



ARTICLE

# Is Homeschool Still Cool?

Since March 2020, when schools announced indefinite shut downs, we have all wondered about the long-term ramifications on students and educators alike. In 2021, schools have reopened but are children returning to in-person schools or opting to stay home? In this article, we explore trends in the data related to the education of primary and secondary school children across the country.

## **Ebbs and Flows of Homeschooling Rates During the Pandemic**

During the pandemic, the U.S. Census Bureau sent “Household Pulse” surveys to millions of Americans. The survey questions spanned a variety of topics, including some related to education. Specifically, the surveys asked households with school-aged children questions such as how much time is spent on teaching activities with their children. The respondents were also asked if their children were enrolled in private or public schools or were normally homeschooled. We anticipated the rise of homeschooling during the pandemic; however,

we were curious about whether our presumed upward homeschooling trend would remain high when the vast majority of school districts were back to in-person learning by the fall of 2021.

Roughly one month into the pandemic,<sup>1</sup> we have data regarding the homeschooling rate of children across the United States and major metropolitan areas. The data show a national homeschooling rate of 4.3%. While there may have been some first-movers into homeschooling, this period was early enough to be used as a baseline for the rates of households that homeschool in each of these cities. As the pandemic progressed and the vast majority

<sup>1</sup> The Week 1 survey covers April 23, 2020 to May 5, 2020.

of schools only offered a virtual school option, the national homeschooling rate spiked to 9.4%, more than double what it was at the beginning of the pandemic. An increase in homeschooling was not unexpected, as many households were trying an alternative to the remote schooling offered by their public school districts. The data reveal the magnitude of the increase and which areas of the country experienced the largest gains.

**Household Homeschooling Rates**

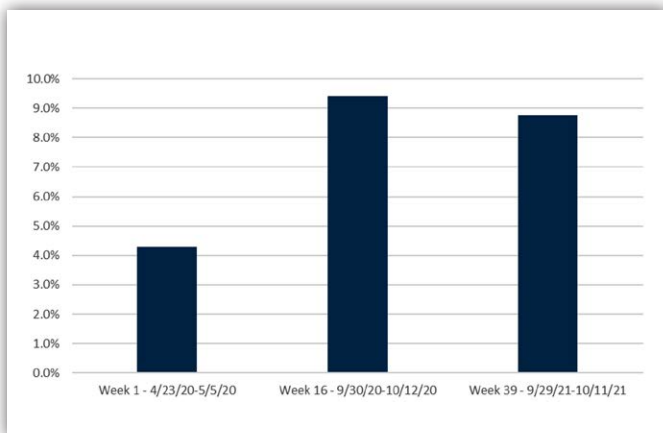


Table 1 – Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, weeks 1, 16 and 39, United States, public use microdata.

Would parents who shifted to homeschooling because of the pandemic now go back to in-person schooling when schools re-opened for in-person learning? For the start of the 2021/2022 school year,<sup>2</sup> when most schools were back to in-person learning, there was a drop in the rate of households that reported children who continued to be homeschooled, falling from 9.4% at the peak of the pandemic to 8.8% for the start of the 2021/22 school year; a less than a 1 percentage point drop in the homeschooling rate. This illustrates that the vast majority of the new homeschooling converts appear to have continued homeschooling their children.

When we look at major metropolitan areas across the United States, we see that this doubling percentage trend of homeschooling at the start of the pandemic and the slight reduction for the 2020/2021 school year was not evenly distributed across the major cities. While this pattern was true in general, we see very large increases in homeschooling rates in Detroit

and Phoenix compared to more modest increases in Washington, D.C. and San Francisco. At the beginning of the pandemic, homeschooling rates were relatively low, ranging from 1-4%. By the start of the following school year, all metropolitan areas had significantly increased homeschooling, ranging from 4-14%. After the pandemic peak, the largest return to in-person schooling was in New York City, where homeschooling increased from 1.8% to 9.8% and fell to 1.4%; below pre-pandemic levels. By contrast, Los Angeles saw a spike in homeschooling in the fall of this current school year (2021/2022), climbing above the increase last fall at the start of the 2020/2021 school year.

