

Homeschooling

A Growing School Choice Option for Meeting Special Educational Needs

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ABSTRACT: The unexplained, rapid growth of homeschooling over the past two decades provides the context for this quantitative study. The relation between parental involvement in education, special educational needs, and the school choice option of homeschooling is examined via completion of an online survey. Of the 309 homeschooling families that responded to the survey, more than half (50.8%) had a child who attended public or private school before they made the decision to homeschool, and 60.6% of these families indicated they were currently homeschooling a child who had special educational needs (SEN). Results suggest that when parents perceive needs of a child with SEN are not being met in a public or private school, the child's SEN is an important factor in their decision to homeschool. Furthermore, for all participating homeschooling parents (those with and without children with special educational needs) in this sample, the desire to be more involved in their children's education was rated as the most important factor in the decision to homeschool.

Introduction



Homeschooling, as an educational choice for American children, has seen a 74% increase in the 8-year period from 1999 to 2007, and the growth rate continues to increase annually (Planty et al., 2009). The continued growth rate of homeschooling is evidenced in data reported from the 2012 National Household Education Survey Program (NHES) that 1.77 million K–12 students in the United States were homeschooled for the 2011–2012 school year (Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2013). This number represents an estimated 3.4% of the total school-age population in the United States. Yet, relatively little is known about why increasing numbers of families are making the choice to homeschool their children.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the understanding of parents' decisions to homeschool their children. More specifically, the purpose of this study is to determine the proportion of homeschooling families in the sample who had children enrolled in public or private school before making the choice to homeschool and to determine the proportion of homeschooling

families in the sample who reported homeschooling a child with special educational needs (SEN). The relationship among school choice history (whether or not the family had a child enrolled in public or private school before making the decision to homeschool), SEN status (whether or not the family reported homeschooling a child with SEN), and parents' decision to homeschool their children is examined.

Review of Literature

The theoretical and conceptual framework for this study is built on literature situating parental involvement in a child's education as a key to understanding parents' participation in school choice. Vygotsky's (1978) work in developmental psychology and his theory of mediated activity provides the theoretical foundation for understanding the importance of parental involvement in a child's development and academic achievement. The importance of parental involvement in a child's education is further supported by social cognitive theory. Learning through social interactions with others is at the heart of social cognitive theory. Bandura (1986) discussed an individual's response to social interactions as the way one makes sense of the world and develops cognitions about his/her own self in relation to self-efficacy, self-regulation, and self-evaluation. Motivational theory, especially self-efficacy, self-regulatory, and goal theories relate to both the parent and the child in research on parental involvement. For example, as a parent's sense of self-efficacy to influence his or her child's academic success increases, so does his or her motivation for involvement. Likewise, when a child's sense of self-efficacy is increased, so is his or her motivation to learn. Motivation is also a key link between parental involvement and a student's academic achievement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). In fact, Ice and Hoover-Dempsey (2011) rely on academic self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation to learn, and self-regulatory strategy use as measurements of learning outcomes in their study of the influence of parental involvement on academic achievement. Their findings indicate parental self-efficacy is positively related to parental involvement, which in turn is positively linked to students' academic self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation to learn.

Cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) (Engeström, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978) provides a set of concepts for understanding the relations between parent, school, and the child's development and academic achievement, adding additional strength to the theoretical framework for this study. Researchers seeking to understand parental motivation for school choice commonly focus on factors that influence parents' motivation for involvement in their child's education. Goldring and Phillips (2008) explain that "one of the most important ways in which parents are involved in their children's education is through choosing the school they attend" (p. 209). Green and Hoover-Dempsey (2007) use parental involvement models developed by

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) to gain a deeper understanding of how the relation between parents' beliefs about how they should be involved with their child's education, the educational organization, and their child's educational needs influence their decision to homeschool. They found that parents who felt they were responsible for their child's education (parent-focused role construction) appeared to be motivated to homeschool "more by their strong beliefs about their parental role, their efficacy for helping their child learn, and their beliefs about the personal resources available to help them educate their children" (p. 282). However, parents with a partnership-focused role construction (reflecting values of partnership with homeschool community or umbrella school for the responsibility of educating the child) "appeared to be motivated by their value beliefs regarding moral and religious issues, appropriate curricular content for their child, appropriate teaching practices for their child, and beliefs about public school abilities to deal with their child's individual needs" (p. 281). While the results of their study indicate that both groups of homeschooling parents shared the value beliefs related to the importance of moral and religious issues, appropriate curricular content and teaching practices, and beliefs about public school's abilities to meet their child's individual needs, the parent-focused group did not feel these were motivating factors in their decision to homeschool. The study results also suggest that parents with a partnership-focused role construction were motivated to homeschool "in part because they believe that the public school system has not met their beliefs and values related to their children's education" (p. 278). The current study builds on this research by examining the influence that having a child with special educational needs has on the decision to homeschool.

