

5 Surprising Facts About Microschooling

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One of the most popular and fastest-growing educational trends today is microschooling. Microschools are intentionally small, mixed-age, K-12 learning communities with personalized curriculum approaches that are sprouting rapidly across the U.S. They harken back to the one-room schoolhouses of yesteryear and were gaining traction even before the education disruption of 2020 unleashed greater exposure to this learning model. Over the past couple of years, interest in microschools has soared, with some estimates suggesting that as many as two million students are



now attending microschools full-time. From large cities to rural villages coast-to-coast, microschools are catching on with parents, teachers, and learners.

Here are five things to know about microschools:

1. Microschooling has been around for years.

The buzz around microschooling may be new, but these small learning spaces have been around for awhile. The [Acton Academy](#) microschool network was founded in 2010 in Austin, Texas by Laura and Jeff Sandefer and now includes approximately 280 microschools in over 30 states and 25 countries. The [Wildflower Montessori](#) microschool network, that activates teacher-entrepreneurs across the country, was launched in Massachusetts in 2014 and now has more than 60 microschools across the U.S.

Additionally, [Prenda](#) microschools emerged in Arizona in 2018 and have since reached over 10,000 students.

These established microschool networks have expanded since 2020, as demand has grown for smaller, more personalized learning experiences. Newer microschool networks have also emerged, such as Boston-based [KaiPod Learning](#) that launched last year and now has microschools in five states. Many entrepreneurial [educators](#) have decided to launch independent microschools without any national network affiliation, and their programs are also filling up fast.

2. Microschooling is a catch-all term.

The term microschooling encompasses a wide variety of different educational models, from homeschooling collaboratives that may meet a few days a week in a local community space, to learning pods in a private home, to full-time, small, low-cost private schools that prioritize individualized learning and don't plan to grow beyond a few dozen students. Some of these microschool founders intend to scale, but they expect to do so horizontally by opening additional microschools, rather than vertically by expanding enrollment in their existing spaces.

The diversity of today's microschooling models is one of its greatest strengths, and a primary reason it may avoid the fate of previous small school movements, such as the "free school" movement of the 1960s. Those earlier schools were largely homogeneous in their mission and style, and reflected a radical, counter-cultural ethos that sprouted from the societal discontent of the time. The microschools that have sprouted in recent years, and the new ones that are now appearing, span a wide variety of educational philosophies and approaches, from structured "classical" models to unstructured "unschooling" models, and everything in between. This assortment will help to fortify today's microschooling movement against shifting cultural whims, while enabling families the opportunity to find a microschool that is most aligned with their child's needs and their personal educational preferences.

3. Microschool founders are increasingly diverse.

Not only are today's microschools pedagogically diverse, reflecting a range of educational ideas and methods, their founders are also diverse. In their [Classrooms Anywhere](#) report, the VELA Education Fund, a philanthropic non-profit organization that provides microgrants to microschool founders and other education entrepreneurs who are building innovative, non-traditional learning models, found that more than half of their surveyed grantees were people of color. Similarly, the majority of microschools I recently visited in [South Florida](#), where there is a cluster of education entrepreneurship, are minority-owned, and many of these microschools have a majority-minority student population as well.

4. Microschools are relatively inexpensive.

Today's microschools are surprisingly affordable with tuition costs that are half, or even one-quarter, that of traditional private schools in a given area. Many microschools, such as those in Florida and Arizona, take advantage of statewide school choice policies that enable more families to attend a microschool tuition-free. Microschool networks such as Prenda have formed public-private partnerships in states such as Kansas and New Hampshire to provide tuition-free access to children in their communities.

Even in states without robust school choice policies, the lower price tag allows more families to access microschools, and most independent microschools also offer scholarships or tuition discounts to reduce costs even further.

5. Microschooling is here to stay.

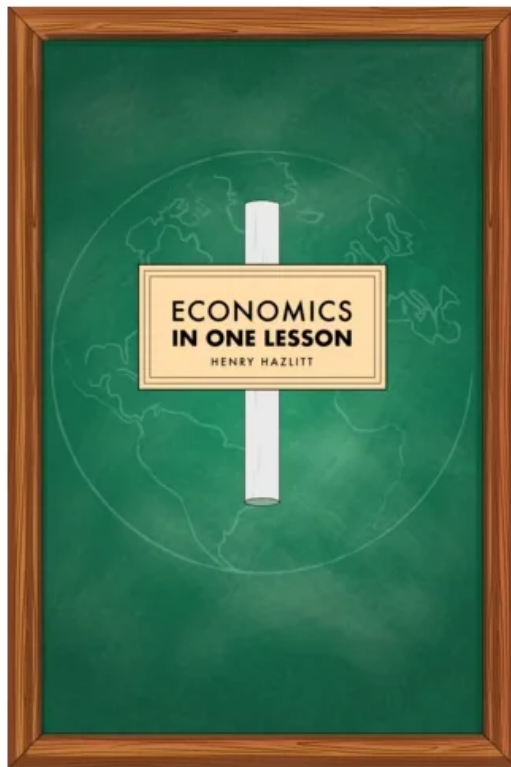
The education disruption caused by the pandemic response has dramatically transformed K-12 education, with many parents now aware and in search of different education options for their children. They appreciate a more individualized educational approach, and are increasingly willing to give up the accoutrements of larger schools, such as organized sports teams, for a smaller, more nurturing, more self-directed learning environment.

For Elizabeth McMeans, who launched a Prenda-affiliated, tuition-free microschool in Wichita, Kansas that includes her eight-year-old son and a small group of learners, the traditional education model is no longer appealing.

"I'm thinking that he may never have to go to a traditional school, and that's a wonderful thing to have options available," she told me recently. "We're understanding now that COVID did have an impact, but really there were a lot of things brewing under the ground before COVID hit us nationally that COVID has exposed as far as the education system. So I see many more parents talking about the things that they want for their children. What I want for my son is what Prenda offers. I want him to have a growth mindset. I want him to take responsibility for his education."

Many parents now feel the same way and are seeking, or building, microschools to meet the educational needs of their children. Microschooling may have started on the margins more than a decade ago, but it has now entered the mainstream as an increasingly sought-after educational option.

[This article first appeared in *The Epoch Times*.](#)



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