

AMERICAN MICROSCHOOLS: A SECTOR ANALYSIS

MAY 2026



By Don Soifer & Ashley Soifer



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report comprises the most thorough research published to date on America's microschooling sector, examining 1,000 microschools located in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Most are currently operating, with prelaunch microschools as well as those which have closed their doors are also included.

Microschools, able to provide new, popular schooling options in communities leveraging flexibilities in education requirements, often face obstacles from education and noneducation frameworks administered by government authorities, and dedicate nearly 100 hours each year on average completing compliance-related tasks, all presenting barriers to sector growth.

This 2026 edition of the annual American Microschools Sector Analysis series by the National Microschooling Center includes questions on a number of new topics, including ways microschools are impacted by different regulatory and policy stipulations, specifics of educational, business and operational aspects within the microschooling sector. Other questions revisit topics examined in previous studies, to illuminate trends over time and effects of growth and evolution on the ways microschools operate.

Findings include:

- One in five current microschools examined have been open for six years or longer, 45 percent have been open for three to five years, 17 percent for one to two years, and 16 percent for less than one year.
- A trend among highly diversified models of microschools, especially prelaunch microschool founders, identified growth in nonacademic learning as their most desired student outcome for the first time our research has tracked these.
- The research finds half of microschools indicated their families receive funding from state-provided school choice programs, while three in five rely primarily on tuition-based funding from families. Most microschools (66 percent) offer sliding scale tuition discounts.

Details follow.



NATIONAL MICROSCHOOLING CENTER

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INTRODUCTION

About Today's American Microschooling Sector

The highly diverse education models found across today's microschooling sector, the subject of this report, are indicative of a dynamism which often characterizes the ways microschools operate.

The sector's growth and evolution seem decentralized, distributed and unpredictable in comparison with other sectors of American elementary and secondary education. Governance and operating models of the learning environments included in this report vary widely. Most serve students as private school students, while those serving students considered homeschoolers follow closely in prevalence.

The most common published estimates of the size of the microschooling sector indicate it serves approximately 1.5 million students, while some estimates have been higher. Applying this report's median size of 20 students per nonpublic microschool, and 30 students per public microschool, leads to an estimate of approximately 75,000 microschools currently operating around the country.

Accurate microschool counts are difficult to obtain, in large part because of an absence of generally-accepted definitions. Especially in many states where registration of microschools is not required, and where they do not receive any taxpayer funding, many have limited public visibility for counting purposes.

Organizations like the National Microschooling Center are frequently able to identify new microschools through requests received for information or assistance or participation in Center programs. Meanwhile, tracking closings is more difficult.

This means that while the presence of newly-launched microschools can be demonstrated, the extent to which this represents sector growth is challenging to confirm, because little is known about microschools which close, as data in this report indicate they do in significant numbers.

"Because microschools are, by design, deinstitutionalized and, therefore, harder to regulate," observed RAND researchers Lauren Covelli, Jonathan Schweig and Sarah Ohls in a 2025 paper, "little consensus exists on what characteristics define the microschool model and differentiate it from other alternative school models, such as homeschooling, schools-within-schools, schools without walls, and unschooling."

Founders generally strive for higher levels of responsiveness to the families they serve, and to their educational needs, in the ways they design and operate their microschools. Each microschool must also operate within combinations of frameworks and regulation which reside at both state and local levels of government. A combination of these and other factors contribute to the highly diversified range of different structures and models seen throughout this sector.

National Microschooling Center

The National Microschooling Center is the country's preeminent nonprofit resource hub and movement-builder dedicated to the health and growth of the microschooling movement. Since 2022, with headquarters in Las Vegas, the Center has worked to support a thriving, diversified microschooling sector that lives up to its transformative potential. It offers a robust program of supports, trainings and professional learning opportunities for microschool leaders. Member microschools engage in movement-building and capacity-building activities, learn to navigate operating frameworks, sharing access to professional growth opportunities, dedicated workshops, and popular learning tools.

Methodology

The National Microschooling Center examined 1,000 currently-operating, prelaunch and closed microschools located in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. All responses were collected either through online survey questionnaires or interviews by the Center's research team. Responses were collected between October 23, 2025 and January 26, 2026.

Only microschools serving students whose grades in traditional schools would be K-12 are included in this report. When microschools serve younger or older students as well, research was focused on programs serving students in the target population.

What's New in This 2026 Report?

This report intends to provide updates and insights regarding trends across the microschooling sector, to produce a timely examination of the lifespans, educational and operational aspects of microschools, as well as to offer a first-time analysis into how regulatory and policy frameworks are impacting the sector and its work.

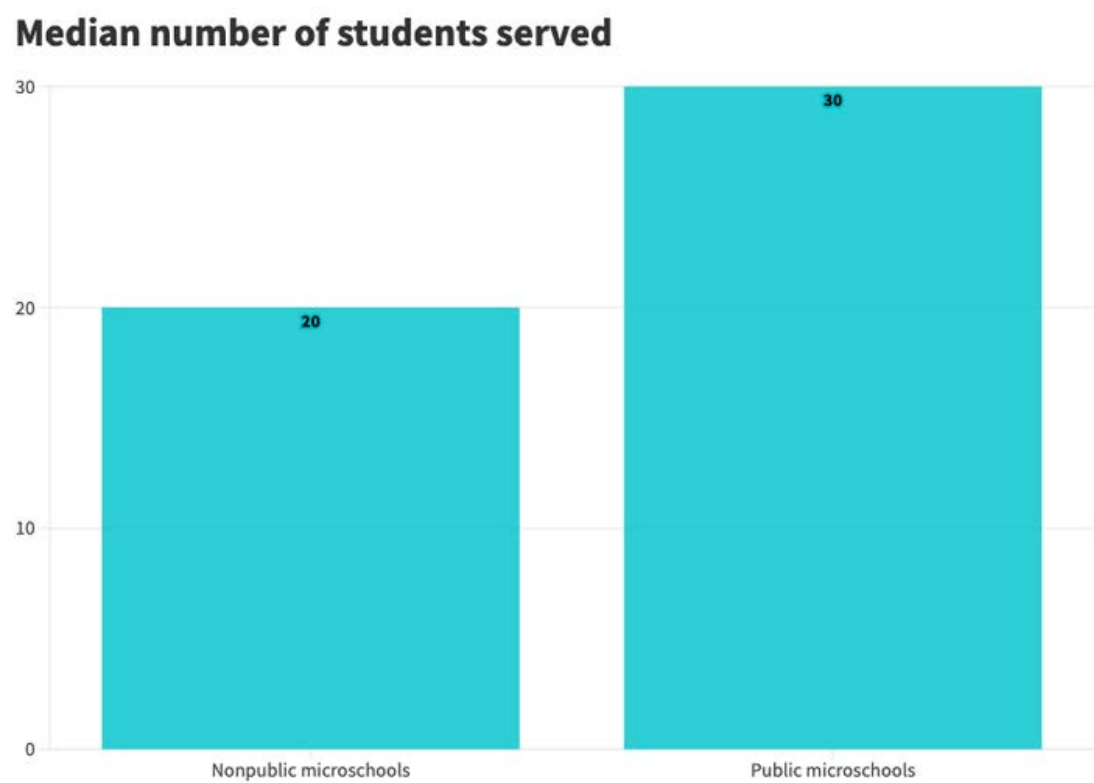
Some of the many new questions included in this analysis consider how microschools respond to government regulations and requirements, how microschools' present size relates to the size its leaders would consider ideal and what prevents them from reaching their ideal size, and what can be learned from microschools that closed?



PART I: MICROSCHOOL OPERATIONS

Microschool Size

The median number of students served in nonpublic microschools is 20. This number is higher for public and public charter school microschools, where the median number of students is 30.



"A microschool is a small learning environment that's innovative and experiential that meets students where they are at."
- Colorado Microschool Founder

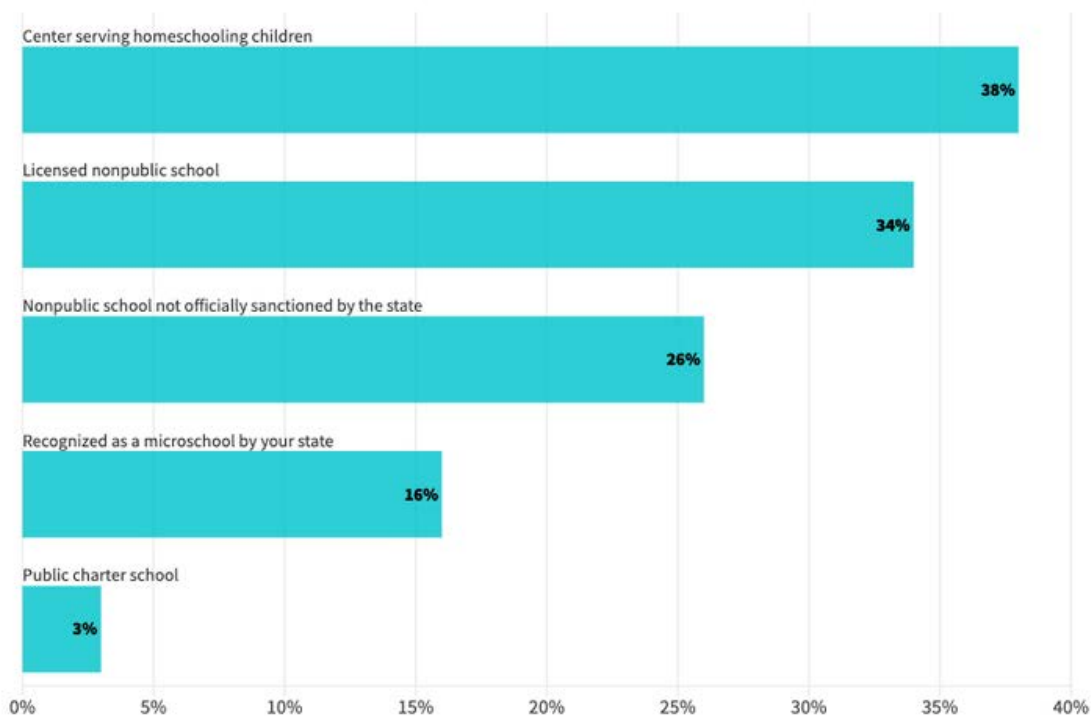


Operational Structure of Microschools

With education mostly governed at the state level across the country, microschools operate within 50 different frameworks. State frameworks, including requirements for homeschool families and private schools, factor most prominently in determining the operating landscape microschools operate within. Only a small handful of states, including West Virginia, Georgia and Utah, currently have statutory definitions for microschools, sometimes referenced as learning pods.

Nearly two in five microschools (38 percent) surveyed operate serving children whose families identify as homeschoolers under the laws and requirement of their state; 34 percent operate as nonpublic schools registered with and recognized by their state education agency, while another 26 percent indicate they operate as nonpublic schools not officially sanctioned by their state government.

Microschools currently operate as

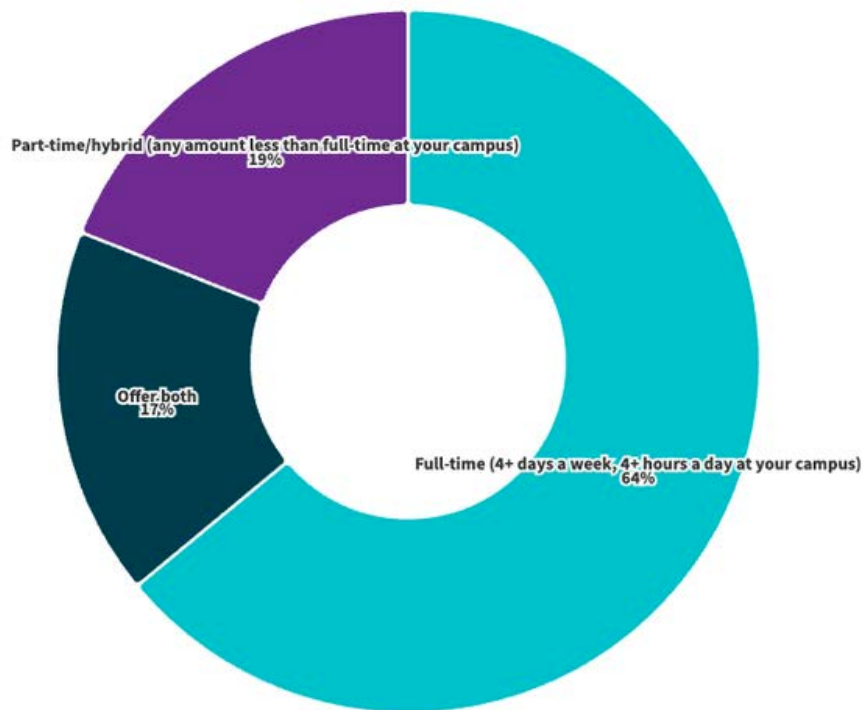


**"I absolutely think this is going to be the way of the future."
- Nevada Microschool Founder**

Schedules

Most microschools surveyed (64 percent) convene on full-time weekly scheduled, defined as meeting for four or more hours at least four days per week; 19 percent convene on part-time or hybrid schedules, while 17 percent offer both options to the families they serve.

