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Who Homeschools, Really?

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Executive Summary

- Homeschooling has grown rapidly in recent years, especially since the pandemic. Before the pandemic, estimates suggested that roughly 3% of American K-12 students were homeschooled. Since then, the proportion has doubled to 6%, rivaling private and public charter school enrollments.

- Homeschooling today is a diverse movement in many senses of the word. It has grown in ethnic and racial diversity, reflecting the broader population in many ways. Our estimates suggest that 15% of households who homeschool any child are Hispanic, 10% are Black, and 5% are Asian.

- The movement also resembles the broader population in terms of region and urbanicity. A similar proportion of homeschoolers represent the Midwest, South, and West as other educational sectors, though the Northeast sees lower rates of homeschooling. By urbanicity, homeschooling is similar in prevalence in Suburban and Small Town settings, though it is more likely to be practiced in Rural settings and less likely to be practiced in Urban settings.

- Homeschoolers represent a wide range of political ideologies and religious lifestyles. Forty-four percent of homeschooling parents identify as Republican (43% as politically conservative) while 29% identify with the Democratic party (25% politically liberal). Similarly, 44% of homeschooling parents report attending religious services at least weekly, though 31% say they never attend at all.

- Families that homeschool at least one child often make different educational choices for other children, demonstrating considerable sector "mixing." Among households with at least one homeschooled child, 44% use some other educational sector, including traditional public schools (35%), public charter schools (9%), and private schools (13%).

- Homeschooling is diversifying by modality as well. Among homeschool students, 71% are homeschooled full-time, but 29% homeschool in some other fashion, including co-op (18%), hybrid school (8%), or something else (3%).

View the full working paper here:

https://www.hks.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Taubman/PEPG/research/PEPG25_10.pdf

Introduction

Homeschooling, the parent-directed education of a child in the home, grew rapidly during the pandemic[1] despite some calls for restrictions.[2] In 2019, homeschool participation was almost 3 percent, increasing to reports of 11% by the fall of 2020 and settling to around 6% by 2024. Given that around 9 percent of students are in private schools and 7 percent are in charter schools, homeschooling students and families represent a substantial portion of the fabric of American K-12 education. Homeschool participation continues to increase,[3] and diversify,[4] with parents opting into hybrid schools, co-ops, microschools, and virtual learning.

Despite recent growth, many homeschool policies are based on stereotypes from decades ago about who homeschools and why. For example, a 2025 *New York Times* article cited homeschoolers' "religious and political convictions" for their skepticism of traditional schooling.[5] A 2024 *Teen Vogue* article described homeschooling as an "evangelical gospel of whiteness and power."[6] Such monolithic treatments of homeschooling obscure the fact that it is ethnically, ideologically, and religiously diverse. Flawed stereotypes inevitably will yield flawed policy.

