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Family Economy, Rural School Choice, and Flexischooling Children with Disabilities*

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ABSTRACT Most homeschooled students would be more accurately described as "flexischooled," partly homeschooled and partly enrolled in school. The popularity of these two alternatives to public or private school enrollment has increased over the past several decades to the extent that, by 2012 over 2 million students, 4 percent of the population, were either flexischooled or homeschooled in the United States. To understand why parents have pursued these options over enrollment, we employed a family economy perspective, arguing that family, child, and locational considerations shaped parents' motivations for homeschooling or flexischooling over enrollment. For example, parents' decisions were partially shaped by the interaction between children's disability status and rural location. Using data from the National Household Education Survey 2012, this article first describes the prevalence of flexischooling and full-time homeschooling. Then, it demonstrates how various family, child, and locational factors shape the odds of flexischooling and homeschooling, and then examines the interaction between location and children's disability status in detail. We discuss the implications of our findings for family economy theoretical perspectives, flexischooling, and rural education research.

Introduction

Most homeschooled students would be more accurately described as flexischooled, partly homeschooled and partly enrolled in school (McNulty 2010; Meighan 1988). Both full-time homeschooling and flexischooling have increased dramatically over the past several decades. By 2012, about 2 million students, representing 4 percent of the overall student population, received some instruction at home. The expansion of homeschooling and flexischooling has led to a concomitant increase in the range of school choice options available to parents. Where parents perceive that local public schools are failing or unsafe, and where viable private or charter schools are nonexistent, full-time

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homeschooling and flexischooling have emerged as particularly attractive alternatives. For clarity, "homeschooling" is used in this article to indicate an educational approach involving no school-based instruction and "flexischooling" is used to indicate an approach involving at least some instruction both at home and at school.

Flexischooling has received scholarly attention as an increasingly popular organizational form in the United States and Europe over the past decade (Aurini and Davies 2005; Cooper and Sureau 2007; Gutherson and Mountford-Lees 2011; Isenberg 2007; Johnson 2013; Kostelecka 2012). Some scholars have restricted their use of the term *flexischooling* to situations in which parents retain control over their children's education but include school-based instruction as part of the overall educational program (Gutherson and Mountford-Lees 2011). In this article, however, we use *flexischooling* more broadly to refer either to essentially homeschooled children who also receive instruction from school or, the converse, essentially enrolled children who also receive some instruction at home. We concede that this definition incorporates a wide range of educational structures, but all share the common trait that instruction is split between school and home.

To understand parent motivations for flexischooling and homeschooling, we employ a modified, sociological, family economy theoretical perspective that takes changes in macrostructural conditions into consideration. Family economy perspectives have evolved as primarily structural and materialist explanations, rooted in economic household and family economics (Becker 1976; Lundberg and Pollak 2007). The variant employed in this study focuses on key family, child, and location factors influencing the educational decisionmaking process. Our work continues a trend of modifying the general framework in light of key social and institutional contextual considerations. This study accomplishes this in two specific ways: (1) It views the family as a *mediating institution* that responds differently to variations in the economic and institutional macrostructural conditions and (2) it moves beyond materialist explanations to demonstrate how social and institutional factors also shape parental decision making (Fuller, Singer, and Keiley 1995; Schafer 2004). With respect to parents' decision to homeschool or flexischool, as opposed to enrolling their children in a public or private school, one critical focus of this analysis is the interaction between rural locational conditions and children's disability status.

Disability status is one of several child-level factors, along with grade and gender, that potentially shape parents' decision to homeschool or flexischool. In addition to family- and child-specific considerations, the decision to homeschool or flexischool is also influenced by locational considerations, or parents' perceptions of school quality and safety, viable alternatives, and technological and institutional support (such as access to libraries, museums, and the Internet). Importantly, family economy perspectives view these considerations as mutually intertwined and contingent. For example, parental perceptions of school quality partly rest on their assessment of each child's specific circumstances, other children's needs, their own capacities, and the range of available alternatives. Thus, a family-level decision-making process would not necessarily lead to the same outcomes for parents living in different communities, or to the same outcomes for children with different educational and health needs. Children's disability status may have particularly important interactions with other family and locational factors, such as the availability of specialty services for children with disabilities (see, for example, Lawrence 2012).

Flexischooling and homeschooling rates vary substantially across locations and regions in the United States. Homeschooling rates are highest in rural locations, partially because urban and suburban parents tend to have more school choice options aside from public schooling. Rural America contains a significant number of students, schools, and school districts, but educational policy decisions, including school choice policies, increasingly revolve around suburban and urban contexts and ignore rural realities (Schafft and Biddle 2014). When there are few other options to the local public school, homeschooling or flexischooling may be particularly attractive school choice options. But children's disability status complicates parents' options. On the one hand, smaller or more isolated rural schools face substantial challenges meeting the needs of special student populations. On the other hand, even if quality lags behind that of their urban and suburban counterparts, some rural locations may lack viable alternatives to school-based resources and expertise for students with disabilities. When parents perceive a strong need for school-based resources and expertise, enrollment or flexischooling may be more attractive options than homeschooling.

We proceed with the development of a conceptual framework that incorporates the literature on homeschooling, flexischooling, rural school choice, and students with disabilities into a family economy framework. We then use data from the National Household Education Survey: Parent and Family Involvement in Education 2012 (NHES-PFI 2012) to examine the prevalence of flexischooling and homeschooling in the United States. We then examine more closely how family, child, and locational factors influence the decision to flexischool or homeschool.

