



MEASURING THE MICROSCHOOL EXPERIENCE:

A NATIONAL ANALYSIS OF STUDENT EXPERIENCES, FAMILY PERSPECTIVES, AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The number of students attending microschools has dramatically increased since the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent estimates now place the microschool student population between 1 and 1.5 million students nationwide. Serving this student population is a highly diverse and decentralized group of small schools with an average total enrollment of 20 students. As multi-age learning environments, microschools often place emphasis on individualized learning, strong relationships, and experiential learning opportunities. Despite the recent growth of microschools, relatively little empirical work has examined student learning and family experiences within these settings. As this school sector has expanded, so has the need to understand how microschools are serving students and families.

Report Purpose and Design

To open a line of empirical inquiry into microschools, this report presents data from student surveys, parent/caregiver surveys, and student assessments collected during the 2025-2026 school year. For this study, microschools were recruited to participate in the study through the National Microschooling Center, a non-profit organization that serves over 2,000 microschools in 50 US states. Each sample is a non-probability sample derived from microschools that voluntarily opted into the study.

Parent/caregiver Survey. The parent/caregiver survey contains results from 291 respondents with children attending 36 microschools across the United States. This survey was administered in spring of 2026.

Student Survey. The student survey presents microschool students' perceptions of multiple dimensions of school climate as well as perceptions of social and emotional skill development. Surveys were administered in early fall of 2025 and again in spring of 2026. There were 1,038 complete student responses from 31 microschools represented in the student survey sample.

Student Assessment. Twenty-seven microschools participated in a student assessment. Using the i-Ready computer-adaptive assessment, students took ELA and math assessments in early fall of 2025 and in late spring of 2026, providing a means of tracking students' academic growth during the school year and comparing this growth to national norms. In the sample, 423 students completed the ELA assessment in fall and spring, and 405 students did so in math.

Results

Overall results show that microschools enroll a large proportion of students with unique/special learning needs. In the parent/caregiver survey, 47% of respondents identified their child as having been diagnosed with a disability while approximately 40% of students in the assessment and survey samples were either diagnosed as having a disability or had a chronic medical condition. Roughly one-in-five microschools in the sample have an explicit focus on students with disabilities. This study's figures may also underestimate the actual number of students with

special needs since some microschools do not classify students using conventional approaches to identification of students with disabilities.

Parent/Caregiver Survey. Families report choosing microschools primarily because of their small class sizes, individualized attention, levels of safety, and positive school culture, with individualized attention being the most important factor for parent/caregivers. Parent/caregivers also hold strong positive perceptions of their child's microschool across academic, social-emotional, and life skills domains. In the survey, a striking 97% of respondents say that they are satisfied/very satisfied with their child's microschool overall. When families compare their child's current microschool to their child's previous public school, parent/caregivers report stronger relationships, increased home-school communication, and enhanced safety in their child's current microschools.

Student Survey. More than 90% of microschool students report strong relationships with teachers across a range of measures while 95% say that they feel safe at school. Ninety-three percent say that they participate in class most of the time. Additionally, students who are new to their current microschool are more likely to report that their current school experience was better than the previous year and that they are currently learning more. Among students who completed both fall and spring surveys, they report enhanced perceptions of their problem-solving ability, communication skills, and respect for others improved from fall to spring.

Student Assessment. In 27 microschools, approximately 52% of students exceed their expected academic growth targets for the year in ELA and 47% do so in math. While baseline achievement was the strongest predictor of end-of-year performance, learning outcomes varied substantially across schools. At least half of students met or exceeded their expected academic growth targets in both ELA and math in 12 of the 26 schools.

Conclusion

This study offers preliminary results from a self-selected sample that may not be representative of the microschool population. Nevertheless, it presents important initial insights on microschools that warrant future investigation. The findings suggest that one critical feature of microschools is that they disproportionately serve students who have unique learning needs (e.g., students with disabilities, significant mental health challenges, severe chronic health conditions). Accordingly, families say that they are seeking safe, supportive environments when selecting microschools, a rationale that aligns with the types of students that microschools tend to enroll. Although this study's assessment data suggest that microschool students largely perform no better or worse than expected on standardized tests in ELA and math, both students and parent/caregivers report extraordinarily positive experiences in microschools across a range of non-academic and academic indicators. As such, one of the main appeals of microschools may lie not in producing above-average test-score gains, but in creating educational environments where students who have significant educational needs feel supported, engaged, and able to thrive.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Enrollments in microschools skyrocketed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic (Ohls et al., 2025). While the precise number of microschool students is difficult to estimate, existing analyses of leaders operating schools in the sector suggest that there may be as many as 1.5 million students attending microschools (Soifer & Soifer, 2026). On the surface, the microschool model may appear to be new, but small multi-age school settings stressing personalized learning have existed for decades. One well known example is the Sudbury school (Greenberg, 1992). Established in the late 60s, the Sudbury model, like many modern microschools, emphasizes student independence and mixed-age learning environments. Present-day microschools can also trace their roots to Montessori and Waldorf school models, which foster small class sizes and personalized learning tailored to the needs of the individual child. However, these long-established models have never expanded at the pace that present-day microschools are growing today.

Prior to the pandemic, the concept of microschooling had already been growing in popularity with the emergence of schools, such as Acton Academy and Alt School (Horn, 2015). It was the pandemic though that seemed to set in motion substantial microschool expansion as families sought alternatives to traditional schools that were closed for in-person learning. Families formed learning pods or enrolled their children in small, teacher-run schools. These temporary pandemic-era arrangements, in some cases, eventually became microschools, evolving into permanent school options for many families even after traditional schools reopened.

Coinciding with the pandemic, states adopted an array of private school programs. Since 2020, 25 states have enacted universal private school choice programs (i.e., tax-credit scholarship and education saving accounts) that in many instances, enable families to use funds from these programs to pay for tuition and fees at private microschools (EdChoice, 2026). Recent survey work indicates that future expansion is probable. For instance, 41% of families have expressed interest in learning more about microschooling as a potential school option for their children (Aldis, 2024).

Microschools have also arguably become one of most innovative and diverse education sectors in American education. RAND researcher Lauren Covelli and her colleagues (2025) note that microschools are “by design, deinstitutionalized and, therefore, harder to regulate.” As such, characterizing microschools can be challenging. Microschools serve both part-time and full-time students in small private schools, charter school arrangements, homeschool cooperatives, hybrid schools, blended learning schools, and other non-traditional school models. The National Microschooling Center offers a definition that helps to illuminate the key characteristics of the sector by stating that microschools are intentionally small learning environments that tend to be organized around flexibility, personalization, strong relationships, family involvement, and special areas of focus (e.g., outdoor learning, project-based learning, or socioemotional learning).

Microschools do not follow one single model, but one defining feature seems to be a desire to create a personalized and responsive educational experience built around the needs, interests, and circumstances of individual students. In 2023, the National Microschool Center’s

Annual Survey showed that the median school enrollment for microschools was 16 students. In the survey, about half of schools operated on a traditional five-day week while the other half using hybrid and part-time models. To attract families, many microschool models highlighted strong interpersonal relationships, mixed-age learning, hands-on experience, and student-driven learning. Nearly a quarter of microschools were affiliated with a religious tradition. They also had student bodies that were largely reflective of the broader US student population although it is important to note that many reported a focus on serving special populations, including students with disabilities, gifted students, students with mental health challenges, and those with chronic medical conditions.

