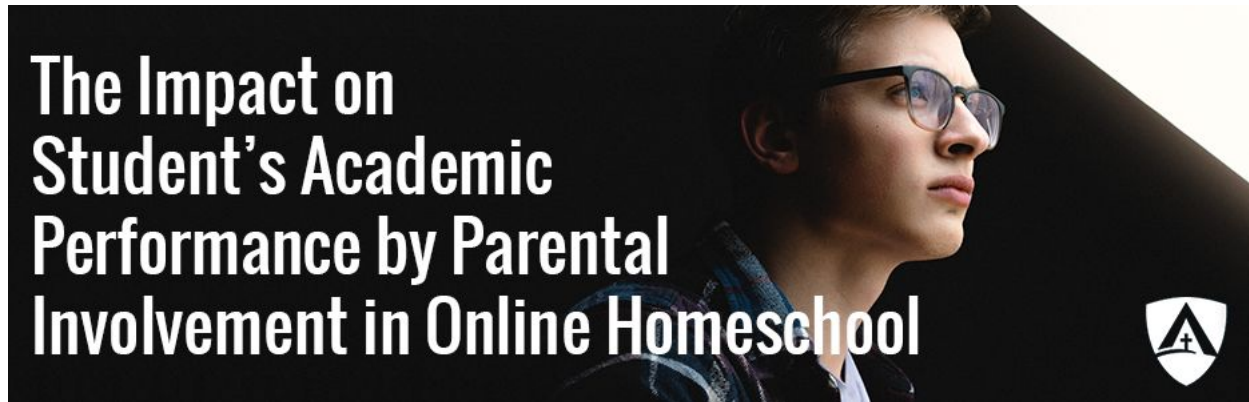


# The Impact on Student's Academic Performance by Parental Involvement in Online Homeschool



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As education transforms with the rise of school choice options in the U.S. such as online homeschooling, there is a need to understand the arguments for and against school choice reforms from the angle of effects on a student's academic performance, so parents can make more informed decisions as school choices will likely continue to expand.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this academic article is to explore the impact on a student's academic performance based on parental involvement in choosing online homeschools. I propose that if parents are actively involved in choosing an online homeschool to fulfill their child's academic needs, that in and of itself tends to improve the student's academic performance primarily because of the increased parental involvement in their child's education. Research suggests that the student's academic performance is likely the driving force behind the parents' choice.<sup>2</sup>

## **A Brief History of K–12 Educational Shift in the 21st Century**

The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) stated that the U.S. is "A Nation at Risk." Since then, with presidential initiatives including George W. Bush's "No Child Left Behind," Bill Clinton's "Goals 2000," and George H.W. Bush's program "America 2000," the U.S. government poured millions of dollars and resources into the U.S. public education system. All of the efforts yielded little impact on students' outcome.<sup>3</sup> The "No Child Left Behind" program ended in 2007. In 2010, the Obama administration sent Congress a blueprint for reform of the elementary and secondary education act, addressing the issues created by "No Child Left Behind" while pursuing high standards and closing the achievement gap. Despite all of the

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<sup>1</sup> Wolf & Egalite, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Liu, Black, Algina, Cavanaugh, & Dawson, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Finn, 2002.

efforts made by the U.S. government,<sup>4</sup> 15-year-old U.S. students are still placed 38<sup>th</sup> out of 71 countries in math and 24<sup>th</sup> in science.<sup>4</sup> In October 2016, President Obama's ConnectED initiative goal was to enrich K–12 education by providing teachers with high-end technology and training and by empowering students through individualized learning and rich, digital content. Since November of 2016, with President Trump taking office, school choice became the central education policy as Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos stated that families should be free to choose the public, private, charter, magnet, religious, or homeschool option as they see fit.<sup>5</sup>

