



HOMESCHOOLING CAPSTONE REPORT

Prepared for EdChoice

July 2021

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INTRODUCTION

This document summarizes findings from a series of reports prepared by Hanover Research (Hanover) on behalf of EdChoice to understand the changing landscape of families who are interested in homeschooling, pods, and new forms of microschooled. This research sequence included:




- An annotated bibliography compiling the most recent available secondary research and best practices related to pods and microschooled;
- A market research survey of current homeschoolers and families interested in homeschooling; and
- Focus groups with homeschoolers and families who had personalized their children's learning over the past year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings, Hanover Research suggests that EdChoice consider the following recommendations.

-  **Facilitate collaboration and communication among homeschooling families.** Focus group participants identify social networks and other homeschool families as key resources for instructional support and socialization.
-  **Provide supports for families of children with special needs.** These families are often interested in homeschooling because they do not believe their children's needs can be met in public schools but face additional challenges in setting up effective routines.
-  **Provide a centralized hub with validated resources and opportunities to connect with other homeschooling families and educational experts.** Both homeschooling parents and parents who have personalized their children's learning during the COVID-19 pandemic express interest in an online hub that will allow them to access vetted instructional materials, network and collaborate with other parents, and receive advice

KEY FINDINGS

-  **Interest in homeschooling has increased substantially due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the potential for long-term growth in homeschooling.** Respondents to the homeschooling market survey provided higher ratings of homeschooling during the pandemic than public, private, or charter schools, and 70 percent of all respondents to the homeschooling market survey report that they either began homeschooling or considered homeschooling during the pandemic. The homeschooling market survey finds that 47 percent of homeschooling respondents are very or extremely likely to continue homeschooling even if schools return to fully in-person learning during the 2021-2022 school year, including 51 percent of current homeschool parents and 26 percent of parents who have not previously homeschooled.
-  **Parents identify greater flexibility and control over their child's education as a key motivation to homeschool.** The homeschooling market survey finds that 68 percent of homeschooling parents cite wanting to have more flexibility and individual attention as very or extremely important motivations to homeschool, while 58 percent cite a desire for more control over what their children learn. Focus group participants note that they customize the structure and instructional strategies of homeschooling to meet the individual needs of their children.
-  **Parents often explore homeschooling after experiencing challenges in other school environments.** Focus group participants report changing to homeschooling after their children experienced academic or social-emotional challenges, or due to broader concerns about school climate and safety. Survey results suggest that homeschooling improves academic and social-

emotional outcomes, as 68 percent of homeschooling survey respondents report identifying learning more as a moderate or major benefit of homeschooling, and 65 percent reporting more enjoyment of and interest in learning as a moderate or major benefit.



Parents use a combination of digital and non-digital supplementary learning resources to meet students' individual needs and ensure an appropriate level of screen time. Parents report that digital resources provide a break from parent-directed instruction for older students and are more engaging for younger students while benefiting students with motor delays that make hands-on projects difficult. However, some parents express concerns about excessive screen time and rely on non-digital resources to facilitate hands-on learning.



Parents rely heavily on networking with other homeschool parents for both socialization and information about curriculum and instruction. Experienced homeschool parents report partnering with other homeschool parents to share instructional duties in homeschooling co-ops or learning pods and use social media to network with other homeschooling parents. Parents in the personalized learning focus group appear somewhat more reliant on existing social networks, but some report forming ad hoc learning pods.

SECTION I: METHODOLOGY

In this section, Hanover discusses the methodology used to examine trends in homeschooling and personalized learning. This section begins by reviewing the methodology used to conduct the homeschooling survey before discussing the homeschooling focus groups, which drew on samples identified by the survey. This section concludes with a brief review of the methodology used to create the annotated bibliography.

HOMESCHOOLING SURVEY

Hanover administered the homeschooling survey in February of 2021 using the Qualtrics survey platform. Participants were recruited through a third-party panel vendor and were required to meet the qualifications listed in Figure 1.1. Respondents who did not meet these qualifications or who provided invalid responses were removed from the sample.

Figure 1.1: Homeschooling Survey Respondent Qualifications



Source: Homeschooling Market Survey

The survey obtained a total valid sample of 1,266 respondents, although sample sizes vary across questions where some questions only pertain to a subset of respondents.

Figure 1.2: Homeschooling Survey Respondent Characteristics

CHARACTERISTIC	PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS
Gender Identity	
Female	64%
Male	35%
Non-binary/Gender non-conforming	0%
Prefer not to respond	0%
Not listed/Prefer to self-describe	0%
Race/Ethnicity	
White	75%
Hispanic or Latin(o/a/x)	13%
Black or African-American	10%
Asian	6%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	2%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0%
Middle Eastern or North African	0%
Not listed/Prefer to self-describe	1%
Prefer not to respond	1%
Household Income	
Under \$25,000	14%
\$25,000 to \$49,999	21%

CHARACTERISTIC	PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS
\$50,000 to \$74,999	21%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	16%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	16%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	5%
\$200,000 or more	4%
Not sure	0%
Prefer not to respond	3%