Microschools may have started to fortify their place in the American education landscape with some observers expecting continued growth for the sector. It is thus critical to understand how these schools are performing and whether they are meeting their stated missions. However, very little empirical research has been done on the performance of microschools. Research has been limited because microschools are difficult to identify and are largely absent from state and federal administrative data (Ohls et al., 2025). One methodological challenge is that microschools are decentralized, using different assessment metrics, adhering to varying educational philosophies, and delivering vastly different school models (e.g., full- and part-time microschools). Moreover, microschools often have distinct goals and measures of success that are different from traditional school models, so their models may not often conform well to traditional assessment metrics used to evaluate conventional public and private schools.

With possibly 1.5 million students attending microschools, credible research on the sector is needed. The sector is growing and private school choice programs are increasingly being used to fuel this expansion. Yet, researchers have mostly been unable to assess the experiences and outcomes of microschool students. Standardized assessment data is lacking. School leaders use varying testing platforms and approaches to assessment while some providers feel that standardized testing is antithetical to their models of learning altogether. In their missions, microschools often stress non-academic skills, relationships, project-based learning, and safety, so the appeal of and learning outcomes produced by microschools may not fit well with conventional analyses used for public and private schools (Soifer & Soifer, 2026).

The little empirical information that does exist on microschools is mainly derived from the National Microschooling Center's annual sector analysis of microschool leaders. Among 1,000 microschool founders participating in this annual survey, 94% report that their main motivation for launching a microschool was to allow children to thrive as they had not in prior settings (Soifer & Soifer, 2026). In tracking performance, microschool leaders say that they rely on a range of different methods, including observations, portfolios, and internal assessments. Only 28% report giving traditional letter grades and about one-third conduct parent surveys to measure families' experiences. Outside of the National Microschooling Center's annual sector analysis, little is known about student outcomes, student experiences, and parent/caregiver rationales for choosing microschools. While microschool leaders say that they aspire to provide supportive and engaging school cultures that meet unique learning needs, it is largely uncertain whether families and students feel that these schools are delivering on this promise.

Report Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide empirical evidence on microschools by investigating student outcomes, student and parent/caregiver experiences, and families' reasons for choosing these schools. It is challenging to locate and study microschools. Therefore, the National Microschooling Center recruited participants and aided in the data collection for this study. The Center serves as a non-profit resource hub for nearly 1,000 microschool operators, offering guidance, training, networking, research, and information about the sector. It also maintains the most extensive network of microschools in the United States, so it was well positioned to facilitate this study. At the same time, schools, parent/caregivers, and students opted into the study, so they are self-selected group that may not be representative of the larger microschool population. This limitation requires that the results of this study be interpreted with a great deal of caution. As an early national study of microschools, this report is intended to establish a foundation for understanding the microschool sector and to identify areas for future research on an understudied but growing sector in American K-12 education.

II. METHODS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

To generate empirical evidence on the performance of microschools, this study collected data from three sources: student surveys, parent/caregiver surveys, and student assessments in math and English language arts (ELA). Parent/caregiver surveys were administered to gather information on family perceptions of the microschool experience, including levels of satisfaction, reasons for enrollment in a microschool, perceived academic growth and quality, and opportunities available to their children. Student surveys were also conducted at the beginning and end of the academic year to examine changes in students' experiences (i.e., their perceptions of academic support, peer relationships, school engagement, and opportunities for social, cultural, and human capital development). Finally, student assessment data were collected at baseline in early fall of 2025 and at the end of the school year in 2026 to measure microschool students' actual academic growth compared to their predicted growth over the course of the school year. The assessment uses students' grade level and beginning-of-year achievement to estimate the score the student is expected to have at the end of the year based on the average growth of other students in the same grade who began at a similar performance level. Students' actual end-of-year test scores are then contrasted with their projected scores to understand how well they performed during the year.

Parent/Caregiver Survey

The parent/caregiver survey was conducted to understand how families perceive and experience their child's microschools as well as to explore families' rationales for choosing a microschool for their child. There were 291 parent/caregivers at 36 different schools with complete survey data who are represented in this analysis.

Survey Sample and Data Collection

The parent/caregiver survey was electronically administered in February and March of 2026. The National Microschooling Center's team directly contacted families as opposed to going through schools to deliver the survey. It was thought that this approach would ensure that families felt comfortable describing their experiences accurately and were not pressured to respond positively by microschool founders. In one case, a school chose to deliver an anonymous survey to parent/caregivers rather than having the National Microschooling Center's initiate contact with families.

Survey Instrument

The parent/caregiver survey asks families to provide information about their oldest child attending a microschool, including the child's age, length of enrollment at the microschool, weekly hours of attendance, and reasons why they choose the microschool for their child. The survey further examines what parents value most about their child's microschool (e.g., academics, safety, small class size, individualized attention, flexible scheduling, hands-on learning, and school culture). It also prompts parent/caregivers to evaluate how well their child's microschool supports academic skills, non-academic skills, leadership, mental health, peer

relationships, parent involvement, teacher quality, and safety. Families also rate their level of satisfaction with their child's microschool.

Among students who transferred from another school, the survey gives parent/caregivers an opportunity to compare their child's current microschool with the child's previous school. Finally, the survey collects sociodemographic background information about the child and family, including special learning needs, emotional trauma, or chronic medical conditions, parent education level, household structure, race/ethnicity, and any parent/caregiver comments.

Table 1. Child, parent, and school characteristics

Variable	Mean/Prop.	SD	Min	Max
<i>School Information</i>				
Length Attended Current School (months)	17.23	16.05	1	84
Attended Current School Last Year	0.56	0.50	0	1
Past School: Local Public	0.21	0.41	0	1
Weekly School Hours (0-10)	0.11	0.31	0	1
Weekly School Hours (11-20)	0.19	0.39	0	1
Weekly School Hours (21-30)	0.37	0.48	0	1
Weekly School Hours (31-40+)	0.33	0.47	0	1
<i>Child Characteristics</i>				
Child's Age	11.05	3.14	4	20
Special Needs	0.47	0.50	0	1
Emotional Needs	0.29	0.45	0	1
Chronic Medical Condition	0.14	0.35	0	1
White	0.56	0.50	0	1
Black	0.16	0.37	0	1
Hispanic	0.08	0.27	0	1
Multi/Other Race	0.19	0.39	0	1
<i>Parent Characteristics</i>				
High Degree or Less	0.09	0.29	0	1
Some College	0.23	0.42	0	1
Undergraduate/Graduate Degree	0.68	0.47	0	1
Two-Parent Household	0.78	0.41	0	1
<i>School Locale</i>				
Large City	0.27	0.44	0	1
Suburb	0.17	0.37	0	1
Midsize/Small City	0.26	0.44	0	1
Small Town / Rural	0.30	0.46	0	1

Note. Parent/caregiver sample was 291 respondents. There are 36 schools in the sample.

Variables and Data Analysis

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for child, parent, and school characteristics in the parent/caregiver sample. The average child was approximately 11 years old and had attended the microschool for about 17 months at the time of the survey. Over half of children had attended the same microschool during the previous school year, while about 21% had previously attended a

local public school. Most students attended their microschool between 21 and 40 hours per week, with 37% attending 21–30 hours and 33% attending 31–40 hours. The sample included a sizable share of children with identified needs: 47% had special learning needs, 28% had emotional support needs, and 14% had a chronic medical condition. For race and ethnicity, 56% of children were White, 16% were Black, 8% were Hispanic, and 19% were multiracial or identified with another racial/ethnic group. Parent/caregivers in the sample were relatively well educated. Approximately 68% holding an undergraduate or graduate degree while 23% had some college and 9% had a high school degree or less. Most children lived in two-parent households, and the sample was geographically diverse, with families distributed across large cities, suburbs, midsize or small cities, and small towns or rural areas.