Family Economy, Rural School Choice, and Deciding to Homeschool or Flexischool

Rational-choice, family economy models hold that parents make decisions based on their perceptions of what is best for the family unit as a whole. Sociological variants hold this too, but include additional economic, social, and institutional considerations to the basic model in order to better understand how parents make decisions in specified contexts. The framework has been used to study parents' decisions about enrollling children in school during periods of economic growth and educational expansion in the United States (Horan and Hargis 1991; Walters and O'Connell 1988) and, more recently, during periods of educational expansion in Africa (Buchmann 2000; Fuller et al. 1995; Schafer 2004, 2006). How appropriate is it to use the family economy framework for understanding American families' decisions to homeschool or flexischool? Essentially, the sociological family economy framework incorporates contextual nuance by including the belief that changing institutional and social factors influence family decision making in critical ways. For example, sociologists have pointed out how changing gender norms and institutional contexts influenced Botswanan parents' decisions to keep daughters in school longer (Fuller et al. 1995). Sociologists have also argued that connections between changing family structures and family economy processes must be taken into consideration (Schafer 2006). Two family structural considerations feature prominently in this family economy framework because both have potential implications for the homeschooling or flexischooling decision. First, the assumed two biological parents norm is thought to lead to a family strategy that gives more equitable consideration of each member's needs, while alternative structures may not be as equitable. Second, the social and institutional influences on family decision making might depend on the number of children involved. With more children, parents' decision to homeschool would entail fewer overall economic and social costs. In addition to structure, several other family contextual factors potentially shape the decision to enroll, homeschool, or flexischool children. Parents' educational backgrounds influence their perceptions of their own capabilities as planners, teachers, and coordinators of their children's individualized education curricula (Kunzman and Gaither 2013; Lois 2008, 2012). Parents' employment status, income levels, and

community networks may also influence their decision to homeschool or flexischool (Collom 2005; Gaither 2008; Isenberg 2007).

Child-level considerations include the age, gender, disability status, and school experiences of each child in the family. Lois's (2012) distinction between first and second choice homeschooling¹ is relevant, as the decision-making calculus for one child may differ from that for another child depending on parents' perceptions of whether each child's needs are being met at the school, as well as their own capacity to meet the needs of children with diverse needs. About 70 percent of fully homeschooled high school children in 2012 had previously been enrolled in school at some point in grades kindergarten through high school (our calculations).

Children's disability status complicates the decision to enroll or homeschool. On the one hand, parents may need school-based resources and expertise; on the other hand, many parents express concerns about the capacity of schools and teachers to meet their children's specific needs (Cook et al. 2013; Duffey 2002; Duvall et. al 1997; Ensign 2000; Hurlbutt 2011, 2012; Kendall and Taylor 2014; Lawrence 2012). For many, flexischooling might be a viable option (Arora 2006).

Location-based, school choice options would also be expected to figure into parents' decision making about their children's schooling. In general, more options are available in urban and suburban locations, but there are wide variations within each context. Although only about one in four students attended rural schools in 2012, over half of all school districts were rural. The No Child Left Behind reforms of the 2000s had a significant impact on rural schools and teachers (Eppley 2009; Monk 2007; Powell et al. 2009). One issue was smaller school and class sizes, on average, which led to greater year-to-year variability in performance indicators. Perhaps the most important impact was on the ability of schools to hire, train, and retain qualified teachers (Eppley 2009). Moreover, No Child Left Behind exposed teacher and school quality to the public at large, leading parents to reconsider the viability of public schools versus alternatives. The rural education literature emphasizes the diversity of rural contexts and, therefore, generalizations about school and teacher quality should not be expected to apply broadly to rural contexts but only to certain locations.

Many homeschooling parents have cited various concerns about available schools related to curriculum, educational quality, and school

¹First choice homeschoolers were homeschooled throughout while second-choice homeschoolers were initially enrolled in school and later homeschooled when parents felt school was not meeting their child's needs.

safety. These concerns are more pronounced among "second choice" homeschoolers. In addition, parents of children with disabilities may have additional reasons to homeschool if they perceive that existing public and private school options are inadequate for their children's specific needs (Reilly, Chapman, and O'Donoghue 2002), or if they think they need to protect their children from perceived negative influences like bullying (Arai 1999; Duvall et al. 1997; Hurlbutt 2011; Reilly et al. 2002; Rice 2009).

In addition to the school choice option available to parents, other institutional changes may influence parents' decisions to try homeschooling or flexischooling, and these changes may also be unequally felt across location. First, homeschooling itself has become a more socially acceptable educational option in some communities. In North Carolina, for example, homeschooling has expanded to the point of rivaling or exceeding private school enrollment (Decarr 2014). Second, technological advances in the delivery of education may have influenced parents' perceptions of their own ability as homeschool or flexischool teachers. Free, massive open online courses like Khan Academy, Edex, Coursera, and Udacity have made it increasingly possible for parents to perceive their role as the facilitator of their children's independent online learning (Walters 2015). For at least a decade, these efforts have already led to the emergence of cyber and home school charter schools (Huerta, Gonzalez, and d'Entremont 2006). Third, homeschooling has increasingly become a collective activity that involves substantial, locally based support from other homeschooling families coordinated through support groups and complete with structured educational materials (Apple 2013). Fourth, some school districts have made express efforts to reach out to the homeschool community and forge effective partnerships (Berger and Riojas-Cortez 2000) and colleges have revised recruiting and admissions policies in light of increasing numbers of homeschool applicants (Gloeckner and Jones 2013), increasing the perceived legitimacy of homeschooling and flexischooling as acceptable educational strategies.