FOCUS GROUPS

Hanover used the national homeschooling survey to identify focus group participants. The survey asked respondents if they would be interested in participating in a focus group to further discuss the topic and were invited to participate in either the homeschooling or personalized learning focus group depending on whether they indicated having experience with homeschooling. In March and April of 2021, Hanover conducted three homeschool focus groups with a total of 15 participants and three personalized learning focus groups with a total of 27 participants.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Hanover created an annotated bibliography to examine the available secondary research on learning pods and similar small-group supports created by families in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. To understand the different models of pods and micro-schools, their effectiveness, and associated best practices, Hanover conducted a targeted search leveraging the sources listed in Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3: Sample Data Sources



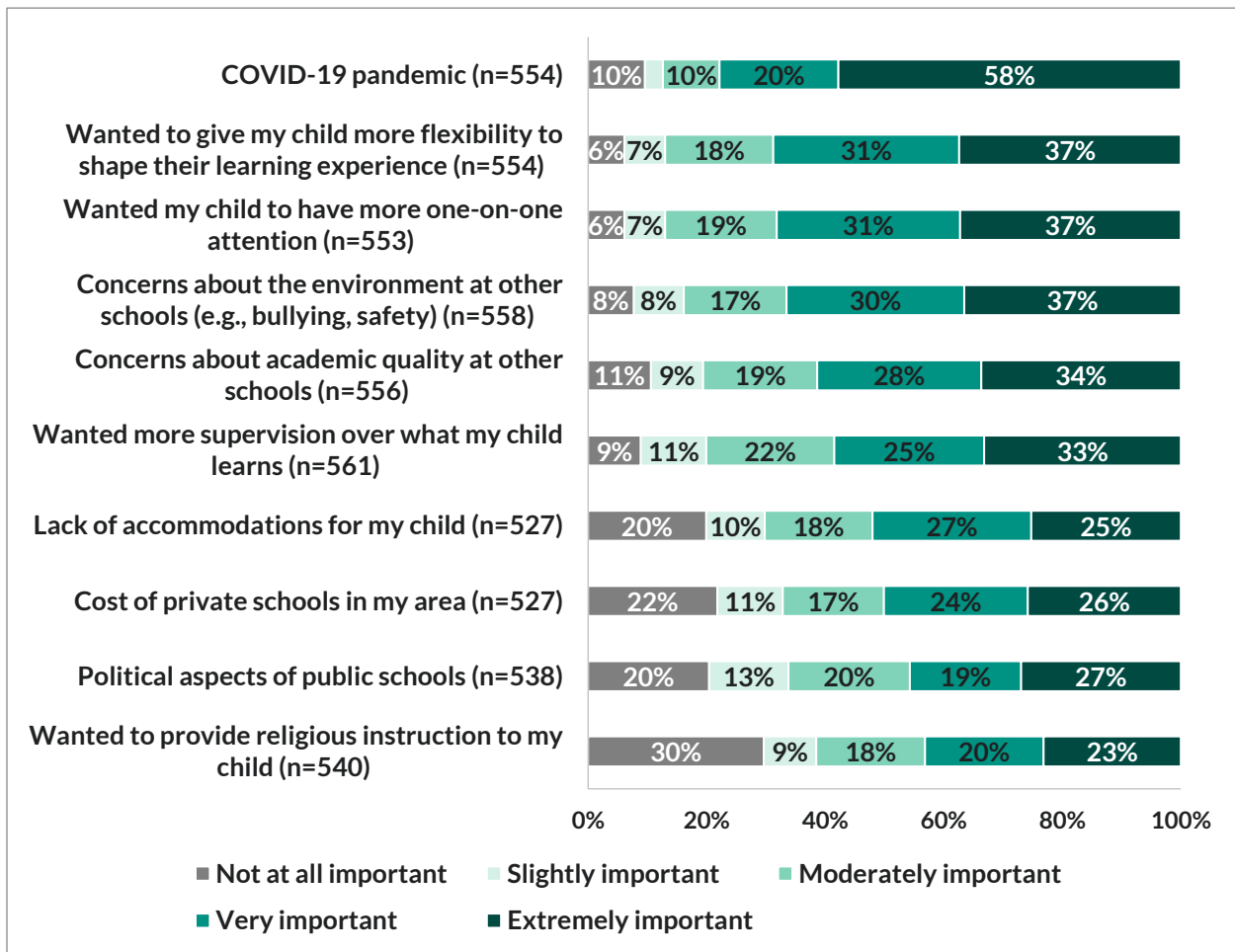
After identifying secondary resources on pods and micro-schools, Hanover synthesized details based on alignment with EdChoice's interests and prepared an Excel workbook that provides background information and a hyperlink to each source and summarizes the source's findings. Depending on the availability of information, summaries address:

- The pod or micro-schooling approach described in the source,
- Whether the source presents evidence of effectiveness and what areas of impacts on students it examines, and
- What strategies the source identifies as beneficial.

SECTION II: REASONS FOR HOMESCHOOLING

Current homeschoolers refer to the COVID-19 pandemic, the benefits of increased flexibility and attention, concerns about other school options, and specialized learning needs as major motivators for choosing to homeschool. Figure 2.1 presents homeschooling market survey respondents' ratings of the importance of various factors in their decision to homeschool their child. The COVID-19 pandemic was by far the largest factor referenced, with 78 percent of current homeschoolers rating this factor as very or extremely important. This finding suggests that the pandemic substantially increased interest in homeschooling. Current homeschoolers also cite a desire for increased flexibility and individual attention, concerns about other school options, and accommodations for specialized learning needs as factors in their decision to homeschool. A smaller majority of respondents cite concerns about religious instruction or the political aspects of public schools.