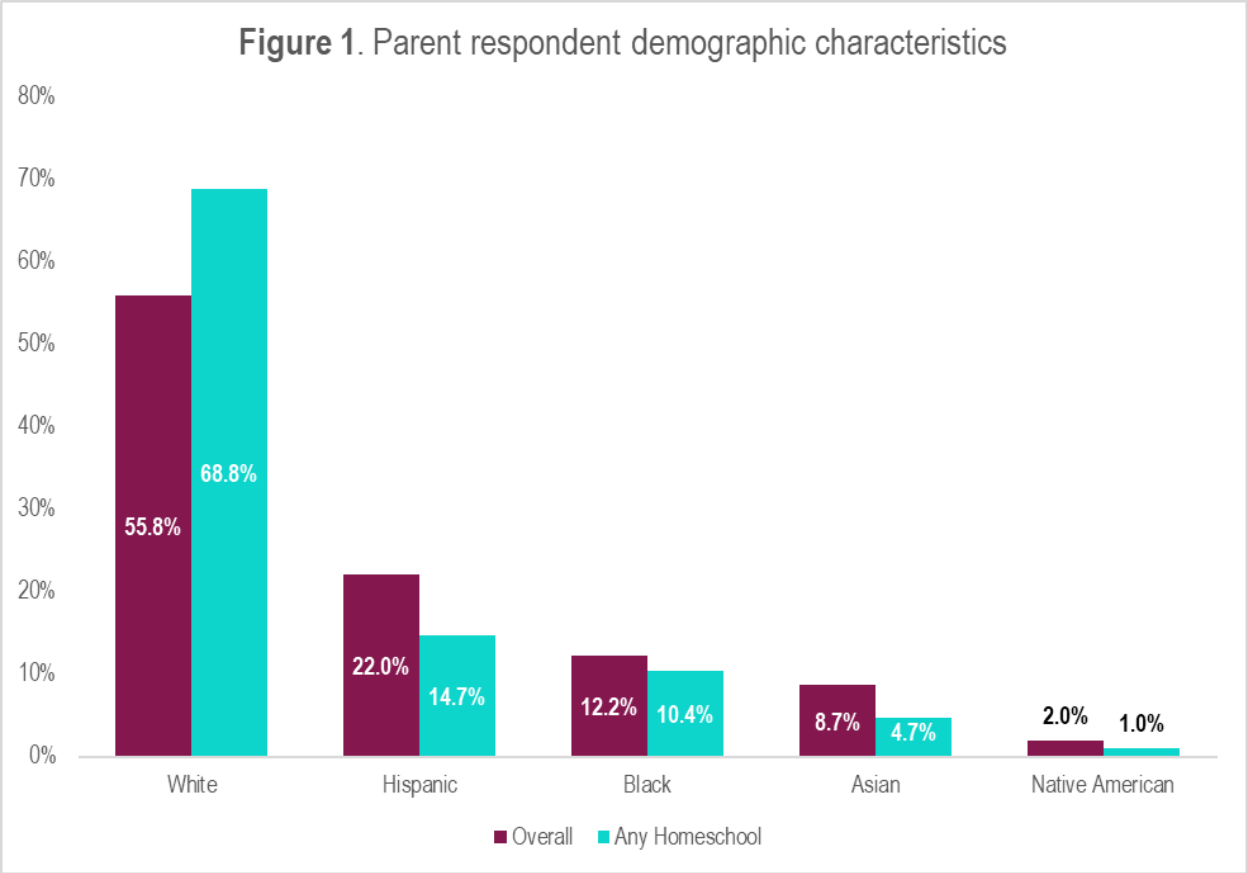
These flawed stereotypes underscore the need for reliable data on who homeschools and their motivations for doing so. Yet, data that could help us better understand this population are scarce and growing more scarce, and rigorous research evidence is limited. Nationally representative data on homeschooled families is limited and the future of federal sources for these data is unclear. Without conclusive evidence, stereotypes about who chooses to homeschool their children persist.

This report provides new and timely information on today's homeschool population, several years after the pandemic. The value of these data is amplified because of the limited information available on homeschooling and our limited understanding of this population, alongside continued growth in this sector. This analysis utilizes nationally-representative data from a survey fielded by Morning Consult in the Spring of 2024. Altogether, 3,191 parents responded to the survey. Unique to our data, we ask each parent respondent how many school-aged children they have in their household as well as the educational sector for each child. These parents have 5,167 school-aged children in kindergarten through 12th grade. The result of the survey is a rich dataset that includes parent, student, and family characteristics; political and religious proclivities; civic engagement; and school sector participation for all children in the household. Thus, this study provides a more detailed and nuanced picture of today's homeschoolers, why

they choose homeschooling, and what they prioritize as success in education. All analysis is weighted to be nationally representative.