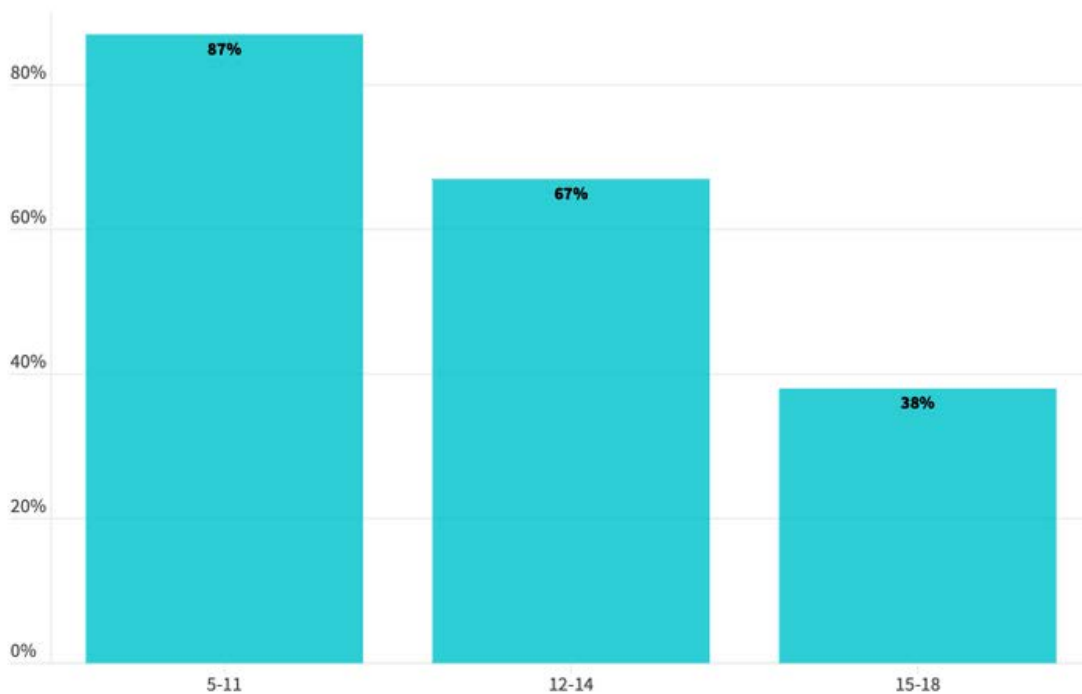
Microschools' weekly schedule?



Ages Microschools Serve

The microschooling movement has continued to trend young in ages of children served, although less so than in the past: 87 percent of microschools serve children age 5-11, 67 percent serve ages 12-14, and 38 percent serve students age 15-18. Note: this research only examined microschools serving children whose age would place them in grades K-12 in traditional school systems.

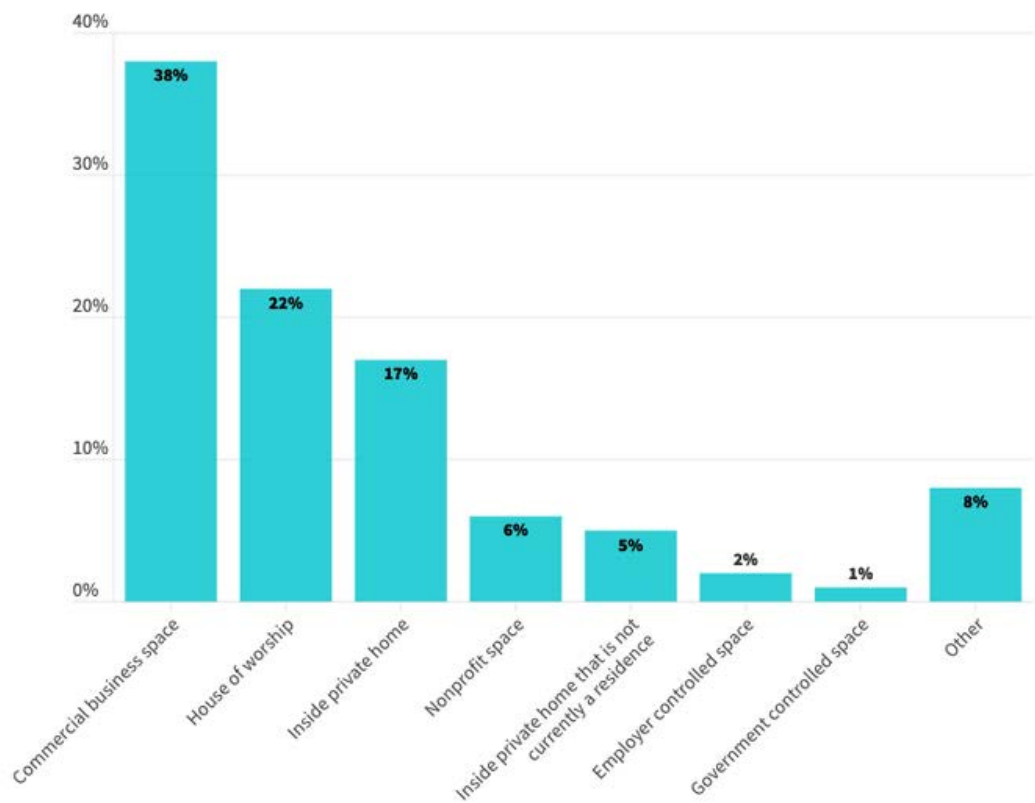
Current microschools serve ages



Facilities

Operating in commercial business space continued to be the most common facilities arrangement for microschools, the choice for 38 percent of microschools examined. Houses of worship serve as the home for 22 percent of microschools, while 17 percent operate inside private homes. Nonprofit-controlled space, inside private homes that are not currently residences, employer or government-controlled space round out the most common facilities locations.

Microschool facilities



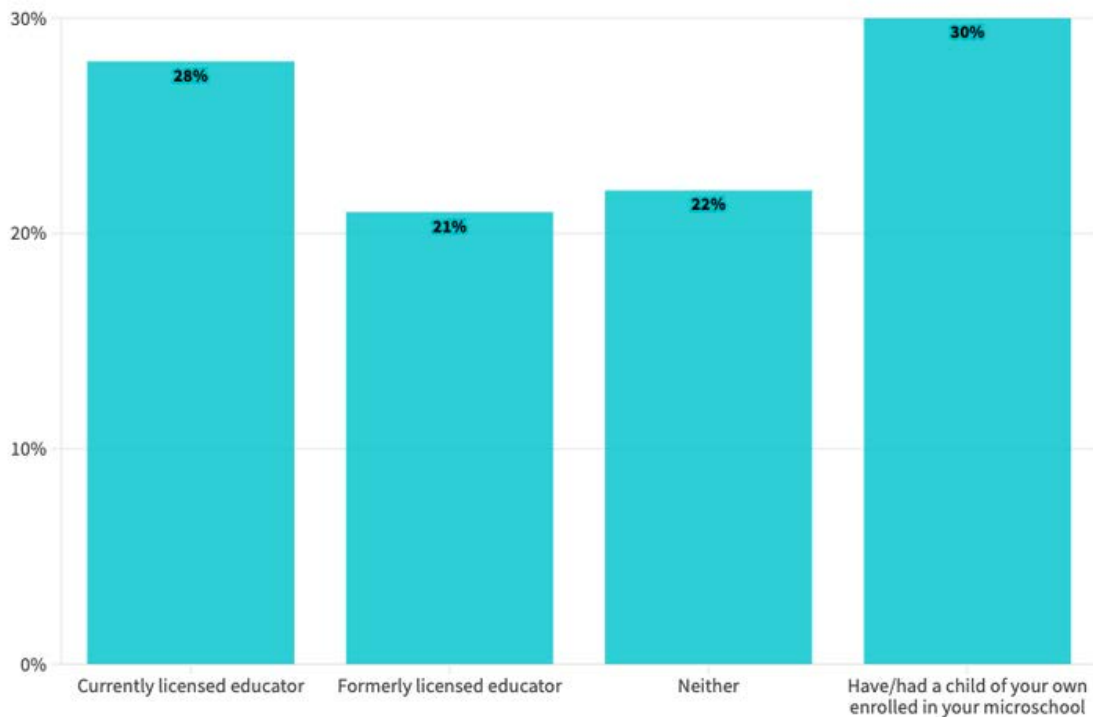
PART II: THE FOUNDERS

Microschool Founders' Backgrounds

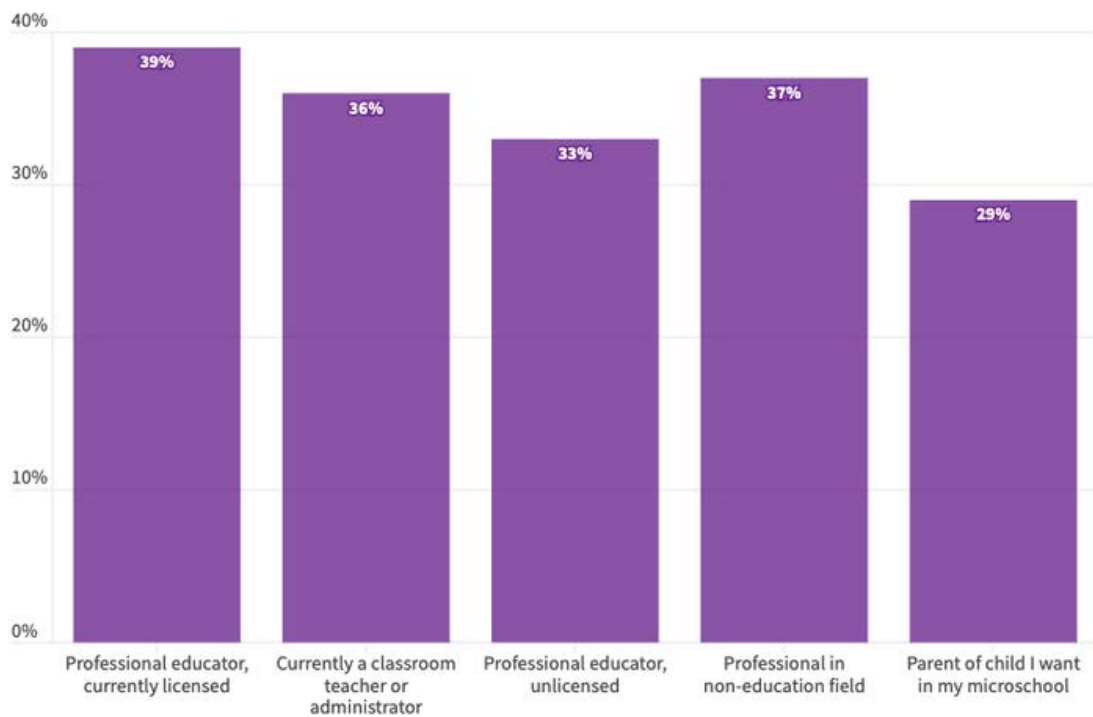
Current microschool founders indicated that 28 percent are currently licensed educators, 21 percent formerly licensed educators, 22 percent neither, and 30 percent have or had a child of their own enrolled in their microschool.

Among prelaunch microschool founders, 39 percent are currently licensed professional educators, while 36 percent were currently working as a classroom teacher or administrator. Professionals in non-education fields represent 37 percent, while one-third (33 percent) are professional educators who do not hold government-recognized licenses, such as early childhood or Montessori educators. More than one-fourth (29 percent) surveyed indicated that they are parents of a child they hope to serve in the microschool they are working to start.