While there is a considerable body of literature on parental involvement and school choice in the United States, there appears to be a gap in the literature concerning the influence that having a child with special educational needs (SEN) might have on the decision to homeschool. The literature on homeschooling children with special educational needs is limited, but in the studies reviewed, a high percentage of parents who were currently homeschooling children with SEN had initially placed their children in traditional public or private school environments (Arora, 2006; Parsons & Lewis, 2010; Reilly, Chapman, & O'Donoghue, 2002). Understanding parents' motivations for homeschooling their children who may have special educational needs (SEN) was a specific focus of this study, so a review of the literature was conducted to identify areas of special education needs where homeschooling has been used. Three main special education needs populations where homeschooling is being used were identified as high ability and gifted students, students with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD), and students with Asperger's Syndrome or autism (collectively referred to as Autism Spectrum Disorder or ASD). Jolly, Matthews, and Nester (2013) used a phenomenological approach to gain an understanding of families that

are homeschooling gifted children. Only 1 of the 13 families interviewed chose to homeschool their child without first attending public and/or private schools. The authors conclude their discussion of the families' decisions to homeschool with this statement, "The decision to homeschool resulted from these parents' recognition that their child/children's progress in school had stagnated or in some cases even regressed, in relation to the potential and learning expectations that their gifted identification status had implied" (p. 127). A very small, but thorough, preliminary investigation study found that homeschooled students with AD/HD were academically engaged almost twice as often as public school students with AD/HD (Duvall, Delquadri, & Ward, 2004). The strongest support for homeschooling children with special education needs was found in the literature on homeschooling children with ASD. Hurlbutt (2011) conducted interviews with nine families that were homeschooling children with ASD. The overarching theme that emerged was that "parents who homeschool their children with ASD feel as though they have found a treatment plan that works and their perception has been that the school has been either (a) not willing and/or (b) unable to provide that treatment effectively" (p. 247).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the understanding of parental decisions to homeschool in relation to having children with special education needs. More specifically, the purpose of this study is to determine the proportion of homeschooling families in the sample who had children enrolled in public or private school *before* making the decision to homeschool and to determine the proportion of homeschooling families in the sample who reported homeschooling a child with special educational needs (SEN). The relation among school choice history (whether or not the family had a child enrolled in public or private school before making the decision to homeschool), SEN status (whether or not the family reported homeschooling a child with SEN), and parents' decision to homeschool their children is examined.

Homeschooling is clearly a growing option in the school choice arena (Noel et al., 2013). The results of this study provide data that inform trends in parents' participation in school choice, specifically the choice of homeschooling, which should be of interest to school administrators. Results of this study should also provide valuable data for school administrators as they work to evaluate resource allocation for developing and supporting parental involvement.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. Is there a difference in the percentage of families who are homeschooling a child with special educational needs (SEN) between the group of

homeschooling families who had children that attended public or private school *prior* to homeschooling and the group of families whose children have always been homeschooled?

2. Is there a difference in parents' perceptions toward factors important to their decision to homeschool between the group of families who have a child who has attended public or private school prior to homeschooling and the group of families whose children have always been homeschooled?
3. Is there a difference in parents' perceptions toward factors important to their decision to homeschool between the group of families who are homeschooling a child with special educational needs (SEN) and the group of families who are not homeschooling any children with SEN?

