

THE NEW NORMAL!

Parents Deserve Real Options For Their Children

By Letrisha Weber, Chair, Public School Options - Indiana Chapter

The issue of "school choice" has always been a controversial one. But now, with the uncertainty of the pandemic and the "new normal" in all facets of our daily lives, it's never been clearer that **students and their parents deserve real options.**

Today, **online learning is seen as a viable option by parents** looking for a safe alternative for their families. While online learning is new to most, many children like mine have been attending established virtual schools with professional, highly trained educators for years and feel it is the right choice for us in the best of times.

Regardless of the preventative measures a school district puts in place, **any number of parents will simply feel uncomfortable sending their children back to a traditional classroom** this year. Many schools don't have the resources or the protocols to ensure safety for all their students and staff in a classroom setting. At the same time, many districts currently can't provide the technology resources, don't have enough teachers trained to teach online, or lack a good system to deal with items like individualized learning plans.

A recent nationwide survey by the National Coalition for Public School Options suggests that **up to 10 million students - or about one in five - may be displaced this fall** because their parents have deep concerns about the safety, quality and potential disruptions of their children's education amid the ongoing health crisis. Already, we're seeing school systems delay the start of their school year throughout Indiana.

Parents' concerns are valid for the beginning of this school year - and well into the future. We don't know if or when the pandemic will end. We don't know what other health or safety challenges may arise with in-classroom teaching. All we know is that **children deserve the opportunity to an uninterrupted education** that prepares them for a life that's successful and fulfilling.

Legislators and policymakers need to offer options both immediately and for the long term. Virtual schools should be empowered for the leadership role we need them to take in the coming school year and in the future. This is the new normal. **We encourage legislators to fully embrace the technology that exists, provide equality in access and funding for all options, and help teachers help students reach their full potential.**