

The Proliferation of Pandemic Pods, Micro-Schools, and Home Education

10 Things to Know

1. Many families are looking into “pandemic pods” to educate their children this upcoming school year. These will be used to either supplement or replace distance learning options offered by public schools.
2. We’ve already seen opportunity gaps widen for students—specifically Indigenous, Black, and students of color and students from under-resourced communities. The proliferation of pandemic pods, micro-schools, and home education will widen this gap and worsen school segregation as well-resourced families will disproportionately benefit.
3. Just like any private school, pandemic pods do not guarantee students or educators the same civil rights protections that are required in public schools. Furthermore, pandemic pods will likely not provide the necessary supports for students with disabilities as required under state and federal legislation.
4. In non-public school programs, students are not held accountable to state standards of learning. Educators are not required to be credentialed. In some cases, unqualified college students, babysitters, and nannies will be hired as teachers.
5. Credentialed educators who teach in a pandemic pod have no guaranteed protections or benefits like those secured under contracts working for school districts.
6. Private funders have invested approximately \$1.7 billion in 2019 in education technology (ed-tech) firms. They now see “pandemic pods” as the way of the future, pushing talking points that traditional public schools are outdated.
7. Private schools and home education programs, just like pandemic pods, are not accountable to the public. Therefore, they do not have to be transparent about their finances or how decisions are made.
8. U.S. Senate Republicans have recently introduced a bill that would create a voucher program entitled “Emergency Education Freedom Grants,” which would allow families to use government funding for programs like “pandemic pods.” This is yet another radical proposal from Betsy DeVos and Donald Trump for a voucher program.
9. Vouchers do not reduce education costs. They do reduce the amount of money public schools receive as fewer families enroll.
10. Public schools serve all students, and educators work tirelessly to make sure all students are receiving a high-quality education. Programs like pandemic pods will make it harder to achieve equity in schools, which is a cornerstone of American democracy.

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Summary

Many families—unsatisfied with district and state school building reopening plans—are turning to “pandemic pods” as an alternative to sending their children back to in-person instruction. Public schools play a vital role in all students’ education, and pandemic pods and other home-based education programs weaken the schools’ ability to do so.

Families, largely affluent and white, are increasingly turning to these pods to supplement or replace digital learning as more and more districts have determined that conditions do not yet allow for the safe reopening of school buildings. These families have expressed concerns that children who are not learning in school buildings are missing out on important peer-to-peer interactions. Parents who are required to return to work have also expressed concerns that closed school buildings would mean their children would go unsupervised during the day. However, the abrupt transition to distance learning in Spring 2020 widened the already-existing opportunity gaps for students—specifically Indigenous, Black, and students of color and students from under-resourced communities that lacked access to personal learning devices and broadband Internet. The proliferation of pandemic pods, micro-schools, and home education options will further exacerbate this gap.

“No one wants to be back in the classroom with students more than educators, but we must do so only if we can ensure it is done in a safe way. [. . .] We must address these inequities now—not push for school reopenings that will harm those students the most—and that requires equitable tools and resources from the federal government, which has failed to act.”¹

— NEA President Lily Eskelsen García

The National Education Association (NEA) encourages innovative solutions that will allow students to have in-person instruction and important opportunities for socialization with peers; however, the NEA believes that such cohort-style learning arrangements should be organized, implemented, and monitored under the authority of state and district education agencies. These pandemic pods, micro-schools, and home education programs should be accountable for upholding student and staff rights, ensuring progress and proficiency according to high-quality standards, and providing all students instruction by a certified educator. Home-based cohort education models should be designed in partnership with stakeholders, especially educators, who have the expertise needed to ensure the quality of instructional programs.

In home-based education models, students and educators are not guaranteed the civil rights or transparency required in public schools. Reporting and assessment requirements will not apply to these education arrangements. In fact, with regard to home education, some states do not have procedures in place that ensure that students are receiving an education before the age of 7 and after the age of 16. The lack of reporting, assessment, and accountability requirements risks children simply disappearing from the

systems that often work to ensure their health and safety, such as attendance requirements and check-ins from adults outside the child's household.

The lack of legislative and regulatory oversight of non-public school alternatives not only results in a lack of transparency regarding student progress and instructional efficacy, but it also allows for the bypassing of state standard requirements for credentialing educators. As parents consider employing college students, babysitters, and nannies to fulfill instructional roles that are typically only borne by certified educators, children will not receive the high-quality education that they deserve.

Further, certified educators who enter pandemic pod arrangements with individual families, groups of families, or private tutoring companies will not have guaranteed protections or benefits like those secured under contracts working for school districts. Without being appropriated resources that would allow students to return to school buildings and campuses safely, we could see a dangerous drain on educator staff pools that will broaden existing shortages.