### **A rise of school choice options.**

Since the dawn of the 21st century, various alternatives to public education have become more common such as charter schools, online schools, and religious schools. In 2004, the U.S. Department of Education issued guidance explicitly defining online school as a legal and acceptable alternative school choice.<sup>6</sup> A 2007 national study found that 700,000 American K–12 students were enrolled in at least one online or blended course; the number rose to 1,030,000 in a 2009 follow-up study.<sup>7</sup> Homeschooling, which is a particular form of private schooling, has increased from 850,000 in 2001 to 1.75 million in 2013. In 2015, 31 states had voluntary inter-district enrollment policies, which allowed a student to transfer to a public school outside of his or her home district. In private education, by 2015, 43 school voucher, tax-credit scholarship, and Empowerment Scholarship Account programs accounted for 350,000 students. Competitions among school choice programs created a new movement in K–12 education from parents becoming more involved in their children's education pushing public schools to improve their performance in the form of higher test scores for students.<sup>8</sup>

### **The result of school choice awareness.**

As educational choices have dramatically increased in the last decade, unsatisfied parents continue to withdraw their children from public schools and enroll in school choice programs.<sup>9</sup> With the information about schools available at the tips of their fingers, parents want to choose the school which will meet their children's needs and prepare them for life. Today's generation of students need different skills to compete in a high-tech world.<sup>10</sup> Nowadays, parents seek more flexible and individualized educational experiences for their children.<sup>11</sup> Online education has become an invaluable opportunity for homeschooling parents to broaden their child's education. It provides students the flexibility to learn anywhere at any time, and obtain a diploma from an accredited institution. Online students can take advantage of unique course offerings such as specialized courses, world languages, dual enrollment, and Advanced Placement.<sup>12</sup> Investigating the reasons for selecting online schools can help illuminate to what extent academic performance is part of the decision.

### **Parental rights in choosing an education for their child.**

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<sup>4</sup> Desilver, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> CAPE Outlook, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Hasell & Terral, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Picciano, Seaman, Shea, & Swan, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Wolf, P.J., Kisida, B., Gutmann, M., Puma, M., Eissa, N., & Rizzo, L., 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Bausell, 2016; Buchen, 2003; Christensen, 2008; Graham & Davis, 2013; Hawkins, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Hawkins, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Bausell, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Hawkins, 2016.

Historically, the right of parents in choosing an education for their child was declared at the United Nations General Assembly: Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.<sup>13</sup> The child is not the mere creature of the state; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for life. The state may require that all children of proper age attend school, that teachers would be of a good moral character and patriotic disposition, that certain studies essential to good citizenship must be taught, and that nothing be taught which is manifestly inimical to the public welfare.<sup>14</sup> The power of choice should be given to the parents in deciding what would be the best education for their children and argues that parents rather than government be primarily responsible in terms of actively participating in their children's educational opportunities.<sup>15</sup> Homeschooling families share a common belief that the education of children is primarily their right and responsibility.<sup>16</sup> Nowadays parents want the freedom to choose the best education for their child and have an opportunity to be actively involved in their child's education. This is a critical aspect to consider in understanding how parents influencing changes in academic performance might be impacted by limitations in parents' rights.

### **The benefits of homeschooling and online education.**

Homeschooling was one of the solutions for parents for decades since home education provides parents the opportunity to teach moral and religious principles to their children.<sup>17</sup> Homeschool education's history serves as a valuable tool for protecting school choice because it illustrates the importance of home education in American society.<sup>18</sup> The first homeschoolers dealt with backlash from numerous groups, family members, educators, politicians, and neighbors who felt they were doing their children an injustice. However, proponents of homeschooling held fast and helped to establish the laws and regulations that recognize that teaching one's children is a right.<sup>19</sup> In 2015, based on the Census Bureau data, 1,642,027 school age children were homeschooled, which is 2.70 percent of all school-age students. Homeschooling parents who live in a state where the homeschool regulations are strict can utilize accredited online schools to minimize the burdensome recordkeeping involved in homeschooling because online schools help meet most of the general requirements.<sup>20</sup> Online schools can partner with parents to deliver to students both the personal accountability through parental involvement and the one-on-one qualified teaching with which many homeschooling parents may need assistance.

