



Homeschooling Interest Climbs as Schools Weigh Closures Due to Coronavirus

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Education observers say a rise in interest in homeschooling as more schools close due to the coronavirus could be the start of a new way to think about educating children in the United States.

Education Week reported that, as of Wednesday afternoon, over 1,500 schools in the United States have closed or are scheduled to close for reasons related to the novel coronavirus – whether for actual exposures to the virus, extensive cleaning of the schools, or plans for extended closures.

Yet, as Breitbart News reported Monday, many school districts are ill-prepared to move to fully online learning models should the virus's spread warrant extended closures.

The director of global outreach for a national homeschooling association said his organization is seeing an uptick in curiosity on its social media, with parents asking more questions about homeschooling as they anticipate potential school closings.

With no certainty of the extent of the coronavirus's spread, Michael Donnelly, staff attorney at the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), told Breitbart News the situation still lends itself to a conversation about how children are educated.

"I think people are going to be confronted with a question, because education in a school may have to stop just because of the coronavirus," he said.

Donnelly observed that, regardless of the current crisis, homeschooling has been the mode of educating many children for decades.

"It's a great way for children to learn, to receive an education that's tailored to their individual learning needs, and that provides a very safe, flexible environment that's nurturing and supportive," he explained.

HSLDA has provided a “quick start” [guide](#) and an accompanying [video](#) with seven steps to help parents who may be faced with the prospect of a school closure and may consider this crisis situation a time to explore homeschooling as a regular education option for their children.

Donnelly explained further that parents who may be pressed into somewhat of a homeschooling situation now because of the coronavirus crisis may actually be surprised by its benefits:

We don't know what this pandemic is going to look like. But it may end up changing people's behavior, and as people have the opportunity to figure out education with their children, in a homeschooling context, some people, I think, are going to say, “You know this isn't so bad; in fact, this is kind of good and I think we're going to keep doing this.”

And I fully expect that there are going to be a lot of people who are going to point back to the coronavirus pandemic as the time when they started homeschooling and they started their homeschooling journey.

Considering this time of the coronavirus threat, Neal McCluskey, [director](#) of Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom, acknowledges, “It's pretty well established that lots of change happens in a crisis.”

McCluskey told Breitbart News that should a school close abruptly due to the changing situation of the virus, the kind of at-home learning that begins “may not be the sort of homeschooling where the parents are driving the curriculum,” as in traditional homeschooling.

“I think it's going to be a lot more of online public education – and maybe online education assembled on the fly,” he explained. “Because it looks like, for many school districts and other brick and mortar schools, their contingency plan is, ‘Well, we may have to close but we're going to try and deliver curriculum, some way, online.’”

“We could very well see that lots of people are suddenly having to do education online,” McCluskey continued, adding that the first days after a school closure “will be extremely difficult and disruptive for all sorts of people because it will be new.”

Like Donnelly, however, he sees the potential for a shift in perspective:

But, it will give us a chance to expand online delivery that already exists to test out new kinds of online delivery. And I wouldn't be surprised if, after lots of initial difficulties, you start to see people say, “You know what? There's actually a lot of benefits to receiving education in the home.”

Then you may see not just an expansion of online public schooling, which again is what most of this will be, but people seeking more homeschooling that is separated from their public school. And so, it could be the sort of disruption that introduces people to a way of receiving education that they hadn't really thought of before, they thought was just too weird. And it may make it more mainstream.

McCluskey's distinction between emergency online school learning, done at home, and parent-directed homeschooling is echoed by veteran Wisconsin homeschooler Tina Hollenbeck.

The owner [The Homeschool Resource Roadmap](#) and [The Christian Homeschool Oasis](#), Hollenbeck told Breitbart News she has noticed an increase in current homeschoolers recommending home education “as a viable way of avoiding uncertainty about whether or not

schools will close, and as a way for parents to have a greater chance of protecting their kids from getting coronavirus.”

