

Black Minds, Bright Futures: Understanding Black Homeschooling

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Introduction

An increasing number of families nationwide are opting for homeschooling as an educational choice for their children. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2022) reported that during the 2022-2023 school year, 5.2% of children ages 5-17 were homeschooled, indicating a significant increase from 2.7% in 2019 and 1.7% in 1999. The increase in the prevalence of homeschooling was notably exacerbated by disruptions to learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Eggleston and Fields (2021) reported that in February 2020, 4.5% of U.S. households with school-aged children had at least one child being homeschooled; this number rose to 7.3% in the fall of 2020. Although many families chose to (re)enroll their children in schools after the pandemic, a considerable number continued homeschooling, as indicated by the data above.

Black families are among those choosing to homeschool at an increasing rate. NCES reported that 1% of Black children were homeschooled in 1999, while census data reported that number increased to 3.3% in 2019 and rose to 16.1% by fall 2020 (Eggleston & Fields, 2021)–indicating a significant yet complex realignment in educational norms and priorities among Black families. In this research brief, we (the authors) examine homeschooling, specifically Black homeschooling. We aim to enhance understanding of Black homeschooling among Black families and other stakeholders, fostering informed decision-making and agency in expanding educational opportunities that effectively support Black children's learning and development.

Homeschooling

Ali-Coleman (2022) defines homeschooling as "[A] form of P-12 schooling, structured or unstructured, led by a parent/guardian of a student, that takes place outside of

the traditional public, private or charter school setting, usually within the home" (p. 200). While Dwyer and Peter (2019) define homeschooling as "parent-directed learning in the home that substitutes, partially or completely, for attendance at a regular school" (p. 3). The definitions above underscore homeschooling as a decentralized, parent-directed educational model that emphasizes flexible structure and personalized education.

Connecting Homeschooling to Policy

State policies influence the format and structure of homeschool programs. Homeschooling is legal in all 50 states; however, the laws that regulate how guardians can homeschool their children differ. For example, the Homeschool Hub, developed by the Johns Hopkins School of Education Institute for Education Policy (Watson, 2023), reports that Maryland parents who homeschool their school-age children must complete an online form to notify their local district of their choice to homeschool. One of the unique aspects of Maryland's regulations is the absence of a mandatory attendance minimum for homeschoolers, which can help alleviate the pressure of adhering to strict schedules. It is important to note that Maryland does not provide sports or extracurriculars to homeschooling students. Additionally, families are responsible for the costs related to homeschooling. In contrast, homeschooling families in Arizona can qualify for the Empowerment Scholarships Accounts program, an Education Savings Account (ESA) that provides financial assistance. The account offers students up to $7,000 for qualifying educational expenses, including homeschooling and related programming. The differences between Arizona and Maryland are notable and representative of the variations in how states regulate and support homeschooling nationwide. Understanding these differences is crucial for Black homeschooling families to ensure they are compliant with state homeschooling laws.

Maryland's and Arizona's regulations provide the legal framework from which residents can approach homeschooling. Both also guide how school districts develop their homeschooling policies to ensure compliance with state law. Black Families and other stakeholders interested in learning more about their state's homeschooling laws and guidelines should start by visiting the *Homeschool Hub* [1] website, developed by Johns Hopkins School of Education: Institute for Education Policy. This website provides a state-by-state overview of homeschooling regulations for all 50 states.

Homeschool Formats

Most state regulations allow homeschooling families to use different formats to deliver education. An example of a homeschooling format is a homeschooling cooperative, sometimes referred to as a co-op. In co-ops, families work together to provide home-based education for their children (Gann & Carpenter, 2019). Some families opt for co-ops to ensure their children can learn with and from others (Mazama, 2016). Another homeschooling format is the hybrid model. Hybrid homeschoolers learn at home several days a week and attend classes at public or private schools on the other days (Wearne, 2021). The various homeschooling formats show no universal approach to homeschooling, indicating that families can select an approach that works best for their child(ren). Table 1 provides insight into some homeschooling formats.