For these reasons and more discussed in the pages that follow, the NEA cautions against the establishment of independent, non-public pandemic pods, micro-schools, and home education programs that are operated outside the authority of state and district public school systems. The NEA believes that public schools are key to ensuring the following: (1) students receive excellent instruction at the direction of qualified, certified/licensed educators, including in early childhood programs²; (2) the maintenance and promotion of stable, functional, healthy families and the emotional, physical, and mental health of people within these families³; (3) inequities and opportunity gaps are addressed, and students and families who need more support—including access to food distribution programs, personal learning devices and hot spots, community health services, and the like—have the means to receive it⁴; and (4) the civil and human rights of students and educators—including the fundamental civil right of all children to access a system of high-quality public education grounded in the principles of adequacy and equity, even during conditions of natural disaster or other interruptions—are upheld and respected.⁵

What Is a Pandemic Pod?

Pandemic pods, also referred to as "micro-schools," are small clusters of families that are set up to facilitate or supplement digital learning or complete at-home coursework together. They are often operate from one or more individuals' homes. In essence, pandemic pods bring families together for cooperative home education. The U.S. Department of Education defines homeschooling as "school-age children (ages 5–17) who receive instruction at home instead of at a public or private school either all or most of the time."⁶ Homeschooling in the United States generally exposes children to less qualified instructors, fewer activities—including extracurricular activities, such as athletics⁷—and less exposure to instruction in chemistry, physics, and scientific inquiry or experiments.⁸ Fewer homeschool parents expect that their students' future education will include the pursuit of a bachelor's, graduate, or professional degree than public school parents.⁹

Despite evidence that public schools offer a more well-rounded and robust learning experience for students, parents are flooding Facebook groups,¹⁰ Nextdoor, and Twitter with calls to action to create

their own pandemic pods and informal micro-schools. Care.com,¹¹ a company that matches consumers with individuals offering services ranging from pet care to housekeeping, has seen a 14 percent increase in families searching for caregivers with teaching and tutoring experience and a 92 percent increase in families seeking shared care arrangements.¹²

Not surprising, the establishment of these non-public education networks is limited to parents with the time and resources to hire educators to instruct their children. Families with the best connections and the most money will disproportionately pursue this route since they are more able to access and arrange alternatives to returning to school buildings or facilitating digital learning themselves.¹³

What Is NEA's Position on Home Education?

State and district education agencies, families, and educators should be wary of the creation of pandemic pods, informal micro-schools, and other home-based education arrangements assembled to substitute students' enrollment in public schools. Non-public education programs, including home-based education options, do not have to be transparent about their finances or how decision are made, and they do not have to provide for the rights and needs of students and staff.¹⁴ The NEA opposes tax credits, vouchers, grants, and other funding assistance because such programs and policies undermine public education by diverting vital funds from public schools.¹⁵

The creation of such alternative learning systems endangers public education, increases economic segregation, undermines school integration, and worsens inequities in access and opportunity that are disproportionately shouldered by Indigenous, Black, and students of color. These programs are not accountable for upholding students' human and civil rights; providing services, resources, and therapies for students with disabilities; or reporting student proficiency and progress to state education agencies.

The creation of pandemic pods will exacerbate school segregation. The likelihood for children to meet friends of diverse backgrounds is further reduced as the clusters are created by the families themselves. Recent research has shown that the average white person's friend group is 91 percent white.¹⁶ These families are also requesting that their cluster be placed in the same classroom post-pandemic, which could also further in-school segregation.¹⁷

This setup would contribute to furthering the economic segregation of schools. Not all families have the resources to contribute to hiring someone to facilitate a pandemic pod, where some families are paying up to \$100 per hour.¹⁸ Families that can afford to hire such persons—which includes facilitators, tutors, and childcare workers—and disenroll their children from public schools will divert resources from those public schools, harming the families that need these resources the most.¹⁹ Black, Indigenous, and students of color; students from less-resourced families; and students with disabilities often require more services to obtain the equitable educational opportunities they deserve. These pods could contribute to enrollment losses, which would create funding gaps, decreasing the possibility for an equitable and just education.

How Has the Pandemic Created Opportunities for Privatization and Vouchers, and How Might They Be Used to Promote Pandemic Pods, Micro-Schools, and Home Education Arrangements?

