



ISSUE BRIEF | Education Freedom

HOMESCHOOLING MOMENTUM: EXAMINING GROWTH & POSITIVE STUDENT OUTCOMES

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TOPLINE POINTS

- ★ Homeschooling is education that is designed and led by parents instead of schools.
- ★ Homeschooling participation has increased since 2019, likely driven by public school closures during the pandemic and parental concerns about progressive ideological influences that intensified in the 2020s.
- ★ On average, homeschooled students perform as well or better academically than peers in traditional schools, while also achieving strong social, civic, and long-term outcomes.
- ★ States vary widely in homeschooling oversight, but stricter regulations have not been demonstrated to improve student achievement.
- ★ Lawmakers should resist additional regulation of homeschooling families and instead expand flexible education options like Education Savings Accounts that can make homeschooling more widely accessible.

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Homeschooling is education that is designed and led by parents instead of schools. It places full authority for instruction and content in the hands of families, giving parents ultimate control over the education of their children. Providing such autonomy to parents reflects a core principle of America First education policy: the primacy of parents in deciding not only what children learn, but what values are transmitted. Homeschooling is especially salient now, given the imminent launch of a federal scholarship tax credit program created by the One Big Beautiful Bill, which encourages private donations to fund scholarships that can help parents cover qualified educational expenses, including those related to homeschooling ([Donalds, 2025](#); [U.S. Congress, 2025](#)).



Researchers debate more fine-grained definitions of homeschooling. For example, Ray (2025) suggests “parent-controlled home-based privately funded private education,” a definition that would notably exclude homeschooling financed by school choice programs like education savings accounts. There is also a question of how to characterize hybrid-homeschools, which Wearne (2021) defines as brick-and-mortar private schools that educate students for half of the school week, with students being homeschooled for the duration. Under hybrid-homeschooling, a more traditional school administers lesson planning and grading, but parents teach lessons in the home (Wearne & Kennelly, 2021).

For the purposes of this issue brief, homeschooling refers to the practice of educating students who receive the majority of their instruction from a family member, without regularly attending a traditional school. This definition includes homeschooling that is funded by school choice programs, but excludes hybrid homeschools. While homeschooling may include elements of online learning, students who are educated in fully structured online schools—such as virtual charter schools or “cyber schools”—should not be classified as homeschoolers.

A Short History

Homeschooling was the historically dominant form of education in the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries, before becoming legally uncertain—and in some cases outright illegal—for much of the 20th century (Gaither, 2017). During that time, states did not recognize homeschooling as a legitimate alternative to compulsory attendance in government-approved schools. Pro-homeschooling legal reforms began in the 1970s, driven both by religious conservatives concerned about secularized public schools and progressive educators concerned that compulsory schooling constrained children’s natural learning (Coalition for Responsible Homeschooling, n.d.; Great Homeschool Conventions, n.d.). By the late 1990s, homeschooling was permitted in all states (Watson, 2024).

A growing landscape of resources has transformed homeschooling from an independent family pursuit to a more highly connected educational option. In the 1990s, homeschooling families typically relied on printed curricula and had limited access to supplemental resources. Today, homeschooling is supported by a range of materials, including more easily accessible curricula, online learning tools, private tutors, learning pods, and partnerships with traditional schools, all creating a more flexible educational experience.

Why Families Homeschool

According to a large survey administered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in 2019, the top reasons parents decided to homeschool were concerns about school environment, a desire to provide moral instruction, and dissatisfaction with academic quality in traditional schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). More than 90% of homeschool parents responded to an earlier NCES survey citing concerns about school environment—such as safety, drugs, or peer pressure—as their primary reason (Redford et al., 2017). Parents who homeschool resemble parents in other education sectors on observable characteristics and what they value in education, including how much they prioritize academic achievement (Watson & Lee, 2025). One notable difference is that homeschool parents are more likely than others to value civic and religious engagement for their children.



Homeschoolers are not a monolithic entity. For some families, homeschooling is a short-term transition into another form of education, while for others, it is the preferred method of education for an entire childhood. Cheng (2024) analyzes two large, nationally representative surveys—the Understanding America Study and the Cardus Education Survey—and describes wide variation in when and how long children are homeschooled. Roughly 25% of students who were ever homeschooled did so for only a single school year, spending 8-10 years in public schools. On the other end of the spectrum, 10-17% of homeschooled respondents were educated in this setting for their entire primary and secondary careers.

HOMESCHOOLING PARTICIPATION TRENDS

There is no reporting system tracking national rates of homeschooling in the United States. Moreover, nearly a quarter of states do not require parents to notify their local school district about their decision to homeschool ([International Center for Home Education Research, n.d.](#)). Accordingly, researchers typically estimate homeschooling trends from large NCES surveys and, to a lesser extent, from data reported to State Education Agencies. The sometimes-blurry definition of homeschooling also complicates participation estimates, since surveys and states differ on what constitutes homeschooling. Despite these challenges, nationally representative surveys provide useful insights.