### **State requirements for homeschooling.**

In 2011, the Homeschool Legal Defense Association announced that all fifty states permit homeschooling. They state that three main requirements for homeschooling are required that are very similar to private education: curriculum, attendance status, and record-keeping; however, the laws and regulations for homeschooling differ: (1) States and territories with no requirements for parents to initiate contact with the state's Department of Education; (2) States and territory with minimal requirements on homeschooling and require only parental notification to the state's

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<sup>13</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.

<sup>14</sup> Peterson, 1968.

<sup>15</sup> Graham, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Varnham & Squelch, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Horrell, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Olsen, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> HSLDA, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Hawkins, 2016.

Department of Education; (3) States and territories with moderate requirements regarding notification, assessment scores, and/or professional evaluation of student progress to the state's Department of Education; (4) States and territories with strict regulations regarding notification, assessment scores, professional evaluation, plus other requirements.<sup>21</sup> The benefits for parents of homeschoolers regarding online schools is that students may have access to standardized examinations and assessments.<sup>22</sup> When considering the impact on students' academic performances, one might consider categorizing data by state per level of strictness about homeschooling laws and so consider the online homeschool for their child's benefits.

### **Online school.**

Online school is one of the fastest growing educational systems in America today.<sup>23</sup> First, it gained popularity for advanced learners and then for the at-risk population.<sup>24</sup> The research suggests that there is a need for school choice, primarily due to the benefits from increased competition among schools for the students' benefit.<sup>25</sup> Online schooling serves students who may have some barrier to attendance at a brick-and-mortar school such as a disability or participation in sports at the professional level. It is a safe-haven for students who are bullied in traditional schools. Even minority students benefit from the online school, for instance Hispanic or Latino students involved in an online school in Arizona are less likely to drop out of school if they are in an entirely online school.<sup>26</sup> The other benefit is that online school is not reliant on a physical location; it is available anywhere with internet connectivity 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Online students could have a broader range of access to courses, since smaller brick-and-mortar private schools may not be able to offer a class if the classroom size is insufficient.

### **Proponents and opposers of school choice.**

With Betsy DeVos becoming the Secretary of Education in 2016, school choice has come under the spotlight.<sup>27</sup> Research provides sufficient data about school choice and its effect on education as a whole.<sup>28</sup> School choice proponents point out several benefits.<sup>29</sup> First, choice allows parents to find schools that better match their preferences for a particular pedagogical approach or emphasis. Second, it provides a mechanism for students who otherwise would be trapped in chronically underperforming schools to gain access to better educational opportunities. Third, proponents claim that choice results in competition among schools, which ultimately improves both schools of choice and traditional public schools. The proponents of school choice argue that schools should concentrate on serving students and respond to the changing world more quickly.

Those who oppose school choice argue that the top school choice institutions will receive the best students and leave those students who are less likely to succeed academically in lower-performing public schools.<sup>30</sup> The administrators of public schools find excuses for the lack

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<sup>21</sup> HSLDS, 2011.

<sup>22</sup> DiPerna, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Watson, Pape, Murin, Germain, & Vasham, 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Curtis & Werth, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Archambault, 2016; Buchen, 2003; Desilver, DiPerna, 2015; 2017; Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2001.

<sup>26</sup> Corry, 2016.

<sup>27</sup> CAPE Outlook, 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Davis, 2005; Graham & Davis, 2013; Russo, 2008; Stewart & Good, 2016; Wolf & Egalite, 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Rabovsky, 2011.

<sup>30</sup> Bausell, 2016; DiPerna, 2015.

of academic progress by asserting that the reforms need more time to gain results. Another argument is that public school teachers blame parents, pointing out that families are deteriorating, poverty is spreading, morals are decaying, and it is not realistic to expect schools to do a better job until the whole society is overhauled.<sup>31</sup> While public school educators might be pointing fingers, parents are taking charge of their child's education through school choice options.<sup>32</sup> Parents now demand that students obtain enough knowledge to prepare them for the workforce.<sup>33</sup> In the modern day, schooling has become even more important as a major institution for raising children and parents want to be in charge of their children's education.