Sociologists have pushed for family economy models that are both dynamic and context sensitive, seeing parents' preferences subject to change with changing circumstances (both in macrostructural conditions and family and child needs). Homeschooling, for example, may be more acceptable for parents in certain communities, or for parents with children at different grade levels. Similarly, flexischooling may be more attractive to parents who perceive that they can meet some of their children's needs while they still rely on schools to meet other needs (Lawrence 2012).

Data and Estimates of Homeschooling and Flexischooling

To study family decisions to homeschool or flexischool we use the most recent wave of the NHES-PFI 2012. Past NHES-PFI surveys conducted in 1996, 1999, 2003, and 2007 have been widely used to estimate the population of homeschooled students in the United States. The 2007 survey yielded an estimate of 1.5 million homeschoolers (Bielek 2008).

The most recent 2012 survey wave both followed and departed from the previous waves. It was conducted from January to August 2012, and designed with previous surveys in mind in order to generate repeated estimates of the same phenomena. It enabled estimates of both fulltime homeschooling and flexischooling. All NHES-PFI surveys have been extensively utilized to better understand family involvement in schools, and the NHES-PFI 2012 survey administrators made every effort to use sound, sophisticated survey methodologies. Nonetheless, NHES-2012 PFI departed from previous survey rounds in at least four significant ways: (1) The NHES survey administrators decided to switch from random-digit dialing to address-based sampling for the 2012 survey due to declining use of land telephone lines; (2) the address-based sampling approach forced a related change from computer-assisted telephone interviews to self-administered questionnaires; (3) the use of self-administered questionnaires, in turn, required NHES administrators to employ a two-stage sampling strategy to first select households and then select only one of the eligible children within the household, whereas previous rounds gathered information about all children in a household; and (4) the increasing interest in homeschooling inspired NHES administrators to prescreen all households selected for the NHES-PFI 2012 survey to determine whether eligible children were enrolled in school or homeschooled and followed up with different questionnaires according to the initial response. Due to these considerable methodological differences we refrained from making comparisons across survey rounds in this article.

The NHES-PFI 2012 survey included a total of 17,563 valid responses of which 397 subsequently completed the PFI-Homeschooled survey and 17,166 completed the PFI-Enrolled survey. Of the 397 PFI-Homeschooled students, 87 were flexischooled (i.e., they attended a public or private school for part of their instruction) while the remaining 310 were fully homeschooled.² Of the 17,166 PFI-Enrolled students,

 $^{^{2}}$ An additional 14 indicated they attended a college for instruction. We did not include these students in our definition of flexischoolers as all were in 10th, 11th, or 12th grade and, we assumed, were taking college-level courses. They were not flexischooled at the K–12 level.

		Enrolled			Flexischooled			Homeschooled		
Grade	N	Population Estimate (Millions)	%	Ν	Population Estimate (Millions)	%	Ν	Population Estimate (Millions)	%	
All	16,083	49.6	96.1	363	1.11	2.2	287	0.91	1.8	
K-5	6,615	24.9	96.3	146	0.59	2.3	92	0.38	1.5	
6-8	3,886	11.5	96.2	77	0.22	1.8	78	0.25	2.0	
9-12	5,582	13,211	95.7	140	0.31	2.2	117	0.29	2.1	

Table 1. Enrolled Students, Homeschoolers, and Flexischoolers in the NHES-PFI 2012 Survey (Ages 5–17).

Note: Population estimates are for students in the United States.

303 were flexischooled (i.e., were homeschooled for some classes or subjects). We, therefore, combined these two groups to arrive at 390 flexischooled students. We then eliminated children under age 5 and over age 17 so that the flexischool sample fell to 363 (282 from PFI-Enrolled and 81 from PFI-Homeschooled), and the homeschool sample fell to $287.^3$

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents across three categories of students: enrolled, flexischooled, and homeschooled. Nearly 4 percent received all or part of their schooling at home, an estimated 2 million students in 2012. Of these, about 900,000 were fully homeschooled, while 1.1 million were flexischooled. Using this classification strategy, flexischooling was more prevalent than homeschooling in 2012. Flexischooling was more prevalent than homeschooling for elementary grades (K-5), 2.3 percent (590,000) versus 1.5 percent (380,000), respectively, while flexischooling and homeschooling rates were similar for the middle school grades (1.8 percent and 2.0 percent) and high school grades (2.2 percent and 2.1 percent).

³Previous estimates of homeschooling from the NHES-PFI 2007 survey indicated that about 2.9 percent (1.6 million students) of the total school-age population was home-schooled, a 36 percent increase since 2003 (Planty et al. 2009). Previous NHES-PFI surveys were also used to estimate percentage of part-time homeschoolers, about 18 percent of all homeschoolers in 1999 and 2003, and only 16 percent in 2007 (NCES 2008). However, the National Center for Education Statistics used specific definitions of homeschoolers and part-time homeschoolers that potentially understated the actual proportions of homeschoolers who received at least some of their education from a public or private school. Specifically, that definition does not consider students enrolled in school more than 25 hours to be homeschooled (either full-time or part-time), irrespective of how many additional hours they spend in home instruction. Data from NHES-PFI 2012 revealed that about one-quarter of homeschooler respondents spent over 25 hours in school *and* averaged over 30 hours per week of homeschool instruction. Therefore, these estimates of part-time homeschoolers were inconsistent with our definition and focus on flexischooling in this article.