Collectively, investors poured \$1.7 billion into education startup companies in the last year alone. Now, many ed-tech companies are pivoting to profit off the pandemic and investing in new areas, including micro-school programs, claiming they are “the future.”²⁰ Despite the fact that inequities in access to digital education were brought to the forefront during COVID-19-related school closures in Spring 2020, there is no clear path for resolution prior to the beginning of the school year this fall. Additionally, the NEA is categorically opposed to for-profit schooling because there is an inherent conflict between serving the needs of children and serving the needs of stockholders in an educational setting and opposes education for profit.²¹

Some anti-public-education members of the government, including Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos and President Donald Trump, believe that families should be able to use federal dollars to educate their children in the manner they choose, including home-based education. They are exploiting the crisis of the pandemic by continually proposing radical policies that undermine the public education system. While they argue that these voucher programs would allow families living in poverty to be afforded the same opportunities as those paying tuition, this has been shown to be false.²² In fact, voucher programs were initially created as a response to those who opposed the racial integration of schools.²³

The NEA believes that voucher plans, tuition tax credits, or other funding/financial arrangement that use tax monies to subsidize PreK–12 private school education can undermine public education; reduce the support needed to adequately fund public education; cause racial, economic, and social segregation of students; and threaten the constitutional separation of church and state that has been a cornerstone of American democracy.²⁴

Some state and federal leaders have exploited pandemic relief funds to promote this agenda. The CARES Act (2020) provided education stabilization funding to governors and local education agencies to assist with the additional fiscal needs related to the pandemic.²⁵ One of these stabilization fund programs—which was allocated for governors to use at their discretion for the schools that were in the most need of stabilization (known as GEER funds)—has instead been used by some states, including South Carolina²⁶ and Oklahoma,²⁷ to establish voucher programs.

The NEA opposes preferential treatment for non-public schools that receive federal funds under current law or concealment of financing, materials, and services received by non-public schools from public funds.²⁸ The purpose of pandemic pods is to provide moderated student learning opportunities while keeping students at home and out of school buildings. DeVos and Trump seek to incentivize programs and policies that will deter enrollment in public schools under the guise of “supporting innovation.”²⁹ This could result in hundreds of millions of dollars being diverted from the CARES Act coronavirus response package to funding education grants dedicated to voucher programs—this time labeled as “microgrants”—that would send funds directly to families to use for home-based education or other

instructional materials.³⁰ DeVos has also been vocal about promoting anti-public-education voucher programs³¹ that families can use for both private schools and home education.

The DeVos–Trump education agenda is clearly anti-public education. Through their advocacy efforts, the U.S. Senate Republicans have recently introduced a bill that would create a voucher program entitled “Emergency Education Freedom Grants.”³² The program would provide vouchers for families to attend private schools or to use toward homeschooling expenses. As a tax credit program, it would provide businesses another means to contribute even less in federal taxes, which would result in even less money for public education.

The NEA believes that public education is the cornerstone of our social, economic, and political structure and that each student has the right to free public education suited to the needs of the individual and guaranteed by state and the U.S. Constitution.³³ Further, the Association believes that all schools should be accredited under uniform standards established by appropriate agencies and that opportunities for high-quality learning should be available to all students. Pandemic pods, informal micro-schools, and home education programs fall short of these requirements.³⁴

Privately organized and facilitated home education arrangements threaten public education because they replace services that could feasibly be provided by public schools and, thus, made available to all families without regard to wealth. These programs place the economic security of public education employees at risk, without regard to individual job performance or agreement by the local affiliate. The NEA believes that any private school, agency, or program that receives public funding through voucher plans, tax credits, and the like should be subject to all accountability measures and regulations required of public schools.³⁵

Where Are Pandemic Pods Gaining Momentum?

Pandemic pods and other adaptations of home education that are either supplementing or replacing remote and in-person public school instruction are cropping up throughout the country, but this proliferation isn’t without a pattern. In addition to gaining the attention of wealthy individuals, micro-schools and pandemic pods appear to have drawn the highest interest from people living in affluent cities and suburbs.³⁶

For more information about where pandemic pods, micro-schools, and home education arrangements (including private tutoring) as alternatives to public school enrollment and/or attendance are receiving heightened interest from families, see *Appendix 1: Pandemic Pod Hotspots and Legislation Spotlight*.

How Might Pandemic Pods Be Responsibly Used in a Way That Promotes an Equitable and Just Education?

Given the widespread concerns about the health and safety of students and families in returning to school in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, many families are scrambling to find alternatives to sending students into school buildings in the coming weeks. We need to hold our government officials at all levels

accountable to provide what students need to receive a high-quality education without sacrificing their health and safety. This must include the provision of services and resources for all students—especially students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, and English language learners.

State and local education agencies should consider bringing home-based education models under the umbrella of public education so that federal, state, and local funds can provide support for educating students in small cohorts that will protect the health and safety of students and educators and their families. Doing so will provide the oversight required to ensure that students' human and civil rights are protected and that students are receiving instruction from certified, qualified educators. Additionally, providing funding and support for offering school-administered home-based education options will allow district and state education agencies to provide learning materials and resources based on high-quality standards and assess student learning to evaluate and address learning gaps.