**Homeschooling Rates of Households by Metropolitan Area**

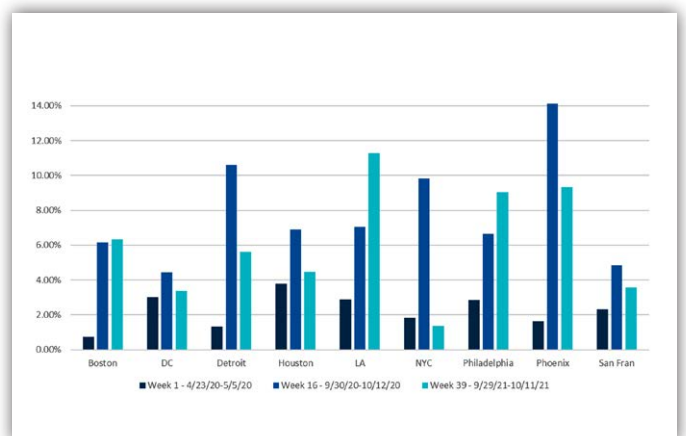


Table 2 – Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, weeks 1, 16 and 39 for specific metropolitan areas.

**From Coast to Coast**

Given the drop of homeschooled children in NYC to levels below the pre-pandemic status, we searched for data to look more closely at the number of schoolchildren enrolled in NYC public schools. Based on our research, it appears unlikely that the number of students enrolled in NYC public schools is rising.

According to the Independent Budget Office of the City of New York, enrollment in NYC public schools has been trending downward since the 2016/2017 school year. By contrast, charter school enrollment has seen a significant increase during this same period.

<sup>2</sup> The Week 39 survey data covers September 29, 2021 to October 11, 2021.

**Traditional Public School Enrollment from 2006-2007 Through 2018-2019<sup>3</sup>**

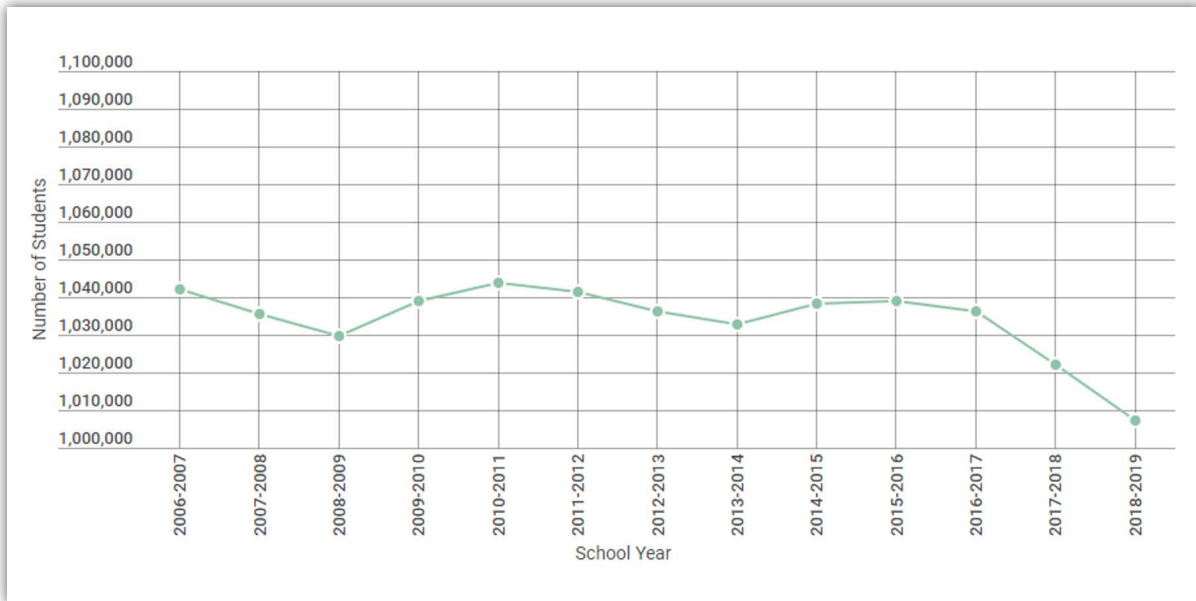


Table 3 – Traditional Public School Enrollment according to the Independent Budget Office of the City of New York