Method

Participants and Setting

Descriptive and inferential methodologies are used in this quantitative study. The target population for this study were families that were currently homeschooling one or more children. Because homeschool laws vary between states, the decision was made to use a regional/state area in the southeastern United States as the accessible population. An online search for homeschool support groups in the defined regional area was conducted. Four large, well-established homeschool support groups and 12 smaller, local groups were identified for inclusion in the accessible population. The 16 homeschool support groups from which the sample was obtained had an estimated total membership of approximately 1,500 families. After obtaining university institutional review board permission, a membership estimate was calculated from support group website information. Invitations to participate in this study were emailed to leaders and/or contact person(s) for identified groups. Support group leaders/contact persons were asked to send the invitation to participate to their group members.

The emailed invitation identified the first author, as a homeschooling mother and longtime member of a large, well-known homeschool support group in a southeastern state. It included personal background and observations about homeschooling that informed this research. The research project was briefly described so participants understood the scope of the study. The email invitation was designed to give participants confidence that this was a study designed to learn more about homeschooling and homeschooling families, not to attack homeschooling. A second request that re-iterated the initial information was sent 5 days after the first emailed invitation, followed by a final request at day 12. The survey was closed 8 days after the final request.

The survey was completed by 333 participants. Of the 333 participants, 15.3% (51) did not answer all of the questions. Additionally, some sections of the survey had qualifying questions, thus the sample size varies with question and statistical test. The percentage of participating families who had a child who attended a public or private school prior to making the decision to homeschool was 50.8% (167), while 49.2% (162) of the participating families had always homeschooled their children.

The special educational needs categories used for this study were based on IDEA categories of disability as reported by the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY) (2012). The category of "Intellectually Gifted" was also included because it is a state-specific disability in the state where the survey was conducted. Fourteen categories of SEN were listed. Of the 309 families who responded, more than half (54%) indicated they were homeschooling a child who had at least one special educational need.

The incidences of children identified within each SEN category, and the method of identification are reported in Table 1. Four categories represented 73.87% of the SEN reported. These categories were (1) Other Health Impaired (22.26%), (2) Intellectually Gifted (21.29%), (3) Specific Learning Disability (15.16%), and (4) Speech or Language Impairment (15.16%). Children were identified as having special educational needs through a variety of processes; 48.07% (149 of 310) had been identified by physicians or psychologists outside of a public school system. Parent observations accounted for 32.90% (102 of 310) of those identified; 12.58% (39 of 310) were identified through school testing, and 6.45% (20 of 310) were identified by other means.

Instrument

The survey instrument contains five sections of questions with a total of 33 questions. The questions in section 1 are designed to collect qualifying and demographic data. Response to question number seven in section one (Have any of the children that you are currently homeschooling ever attended a public or private (K–12) school full time?) is used as an independent variable to assess differences in parental perceptions of factors important to the decision to homeschool based on school choice history. This independent variable is identified as *School Choice History* and coded as *PPS* for the families who had a child that attended public or private school before they made the decision to homeschool and *No PPS* for families who had always homeschooled their children.

Section two contains questions to quantify the perceived incidence of special educational needs (SEN) within the study participant groups. These questions also provide background data concerning the methods of identification for a child's special educational needs. As noted, special educational needs

Table 1. Incidence of Special Educational Needs and Method of Identification

| SEN | Method of Identification | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|------------|------------|
| | School Testing | | Private Doctor or Psychologist | | Parent Observations | | Other Means | | SEN Total | |
| | Count | Row % | Count | Row % | Count | Row % | Count | Row % | Count | % of Total |
| Autism or Asperger's Syndrome | 2 | 9.1 | 12 | 54.5 | 6 | 27.3 | 2 | 9.1 | 22 | 7.10 |
| Blindness | 0 | | 0 | | 0 | | 1 | 100 | 1 | 0.32 |
| Deafness | | | 1 | 100 | | | | | 1 | 0.32 |
| Emotional Disturbance | | | 9 | 56.3 | 6 | 37.5 | 1 | 6.3 | 16 | 5.16 |
| Hearing Impairment | | | 4 | 50 | 3 | 37.5 | 1 | 12.5 | 8 | 2.58 |
| Intellectual Disability | 3 | 30.0 | 7 | 70.0 | | | | | 10 | 3.23 |
| Multiple Disabilities | | | 4 | 100 | | | | | 4 | 1.29 |
| Orthopedic Impairment | | | 5 | 100 | | | | | 5 | 1.61 |
| Other Health Impairments | 4 | 5.8 | 40 | 58.0 | 20 | 29.0 | 5 | 7.2 | 69 | 22.26 |
| <i>(Includes ADD/ADHD and other acute & chronic conditions)</i> | | | | | | | | | | |
| Specific Learning Disability | 4 | 8.5 | 25 | 53.2 | 16 | 34 | 2 | 4.3 | 47 | 15.16 |
| Speech or Language Impairment | 12 | 25.5 | 21 | 44.7 | 13 | 27.7 | 1 | 2.1 | 47 | 15.16 |
| Traumatic Brain Injury | | | 1 | 100 | | | | | 1 | 0.32 |
| Visual Impairment | | | 12 | 92.3 | 1 | 7.7 | | | 13 | 4.19 |
| Intellectually Gifted | 14 | 21.2 | 8 | 12.1 | 37 | 56.1 | 7 | 10.6 | 66 | 21.29 |
| Totals for each method of diagnosis | 39 | 12.58 | 149 | 48.07 | 102 | 32.90 | 20 | 6.45 | 310 | 100 |