The COVID-19 pandemic coincided with a considerable increase in homeschooling, from about 2.8% of students in 2019 to 5.4% of households with school-aged children immediately after the onset of the pandemic in Spring 2020 ([U.S. Department of Education, 2022](#); [Eggleston & Fields, 2021](#)). Several factors made homeschooling more appealing to parents, chief among them school closures, health and safety concerns, dissatisfaction with the quality of virtual instruction, and growing preference for flexible schooling amid work disruptions. Homeschooling likely peaked in Fall 2020 and then stabilized in the years following, at around 6% ([Smith & Watson, 2024](#)). In spite of large, sustained enrollment declines in traditional public schools ([Monochau, 2025](#)), the most recent data from State Education Agencies suggests that homeschooling is on the rise. Families appear to be making a deliberate, enduring shift away from the public K-12 system in favor of educational models that better reflect their values and beliefs.

Pre-Pandemic

In the 1970s, the number of documented homeschoolers in the United States was fewer than 15,000, amounting to a mere fraction of a single percent of school-aged children ([Lines, 1991](#)). By 1996, after states significantly relaxed restrictions, researchers estimated 1.4% of the nation’s school-aged population was homeschooled ([Lines, 1999](#)).

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2022), homeschooling rates held steady and moderately increased from 1.7% in 1999 to 2.8% in 2019. In 2019, 4% of White children in the United States were homeschooled, compared to 2% of Hispanic and 1.2% of Black children. Homeschooling was more common in larger families, two-parent households, rural areas, and middle-income families earning \$50,000–\$75,000 annually ([U.S. Department of Education, 2023](#)).



Pandemic Surge

The COVID-19 pandemic was a catalyst for homeschooling, accelerating the modest yet steady growth that emerged over the previous 50 years. In late April 2020, shortly after the beginning of state lockdowns and what would become prolonged school closures, 5.4% of households with school-aged children reported homeschooling, according to the United States Census Bureau’s Household Pulse Survey ([Eggleston & Fields, 2021](#)).

By Fall 2020, with two-thirds of school systems implementing remote instruction ([National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.](#)) and mask-mandates in full force, 11.1% of households with school-age children reported homeschooling. In other words, the rate of homeschooling doubled from Fall 2019 to Spring 2020, and then doubled again from Spring 2020 to Fall 2020. Note that the 11.1% represents households rather than individual students, so it could be viewed as an upper bound estimate of homeschooling.

Post-Pandemic Stabilization

Although the high-water mark of Fall 2020 eventually leveled off, homeschooling continues to attract parents who want to direct their children’s learning, with rates remaining far above the pre-pandemic levels. By the 2023-24 school year, when COVID-era restrictions were finally relaxed, the national homeschool participation rate stabilized around 6% of K-12 students ([Smith & Watson, 2024](#)).

Participation varies widely by state, with the leading homeschool states being Alaska (12.6% of children homeschooled), followed by Tennessee and West Virginia (9%), and Montana and Missouri (8%) ([Smith & Watson, 2024](#)). Scholars from the Johns Hopkins Homeschool Research Lab, collecting data from State Education Agencies, found that 19 out of 21 states reported homeschooling growth in 2024 relative to 2023 ([Watson, 2024](#)), suggesting that homeschooling is likely to continue growing for the foreseeable future. Some of this state-level homeschooling growth may be attributable to increased access to school choice programs, which allow parents in several states to use public funds on homeschooling expenses.

EVIDENCE ON HOMESCHOOLING OUTCOMES

Because researchers cannot randomly assign students to participate in homeschooling, there will always be difficulties isolating the causal impacts of homeschooling. Even so, decades of non-experimental and observational research consistently show positive results. Most empirical studies suggest homeschooled students perform as well as or better academically than their conventionally schooled peers, and there is little evidence that children experience negative social outcomes as a result of being homeschooled ([Valiente et al., 2022](#)).

Some critics argue that children are, on average, “positively selected” into homeschooling ([Kunzman & Gaither, 2020](#)), meaning they tend to come from families with higher levels of education or parental engagement and would likely succeed in any educational setting. Even if that were true, it is hardly an argument for stricter regulation or for steering families back toward conventional schools. Families making effective educational choices that align with their children’s needs and values should not be treated with greater suspicion.

Scholarly research affirms that parents’ decision to homeschool has yielded positive results for children. Ray ([2017](#)) produced the most systematic review of the literature published prior to



the recent increase in homeschooling. The review included only peer-reviewed sources to analyze research on achievement, social development, and later-life outcomes. Ray (2017) found that:

- Among 14 peer-reviewed studies on academic achievement, 11 found an advantage for homeschoolers relative to conventionally schooled children, with 2 studies showing mixed or neutral results.
- Among 15 peer-reviewed studies on social development, 13 found an advantage for homeschoolers relative to conventionally schooled children, with 2 studies showing mixed results.
- Among 16 peer-reviewed studies on later-life outcomes, 11 found an advantage for homeschoolers relative to conventionally schooled children, with 4 studies showing no difference between homeschoolers and the comparison group.