**Charter School Enrollment from 2006-2007 Through 2018-2019<sup>4</sup>**

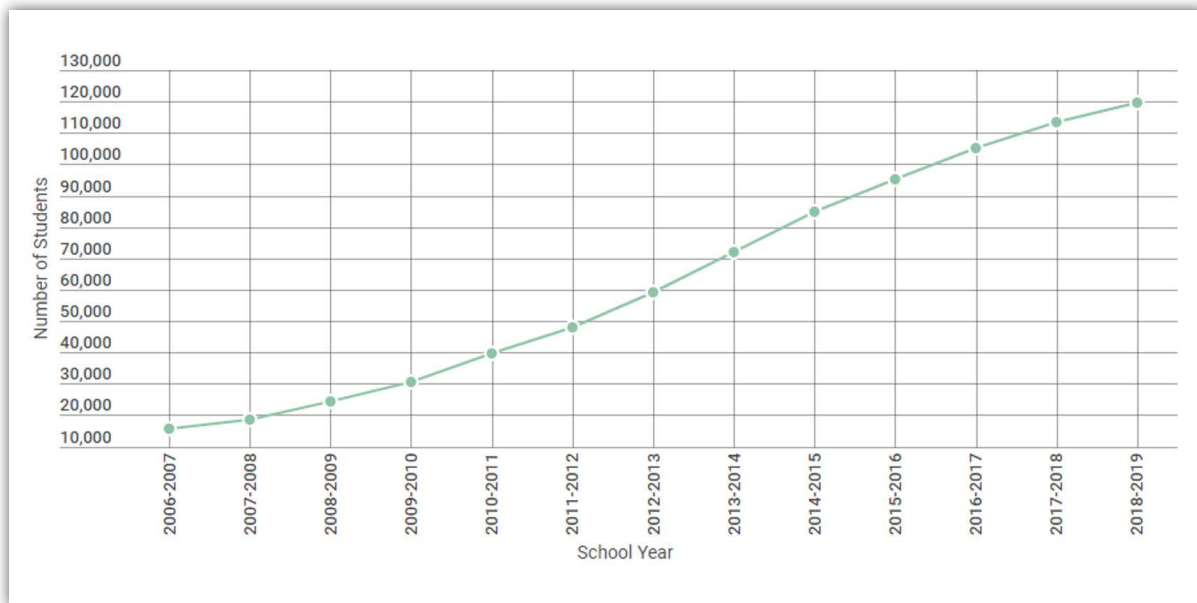


Table 4 – Charter School Enrollment according to the Independent Budget Office of the City of New York

NYC public schools represent the largest school district in the United States. The NYC Department of Education website puts total enrollment for the 2021/2022 school year at 1,094,138 students, with 138,648 of these students in charter schools.<sup>5</sup> This would put traditional public school enrollment at just over 955,000, below one million students for the first time since at least 2006. It appears the pandemic accelerated the trend of parents in NYC shifting their children away from traditional public schools and into charter schools or moving out of NYC entirely.

<sup>3</sup> <https://ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/school-enrollment-trends-2019.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/school-enrollment-trends-2019.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/reports/doe-data-at-a-glance>



Los Angeles Unified School District is the second-largest school district in the country, with just under 600,000 students and a total K-12 public school enrollment that has been decreasing steadily. Although interestingly, charter school enrollment has remained relatively stable at around 150,000 students since 2015.