Educators are notoriously innovative in times of crisis. School districts should leverage educators' talents and encourage their participation and input to creatively plan and innovate, in partnership with families and other stakeholders. In one example, San Francisco Mayor London Breed recently announced that the city is instituting a Learning Hub Program, where students can receive support for digital learning at more than 40 sites across the city, including libraries, recreation centers, and other community sites.³⁷

Disenrollment will only make public schools worse off by creating a vicious cycle whereby the inability of public schools to be able to provide for the safety of students and staff due to funding shortages is exacerbated by even deeper cuts to education budgets.³⁸ Every student in America deserves a free quality public education. The institution of pandemic pods as a public school alternative that is only available to some will only work to the detriment of all as vulnerable populations will suffer even more devastating consequences that will further threaten the country's ability to bounce back from the global pandemic.

Public schools serve all students, and educators work tirelessly to make sure all students are receiving a high-quality education. As we envision equitable and just schools during and after the pandemic, programs that are not organized by public school districts, like pandemic pods, will make it harder to achieve this goal, which is a cornerstone of American democracy.

APPENDIX 1: Pandemic Pod Hotspots and Legislative Spotlight

California

[San Francisco Median Household Income: \$112,376]³⁹

Governor Newsom announced on July 17, 2020, that schools cannot physically reopen for in-person instruction until a county is no longer on the State Monitoring List for 14 consecutive days.	
Pandemic Pod Chatter (Social and Traditional Media)	<p>Pandemic Pods – San Francisco had 2,260 members as of July 28, 2020, despite being created only two weeks prior.</p> <p>Companies like Weekdays are offering a service to match families interested in forming micro-schools with “leaders” (“thousands of nannies, parents, artists, [and] teachers”) to design and administer learning programs.</p> <p>Responding to families’ calls for more support in digital learning, the City of San Francisco is responding to calls for pandemic pods by transforming recreation centers, libraries, and community centers across the city into learning spaces where students can access support and assistance with digital learning in small groups with social distancing protocols. The Learning Hub program will begin in August 2020.</p>
State Reopening Plan Notes	<p>California released Stronger Together: A Guidebook for the Safe Reopening of California’s Public Schools on June 8, 2020. Instructional scheduling model options include a two-day rotation blended learning model, A/B week blended learning model, looping model, and early/late staggered schedules. The California Department of Education included a health and safety checklist and Department of Public Health Guidance.</p>
Local Reopening Plan Notes	<p>San Francisco will begin with distance learning on August 7, 2020. Their website announced, “We have worked diligently to create a plan that incorporates health guidance, our district’s priorities and values, and the input of our diverse community.” The reopening plan states, “We hope to provide a hybrid model . . . when science and data suggest it is safe to do so.”</p> <p>SFUSD’s Teacher Credential Program incorporates digital instruction to help new educators teach from a distance. More than 70 participants recently completed seven weeks of coursework and are prepared to lead classroom instruction virtually when the 2020–2021 school year begins in August.</p>

Colorado

[Denver Median Household Income: \$68,377]⁴⁰

<p>Homeschool is considered non-public and is not regulated by the State of Colorado. Homeschools are not accredited. Parents who wish to begin homeschooling must provide written notification of the establishment of the homeschool program 14 days before the beginning of the program to a Colorado school district and re-submitted each year thereafter.</p>	
<p>Pandemic Pod Chatter (Social and Traditional Media)</p>	<p>Pandemic Pods – Denver has 260 members who are seeking to connect families and potential instructors through social networking. Some of the educators seeking positions include a “20-year veteran educator who has taught in Denver public schools and Chicago public schools.”⁴¹</p> <p>Embark Education is a micro-school that started in 2019–2020 that partners with two small businesses—Framework Cycles and Pinwheel Coffee—to provide instruction to students in the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. They purport to have a cap of 30 students and are expecting increased interest in the program in the 2020–2021 school year. The school claims that it will “view and use Common Core Math and English as well as Next Generation Science standards as guardrails.” A member of the support team from Great Works, Inc. is a Montessori adolescent director, and there is also a pedagogical advisor. There is no mention on the website(s) of the school being credentialed, certified, or otherwise accredited.</p>
<p>State Reopening Plan Notes</p>	<p>According to the Colorado reopening plan, local public health agencies may declare the phase for their county using the state framework. Reopening in-person instruction (entitled the Protect Our Neighbors phase) requires a request for certification to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment for approval. Face coverings over the nose and mouth will be required for all staff, including during in-person instruction. Face coverings over the nose and mouth will be encouraged for students up to 10 years of age and required for students 11 and older. The Protect Our Neighbors phase recommends strict cohorting, which may require staggered or alternative in-person schedules, block scheduling, or hybrid in-person and proctored remote learning.</p> <p>Colorado has a list of accredited online schools and programs that provide full-time online education programs and are authorized by a Colorado school district, BOCES, or the Charter School Institute (with authority from the State of Colorado).</p>
<p>Local Reopening Plan Notes</p>	<p>Denver will return to schools for the start of the fall semester on August 24, 2020, with remote learning for all K–12 students. They will consider phasing in</p>