Findings

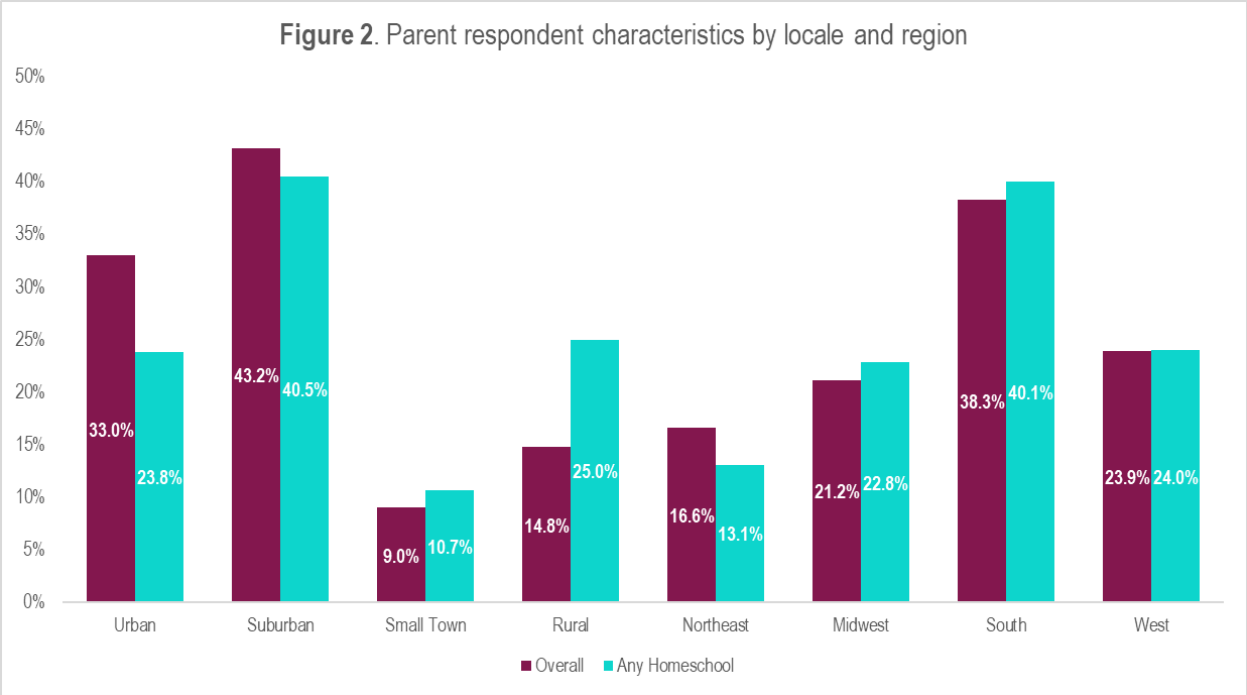
While stereotypes dominate conversations about who homeschools and why, the evidence provides a more nuanced view of parents who have at least one homeschooled child in the home.



Homeschooling today is a diverse movement. It has grown in ethnic and racial diversity, reflecting the broader population in many ways. Our estimates suggest that 15% of households who homeschool any child are Hispanic, 10% are Black, and 5% are Asian.

The movement also resembles the broader population in terms of region and urbanicity. A similar proportion of homeschoolers represent the Midwest, South, and West as other educational sectors, though the Northeast sees lower rates of homeschooling. By urbanicity, homeschooling is similar in prevalence in

Suburban and Small Town settings, though it is more likely to be practiced in Rural settings and less likely to be practiced in Urban settings.



Homeschool parents represent a wide range of political ideologies and religious lifestyles. For example, forty-four percent of homeschooling parents identify as Republican (43% as politically conservative) while 29% identify with the Democratic party (25% politically liberal). Similarly, 44% of homeschooling parents report attending religious services at least weekly, though 31% say they never attend at all.

