

The new education consumerism

By Peter Ruppert

After two school years impacted by COVID-19, we should step back and ask what we have learned and what the future of education will hold. Clearly, learning has suffered in large, online environments where full classrooms of students had to try to learn together virtually. Even where schools did an admirable job adjusting to the situation, students have fallen behind academically. Many will forever struggle to catch up. Also, the isolation and loneliness while learning from home has impacted millions of students socially and emotionally.

Everyone is hoping for a return to “normalcy” this fall, but will that be enough? Will traditional schools be equipped to help students catch up academically? Will they have the resources and skills to help students recover from increased social and emotional issues? Can we simply return to the way things used to be?

The short answer is “no.” School, as we knew it, has changed forever, and the future of education will now change even faster. One bright side of this pandemic is that it marks the beginning of a new era of education consumerism where informed parents demand more customization and specialization around the unique needs of their children.

Prediction 1: Parents will seek more personalized education

At first, parents will simply sigh and rejoice that the status quo has returned. In September, moms and dads will be relieved to have their children back in school every day, spending time with their friends, and learning from their teachers. However, that initial euphoria won't last. Many parents will begin to quickly realize that the time away from school was not nearly productive enough and that their children need more, much more. Try as they might, few schools will have the resources or the flexibility to adjust to these increased demands for support.

A silver lining of COVID-19 has been the energy shown by many parents to become much more knowledgeable and sophisticated consumers of education. They are more aware of how their children are really doing. They now know and understand how virtual learning works. They are more cognizant of the many tutoring options available.

This article originally appeared, in slightly different form, on EmergingEdTech.com and is reprinted with permission.



Post-pandemic, it may become more common for students to take online courses for credit with a “rock star” teacher in a virtual school.

Innovative parents already are finding services in the education marketplace to help their children catch up or get ahead. These early adopters will quickly be followed by other families who, in the fall, see their children struggling or performing below their potential.

Educational organizations providing high-quality, more personalized tutoring services will be in high demand. Other parents will seek out a growing number of full-time, micro or virtual school options that can provide smaller classes, more customized instruction and individual mentoring.

School, as we knew it, has changed forever, and the future of education will now change even faster.

As study after study has shown, the more personalized the education, the more learning a student achieves.

Prediction 2: New educational alternatives will arise

Educational consumerism will lead to a new era of education driven by an acceleration of more alternative public, private and charter school models built around the personalized needs of each student. While the traditional school models will continue, they will need to change and adapt to this new education consumerism.

More families will be seeking schools (and teachers) that best meet their

child's unique situation. Many students will attend multiple schools during their middle and high school years. A student may go to his/her local public or private school for part of the day, take an online course for credit with a rock star teacher in a virtual school that evening, and even attend another specialty school to take a unique course for part of a week.

For generations, parents have relied on their child's local public or private school to do all the educating. For many this has been successful, but, as we know, too many students have fallen through the cracks.

We have been waiting for more customization and specialization to come to education. Nearly every other industry has already been transformed by the changing demands of the consumer. Yesteryear's general stores, family diners, and local department stores essentially provided “all things to all people,” but were eventually replaced by more nimble competitors focused on the specific needs of a niche group of consumers. Yet, while these industries underwent massive change, our education system has remained largely intact for generations.

In traditional schools, we still group students by age, even when some students

are unchallenged and should be far ahead while others are way behind and struggle immensely. We still ask our teachers to do the impossible: meet the unique needs of every student in a large class with little extra help. That formula, designed in and for the industrial age, simply doesn't work in today's rapidly changing world.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hurt our society in innumerable ways, and it will take years to fully recover. But education will improve as parents demand that we give students more options and more ways to find their success. What traditional schools do not provide will be provided by the marketplace.

We can build an educational system in which all students leave high school with the same enthusiasm for their futures as when they entered school as kindergartners so many years earlier. Let's hope I'm right for the benefit of every student we, are charged to educate.B

Peter G. Ruppert (www.peteruppert.com) is the founder and CEO of Fusion Education Group, which provides one-to-one education for middle and high school students on more than 75 campuses including three in New York City, one on Long Island and one in Westchester County. The author of the book Limitless, Nine Steps To Launch Your One Extraordinary Life, Ruppert is also CEO of Fusion Global Academy, an international, 1:1 virtual school that launched in 2020.

NYSSBA's tri-annual membership survey coming soon

By Paul Heiser
SENIOR RESEARCH ANALYST

Attention NYSSBA members!
NYSSBA will soon be conducting a comprehensive survey of our members

to better understand their needs and viewpoints. An email will be sent to all school board members, superintendents and district clerks who have membership in NYSSBA asking them to participate in the online survey, which is scheduled to begin the week of August 9.

“We are extremely excited about this project,” said NYSSBA Executive Director Robert Schneider. “We survey our members every three years or so in order to gain insight into what motivates school district decision makers and how NYSSBA can help them be more effective leaders.”

Data collection and analysis will be anonymous, unbiased and meet strict quality standards. A summary of the results will be published in a subsequent issue of On Board.

Look for a survey link in your email inbox soon.