Currently-operating founders' professional background



Prelaunch founders' background

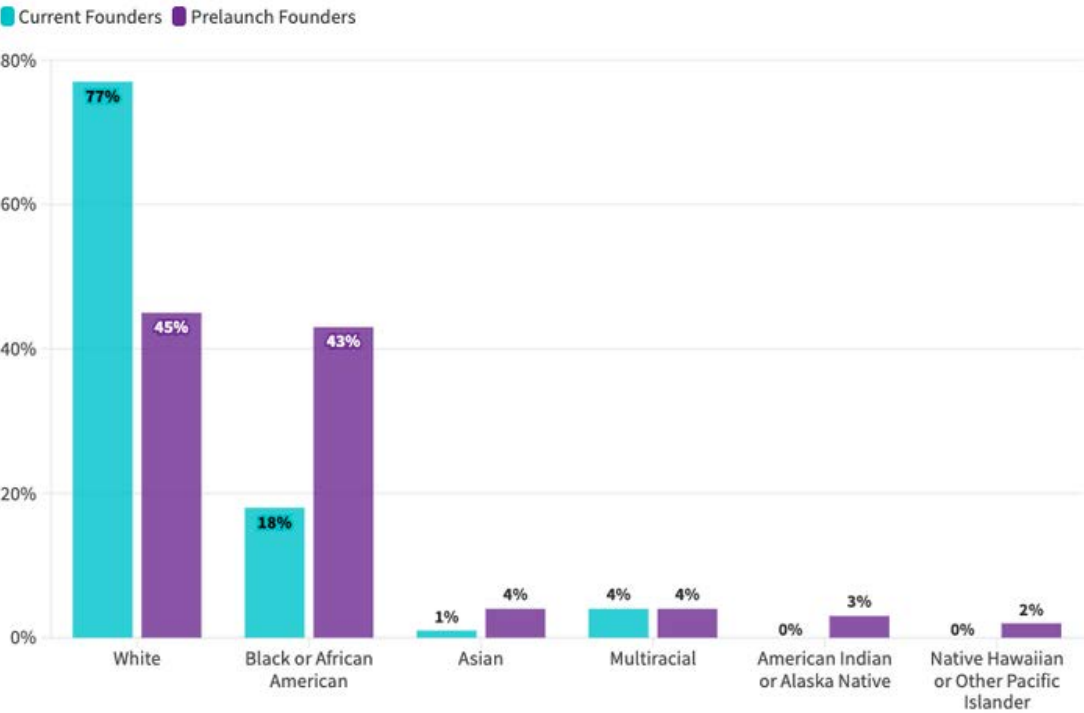


Race and Ethnicity

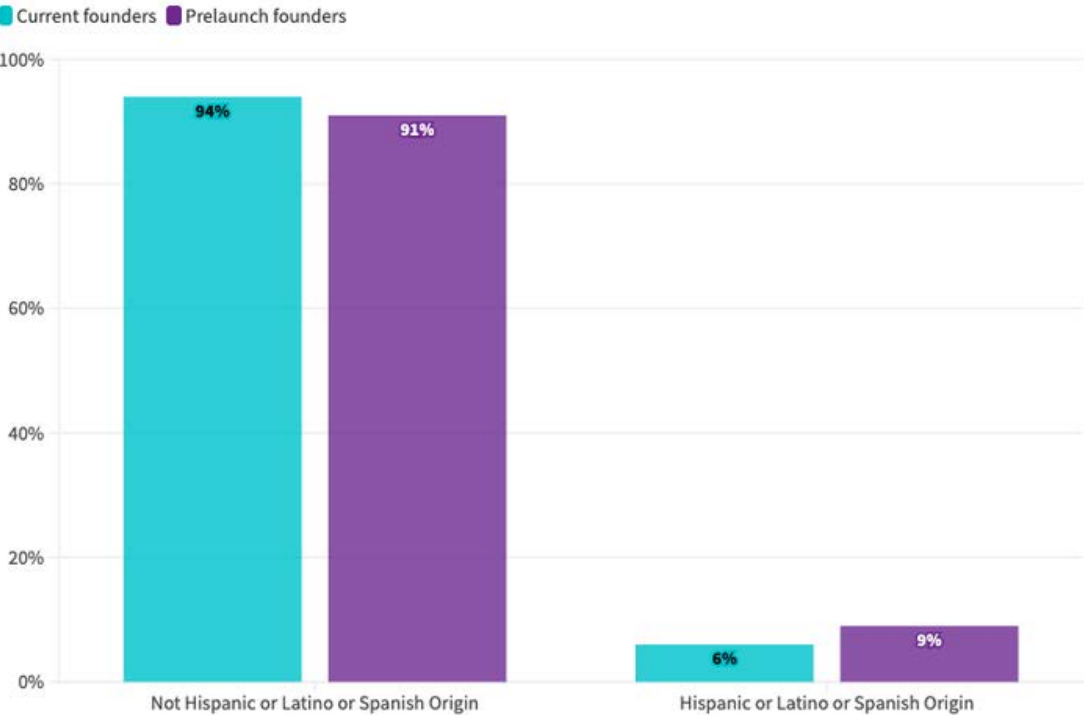
Current microschool founders report their race as 77 percent white, 18 percent Black or African-American, 4 percent multiracial, with 1 percent comprising all other categories. They report their ethnicity as 6 percent Hispanic or Latino or Spanish origin.

Prelaunch founders report their race as 45 percent white, 43 percent Black or African-American, 4 percent Asian, 4 percent multiracial, 3 percent American Indian or Alaska Native, and 2 percent Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. They report their ethnicity as 9 percent Hispanic or Latino or Spanish origin.

Microschool founders' race



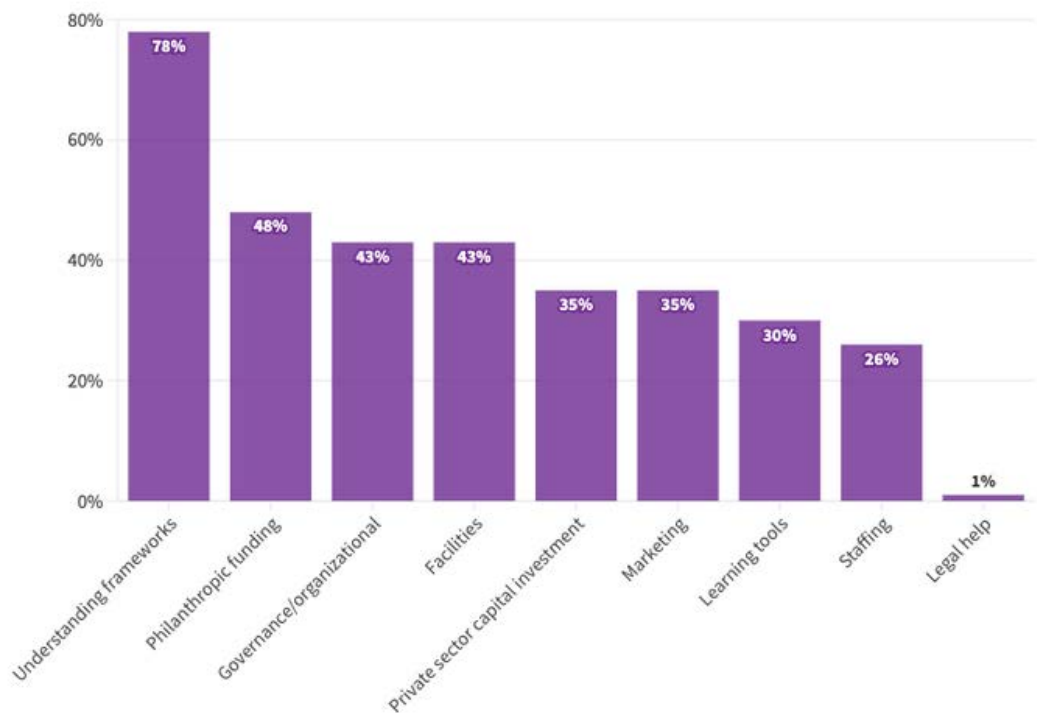
Microschool founders' ethnicity



Prelaunch Founders Seeking Help

Prelaunch founders told us they are seeking help with a range of important guidance, knowledge and information pertinent to launching their microschool. The most popular topics sought were understanding legal and operational frameworks in their state (78 percent), philanthropic funding (48 percent), governance and organizational guidance (43 percent), help and advice relating to their facilities (43 percent), private sector capital investment (35 percent), marketing (35 percent) and learning tools (30 percent).

Prelaunch founders are seeking help with



“Microschooling is a way to look at each student’s unique needs and meet those needs.”
- Indiana Microschool Founder

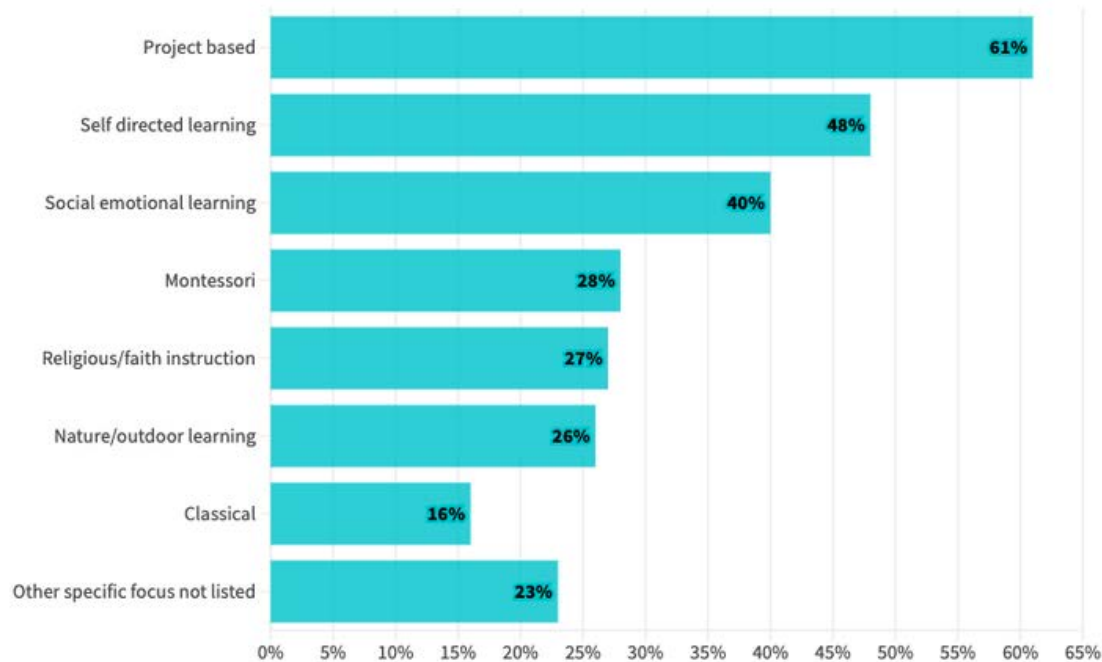
PART III: TEACHING AND LEARNING

Educational Approach, Currently Operating Microschools

Project-Based Learning (61 percent) remains the most popular approach currently operating microschools report incorporating into their educational models, followed by self directed learning (48 percent) and social emotional learning (40 percent).

More than one-fourth of microschools indicated that Montessori (28 percent), religious/faith instruction (27 percent), nature/outdoor learning (26 percent), or classical (16 percent) provided a significant part of their academic approach. Respondents were instructed to select all that apply.

Which of the following philosophies are a significant part of your educational approach (at least 25% of children's time)?

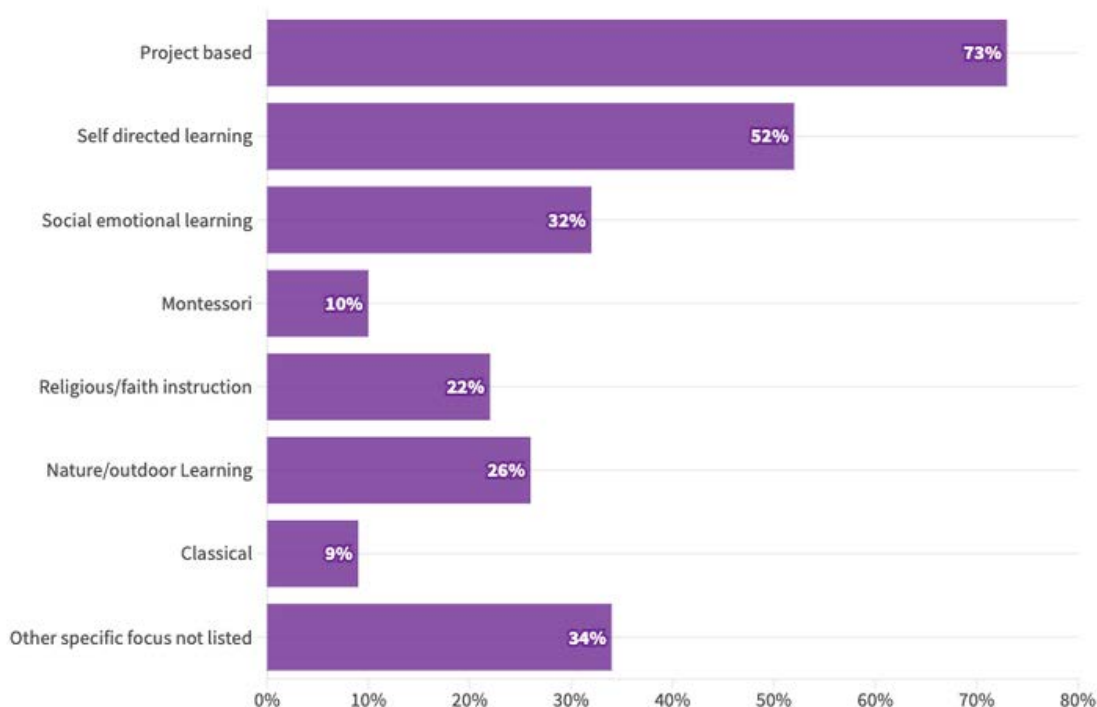


Educational Approach, Prelaunch

Among prelaunch microschools, 73 percent reported Project-Based Learning comprise a significant element of their educational models, followed by self directed learning (52 percent) and social emotional learning (32 percent).