Figure 3. Parent respondent characteristics by political ideology

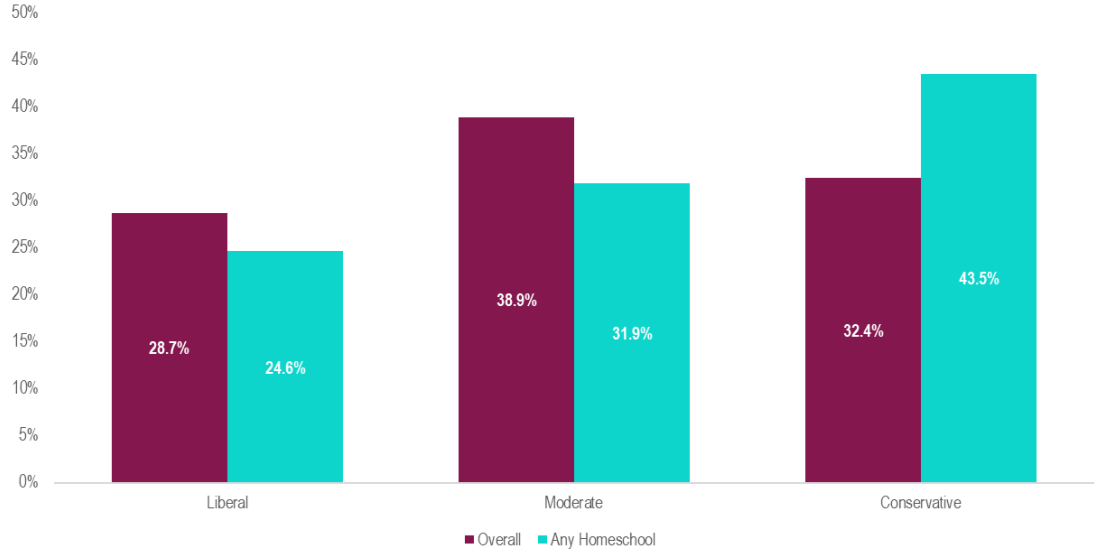
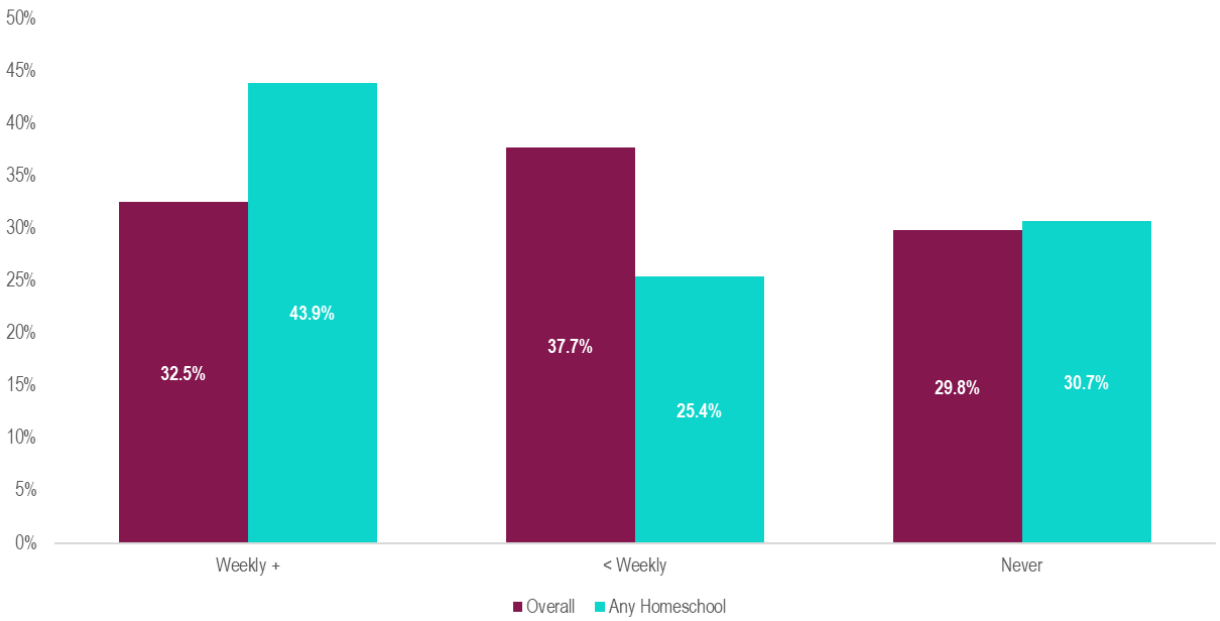
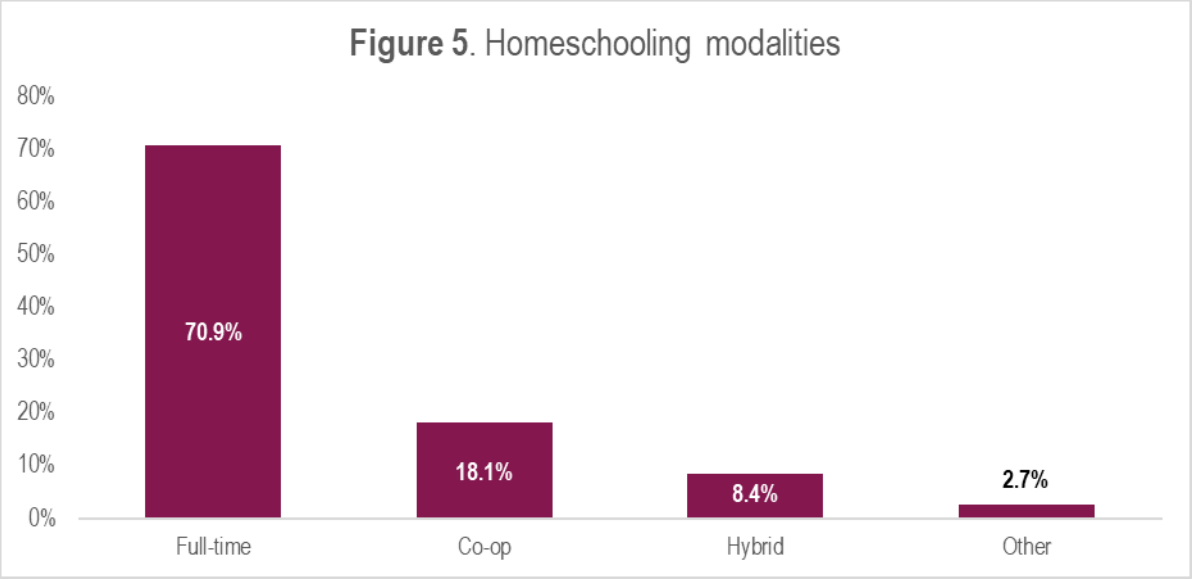