Figure 2.1: How important were the following factors in your decision to homeschool your child?



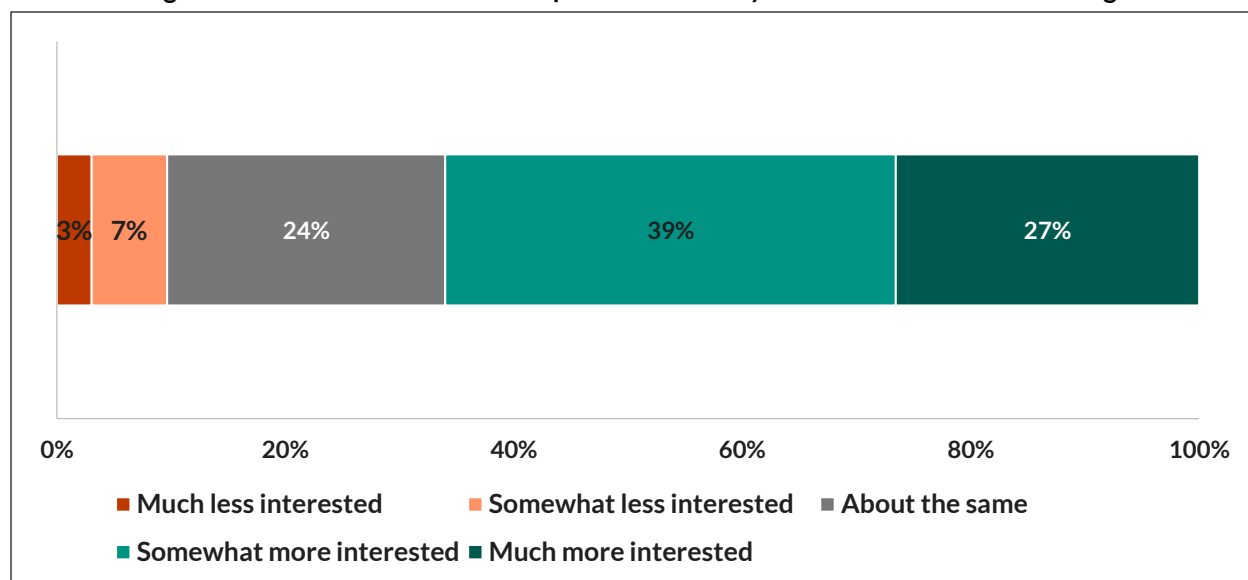
Source: Homeschooling Market Survey

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

COVID-19 significantly increased interest in homeschooling, with 70 percent of all respondents to the homeschooling market survey reporting that they either began homeschooling or considered homeschooling during the pandemic. Among the 14 percent of respondents who began homeschooling before the pandemic, 31 percent report that their homeschooling experience improved during the pandemic. Parents in the personalized learning focus groups note that they were effectively forced to engage more with their

children's learning due to the transition to remote learning. Figure 3.1 presents respondents' ratings of the impact of COVID-19 on their interest in homeschooling.

Figure 2.2: How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect your interest in homeschooling?



Source: Homeschooling Market Survey

Evidence suggests that the increased interest in school options will continue following the COVID-19 pandemic.

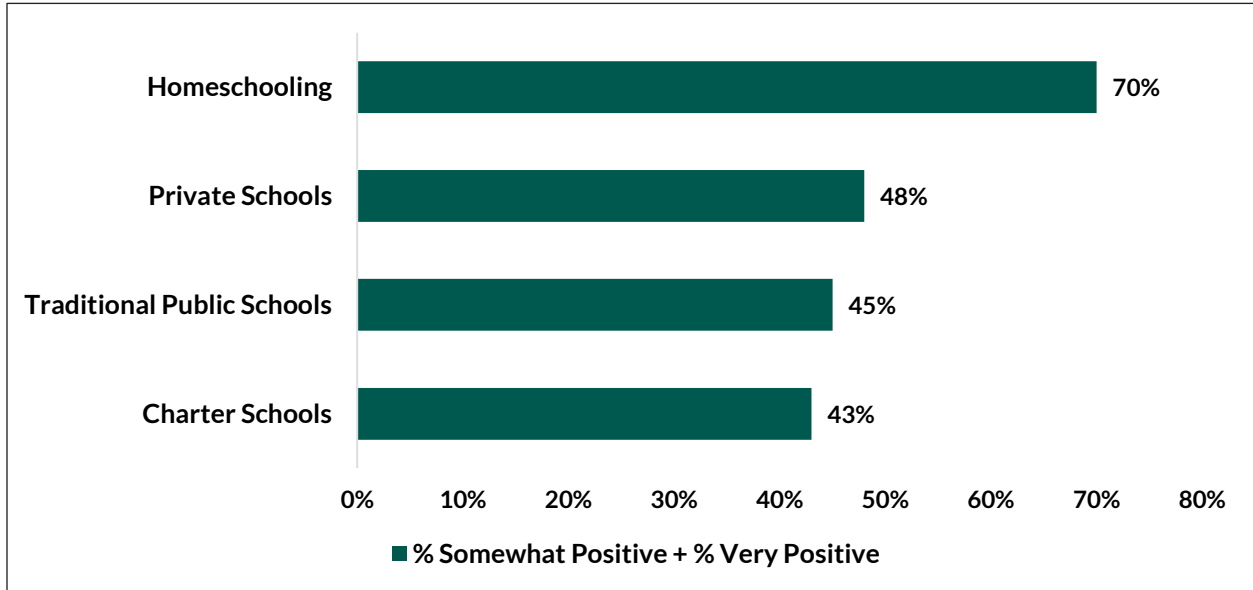
Although most participants in the personalized learning focus groups welcome a safe return to in-person learning, some parents of middle and high school students prefer to continue learning remotely after finding that they did well in a remote environment or because they were not emotionally prepared to return to in-person learning. Parents who plan to return to in-person schooling report that they will remain more engaged with their children's learning after gaining awareness of their learning needs during the pandemic. This engagement includes both support for learning at home and advocacy at school. Personalized learning focus group participants report realizing that their children's needs were not being addressed, in large part because teachers are not aware of those needs. As a result, parents plan to work more closely with schools to ensure that their children's needs are understood and met. Some parents plan to focus on communicating their children's needs, while others plan to advocate more forcefully for their children.

