



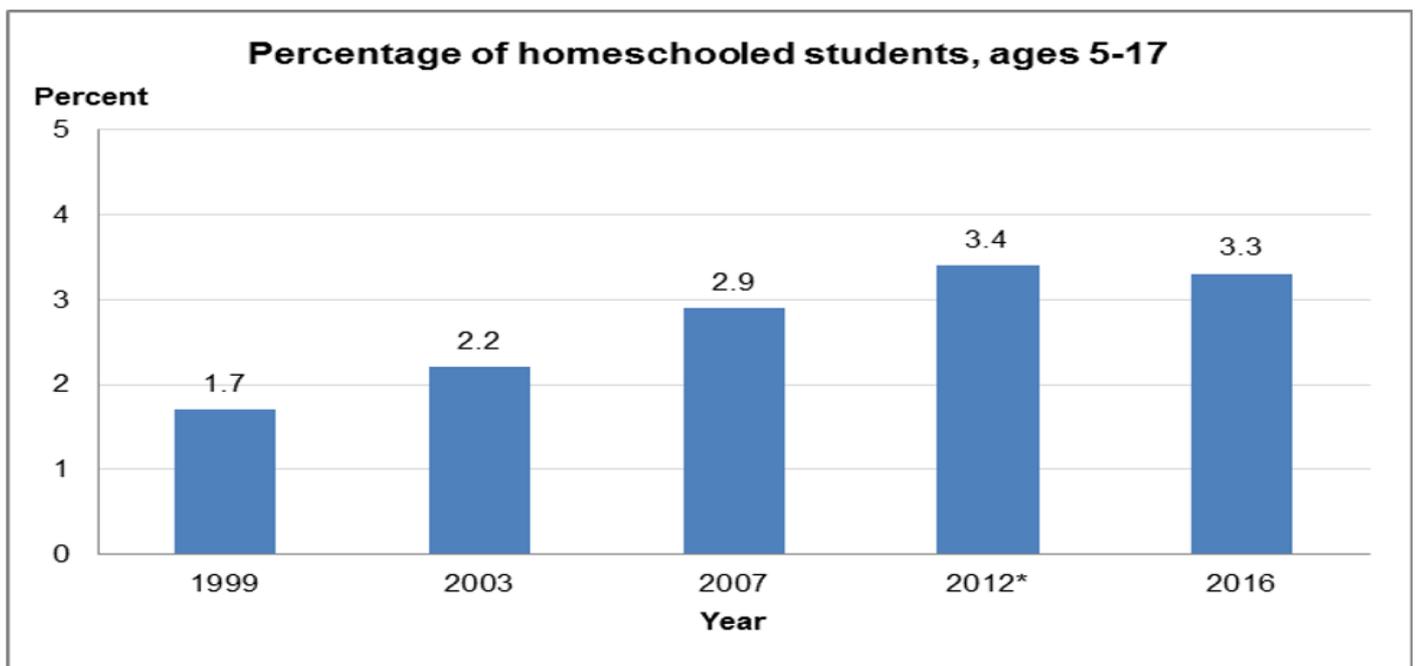
# Education Savings Accounts for Homeschoolers: Innovation in Action

Published on *Show-Me Institute* (<https://showmeinstitute.org>)



*By: James V. Shuls*

I recently heard it claimed that homeschooling was an innovative approach to education. It is hard to imagine calling something innovative in 2017 when it was the dominant approach to education throughout most of history. Nevertheless, interest in homeschooling does seem to be growing. From 1999 to 2012, the [percentage of students](#) ages 5 to 17 that are homeschooled doubled, going from 1.7 percent to 3.4 percent. The percentage has held relatively steady since, dipping slightly to 3.3 percent in 2016.



\* Statistically adjusted

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Parent Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES), 1999; Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of the NHES, 2003, 2007, 2012, and 2016.

Parents homeschool their children for various reasons. According to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#), “a concern about the environment of other schools,” “a dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools,” and “a desire to provide religious instruction” are among the most important reasons parents choose to educate their children at home.

These were certainly considerations when my wife and I chose to begin homeschooling our eldest son, a 7th grader, for the first time this year. But most important for us was that we felt like our son was falling through the cracks at the school he was attending. He’s bright, but he struggles in school. Since my wife and I were both educators, we thought we would see if we could give him the individual attention he needs. Our other school-aged children remain in the public school because it seems to suit them. In other words, our decision was all about customization—helping our child get the education that fit him best. (We’re still early in the process, so we’ll see how this goes!)

In recent years, states have begun to explore the idea of using education savings accounts (ESAs) to assist parents in this endeavor. I’ve written previously about how [ESAs can be used to pay for private school tuition](#). Some states, such as [New Hampshire](#), also allow ESAs to be distributed to homeschoolers. Parents can use these funds to purchase textbooks, tutoring services, or even classes at schools or colleges.

Homeschooling is not for everyone. It takes a lot of time and is a huge commitment. Moreover, it takes a lot of financial resources to do the job well. ESAs cannot remove all of these obstacles for parents, but they can help equip dedicated families with the resources they need to educate their children at home. I’m still not sure whether we should call homeschooling innovative, but using ESAs to help families customize their children's education? Well, you don’t get much more innovative than that.

## Tags:

- [Homeschooling](#)

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