Furthermore, an analysis of the 2023 Cardus Education Survey finds numerous positive associations between homeschooling and later-life outcomes (Cheng & Watson, 2025). The Cardus survey examined a range of outcomes from a nationally representative sample of 24- to 39-year-olds. Compared to other respondents, individuals who were homeschooled for at least eight years were:

- More likely to be optimistic, grateful, and satisfied with life.
- Less likely to report symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- More likely to have volunteered and given to charity in past twelve months.
- More likely to be married and less likely to be divorced.
- More likely to have children.
- More likely to hold religious beliefs, with religiosity increasing alongside the number of years someone was homeschooled.

In a separate study of undergraduates at a Christian university, Cheng (2014) found that homeschooling was associated with higher political tolerance. That is, more years of being homeschooled were correlated with a greater willingness to extend civil liberties to people who hold opposing viewpoints.

There is also evidence that homeschooling may have benefits for parents. Specifically, Makridis et al. (2025) found that parents who homeschooled during the COVID-19 pandemic experienced significantly less deterioration in mental health compared to those using other school options, reporting lower levels of anxiety, worry, and depression.

NATIONAL LANDSCAPE & REGULATION

Homeschooling is legal in all states, but degrees of regulation vary widely (Watson & Smith, 2023). States differ in requirements for notification of local officials, parent qualifications, student assessment, required subjects, and compliance with immunization schedules. States also differ in compulsory school ages, as well as whether homeschoolers may enroll in à la carte public school courses or participate in public school athletics.

According to the Homeschool Legal Defense Association (2025) and the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy (2025), which both maintain 50-state comparison of



homeschooling regulations, the Northeast generally imposes more regulations (with the exceptions of New Jersey and Connecticut), while the South, Midwest, and Southwest have lighter regulatory frameworks. For example, Texas does not require parents to notify the state of their decision to homeschool, does not require that homeschool instructors be qualified relative to an arbitrary standard, and does not impose assessment or immunization requirements ([Homeschool Legal Defense Association, 2025](#)). Other states, like New York, require parents to notify the local school district, provide instruction in certain courses, and submit quarterly reports to local school officials ([Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy, 2025](#)).

Increased regulations appear unlikely to produce better outcomes for homeschoolers. There is little research linking stricter oversight with higher academic achievement ([Ray, 2010](#)). Requiring parents to hold teaching credentials also does not improve student performance ([Dumas et al., 2010](#)). Similarly, concerns from homeschool critics like Elizabeth Bartholet that lenient regulation increases the risk of child abuse are not supported by data ([Wolf et al., 2020](#)). Finally, Ray and Shakeel ([2022](#)) found no association between school sector and a child's likelihood of experiencing abuse and neglect.

CONCLUSION: RESIST EFFORTS TO OVERREGULATE HOMESCHOOLERS

Policymakers should encourage homeschooling because it represents a return to America's oldest and most family-centered approach to education. It places parents, not state education bureaucracies, at the center of a child's learning. After decades of steady growth, homeschooling now accounts for a meaningful share of the K-12 education population. Many studies suggest homeschoolers perform well academically, and little credible research links stricter top-down regulations with improved outcomes.

Given this record, state lawmakers should resist efforts to impose intrusive monitoring or mandates. Instead, policymakers should protect the autonomy homeschoolers currently enjoy and expand access for more families who want to fully direct their children's education. Heavily regulated homeschool states, like Pennsylvania, should eliminate burdensome requirements that needlessly restrict parental autonomy. Moreover, as states implement and expand education savings accounts, they should ensure these programs integrate seamlessly with homeschooling, with funding available for parents to spend on a range of homeschooling expenses if they choose. Finally, all states should opt-in to the federal tax credit program made possible by the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, and these states should encourage scholarship granting organizations to offer scholarships that cover eligible homeschooling expenses.

The overall policy priority should not be to constrain homeschooling but to make it possible for more families to choose it freely. States should recognize homeschooling as a legitimate form of education, free from excessive reporting, mandated subjects, adherence to public school learning standards, and standardized testing requirements. Whenever possible, policymakers should refrain from applying traditional public school accountability frameworks to homeschool families. States with heavier homeschool regulations would benefit from following the examples of Texas, Michigan, and New Jersey, which recognize parents as the primary stewards of their children's education and minimize top-down control over homeschoolers. By trusting parents to make educational decisions, students benefit through meaningful learning, stronger familial connections, and ultimately positive outcomes.



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