

Return of the One Room Schoolhouse?

America should never have closed but even if you think it should have its K-something schools should not have followed. Policymakers chose a different path, however, and now some seem poised to repeat it in the Fall despite overwhelming evidence that children are safe from COVID-19 and are unlikely to spread it to their teachers or parents.

The New York City school district, in fact, [just announced](#) classes will only be held three days a week “in an effort to continue to curb the coronavirus outbreak.” As if!

It is difficult to see anything other than partisan politics at play in the decision. The goal seems to be to keep schools closed so that parents cannot return to work so the economy will stay weak, which will give Joe Biden a better chance of going down in history as a real President and not just the Obama administration’s backup. [Public teachers unions](#) are another major force as they naturally want their members to get paid as much as possible for as little work as possible.

So now we stand witness to the rather bizarre spectacle of Democrats pushing to keep PUBLIC schools shuttered and Republicans touting the importance of the institutions that prepare young people [for further Leftist indoctrination in college](#).

Worse, Democrats, the alleged party of the poor, are pushing a policy that will hurt the poor far more than those who can afford tutor-nannies, private schools, and other pricey stop gaps.

Look for more of these bizarro situations as the election nears.

I know what I would do if I still had children attending K-12 in a district that does not open for regular business this late summer/fall: I would join with ALL my neighbors for a real estate tax rebate on the grounds the taxes were paid in expectation of regular instruction.

I would then use the refunds to fund tutor-nannies and private school attendance. And if I couldn't get a refund, or it proved insufficient, I would join with my neighbors with K-12 children to establish "One Room Schoolhouses."

A "One Room Schoolhouse" is more a pedagogy, an approach to learning, than a physical description, though most this year would indeed meet in private homes out of necessity if nothing else. Historically many schools that employed the "One Room" method were, in fact, just a single room, often framed like a house, and which could double as the residence of the marm or teacher.

The crux of the One Room School, however, is not the physical meeting place, which could be under a tree in a park. It is that older students instruct younger ones. That pedagogy worked amazingly well for over a century, up until the 1960s [in some parts of this country](#). It was inexpensive but efficient, especially at teaching independent thinking.

If you have ever taught, trained, or tutored anyone, you already know that the most effective instruction occurs at the most personal level. Smaller classes are better than bigger ones and tutoring is more effective than lecturing to a room of people with vastly different levels of comprehension and different learning styles (visual, auditory, tactile, etc.)

The teachers, who could be un- or underemployed parents or college students taking a term or two off or a combination thereof, oversee the classroom and tutor the older students, who then teach the younger ones, often in more relatable ways than traditional instructors can muster. It is not child labor

exploitation because teaching promotes mastery of material for the older students.

I would also push for more of a student-centered [Montessori](#) or [project-based approach](#) to learning, where students learn by doing rather than through rote exercises but neither is a necessary part of the One Room approach. It does, however, foster creative, independent thinking, something that is sorely needed. Students in really good project- or problem-based learning environments wake up joyously thinking, "I get to go to school today!" rather than whining "Do I have to go to school today?"

I imagine that many apartment buildings in New York City have enough K-12 students to form multiple One Room Schools and surely most students in the more densely packed parts of the city will not even have to cross a street to get to one, much less take public transportation, which of course is the real risk of reopening schools in the Big Apple.

In less densely populated places, some travel by vehicle may be necessary but that is low risk if parents are doing the dropping off and picking up. In many small cities, students are accustomed to walking to school so they will be able to walk to more numerous and hence likely closer One Room Schools.

Fancy equipment is completely unnecessary, even for recreation, which can be done at parks or even the playgrounds of shuttered schools. A hiking trail can provide both exercise and lessons (or projects) in biology and ecology. Even lunch can provide hands-on skills, like in a formal Home Economics class, as well as lessons or explorations in nutrition. (Probably best to leave sex education to parents!)

With luck, One Room Schools will flourish, if only because parents need to work and know that they cannot homeschool, [which works extremely well for some families](#) but, as we

learned in during the COVID crisis, not for most. That does not mean, however, that bloated bureaucratic entities are best. Let's learn from history and use the failure of our political system to push education back to the local level. I know many college professors, myself included, would be thrilled just to have students whose natural love of learning hasn't been beaten out of them by 13 years of mass public education.

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YouTube-Iowa PBS, " Teaching in an Iowa One-room Schoolhouse | Iowa's One-room Schoolhouses "