

Home-Based Education and Colorado Public Libraries

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Home-based education is defined as an education program whose instruction takes place at home, is implemented by “the child’s parent or by an adult relative of the child designated by the parent” and is not managed by a school district. The homeschool population is small within Colorado and across the nation, however, as Colorado’s home-based education numbers decrease, the nation’s numbers are rising.



According to the Colorado Department of Education, in Fall 2003, 8,591 children were educated at home in Colorado and those numbers dropped by 18% to 7,081 in 2004. Between 2000 and 2004 there has been a steady decrease in reported homeschooled students—the only exception being 2001, in which there was a 3.2% increase. Conversely, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports in *Homeschooling in the United States: 2003* that “the percentage of the entire student population who were being homeschooled increased from 1.7 percent in 1999 to 2.2 percent in 2003.” Although these numbers are small, consider that in 2003, only 1.1 million children were nationally homeschooled compared to 49 million students enrolled in schools (from nursery to high school). Thus increases and decreases in the homeschooled population, even seemingly small changes, are considerable. One possible reason for the decrease in Colorado’s homeschooled population may be the increase in online schooling.



So how do libraries fit into these numbers? Despite the decrease in Colorado’s numbers, at least 7,000 homeschooled children need curriculum-based books and materials. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 77.9 percent of parents who homeschool their children acquire sources of curriculum materials from the public library (see table below). Although libraries aren’t the only source home-based educators turn to, they are utilized most.

Curriculum-based materials from public schools (22.6) and private schools (16.8) are employed the least.

¹ “Colorado Online Learning Evaluation Report: 2002-2005.” (October 2005).
<<http://www.col.k12.co.us/aboutus/evaluationreports.htm>>.



| Sources of curriculum or books | Number | Percent |
|--|---------|---------|
| Public library | 854,000 | 77.9 |
| Homeschooling catalog, publisher, or individual specialist | 843,000 | 76.9 |
| Retail bookstore or other store | 753,000 | 68.7 |
| Education publisher not affiliated with homeschooling | 653,000 | 59.6 |
| Homeschooling organization | 539,000 | 49.2 |
| Church, synagogue, or other religions organization | 400,000 | 36.5 |
| Other sources | 284,000 | 26.0 |
| Local public school or district | 248,000 | 22.6 |
| Private school | 184,000 | 16.8 |

NOTE: Excludes students who were enrolled in school for more than 25 hours a week and students who were homeschooled due to a temporary illness. Percentages do not sum to 100 percent because respondents could choose more than one source of curriculum or books.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of the 2003 National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES).

Colorado's public librarians seem to have mostly positive experiences with homeschoolers and their parents. What are the main reasons why public libraries and home schoolers work so well together? Preparation and good communication. When parents request materials for their curriculum ahead of time the librarians have time to find pertinent material, not only from the library's collection, but through

interlibrary loan (ILL), which is particularly popular with homeschoolers since not everything is readily available at the library. The downside, however, is when parents expect curriculum material to be at the library and ready to use right away. Without proper preparation, the librarian isn't able to assist the home-based educators with materials as readily as they would if they were given notice.

Colorado public libraries have no legal obligation to supply homeschoolers with materials that specifically pertain to their curriculum. Although textbooks are not typically considered when doing collection development in public libraries, many libraries must take into consideration homeschooled children since, many times, they are a considerable number of the regular patrons at the library. Beth Harper, from Spanish Peaks Library District, says that instead of stocking textbooks her library makes sure to have "core reference books...as well as a diverse, up-to-date, and high quality children's nonfiction area." This idea resonated with other Colorado public librarians who, instead of stocking textbooks, make sure that the non-fiction section of the library has good, updated materials.



Public libraries are clearly playing an important role in serving these children. With the increasing numbers of homeschoolers nationally, there is a need to continually communicate with home-based educators to understand the needs of the communities. And although Colorado's homeschool population is decreasing, librarians must still be aware of the effect they have on homeschooled children.

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