

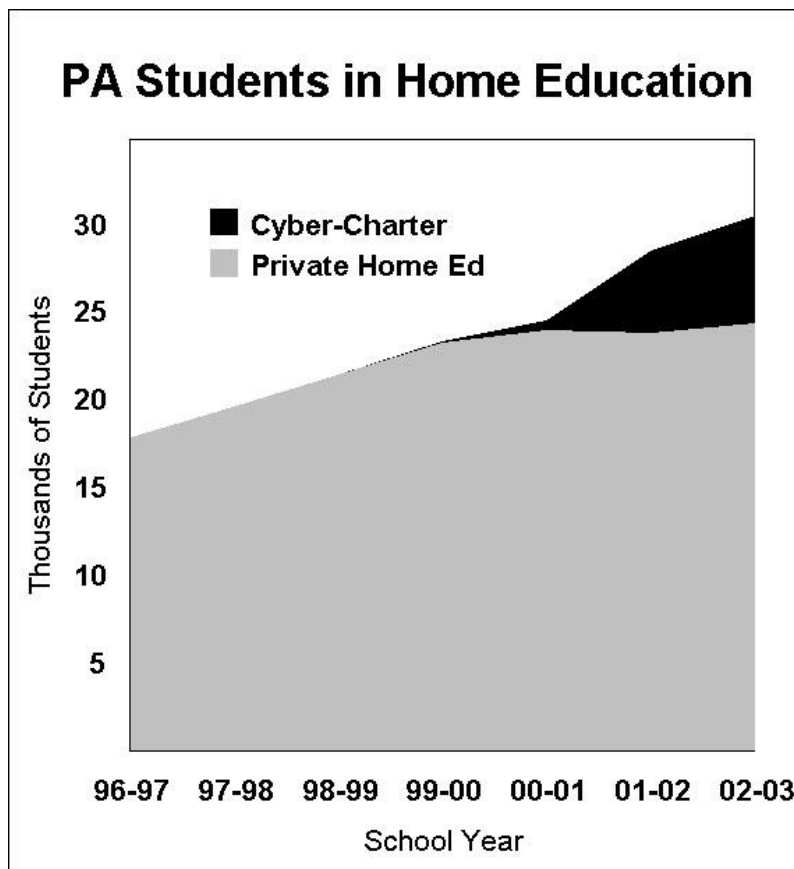
# Home Education Population Growing

## Higher Numbers for both Private and Public Home Education

by Howard Richman

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The population of students in home education in Pennsylvania is growing. This is true both for students in private home education and for students in public home education. The chart below shows the growth in home education since the 1996-1997 school year. The gray area shows the students enrolled in private home education programs and the black area shows the students enrolled in public cyber-charter schools.



During the 2001-2002 school year, the number of students in home education programs dipped slightly from 24,019 to 23,903. But in 2002-2003 the number hit the new high of 24,415. During the same period, the number of students enrolled in the new cyber-charter-school option rose dramatically. When Susquehanna, the first cyber-charter school, started during the 1998-1999 school year it only enrolled 44 students. Now there are 6,202 students, one out of every five home educated students, enrolled in Pennsylvania cyber-charter schools.

Cyber-charter schools continued to grow during the 2002-2003 school year despite the demise of Einstein Academy, which was once the largest. The chart below shows the change in enrollment for each of the cyber-charter schools from October 31, 2001 when Einstein was at its height until June 30, 2003. This chart does not include the Commonwealth Connections Academy, associated with Sylvan Learning, which started in Sept. 2003. Nor does it include Pennsylvania Leadership, which plans to bring back the interactive aspect of Einstein's curriculum, starting this fall.

## Number of Students in each cyber-charter school

Cyber-Charter	Oct 31 2001	June 30 2003	Change
PA Virtual	622	2389	+1767
Western PA	996	1546	+550
Einstein Academy	2713	803	-1910
PA Learners Online	196	428	+232
21st Century	61	363	+201
Midwestern Regional	68	282	+214
Central PA Digital	---	263	+263
Susquehanna	76	128	+52
<b>Total</b>	<b>4732</b>	<b>6202</b>	<b>+1470</b>

Note: The 2001 data appeared in a report that the KPMG accounting firm performed for the PDE (PA Dept. of Education). The 2003 data was obtained from the Child Accounting Office at the PDE.

Some people wonder whether the growth in cyber-charters will cut into the numbers of children being privately home educated. So far in Pennsylvania, cyber-charter enrollment has grown rapidly, while the number of students in private home education has stayed relatively constant.

The growth in home education has been slowing in almost every state in recent years, probably due to a demographic transition. The first big wave of homeschoolers, the children of the baby-boomers, has been graduating from high school. It will be a few years yet before their children reach school age and start another big wave of homeschooling.

It is apparent from the chart on the left, that the total number of students in home education (the combined gray and black in the chart at the left) is higher than it would be

if there were no cyber-charter option. Some of the children who are being educated in cyber-charter schools would otherwise be attending regular schools.

Few states have as many cyber-charter choices as Pennsylvania, but cyber-charters are definitely not for everyone. We have had several messages posted on our message board from parents who have decided to switch from a cyber-charter to private home education. They have complained that the cyber-charter curriculum is "too intense," that it "bogs" their children down, or that it tends to "ruin the fun of the actual learning." One mother wrote. "I also did not like being 'tied' to the computer. No longer could we do math in the living room and reading in the kitchen." Some prefer private home education because they can choose a curriculum that is consistent with their religion. For example, one mother wrote, "I also found some of the fables to be a little too 'magical' for our taste. Also, a few books mention Halloween.

Although Susan and I make our livelihood through our services to the private home education community, we are pleased that we live in a state where people have so many home education options