I've been more immersed with it. I really appreciate the teachers, and I know how I can help him more.

-Parent (K, 5th & 12th grades)

Similarly, the homeschooling market survey finds that 47 percent of homeschooling respondents are very or extremely likely to continue homeschooling even if schools return to fully in-person learning during the 2021-2022 school year, including 51 percent of current homeschool parents and 26 percent of parents who have not previously homeschooled. As shown in Figure 2.3, respondents provide higher ratings of the quality of homeschooling options than other forms of education.

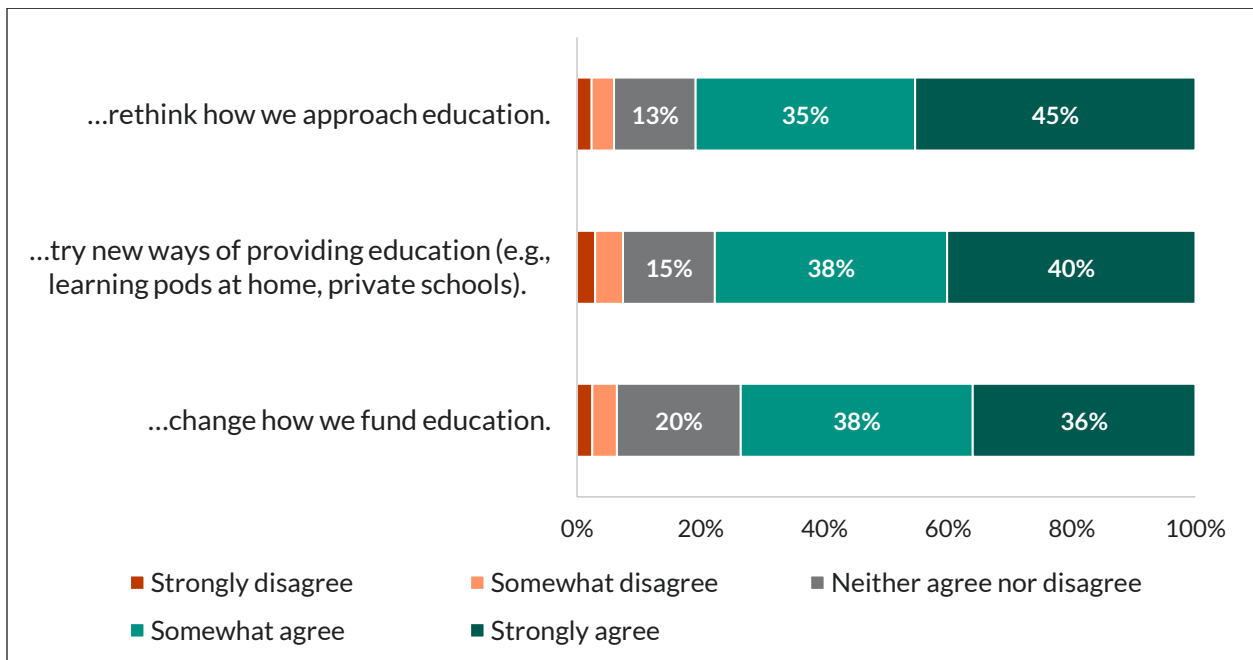
Figure 2.3: Given what you have seen and experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, how would you rate each of the following?



Source: Homeschooling Market Survey

As shown in Figure 2.4, respondents believe that the nation should use COVID-19 as an opportunity to rethink education and experiment with new models such as learning pods. Specifically, 58 percent of respondents slightly or strongly support programs such as school vouchers that support families in paying for private school tuition and other education services. In addition, 24 percent of respondents are very or extremely favorable toward a hybrid homeschool model, while 18 percent are not at all favorable toward a hybrid model.