Why Families are Homeschooling

Data from the National Household Education Survey (NHES) (2022) share families' reasons for homeschooling. The survey, which included families from various racial and cultural backgrounds, allowed parent respondents to select a prepopulated reason or write in their reason. The top reasons cited were:

1. a concern about the school environment (80.3%)
2. a desire to provide moral instruction (74.7%)
3. emphasis on family life together (74.6)
4. dissatisfaction with the academic instruction at other schools (72.6%)
5. a desire to provide religious instruction (58.9%)

The reasons cited above are instructive as they provide insight into why families opt to homeschool.

1 https://education.jhu.edu/edpolicy/policy-research-initiatives/homeschool-hub/

Type of Homeschool	General Overview
Individual Homeschool	Individual homeschools are when one family chooses to school their child(ren) alone. Families may choose to enlist private tutors to support their home education plan.
Cooperative Education Group	Cooperative education groups, also known as homeschool co-ops, are a form of collaborative homeschooling. Families in cooperative education groups often share specific educational goals and voluntarily work together to provide their children's core education functions. The co-op's structure allows families to engage in group learning through classes taught by parents or professionals.
Flexi-schooling	An approach where parents retain primary responsibility for their children's educational program and integrate school-based instruction as a component of the broader educational framework.
Hybrid Homeschool	Hybrid homeschools center on students being schooled at home several days a week and attending classes at public or private schools on the other days.
Online (Virtual) Homeschool	Online (virtual) homeschooling is when families use a virtual platform, including virtual academies, to expose their children to curriculum content. Online homeschooling is typically structured like a traditional K-12 school day.

Table 1: Types of Homeschools

Motivations for Black Families to Homeschool

In addition to the survey data noted above, studies have been conducted on the motivations for Black families to homeschool. For example, to learn more about Black homeschooling families, Mazama & Lundy (2013) conducted 74 interviews across the Mid- and South Atlantic and the Midwest to capture the voice and agency of African Americans. The study's result indicated that quality of education (25%), racism (23.9%), and family bonding (14.8%) were the leading motivations for Black families to homeschool. Black families have also cited protection from racism, lower teacher expectations, increasing cultural relevance in education, and racial disparities in school discipline as motivations to homeschool (Mazama, 2015; Mazama & Lundy, 2012; 2013; Fields-Smith, 2020). The motivations cited by Black families have some overlap with the reasons mentioned by families nationwide, as indicated in the NHES survey. The difference is that Black families note racialized experiences in schooling as a motivating factor, suggesting specific push and pull factors between Black families and schooling institutions were instrumental in their decision to homeschool.

The decision to withdraw a child from traditional educational institutions is often a complex and multifaceted process for parents. Fields-Smith (2020), in her book *"Exploring Single Black Mothers' Resistance Through Homeschooling,"* highlighted this phenomenon through the narratives of four single Black mothers who opted for homeschooling. Notably, for 75% of the participants in the study, homeschooling was not their initial educational preference for their children. Fields-Smith (2020) notes that the transition to homeschooling can emerge as a deliberate assertion, especially for Black mothers, to take control of their children's education.

Quality Education and Access

Traditional education defines success by performance on Eurocentric tests (Shockley, 2023), limiting Black students to assessments that overlook their history, culture, and community goals. In contrast, Black homeschooling is a liberating process that empowers individuals to think critically, question systems, and develop cultural knowledge and a sense of agency. This approach is part of a rich history of using home instruction to ensure Black children learn what the schools are not teaching them (Anderson, 1988).

Historically, Black families have engaged in home instruction not just to address learning gaps by teaching what schools may overlook but also to address how schools may deliberately exclude Black children from learning opportunities due to entrenched racialized systemic barriers. For example, Patrick et al. (2020) report that Black students continue to be denied the opportunity to take accelerated math and science courses despite showing proven skills and potential for success. In contrast, homeschooling programs can be designed to meet children's academic needs and potential regardless of race, ensuring all children receive academic enrichment and support. One can see how Black parents can leverage the homeschool model to support, protect, and advance quality education for their children (Dennis & Fields-Smith, 2020).