Student Survey

Two student surveys were conducted to explore students' perceptions of their microschool, opportunities for learning, and socioemotional development. Thirty-one microschools participated in the student survey. There were about 1,038 responses from the fall and spring surveys, and 351 students took both the fall and spring surveys enabling pre- and post-comparisons for this small subset of students.

Survey Sample and Data Collection

The student surveys were administered in both the fall of 2025 and spring of 2026 to collect information on students' school experiences, relationships, engagement, and personal development. In the survey, it is worth noting that 40% of students were identified as having special needs or a chronic medical condition. Thirty-seven percent were considered eligible for free- and reduced priced lunch, but this data point may be underestimated, having been gleaned from school leaders' records on family income and socioeconomic indicators. Students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds are represented in the survey although 65% of students are White.

Survey Instrument

In the survey, questions ask students to report their current school, prior school enrollment, age, and home language. It then measures access to individualized instruction, small-group learning, school satisfaction, and classroom participation. The survey captures opportunities for human capital development by assessing exposure to careers and adults in different occupations. Measures of social capital include students' friendships, ease of making friends, relationships with peers from different family backgrounds, and the extent to which students feel known and connected at school. The survey also examines teacher-student relationships, including whether students feel respected, encouraged, cared for, and supported in their learning. Additional items assess school safety, belonging, enthusiasm for school, cultural learning, bullying, loneliness, and conflict. Finally, the survey includes measures of student mindsets and social-emotional skills, including preference for challenging work, growth mindset, emotional regulation, respect for others' perspectives, and communication of thoughts and feelings. The spring version also

asks students to compare the current school year with the prior year based on their overall experience, learning, and confidence.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of the Student Sample

Variable	Prop.	SD	Min	Max
Gender	0.50	0.50	0	1
Special Needs/Chronic Medical	0.40	0.49	0	1
Free-reduced Price Lunch Eligible	0.37	0.40	0	1
English language learner	0.03	0.18	0	1
Asian	0.03	0.17	0	1
Black	0.18	0.38	0	1
Hispanic	0.08	0.26	0	1
Multi-racial	0.03	0.18	0	1
Native American	0.03	0.18	0	1
White	0.65	0.48	0	1
Elementary School	0.45	0.50	0	1
Middle School	0.54	0.50	0	1
High School	0.54	0.50	0	1
Large City	0.31	0.46	0	1
Midsized City	0.14	0.35	0	1
Small City	0.12	0.33	0	1
Small Town/Rural	0.27	0.44	0	1
Suburb	0.16	0.37	0	1

Student Sample = 1,038; Fall Sample = 586; Spring Sample = 452; 351 students took the fall and spring surveys. The table above only presents data for 531 students who had complete demographic data.

Data Analysis

Descriptive analyses were conducted for the full analytic sample and then repeated across key subgroups to examine whether patterns differed by respondent type and student or school context. Specifically, subgroup analyses compared repeat respondents, who completed surveys in both the fall and spring, with non-repeat respondents, who completed only one survey administration. Additional descriptive comparisons were conducted by school locale, school characteristics, and student characteristics to identify variation in experiences and outcomes across different types of microschool settings and student populations.

Student Assessment

Microschool leaders highlight an emphasis on non-academic learning in their schools (Soifer & Soifer, 2026). Given this emphasis, one potential concern might be that the academic skill development of microschool students could be lacking their peers in other school sectors. To explore this possibility, student assessment data were collected to estimate how microschool students grow academically in ELA and math during the course of an academic year and whether their academic growth is consistent with national norms and expected growth trajectories.

Student Assessment Instrument

The i-Ready Diagnostic was used to test students in ELA and math at the beginning and end of the school year. The i-Ready Diagnostic is a computer-adaptive assessment that adjusts the difficulty of questions based on each student's responses, allowing it to identify both skills the student has mastered and areas requiring greater instruction. In ELA, i-Ready assesses phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension of literature, and comprehension of informational text, with the domains varying by grade level. In mathematics, it measures performance in number and operations, algebra and algebraic thinking, measurement and data, and geometry. The results of the ELA and math assessments provide an overall scale score, grade-level placement, domain-level performance, and growth measures that educators can use to differentiate instruction and monitor progress over time. Scores are vertically scaled estimates derived from a Rasch item response theory model.

Assessment Administration

At each participating school, the National Microschooling Center funded the administration of the i-Ready Diagnostic assessments in ELA and mathematics. Participating schools administered the assessments twice during the academic year: once in the fall, near the beginning of the school year, and again in the spring, near the end of the school year. School personnel were responsible for coordinating and administering the assessments. The fall assessment provided a baseline measure of student achievement while the spring assessment measured students' end-of-year performance. Having these two scores allowed for the calculation of academic growth over the school year. Students' individual growth trajectories by using grade level and baseline achievement to determine projected growth versus actual growth.

Variables

Dependent variables. Three ELA outcomes were examined. The spring ELA score represents the student's end-of-year scaled item response theory (IRT) score. Fall-to-spring ELA growth represents the point difference between the student's fall and spring test scores, calculated by subtracting the fall score from the spring score. Using a student's grade level and beginning-of-year achievement, i-Ready calculates the score the student is expected to reach based on the average growth of students in the same grade who began the school year at a similar academic level. The student's end-of-year score is then compared with this projected score to establish whether the student met or exceeded projected growth targets.

Greater-than-expected ELA growth is a binary indicator based on the student's predicted spring score given their starting achievement level. Students whose observed spring score exceeded their predicted spring score were coded as demonstrating greater-than-expected growth, but students whose observed score was equal to or below their predicted score were coded as not demonstrating greater-than-expected growth. The same outcomes were generated for the math and ELA assessments.

Independent variables. The variable gender identifies the student as male or female. For the purposes of analyses, a small number of students identifying as non-binary or who for those who

preferred not answer were subsumed under the category of female. In the analysis, diagnosed special needs/disability refers to whether the student had a diagnosed disability or other identified special learning need. White, Hispanic, Black/African American, and Other Race are binary indicators identifying the student's reported racial or ethnic background. Free/reduced-price lunch eligibility indicates whether the student qualified for subsidized school meals and serves as a measure of socioeconomic disadvantage. I-ready collects this information as part of administering its assessment. Parent/caregiver and school leader data were also used to identify student eligible for free/reduced priced lunch. The variable English language learner indicates whether the student was identified as an English learner. Elementary, middle, and high school are binary indicators identifying the grade-level category of each student. Special-needs focus indicates whether or not the student attended a school primarily designed to serve students with disabilities.

ELA and Math Assessment Sample

In the sample, 27 schools participated in the i-Ready assessment. The analytic sample exhibited average gains in both subject areas during the school year. Mean ELA scores increased from 515 points in the fall to 541 points in the spring, representing an average gain of 25 points, while mean mathematics scores increased from 436 points to 455 points, an average gain of 19 points. More importantly, slightly more than half of students achieved greater-than-expected growth in ELA (52%), compared with 48% doing so in mathematics.

The sample was evenly divided by gender. However, for respondents designated “prefer not to answer, non-binary, and other gender, these responses were subsumed under the female category as a way of preserving these cases in the sample. Approximately 43% of students were diagnosed special needs or had a chronic medical condition. Sixty percent of students were White, 23% were Black or African American, 8% were Hispanic, and 9% identified with another racial group. Approximately 27% were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, while 1% were identified as English language learners. Most students attended elementary (57%) or middle school grades (38%), with 4% attending high school, and 19% attended schools with a specific focus on serving students with special needs.

