Homeschoolers: A Snapshot

Curiosity abounds regarding the home school population in America. Why are parents homeschooling? Are they religious conservatives? How can homeschoolers go to college without a high school diploma? Do they socialize with other students or are they loners? Are they keeping up academically? What are their majors? Answers to these questions and others will be clarified through this study, giving us a better understanding of the students and parents directly involved in this movement.

Since this study is based on students attending Austin College, a small, highly selective 4-year Liberal Arts institution in north Texas, it's appropriate to include state law on homeschooling. Texas is one of the most home school friendly states in the nation. Home schools do not have to register with the school district, submit to home visits, or submit their curriculum for approval by a school district. A homeschooler no longer has to have a high school diploma, a GED, or an ability-to-benefit test in order to qualify for college financial aid (Texas Educational Agency v. Leeper (893 S.W. 2d 432, 1994)).

According to the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), homeschooling is now a legal option for parents in all 50 states.

Demographics of Austin Homeschoolers and Traditional Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Home School</th>
<th>Traditional Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homeschoolers</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
<td>53.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Home School</th>
<th>Traditional Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amer Indian</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>84.1%</td>
<td>73.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the homeschoolers attending Austin College are from the state of Texas (93%), with small percentages from Arizona, California, Colorado, Georgia, Kansas, Michigan, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Costa Rica.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religions</th>
<th>Home School</th>
<th>Traditional Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Denominational</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other Protestant</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Religions</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority (78.7%) of the 157 Austin homeschoolers represented were homeschooled 4–9 years, with 10.2% having graduated from a home school.

SAT Score Averages for Austin students and national averages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Austin Homeschoolers</th>
<th>Austin Traditional Students</th>
<th>National</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SAT Critical Reading</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT Math</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT Writing</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>591</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Homeschoolers and Campus Involvement

These 157 homeschoolers were associated with 1,359 co-curricular groups and activities from varsity sports to music, theater, student government, humanitarian organizations, fraternities and sororities, leadership, ethnic organizations, religious ministries, the Homecoming court, honor societies, residence hall councils/assistants, departmental organizations, peer educators, political organizations, and the dean’s list.
Traditional Students are more difficult to come by, as most of the home school materials are geared more towards the humanities. Another mother less Math and Science courses taken by the homeschoolers; she commented that good home school Math and Science curriculums. Focus Groups: One mother, participating in one of the home school parent focus groups, was not surprised by these data reflecting cumulative GPA). In addition, 16.2% of the Math and Science courses taken by the homeschoolers were either taken for a pass/fail action. Their strongest conservative beliefs were relating to abortion, taxes for the wealthy, banning extreme speakers on campus, and legalizing same sex marriages. Deep Learning in Math and Science Courses On average, each traditional Austin student completed 1.9 Math courses and 3.2 Science courses vs. homeschoolers 0.8 Math and 1.9 overall conservative group of homeschoolers showed a lack of preparedness for Math and Sciences in higher education when contrasted with the traditionally-schooled students. The number of homeschooled students is growing each year in Texas and across the United States. A home school mother taking part in one of the focus groups commented, “Homeschooling has become trendy.” In the next few years it will be interesting to watch the national percent (36%) of home school families that report homeschooling for religious and moral reasons, to see, if indeed, this percentage drops, and more “trendy” reasons for homeschooling evolve. Institutions of higher education should continue to explore the theories, assumptions, realities, and impacts of the home school experience. Austin College has clearly benefited from being more open-minded and accessible to these students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Views</th>
<th>% of Homeschooled Students</th>
<th>% of Traditional Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberal/far left</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle of the road</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative/far right</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Deep Learning in Math and Science Courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Homeschoolers Average Scores</th>
<th>Traditional Austin Students Average Scores</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Math GPA – 2.58</td>
<td>Science GPA – 2.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.6% of the homeschoolers took upper-level Science or Math courses, while 90.4% completed only introductory level Science and Math courses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, 16.2% of the Math and Science courses taken by the homeschoolers were either taken for a pass/fail grade (not calculated in their cumulative college GPA), or taken, but then dropped with a passing grade (also not calculated in their cumulative GPA).

Focus Groups: One mother, participating in one of the home school parent focus groups, was not surprised by these data reflecting less Math and Science courses taken by the homeschoolers; she commented that good home school Math and Science curriculums are more difficult to come by, as most of the home school materials are geared more towards the humanities. Another mother commented that many of the home school mothers don’t feel comfortable teaching college prep Science and Math courses.

Conclusions

Homeschoolers:
- adjusted well in the areas of peer socialization and activity involvement
- submitted higher SAT Critical Reading scores than peers, possibly influencing their selection of college majors: 45.7% Social Sciences, 43.5% Humanities, 7.6% Math and Sciences, 3.3% Interdisciplinary Studies
- responded with confidence in their artistic abilities, creativity, understanding of others, and writing abilities
- spent more time preparing for classes, were more likely to complete assignments, and showed an elevated drive to achieve over their peers
- reflected slight upward differences in graduation rates
- had slightly higher average cumulative undergraduate GPA than peers: 3.23 vs. 3.15

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