Homeschooling Curriculum and Results

Mazama (2016) identified two significant themes in Black homeschool curricula. The first theme is the curricula cultivates African and African American historical and cultural literacy. The second theme is curricula that emphasizes the holistic development of a child's multifaceted abilities, encompassing academic, spiritual, creative, affective, interpersonal, and physical domains. Mazama's research indicates that Black homeschooling environments foster racial pride and self-esteem in Black children, creating a sense of community and support. In these environments, Black children's psychological resilience, academic achievement, and social well-being are positively reinforced, which has the potential to counteract the adverse effects of discrimination and societal bias. Mazama's findings about Black homeschooling are bolstered by research on the academic performance of Black homeschooling children. For instance, Ray (2015) studied the educational achievement of Black homeschooled students in Grades 4 to 8. Ray's findings indicate that Black homeschoolers perform academically "equal to or higher than all public-school students as a group" (p. 71). Furthermore, Ray's research revealed that Black homeschooled students score 23 to 42 points higher than Black public-school students on standardized academic achievement tests. The positive socio-academic results associated with Black homeschooling environments indicate the need for continued exploration of curricula and pedagogical strategies that work for Black children. Perhaps what is learned can inform how educators and policymakers advance equity in public education.

Recommendations

We recommend that policymakers and researchers conduct structured family interviews at both the state and national levels to learn more about the lived experiences of homeschooling families. This methodology facilitates incorporating community needs into policy formulation, enhancing equity by addressing pertinent barriers, fostering trust, and promoting data-informed decision-making. Moreover, this approach increases the likelihood that future policies will reflect what homeschooling families require to provide a high-quality educational experience for their children. **We must engage in more listening and learning before we act!**

We recommend that policymakers work alongside homeschooling families to revise and develop homeschooling policies. While the suggested listening sessions provide insight into homeschooling families' aspirations, goals, and needs, working alongside families provides opportunities to develop more equitable and inclusive policies. For example, as discussed above, in Maryland, families are financially responsible for providing the home-based learning program. The economic impact of purchasing resources and providing other support for their children restricts some families from homeschooling. Working alongside families to revise and develop homeschooling policy can ensure that homeschooling is an option for all families, not just those who may be well-resourced. The impact of equitable policy creation would expand the number and types of families who opt to homeschool, leading to a more diverse and enriched educational landscape.

Conclusion

The growing number of families opting to homeschool represents an important sociocultural educational shift with significant policy implications. While approximately 5% of school-age children nationwide are homeschooled, the reasons families choose to homeschool fit within the

larger conversation of advancing educational models that produce positive outcomes for children. No single educational approach can meet all children's and families' racial, cultural, religious, and other needs; perhaps homeschooling is gaining in popularity because it provides the personalized flexibility and adaptability families desire in an increasingly diverse society. Educators and policymakers must have a nuanced understanding of homeschooling, including why families select this mode of education. A nuanced understanding is essential for ensuring that educational policy adequately reflects the evolving role of homeschooling within the broader educational framework and the Black community. As stated above, this understanding can be enhanced by listening to and working alongside families to determine how homeschooling can be structured to advance more just and equitable educational opportunities for children and families.

Homeschooling remains a space where Black families employ quality educational programming to meet their children's needs. Black homeschooling families use a praxis that underscores education as an evolving discipline that must be critiqued and reimagined to achieve specific cultural and philosophical aims. As indicated in the research, Black families interested in homeschooling should trust themselves and know that creating a quality home-based program is demanding but achievable. This statement is not a clarion call for all Black families to abandon public education and immediately begin homeschooling, but instead, a soft whisper that homeschooling might be the educational format your family has been seeking.

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