Nature/outdoor learning is a component reported by 26 percent of prelaunch microschools, religious/faith instruction is a component in 22 percent, Montessori (10 percent), classical (9 percent), and other specific focuses not listed were noted in 34 percent of responses.

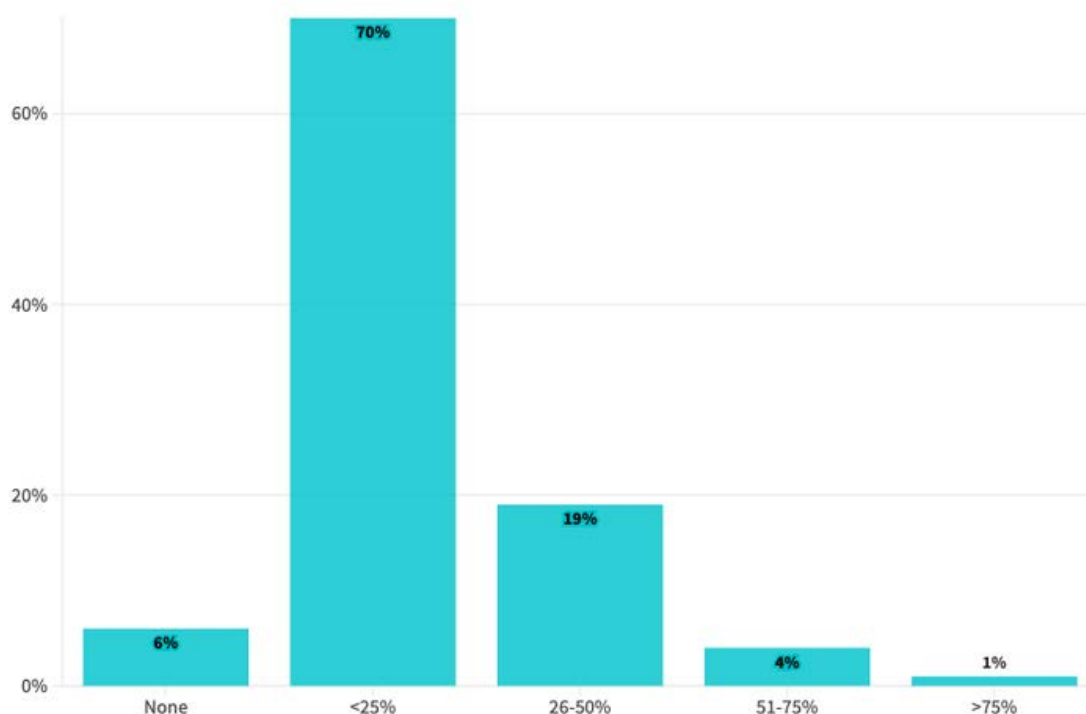
Prelaunch educational approaches include



Offsite Learning

Asked to describe the amount of learning that happens offsite at their microschool, such as at museums, outdoors, community projects or internships, 70 percent of leaders indicated that offsite learning occurs regularly at their microschools, but comprises less than 25 percent of students' time. One in five (19 percent) of microschool leaders indicated offsite learning occupies more than one-fourth and less than one-half of students' time.

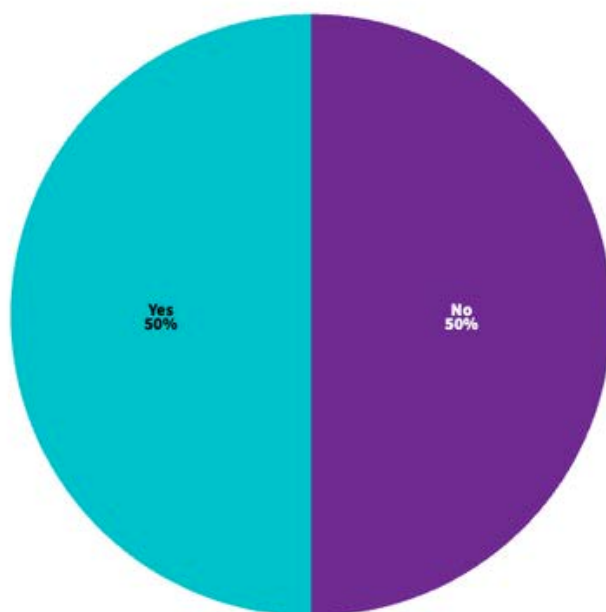
Time spent learning offsite



External Partners

Half of microschools, 50 percent, report that they partner with external organizations such as arts, mental health, universities and businesses for programming, resources, or services.

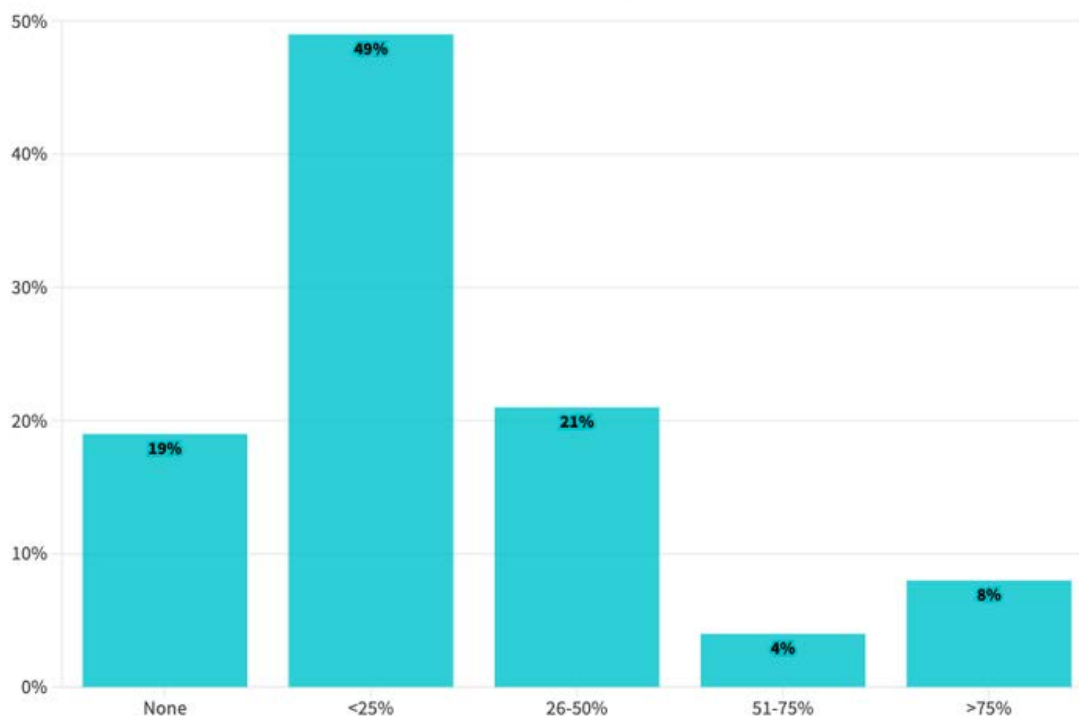
Do you partner with external organizations (arts, mental health, universities, businesses) for programming, resources, or services?



Digital Learning

Half of microschools surveyed (49 percent) indicated that learning occurs digitally, but digital learning comprises less than 25 percent of students' time. One in five microschools (19 percent) indicated that children do not learn digitally as part of their programming.

Percentage of teaching delivered digitally



PART IV: MEASURING IMPACT

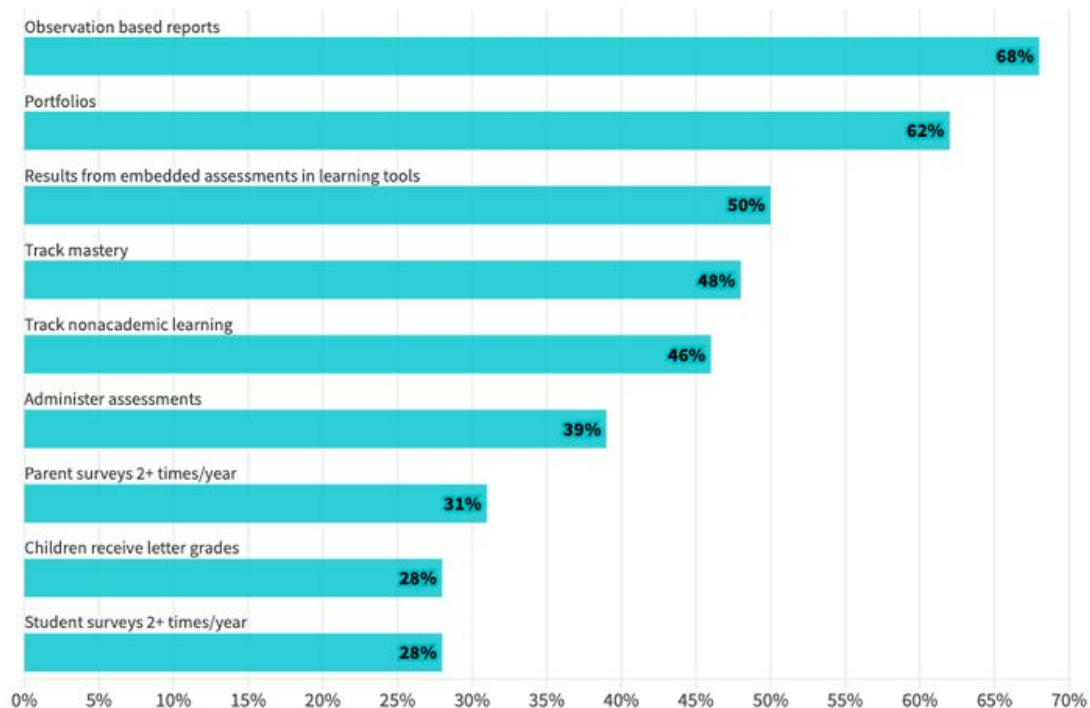
One resonant flexibility characterizing most of the microschooling movement comes from operating outside of their states' public school performance frameworks, or "accountability systems." This presents them with the important opportunity to track and demonstrate their impact in different ways, and many have explored doing this in ways which align with their distinctive education models.

The most common methods identified were observation-based reporting (68 percent), portfolios (62 percent), and results from assessments embedded in digital learning tools (50 percent). These were followed closely by microschools tracking mastery (48 percent) and tracking nonacademic learning (46 percent).

Since more students come to microschools from traditional, district-operated public schools than any other prior education setting, it is especially noteworthy that only 39 percent administer norm- or criterion-referenced standardized assessment regularly, and that just 28 percent assign students regular letter grades. Surveys administered at least twice a year to parents are utilized in 31 percent of microschools, and 28 percent at least twice each year to students.

Most microschools studied reported using more than one of these methods.

How do microschools track and demonstrate impact?



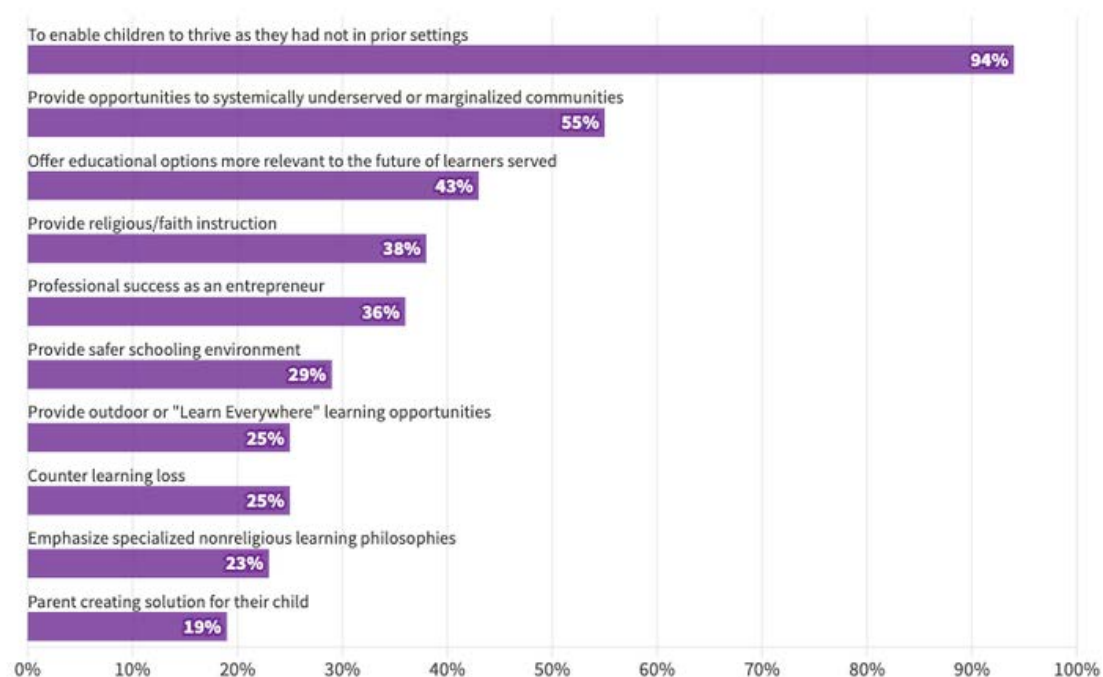
**"We focus on empowering students with strategies that teach them how to learn so they can make a difference in this world."
- Mississippi Microschool Founder**

Main Motivations for Creating Their Microschool

The vast majority of prelaunch microschool founders (94 percent) described “to enable children to thrive as they had not in prior educational settings” as among their main motivations for creating their microschool. Providing opportunities to children representing systemically underserved or marginalized communities was second, at 55 percent.