Data Analysis

Summary statistics were generated to describe the characteristics of the analytic sample and students' fall and spring achievement. Independent-samples t-tests were then conducted for each variable to examine whether average student characteristics and assessment outcomes differed between the comparison groups. Finally, separate ordinary least squares regression models were estimated for growth in English language arts and mathematics. In each model, the student's spring i-Ready test score served as the dependent variable, and the corresponding fall test score was included as a baseline control. The models also controlled for available demographic characteristics, including grade level, race and ethnicity, gender, eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch, English learner status, and identified special learning needs. These models estimated differences in spring achievement after accounting for students' initial achievement and observed sociodemographic characteristics. Because students were nested within schools and outcomes for

students attending the same school may not be statistically independent, standard errors were clustered at the school level. Logistic regression models with the same specifications were also estimated to predict whether a student achieved greater than expected growth or not during the course of the academic year. Results are presented as odds ratios.

Table 3. Characteristics of ELA and Math Assessment Sample

Variable	Mean/Prop.	SD	Min.	Max.
Fall ELA Score	515.25	90.50	284	677
Spring ELA Score	540.65	85.73	339	698
Fall-Spring ELA Growth	25.39	37.47	-117	226
ELA: Greater Than Expected Growth	0.52	0.50	0	1
Fall Math Score	436.02	52.14	310	553
Spring Math Score	455.42	52.92	316	597
Fall-Spring Math Growth	19.40	23.20	-95	134
Math: Greater Than Expected Growth	0.47	0.50	0	1
<i>Individual Demographic Data</i>				
Gender	0.50	0.50	0	1
Diagnosed Special Needs/Chronic Medical Condition	0.43	0.50	0	1
White	0.60	0.49	0	1
Hispanic	0.08	0.27	0	1
Black/African	0.23	0.42	0	1
Other Race	0.09	0.28	0	1
Free/Reduced Priced Lunch Eligible	0.27	0.44	0	1
English Language Learner	0.01	0.12	0	1
<i>School Characteristics</i>				
Elementary	0.57	0.50	0	1
Middle	0.38	0.49	0	1
High School	0.04	0.21	0	1
Special Needs Focus	0.19	0.40	0	1

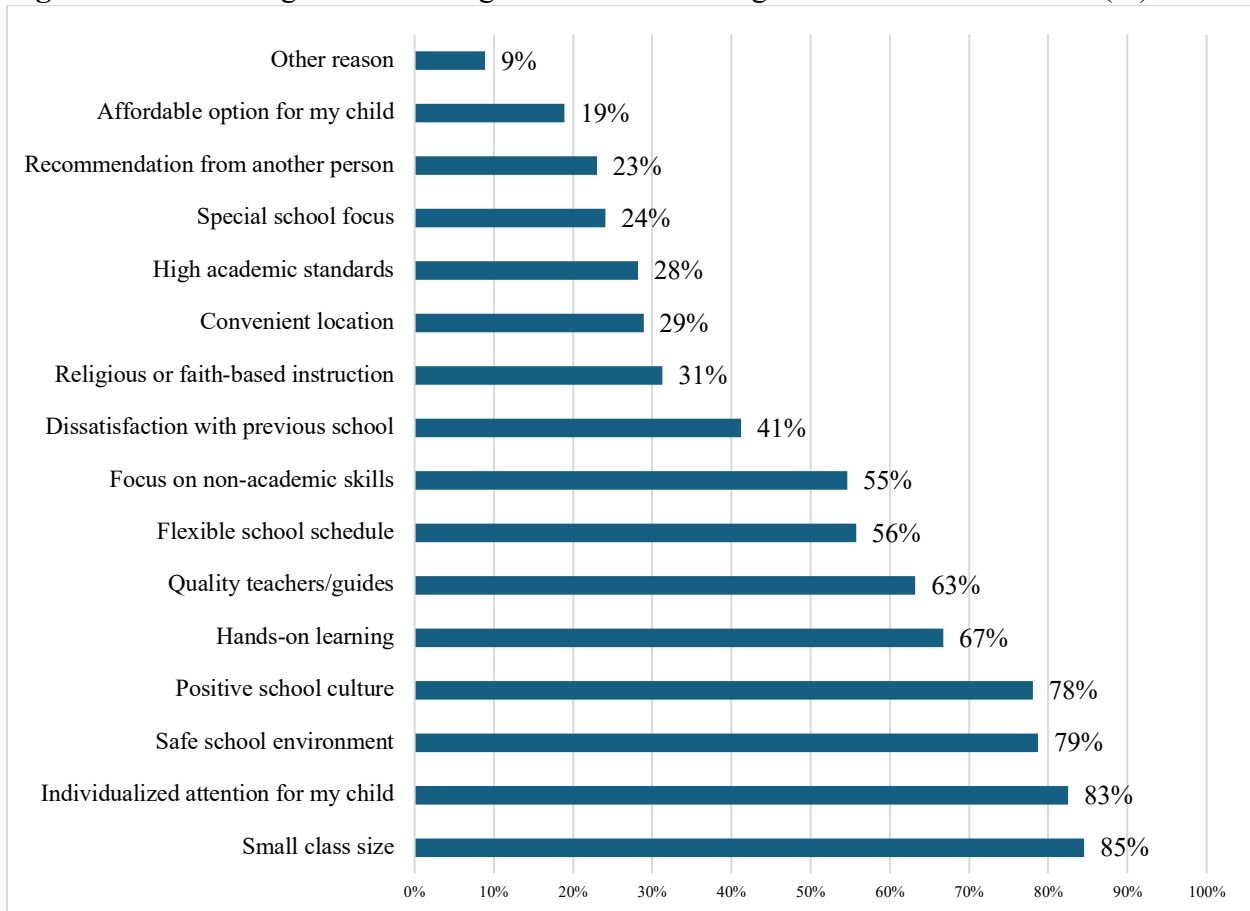
Note. Demographic data are based on the ELA sample. ELA sample = 423; Math sample = 405.

III. RESULTS: PARENT/CAREGIVER SURVEY

Figure 1 presents reasons why parent/caregivers chose their child’s microschool.

Parent/caregivers most frequently report choosing their child’s microschool because of small class sizes (85%), individualized attention (83%), a safe school environment (79%), and positive school culture (78%). Most parents also identify hands-on learning (67%), quality teachers or guides (63%), flexible school schedules (56%), and a focus on non-academic skills (55%) as reasons why they chose their child’s microschool. These commonly selected reasons from parent/caregivers seem to align with the stated goals of most microschools (Soifer & Soifer, 2026).