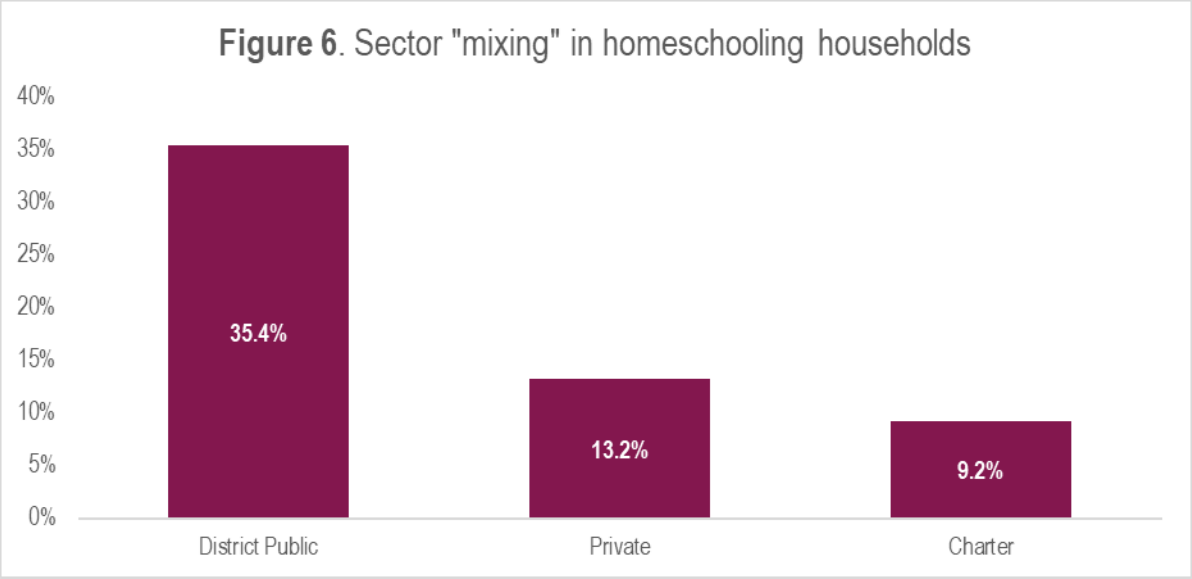
Figure 4. Parent respondent characteristics by religious service attendance





Alongside the diversity in who homeschools, there is variation in how families practice homeschooling[7]. Some who identify as homeschooling may enroll in online virtual schools, charter schools, and even traditional public schools on a part-time basis. Similarly, homeschooling families now qualify for public funding in more states, further incentivizing and removing barriers to entry for new families. While most homeschooling parents from our survey say that they homeschool full-time, 29% also are part of a hybrid school or a co-op or homeschool through some other modality.