	<p>a return to in-person learning starting September 8, 2020. There is an educator-led return to school workgroup, and the district conducted a number of surveys, including several on distance learning. Based on the surveys and input from workgroup members, the workgroup proposed alternative scheduling options in case of changing health conditions. Henry Roman, teacher and DCTA representative, served on the workgroup. Of the 36 people on the workgroup, there was one school psychologist and one school nurse. There were more than 20 principals.</p>
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Texas

[Houston Median Household Income: \$51,203]⁴²

Pandemic Pod Chatter (Social and Traditional Media)	<p>Pandemic Pods – Houston seeks to match families, teachers, and caregivers to “discuss local issues” and “connect with others in the area for pod and micro-school formation.”</p> <p>The Texas Tribune reports that many parents have reservations about sending their children back to school buildings but do not feel they have other viable options.</p>
State Reopening Plan Notes	<p>Texas Education Agency’s Strong Start Program encourages districts to work closely with local health authorities in weighing reopening decisions. The resources were released after some delay and updates on July 27, 2020. The state plan includes a guidebook, sample plans, and models of how schools might be operated at various phases.</p>
Local Reopening Plan Notes	<p>Houston students will return to schools virtually on September 8, 2020. Digital instruction will continue until October 16, 2020. Parents can choose whether to enroll students in face-to-face or online instruction. They can also opt to enroll students in face-to-face or online instruction for the semester OR the entire year.</p> <p>When students return to school buildings, ratios will be capped to 10 students per classroom teacher.</p>

SPOTLIGHT: COLORADO

Existing Legislation Governing Homeschooling

Teaching, Learning, and Accountability Issues

- Homeschooled children do not have to participate in state and federally mandated assessments in math and English language arts.⁴³
- Homeschool programs must provide written notification of the establishment of such program to a Colorado school district. Such notification cannot be provided until the parent's child is 6 years of age and only needs to be provided when the child is between 7 and 16 years of age.⁴⁴
- Each child participating in a non-public home-based educational program shall be evaluated when such child reaches 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th, and 11th grades.
- Each child shall be given a nationally standardized achievement test to evaluate the child's academic progress, or a qualified person (licensed teacher, teacher employed in an independent/ parochial school, licensed psychologist, or person with a graduate degree in education) shall evaluate the child's academic progress. The test or evaluation results, whichever is appropriate, shall be submitted to the school district that received the notification to participate in a non-public home-based educational program. The purpose of such tests or evaluations shall be to evaluate the educational progress of each child. No scores for a child participating in a non-public home-based educational program shall be considered in measuring school performance or determining accreditation of the school district to which the homeschool reports.⁴⁵

Certification and Professionalism Issues

- Non-public home-based educational programs are subject only to "minimum state controls," according to Colorado law.⁴⁶ Instruction is to be provided "by the child's parent or an adult relative of the child designated by the parent" and is not under the supervision and control of a school district.
- Colorado law specifies that a homeschool educational program is neither intended to be nor qualifies as a private, nonprofit school. A parent or adult relative designated by a parent to provide instruction does not need to meet certification requirements under the Colorado Educator Licensing Act of 1991.