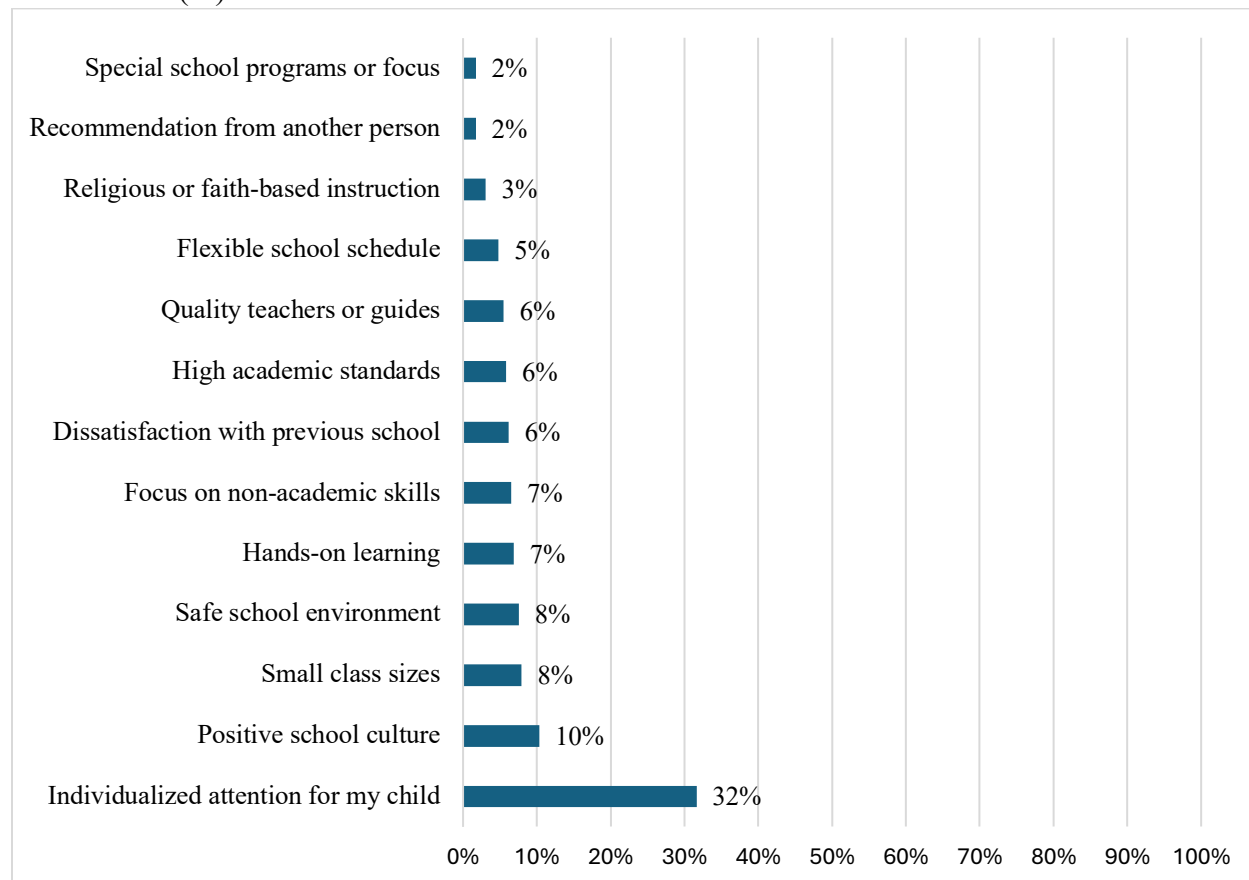
Figure 1. Parent/caregivers indicating reasons for choosing their child’s microschool (%)



Note. Parent/caregiver sample = 291.

In Figure 2, parent/caregivers indicate the most important reason for selecting their child’s microschool from the reasons presented in Figure 1. Individualized attention is the “most important” reason, being selected by nearly one-third of parent/caregivers in the sample. No other reason exceeds 11%, suggesting that while many factors are important, parent/caregivers most often prioritize personalization over other school features. Positive school culture, small class sizes, and safety are the next most common reasons, but each is selected by fewer than one in ten parents.

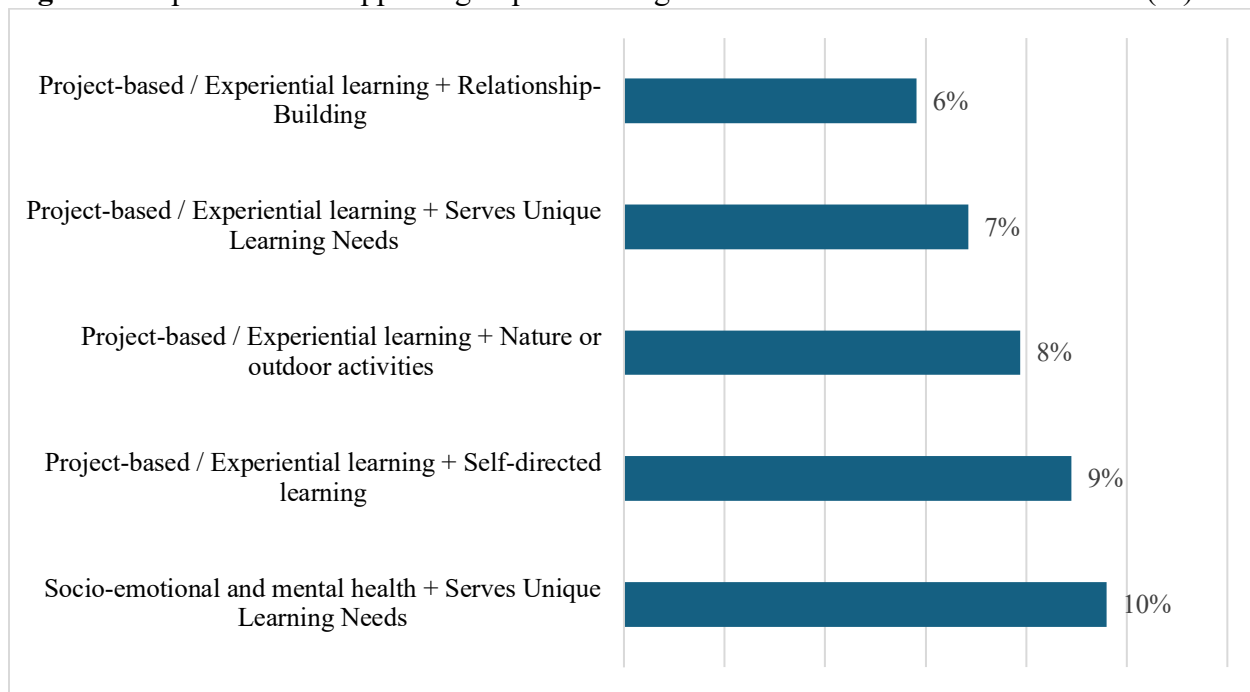
Figure 2. Parent/caregivers indicating the most important reason for choosing their child’s microschool (%)



Note. Parent/caregiver sample = 291.

Figure 3 presents a different set of school characteristics, asking parent/caregivers to select the top two factors that appealed most to them about their child’s microschool. Results from the top five combinations suggest that parent/caregivers are drawn to microschools for instructional, relational, and student-centered reasons. The largest share of parents identify socio-emotional and mental health supports combined with serving unique learning needs (10%), so many families appear to view microschools as environments with individualized and supportive conditions. Several other common pairings include project-based or experiential learning, especially when combined with self-directed learning (9%), nature or outdoor activities (8%), and serving unique learning needs (7%). These patterns might underscore the possibility that parent/caregivers are attracted to microschools for the way these schools combine personalized learning, alternative instructional approaches, and closer attention to students’ developmental needs. The significance of serving unique learning needs in Figure 3 is notable since about half of parent/caregivers in the sample have a child with special learning needs (e.g., Individual Education Plan, a 504 plan, or learning difference).

Figure 3. Top two factors appealing to parent/caregivers about their child’s microschool (%)



Note. Parent sample = 291.

In Table 4, parent/caregivers describe how well they believed their child’s microschool develops various academic and non-academic skills and competencies. Parent/caregivers rate students’ skills and competencies very positively across all areas, with at least 92% describing each item as good or very good. The strongest ratings are reported for compassion, leadership, mental health, cooperation, communication, and peer relationships, but academic and technical skills are rated very highly as well.