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Parents of all 363 students in the flexischooled sample reported that their children received some instruction at home and some at school, but depending on how they responded to the initial screening, they completed different surveys, enrolled or homeschooled. Therefore, we compared the two parts of the flexischooled sample to their respective enrolled and homeschooled counterparts. Parents of the 282 "enrolled flexischoolers" were statistically similar to the parents of their fully enrolled counterparts in their interactions with the school, which were substantial. For example, the vast majority of both groups reported attending events, communicating through e-mail, and attending parent-teacher conferences. Parents of the 81 "homeschooled flexischoolers" reported similar educational approaches to parents of full-time homeschoolers. For example, the mother was the primary teacher for the majority of students in both groups, and the majority of both groups utilized a formal teaching style. Both groups of parents reported similar hours of home instruction per week, about 23 hours. The flexischooling parents reported an average of an additional 14 hours in school, but also fewer days of home instruction. Although some of this group of flexischooled students may have spent very little time in school, 38 of 81 (47 percent) reported spending equal or more hours in school-based versus homeschool instruction.

Approach

To examine the role that family, child, and locational factors play in shaping the decision to homeschool or flexischool, we use data that are available and comparable from both the enrolled and homeschooled waves of the NHES-PFI 2012 survey. We first examine the distribution of family, child, location, and control variables across three school choice strategies: enrollment, flexischooling, and homeschooling. These data provide a descriptive picture of the distribution of families and children. We use comparative (chi-square) tests to explore bivariate statistical significance in the distributions of families within each educational approach. Then we use multinomial logistic regression analysis to further assess which family, child, and location factors influence the odds of flexischooling and homeschooling, respectively, versus enrollment and the odds of flexischooling versus homeschooling as well. We focus on family economy-inspired factors predicting parental choice of homeschooling and flexischooling over enrollment. We also examine factors shaping the homeschooling versus flexischooling decision for parents who do not enroll their children in school full time.

	Enroll	ed ^a	Flexischo	oled ^b	Homesch	ooled ^c
Item	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Family context						
Two parents*	10,937	69.2	224	64.2	241	85.8
>2 siblings*	4,106	39.1	102	45.3	113	56.2
Biological parent	15,356	95.6	341	93.7	276	96.7
Parent is graduate*	7,434	37.6	146	30.3	150	46.0
Both full time*	4,047	23.9	66	15.1	24	7.8
Family assistance*	837	5.6	35	12.0	10	4.1
Low income*	2,630	14.7	78	21.0	26	4.9
High income*	10,427	66.7	205	56.1	200	78.9
Own home	11,760	62.4	242	56.7	222	76.1
5 years at address	10,560	58.5	225	56.0	203	71.2
Child						
Male	8,320	51.6	182	51.2	147	47.2
Grade K–5	6,615	50.1	146	52.9	92	41.4
Grade 6–8	3,886	23.3	77	19.4	78	26.9
Grade 9–12	5,582	26.6	140	27.7	117	26.7
Disability ^d	3,662	22.2	117	28.8	71	19.4
Locational						
Northeast*	2,842	17.6	47	12.1	31	11.7
South*	5,942	35.8	151	35.7	137	45.5
Midwest	3,455	21.6	62	15.7	57	21.4
West*	3.844	25.0	103	36.6	62	21.3
Urbanicity*	,					
City*	4,472	29.4	127	35.9	78	20.6
Suburb*	6,127	37.6	137	42.6	81	25.7
Town	1,427	9.5	17	3.8	25	10.2
Rural*	3,757	23.5	82	17.7	103	43.5
Race	-)					
White*	8.810	51.7	189	49.4	235	86.4
Black*	1,901	14.1	37	13.1	10	3.4
Latino*	3,547	23.2	89	25.0	22	4.8
Asian*	929	5.6	23	6.3	6	2.0
Other	896	5.5	25	6.3	14	3.5

 Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Enrolled, Flexischooled, and Fully

 Homeschooled Students in the NHES-PFI 2012 Survey.

 $^{a}N = 16,083.$

* p < .05.

Findings

Table 2 presents comparative, descriptive statistics of three groups of students representing parents' educational choice to enroll, flexischool, or homeschool, using the NHES-PFI 2012 survey. The 10 rows in the family context group in the table enable cross-group comparisons between the family contexts of enrolled, flexischooled, and

 $^{{}^{\}rm b}N = 363.$ ${}^{\rm c}N = 287.$

 $^{^{}d}p = .057$

homeschooled children. Over 85 percent of homeschool students live in two-parent families, versus under 70 percent of enrolled and about 65 percent of flexischooled students, a significant 16 to 20 percentagepoint difference. Moreover, a significantly higher percentage of homeschoolers (over 55 percent) had two or more siblings, on balance, than the other two groups (about 45 percent for flexischoolers and under 40 percent for enrolled students, respectively). A very high percentage of all types of students live with at least one biological parent. Homeschoolers are more likely to have at least one parent who graduated from college (over 45 percent) than enrolled students (less than 40 percent) or flexischoolers (about 30 percent). A relatively small percentage of homeschoolers and flexischoolers (about 15 percent and less than 10 percent) had both parents working full time versus slightly under 25 percent of enrolled students. A significantly higher percentage of flexischoolers' parents reported receiving family assistance (over 10 percent), versus less than 5 percent and slightly over 5 percent of homeschoolers and enrolled students, respectively. Similarly, over 20 percent of flexischoolers' parents reported an annual income under \$20,000 per year versus only about 15 percent of enrolled students and 5 percent of homeschoolers. Conversely, almost 80 percent of homeschoolers' parents reported incomes over \$40,000 per year, versus only around 65 percent of enrolled and 55 percent of flexischoolers. Homeschoolers are also more likely to have more residential stability as more than 75 percent of their families are homeowners and over 70 percent have lived at their current address for five years or more, rates that are 15 to 20 percentage points higher than rates for their enrolled and flexischooled counterparts.