categories used to define SEN are based on IDEA categories of disability as reported by the NICHCY, 2012. The category of “Intellectually Gifted” is also included as it is a state-specific disability in the state where the survey was conducted. If a participant indicated that he or she was homeschooling a child with a SEN in any of these categories, their SEN status is coded as *Yes*. If the participant indicated that he or she was not homeschooling a child with SEN, their SEN status is coded as *No*. SEN status was used as an independent variable to assess differences in parental perceptions of homeschool support group use, of opportunities for parental involvement, and of factors important to the decision to homeschool based on SEN status. This section also contains a question to assess parents’ perceptions of the importance of having a child with SEN to the decision to homeschool.

The purpose of questions in sections three and four is to collect data on participants’ use of homeschool support groups, and these data are not the focus of this study and will be presented in a future study. Section five questions assessed parents’ perceptions of factors important to their decision to homeschool. For all questions where participants are asked to rate factors or participation, a scale of 1–5 (least to most) is used. Parents’ assessments of factors important to their decision to homeschool are reported in Tables 2 and 3.

The survey instrument was developed based on constructs supported by appropriate theoretical and conceptual foundations (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Isenberg, 2007; Planty et al., 2009). It was reviewed by a panel of experts who checked for clarity and face validity. The panel included experts in survey research, special educational needs, and homeschool support group leadership. To further test for clarity and validity, a pilot test was conducted using a sample of six homeschool families from a state bordering the state in which the data were collected. These families were chosen because they were not members of any of the homeschool support groups used in the study. No areas of concern regarding clarity and readability were reported from participants in the pilot test. To test for survey reliability, a pilot test/retest study was planned. A request for participation was posted on the Yahoo Group site of a small homeschool support group (31 members) from a bordering state. Ten participants completed the first test. A week later the survey was sent again, with a request for participants to complete it a second time. Only five participants completed both the first and second surveys. Responses were consistent (identical) between the test and retest for all questions addressed in the study except for the question which asked participants to rate their perceptions of the importance of various factors on their decision to homeschool. The number of participants who completed both test and retest was too small for the planned analyses of paired sample *t*-tests to be statistically meaningful. However, given the almost identical answers to the five pairs of test/retest surveys, the survey was administered with no changes. The lack of test/retest reliability data is noted as a limitation of the study.

Table 2. Means—School Choice History and the Decision to Homeschool

| <i>Dependent Variable</i> | <i>School Choice History*</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Std. Error</i> | <i>95% Confidence Interval</i> | |
|--|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| | | | | <i>Lower Bound</i> | <i>Upper Bound</i> |
| The desire to provide religious or moral instruction | PPS | 3.880 | .110 | 3.663 | 4.097 |
| | HS | 4.415 | .108 | 4.203 | 4.628 |
| Concern about school environment (safety, drugs, negative peer pressure) | PPS | 4.128 | .097 | 3.936 | 4.320 |
| | HS | 4.215 | .095 | 4.027 | 4.403 |
| Dissatisfaction with academic instruction at a public or private school | PPS | 4.040 | .109 | 3.825 | 4.255 |
| | HS | 4.046 | .107 | 3.835 | 4.257 |
| The desire to provide a non-traditional educational approach | PPS | 3.552 | .113 | 3.329 | 3.775 |
| | HS | 3.800 | .111 | 3.582 | 4.018 |
| The special needs of a child | PPS | 3.280 | .142 | 3.001 | 3.559 |
| | HS | 2.692 | .139 | 2.418 | 2.966 |
| Other family-specific reasons (travel, finances, family time) | PPS | 3.464 | .128 | 3.213 | 3.715 |
| | HS | 3.577 | .125 | 3.331 | 3.823 |
| The desire to be more involved with your child/children's education | PPS | 4.224 | .082 | 4.062 | 4.386 |
| | HS | 4.708 | .081 | 4.549 | 4.867 |