Figure 2.4: How much do you disagree or agree with each of the following statements? As a nation, we should take the opportunity provided by the COVID-19 Pandemic to...



Source: Homeschooling Market Survey

DESIRE FOR FLEXIBILITY AND CONTROL

Survey respondents cite a desire for increased flexibility and the ability to control their children's learning experiences as motivations for homeschooling. Likewise, participants in the homeschool focus groups who began homeschooling before the COVID-19 pandemic cite the importance of direct oversight and involvement in their children's learning. For example, one parent of students in Grades 1 and 3 reported:

“ I have been homeschooling from the beginning. When my oldest was old enough for Kindergarten, me and my husband decided that we did not want to send our kids to a public school, and we couldn't afford private school. We wanted to be in control of what our kids could and could not learn and how they were taught and wanted them to learn the way that they needed to learn.

There's really no right or wrong way to homeschool your kid. It's whatever fits their needs.

-Parent (1st and 3rd grades)

Focus group participants note that they customize the structure and instructional strategies of homeschooling to meet the individual needs of their children. Parents may rely on synchronous virtual learning resources or guide their students using a purchased curriculum. In many cases, parents combine resources from multiple publishers to emphasize information that is particularly important to them and provide additional support in subjects their children find challenging.

However, respondents report that their flexibility to select curriculum and instructional materials is constrained by state requirements. These requirements vary by state, and some states are less restrictive than others. Notably, secondary research suggests that some states are in the process of revising regulations related to homeschooling to address issues posed by learning pods and micro-schools.¹ EdChoice should include up-to-date information on state regulations in its guidance for homeschool families.

CONCERNS ABOUT OTHER SCHOOL OPTIONS

Responses to the homeschooling market survey suggest that concerns about the academic quality and environment at other schools motivate parents to consider homeschooling. Findings from homeschool focus groups confirm this trend. Some homeschool parents in the focus groups report that they decided to homeschool because they were dissatisfied with the quality of their local public schools but could not afford tuition for private schools. For example, a parent of a Grade 3 student reported concerns about class sizes and a specific teacher in their previous school, noting:

“ Kids were struggling in learning, and her grades were starting to fail. She did not want to have to deal with that teacher.

Focus group participants also report trying homeschooling in response to social-emotional and academic challenges their children experienced in the early elementary grades. For example, one parent reports that teachers recommended they homeschool their son because he faced challenges engaging with other students in Kindergarten. Another parent homeschooled their daughter after she experienced challenges adjusting to the classroom environment in Kindergarten. This family successfully returned to a public school at the daughter's request after two years of homeschooling.

¹ Butcher, J. "Protecting Learning Pods: A 50-State Guide to Regulations Threatening the Latest Education Innovation." State Policy Network, 2020. <https://spn.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Protecting-Learning-Pods-Report.pdf>

In addition to academic concerns, focus group participants cite concerns about school safety and negative peer influences. One parent reported deciding to homeschool their daughter, now in Grade 10, after "she started running with some of the bad group of kids" in traditional public school. This parent reported that their daughter's grades improved substantially after transitioning to online learning.

We were just concerned with what a child can get into and wreck their life.

-Parent (6th, 8th, 9th, and 11th grades)

Participants in the personalized learning focus groups also reported that they decided to personalize their children's learning after observing declines in academic performance, engagement with online learning, or social-emotional wellbeing. Other parents reported observing their children's online classes and deciding that instruction was inadequate. For example, one parent of a Grade 5 student reported that:

Distance learning gave us a chance to shadow the classroom and see what was actually going on. Some of it was quite disappointing. I think the technology enabled the teachers to take the easy way out.

Some evidence suggests that homeschooling options result in improvements to academic and social-emotional outcomes. Sixty-eight percent of homeschooling respondents to the homeschooling market survey report identify learning more as a moderate or major benefit of homeschooling, while 65 percent report more enjoyment of and interest in learning as a moderate or major benefit. Respondents also report positive social-emotional outcomes from homeschooling, with 68 percent of respondents identifying increased happiness as a benefit of homeschooling and 60 percent of respondents identifying improved behavior as a moderate or major benefit.

SPECIALIZED LEARNING NEEDS

Some homeschooling survey respondents cite a lack of accommodation for their child's learning needs as a motivation for homeschooling, with 52 percent of respondents citing this motivation as very or extremely important. In addition, 34 percent of homeschooling survey respondents identify no longer receiving treatment for behavioral or medical issues as a moderate or major benefit of homeschooling.

Accommodation of learning needs in public schools appears to be particularly challenging for parents of students with certain neurodevelopmental disorders, including autism spectrum disorders and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). These parents report that their children need comprehensive and individualized support that is not available in a public-school environment. For example, one parent of a Grade 5 student notes that:

My 11-year-old has some special needs. He's got autism on the mild end of the spectrum, but still definitely challenging, and some attention deficit issues. He really does need a lot of one-on-one attention. We just weren't seeing that in the school.