Similarly, families that homeschool at least one child often make different educational choices for other children, demonstrating considerable within-household sector "mixing." Our data, which includes the educational sector of each school-aged child in the household, allows us to observe the degree of sector "mixing" within household, that is to say, children in the same household enrolled in different educational sectors. Among households with at least one homeschooled child, 44% use some other educational sector, including traditional public schools (35%), public charter schools (9%), and private schools (13%). It is important to note that because this mixing data is limited to school-aged children only, the degree of sector mixing may be greater than what we observe, as parents may have used different sectors for older children or may plan to use different sectors in the future for younger children. Our estimates of sector mixing should therefore be considered lower-bound estimates.



Finally, parental attitudes and perspectives regarding student "success" likely drive their educational choices. However, little research has examined the importance of these attitudes on choice, particularly in the homeschool population.

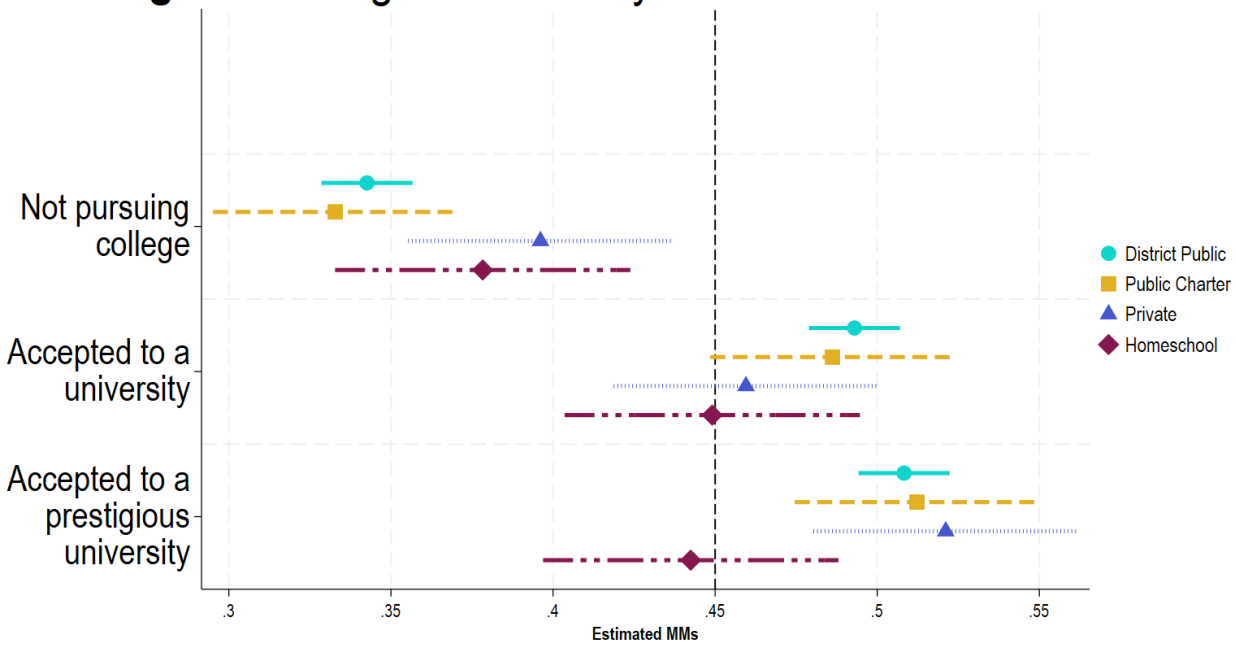
To understand the pedagogical priorities of homeschool parents, we embedded a fully randomized stated preferences experiment known as a conjoint experiment into our survey. In our survey experiment, we presented parents with 6 sets of 12 hypothetical graduates and asked the parent to identify the most "successful" graduate within each set. Hypothetical graduates were randomly assigned attributes across 5 components and answer choices: standardized test scores (below average, average, or above average), college matriculation (not pursuing college education, accepted to a university, or accepted to a prestigious university), civic outcomes (not involved in community, involved in community, or actively involved in community), academic skills (average literacy and numeracy skills, strong literacy skills, strong numeracy skills, or strong literacy and numeracy skills), and religiosity (not religious, nominally religious, involved in a religious community, or actively involved in a religious community). We find that parents who homeschool a child look very similar to their non-homeschooling peers when it comes to what they view as successful outcomes in education and life.