*PPS—family had a child enrolled in public/private school before homeschooling; HS—family has always homeschooled.

Table 3. Means—SEN Status and the Decision to Homeschool

| <i>Dependent Variable</i> | <i>SEN Status</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Std. Error</i> | <i>95% Confidence Interval</i> | |
|--|-------------------|-------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| | | | | <i>Lower Bound</i> | <i>Upper Bound</i> |
| The desire to provide religious or moral instruction | Yes | 3.930 | .105 | 3.723 | 4.136 |
| | No | 4.422 | .124 | 4.178 | 4.665 |
| Concern about school environment (safety, drugs, negative peer pressure) | Yes | 4.077 | .091 | 3.898 | 4.257 |
| | No | 4.314 | .108 | 4.102 | 4.526 |
| Dissatisfaction with academic instruction at a public or private school | Yes | 4.028 | .102 | 3.827 | 4.229 |
| | No | 4.029 | .121 | 3.792 | 4.267 |
| The desire to provide a non-traditional educational approach | Yes | 3.669 | .106 | 3.460 | 3.878 |
| | No | 3.676 | .125 | 3.430 | 3.923 |
| The special needs of a child | Yes | 3.500 | .126 | 3.252 | 3.748 |
| | No | 2.324 | .149 | 2.031 | 2.616 |
| Other family-specific reasons (travel, finances, family time) | Yes | 3.458 | .120 | 3.222 | 3.693 |
| | No | 3.578 | .141 | 3.300 | 3.857 |
| The desire to be more involved with your child/children's education | Yes | 4.254 | .078 | 4.100 | 4.407 |
| | No | 4.755 | .092 | 4.574 | 4.936 |

Results

Appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical analyses using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences 21 (SPSS) (IBM Corp., 2011) were conducted to answer the study's research questions. Descriptive analyses (frequencies, mean, etc.) are reported overall and by group (school choice history and SEN status) to provide an updated view of factors affecting the decision to homeschool. Chi-Square tests, *t*-tests, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) were used to test for significant differences in groups based on the two independent variables (school choice history and SEN status) for the various dependent variables associated with factors important to the decision to homeschool.

Overall, 54% of the participating homeschooling families indicated they had a child with SEN. However, there was a significant difference (chi-square = 5.720, *df* = 1, *p* = 0.17) in the percentage of families who had a child with SEN between the school choice history groups (Table 4). For the group of families who had a child who attended public or private school before homeschooling, 60.6% of the families had a child with SEN (as defined in this study). In the group that had always homeschooled, only 43.4% of the families had a child with SEN.

A significant difference in parents' perceptions of three of the factors important to the decision to homeschool was found between the school choice history groups (Table 5) (Figure 1). Parents who have had a child in public or private school before making the decision to homeschool rated "the desire to provide religious or moral instruction" as less important to their decision to homeschool (*M* = 3.88) than parents who have always homeschooled their children (*M* = 4.42). Parents who have had a child in public or private school before making the decision to homeschool rated "the desire to be more involved with your child/children's education" as less important to their decision to homeschool (*M* = 4.22) than parents who have always homeschooled their children (*M* = 4.71). Parents who have had a child in public or

Table 4. School Choice History and SEN Status Analyses Summary

| <i>School Choice History*</i> | | <i>SEN Status</i> | | <i>Total</i> |
|----------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|-----------|--------------|
| | | <i>Yes</i> | <i>No</i> | |
| Yes, public or private (PPS) | Count | 94 | 61 | 155 |
| | % | 60.6 | 39.4 | 100.0 |
| No, Always homeschooled (No PPS) | Count | 72 | 81 | 153 |
| | % | 43.4 | 57.0 | 49.7 |
| Total | Count | 166 | 142 | 308 |
| | % within SEN | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

*SEN Status Crosstabulation.