These bivariate results support the family economy perspective that family and parent contexts influence education decisions (whether to homeschool or flexischool). They suggest that various family structure, income, background, and residential factors influence the decision to homeschool or flexischool.

We included three child-level factors—gender, grade, and disability status—to consider the extent to which they influenced the flexischooling or homeschooling decision. As expected, the three groups have similar gender balances. The majority of enrolled and flexischooled students were male, while the majority of fully homeschooled students were female, but the differences are not statistically significant. Similarly, the cross-group variation in the percentages of students in the elementary, middle, and high school grades is insignificant. Although the differences are not statistically significant, percentages of elementary grade students are lowest among homeschoolers and percentages of middle school grade students are lowest among flexischoolers. A higher percentage of flexischooled students (almost 30 percent) have disabilities than enrolled (over 20 percent) and homeschooled (almost 20 percent) students, respectively, a difference that is nearly statistically significant (p = .057).

The next section of Table 2 shows that enrolled, flexischooling, and homeschooling percentages also varied across locational contexts. Slightly over 10 percent of flexischoolers and homeschoolers lived in the Northeast, versus almost 20 percent of enrolled students. Also, about 35 percent of flexischoolers and enrolled students lived in the South, versus about 45 percent of homeschoolers. The Midwest was home to about 15 percent of flexischoolers, versus over 20 percent of enrolled students and homeschoolers (but these were not statistically significant differences). Flexischooling prevailed in the West, where over 35 percent of all flexischooled students lived, versus only 25 percent of enrolled and slightly over 20 percent of homeschoolers. Flexischooling also prevailed in urban contexts, while homeschooling prevailed in rural areas. When we combine urban and suburban families, 53.7 percent of homeschoolers lived in rural areas and towns, versus only 33 percent of enrolled students and only 21.5 percent of flexischoolers. The regional variation suggests that homeschooling has become more accepted (institutionalized) in some regions than in others. The urbanicity differences may indicate variations in the lack of alternatives to public schooling in rural locations.

Race and ethnic variation in enrollment, flexischooling, and homeschooling is shown at the bottom of Table 2. Flexischoolers were racially and ethnically very similar to enrolled students, and different from homeschoolers. Roughly half of the enrolled and flexischoolers were white, while more than 85 percent of homeschoolers were white, a statistically significant, 30 percentage point difference. Much smaller percentages of blacks, Latinos, and Asians were homeschooled in comparison to either flexischooled or enrolled. Racial and ethnic differences between enrolled and flexischooled students were not statistically significant.

Multivariate Analysis

The bivariate analysis suggests support for the argument that family, child, and locational considerations shape parents' educational decisions. Table 3 presents the estimated coefficients and relative risk ratios for multinomial logistic regression of flexischooling, enrollment, and homeschooling. Relative risk ratios represent the relative "risk" (or

in the NHES-PFI 2012	Survey.					
	Model 1 Flexischooled Enrolled	vs.	Model 2 Homeschooled Enrolled	vs.	Model 3 Homeschooled Flexischooled	vs.
Independent Variables	Coefficient (SE)	RRR	Coefficient (SE)	RRR	Coefficient (SE)	RRR
Family context						
I wo parents	0.01 (0.22)	1.01	$0.92\ (0.34) ***$	2.41	0.92 (0.41) **	2.50
≥2 siblings	0.23(0.19)	1.25	$0.74 (0.18)^{***}$	2.02	$0.52 (0.26)^{**}$	1.67
Biological parent	-0.23 (0.53)	0.80	-0.75(0.50)	0.49	-0.52(0.72)	0.59
Parent is graduate	-0.15(0.18)	0.86	-0.04(0.20)	0.94	$0.11 \ (0.26)$	1.11
Both full time	-0.38(0.19)*	0.69	$-1.73(0.32)^{***}$	0.18	-1.36(0.37)***	0.26
Family assistance	$0.63(0.28)^{**}$	1.87	0.26(0.61)	1.30	-0.37 (0.67)	0.69
Lowincome	0.05(0.26)	1.05	-0.78(0.31)**	0.45	-0.84 (0.40) **	0.43
High income	-0.23(0.21)	0.79	0.06(0.25)	1.05	0.26(0.33)	1.30
Own home	0.08(0.21)	1.08	-0.14(0.28)	0.88	-0.22(0.34)	0.80
5 years at address	$0.04 \ (0.20)$	1.04	0.42(0.22)*	1.57	0.37 (0.30)	1.45
Child						
Male	-0.12(0.17)	0.94	-0.12(0.17)	0.89	-0.66(0.23)	0.94
Middle school	-0.24 (0.20)	0.79	0.43(0.23)*	1.54	0.67 (0.30) **	1.96
High school	0.00(0.18)	1.00	$0.49(0.21)^{**}$	1.64	0.49 (0.28)*	1.63
Disability ^a	0.15(0.23)	1.19	0.15(0.23)	1.01	-0.16(0.31)	0.85
Location						
South	$0.41 (0.20)^{**}$	1.50	$0.78(0.22)^{***}$	2.16	0.37 (0.29)	1.45
West	$0.73 (0.24)^{***}$	2.08	0.40(0.23)*	1.49	-0.34(0.32)	0.71
Rural	$-0.56 (0.23)^{**}$	0.57	$0.70(0.21)^{***}$	1.98	$1.27 (0.31)^{***}$	3.55
Controls						
Black	-0.31 (0.29)	0.73	$-1.69(0.38)^{***}$	0.18	-1.39 (0.47)***	0.25

