

With KaiPod, Parents Decide What Their Children Learn

One education entrepreneur is trying to put parents back in charge of their children's curriculum, while creating a collaborative, cost-effective space for learning.

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Curriculum battles in public schools across the US have reached a fever pitch in recent years, with parents and politicians fighting about what children should and should not be taught.

The Cato Institute's Neal McCluskey keeps a running list of these battles, explaining that "rather than build bridges, public schooling often forces people into wrenching, zero-sum conflict."

Private education models, along with school choice policies that enable parents to exit an assigned district school if they are dissatisfied, help to avoid these public schooling battles. Parents can choose the learning environment for their children that best fits their individual needs and preferences without fighting a political war on the school board floor.

From curriculum to educational philosophy, private education models offer the variety and personalization of learning options that one-size-fits-all, government-run schooling cannot. School choice policies that enable education dollars to follow students directly, rather than going to school districts, allow lower- and middle-income families access to this diversity of options that higher-income families have long enjoyed.

One education entrepreneur is trying to put parents back in charge of their children's curriculum, while creating a collaborative, cost-effective space for learning.

Amar Kumar is the founder of KaiPod Learning, a venture capital-backed education startup that brings together the best of online learning with crucial, in-person social experiences and adult mentorship. He joined me on this week's episode of the LiberatED Podcast.

Kumar, who worked in online product development at Pearson before starting KaiPod, participated in the selective Y Combinator startup accelerator program in Silicon Valley last year while launching his flagship KaiPod learning center just outside of Boston.

At KaiPod, parents choose whatever online curriculum they want for their child. The curriculum possibilities are endless, from faith-based options to the Ron Paul Curriculum, Sora Schools to the Socratic Experience, parents can choose a curriculum philosophy and approach that respects their values and honors their expectations. If parents want help, KaiPod can offer suggestions, including recommending tuition-free, public virtual schooling options available in some states.

Small, multi-age groups of students then meet together each week in a convenient, commercial location, part-time or full-time depending on a family's preferences, to work through their individualized curriculum while learning in a social setting with others. An adult educator facilitates the pod, offering guidance and support as well as hosting various interactive group enrichment activities.

“Real, high-quality, online learning paired with these groups of pods could be one of the best solutions out there,” Kumar told me during our podcast conversation.

KaiPod's Boston-area location costs \$220/week for a full-time, 5-day option or \$95/week for two days a week, plus the cost of whatever online curriculum the family chooses, making it one of the most affordable private education options available in the area.

Still, the cost is prohibitive for many families and Kumar is expanding into school choice-friendly states, such as Arizona, where an abundance of high-quality virtual charter schools, and the wide availability of education savings accounts, make the KaiPod model much more accessible to more families.

KaiPod Learning is a pioneering educational model that blends online learning with in-person education in a way that maximizes family autonomy and parental preferences. Parents decide what their children learn and monitor their progress, while their children learn together with peers and adult mentors.

FEE founder Leonard Read wrote that “education is a peaceful, creative, productive pursuit” in the absence of government force. “Remove the police force — government as boss — and education is restored to the free, competitive market,” he added.

It is in a fully free, competitive market of education that parents can peacefully choose from a variety and abundance of learning options that best reflect their needs and preferences. In such a world, curriculum battles and school board brawls would be a thing of the past.

Kerry McDonald is a Senior Education Fellow at FEE and host of the weekly LiberatED podcast. She is also the author of Unschooling: Raising Curious, Well-Educated Children Outside the Conventional Classroom (Chicago Review Press, 2019), an adjunct scholar at the Cato Institute, and a regular Forbes contributor. Kerry has a B.A. in economics from Bowdoin College and an M.Ed. in education policy from Harvard University. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts with her husband and four children. You can sign up for her weekly newsletter on parenting and education here.