Table 5. ANOVA—School Choice History and the Decision to Homeschool

| <i>Dependent Variable</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>Mean Square</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>Sig.</i> |
|---|-----------|--------------------|----------|-------------|
| The desire to provide religious or moral instruction | 1 | 18.266 | 12.073 | .001 |
| Concern about school environment (safety, drugs, negative peer pressure) | 1 | .487 | .410 | .522 |
| Dissatisfaction with academic instruction at a public or private school | 1 | .002 | .002 | .968 |
| The desire to provide a non-traditional educational approach | 1 | 3.919 | 2.456 | .118 |
| The special needs of a child | 1 | 22.010 | 8.743 | .003 |
| Other family-specific reasons (travel, finances, family time) | 1 | .813 | .399 | .528 |
| The desire to be more involved with your child/ children's education | 1 | 14.909 | 17.575 | .000 |

Tests of Between-Subject Effects (Design: Intercept + School Choice History).

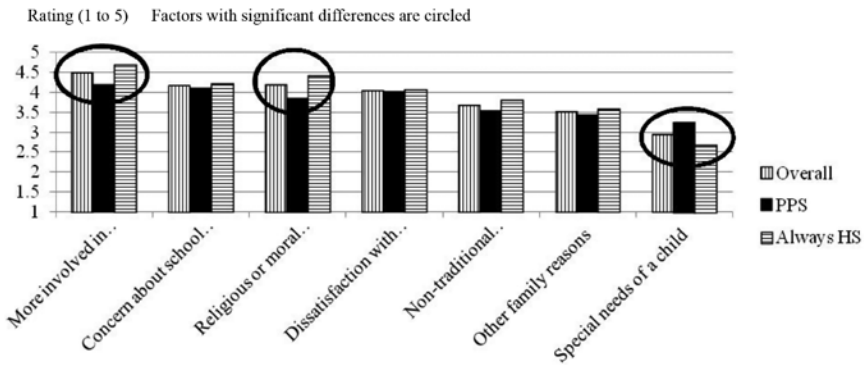


Figure 1. The Decision to Homeschool and School Choice History.

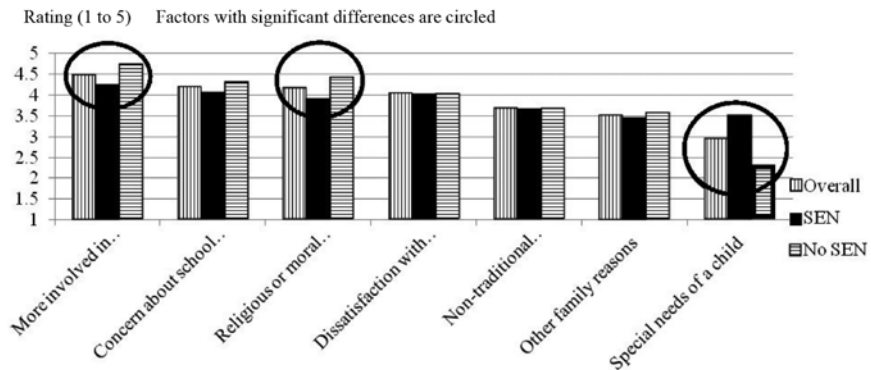
private school before making the decision to homeschool rated “the special needs of a child” as more important ($M = 3.28$) than parents who have always homeschooled their children ($M = 2.69$).

A significant difference in parents’ perceptions of importance for these same three factors was also found between the SEN status groups (Table 6) (Figure 2). Parents who have a child with SEN rated “the desire to provide religious or moral instruction” as less important ($M = 3.93$) than parents who do not have a child with SEN ($M = 4.42$). Parents who have had a child with SEN rated “the desire to be more involved with your child/children’s education” as less important ($M = 4.25$) than parents who do not have a child with SEN ($M = 4.76$). Parents who have had a child with SEN rated “the special needs of a child” as more important ($M = 3.50$) than parents who do not have a child with SEN ($M = 2.32$).