Table 4. Parent/caregivers indicating how well their child’s microschools is at developing... (%)

Skill/Competency	Good / Very Good	Poor / Very Poor
Math ability	92%	8%
Hands-on workforce/vocational skills	93%	7%
Technology skills	93%	7%
Reading, writing, and literacy	95%	6%
Self-discipline	96%	4%
Understanding of different cultures	96%	4%
Relationships among peers	98%	2%
Communication ability	98%	2%
Leadership skills	99%	1%
Positive mental health	99%	1%
Ability to cooperate with others	99%	1%
Compassion for others	99%	1%

Note. Parent sample = 291.

Table 5 presents the frequency of different learning opportunities that parent/caregivers report are offered at their child's microschool. Hands-on learning is the most frequently offered opportunity, with 97% of parent/caregivers reporting that it occurred "often" or "all the time". Leadership opportunities, outdoor or nature-based learning, and community projects are commonly reported. While internships and apprenticeships are less common relative to other opportunities, 33% of respondents say that these opportunities occurred, which is an ostensibly high percentage for this type of activity, which is typically offered to high school students.

Table 5. Parent/caregivers indicating frequency of learning opportunities offered their child's microschool (%)

Learning opportunity	Often / All the time	Never / Rarely
Hands-on learning	97%	3%
Leadership opportunities	88%	12%
Outdoor or nature-based learning	83%	17%
Community projects	76%	24%
Learning with local experts	64%	36%
Meaningful homework/projects at home	49%	51%
Internships or apprenticeships	33%	67%

Note. Parent sample = 291.

In Table 6, parent/caregivers express strong trust in their microschool's decision-making (97% agree/strongly agree). More than three-quarters strongly agree/agree that their child's microschool connected students with mentors with whom their child might not otherwise interact. Views are more mixed on parent-parent communication, but most (57%) exhibit positive responses.

Table 6.

Item	Agree / Strongly Agree	Disagree / Strongly Disagree
I trust my child's microschool to make decisions in the best interest of my child.	97%	3%
My child's microschool often connects my child with professionals/mentors that my child would otherwise never meet.	77%	23%
I often communicate with other parents about school (e.g., carpooling, homework help, organizing events).	57%	43%

Note. Parent sample = 291.

In Table 7, parent/caregivers once again exhibit highly positive experiences with family engagement at their child's microschool. Nearly all respondents feel welcome, are involved in decision-making, and receive regular updates from their child's microschool. Every respondent (100%) strongly agree/agrees that parents and teachers/guides treat one another with respect. Ratings are somewhat lower but still positive on the extent that microschools help

parent/caregivers to develop new skills and knowledge related to their children's education. Given this finding, microschools may be working to co-produce learning outcomes with families as is often alluded to in their missions and in surveys of school leaders (Soifer & Sofier, 2026).

Table 7. Home-school family engagement (%)

Item	Agree / Strongly Agree	Disagree / Strongly Disagree
I am treated with respect by my child's teachers.	100%	0%
I feel welcome at my child's microschool.	98%	2%
I am involved in decisions about my child's education.	93%	7%
My child's microschool regularly updates me on my child's progress.	92%	8%
My child's microschool provides opportunities for me to develop new skills/knowledge related to my child's education.	86%	14%

Note. Parent sample = 291.

Table 8 presents several responses related to student safety and experiences in microschools. Parent/caregivers express overwhelmingly positive perceptions of their children's social experiences, safety, and relationships with teachers/guides. All respondents agree that their child is safe at school while 99% say that their child likes their teachers/guides and that teachers/guides care about their child and the child's learning. Parent/caregivers cite high levels of student engagement and preparation, with 93% indicating that their child wants to attend the microschool, 96% reporting excitement about learning, and 94% believing the microschool is preparing their child for life.

Table 8. Student safety and experiences in microschools

Item	Agree / Strongly Agree	Disagree / Strongly Disagree
<i>Child's social experience and safety</i>		
My child has close friends at school.	92%	8%
My child is NOT lonely at school.	97%	3%
My child likes his/her teachers at school.	99%	1%
My child isn't bullied at school.	96%	4%
My child is safe at school.	100%	0%
<i>Child's experience with teachers/guides</i>		
My child's teachers care about my child.	99%	1%
My child's teachers try to do what is best for my child.	99%	1%
My child's teachers care about my child's learning.	99%	1%
<i>Child engagement and preparation</i>		
My child wants to be at school every day.	93%	7%

Most of the time my child is excited about what he/she does at school.	96%	4%
I feel that my child will be prepared for life by attending this school.	94%	6%

Note. Parent sample = 291.

In Table 9, parent/caregivers express high levels of satisfaction across all aspects of their child's microschool experience. Satisfaction is highest for teachers/guides, the development of nonacademic skills, and the overall microschool experience. Extracurricular activities receive the lowest rating at 81% although more than four in five parent/caregivers are still satisfied or very satisfied with extracurricular activities at their child's microschool. While not featured in the table, 86% of parent/caregivers say that they can afford the school's tuition and fees beyond this year while 87% feel that their child's current microschool offers enough academic programs.

Table 9. Parent/caregiver satisfaction

Area of satisfaction	Satisfied / Very Satisfied	Dissatisfied / Very Dissatisfied
Teachers or guides	98%	2%
Development of nonacademic skills	97%	3%
Overall microschool experience	97%	3%
Facilities	95%	5%
Academic program	94%	6%
Cost/affordability	93%	7%
Extracurricular activities	81%	19%

Note. Parent sample = 291.

In the survey, 61 respondents had transferred their child to the current microschool from a local public school. These respondents were asked to compare their experiences between their current microschool and their former public school. Table 10 indicates that parent/caregivers see their child's current microschool as being more supportive, better at communication, safer, and offering greater learning by wide margins. These results are consistent with the overall responses showing that parents/caregivers are largely satisfied with most aspects of the microschool experience.

Table 10. Comparison with previous public school

Item	Agree / Strongly Agree	Disagree / Strongly Disagree
My child has more friends	85%	15%
My child receives more support	87%	13%
My child's microschool communicates more	92%	8%
My child is learning more	92%	8%
I am more satisfied	97%	3%
My child feels safer	98%	2%

Note. Parent/caregiver sample = 61.

In reflecting on the overall findings, parent/caregivers primarily choose microschools for individualized attention, safety, and positive school culture. This emphasis on personalization is notable because nearly half of respondents have a child with unique learning needs. Across survey items, parents reported exceptionally positive perceptions of student safety, teacher relationships, family engagement, academic and non-academic skill development, and overall satisfaction. Parents whose children had transferred from public schools also widely viewed their microschools as safer, more supportive, more communicative, and more effective academically.

IV. RESULTS: STUDENT SURVEY

Table 11 presents students' perceptions of school climate in their microschool. Based on these results, students experience microschools as close-knit environments where they feel well known, included, and socially connected. Each category of survey items is reviewed as follows.

Personalization. Nearly three-quarters of students (74%) report receiving one-on-one time with a teacher almost every day, indicating that individualized attention is a common feature of the microschool experience for students.

Academic Engagement. Students generally report high levels of academic engagement. Approximately 87% say that they learn in small groups, 92% indicate that they liked school, and 93% report participating in their classes most of the time. While 80% feel excited about school, a lower percentage, only 61%, say that they want to attend every day.

Social Capital. Most students report strong peer relationships and access to socially diverse networks. More than 91% indicate that they have close friends at school, 83% report that they can make friends easily, and 93% report having friends from families different from their own. Moreover, 66% report learning about different jobs by speaking with adults who work in those occupations, indicating that many students have at least some opportunities to build connections beyond their immediate peer groups.

