

Homeschool Slow-Down? Not So Fast

The Washington Post [reported](#) last week that after years of rapid growth, homeschooling rates seem to be leveling off. Between 1999 and 2012, the homeschooling population surged from 1.7 percent of the overall K-12 school-age population, to 3.4 percent—or approximately two million homeschoolers. Updated homeschooling data from the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) indicate that as of 2016, the percentage of homeschoolers held steady at roughly 3.3 percent.

In an [article](#) earlier this week, *Education Week* speculated on some possible reasons for the stabilizing homeschooling rate compared to the previous decade of rapid growth. Some suggestions include more education choice that gives parents additional options for their children's schooling, slowing growth of the Christian homeschooling movement, and an overall saturated market. As Indiana University education professor Christopher Lubienski told *Education Week*: "A lot of these movements just reach a natural plateau. It only appeals to certain families. Once all those families are involved, you've reached a point of saturation and growth becomes harder then."

But Brian Ray, Ph.D., president of the National Home Education Research Institute ([NHERI](#)) disagrees. Dr. Ray has closely tracked homeschooling data and trends for the past 33 years. He believes the DOE data are inaccurate. "Something is amiss in the DOE researchers' findings," says Ray.

The DOE data relies on completed responses to the [Parent and Family Involvement in Education](#) survey. In 2016, 14,075 questionnaires were completed, including 552 from homeschooling families included in the sample. From these limited data, DOE researchers concluded that homeschooling rates have remained constant since 2012.

In an interview with Intellectual Takeout, Dr. Ray explained that homeschooling rates are not only not stagnating they are accelerating, and in some cases skyrocketing.

In his research, Ray analyzed government-provided homeschooling data by state and found some striking patterns. In seven geographically diverse states that collected homeschooling data between the spring of 2012 and the spring of 2016—the same time period that the DOE researchers recently analyzed—Ray found homeschooling rates increased dramatically, from a low of +12.9 percent in one state to a high of +94.7 percent in another.

According to Ray: “I don’t think homeschooling growth is flat at all. Is there any evidence that the DOE researchers got it wrong? I think yes.”

Ray believes that while there is likely a homeschooling “ceiling,” he doesn’t think we have come anywhere near it yet. “The foundational reasons for homeschooling—including stronger academics than schools can provide, more family time, dissatisfaction with local government schools, more sibling bonds—are not going away,” says Ray. “In fact,” he continues, “my research shows that as the first generation of homeschoolers now becomes parents, they are planning to homeschool at much higher rates than the general population.”

While homeschoolers can be notoriously difficult to track, given their not-so-distant history when, as Dr. Ray says, homeschooling parents were worried about “being handcuffed and threatened with jail time,” it seems that in the states that are tracking them, homeschool rates are jumping.

Some might find Ray’s conclusion surprising.

It is possible that homeschool growth might slow as parents have more educational options from which to choose. As school choice expands and alternatives to school sprout, fewer parents will be left with a binary choice: keep your children

in a failing system or pull them and educate them at home.

But Ray's research says this is simply not happening.

"Based on my research," he says, "there's no way that homeschooling has not been growing these last four years."

—

[Image Credit: U.S. Air Force photo/Airman 1st Class Dillon White]