- ¹ National Education Association. (July 20, 2020). "Florida Educators File Lawsuit to Protect Health and Well-Being of Students, Educators and Communities." Retrieved from nea.org/home/76383.htm.
- ² National Education Association. "Resolution G-3. Licensure." NEA Handbook (2019): 305. The NEA Handbook is updated annually and is available at nea.org/handbook.
- ³ National Education Association. "Resolution B-52. Family Life Education." NEA Handbook (2019): 229. Retrieved from nea.org/handbook.
- ⁴ National Education Association. "Resolution B-14. Racial Diversity Within Student Populations." NEA Handbook (2019): 229. Also see Resolution B-76. Fair and Equal Access to Technology (240); C-1 Health Care for All Children (243); and, C-4. Nutrition (243).
- ⁵ National Education Association. "Resolution I-14: Human and Civil Rights of Children and Youth." NEA Handbook (2019): 314. Retrieved from nea.org/handbook.
- ⁶ National Center for Education Statistics. (December 2019). "Homeschooling in the United States: Results from the 2012 and 2016 Parent and Family Involvement Survey." U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020001.pdf. *NCES reports that providers of homeschool instruction are overwhelmingly the "mother" in families (78%), followed by instruction by local homeschooling group or co-op (31%), and then instruction by tutor or private teacher (23%).*
- ⁷ Coalition for Responsible Home Education. (May 19, 2020). "2016 Homeschool Athletics Survey." Retrieved from responsiblehomeschooling.org/2016-homeschool-athletics-survey/. *Finding 22% of 150 students surveyed said public school athletics were available to them and 39% of those students reported participating in athletic activities. 21% of respondents indicated they would have wanted to participate if their caregivers would allow them to do so. Nationwide, 60% of students in grades 8, 10, and 12 participate in school athletics.*
- ⁸ Coalition for Responsible Home Education. (November 7, 2016). "New Homeschool Data Raises Questions about STEM." Retrieved from responsiblehomeschooling.org/new-homeschool-data-raises-questions-about-stem-access/. *Discussing findings from NCES from "Homeschooling in the U.S. Survey" (cited below). This survey and others indicate that there may be a math gap as well, since "few parents are qualified to teach higher-level math, and tutors or community college classes can be successful."* Also see "The Home School Math Gap: The Data." (May 19, 2020). Retrieved from responsiblehomeschooling.org/the-homeschool-math-gap/. *Summarizing a 2000 study by Medlin and Blackmer found that "homeschool children were more intrinsically motivated in reading and less intrinsically motivated in math than children attending a conventional school."*
- ⁹ National Center for Education Statistics. (2019). "Homeschooling in the United States: Results from the 2012 and 2016 Parent and Family Involvement Survey." U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020001.pdf. *According to NCES findings, 86% of public school parents expect that their student's future education will include two or more years of college (14%), a bachelor's degree (29%), or graduate or professional school (43%). 75% of homeschool parents have the same expectations—14% expect their student will complete two or more years of college, 31% expect a bachelor's degree, and 30% expect graduate or professional school.*
- ¹⁰ Facebook.com. "Pandemic Pods." Retrieved from facebook.com/groups/pandemicpods/. Accessed July 28, 2020. *The group has swelled from approximately 3,000 members to almost 30,000 in the last 10 days.*
- ¹¹ Fabian-Weber, N. (June 14, 2020). "8 Back-to-School Child Care Options and What Safety Protocols Experts Suggest for Each." Retrieved from care.com/c/stories/16869/school-year-child-care-options-safety/. *Care.com is citing the guidelines set forth by the American Academy of Pediatrics and Centers for Disease Control guidance to encourage parents to consider alternatives to a full-time return to school buildings. The article encourages employing child care "options," such as afterschool programs, full-time and part-time nannies, nanny share arrangements, child care bubbles, pods, or cohorts, and more.*
- ¹² Grantham-Philips, W. (July 26, 2020). "As School Starts Online, Parents Needs to Study Up on 'Pandemic Pods' and What They Mean for Equity." USA Today. Retrieved from usatoday.com/story/news/education/2020/07/26/pandemic-pods-childcare-homeschool-school-inequality/5485353002/.
- ¹³ Banjo, S. (July 27, 2020). "'Pandemic Pods' Frenzy Reveals Failures of Education Tech." Bloomberg. Retrieved from bloomberg.com/news/newsletters/2020-07-27/-pandemic-pods-frenzy-reveals-failures-of-education-tech.
- ¹⁴ National Education Association. "Resolution B-82: Home Schooling." NEA Handbook (2019): 242. Retrieved from nea.org/handbook.

¹⁵ National Education Association. "Resolution A-24. Voucher Plans and Tuition Tax Credits." NEA Handbook (2019): 201. Retrieved from nea.org/handbook.

¹⁶ L'Heureux Lewis-McCoy, R. (July 23, 2020). "Pandemic Pods Will Make the Inequality in American Schools Even Worse." Barron's. Retrieved from barrons.com/articles/parents-are-forming-exclusive-school-pods-more-inequality-will-follow-51595511661.

¹⁷ Fernandez, L. (July 27, 2020). "Oakland Elementary School Principals Come Out Against 'Pandemic Pods.'" FOX KTVU. Retrieved from ktvu.com/news/oakland-elementary-school-principals-come-out-against-pandemic-pods.

¹⁸ Berman, J. (July 28, 2020). "From Nanny Services to 'Private Educators,' Wealthy Parents Are Paying Up to \$100 an Hour for 'Teaching Pods' During the Pandemic." MarketWatch. Retrieved from marketwatch.com/story/affluent-parents-are-setting-up-their-own-schools-as-remote-learning-continues-its-the-failure-of-our-institutions-to-adequately-provide-for-our-students-11595450980.

¹⁹ Gould, E., and Wilson, V. (June 1, 2020). "Black Workers Face Two of the Most Lethal Preexisting Conditions for Coronavirus—Racism and Economic Inequality." Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved from epi.org/publication/black-workers-covid/. *Workers of color have fewer options for protecting their health and economic well-being than their white counterparts. Black workers make up a disproportionately high percentage of workers designated as "essential" frontline workers, and they are often paid less than workers in industries that were able to pivot to work from home arrangements. Also, Black and Hispanic unemployment rates have been higher than white unemployment rates since April 2020. Taken together, these facts indicate that families of color are less likely to have the funds and resources available to participate in pandemic pods and micro-schools.*

²⁰ Banjo, S. (July 27, 2020). "'Pandemic Pods' Frenzy Reveals Failures of Education Tech." Bloomberg. Retrieved from bloomberg.com/news/newsletters/2020-07-27/-pandemic-pods-frenzy-reveals-failures-of-education-tech. Also see Research and Markets. (July 2020). "Private Tutoring—Global Market Trajectory & Analysis." Retrieved from researchandmarkets.com/research/279kzn/global_private?w=5. *Research and Markets projects that the global market for private tutoring will reach \$279.3 billion by 2027. Many private tutoring companies previously focused on services for individual students are pivoting to offer in-home supplemental or remote instruction and pandemic pod instruction.*

²¹ National Education Association. "Resolution A-26. For-Profit Schools." NEA Handbook (2019): 202. Retrieved from nea.org/handbook.

