



A Critique of:

Homeschooling in Alberta: The Choices, Contexts, and Consequences of a Developing System,

by Curtis Riep, Ph.D

In October, 2021, The Public School Boards Association, released a research report commissioned from Curtis Riep, Ph.D, to examine the current situation of home education in Alberta and make a recommendation that Independent schools' home education departments no longer supervise home education programs, as well as a call for further government regulations on unsupervised/unsupported home education programs.

AHA had the pleasure of reading over the report and was surprised how an academic research report could have so many errors and omissions.

They are summarized below.

Page 4 – In 2019-2020, Alberta Home education numbers tripled to 5% of the population, more than Charter, Francophone and Independent School attendees combined, when including the unfunded 14,256 Kindergarten home educated students that were pulled out of the school system registration system called PASI. Unlike school-based Kindergarten, home education Kindergarten is unfunded, and unregistered, and thus, is invisible in statistics. These children are referred to as “missing Kindergarten children.” Including home education Kindergarten students, brings the total home educated in 2019-2020 to 38,634 students and thus, 5% of the school aged population.

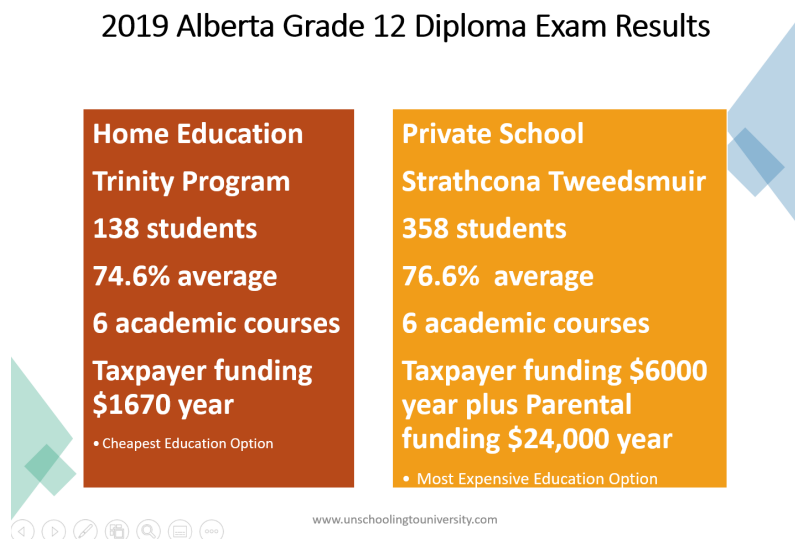
Page 15 - According to a joint 2020 survey of AHEA and AHA members, many parents home educate their children because they have special needs that are not being met, or are being poorly addressed in the system. The survey indicates that anxiety and mental health issues arising from school bullying is a huge factor in parents choosing to home educate as well as targeted, funded learning supports not directly being given to their student, but to ease the effects of overcrowded and mixed learner classrooms.

Page 10 – The Martin-Chang 2011 study on unschoolers (homeschoolers in an unstructured learning environment) consisted of a mere sample of 12 (!) unschooled children that were tested in grade 5 or ten years of age. For a comparison, AHA is aware of 5 children in one Alberta family that “unschooled” or self-directed their learning for 8-12 of the school age years and grades and were accepted into ten universities across Canada, in the fields of engineering, bio-medical science, English, and chemistry/science. This one example of “anecdotal” research indicates that how unschooled children test at grade 5 level (such as the Martin-Chang test) in no way indicates how they will test on grade 12 diploma exams. This study should in no way ever be cited as evidence that unschooling is substandard because of the extremely low numbers of subjects. There are an estimated 12,000 “unschooled” children across Canada, and until there are better quantitative research studies, the author should not be making sweeping recommendations based on personal and professional opinion. The Martin-Chang

& Levesque, 2017 essay (quoted in the bibliography) discussed the lack of good research on unschooling and homeschooling. Much information in this essay is opinion based. But it doesn't need to be in Alberta if the authors of the essay and Mr. Riep did some digging into the statistics that are already available in Alberta.