### **Parental Involvement in Online Homeschooling**

Parental involvement is vital to children being successful in online school, even though their roles might vary based on the emotional and mental level of their child. Research stated that parental involvement has a positive impact on their child's learning.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, students viewed parents' interactions as significantly motivational.<sup>35</sup> Research suggest that online students thrive in an online environment if parents are available to monitor, mentor, and motivate their child on a daily basis.<sup>36</sup> Since online students can generally complete all of their assignments within the regular school hours, no after-school homework is required and thus frees up their afternoon for other social activities, such as music, sports, recreational activities, and valuable time with their family.

#### **The benefits of parental involvement.**

As online learning has grown, it becomes clear that not only do students need to learn how to work online, but parents must learn how to assist their children. Parental involvement in their child's education is valuable, as noted by research studies.<sup>37</sup> Liu (2010) suggests school choice develops programs that include parents in their children's education and make good use of parental involvement: "Parental modeling and reinforcement could play an important role in motivating students to take more learning responsibility and persevere to achieve learning goals" (p.110). Parental involvement boost a child's ability to acquire and practice skills necessary to be successful in online learning.<sup>38</sup> Another benefit for parental involvement states that when parents choose a school for their child, that in and of itself tends to increase parental involvement because now it is their decision and their responsibility.<sup>39</sup> Parental involvement could have a positive impact on their child's learning, especially in online settings, where parents provide the primary level of support to ensure the learner is kept on task.<sup>40</sup> Understanding how a parent can impact academic performance through various activities will help focus further study in this area.

#### **The impact of parental involvement.**

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<sup>31</sup> Marsh, Carr-Chellman, & Sockman, 2009.

<sup>32</sup> Merry & Karsten, 2010.

<sup>33</sup> Olsen, 2008.

<sup>34</sup> Curtis & Werth, 2015.

<sup>35</sup> Graham & Davis, 2013.

<sup>36</sup> Curtis and Werth, 2015.

<sup>37</sup> Graham & Davis, 2013; Liu et al., 2010; Schoenig & Staud, 2014.

<sup>38</sup> Borup, Stevens, & Waters, 2015.

<sup>39</sup> Russo, 2008.

<sup>40</sup> Carnahan and Fulton, 2013.

Parental involvement boosts their child's ability to acquire and practice skills necessary to be successful in online learning that include perseverance, organization, internal control, technology skills, and time management.<sup>41</sup> When parents worked to learn the content alongside their child, it created an atmosphere of learning experiences. Knowing that their parents and teachers worked together to support their learning was also reassuring to students. Specifically, parents of online students have more opportunities to interact with their child's learning than parents of students in a traditional brick-and-mortar environment.<sup>42</sup> Active parental involvement and participation in their child's education is a key factor in achieving successful educational outcomes.<sup>43</sup> Nowadays parents recognized education as the key to a better future and a more productive life for their children.<sup>44</sup> Research noted that parental involvement is effective when parents assume the teacher role in providing guidance in taking notes, reviewing materials for quizzes and tests, and checking on comprehension.<sup>45</sup>

### **Parental involvement with students in need.**

In regards to students with special needs or disabilities, parent education is imperative to ensure that parents possess the skills necessary, including instructional methods, to take the primary role in supporting their child's learning in a fully online environment.<sup>46</sup> The online education may not be appropriate for all learners, yet having the ability to modify curriculum, making special adaptations for individual learners, and maintaining sufficient parental involvement would provide an opportunity for good results.<sup>47</sup> Students who need extra support, self-pacing, or who cannot attend school physically can benefit from virtual schooling.<sup>48</sup> Recently, many online schools have added credit recovery as a way to provide failing or at-risk students with an alternative to traditional credit recovery courses.<sup>49</sup>

### **Parents as role models for their child in online school.**

The Parental Involvement Mechanism Model demonstrated the influence of parental involvement on students' academic performances in online learning.<sup>50</sup> The parental involvement was defined by using four factors: encouragement, modeling, reinforcement, and instruction. Parental encouragement helped students believe learning goals were attainable. Parents also served as good role models who value education and reinforced setting goals and managing time, which motivated students to be more responsible for learning and to persevere to achieve goals. Lastly, parental instruction helped students obtain effective educational strategies to be successful learners in an online school. Parents in their research indicated that knowledge of student progress gave them the tools they needed to assist their children.<sup>51</sup>

## **Students Academic Performance in School Choice Programs**

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<sup>41</sup> Liu, 2010.