²² *There are several documented problems with voucher programs: They provide no gains in student achievement, they undermine accountability for public funds; they do not reduce public education costs; and they do not give parents real educational choice.* See Public Funds Public Schools. Research. Retrieved from pfps.org/research/.

²³ Ford, C., Johnson, S., and Partelow, L. (July 12, 2017). "The Racist Origins of Private School Vouchers." Center for American Progress. Retrieved from americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2017/07/12/435629/racist-origins-private-school-vouchers/.

²⁴ National Education Association. "Resolution A-24. Voucher Plans and Tuition Tax Credits." NEA Handbook (2019): 201. Retrieved from nea.org/handbook.

²⁵ Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. (2020). Pub. L. No. 116-136 § 18002. Retrieved from congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/748/text.

²⁶ Adcox, S., and Mitchell, A.B. (July 31, 2020). "McMaster to Spend \$32M of Federal COVID-19 Aid on Private School Vouchers." The Post and Courier. Retrieved from postandcourier.com/health/covid19/mcmaster-to-spend-32m-of-federal-covid-19-aid-on-private-school-vouchers/article_ab04b1e4-ca8f-11ea-8a8e-a3712f363d9f.html.

²⁷ Martinez-Keel, N. (July 19, 2020). "Stitt Pledges \$30 Million to Private Schools, Digital Learning." The Oklahoman. Retrieved from oklahoman.com/article/5667059/stitt-pledges-30-million-to-private-schools-digital-learning.

²⁸ National Education Association. "Legislative Program for the 115th Congress, Second Session." NEA Handbook (2019): 333–375. Retrieved from nea.org/assets/docs/Legislative%20Program_NEA_HB_2019.pdf.

²⁹ U.S. Department of Education. (April 27, 2020). "Secretary DeVos Launches New Grant Competition to Spark Student-Centered, Agile Learning Opportunities to Support Recovery from National Emergency." Retrieved from ed.gov/news/press-releases/secretary-devos-launches-new-grant-competition-spark-student-centered-agile-learning-opportunities-support-recovery-national-emergency.

³⁰ U.S. Department of Education. (July 29, 2020). Secretary DeVos Awards More than \$180 Million to States Rethinking K–12 Education to Better Meet Students’ Needs During Coronavirus Disruption. Retrieved from ed.gov/news/press-releases/secretary-devos-awards-more-180-million-states-rethinking-k-12-education-better-meet-students-needs-during-coronavirus-disruption. Grants were awarded to 11 state education agencies: Louisiana, Tennessee, Rhode Island, Texas, Iowa, Georgia, South Carolina, New York, North Carolina, South Dakota, and Maine. The abstract, application, and technical review forms can be accessed at oese.ed.gov/fy-2020-esf-rem-award-information/. Some of the applications, including South Carolina’s proposal to use the grant funds to provide “homeschool students with an array of platforms that include innovative methods in a robust digital education ecosystem.” See “South Carolina’s Return to Learn: Delivering Quality Instruction Virtually Anywhere.” (p. e21). Retrieved from oese.ed.gov/files/2020/07/S425B200037-South-Carolina-Department-of-Education.pdf.

³¹ These programs hide behind euphemisms, such as “Opportunity Scholarships,” “Tax Credit Scholarships,” “Education Savings Accounts,” and “Tuition Tax Credits,” but they all function the same way. Public funds intended for public schools are diverted to private schools.

³² Safely Back to School and Back to Work Act. (2020). S. 4322, 116th Cong. § 202. Retrieved from congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/4322/text.

³³ National Education Association. “Resolution A-1. Public Education.” NEA Handbook (2019): 191. Retrieved from nea.org/handbook.

³⁴ National Education Association. “Resolution A-2. Educational Opportunity for All.” NEA Handbook (2019): 191. Retrieved from nea.org/handbook.

³⁵ National Education Association. “Resolution A-23. Privatization and Subcontracting Programs.” NEA Handbook (2019): 201. Retrieved from nea.org/handbook.