Table 6. ANOVA—SEN Status and the Decision to Homeschool

| <i>Dependent Variable</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>Mean Square</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>Sig.</i> |
|---|-----------|--------------------|----------|-------------|
| The desire to provide religious or moral instruction | 1 | 14.369 | 9.195 | .003 |
| Concern about school environment (safety, drugs, negative peer pressure) | 1 | 3.313 | 2.803 | .095 |
| Dissatisfaction with academic instruction at a public or private school | 1 | 9.168E-005 | .000 | .994 |
| The desire to provide a non-traditional educational approach | 1 | .003 | .002 | .964 |
| The special needs of a child | 1 | 82.160 | 36.427 | .000 |
| Other family-specific reasons (travel, finances, family time) | 1 | .865 | .425 | .515 |
| The desire to be more involved with your child/ children's education | 1 | 14.922 | 17.383 | .000 |

Tests of Between-Subject Effects (Design: Intercept + SEN Status).

**Figure 2. The Decision to Homeschool and SEN Status.**

Discussion

An important goal for this study was to collect data that would contribute to understanding of the trend of increased rate of growth in the school choice option of homeschooling. This study was designed to determine (1) the percentage of families who were homeschooling a child with SEN; (2) the percentage of families that decided to homeschool after first placing their child in a traditional public or private school; and (3) the factors that were most important to a family's decision to homeschool. As the results of this study are discussed, it is important to keep in mind that the focus of the study was the family unit and their decision to homeschool, not individual children.

In this study, 54% (167) of the participating families ($n = 309$) indicated that they were homeschooling a child who had a special educational need. To better

understand the effect of a family having a child who had a SEN to the decision to homeschool, participants were asked if they had at least one child who the parent believed had a special educational need that would make learning in a traditional classroom setting difficult. One-third (105) of participating families ($n = 318$) indicated that they had at least one child who the parent believed had a special educational need that would make learning in a traditional classroom setting difficult. Parents believed that 18% (125) of the children in the sample had special educational needs that would make learning in a traditional classroom setting difficult. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that for the 2010–2011 school year, 13% of the total U.S. K–12 public school enrollment received services through federally supported special education programs (Snyder & Dillow, 2013). It should be noted that this national figure is included as a frame of reference only. A direct comparison of the incidence of SEN cannot be made between results of this study and the national data. The national data referenced are compiled from students who have been identified formally as eligible for special education services and who have an Individual Education Plan. Interestingly, only about 13% of those identified with SEN in this sample had been identified via school testing and almost half had been identified via out-of-school testing, lending credence to the idea that parents in this sample with children with SEN did not believe traditional school adequately identified or met their child's special educational needs.

The method of identification for students within each category of SEN in this study is presented in Table 1. The majority of students identified, with the exception of Intellectually Gifted, were reported as being made aware by private physicians or psychologists or by school testing. In contrast, the majority of students identified as Intellectually Gifted were identified by parent observation. The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC, 2014) estimates that there are approximately 3 to 5 million academically gifted children in grades K–12 in the United States (approximately 6%–10% of the student population). However, local education agencies (LEA) Comprehensive Applications for Special Education Services for the counties most heavily represented in the sample used for this study report an extremely low incidence of Intellectually Gifted students. In their 2012–2013 LEA Comprehensive Applications for Special Education Services, both County A (19.2% of this sample) and County B (30.8% of this sample) reported serving only nine Intellectually Gifted students each (TN Department of Education, 2012). This means that County A, with a total of 11,403 students, only identified .08% of their students as intellectually gifted. County B, with a total of 58,929 students, only identified .02% of their students as intellectually gifted. In this study of 333 families who were homeschooling a total of 693 students, parents reported that 66 students (9.5%) were identified as being intellectually gifted. This incidence is consistent with incidence estimates from NAGC. These data provide support to the concern that special educational needs of children are not being met in public school classrooms, especially