In non-technical terms, a conjoint experiment is akin to an eye exam in which an optometrist, by altering specific features of a vision tester, can quickly measure a patient's eyesight. Similarly, in a conjoint experiment, a survey respondent is presented with a set of hypothetical options and asked to identify the option that most closely approximates his or her ideal. Since attributes are randomly assigned,

this method allows a researcher to identify the causal effect of an attribute on the likelihood an option will be chosen—just as an optometrist might measure one's eyesight.

In figure 7, we present the marginal means (MMs) of parental choices. In a conjoint experiment, MMs capture the average rate at which an option was chosen when a given attribute was present. These estimates allow a researcher to compare how these rates may differ across subgroups. Our analysis shows that, on average, the homeschool population aligns with the larger population on metrics of successful education, with only slight variation. Generally speaking, there is limited evidence of variation in preferred student outcomes across educational sectors, signaling that parents largely desire similar outcomes for their children. However, homeschoolers placed less emphasis on entrance into a prestigious college (44 percent vs. 51 percent) than did parents in other sectors.

Figure 7. Marginal means by school sector of oldest child



Conclusion

Homeschool participation has grown dramatically in recent years and appears to be on a new upward trend.[8] This growth will likely lead to the continued population diversification and new innovations in how "homeschooling" is defined and delivered. The stereotypes of the past must be examined alongside accurate information and data. This study is a step toward that reexamination and a better understanding of today's homeschooling population, why they choose to homeschool, and what they value as successful education outcomes for their children.

These nationally representative data provide important information on today's population of parents who homeschool a child. While Black and Hispanic homeschoolers are underrepresented, and White homeschoolers are overrepresented, the homeschooling population looks essentially like the larger population, and recent evidence points to increasing diversity in these populations.[9]

While there is evidence of concentrated homeschool participation in small towns and rural areas, homeschooling is distributed across all locales and regions of the country. This finding could be due to differences in local culture or values, or simply related to the constriction of accessible alternative educational choices. There may be few viable choices besides the local public school or homeschooling in small towns or rural areas.

We also find that while homeschool respondents are more likely to identify as Republican and conservative, the difference is slight, and the population varies across political ideologies. Similarly, while homeschooling respondents are more religious than their non-homeschooling peers, over 30 percent never attend religious services and look very much like their non-homeschooling peers. Indeed, this finding comports with Isenberg's findings nearly two decades ago that found limited differences in religiosity between homeschooling and non-homeschooling families.[10]

Homeschooling parents appear to value college, though to a lesser degree, and they discount the value of prestigious colleges. Prior descriptive research finds that homeschoolers graduate from college and university at lower rates than students from other sectors.[11] While some attribute this difference to lower levels of preparation for higher education among homeschoolers, our analysis suggests a difference in preference rather than ability. In other words, homeschoolers are less likely to pursue and persist in college education since it matters less to their perceived success.

Overall, we find that, in general, homeschooling parents look like their non-homeschooling peers and value the same things as other parents. While there are exceptions, like valuing civic and religious engagement more and matriculation in a prestigious college less, the homeschooling population is not a monolith, and variation between these two groups is limited.

Finally, many homeschooling families do not exclusively homeschool but engage in some form of "sector mixing" with other educational sectors. For example, while homeschooling is often characterized as a rejection of public schooling, we observe much evidence of homeschooling households using some form of public education, including traditional public schools, charter schools, and intradistrict choice. Of the 328 homeschooled students in our sample, 20% of these students are in a household with a child enrolled in a public school. Of the 443 students in a household with at least one homeschooled child, 38% are in a household with at least one child in a public school.

Our evidence on homeschooling modalities and sector mixing provide evidence of the dynamism of the homeschooling movement. Paired with continued innovation in what is defined as homeschooling and the removal of financial barriers through increased access to public funding such as education savings accounts and other programs, homeschooling is likely to continue to diversify and diffuse. As more choices become available, parents are likely to increasingly choose from year to year and child to child the sector that best meets the needs of their families.

Notes

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About the Author(s)

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