To offer students educational options more relevant to their future (43 percent), providing options offering religious or faith instruction (38 percent), and professional success as an entrepreneur (36 percent), were all cited by prelaunch founders. Providing a safer schooling environment was described as a prime motivation by 29 percent of prelaunch founders. Founders were able to identify more than one main motivation.

Prelaunch founders' main motivations for creating a microschool

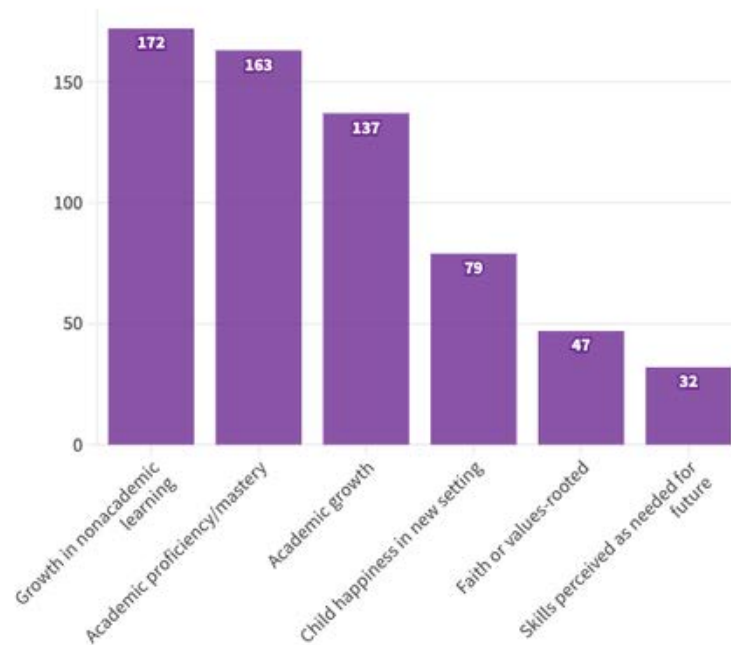


Most Desired Student Outcomes, Prelaunch Microschools

Asked to identify the student outcomes they most desire for their microschool to produce with the children they serve, prelaunch founders identified growth in nonacademic learning as the most prevalent. On a weighted scale where founders ranked their top three student outcomes, academic proficiency/mastery was rated second, followed by academic growth of individual students over time.

Following a significant dropoff in prevalence, children’s happiness in a new educational setting, instilling outcomes rooted in faith or values, and skills perceived as needed for their futures rounded out the outcomes selected.

Prelaunch founders' most important desired outcomes (weighted)



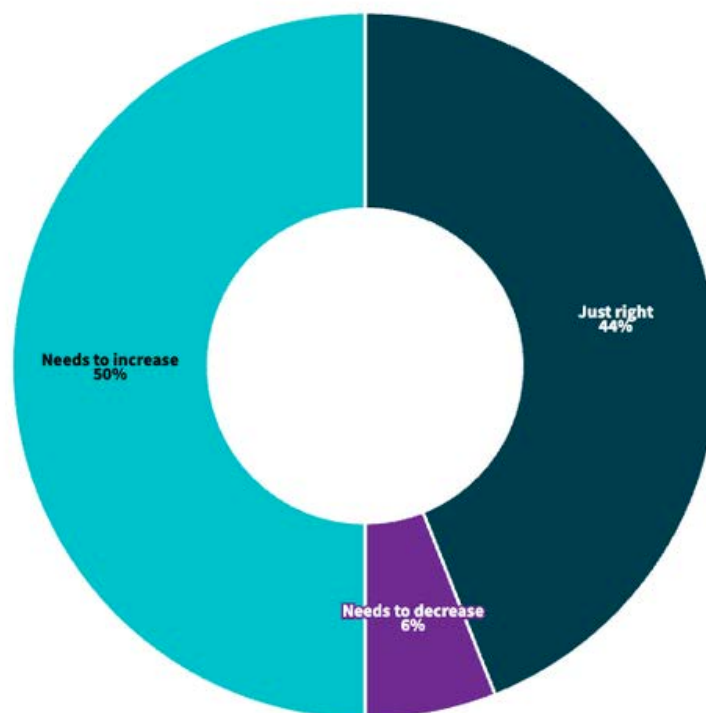
PART V: REVENUE AND EXPENSES

Considering, and Reconsidering, Tuition Rates

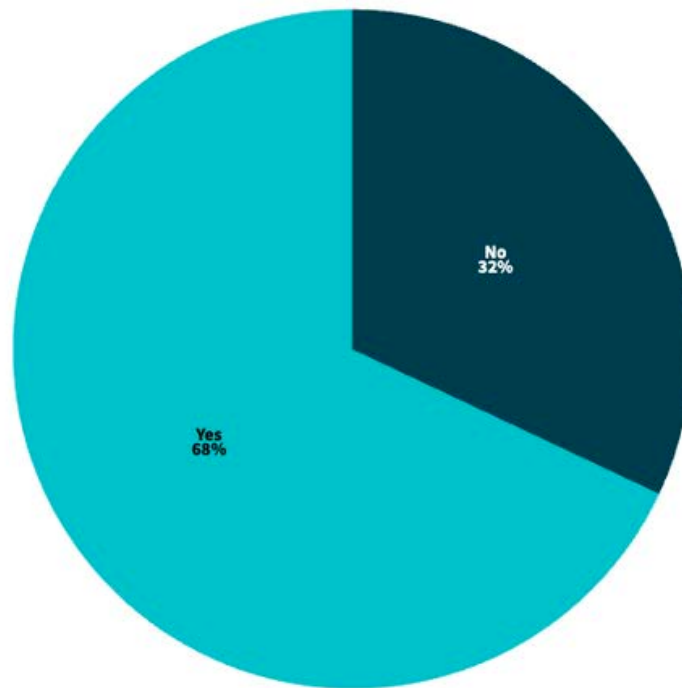
Half of microschool leaders (50 percent) describe their current tuition rate as in need of increasing, 44 percent their tuition rate as just right, and 6 percent that their tuition needs to decrease.

Two thirds of microschool leaders, 68 percent, said that they have seriously reconsidered their tuition rates since they opened initially.

How would you describe your current tuition rate?



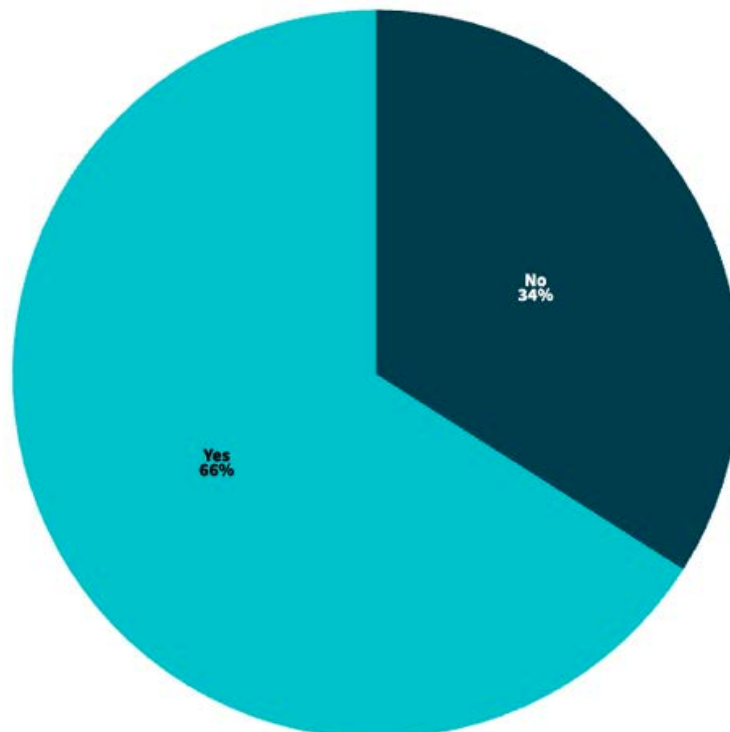
Have you seriously reconsidered tuition rates since opening your microschool?



Flexible Tuition

Most microschools, 66 percent, offer some form of sliding scale tuition discounts.

Do you offer sliding-scale, tuition discounts, etc?



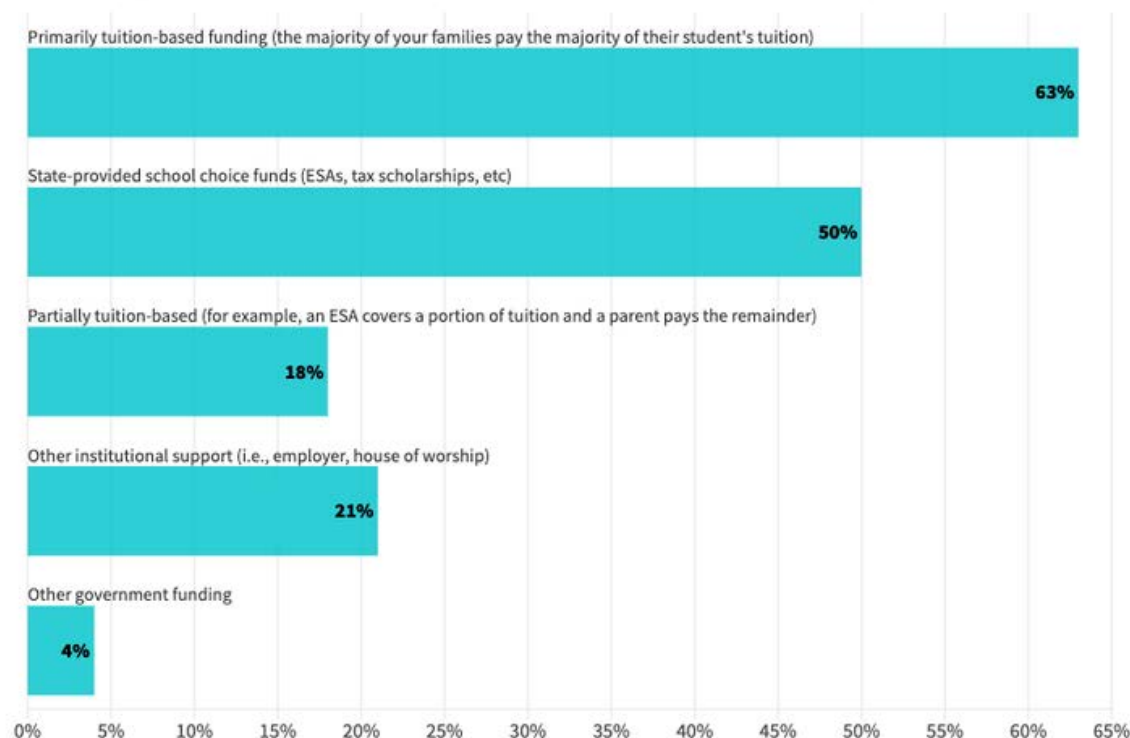
Funding for Tuition

More than 3 of 5 microschools, 63 percent, rely primarily on tuition-based funding, where the majority of families pay the majority of their children's tuition.

Half (50 percent) receive funding for tuition from state-provided school choice programs, including ESAs and taxpayer-funded scholarships.

Able to indicate all the funding sources which apply, 18 percent of leaders indicated their microschool is partially tuition based, and 21 percent indicate receiving other institutional support, such as from employers or houses of worship.

Funding sources for tuition/fees include (select all that apply)



Monthly Rent

Eighteen percent of microschools reported paying no regular rent. For microschools that reported paying rent, \$3,371 was the average monthly rent paid.