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Table 3. Estimation of Multinomial Logistic Regression for Enrolled, Flexischooled, and Homeschooled Students

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	Model 1 Flexischooled Enrolled	.vs.	Model 2 Homeschooled Enrolled	l vs.	Model 3 Homeschooled Flexischoolec	vs.
Independent Variables	Coefficient (SE)	RRR	Coefficient (SE)	RRR	Coefficient (SE)	RRR
Latino	-0.26(0.24)	0.77	$-2.14(0.29)^{***}$	0.12	$-1.88 (0.37)^{***}$	0.15
Asian	-0.01 (0.42)	0.99	-1.28(0.55)**	0.27	-1.27 (0.69)*	0.28
Other race	-0.02(0.31)	0.98	-0.91(0.36) ***	0.39	-0.88(0.47)*	0.42
Interaction: Rural \times Disabled	$0.69 (0.36)^{*}$	1.99	-0.78(0.40)**	0.45	$-1.48(0.53)^{***}$	0.23
Notes: SE = standard er	ror. $RRR = relative risk ra$	tio.	-1 20 × 4 × 44 × 4 × 05 1			

Table 3. Continued

"Without the interaction, the coefficients are significant in Models 1 and 3 at the p < .05 level. * p < .10;** p < .05; ***p < .01.

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odds or probability) of a certain factor influencing one of the three education options (enrollment, flexischooling, or homeschooling) versus another, holding all other factors constant. As we are, primarily, interested in the decisions to flexischool or homeschool, versus enrollment, we begin with the models that make these comparisons explicit. We also include discussion of factors that shaped the decisions of families who did not choose enrollment to flexischool versus full-time homeschool.

All models include consideration of all family context, child, and location factors potentially associated with school choice decision making. In addition, we include the race and ethnicity controls as well as an interaction variable to examine the expected effect of the interaction between a child's disability status and rural location.

Flexischoolers versus Enrolled

Model 1 in Table 3 compares the flexischoolers and enrolled students. The results show that most family context factors have an insignificant effect on the odds that parents will choose flexischooling over enrollment. Only 2 of the 10 factors are significant. When both parents work full time, the odds that children will be flexichooled versus enrolled decreased significantly. By contrast, receipt of family assistance was associated with significantly increased odds of flexischooling over enrollment. None of the child or race factors influenced the likelihood that parents would choose flexischooling over enrollment, directly. By contrast, the odds of flexischooling were tied to both types of locational factors. Specifically, the odds of choosing flexischooling over enrollment increased for those living in the South or West (versus the Midwest and Northeast), and decreased for those living in rural areas (versus urban areas, suburban areas, and towns). Although child disability status did not directly influence the odds of flexischooling versus enrollment, for rural children with disabilities the odds of parents choosing flexischooling versus enrollment doubled. In sum, the flexischool versus enrollment decision was only minimally directly influenced by child and family factors. Rather, the decision was largely shaped by regional and locational considerations, as well as children's disability status.

Homeschooled versus Enrolled

Model 2 of Table 3 presents a comparison of homeschooling and enrollment decisions. First, family factors played a far greater role in this decision than in the flexischooling versus enrollment decision. Six

of the ten family factors were statistically significant. Two-parent families, more siblings, and five years' residential stability all increased the odds of choosing homeschooling over enrollment, while both parents employed full time and low-income status both reduced the relative odds of homeschooling. Child-level factors were also significant in the model, as middle and high school status increased the odds of homeschooling over enrollment. As with the flexischooling versus enrollment model, all locational factors played a significant role in the decision to homeschool versus enrollment. Living in the South and West increased the relative odds of choosing homeschooling over enrollment, as did rurality (perhaps partially due to limited other school choice options). All race and ethnicity variables were strongly significant and negative, indicating simply that all other races and ethnicities were less likely than whites to choose homeschooling over enrollment. Finally, the interaction between rural and disability status was also significant and negative. In rural areas, the odds of homeschooling versus enrollment for children with disabilities declined significantly.

Flexischoolers versus Homeschoolers

Model 3 of Table 3 presents the results of the model testing whether parents who do not enroll their children full time in public or private schools choose homeschooling versus flexischooling. Four of the ten family context factors in the model revealed significant effects. Again, the odds of choosing homeschooling over flexischooling are significantly increased for families with two parents or with three or more children. The odds of choosing homeschooling over flexischooling are reduced for families in which both parents work full time and for those with annual incomes less than \$20,000. Middle and high school grade levels increase the odds that parents chose homeschooling over flexischooling. While regional factors have no effect, rural location increased the odds of homeschooling versus flexischooling. The odds of homeschooling over flexischooling are also decreased for all nonwhite races or ethnicities. Finally, the interaction effect is again significant, indicating that the positive effect of rural location favoring homeschooling does not hold for children with disabilities.

