



# Journal of School Choice

## International Research and Reform

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: [www.tandfonline.com/journals/wjsc20](http://www.tandfonline.com/journals/wjsc20)

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To cite this article: Angela R. Watson (2024) Academic Research on Modern Homeschooling in America, Journal of School Choice, 18:4, 441-443, DOI: [10.1080/15582159.2024.2422230](https://doi.org/10.1080/15582159.2024.2422230)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15582159.2024.2422230>



Published online: 12 Nov 2024.



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## Academic Research on Modern Homeschooling in America

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Homeschooling is growing and diversifying in the United States (Bjorklund-Young & Watson, 2024; Smith & Watson, 2024b; Watson, 2024a this volume). This special issue of the Journal of School Choice covers rigorous academic homeschooling research. It was born out of a desire to elevate the quality of homeschool research and conversation, and ultimately inform evidence-driven policy and practice that best serves the needs of all children, including those in homeschooling. A common critique of existing homeschool literature is that it is not always rigorous and may be viewed as advocacy clothed as research (Bartholet, 2020). This volume addresses that challenge head-on with 16 academic research pieces from 26 authors and 13 academic institutions spanning a wide range of homeschool-related topics. Homeschool conversations are frequently polluted with an over-reliance on tired and often false stereotypes about what and who homeschooling is. These misunderstandings or misrepresentations lead to false narratives. False narratives generate flawed policies that serve no one well. Information and evidence from high-quality research is the remedy. A false narrative is difficult to spread when facts are readily available. This special issue is an effort toward not only generating much-needed evidence but disseminating that evidence widely through publication, presentation of these studies at academic conferences, and open access.

This issue represents an impressive collection of diverse authors from leading academic institutions, each presenting unique and multifaceted research on homeschooling. These authors span a variety of experience levels including students, junior academics, and the most senior of experts. Many are also homeschooling alumni or parents. Authors from Johns Hopkins University play a prominent role in this issue because it is home to the Homeschool Research Lab and Hub where I serve as director. All work in this issue, from qualitative to experimental, is of the highest quality and has been peer-reviewed by other academic experts.

The issue is divided loosely into three sections.

First, a collection of authors present evidence on homeschool growth, informing a better understanding of exactly who counts as a homeschooler. Homeschool participation increased during the

pandemic and appears to not only have persisted but is on the rise once again, as I cover in the first paper (Watson, 2024b this volume). Homeschoolers appear to switch in and out of predominantly public schools (Cheng, 2024 this volume) and demographic characteristics predict a variety of behaviors and preferences adding important nuance to our understanding of homeschool practice (Cheng & Watson, 2024 this volume). Several authors leverage nationally representative surveys that capture homeschoolers and explore the promise of these types of surveys in the future homeschool research (Smith & Watson, 2024a; Shelton & Hitt, 2024 this volume).

The second section delves into the characteristics of homeschoolers (Bjorklund-Young & Watson, 2024 this volume) and why they choose this model of education for their families with a special focus on Black homeschool policy (Baker, 2024 this volume; Johnson, 2024 this volume) and practice, and some of the first empirical homeschool research concerning the quickly growing Hispanic/Latina homeschool community (Batts et al., 2024a, this volume). Other authors consider special groups such as those who homeschool for safety (Batts et al., 2024b, this volume), the intersection of gifted learners and homeschooling (Connelly-Sporing et al., 2024 this volume), and those who participate in homeschool adjacent models like hybrid schools (Thompson et al., 2024 this volume).

The last section considers the future role of homeschool research (Donnelly, 2024 this volume) with ideas on how we can leverage existing data to learn more (Valiente, 2024 this volume; Hamlin, 2024 this volume). Finally, the last piece is a summary from the recent 2024 Homeschool Policy Summit that captures current thinking on homeschool policy from diverse leaders and practitioners.

Now, more than ever, research evidence should inform evidence-based policy that best serves the needs of children, families, and communities. My hope is that the research from this issue helps elevate, inform, and influence future conversations about homeschooling in this country and beyond.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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