Revenue Sources

Only 4 percent of microschools reported receiving more than 25 percent of their operating revenue from philanthropic sources.

Half of all microschools surveyed (51 percent) indicated that more than 25 percent of their operating funds comes from state school choice programs.

One-third of microschools (34 percent) reported that tuition paid by families accounts for more than 75 percent of their annual operating budget.

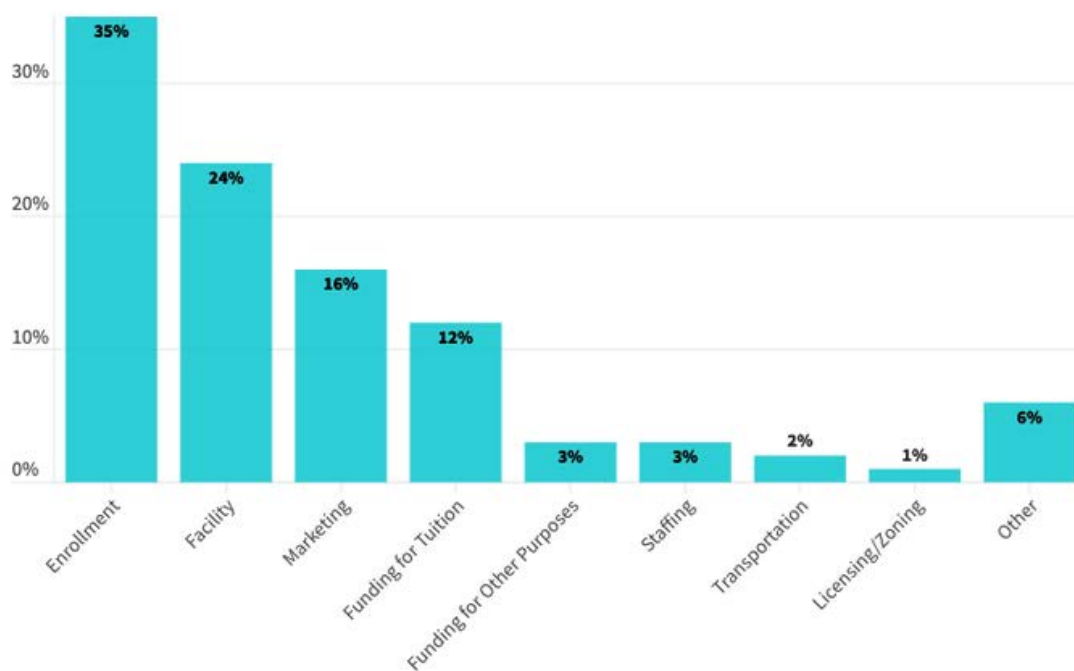
Reaching Ideal Enrollment Numbers

According to current microschool founders, on average their microschool would need to increase current enrollment by 35% to reach ideal enrollment.

Barriers to Reaching Ideal Enrollment

Microschool leaders identified their biggest barrier to reaching their ideal size as enrollment (35 percent), their current facility (24 percent), marketing (16 percent) and adequate funding to help pay for tuition (12 percent).

What is your biggest barrier to reaching your ideal enrollment size or profitability?

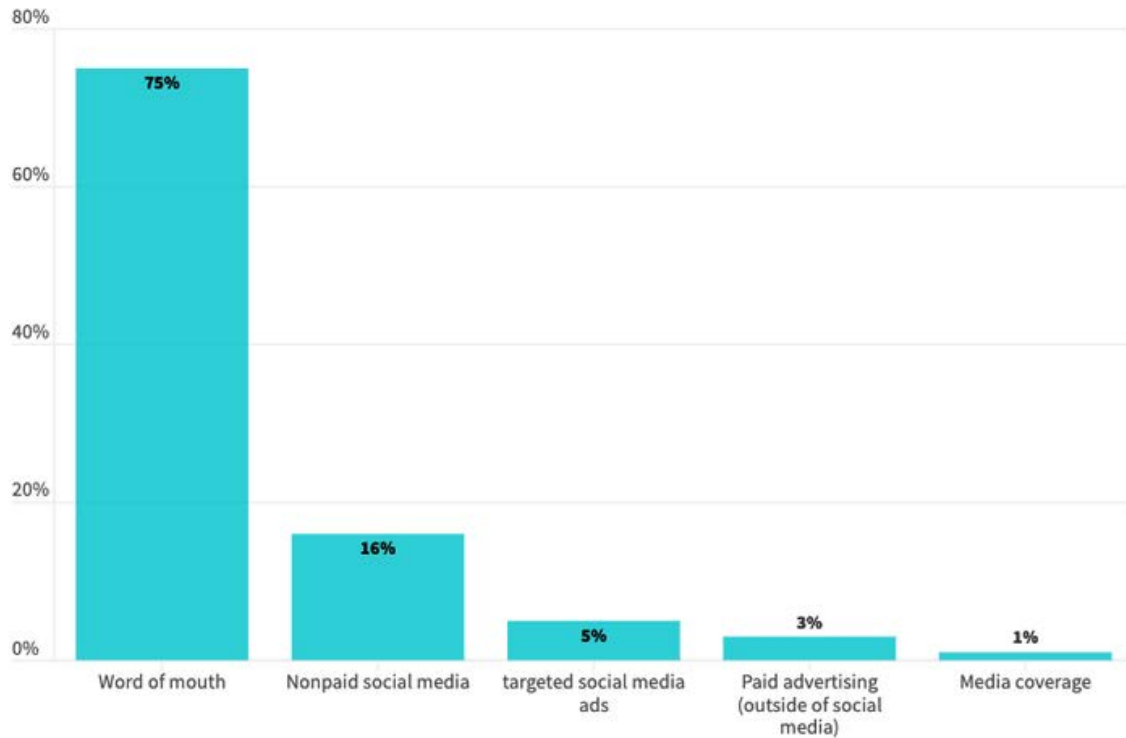


How Do Most Enrolled Families Hear About Your Microschool?

Word of mouth is the most important way families learn about their microschool, according to 75 percent of founders. Nonpaid social media was a distant second, reported by 16 percent of leaders, followed by targeted social media advertising, at 5 percent, and other paid advertising at 3 percent.

**"We really focus on wanting to make sure that parents know we're a team."
- Nevada Microschool Founder**

How do most enrolled families hear about your microschool

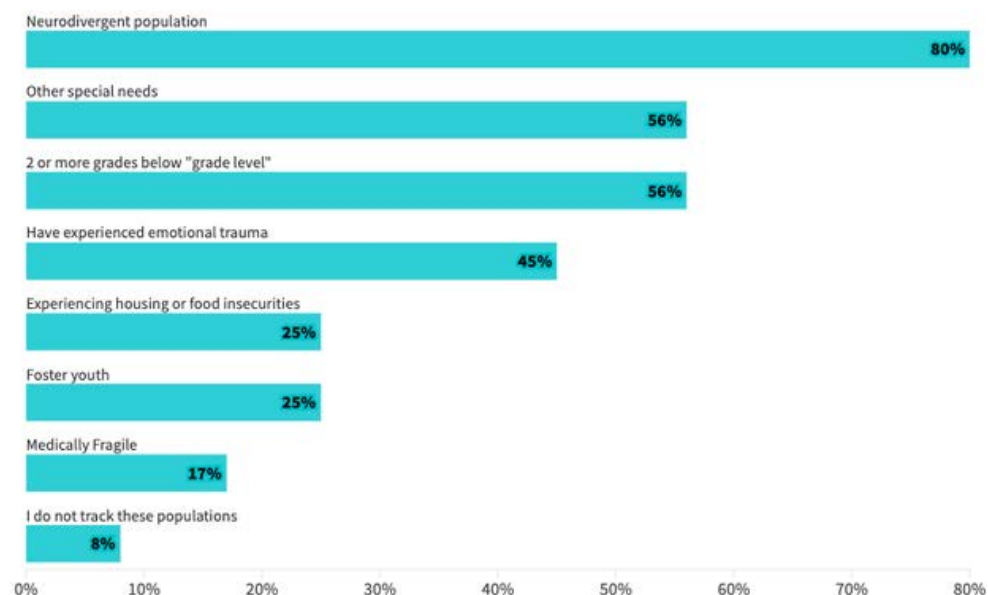


PART VI: POPULATIONS SERVED

Learner Populations

Microschools were asked if they currently serve children who represent a range of different populations. Children with neurodivergencies are served by 80 percent of microschools, and children with other special needs by 56 percent. Children whose educational proficiency is at two or more grades below “grade level” are also served by 56 percent of microschools. Children who have experienced emotional trauma are served by 45 percent of microschools, followed by 25 percent of microschools who report serving children currently experiencing housing or food insecurities, and the same number serving foster youth.

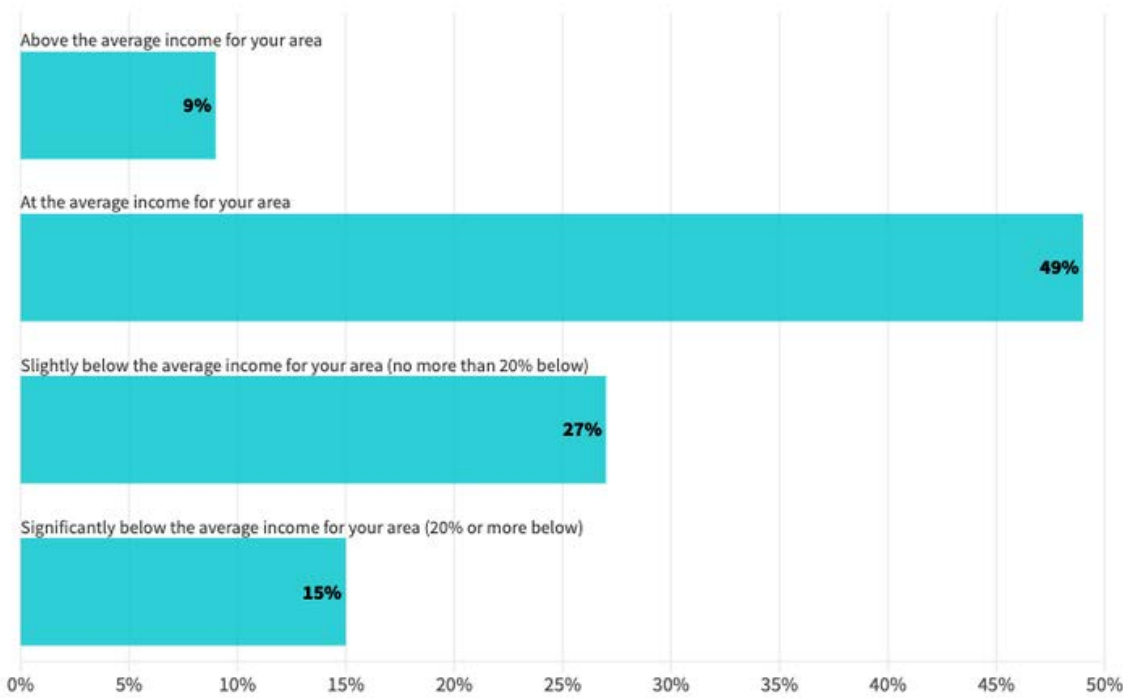
Do you currently serve children from any of the following populations?



Household Income

Children from families whose household income is below the average for their area are served by 42 percent of microschoools – 27 percent “slightly below,” and 15 percent “significantly below.” Children whose household income is at the average for their area are served by 49 percent of microschoools, and only 9 percent of microschoools report serving children whose household income is, on average, above average for their area.

To the best of your knowledge, on average, are your families' household incomes

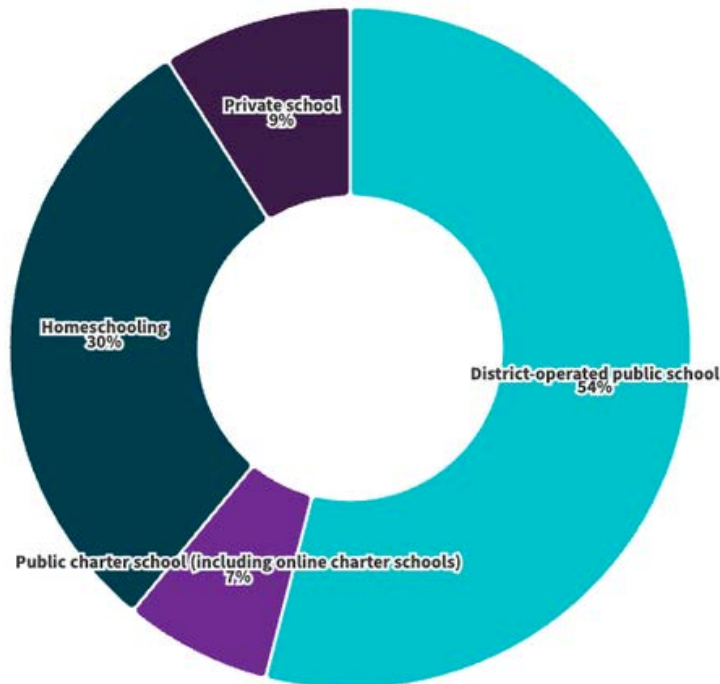


Students' Prior Educational Careers

Prior to attending their microschoool, 54 percent of students attended their traditional, district-operated public school, 30 percent homeschooled, 9 percent attended a private school, and 7 percent attended a public charter school, including online charters.