³⁶ Berman, J. (July 28, 2020). “From Nanny Services to ‘Private Educators,’ Wealthy Parents are Paying Up to \$100 an Hour for ‘Teaching Pods’ During the Pandemic.” MarketWatch. Retrieved from marketwatch.com/story/affluent-parents-are-setting-up-their-own-schools-as-remote-learning-continues-its-the-failure-of-our-institutions-to-adequately-provide-for-our-students-11595450980. And Zweig, D. (July 30, 2020). “\$25,000 Pod Schools: How Well-to-Do Children Will Weather the Pandemic.” The New York Times. Retrieved from nytimes.com/2020/07/30/nyregion/pod-schools-hastings-on-hudson.html. In response to surging demand and after Fairfax County Public Schools and Montgomery County Public Schools announced that they would begin the school year with remote instruction, Education Connections Tutoring created three different options for virtual and in-person instruction. In addition to her regular employees, she vetted over 20 “tutors” to keep up with staffing needs. Swing Education, a large company previously dedicated to vetting and staffing substitutes in New Jersey and Washington, DC, recently added “teachers for your home learning pod” to their list of available services. *Bubbles by Swing Education* promises to match family “learning bubble[s]” to “a qualified, experienced K–12 teacher to provide in-home education for a learning pod of 2–8 students. Swing claims to have over 8,500 educators available for this service.

³⁷ Office of Mayor London Breed. (July 23, 2020). “Mayor London Breed Announces Community Learning Hubs to Support Distance Learning and Extension of Emergency Child and Youth Care for COVID-19 Frontline Workers.” Retrieved from sfmayor.org/article/mayor-london-breed-announces-community-learning-hubs-support-distance-learning-and-extension. The Hubs will provide full-day, in-person programming and will support children and youth’s access to technology for distance learning and provide additional enrichment programming. It will also provide social and emotional support services, meals, and physical activities.

³⁸ Strauss, V. “The Huge Problem with Education ‘Pandemic Pods’ Suddenly Popping Up.” Washington Post. Retrieved from washingtonpost.com/education/2020/07/22/huge-problem-with-education-pandemic-pods-suddenly-popping-up/. There are more ways to promote equity in the event parents decline to send their students to reopened schools and lack the time or ability to provide instructional support to their children at home. A critical component of doing so must be to keep children enrolled in public schools, even if their learning is supplemented or facilitated by privately hired individuals. Such actions might include privately arranged subsidies to promote more equitable access to supplemental services, seeking to hire tutors or caregivers who are underrepresented in education, especially persons of color, and hiring educators who are professional, certified, school district employees. Also see Bastian, R. (July 19, 2020). “How Educational Inequality in America Could Be Impacted by the Homeschooling Pod Frenzy” Forbes. Retrieved from forbes.com/sites/rebekahbastian/2020/07/19/how-educational-inequality-in-america-could-be-impacted-by-the-homeschooling-pod-frenzy/#723d1ffa72cb.

³⁹ Deloitte. "Data USA: San Francisco." Retrieved from datausa.io/profile/geo/san-francisco-ca/. Accessed July 29, 2020. *San Francisco is the 67th largest school district in the United States.* Also see NCES's most recent report on this data: National Center for Education Statistics. (November 2010). "Characteristics of the 100 Largest Public Elementary and Secondary School Districts in the United States, 2008-2009." Retrieved from nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/100largest0809/index.asp.

⁴⁰ Deloitte. "Data USA: Denver." Retrieved from datausa.io/profile/geo/denver-co. Accessed July 29, 2020. *Denver County school district is the 33rd largest school district in the United States.* Also see NCES's most recent report on this data: National Center for Education Statistics. (November 2010). "Characteristics of the 100 Largest Public Elementary and Secondary School Districts in the United States, 2008-2009." Retrieved from nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/100largest0809/index.asp.

⁴¹ Alexandra Saba post to Pandemic Pods—Denver Facebook Group. Retrieved from facebook.com/groups/pods.denver. Accessed July 27, 2020. *Alexandra claims she is planning on continuing to teach and also serve as a Literacy Senior Team Lead for Denver Public Schools. She describes her pricing structure as follows: "I'm asking \$30 an hour for instruction, per child, at the minimum of seven hours a week per child, paid weekly, if curriculum design is integral to the cohort (this includes highly differentiated QUALITY instructional design, which takes time). If we are using more of a symposium and tutorial structure, the fee will be \$20 per hour, per scholar, with a minimum of five hours a week per child and paid weekly."*

⁴² Deloitte. "Data USA: Houston." Retrieved from datausa.io/profile/geo/houston-tx. Accessed July 29, 2020. *Houston Independent School District is the 7th largest school district in the United States.* Also see NCES's most recent report on this data: National Center for Education Statistics. (November 2010). "Characteristics of the 100 Largest Public Elementary and Secondary School Districts in the United States, 2008-2009." Retrieved from nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/100largest0809/index.asp.

⁴³ Colorado Department of Education. "Title 22, Colorado Revised Statutes: Education Article 22: School Attendance Law of 1963, § 104.5, as amended." Retrieved from cde.state.co.us/choice/homeschool_law. Accessed July 29, 2020. *Outlining Colorado's home-based education law.*

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.