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## Wealthy parents set up "school capsules", teachers hunt for masks: coronavirus crisis divides school children into different realities in the US

### The majority of Americans oppose opening schools for fear of coronary infections.

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Scott Hottenstein and other teachers protested against the reopening of schools closed due to the corona epidemic in Tampa, Florida on July 16. Octavio Jones / AFP

Iida Tikka



Scott Hottenstein ja muut opettajat osoittivat mieltään koronaepidemian vuoksi suljettujen koulujen uudelleen avaamista vastaan Tampassa, Floridassa 16. heinäkuuta.

At the beginning of July, Ron McCarthy sought help from where he thought he was getting it: by e-mail from a Finnish principal. McCarthy is the principal of an elementary school in Fall Rivers, Massachusetts.

The emergency message to Finland describes the interest rate chaos sweeping around schools in the United States.

Two days earlier, President Donald Trump had threatened that schools would lose some of their funding if they did not open their doors regardless of the pandemic situation.

The presidential administration has since softened its line a bit, but the opening of schools has already become part of party politics. Democrats have also made an ad about the school issue (you're moving to another service): "Do you trust him to do what's best for our children? This isn't a test," it asks parents' thoughts on Trump.

The administration has proposed \$ 105 billion in support for the reopening of schools. A difficult twist is expected; both Republicans and Democrats do want to give schools more money, but on different terms. The school year may begin before an agreement is reached.

Parents, teachers and school districts are now developing their own solutions for organizing fall teaching. We asked three people from different states how they prepare for the school year.

In California, \$ 22,000 for a school capsule

Nearly a third of Americans don't want (you switch to another service) for schools to open at all.

One of them is Pauline Becker, who lives with her husband and first-class son in Menlo Park, California. Becker would like to set up his own "school capsule" for his son. They are in high demand, especially among wealthy parents.

A school capsule, in English a learning pod, is practically a group of a few families who together hire a teacher or tutor for their children. The basic idea is that families commit to socializing only with their own capsule families, thus reducing the risk of infection. Children get personalized tutoring instead of staring at the screen, and parents can focus on their own work during the day.

Becker had calculated that the teacher's annual salary would go to a total of \$ 125,000, and when taxes and other expenses had been divided into a group of six children, the price would have been about \$ 22,000 a year per child. Becker considers the price reasonable. According to him, a private school would cost about the same, and many families he knows would pay a couple of tons a month for childcare as well.

Families are looking for capsule partners and teachers in Facebook groups with tens of thousands of members. Becker and her husband have also spent hours in different groups figuring out what is the appropriate salary for a teacher, how the capsule should be registered as an educational institution, and what things families should decide before establishing a capsule.

The preliminary agreement created by Becker, for example, agrees that capsule families will not visit outside their own home without compelling reason.

“We originally planned to hire a full-time teacher and pull our children out of the local school. We had already found a charming Florida teacher who was ready to move to the other side of the country for us”, Becker says.

School capsules have sparked a lot of public debate about what kind of inequality a pandemic causes. In particular, the withdrawal of children from public schools is detrimental to everyone, as the number of children affects the overall funding of schools in many states.

Beckerkin began to consider equality and his own prerogatives as he considered setting up the group.

“There's a meme circling on Facebook that startled me. It says “all white families first say Black Lives Matter, and then the same white families take their children out of public schools and take support as they go,” Becker says.

“There are things I want to do from the bottom of my heart for the good of others, but at the end, my family is always my priority. When we designed the capsule, we just did what’s best right now and hoped I could somehow patch things up afterwards. And it's a shame to admit out loud.

At first, the Beckers considered sponsoring a capsule fee for a disadvantaged child, but eventually decided to support local organizations. Nor do they take their child out of the school district.

Becker doesn't think the capsules will eventually become as popular as it now appears from the forums. Finding suitable families and bureaucracy is ultimately too difficult.

-And we Americans love to sue each other. Imagine all that can happen even if an earthquake in which a child is seriously injured in another's home, Becker adds.

Becker's first attempt to establish a capsule failed when not enough families could be found. A Florida teacher accepted an offer from a school capsule in the neighboring city of Palo Alto.

**Of all the states, Florida has the most new cases of coronavirus, and Miami has the most.**

The Miami-Dade school district has the fourth most students in the entire country. Thus, in addition to the pandemic, the city is also at the heart of the school twist. Florida Republican Governor Ron DeSantis is demanding that state schools start the school year normally, but the Miami-Dade school district has announced that the year will begin remotely. The Florida Education Association has sued the governor with the goal of preventing schools from opening by law.

Florida social worker Marcela Gomez-Bogomolni is a candidate in the school district election, which will be held in late August.

Gomez-Bogomolni is aware that Miami is currently one of the densest outbreaks in the world: there have been more than 4,000 infections per 100,000 inhabitants.

His own mother has also died during the pandemic; though not as a coronavirus patient, even though she was first placed in the coronavirus department.



Marcela Gomez

Marcela Gomez Bogomolni's own son will move to a student dormitory in the fall and start distance learning at the university.

- Everything can be made into politics, but here it is now about you and me: do we take responsibility and teach children to wear masks on their faces? Do we make sure they do their homework?

Staying stuck in schools hits those parents hardest who can't stay out of work to watch their children go to school. According to Gomez-Bogomolni, immigrants in particular are in terrible trouble, as parents are forced to work to cope and every school year for children is an important part of adjustment. They are also at the center of her election campaign, after all, Gomez-Bogomolni has moved to the country from elsewhere.

Massachusetts: Plans without a budget

Then, at the beginning of July, principal Ron McCarthy received a lot of instructions for opening schools, also from other parts of Finland. In addition, the Fall River school district has asked every family what they would like.

When the school year begins, it begins with a hybrid model so that only a fraction of the children are in school at a time, and come to school on parental rides instead of buses. School classes are halved so that there are only 15 students per class at a time. Breakfast and lunch are served on your own desk. So many of McCarthy's school children live below the poverty line that meals are free for everyone.



Miku Huttunen / General

This fall, all students will also be given their own laptops to ensure everyone gets to participate in the classroom. About a fifth of Fall River residents live below the poverty line, and a third lack the internet (you move to another service).

The laptops have been funded by a grant from a broadband company.

In the United States, school funding usually comes from a slice from the state, state funding, and a portion collected through local property taxes, which depends on the wealth of the surrounding area. In most parts of the country, state school funding was cut as a result of the 2008 recession, and normal readings have not returned to normal.

Pandemic arrangements such as the purchase of cleaning supplies and masks require additional funding. They are acquired as money is received.

The school district budget has not been locked in, but budget cuts have already begun. The McCarthy School is giving up extended teaching time specifically designed to keep those most in need with them.

The school district is seeking corona support from the state, which has earmarked \$ 13.5 billion in the spring CARES support package to be distributed to educational institutions.

Further funding is open and the parties are negotiating. Democrats would give primary schools 175 billion, and limit support for private schools. Republicans would support primary schools with \$ 70 billion, two-thirds of which would be reserved only for schools with contact teaching.

School funding is part of a broader support package that Congress and the Senate need to reach an agreement quickly. The Senate will remain vacant after this week, and the session of Congress should, in theory, have already begun (you will move to another service). The negotiations are expected to be the most difficult of the interest rate year to date.