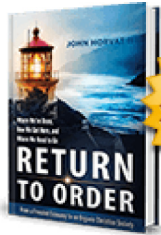




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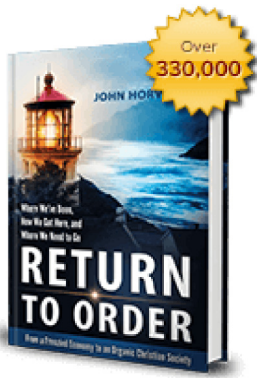


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The Bleak World of Post-Coronavirus Schools

By [Edwin Benson](#)

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The Bleak World of Post-Coronavirus Schools

The segment of society that was least prepared for the Coronavirus crisis was education.

The whole education model – public, parochial, and private – involves bringing together children from many families into a single room. Everything from circle rugs in preschools to the large university classes in lecture halls shares this common characteristic.



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Almost every school in the nation suspended classes around March 15. Administrators scrambled to patch together something to finish the year. Teachers, parents, and students struggled to make those plans work.

Now, they will have to figure out a plan for the next school year. Should there be a “second wave” of the coronavirus, it could prevent the school from starting. It could also interrupt the year in October, November, or whenever.

[Paul Reville](#), of the Harvard School of Education and former Massachusetts secretary of education, laid out the task ahead. “Next fall should mark the beginning of the end of the “one size fits all” approach to schooling—whether schooling is conducted in person or remotely. To get students back on track, educators will need to meet them where they are and give them what they need, customizing an education strategy for each child designed ... to determine the particular academic and social-emotional needs of each student.”

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However, some fundamental (and extremely difficult) problems will have to be solved first.

Physical Arrangement

Even before the Coronavirus, the size of most classrooms was substandard. The [University of Georgia's School of Design and Planning](#) concluded that the optimal size for a junior or senior high school classroom with twenty students is 1,344 square feet. Very few classrooms have that much space and contain far more than twenty students. [Insider](#) showed that the average high school class size was somewhere between 22 and 27 students per class.

Seating a class to accommodate 25 students six feet apart would require massive classrooms. In addition, cafeterias, libraries, restrooms, gymnasiums, and auditoriums would need to be enlarged. That additional space needs to be heated, cooled, lighted, and cleaned. Every chair, desk, counter, locker and commonly used furniture will need to be wiped daily to meet new health protocols.

Some schools hope to relieve the pressure by having half of the students come one day and the other half on the next. Some may try having half of the students come in the morning and the other half during the afternoon. Large classes could be taught in the auditoriums or other classes held outside.

Grading

Grades were initially designed to express each student's command of the material. They soon became Newport, Oregon seen as a punishment for those who had not done well. Educationists have been trying to get rid of them for decades, but public opinion has not allowed that to happen.

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The coronavirus has obliterated this assessment. Many schools decreed that any work will be automatically deemed satisfactory. Other systems have decided that such work – even if it is poorly done or not done – will not lower the grade that the student had before the suspension of classes. The [San Francisco schools](#) decided to give all students A's for all classes this year before they dropped the plan due to community reaction.

In a distance learning environment, helping students that have difficulty is complicated. A skilled teacher can look at students as they work and see which ones are having difficulty. Often, a timely intervention can get those students

on track.” Under distance learning, the teacher does not see the work until it has been completed. Showing students their errors and persuading them to fix them is difficult. It is much easier to “give them the benefit of the doubt” and post grades higher than those earned by the students.

Community Expectations

Society continues to pay for a broken education system because it provides many non-educational benefits to the community.

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One basic expectation is that the students are housed, supervised, and kept busy for six-to-eight hours a day, five days a week. Two-income households must have some place to keep their children safe and out of trouble. Installing a system in which students attend every other day will not suffice. Many unsupervised students are a menace to themselves and their communities.

Most communities also expect schools to provide a wide range of sports and extracurricular activities, which are now suspended. These activities may not be feasible if the current “social distancing” guidelines are extended.

Money

No school has unlimited financial resources. Constructing larger buildings would be expensive. If existing classrooms are used, class size will have to be cut so that schools will need more classrooms. That means hiring extra teachers. In most schools, teacher salaries are already the biggest single expense, especially when pensions and fringe benefits are counted.

Social distancing will also impact the cost of busing. According to [Education Week](#), “[Kathy] Granger [superintendent of the Mountain Empire Unified School District in southeastern San Diego County] already spends \$1.5 million a year—7 percent of her annual budget—to bus 3,200 students to eight schools. But to make sure kids can be spaced out enough on buses this fall—meaning no more than 20 per bus—Granger figures she needs to quadruple the district’s 14 bus routes a day to 56. Sticker price: \$4.5 million.”

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Distance education may be part of the long-term answer, but it also carries high costs. The [National Center for Education Statistics](#) estimates that 56,678,000 students will be enrolled in America’s K-12 schools this fall. Each student needs the digital infrastructure to participate in such learning. School systems will need to hire people to maintain and update devices. There will also be massive costs involved to ensure that students in rural areas can be connected to the system for several hours a day. [Michael Griffith](#), a senior school finance researcher and policy analyst for the Learning Policy Institute, estimates that “15 percent of children between 3 and 18 don’t have home access to the internet.”

The only source of money for public schools is taxation. The coronavirus shutdown has affected taxation at all levels. California alone expects to cut more than \$19 billion from its education spending.

The Outlook

These considerations would be monumental if the administrators had years to plan, implement, and test solutions. They do not have that time. Even though most schools have been suspended for the rest of the school year, the students will be back in just a few short months. They need a plan for the here and now.

The first step should be to evaluate the dangers involved. What makes the whole scenario perplexing is the fact that students at all levels are the least affected by the coronavirus. All these measures are mandated to protect a population segment that experiences almost no deaths from the virus.

Would it not be wiser to address the problem by considering the reality of the facts? Schools are reopening in other places without massive changes. Schools should take commonsense sanitary precautions that match the minimal risks involved for young people. There is no need to turn schools into sterile hospital wards.

Solving problems based on truth and facts is what education is supposed to be about.

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I'd say education was pretty bleak before the plandemic. Now that children are absent from the indoctrination centers, parents have a good opportunity to teach them useful things. Of course, most parents are not equipped (or think they're not) to take charge, but those who can, ought to.



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