The challenges facing neuro-atypical children have increased during remote learning. Parents in the personalized learning focus group report that neuro-atypical children face challenges focusing and learning in virtual classrooms with high numbers of students. These parents have invested a substantial amount of time in working with their children, and often rely on outside resources such as behavioral, speech, and occupational therapy. For example, one parent of students in Kindergarten and Grades 8 and 9 reported:

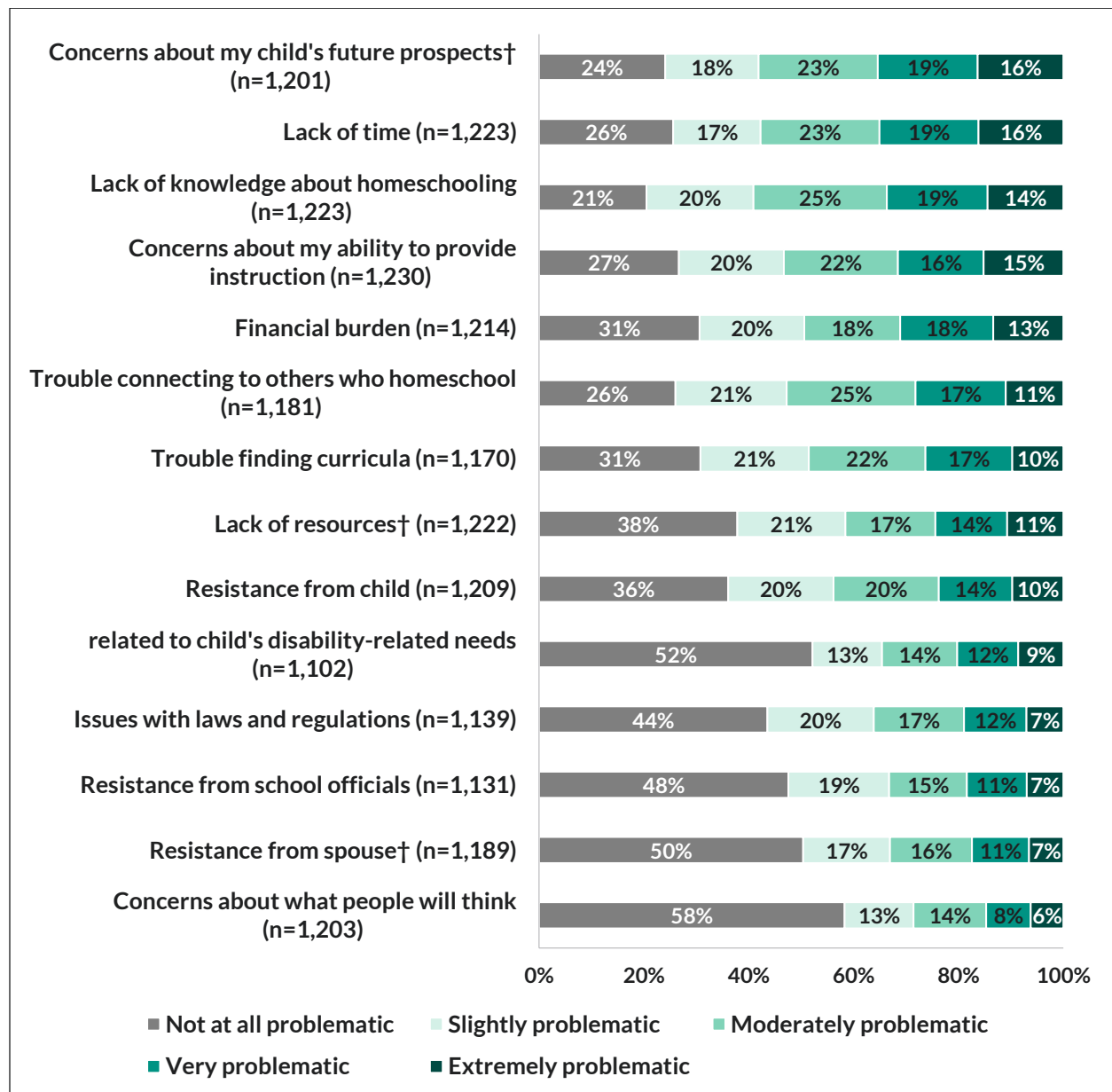
The system was not set up to help special needs children learn. The online environment, it was not catered to children like her.

-Parent (Kindergarten, 8th, and 9th grades)

SECTION III: OBSTACLES TO HOMESCHOOLING

The most salient obstacles to homeschooling cited by current homeschoolers in the survey include concerns about instructional quality and children's future prospects, the time and financial burden of homeschooling, and difficulty accessing resources and support (Figure 3.1). Fewer homeschoolers cite resistance from others or issues with regulations as obstacles to homeschooling. In the remainder of this section, Hanover reviews findings from the homeschool and personalized learning focus groups about families' concerns about social interaction and extracurricular activities and the time and financial burden of homeschooling or personalized learning. The following section provides additional detail about strategies families use to access resources.

Figure 3.1: How problematic have the following obstacles to homeschooling your child been?



Source: Homeschooling Market Survey

CONCERNS ABOUT SOCIAL INTERACTION AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Homeschooling parents experience challenges ensuring that their children can participate in social interaction and extracurricular resources. The homeschooling market survey finds that 44 percent of parents experience challenges to socialization a moderate amount or a great deal, while 35 percent experience inadequate opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities.