<sup>42</sup> Borup, Stivents, & Water, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> Varnham and Squelch, 2008.

<sup>44</sup> Curtis and Werth, 2015.

<sup>45</sup> Liu et al., 2010.

<sup>46</sup> Smith, Burdette, Cheatham, & Harvey, 2016.

<sup>47</sup> Carnahan and Fulton, 2013.

<sup>48</sup> Fernandez, Ferdig, Thompson, Schottke, & Black, 2016.

<sup>49</sup> Toppin & Toppin, 2016.

<sup>50</sup> Feng, Black, Algina, Cavanaugh, & Dawson, 2010.

<sup>51</sup> Curtis & Werth, 2015.

The most common reasons for supporting school choice are: Access to schools having better academic outcomes (38%) and more freedom and flexibility for parents (28%), while opposers (57%) argue that it would divert funding away from public schools.<sup>52</sup> Numerous polls showed parents participating in school choice programs across the nation tend to be far more satisfied with their child's school than are public school parents.<sup>53</sup> Russo (2008) challenged opponents of school choice with a question, "How can one explain the fact that the same inner-city children failing in public schools, are succeeding in private schools they attend at a great financial sacrifice?" (p. 289). Parental involvement in student academic activities are especially important for student academic achievement considering the lack of physical presence of teachers and the amount of time students spend on learning at home.<sup>54</sup>

Information from student assessments provides valuable data about student performance in school choice programs. A great example of school choice is Milwaukee Parental Choice Programs which gained significant improvements in math, reading, science, and social studies test scores and improvements in high school graduation rates.<sup>55</sup> Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos noted at the annual CAPE (2017) summit that one of her priorities was to advance parental choice in education in a significant way that would "help parents and children who are trapped all too often in places that don't work for them" (p. 2). Research indicated that 30 of the 42 studies conclude that increased competitive pressure results in statistically significant achievement gains for students in core subject areas.<sup>56</sup>

### **Online social and emotional learning and impact on students' academic performances.**

Students are more likely to display increased engagement when parents, teachers, and peers become engaged.<sup>57</sup> Parents will make the best decisions for their children's education if they have sufficient information on which to base those decisions.<sup>58</sup> It is very important for online schools to promote the development of character and social-emotional learning (SEL) skills as part of the student online learning experience.<sup>59</sup> Importantly, children who can manage their emotions have shown positive academic outcome. Research in traditional learning environments noted that programs that promote social and emotional learning and character education have a positive impact on students' emotional and academic growth.<sup>60</sup>

Social and emotional learning and character development are need to be addressed for online settings to better serve students, so they have needed skills to successfully function and solve problems. The five core SEL competencies are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Nolan (2016) researched the social and emotional learning and character development of K–12 online students and found that online educators who incorporated the character education and social-emotional learning in their curriculum received the positive effect on students' achievements in school, work, and life. In

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<sup>52</sup> DiPerna, 2015.

<sup>53</sup> Russo, 2008.

<sup>54</sup> Feng, 2010.

<sup>55</sup> Russo, 2008.

<sup>56</sup> Wolf & Egalite, 2016.

<sup>57</sup> Borup, 2015.

<sup>58</sup> Steward & Good, 2016.

<sup>59</sup> Nolan, 2016.

<sup>60</sup> Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011.

regards to parochial schools, pastors believe that active parent participation in school functions increased dialogue between parents and teachers and thus benefiting children.<sup>61</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The current public school education system was developed more than a hundred years ago and was designed to meet the needs of the Industrial Revolution. In the current world, teaching and learning are moving from brick and mortar to the virtual world and cyberspace; otherwise, from 30 students in the class to one student that connects to others virtually. The Information Age has facilitated a reinvention of nearly every industry except for education. It is time to unhinge ourselves from many of the assumptions that undergird how we deliver instruction and begin to design new models that are better able to leverage talent, time, and technology to meet the unique needs of each student.<sup>62</sup> According to data presented by Christensen (2008) in his book “Disrupting Class,” he suggested that by 2019 about 50 percent of K–12 courses will be delivered online.

