

The Washington Times

Coronavirus upends one-size-fits-all public schools

Deborah Simmons

July 23rd, 2020

For decades, the playbook for K-12 public education has been titled “One Size Fits All,” with academics and elected politicians on the East and West coasts and in the blue states in the Midwest making the calls to uphold the status quo.

My, my how things are changing.

Consider the COVID-19 pandemic as the game-changer.

Every school year, teacher unions, colleges and universities, politicians and their wannabe brethren, and poor-people advocates begged for increases in school funding. Teachers in some school districts would even strike, proving that their pocketbooks were more important than textbooks.

Except now, after a four-month closure of school facilities and just as it’s time to announce plans for the 2020-21 school year, there’s a four-way fight over how.

Everyone agrees that the same guidelines we’ve been following since spring — face masks, social distancing, disinfecting and staying home if sick — must be followed. The legitimate science and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have been the leading voices, and for the most part, we’ve followed their lead (knuckleheads, protesters and partygoers excluded, of course).

The four-way how-to fight is essentially over school facilities, school funding, in-school instruction and off-campus learning.

1) The issue of school facilities is always on the table, and it was most profound following another significant game changer — the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954. Ever since, major cities, including D.C., have been trying to level the playing field. If a school is modernized or rebuilt in a mostly White neighborhood, a school must be modernized or rebuilt in a mostly Black neighborhood.

COVID-19 proved that neither the teaching staff and curriculum nor the city’s tech-driven economy was equipped for distance learning. The policy continues today — and neither the Trump administration nor its predecessors is to blame.

If City Hall can’t figure out how to follow CDC guidelines inside public schools, give families vouchers and let them decide what’s best for kids.

2) School funding is a misnomer because politicians do not fund teaching and learning; they fund education bureaucracies — federal, state, county and local.

Consider this nitty-gritty from a Cato Institute web post: “On average, the U.S. spends \$15,424 per student per year of K-12 schooling. That money could go a long way with helping low-income families access home education, and it would be more than enough to cover tuition at the average private school. According to Private School Review, the average tuition of U.S. private schools is currently \$11,012, or about 29 percent less than the amount spent in government schools per child.”

And you thought members of the Democratic Party were thought-provoking. Ha!

3) and 4) Now let’s visit in-school and off-campus instruction. In D.C., school buildings are being used as cooling centers to comfort the homeless, the waywards and God only knows who else. But school children aren’t allowed.

The U.S. Constitution is practically silent on public schooling, and until President Jimmy Carter opened the door, the federal government was, too.

Public education rightly is a state’s right, and D.C. gets a pass because of Congress, the White House and the voters in the real 50 states.

So to wrap: Teachers and other school staff don’t want to go back to school.

Thank goodness school-choice advocates have another game-changer at the ready.

It’s called school saving accounts, and Congress is pondering amid the COVID-19 stimulus. Ha ha!