Some parents in the personalized learning focus groups express concerns about social reintegration as students return to in-person learning after the COVID-19 pandemic. These parents report that younger children have become used to remaining at home with their parents, while older children find remote learning less structured than in-person learning. Some parents in the personalized learning focus group also worry that their children will not be academically prepared to return to in-person learning.

“ My son gets less and less willing to join the school in person. He’s really unwilling to go to school every day after feeling the comfort of home and spending their time entirely with his mommy and daddy.

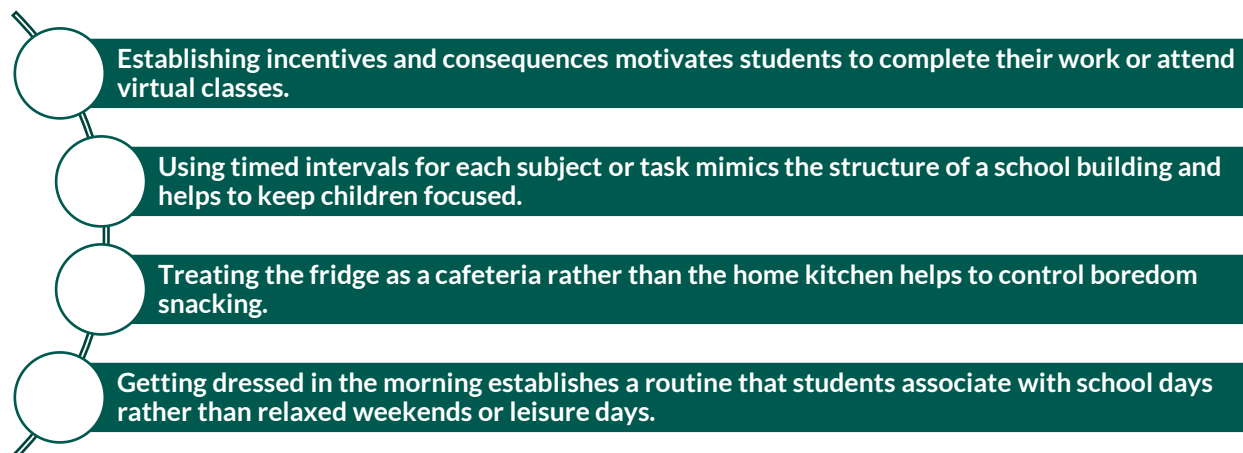
-Parent (1st grade)

TIME AND FINANCIAL BURDEN

Homeschooling focus group participants agree that homeschooling requires a substantial investment of time, and parents must determine whether homeschooling fits their lifestyle and other time commitments. Depending on the instructional model chosen, parents need to continuously monitor their student's progress or ensure that students remain engaged in online synchronous learning. Parents in the personalized learning focus group report that they follow the virtual learning model set by their child's school, while parents in the homeschooling focus group have more flexibility to customize a schedule.

Most parents in the personalized learning focus group report that their children need intensive parental supervision to complete assignments in online learning, including parents monitoring children during the school day and keeping track of assignments in the school's learning management system (LMS). Support needs vary by age. In general, younger students have more difficulty remaining engaged in online learning activities, while parents may find it difficult to teach more advanced subjects to older students. Parents report that they adapt the homeschool routine to meet their individual child's needs while maintaining a consistent schedule using the strategies listed in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2: Strategies Used by Homeschool Parents to Maintain Routines



Source: Homeschool Parent Focus Groups

Similarly, survey findings suggest that the investment of time required to set up a homeschooling arrangement and supervise students presents a barrier to homeschooling for many parents. The homeschooling market survey finds that 26 percent of homeschooling parents report difficulty managing homeschooling and other responsibilities a moderate amount or a great deal. The market survey also finds that 42 percent of parents who have never homeschooled identify lack of time as very or extremely problematic for their decision regarding homeschooling, compared to only 27 percent of homeschooling parents. This finding suggests that the time required for homeschooling may prevent families who would otherwise consider homeschooling from pursuing homeschooling options.

The challenge of setting consistent routines may be greater for families of students with special learning needs, who need more parent engagement and flexibility to develop a working routine. For example, one parent of students in Kindergarten and Grade 4 reports that:

“My five-year-old has ADHD, so the schedule is unpredictable. One day, everything would be good. I don't know what I'm going to get with her. She likes to participate, but she's just distracted a lot, so she's got to run outside, do some laps.”

Notably, homeschooling families in the homeschool focus groups often report that one parent works from home or works part-time. This finding may suggest that homeschooling is a more feasible option for families with flexible or non-traditional work arrangements and that the number of families able to pursue homeschooling will increase if these arrangements remain more common in the post-COVID-19 era. The McKinsey Global Institute predicts that between 20 and 25 percent of the overall workforce in highly developed economies will be able to adopt a hybrid schedule in which employees work remotely for a portion of the week.²

Parents identify financial burdens as a challenge to homeschooling, with 36 percent of non-homeschooling parents and 26 percent of homeschooling parents identifying this challenge as very or extremely problematic. In addition to the potential impact of homeschooling on parents' work, parents in the personalized learning focus group note that they have invested in creating personalized spaces for their children to complete schoolwork, including purchasing desks and learning materials and upgrading internet connectivity.