**Los Angeles Unified School District**

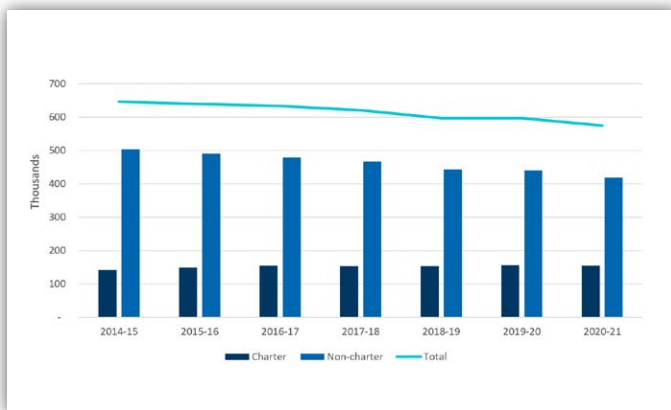


Table 5 – Los Angeles Unified School District Total Enrollment, Source: <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest>

In the fall of 2021, NYC saw a decrease in homeschooling to below pre-pandemic levels while also seeing a spike in the number of children in charter schools. By contrast, Los Angeles saw a spike in homeschooling during the pandemic that continued into the fall of 2021, correlated with a decrease in the number of children in traditional public school. We speculate that perhaps the small living spaces inhabited by New Yorkers make homeschooling less favorable, and New Yorkers thus take advantage of available in-person options like charter schools.

**Money to be Made**

The U.S. Census data that shows increased interest in homeschooling among parents can also be seen in the financial performance of K-12 education companies. Stride, Inc., is one of the few for-profit public companies that specializes in K-12 education and therefore has publically available enrollment and revenue numbers. Enrollment in Stride’s programs increased 54% from the 2019-2020 to the 2020-2021 school year.

Stride’s revenues were on an upward trajectory prior to the pandemic but spiked after the June 30, 2021 fiscal year-end. Further estimates from Stride for the quarter ending September 2021 forecast an additional 4% growth in revenue from \$1.5 billion to \$1.6 billion for the 2021-2022 school year, driven by increased enrollment in middle and high school programming.<sup>6</sup>

**Stride, Inc. Financial Information**

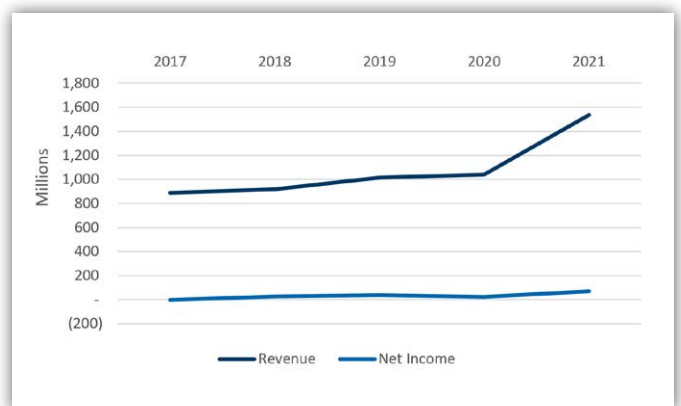


Table 6 – Source: Stride, Inc. Annual Reports. Fiscal year ends are 6/30.

<sup>6</sup> Stride Inc Oct 19, 2021 press release on quarterly earnings

Stride's 2021 Annual Report anticipates continued interest in virtual learning, noting that "virtual and blended learning has gained greater acceptance and broader usage due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic."<sup>7</sup> Citing a study done by the Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics, they find opportunity for growth based on a survey of 16- to 18-year-old students in the U.S. and UK "that one-third of students would choose either full-time or part-time online education even after things return to normal after the pandemic."<sup>8</sup>

## Summary

It will be interesting to continue to track interest in alternative education and the number of homeschooling students in the years to come as society adapts to the fallout from the pandemic. Traditional school enrollment will also continue to be affected by changes in demographics, families moving from larger metropolitan areas into rural and smaller cities, responses to lockdowns, vaccine mandates, availability of in-person schooling, and other macro factors. As public school funding is generally based on the number of enrolled students, it will be notable to watch what, if anything, public school systems will do to stave off falling enrollment, or if the way of the future will continue to indicate that homeschool is, in fact, "cool."



<sup>7</sup> Stride Inc 2021 Annual Statement, p23

<sup>8</sup> Stride Inc 2021 Annual Statement, p24

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