



## Public Schools Might See an Exodus: Parents Debate Education Options

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As parents across the country sort through educational options for their children this fall many are debating leaving their public school.

For some families, the driving concern is COVID-19 safety, especially in school districts that are offering in-person classes.

A new [Gallup poll](#) from mid-July shows that just one-third of parents want full-time in-person school, compared with 56% in early June. Also, more than two-thirds of parents say they're somewhat or very worried about their children catching the coronavirus. That compares with less than half in June.

For other families, the focus is more on the quality of education and what will happen with remote instruction or classrooms with social distancing and masks.

Many districts will only offer online education this fall, including eleven of the 15 largest school systems in the country.

Education coach Candice Dugger founded the [Reimagine Education Conference](#) and advises parents who are navigating different options. This year, she says the interest in home-schooling is huge.

"We have seen an explosion in the home school community nationally to the point that many districts are finding their superintendents' offices are being flooded and their systems are shutting down by how many families are withdrawing from public education this fall," she told CBN News.

The Texas-based [Home School Legal Defense Fund](#) (HSLDA) reports that its membership has tripled.

"Parents have been not that pleased with distance learning," said spokeswoman Sandra Kim. "I think the combination of the pandemic plus distancing learning plus having a lot of screen time -- parents are looking for other educational options."

The Home School Association of California (HSC) is seeing the same increase in the number of parents seeking information.

HSC secretary and treasurer Jamie Heston says she's been bombarded with inquiries from parents seeking information on homeschooling or just better ways to manage their children's public school distance learning.

"A lot of them are looking for tutors, ideas for how to keep their kids busy," she said.

Working parents are especially struggling with the time crunch. "It's difficult. They have to work. They have to bring money in," she said.

Normally Heston offers HSC parent seminars in public libraries three times a year, averaging a dozen or so people. Now, she's holding Zoom sessions every two weeks with anywhere from 50 to 100 parents logging in.

Perhaps most startling, a report from the Texas Home School Coalition (THSC) that shows 15 times the usual number of public school families are withdrawing from their districts via the organization's website in order to home school.

THSC offers an online tool that generates a withdrawal letter that families can email to their local school to pull out and begin homeschooling.

In July, THSC processed 3,114 withdrawals and it expects more in August.

President Tim Lambert attributes the increase to worries about COVID-19 safety and a lack of clarity about what public schools will be able to offer this year.

"The health concerns raised by the global pandemic and the substantial uncertainty and inconvenience involved with new back-to-school requirements is simply more than many families feel comfortable accepting," he said.

Other parents are flocking to private schools, especially those that are offering in-person instruction.

Dr. Neal McCluskey, the director of the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom, says he's been keep track of private schools that go out of business in the COVID economy and so far, fewer have than he expected.

"That's another indication that a lot of parents may be moving kids to private schools because they're offering in-person education and public schools aren't," he said.

One of the hottest trends right now is learning pods, also known as micro-schools. A San Francisco-based Facebook group created about the concept three weeks ago now has 35,000 members.

McCluskey says the concept emerged in the last few years as families created educational groups for 20 - 30 kids. Now, it's been accelerated by COVID.

"Families, maybe 10 kids or so, are getting together and they're pooling their resources to bring a teacher on to teach those kids in person," said McCluskey. "They're sort of self-contained groups so that decreases the danger of COVID-19."

Perhaps the least affected group in this educational sea change are home school families who are continuing mostly as normal.

Dugger is one of these experienced parents who's now coming alongside parents who want to home school for the first time. Her advice? Learn your state's laws on homeschooling and work with your children to get organized.

"You're still going to need a schedule," she said. "You might not be worried about finding your shoes and your lunch boxes and your backpacks in the morning but you'll be switching those problems out for 'where's my computer? Where's my charger? I can't find my headphones.'"

One silver lining for parents whose children are now at home more--plenty of time to explore what their kids enjoy learning.

"When you can bring them home and put systems in place, let them dive deep into their passions. Let them find out now if there's a career or something they're excited about," said Dugger.