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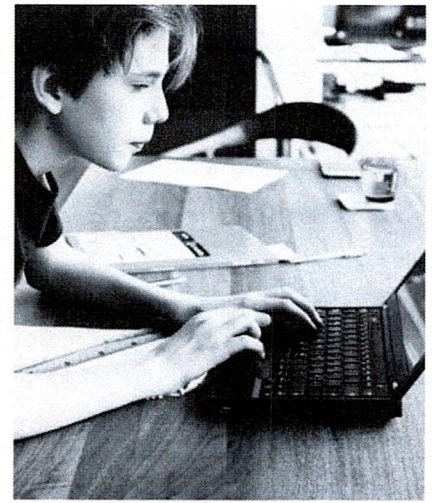
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NEWS

# More Than a Third of Homeschool Families Also Use Public Schools, New Data Shows

'I don't know any family that really has kids who learn the same way,' one parent said.



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**More Than a Third of Homeschool Families Also Use Public Schools, New Data Shows**

**'I don't know any family that really has kids who learn the same way,' one parent said.**

By [Linda Jacobson](/about/team/linda-jacobson/)

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Hopkins University. More than a third of families with at least one homeschooled child also have a student enrolled in a traditional district school. Another 9% of homeschoolers have a child in a charter.

Angela Watson, an assistant professor and director of the university's Homeschool Research Lab, called the finding a "big deal."



Angela Watson

The data is "evidence that there's not this rejection of public schooling that people frame it as," she said. She doesn't know whether many families were "mixing" different forms of education before the pandemic. "To my knowledge, no one has thought to ask this question before. Folks just assumed homeschool families were homeschool families."

As more families choose to educate their children at home, Watson's post-COVID analysis of responses from nearly 3,200 parents reflects the growing diversity within the population. Less than half of homeschoolers identify as Republicans, whereas, before the pandemic, this group



outnumbered Democrats 3 to 1. A quarter say they are politically liberal, and a third say they never attend religious services. That's a big shift from 2012, when nearly two-thirds of parents said imparting their religious beliefs to their children was a primary reason for homeschooling.

“That really changes the conversation for Democrats to see how diverse this group is,” Watson said.

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Families often turn to homeschooling after struggling to get adequate services in the public system for children with disabilities. Education savings accounts — public funds that pay for private school tuition or homeschooling costs — have made that decision even easier.

Angela Faber pulled her youngest child, who has autism, out of the Deer Valley Unified School District, near Phoenix, during the pandemic.

Remote learning had allowed Faber to see up close the extent of her daughter's delays. She was in fourth grade, but reading at a kindergarten level and getting just 30 minutes of extra help each week.

With state funds, her daughter now learns at home with a private teacher and receives horseback riding therapy, which helps with balance, coordination and focus.

But she's sometimes envious of her older sister, who attends what Faber described as a "pretty darn liberal" charter school and manages a hectic extracurricular schedule. As a basketball player, she's out the door some mornings at 6 a.m. and not back until after dark.



Arizona mom Angela Faber has one daughter who learns at home on an education savings account and another in a Phoenix-area charter school. (Courtesy of Angela Faber)



“The youngest is like ‘I want to go to school and play all these sports.’ But she just doesn’t like people and she knows that,” Faber said. “I don’t know any family that really has kids who learn the same way.”

## **‘Not a fit for all situations’**

One complication for families juggling the mix is that the rhythms of homeschooling and public school don’t necessarily mesh.

When Audria Ausbern, from the west Texas town of Tahoka, homeschooled her two sons, the family used to avoid vacation crowds by scheduling trips after public schools started in the fall. That’s what they did in 2019 when Talon, their oldest, insisted they visit Boston, the site of the Great Molasses Flood of 1919. He learned about the bizarre event from the “I Survived” series of books.

For five years, they took off in their RV whenever they wanted, with excursions to the Pacific Northwest, Florida, and Minnesota, where they biked the Grand Marais trail. But once Talon entered public school in 2022, they had to plan their adventures around the school calendar. At 6-foot-6, he wanted to play high school basketball and get used to the dynamics of a typical classroom so he’d be better prepared for college.



The Ausbern family — Doug, Weston, Audria and Talon — could plan family trips anytime they wanted until Talon opted to finish high school in the local district. (Courtesy of Audria Ausbern)

The transition came with hiccups. The school didn't accept all of his credits — like sign language for a foreign language — and he had to take an extra science class, Ausbern said. The counselor wasn't pleased that Talon didn't take social studies courses in the same order as district kids, and she required him to double up on English when she decided his at-home curriculum didn't include enough paperwork.

“Since English is Talon's weaker subject, and he had room in his schedule, we decided not to fight the issue,” his mother said.

Now Weston, his younger brother, is weighing whether he too will spend his senior year in a

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public school.

Homeschooling “is not a fit for all situations,” she said, “and we had some great experiences with public education.”

In the future, families’ preferences may even change “year by year,” said Jeremy Newman, vice president of policy and engagement at the Texas Home School Coalition, an advocacy group.

“It’s not the case anymore that the average student is going to one form of education for their whole K-12 education,” he said. That doesn’t mean, however, that the “natural suspicion” some homeschoolers have toward the public system is gone, he said. “It was just like 30, 40 years ago when states were trying to prosecute homeschoolers just for homeschooling.”

Two attorneys founded the Home School Legal Defense Association in 1983 for that reason, and the organization still fights legal challenges today. For example, a bill proposed in Illinois in this year’s session recently reignited parents’ mistrust toward the government.

The Democratic-backed Homeschool Act would have required parents to have a high school diploma to homeschool and to alert their local district if they intended to do so. Sponsors said



they want to ensure children are safe and learning, but families rallied in protest and have defeated the proposal for now.

Kevin Boden, an attorney with the association, thinks the growing racial, economic, cultural and diversity of homeschoolers is one reason why the legislation died this year. While he spends his time protecting parents' right to educate their children at home, he said he's not surprised that so many families also have a child in public school.

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## **'I needed help'**

Aimeé Fletcher, a Nashville-area mom, took remote learning during COVID as a chance to rethink how her children were being educated. After the pandemic, she put her two sons, Noah and Nash, in private school. Now homeschooled, they follow a Bible-themed curriculum with a study group two days a week and spend the rest

completing assignments on the couch or at the dining room table. The flexibility allows Noah, a sophomore this fall, time to paint, teach himself guitar and work part-time at a local farm.

“Both boys seem to have settled and are thriving in the homeschool environment,” she said.

Their sister Sara has very different needs, which for now, Fletcher thinks the public schools are in the best position to meet. Adopted from Colombia, the rising fifth grader has cerebral palsy, was orphaned and didn't know English when she arrived in 2020. With her learning still delayed, she depends on more than 1,000 minutes a week of one-on-one and small group support in reading and math.





Noah, rear, and Nash Fletcher have been homeschooled since the pandemic. Their sister Sara attends public school in Williamson County, Tennessee. (Courtesy of Aimeé Fletcher)

A homeschool advocate who works for a conservative nonprofit, Fletcher tried to teach Sara letters and numbers. But she determined that enrolling her at Amanda North Elementary, in the Williamson County district, was the best option.

“I needed help and I still do, honestly,” Fletcher said. “Her story is different from my boys, and so is her schooling.”

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