Overall, the multinomial logistic regression supports the central arguments that family, child, and locational factors influence the decision to homeschool or flexischool. First, working parents are associated with significantly reduced odds of either flexischooling or homeschooling, consistent with family economy perspectives arguing that time

Disability Status	Enrolled %	Flexischooled %	Homeschooled %	F	<i>P</i> - Value
Any $(N = 16,733)^*$	22.2	28.8	19.4	2.87	.057
Rural $(N=3,942)^{***}$	22.8	42.5	13.3	6.82	.001
Urban $(N = 12,791)$	22.0	25.9	24.2	0.82	.436
Specific disabilities					
ADD*	9.7	14.1	8.4	2.61	.074
Rural***	11.0	26.0	4.8	6.72	.001
Urban	9.4	11.5	11.2	0.74	.479
Learning	8.2	11.7	7.6	1.72	.180
Rural ^{**}	7.4	12.5	3.3	3.58	.031
Urban	8.5	11.5	10.5	1.23	.293
Serious emotional***	2.4	5.3	2.8	5.31	.005
Rural ^a	2.0	5.3	1.6	1.89	.157
Urban**	2.5	5.3	3.8	3.99	.019
Orthopedic**	1.8	3.6	1.2	3.37	.045
Rural*a	2.1	6.7	0.7	3.19	.053
Urban	1.7	3.0	1.6	1.42	.242
Autism**	1.6	3.6	1.3	3.88	.026
Rural** ^a	1.3	5.2	1.1	3.42	.042
Urban	1.6	3.2	1.5	1.79	.172
PDD*	0.8	1.9	1.6	2.90	.059
Rural ^a	0.9	0.5	0.4	0.45	.626
Urban***	0.7	2.2	2.5	4.86	.009

Table 4. Enrollment, Flexischooling, and Homeschooling in Rural andUrban Locations by Disability Type in the NHES-PFI 2012 Survey.

Notes: ADD = attention deficit disorder. PDD = pervasive development disorder. Boldface type indicates flexischooled or homeschooled percentages that vary significantly from enrolled percentage.

^a Interpret with caution, cell count < 5.

*p < .10; **p < .05; ***p < .01.

resources play a critical role in the decision-making process. Second, homeschooling becomes a more viable option (than enrollment or flexischooling) when children reach middle and high school grades, supporting arguments that homeschooling becomes a "second choice" option. Third, locational and child factors are of central importance supporting the contention that parents must take into account both children's needs and the availability of resources. In rural areas, homeschooling is much more common except for children with disabilities. Access to school-based resources and expertise (through enrollment or flexischool arrangements) may be the most important decision-making criteria for rural parents with children with disabilities.

Specific Disabilities, Rural Location, and Flexischooling

Table 4 explores this relationship further by examining locational differences for specific disabilities across urban or rural contexts. Because 96 percent of all students in the sample are enrolled, the percentages for the enrolled group (column 2) can serve as a comparison for the other two groups of flexischooled and homeschooled students. The F statistic in column 5 compares the percentages of students with the disability across the three groups of enrolled, flexischooled, and homeschooled students and the P-value demonstrates which three-group comparisons reveal statistically significant differences. Boldface type indicates flexischooled or homeschooled percentages that vary significantly from the enrolled percentage. Overall, over 20 percent of enrolled, almost 30 percent of flexischool, and slightly under 20 percent of homeschooled students had disabilities, and only the flexischooled percentage is significantly higher than the enrolled percentage. In rural locations, however, both flexischool and homeschool percentages of children with a disability are significantly different from the enrolled group. Less than 20 percent of flexischooled students lived in rural locations (see Table 2), but over 40 percent of rural flexischoolers reported disabilities, versus less than 15 percent of rural homeschoolers and slightly over 20 percent of rural enrolled students. By contrast, in urban locations the percentages of students with disabilities of any kind are more or less the same, between 22 and 26 percent.

The remaining rows show these group differences for selected, specific disabilities. Overall, about 10 percent of students had attention deficit disorders (ADD), but ADD was reported in almost 15 percent of flexischooled versus less than 10 percent of homeschooled students. In rural locations, the percentage of flexischooled students with ADD increased to over 25 percent, while the percentage of homeschoolers with ADD decreased to less than 5 percent, and the significance level increased to p < .01. By contrast, in urban areas the percentages reported to have ADD were statistically similar, between 9.4 and 11.5 percent, for all three groups of students. This same general pattern can be seen with learning disabilities, orthopaedic disabilities, and autism. For all these disabilities percentages of urban enrolled, flexischooled, and homeschooled students reported to have them were about the same, but rural flexischooled percentages were higher and rural homeschooled percentages were lower than the enrolled student percentages. For serious emotional disabilities and pervasive development disorder, the story is slightly different. In these cases both flexischooling and homeschooling rates exceeded rates for enrolled students and the increases were primarily linked to *urban* locations. We present these data for descriptive purposes, to suggest important locational differences, but the low cell counts (N < 5) for much of the rural data make

statistical comparisons problematic. Importantly, the survey also included many other types of disabilities (visual, hearing, speech, and others) for which there were no statistically significant differences in distribution across enrollment, flexischooling, and homeschooling groups or between rural and urban contexts. The findings support the notion that some child-specific needs interact with location to shape parents' educational choices, but the nature of this complex relationship is partially determined by the nature of children's needs and the adequacy of institutional support.