for intellectually gifted students. A significant difference ($\chi^2 = 5.720$, $df = 1$, $p = .011$, one-tailed) was found between the percentage of families that had a child with SEN between the group of families who attended public or private school before homeschooling and the group of families who had always homeschooled. For the group of families that had a child who attended public or private school before homeschooling, 60.6% had a child with SEN. In the group that had always homeschooled, 43.4% had a child with SEN. These findings support the contention of prior research that parents of children with SEN may be choosing to homeschool when they believe their child's needs are not being met in the traditional classroom (Arora, 2006; Jolly et al., 2013; Parsons & Lewis, 2010; Reilly et al., 2002). These findings are also consistent with results of prior studies that focused on families homeschooling children with SEN (Arora, 2006; Parsons & Lewis, 2010; Reilly et al., 2002), which found that a high percentage of families homeschooling children with SEN had placed their child(ren) in a public or private school before they made the decision to homeschool. The surprisingly high incidence of families who are homeschooling children with SEN (60.6%) in the sample population strongly suggests an association between the growth of homeschooling and current trends in parental perceptions of how public and private schools are meeting the needs of children with SEN.

An important focus of this study was to better understand why parents are deciding to homeschool their children. One consistency in the literature reviewed for the study was the importance of parental involvement to a student's academic success. Another consistency was consensus on the complex nature of how and why parents choose to become involved in their child's education. Because parents who have made the choice to homeschool are obviously extremely involved in their child's education, it was expected that parents would perceive all of the factors assessed to be important to the decision to homeschool. It was also expected that both school choice history and SEN status would be associated with differences in the strength of parents' perceptions as to the importance of various factors.

In prior studies, "meeting the special educational needs of a child" has been rated as having low importance as a factor in parents' decision to homeschool (Planty et al., 2009; Isenberg, 2007). In this study, overall, "meeting the special educational needs of a child" received the lowest rating as a factor important to the decision to homeschool. However, this factor was significantly more important to the decision to homeschool to families who had a child in public or private school before making the decision to homeschool ($M = 3.28$) and to families who had a child with SEN ($M = 3.50$) than it was to families who have always homeschooled ($M = 2.69$) or families that had no children with SEN ($M = 2.32$). These data suggest that when a parent perceives needs of a child with SEN are not being met in a public or private school, the child's SEN is an important factor in their decision to homeschool.

For all participating parents ($n = 278$), the desire to be more involved in their children's education was rated as the most important factor in the decision to homeschool ($M = 4.49$). Tedin and Weiher (2011) summarized a large body of research when they stated that "both scholars and practitioners agree that one of the most important factors promoting student success is the active involvement of parents in a child's education" (p. 609). Yet, Lai and Vadeboncoeur (2012) found a discrepancy between the emphasis in the literature about the importance of parental involvement and schools' narrowed definitions of parental involvement. Their analysis illustrated how schools' definitions of parental involvement and partnership frequently subjugated parents' beliefs about how they should be involved with their child's education. Results of this study suggest that homeschooling parents want to be integrally involved in the education process. This is a much different type of parental involvement than helping with school fundraisers, class parties, or activities such as painting the teachers' lounge and working on the school landscape. The significant differences in parents' perceptions of factors important to the decision to homeschool between groups, based on school choice history and SEN status, provide data important to understanding school choice trends.

A limitation of the study is that the sample was drawn from a specific region in the Southeast. However, the sample size ($N = 333$) was larger than samples used in most prior studies related to homeschooling, and there is no reason to believe results would not be generalizable outside the region in which the data were collected. Also, though robust in size, only about one-fifth of the potential participants (more than 1,500 from the sites contacted) responded; thus, selection factor cannot be ruled out as a potential threat to validity. As noted, no test/retest data were gathered; further the survey is based on self-report. Consequently, results must be interpreted with caution.

Conclusions and Significance of the Study

Results of the study suggest that when parents perceive needs of a child with SEN are not being met in a public or private school, the child's SEN is an important factor in their decision to homeschool. The percentage of families who had a child with SEN was significantly higher (60.6%) in the group of families that had a child who attended public or private school before homeschooling than in the group that had always homeschooled (43.4%). Also, for all participating homeschooling parents in this sample, the desire to be more involved in their children's education was rated as the most important factor in the decision to homeschool. Results provide public and private school administrators and policymakers with valuable data to consider as they work to evaluate resource allocation for developing and supporting parental involvement, especially for families with children who have special educational needs.

Future research should address reasons for and prevalence of homeschooling for children who are gifted or who exhibit specific types of disabilities such as autism and ADHD. Additionally, researching the effect of learning environments on a child's academic success, and the effect of parental and community involvement in the education process would be important. **IJER**

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