Alberta is the largest home education province in Canada and Alberta has Grade 12 diploma exams. The evidence is there in plain sight if anyone would like to expose it. All one has to do is isolate all the children writing grade 12 diploma exams under PASI funding code 600 or 611 home education and one will see their exam marks per academic core subject. The best research is that undertaken by non-stakeholders and diploma exams are the best unbiased measure of academic achievement because all students write the same exam at the same time, regardless of learning background. Of course, the whole child is being educated, so soft skills such as cooperation, problem-solving, creativity, tenacity, and effective communication can't be measured by exams, and home educated children may only prove success in those areas via anecdotal surveys and interviews.

Alberta Education statistics of an independent school providing home education supervision show how well home educated PASI code 600 students did on diploma exams in 2019-2020. The provincial average mark is 67%.



Page 19 – The author equates high school completion with advancement to post-secondary education, but doesn't realize that any student with any educational background, may write a diploma exam beginning at age 19 without a course mark and present those diploma exam marks for post-secondary admission at all the major universities across Canada. Many unschooled children access university and college admittance this way.

Page 23 – There are no professionals providing periodic supervision or checks on children ages birth to 5 years, when child maltreatment is most likely to occur, yet, children from ages 6 to 16 require supervision from professionals to avoid potential child abuse? This is unnecessary and a false assumption that home schooling is rife with abuse, because research suggests that child abuse occurrence is no greater in the home education homes than public schoolchildren's homes.

There is no mention of the mental health benefits of home education in the report, where children are free from the ongoing toxic stress, and possible brain impairment from the ongoing violence of bullying both in person and cyber.

Page 24 - Alberta (Supervised Option) should not be under high regulation because adherence to the provincial curriculum (Alberta Programs of Study) is not required.

Page 25 – The funding saved for the 14, 256 Kindergarten students who home educated but were not funded, is not included in provincial savings.

The author neglected to factor in that both parents can work full time and home educate their children by procuring free-lance teachers and tutors to provide the education outside the classroom. In Alberta, the parent procurs their children’s education under their responsibility, but they do not have to actually provide the teaching. They can outsource to many third party resources.

In addition, the future societal costs of courts, policing ,mental hospital treatment, jails, and other negative institutional costs resulting from the mental, physical and emotional trauma brought to children by schools and bullying peers, are saved when parents choose to home educate.

Page 26 – The author states: “Additionally, homeschooled students in Alberta that do not follow the provincial curriculum may encounter difficulties when transitioning to post-secondary education.” Again, there is no evidence to support this large generalization, nor does the author provide any.

Conclusion Section of the Report – Here the author does not indicate that third party providers are subject to government audits and accountability when he calls for a removal of their ability to supervise home education programs. The facilitators providing the “third party” supervision are certified Alberta teachers employed by the accredited school authority. The author errors when he states the supervisors are employees of third party providers and not the school.

The author doesn’t state that a “Prequalification for Home Education” would be that parents have already successfully raised a 5 year old, and that should be enough qualifications for a parent to continue to educate their child, as they know their child’s temperament, personality, learning style, and preferences best. Teachers are education professionals in a classroom. Parents are education professionals in the home. After all, every parent of every child in Alberta is already a successful home educator for 5 years when they sign up their child for Kindergarten. They are more than qualified.

This report does not adequately reflect the state of home education in Alberta and shows a lack of respect and knowledge for the intelligence and warmth of parents doing an excellent job procuring an education for their children.

Judy Arnall, BA, Certified Canadian Family Life Educator, DTM, and bestselling author of 5 print books on non-punitive parenting and child development. Her latest book, *Unschooling to University: Relationships matter most in a world crammed with content*, is becoming a Canadian bestseller. She is currently President of the Alberta Homeschooling Association.

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