Discussion

In this study, we made key conceptual and methodological contributions to further our understanding of parental decisions to homeschool or flexischool their children in the United States. We employed a sociological family economy perspective that pays specific attention to family, child, and locational contexts.

First, we conceptualized three options for parents: enrollment, flexischooling, or full-time homeschooling. Even though 96 percent of all parents choose the first option, we argue that scholars should be increasingly cognizant of the rise of the two alternative options, particularly the option of flexischooling, which involves instruction at both the home and the school. By contrast, we provide evidence that most homeschoolers are flexischoolers and even those who are being homeschooled full time had previously attended school. Combined, fewer than one in four of the 2 million homeschoolers and flexischoolers had been homeschooled throughout their K–12 educational careers. In sum, studies of homeschooling should take both previous and current interactions with local schools, mostly public schools, into consideration to gain a more complete understanding of these children's educational experiences.

Second, our results suggest that more economically and racially diverse families see flexischooling as a viable option. Family structure, parental work, and poverty all factored more significantly into the decision to homeschool than into the decision to flexischool in our study. Indeed, family assistance even increased the relative odds of flexischooling versus enrollment. Thus, flexischooling plays an important role in the diversification of the homeschool movement according to race, class, and family factors (Macbeth 2000). The vast majority of homeschoolers in the survey were white, lived with both parents and had many siblings, lived with parents in the higher-income categories who own their own home, and have lived at the same address for a considerable length of time. By contrast, flexischoolers are generally similar to enrolled students, and much more likely than homeschoolers to be minorities, to have disabilities, and to live in low-income families.

Third, we highlight the critical interaction between family, location, and child factors with a specific focus on the disability status of the child in an urban versus rural context. Our findings provide more generalizable support for qualitative studies and personal stories of how parents of students with disabilities negotiate with schools to ensure their children get the education they need and deserve (e.g., Lawrence 2012) by combining education at home and school, and attempting to avoid potentially harmful effects of public schooling while taking advantage of supportive school resources. Many parents believe they must oversee their children's schooling; in isolated rural communities parents of students with disabilities may also perceive that they lack the required resources and need school-based resources to ensure the best outcomes for their children (Ofsted 2010). More qualitative and mixed-method studies could further elucidate the interactions among rurality; children's disability status; and the decision to enroll, homeschool, or flexischool.

Our study contributes to two different research traditions that have historically been neglected in the education profession and educational policy research literature: homeschooling (Howell 2013) and rural education (Schafft 2016). Both of these traditions address how we can better understand how macrostructural and institutional change affects family-level processes and decision making.

We are convinced of the importance of flexischooling in expanding the range of educational options available to parents, but we were unable to examine flexischooling trends over time. The NHES-PFI survey series provided the best available sources of information for trends in homeschooling, flexischooling, and parent and family involvement in schooling from 1996 to 2007, but the 2012 survey departed in too many ways from previous survey waves to confidently measure change over time. It is possible that the increase in the proportion of flexischoolers simply reflected different sampling strategies, and not a trend. However, the 2012 survey warrants further exploration of both the prevalence and the implications of flexischooling in the United States. Rural education scholars should continue to follow trends in flexischooling and homeschooling, particularly with respect to students with disabilities in the future.

A second limitation of this study involved our inability to incorporate state-level factors that might shape the family decision to homeschool or flexischool. Over the past several decades, some states have developed policies specifically designed to address homeschooling. States have also designed policies oriented toward the rights of parents and families that have implications for homeschooling. Future research should attempt to better understand variation in state policies and their implications. State policies may be particularly important for families with children with disabilities as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)-based resources flow directly through schools in certain states but "follow the child" in others. A restricted-use version of the PFI data may be made available in the future, enabling state-level factors to be incorporated into the model.

A third limitation to our study is that the model is primarily structural and therefore has little to contribute to cultural perspectives on the choice to homeschool or flexischool. Cultural arguments suggest that parents' decisions are rooted in deeply held religious or pedagogical beliefs about the most appropriate way to raise children (Gaither 2008; Lois 2012). While some of this variation may be captured in locational and control variables, the data did not allow us to specifically examine the effects of cultural capital or religious beliefs and practices.

How appropriate, then, is our use of a family economy framework, originally employed to better understand family enrollment choices during the period of rapid industrialization in the United States and later applied to development in Africa and other developing nations? More importantly, what are the implications of our study for the evolution of sociologically oriented family economy perspectives? The critical theoretical argument is that changing macrostructural conditions have influenced parents' choices (Buchmann 2000; Fuller et al. 1995; Horan and Hargis 1991; Schafer 2004, 2006; Walters and O'Connell 1988). Parents' choices were conditioned by changing gender norms, family structures, and institutional norms and associated trust. Sociologists should continue to study how changing institutional and social contexts influence parent and family decision making. Urban and particularly rural conditions in the United States are highly diverse, and therefore future research should strive to go beyond quantitative interactions examine the flexischoolingto homeschooling option under specific and specified locational contexts. Moreover, our study suggests that family-level and child-level contexts interact significantly with changing contexts. Sociologists interested in the interaction between family, education, and rural change should carefully consider the potential implications of multiple interactions that lead to diverse outcomes.

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