Cultural Competence. Students commonly underscore exposure to cultural learning, but the extent of these experiences varies based on the survey item. Approximately 81% say they learn about other cultures, 73% report learning about their own culture, and 65% say they learn about people who speak another language than their own language.

Student–Teacher Relationships. Student perceptions of their relationships with teachers are considerably positive. More than 95% report being treated with respect by their teachers, and 97% indicate that their teachers care about them, want what is best for them, and care about their learning. More than 90% say that their teachers encourage them. Overall, these results point to strong, supportive, and caring relationships between students and educators.

School Safety. Most students feel safe at school, with nearly 95% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they feel safe. Only 9% report that students sometimes get into fights. About one in five students say that they have been bullied at school.

Connectedness. Students generally have a strong sense of connection to their schools. Approximately 91% feel that they belonged, and 93% say that people at school know them well. In addition, only 16% report feeling lonely at school, meaning that more than four in five students do not feel lonely at school.

Table 11. Student Perceptions of School Climate

Survey item	Agree/Strongly Agree	Disagree/Strongly Disagree
Personalization		
One-on-one time with teacher almost every day	74%	26%
Academic Engagement		
Learns in small groups	87%	13%
Likes school	92%	8%
Participates in classes most of the time	93%	7%
Feels excited about school	80%	20%
Wants to attend school every day	61%	39%
Social Capital		
Learns about different jobs by talking to an adult who does those jobs?	66%	34%
Has close friends at school	91%	9%
Can make friends easily at school	83%	17%
Has friends from families different from their own	93%	7%
Cultural Competence		
Learns about other cultures	81%	19%
Learns about his/her own culture	73%	27%
Learns about people who speak another language	65%	35%
Student-Teacher Relationships		
Treated with respect by teacher	96%	4%
Teachers encourage the student	91%	9%
Teachers care about the student	97%	3%
Teachers want what is best for the student	97%	3%
Teachers care about the student's learning	97%	3%
Safety		
Feels safe at school	95%	5%
Students get into fights sometimes	9%	91%
Has been bullied ²	19%	81%
Connectedness		
Feels a sense of belonging	91%	9%
Feels lonely at school ²	16%	84%
People at school know the student well	93%	7%

Student Sample = 1,038; Fall Sample = 586; Spring Sample = 452; 351 students took the fall and spring surveys.

Table 12 presents a comparison of students who attended their current microschool during the previous school year with those who attended a different school last year. Students who did not attend their current microschool during the previous year show more positive perceptions of their experience than their peers. Among these students, 86% agreed/strongly agree that the current school year was better than the previous year, compared with 70% of returning students. Similarly, 89% of new students report learning much more than the year before as opposed to 79% of students who had attended the microschool previously. Perceptions of increased confidence are nearly identical. Students entering a new microschool appear to experience strong improvements in their school experience and perceived learning.

Table 12. Comparison of students who attended/did not attend their current microschool last year

Survey item	Attended current school last year	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
This school year was better than last year	No	38%	48%	86%
	Yes	42%	28%	70%
Learned a lot more this year than last year	No	41%	48%	89%
	Yes	46%	33%	79%
Feel more confident this year than last year	No	42%	42%	84%
	Yes	44%	42%	85%

Student Sample = 305 students attended their microschool last year; 147 students did not.

Social and Emotional Skill Development

Table 13 compares the fall and spring student surveys on social and emotional learning domains for students who took both surveys during the year. Across the matched fall and spring samples, students generally report more strongly positive attitudes toward problem solving and respectful relationships by spring. The largest increase in “Strongly Agree” occurs for enjoying activities that challenge thinking, which rises by 13 percentage points, followed by liking hard problems and thinking about new solutions.

Table 13. Fall-spring difference on SEL domains among students who took both surveys

SEL Domain	Survey Item	Fall Agree	Fall Strongly Agree	Spring Agree	Spring Strongly Agree	Change "Strongly Agree"
Problem Solving	Likes hard problems more than easy problems	40%	13%	41%	20%	7%
	Likes activities that challenge their thinking	54%	24%	43%	37%	13%
	Enjoys situations that require thinking	44%	28%	44%	32%	4%
Growth Mindset	Enjoys thinking about new solutions to problems	49%	28%	50%	33%	5%
	Believes working hard can make them smarter	38%	54%	44%	52%	-3%
	Believes effort helps he/she learn	38%	54%	42%	50%	-4%
	Persists when schoolwork is difficult	45%	46%	47%	46%	1%
	School shows ways to feel better on a bad day	52%	27%	52%	27%	--
Emotional Regulation	School teaches how mood affects treatment of others	51%	40%	47%	44%	4%
	School shows how to calm down	49%	34%	51%	32%	-2%
	Listens carefully to other people's points of view	60%	34%	55%	38%	4%
Respectful Relationships	Respects others' views even when disagreeing	61%	30%	60%	34%	4%
	Describes thoughts and feelings so others understand	45%	26%	48%	28%	2%

Student sample = 351 students took both the fall and spring surveys.

V. RESULTS: STUDENT ASSESSMENT

During the 2025-26 school year, 27 microschools participated in a student assessment in ELA and math. To participate, school leaders at each microschool administered the i-Ready assessment in ELA and math at the start of the school year in fall of 2025 and at the end the of the school year in 2026. Table 14 presents the proportion of students who achieve greater than expected growth on the ELA assessment. Female students are more likely than male students to demonstrate greater-than-expected ELA growth (58% versus 46%), and White students are more likely than non-White students to do so (56% versus 46%). Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch are less likely than non-eligible students to demonstrate greater-than-expected growth (41% versus 56%). It is notable that there is no statistical difference between students with special needs or chronic medical conditions when compared to their peers.

Table 14. Greater Than Expected Growth in ELA (%)

Group Characteristic	Prop. (SD)	Prop. (SD)	Sig.
Gender (Male/Female)	0.46 (0.50)	0.58 (0.49)	*
Diagnosed special needs/medical (No/Yes)	0.51 (0.50)	0.54 (0.50)	
White (No/Yes)	0.46 (0.50)	0.56 (0.49)	*
Hispanic (No/Yes)	0.52 (0.50)	0.56 (0.50)	
Black/African American (No/Yes)	0.55 (0.49)	0.43 (0.49)	
Other race (No/Yes)	0.53 (0.50)	0.43 (0.50)	
Free/reduced-price lunch eligible (No/Yes)	0.56 (0.50)	0.41 (0.49)	**
English language learner (No/Yes)	0.52 (0.50)	0.50 (0.55)	
Elementary school (No/Yes)	0.55 (0.50)	0.49 (0.50)	
Middle school (No/Yes)	0.46 (0.50)	0.62 (0.49)	**
High school (No/Yes)	0.55 (0.50)	0.00 (0.00)	***
Special needs focused school (No/Yes)	0.51 (0.50)	0.57 (0.50)	

Student sample = 423

Table 15 presents the same comparison in math on the i-Ready assessment. As with the ELA assessment, statistically significant differences in math growth are also observed across several characteristics. White students are more likely than non-White students to exceed expected growth (53% versus 39%), whereas Black students are less likely than non-Black students to do so (28% versus 53%). Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch are also less likely than non-eligible students to exceed expected growth (39% versus 50%). At the school level, elementary students are less likely than students outside elementary school to exceed expected growth (40% versus 56%). Middle school students are more likely than students not in middle school to do so (63% versus 37%). No high school students in the sample exceed expected growth, compared with 49% of students in middle and elementary school.