This academic article aims to lay out the current perspectives about school choice and how there is a cycle of development centered around students’ academic performances. On the one hand, school choice is stated to benefit students’ academic performances as it continues to drive school choice expansion. In school choice, parents have access to a broader range of educational options, including online homeschooling, where they can further benefit their child’s academic performance through increased involvement. The increased academic performance then further validates the parent’s choice; alternatively, the lack of progress may indicate to the parent to begin the process of selecting another school. This cycle will further be perpetuated by the increased competition that will result from it. The natural assumption is that school choice expansion will not likely go away soon, but instead it will continue to expand, allowing the United States to rise back to the ranks of top performing students on a global scale.<sup>63</sup>

As school choice will likely expand, it is important to understand the decision-making process of parents to better coordinate efforts between parents and educators. It is important to further study both the academic and non-academic benefits, such as the parent's hope that their child will receive a high-end education, that drive the parent’s decisions amidst their expanding options. The academic impact on a student can be measured first by their grades and standardized tests. This metric can be further analyzed through evaluating what non-academic factors played a part through increased parental involvement and school choice has had on the student. A few of the areas of study could be the student’s motivation levels, overall satisfaction with the school, and desire for learning.

The key question of this academic article is not thoroughly discussed due to the page limitation: Can parents positively impact their student's academic performance through parental involvement in selecting online homeschools? From my experience working in an online homeschool setting, I believe that if parents are actively involved in selecting an online homeschool to meet their child’s academic needs, that in and of itself tends to improve a

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<sup>61</sup> Frabutt, Holter, Nuzzi, Rocha, & Casses, 2010.

<sup>62</sup> Rose, 2012.

<sup>63</sup> Wolf & Egalite, 2016.



student's academic performance primarily because of the increased parental involvement. A quantitative research may provide more data on students' academic performances by analyzing changes in grade point average (GPA), improvements identified through annual assessments, and rates of college acceptance.

Beyond identifying the impact and importance of parents' choice and involvement in their children's education, leadership is an essential topic of discussion in any field.<sup>64</sup> Throughout my educational experience, I have learned the importance of parents being leaders in their children's life: leading them by example, being consistent in discipline, instilling good study habits, and building good relationships that would sustain life circumstances. The Bible advises parents to lead by example, "Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deuteronomy 11:19). Leadership involves influence; without influence, leadership does not exist.<sup>65</sup> I see parents as leaders in their children's education and thus empowering parents in this leadership role is essential, so additional research is needed to dive into parental leadership in regards to their children's education.

When evaluating motivation, or any of the other factors, it will be important to consider what else might have impacted that factor, other than increased parental involvement or school choice. Depending on the school the parent chooses, there will be a variety of factors that could impact the student: teachers, peers, administration, and curriculum. The timing of transferring between schools can also play a major part in the impact a transfer can have on a student. If a student is reluctantly moved to a different school at an unfavorable time, some school work might be lost, and a student may be behind schedule, and thus further demotivated. These impacts will need to be considered in evaluating the data.

Hopefully, this academic article sheds some light on the importance of discovering the impact the parental role in school choice can have on their child's academic performance. The parents of online students consistently reiterate the need for parental involvement for the student to be successful, and it is common for students who were not able to find success in a public school setting to succeed in online homeschooling, especially when parents are actively involved. The strength of this article lies in bringing the reader to understanding why school choice options have expanded and the importance for that to continue. The weakness is that I might be biased toward expanding school choice due to being an advocate for that movement for more than ten years. Further research might bring additional validation for online homeschool choice and help parents make more informed decisions.

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<sup>64</sup> Northouse, 2015.

<sup>65</sup> Spears & Lawrence, 2002.

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