² Lund, S. et al. “The Future of Work After COVID-19.” McKinsey Global Institute, February 18, 2021. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/the-future-of-work-after-covid-19>

SECTION IV: HOMESCHOOLING RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS

Most respondents report that they have been able to access the supports and resources needed to support homeschooling. Of the homeschooling parents responding to the homeschooling market survey, 53 percent report that it has been somewhat or very easy to find homeschooling resources. However, some homeschooling parents do report challenges identifying curricula and resources for homeschooling. Participants in the homeschooling focus groups report using a variety of instructional resources, including stand-alone curricular and supplemental apps and games. However, parents participating in the personalized learning focus groups report that supplemental resources are insufficient to meet their children's learning needs. Figure 4.1 lists specific resources reported by families participating in the homeschool focus groups.

Figure 4.1: Resources Used by Homeschool Families

FULL CURRICULA		SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES	
▪ Master Books	▪ PowerSchool	▪ Reading Eggs	▪ CodaKid
▪ FunSchooling	▪ Time4Learning	▪ Duolingo	▪ Lexia
▪ Outschool	▪ K12.com	▪ Babbel	▪ ABCMouse
▪ Easy Peasy	▪ Schoology	▪ Prodigy Math	▪ ABCya
▪ Epic School	▪ IXL Learning	▪ Khan Academy	▪ Adventure Acad

Source: Homeschool Family Focus Groups

SOURCES OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

Homeschool parents rely heavily on networking with other homeschool parents for both socialization and information about curriculum and instruction. Parents work with teachers and other homeschool parents in their personal social networks and use social media to connect with other homeschooling families. For example, one focus group participant reported:

Using Nextdoor, I posted that I'm planning to homeschool my son and if any of you have already done it, please get in touch with me. Through that, one of my community members posted that they're also doing it. To my good luck, they were in the third grade, and my son was going to second, so it helped me out.

Experienced homeschool parents report partnering with other homeschool parents to share instructional duties in homeschooling co-ops or learning pods. Historically, these groups have met in person, although many have transitioned to videoconferencing platforms due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Co-ops and learning pods allow parents to share responsibility for teaching and create social opportunities for both parents and students. Some parents participating in homeschool focus groups report using resources available through state government websites. However, these parents also note that state websites can be time-consuming to navigate.

Likewise, parents in the personalized learning focus groups report collaborating with other parents to personalize learning and cope with the transition to remote learning. These parents appear to rely more on existing relationships, such as friends, family members, and less on formal networks or co-ops than parents in the homeschool focus groups. However, some personalized learning parents report setting up learning pods in which parents alternate teaching or students

There are informal employee groups that you're sharing tips with one another. A lot of parents have learning pods...Also, there are parent support groups in our little neighborhood.
–Parent (6th grade)

learn in small groups. According to parents in the personalized learning groups, these learning pods provide an opportunity for socialization while reducing the burden of personalizing learning for individual parents.

DIGITAL AND NON-DIGITAL RESOURCES

Participants in the personalized learning focus groups use both digital and non-digital resources to supplement the basic curriculum. Figure 4.2 presents the benefits of digital supplementary materials identified by focus group participants.

Figure 4.2: Benefits of Digital Supplementary Materials

Among older students, digital apps allow parents to take a break from supervising learning.

For younger children, they provide a fun and engaging way to learn with parents' guidance and support.

Apps aid in learning for neuro-atypical students who struggle with hands-on activities due to motor skill delays.

Source: Personalized Learning Focus Groups

However, some parents prefer to use non-digital supplementary materials due to concerns about excessive screen time. These concerns are particularly prominent among parents of younger students who use the non-digital supplementary strategies listed in Figure 4.3 and parents of academically advanced students who need hands-on projects to prevent boredom.

Figure 4.3: Nondigital Supplementary Activities for Young Students



Source: Personalized Learning Focus Groups

NEEDS FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Both sets of parents expressed interest in a centralized hub of vetted learning resources that will provide access to the resources listed in Figure 4.4. Homeschooling focus group members express a desire for resource repositories that are searchable by state to identify materials approved for use in their state.

Figure 4.4: Desired Supports from a Learning Resources



Source: Personalized Learning Focus Groups

Additionally, parents in the personalized learning focus groups expressed a greater need for additional resources than parents in the homeschooling focus groups. These parents find it difficult to identify high-

quality resources within the wide range of resources available on the internet, particularly as information is often scattered across multiple websites. Some parents note that unverified information they receive from peers is not reliable. Personalized learning parents express a need for third-party assurance that the information they receive is reputable. These parents are also interested in discussions facilitated by school officials who can explain the local context around curriculum and instruction and receive feedback on online learning from parents. Individual school districts have taken varied approaches to learning pods and microschooning, with some districts seeking to limit the formation of learning pods due to equity concerns and others facilitating networking among families interested in learning pods.³ EdChoice may be able to work with supportive school districts to create opportunities for collaboration among district staff and parents.

³ "Pandemic Learning Pods and K-12 Education." New York State School Boards Association, 2020. p. 2.
https://www.nyssba.org/clientuploads/nyssba_pdf/Reports/learning-pods-report-rev2-11182020.pdf

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Build a high-performing administration that is the first choice for students, parents, and staff.

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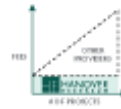
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