Majority of students' educational careers prior to joining a microschool



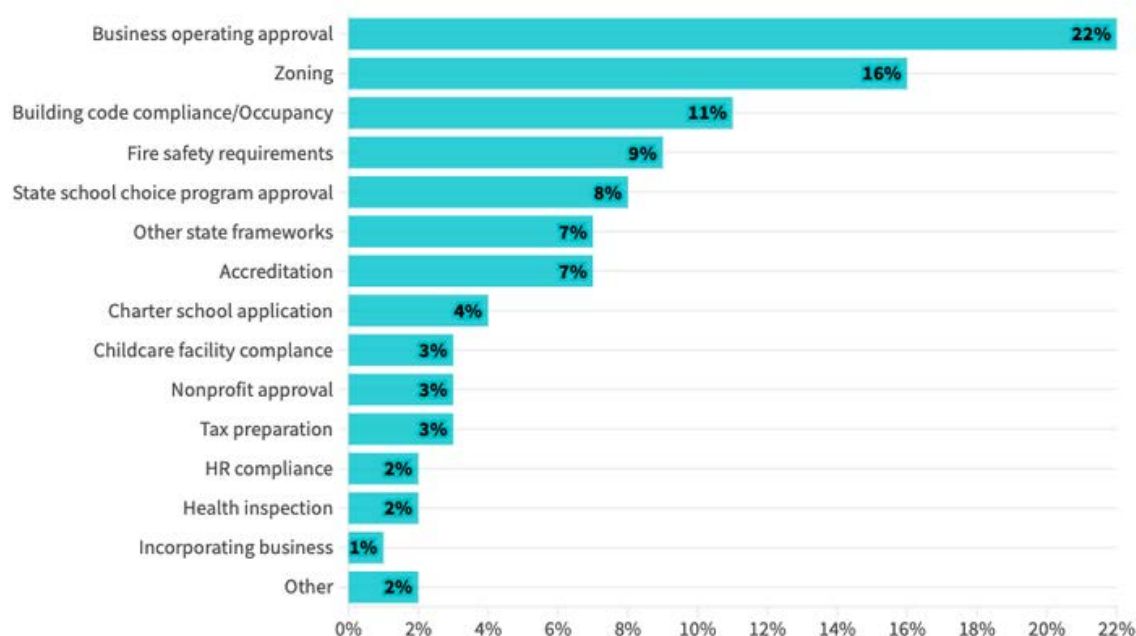
PART VII: REGULATORY IMPLICATIONS

Which government requirement took the longest to understand and comply with before opening your microschool?

Microschool leaders reported that the process of obtaining required government approval to operate their business was the

most time consuming to understand and complete (22 percent). Navigating zoning approval (16 percent), building code and occupancy requirements (11 percent), and fire safety requirements (9 percent), all local-government-imposed obligations relating to facilities, followed. Rules imposed by state education frameworks were also raised in response to this question, namely approval for participation in state school choice programs (8 percent), other state framework requirements (7 percent), and accreditation (7 percent).

Which government requirement took the longest to understand and comply with before opening your microschool?



**"We really are out here trying to do what's new. What's future focused."
- Nevada Microschool Founder**

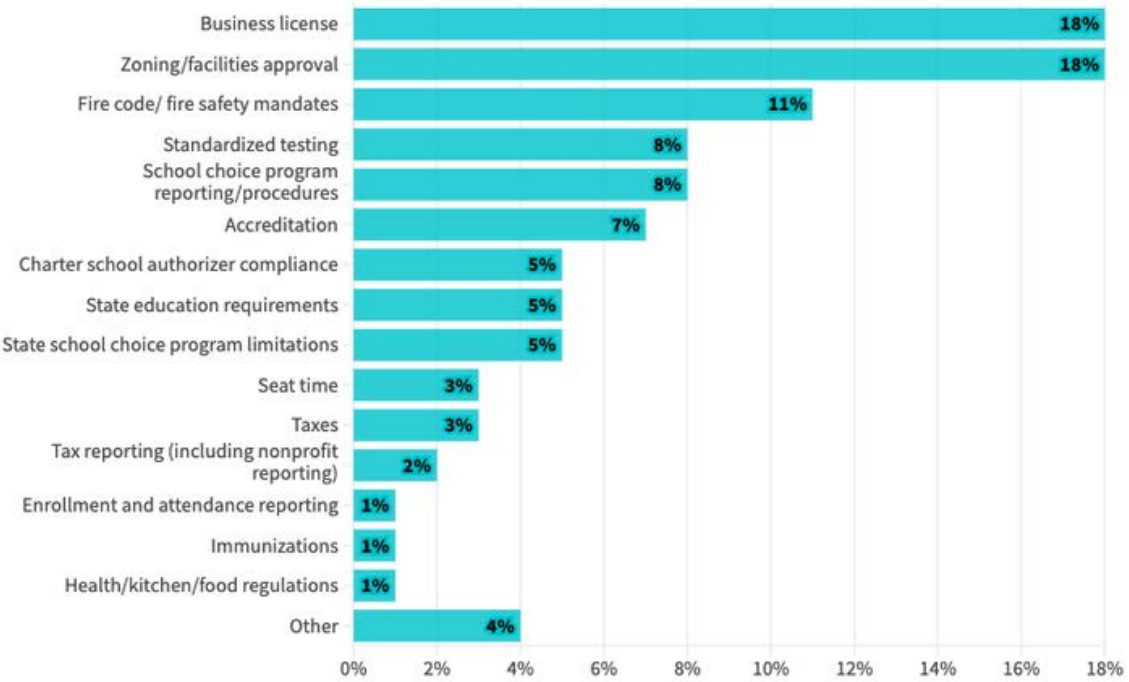
How many hours per school year do you spend on compliance-related tasks, on average?

Microschool leaders indicated that they spend 93 hours per school year, on average, completing compliance-related tasks.

If you could remove one government-imposed requirement or task, what would it be?

Business licensing (18 percent), local zoning and facilities approval (18 percent) and fire safety/fire code mandates (11 percent) were the top three government requirements microschool leaders would choose to eliminate, given the opportunity. These were followed by standardized testing requirements (8 percent) and school choice program reporting and procedures (8 percent), and accreditation requirements (7 percent), all associated with particular states.

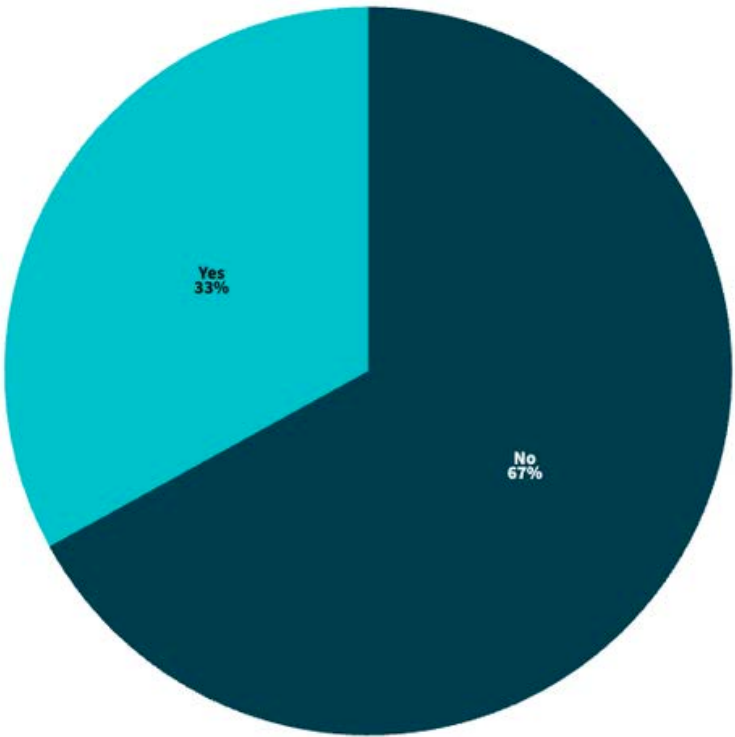
If you could remove one government-imposed requirement or task, what would it be?



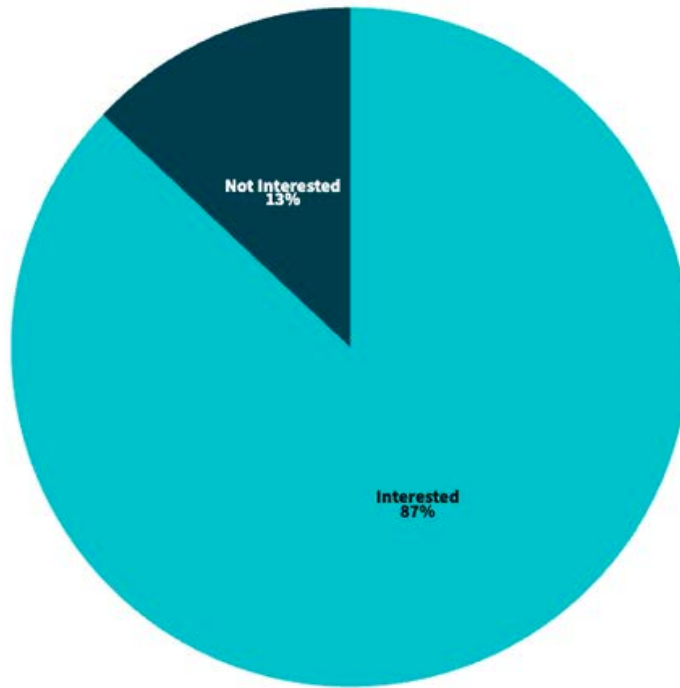
Accreditation

Most microschools surveyed, 67 percent, are not currently accredited by an official, government-recognized accreditation organization. If not currently accredited and presented with a truly microschool-friendly accreditation process, 87 percent of microschools indicate they would be interested in seeking accreditation.

Are you currently accredited?



Not accredited, interested in microschool-friendly accreditation

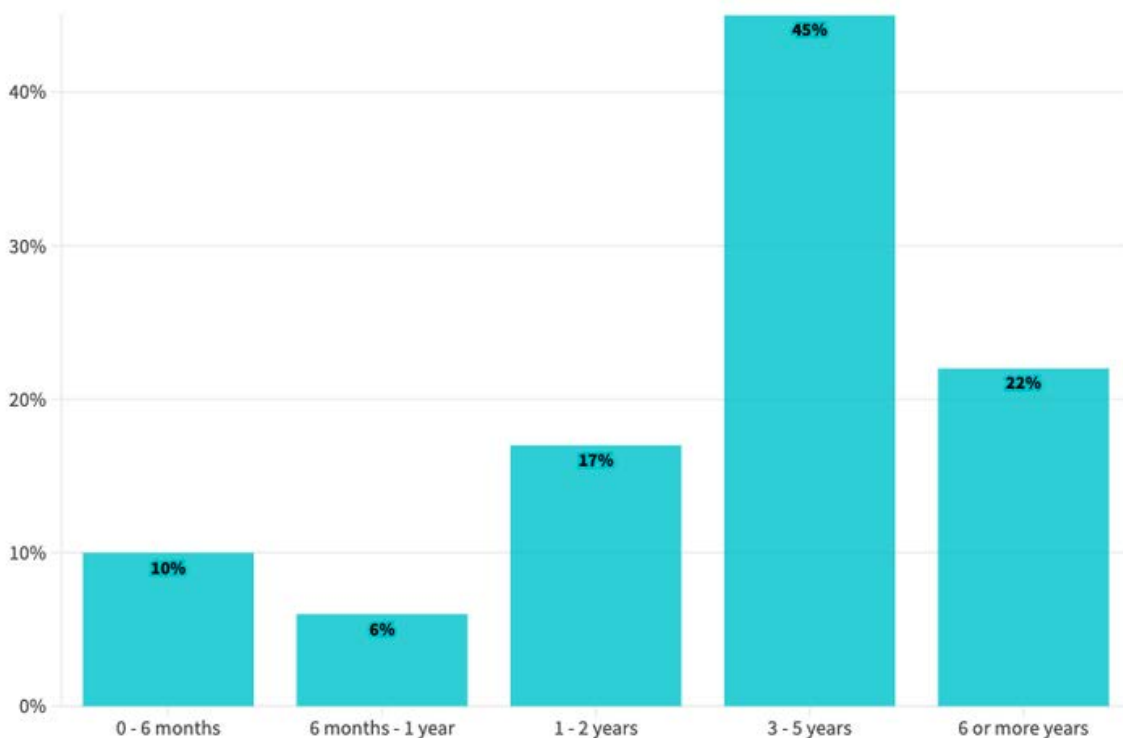


PART VIII: LIFESPAN OF A MICROSCHOOL

Time Open

One in five microschools examined, 22 percent, have been open for 6 or more years, 45 percent have been open for 3-5 years, 17 percent for 1-2 years, 6 percent between 6 and 12 months, and 10 percent were in their first six months in operation at the time of their survey.

