

# Home-schooling appears to be moving away from educational outsiderdom

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Once on the outskirts of education, home-schooling seems to be steadily picking up steam.

If the term makes you think of a feral child living in a Volkswagen camper van with dreadlocked parents, you're way off because it appears that a variety of parents are turning to it.

Esther Ng, a Mississauga mother who home-schools her two children, ages 10 and 15, said the endeavour is a lifestyle change, but rewarding. She works as a music teacher in the evenings and says home-schooling was a way to spend time with her children.

A member of the Mississauga Christian Homeschool Association (MCHA), one of a small handful of local support groups in Peel, Ng has seen the number of home-

schoolers here anecdotally "skyrocket" in the past couple years.

There are about 100 home-school students tied to the volunteer-run MCHA, which started about 25 years ago.

She said there's been a surge in parents who have told her they are unhappy with the incoming sex-ed curriculum.

"I think that's one big motivation. I talked to other group leaders as well and they said the membership has doubled or tripled," said Ng, adding that sex-ed is not the sole factor behind the apparent uptick.

"Some families decide to home-school because they find their kid doesn't belong (in a traditional school setting)," she said. "For example, they are more advanced, or the parents find that the kids want to spend more time on a certain subject."

Munazza Mukri, administrator of the Toronto Muslim home-schoolers, a GTA-based support group with a large portion of members in Peel, told *The News* through email that the organization has also seen "incredible growth."

"(Home-schooling) matches the way we live and the opportunities that we have, of course, with Internet connection, education can be delivered so much more easily now because of the access to technology," said Deani Van Pelt, director of the Fraser Institute's Barbra Mitchell Centre for Improved Education.

Van Pelt added that this was a "big contrast" to the movement a few decades ago: "Those were very different sorts of parents that were choosing home-schooling for different sorts of reasons that were much more ideologically based."

Though home-school regulations vary by province, Van Pelt said that in Ontario there's only a policy that parents should be registering with their local school board.

However, if your child has never been to school, you are not legally bound to register. In the Peel District School Board, the number of home-schoolers registered as of last October was 764. Compared to the 151,423 other students, that number appears insignificant. However, it has climbed from the 530 home-schoolers registered at that time the previous year and the 493 the year before.

There are currently 56 home-schoolers

Some say the increase in home-schooling could be partially related to the new sex-ed curriculum.



## Crunching the numbers

### What's the difference?

Home-school regulations differ by province in Canada. Deani Van Pelt, director of the Fraser Institute's Barbra Mitchell Centre for Improved Education, says the anecdotal evidence suggests that not everyone is being recorded by the system. However, here's a breakdown of those who are on the radar.

**764** registered with the Peel District School Board (as of Oct. 31, 2015)

**56** in the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board (as of January 2016)

**5,600** in Ontario from the 2013-14 school year, according to Ministry of Education

**7** per cent was how much home-schooling grew on average each year in Ontario from the 2006-07 school year to 2011-12\*

**29** per cent is how much home-schooling increased overall in Canada from 2006-07 school year to 2011-12\*

**8,000** is the number of home-schoolers registered in Alberta in 2011-12\*

**81** was amount of home-schoolers in Prince Edward Island in 2011-12 – the lowest number of all provinces\*

\*Source: Fraser Institute

registered with the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board as of this month, a decrease from the 82 recorded by the Catholic board in each of the two previous years.

According to the most recent numbers from the Ministry of Education, there were two million students (ages six to 18 years old) registered in the 2013-14 school year in Ontario – 5,600 were home-schooled.

Van Pelt authored a study released last summer by The Fraser Institute that found home-schooling grew on average by seven per cent each year from 2006-07 to 2011-12 in Ontario.

Entitled, *Home schooling in Canada: The Current Picture*, the research found that parents staying home to educate their own children in Canada has grown by 29 per cent in that six-year period.

Given that people like Ng's children fall in the category of unregistered, Van Pelt suspects that overall registration data "doesn't even get it by half."

Provinces with higher numbers and more regulatory requirements such as Alberta and Saskatchewan also provide funding to parents who stay home to school their children.

Though it's done by school board in Saskatchewan, Saskatoon parents can receive up to \$1,000 per home-school child.

The average annual cost of public school in Ontario is \$12,000 per pupil.

Ng said the cost of teaching her children is about \$4,000 a year, but noted it's really up to the parent how much they want to spend. This allows for a lot of creativity when it

comes to curriculum, which, similarly to private schools, is not controlled by the Ontario government, said Van Pelt.

"A lot of parents, they pair up with other parents and then they take turns teaching different things," said Ng, adding that she enjoys the freedom.

The "no holds barred" approach gives Ng the chance to provide her kids with a more individualized education. For instance, when her son was younger, he struggled with writing, but excelled at math, so she could spend more time on literacy, providing a more well-rounded approach.

Just as the face of home-schooling is changing, so is the perception of it from an academic and social standpoint.

While working on a study in 2009, Van Pelt spoke with adults who were previously home-schooled and heard anecdotal evidence that they encountered the stereotype of being perceived as socially awkward.

"It was almost this external imposition that the rest of us put onto home-school kids. It's almost, 'Oh, you're different,'" said Van Pelt.

Ng's support group, which also has members from Brampton and Oakville, meet up at a gym inside a Mississauga church once a week for a social experience and to share ideas, with some families getting together outside of the schedule to work on educational projects.

"I always tell my kids that I don't know everything, but we are going to tackle all the difficulties together as we go down this journey," said Ng.