“So, homeschoolers are, in a sense, ‘mobilizing’ to help others begin to homeschool if interest does increase,” she explained, adding, however, the concerns most homeschooling parents always carry with them:

We insist that the clear delineation between actual, independent homeschooling on the one hand and any iteration of public-school-at-home on the other be strictly maintained. Those who are considering homeschooling in response to this health concern – or for any other reason – need to be clear that real homeschooling is its own distinct legal entity under state law and that it does not involve getting “free” resources or “stipends” from the government. Families must know that if they sign up for any sort of “free,” government-sponsored program, it is not homeschooling; it is simply exchanging brick-and-mortar public school for virtual public school. Some parents will choose that route and that’s their right; they must not be led to believe, though, that using virtual public school is homeschooling. It is not. We must be very vigilant to insist that the legal distinctions are not blurred so that bureaucrats do not use this situation to try justifying added regulation on actual homeschoolers.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the number of U.S. homeschoolers more than doubled between 1999 and 2012, from 850,000, or 1.7 percent of K-12 students, to 1.8 million children, or 3.4 percent of school-aged children.

Writing at the Cato Institute in September, Kerry McDonald observed current demographics of homeschooling families in the United States:

Homeschoolers have become more urban, secular, and socioeconomically diverse, and more single parents and dual-working parents have taken to homeschooling. But perhaps the most significant recent shift in the homeschooling population is its growing racial and ethnic diversity that is now more reflective of American society. Between 2007 and 2012, the percentage of black homeschoolers doubled to 8 percent of all homeschoolers, and the percentage of Hispanic homeschoolers continued to mirror the overall K–12 distribution of Hispanic children, at around one-quarter of all students.

Addressing some practical concerns, Donnelly said parents who are thrust into a home learning situation due to a school closing may panic at first, until they realize their children can experience a flexible approach to education on a regular basis.

“They can put together a variety of different resources to be able to address their individual child’s learning needs,” he said, acknowledging that perhaps child care, for working parents, is an immediate concern:

With older kids, they may be able to just stay home on their own and supervise themselves. That’s something parents can decide for themselves ... and obviously people need to use common sense and good judgment. But, there are lots of learning platforms both online and offline that parents can put together to create a learning environment for their older children. And maybe they have older children who can look after the younger children, or they need to look at possibly involving some of their close family. Grandparents, uncles, aunts, and others may have the flexibility at least to provide adult

supervision, while the parents put together a learning program that may eventually morph and evolve over time.

Donnelly cautions parents about being careful not to cram their child's day from morning until 3:00, when school would ordinarily be dismissed:

Actually, what people need to do is back up. Take a look at the situation and say, maybe we should look at the quality of the learning – is the child learning what he's interested in, for example – and not worry so much whether he is busy all the time. There's lots of things that kids can do that are learning experiences. Maybe they'll read a lot more books than they could while attending school, and that will be a good thing.

I would encourage people to make the most of the opportunity to home educate, if they're confronted with one of these school closings, and not feel like they have to replicate school at home.

U.S. Parents Involved in Education (USPIE) advocates for parents, rather than the government, to be in control of their children's education.

In a statement sent to Breitbart News, the group that developed in response to the federally incentivized Common Core State Standards observed the coronavirus crisis is just the most recent issue that has led parents to evaluate how their children are educated and explore homeschooling:

Many parents have moved to, or are considering homeschooling due to concerns about Common Core's weak academic standards, increased bullying of children, mandated, developmentally-inappropriate content, including pornography in Comprehensive Sexuality Education programs, LGBTQ+ policies that are confusing and detrimental to mental and physical health, mandated vaccines, and, now, with schools closing for weeks due to risk of coronavirus, we witness another incentive for parents to seriously consider home schooling.

While USPIE affirms the benefits and rewards of home education, the group advises parents to assess their goals both for children and the family as a whole before starting out.

The parents' organization recommends joining a homeschool group or association for ideas about curriculum, extracurricular activities, museums, outdoor exploration, and sports.

"Parents will find there are more options than they could imagine, specifically tailored for homeschoolers," USPIE noted, but, consistent with its motto of education freedom, also cautioned parents to avoid groups that accept state or federal funding.

"These groups shift their focus away from freedom and real parent-child-focused advice to become marketing arms for government education," USPIE warns.

The group stresses that homeschooling affords parents an opportunity to "reignite a child's love of learning."

"We're excited to see the increasing trend of parents taking back control of educating their children," USPIE states. "No one loves children as much as their own parents and family. We will continue our efforts to reduce government intrusion and increase parental control."

In January 2018, Chris Weller wrote at Business Insider, “Homeschooling could be the smartest way to teach kids in the 21st century.”

It may be that the current crisis will inadvertently thrust parents into evaluating that statement for themselves.