highly dependent upon the extent to which opportunities are provided for social interaction and contact with diverse ideas. In general, homeschooling does not appear to harm the development of social skills and competencies, so long as homeschooled youth are offered ample opportunities for group socialization to develop their own social values and put those skills into practice.
- ▶ Greater social isolation compared to school-goers (Guterman & Neuman, 2017).

# Homeschooler outcomes: Physical and Mental Health

- ▶ Homeschooling parents may be less likely to support immunizations for their children (Kennedy & Gust, 2005; Mohantey et al, 2020)
- ▶ Education professionals are responsible for reporting cases of child maltreatment, but homeschooled students lack this protection.
- ▶ Home education *can* be used by parents to hide child abuse or neglect. Multiple studies from the USA indicate that homeschooling has been used to remove children from school as a way to conceal abuse or neglect (Knox et al., 2014; Office of the Child Advocate, 2018)

# Homeschooling Regulations by Province

<b>Low Regulations</b> Only require parents to notify school authorities and provide nominal information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Alberta (non-supervised option)</li><li>• British Columbia</li><li>• Ontario</li><li>• New Brunswick</li><li>• Newfoundland &amp; Labrador</li></ul>
<b>Moderate Regulations</b> Require programs to be certified or inspected, the submission of an education program plan, and some reporting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Manitoba</li><li>• Nova Scotia</li><li>• Prince Edward Island</li></ul>
<b>High Regulations</b> Require an educational plan that is officially reviewed, program monitoring that is conducted by the registering school authority, student progress that is periodically reviewed and assessed, and a curriculum that follows provincial standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Alberta (supervised option)</li><li>• Saskatchewan</li><li>• Quebec</li></ul>

# Fiscal Impact

- ▶ Alberta Education offers a grant for supervised homeschooling (worth \$1,700 divided evenly between families and school authorities).
- ▶ In 2019-20, Alberta Education disbursed more than \$23 million to offset the costs of supervised homeschooling, which is believed to result in net financial savings for the provincial government of more than \$127 million (or 1.5% of K-12 spending).
- ▶ Parents (often mothers) forego an income to stay at home, which lowers tax revenues collected.

# Conclusion & Recommendations

- ▶ All home education programs in Alberta should be supervised by an accredited school authority.
- ▶ Third-party contractors should not be permitted to supervise home education programs because they are not registered or accredited by the provincial government.

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