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QuickPoint! – School Choice Can Help Solve K-12 Social Distancing Challenges

By Eric Fruits, Ph.D.

The COVID-19 pandemic has wrecked education budgets. And, it's looking more likely that school operations will not return to normal this fall. Social distancing guidelines will demand smaller class sizes, and there is simply not enough space in our brick-and-mortar schools.

Some distancing can be achieved by staggering instruction across days or weeks. However, these arrangements will create scheduling havoc for families trying to return to work, especially for families with multiple children spanning several grades or schools.

We can also achieve the required social distancing by encouraging alternatives to existing brick-and-mortar schools. For example, online public charter schools have a long history of successful education outcomes while achieving social distancing.

Many private schools had digital learning plans in place prior to the pandemic and were able to adjust virtually overnight to Governor Kate Brown's March 23 "stay home, save lives" order. In contrast, Portland Public Schools took nearly a month to get its plans in place.

Education savings accounts are a readily available option to foster school choice and downsize public school enrollment to achieve class sizes consistent with social distancing guidelines. It can also save the state hundreds of millions of dollars.

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