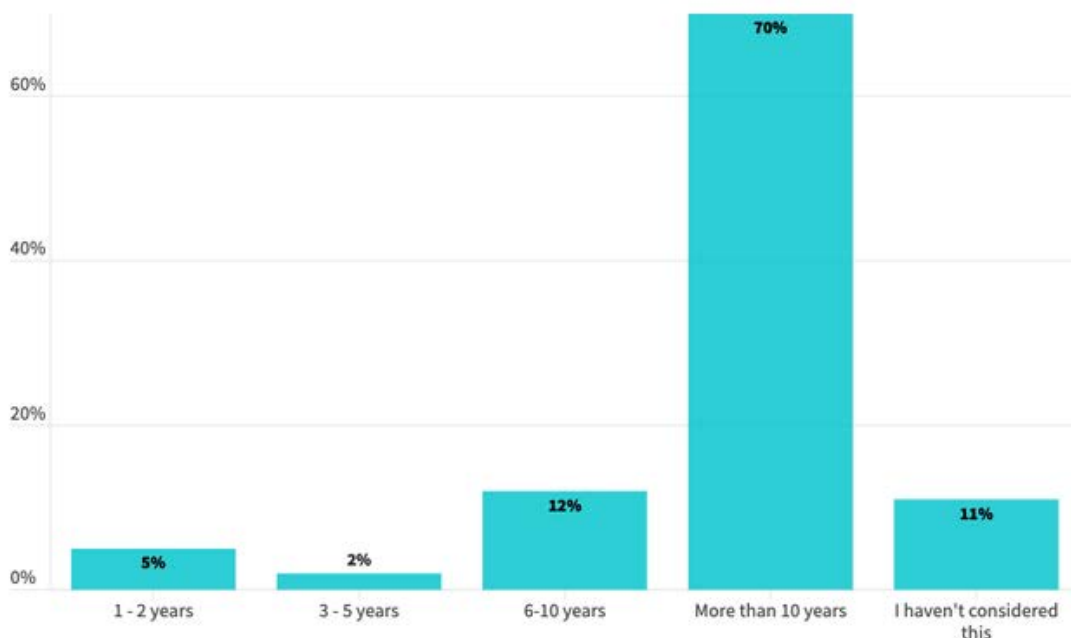
How long have you been open?



Expected Lifespan

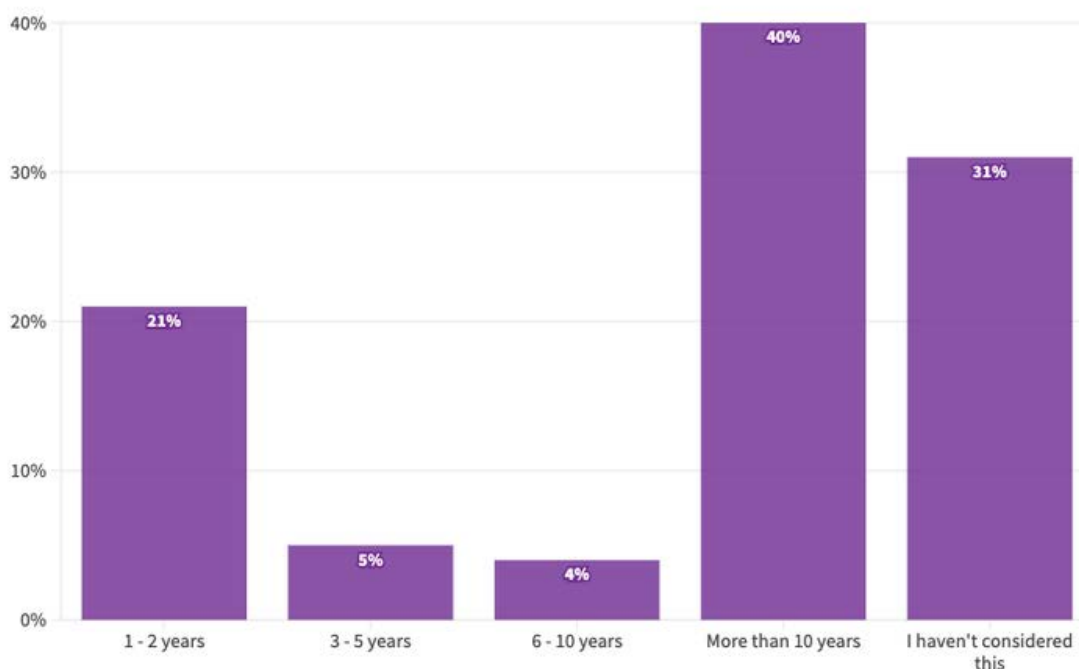
Most currently operating microschools (70 percent) indicated that they anticipate remaining in operation more than 10 years from launch, 12 percent anticipate being open 6-10 years, 2 percent between 3-5 years, 5 percent just 1-2 years, and 11 percent indicated they have not seriously considered this question.

Currently Operating: How long (from launch) do you anticipate being open?



When prelaunch founders were asked how long from launch they expect their microschool to remain open, 40 percent indicated they anticipate their microschool to be in operation for more than 10 years. Meanwhile 21 percent anticipate their microschool being open for only 1-2 years from launch. Another 31 percent said that they had not seriously considered this question.

Prelaunch: How long do you anticipate being open from launch?



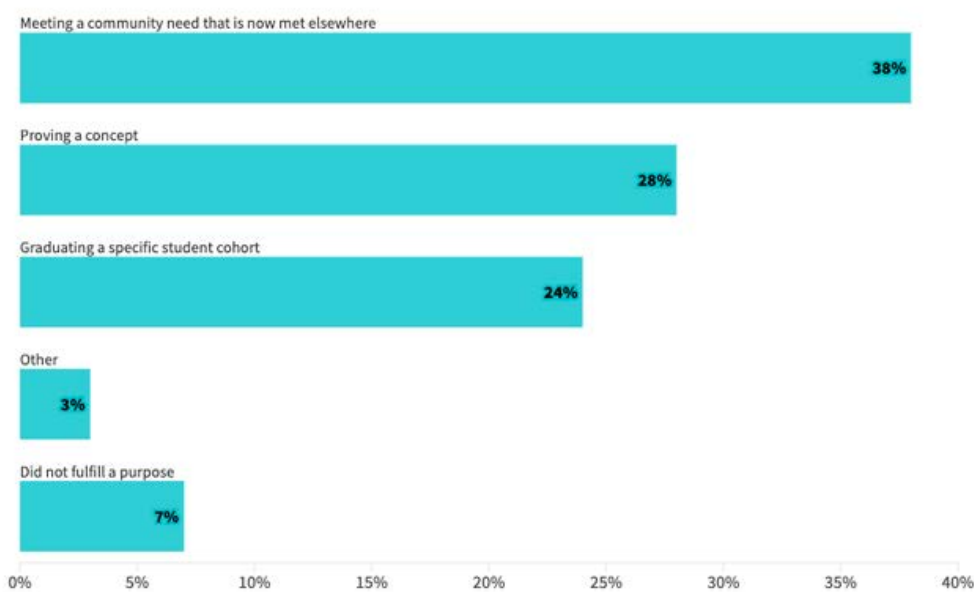
Different Forms of "Sustainability"

Microschool leaders indicated strong confidence, an average of 4.4 on a scale of 1 to 5, that principles and relationships acquired at their microschool would outlast their school itself. On the scale, a 1 signified being "not confident," while a 5 being "most confident."

Fulfilling Their Purpose

When leaders of microschools that have closed were asked what milestones met signaled fulfillment of a purpose, 38 percent indicated that meeting a community need that is now met elsewhere provided this signal. Proving a concept (28 percent) and graduating a specific student cohort (24 percent) followed, while 7 percent indicated that their microschools did not fulfill their purpose before they closed.

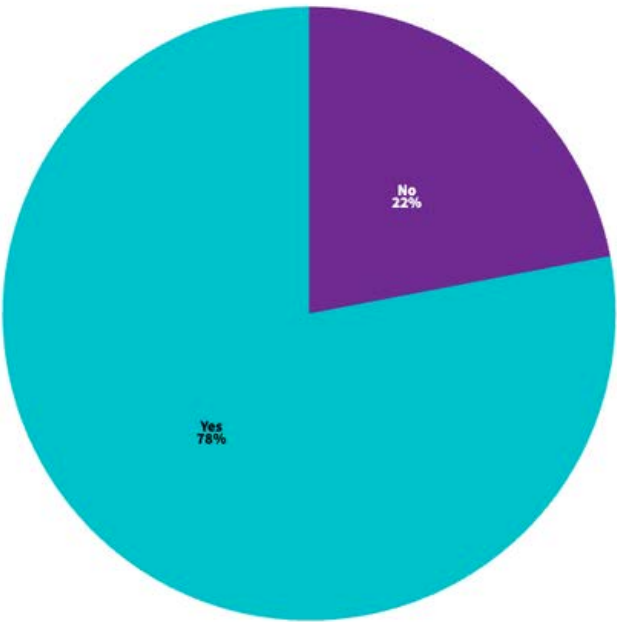
What milestone that you met signaled that your microschool has fulfilled its purpose?



Still in the Movement

Leaders of closed microschools indicated they are overwhelmingly still involved in the microschooling movement, 78 percent to 22 percent indicating they are not.

Are you still involved in the microschooling movement?



CONCLUSION

These findings based upon answers from the leaders of 1,000 microschools all over the United States suggest that while many trendlines within today's microschooling sector continue to move in similar directions, different than those represented in the more traditional sectors of American education, others do so along widely divergent trajectories even within the relatively small sector of microschool.

Such patterns can be seen to contribute to an ever-expanding state of pluralism within microschooling.

Small learning environments: With a median average of 20 students per nonpublic microschool, and 30 per public microschool, microschools' small size allows for educational styles which are far less practicable in larger, traditional settings.

Regulatory implications: Despite most microschools not receiving any taxpayer funding, many experience a significant weight of regulatory pressures. Leaders indicate spending 93 hours per school year completing compliance-related tasks, on average. Leaders also indicated that their path to reaching ideal enrollment is complicated by challenges related to obtaining larger facilities and recruiting more families, that require overcoming regulatory pressures.

Sector dynamism: While 70 percent of currently-operating microschool leaders indicate they anticipate their microschool being in operation more than 10 years from launch, only 40 percent of prelaunch founders do. Meanwhile, 21 percent of prelaunch founders only expect their microschool to remain in operation 1-2 years from launch, and another 31 percent say they have not considered the question seriously. This suggests business models within the microschooling sector may increasingly challenge traditional approaches to financing, philanthropy and "sustainability" as perceived across schools of choice more broadly.

Measuring impact: Microschools track and demonstrate their impact in many different ways, and the regular use of standardized criterion-referenced and also norm-referenced assessments are decidedly less common than they are in most schools of choice communities.

Founder diversity: While the community of currently-operating microschool founders remains more white and less racially and ethnically diverse in proportion to the overall populations of the states where microschools operate, this dynamic has continued along a trajectory where this is changing.

CONCLUSION CONT...

Trends and developments including these provide evidence that today's microschooling movement is continuing along trajectories with both similarities and differences not only from American education overall, but even from the broader schools of choice experience over recent decades.

Don Soifer serves as the National Microschooling Center's Chief Executive Officer and Ashley Soifer is the Center's Chief Operating Officer. The authors wish to thank team members Katie Elliott, Laura Boyer, Sarah Silvestros, Jill Haskins, Alex Roosenburg, Dr. Erin Flynn, Tiffany Blassingame, Tonya Kipe, Dr. Jill Brown, Darla Baquedano, Mary Jo Fairhead, Michael Parsons and Brianne Parsons for their assistance throughout the research process.

Additional reports from the 2026 Sector Analysis data set will be published in the coming months, exploring trends in microschool finances, risk factors, impacts of government regulations and requirements, as well as a dedicated series analyzing disaggregated data and comparisons over time.



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The National Microschooling Center is the nation's preeminent nonprofit resource hub and movement-builder committed to advancing the growth, health and evolution of the microschooling movement to live up to its fullest potential.

Photos in this report courtesy of The Pearl Remote Democratic High School, The Ferguson School, Wonder Academy NWI, Nevada School of Inquiry, Tomis Parker, CALE, and Tim Harbour.

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