Table 15. Greater Than Expected Growth in Math (%)

Group Characteristic	Prop. (SD)	Prop. (SD)	Sig.
Gender (Male/Female)	0.45 (0.50)	0.49 (0.50)	
Diagnosed special needs/medical (No/Yes)	0.52 (0.50)	0.41 (0.49)	*
White (No/Yes)	0.39 (0.49)	0.53 (0.50)	**
Hispanic (No/Yes)	0.46 (0.50)	0.58 (0.50)	
Black/African American (No/Yes)	0.53 (0.50)	0.28 (0.45)	***
Other race (No/Yes)	0.47 (0.50)	0.51 (0.51)	
Free/reduced-price lunch eligible (No/Yes)	0.50 (0.50)	0.39 (0.49)	*
English language learner (No/Yes)	0.47 (0.50)	0.50 (0.55)	
Elementary School (No/Yes)	0.56 (0.50)	0.40 (0.49)	**
Middle School (No/Yes)	0.37 (0.48)	0.63 (0.48)	***
High School (No/Yes)	0.49 (0.50)	0.00 (0.00)	***
Special needs focused school (No/Yes)	0.46 (0.50)	0.52 (0.50)	

Student sample = 405

Table 16 presents two regression models predicting test scores at the end of the school year in ELA and math. Model 1 estimates end-of-year test scores in ELA. Fall baseline ELA achievement is the strongest positive predictor of end-of-year ELA performance. Holding the other variables constant, each one-point increase in the baseline ELA score is associated with a 0.82-point increase in the end-of-year ELA score ($p < .001$). Students eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch score approximately 17 points lower than non-eligible students ($p < .05$). Elementary school-aged students score approximately 11 points lower than students at other grade levels ($p < .05$). Model 2 estimates end-of-year test scores in math. Baseline math achievement is a strong positive predictor of end-of-year math performance. Each one-point increase in the baseline math score is associated with a 0.87-point increase in the end-of-year math score, holding the other variables constant ($p < .001$). Black students score approximately 8 points lower than White students ($p < .05$), and English language learners score approximately 12 points lower than non-English learners ($p < .05$).

Table 16. OLS regression model estimates end-of-year test scores in ELA and math

Variables	EOY Test Score in ELA	EOY Test Score in Math
Baseline Test Score	0.82*** (0.02)	0.87*** (0.03)
Female	7.74 (4.28)	2.48 (2.42)
Diagnosed special needs/medical	-4.57 (3.62)	-5.58 (3.10)
Hispanic	2.44 (6.29)	7.14 (4.23)
Black/African American	-2.47 (5.20)	-8.47* (3.75)
Other Race	2.25 (8.21)	-0.63 (4.35)
Free/reduced-price Lunch Eligible	-16.55** (5.90)	-5.89 (4.88)

English language learner	-17.90 (10.01)	-11.53** (3.97)
Elementary School Student	-11.20* (4.97)	-3.90 (3.73)
Special Needs Focused School	-1.79 (7.46)	0.43 (5.10)
Constant	126.11*** (10.03)	81.70*** (14.47)
Observations	423	405
Adjusted R-squared	0.84	0.83

Note. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

Table 17 estimates greater-than-expected growth in ELA and math. Female students have 1.6 times the odds of demonstrating greater-than-expected growth in ELA compared with male students ($p < .01$). Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch have approximately 52% lower odds of demonstrating greater-than-expected ELA growth than non-eligible students ($p < .05$). In Model 2, Black students have approximately 38% lower odds than non-Black students ($p < .01$) of achieving greater than expected growth in math, and elementary school-aged students have approximately 39% lower odds than students in middle and high school grades ($p < .001$).

Table 17. Logistic regression estimating greater-than-expected growth in ELA and math

Variables	Greater Than Expected Growth ELA	Greater Than Expected Growth Math
Baseline Test Score	1.00 (0.00)	1.00* (0.00)
Female	1.59** (0.26)	1.18 (0.29)
Diagnosed special needs	1.03 (0.24)	0.60* (0.14)
Hispanic	1.28 (0.48)	1.19 (0.45)
Black/African American	0.78 (0.27)	0.38** (0.12)
Other Race	0.58 (0.30)	0.91 (0.50)
Free/reduced-price Lunch Eligible	0.52* (0.15)	0.60 (0.27)
English language learner	0.62 (0.45)	0.73 (0.38)
Elementary School Student	0.80 (0.16)	0.40*** (0.10)
Special Needs-focused School	1.21 (0.52)	1.24 (0.63)
Constant	1.05 (0.77)	13.83* (14.37)
Observations	423	405

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

Table 18 presents the proportion of students in microschools who achieve at a level higher than what was expected during the academic year. In the ELA sample, 50% or more of students in 12 of 26 microschools meet or outperform expected academic growth for the school year. In the math sample, 50% or more of students in 12 of 26 microschools meet or outperform expected academic growth for the school year.

Table 18. Students performing higher than expected growth in ELA and math (%)

School	ELA			Math		
	N	Prop.	SD	N	Prop.	SD
School 1	2	0.00	0.00	2	0.50	0.71
School 2	2	0.00	0.00	2	0.50	0.71
School 3	15	0.20	0.41	11	0.09	0.30
School 4	11	0.27	0.47	12	0.33	0.49
School 5	3	0.33	0.58	3	0.67	0.58
School 6	9	0.33	0.50	9	0.22	0.44
School 7	59	0.36	0.48	59	0.42	0.50
School 8	5	0.40	0.55	4	0.00	0.00
School 9	10	0.40	0.52	10	0.10	0.32
School 10	22	0.41	0.50	22	0.36	0.49
School 11	12	0.42	0.51	12	0.42	0.51
School 12	18	0.44	0.51	18	0.33	0.49
School 13	28	0.46	0.51	29	0.34	0.48
School 14	29	0.48	0.51	27	0.37	0.49
School 15	2	0.50	0.71	--	--	--
School 16	20	0.50	0.51	15	0.40	0.51
School 17	8	0.50	0.53	8	0.38	0.52
School 18	34	0.56	0.50	34	0.62	0.49
School 19	7	0.57	0.53	8	0.50	0.53
School 20	12	0.58	0.51	13	0.62	0.51
School 21	31	0.68	0.48	32	0.75	0.44
School 22	23	0.74	0.45	23	0.61	0.50
School 23	4	0.75	0.50	4	0.00	0.00
School 24	59	0.80	0.41	58	0.67	0.47
School 25	1	1.00	.	1	0.00	.
School 26	2	1.00	0.00	2	0.00	0.00
School 27	--	--	--	3	0.67	0.58
Total/Average	428	0.49	0.45	421	0.38	0.44

In summarizing the student assessment data, microschool students demonstrate slightly higher than expected growth in ELA but lower than expected growth in math. Still, academic growth varies considerably. Some schools show most or all students surpassing expected growth targets. Other microschools see substantially lower growth rates in their student bodies. Baseline achievement is the strongest predictor of end-of-year performance in both ELA and math as is typically the case in analyses of standardized assessment data. In regression analyses, lower

outcomes were observed for students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, Black students in math, and elementary-aged students. Students attending special needs-focused microschools perform comparably to students in other microschools after accounting for baseline achievement and student background characteristics. It is worth reiterating that firm conclusions should not be drawn from the subgroup analyses since subgroup analyses are derived from very small samples, often clustered within a small number of schools.

VI. CONCLUSION

Microschools represent a growing and highly diverse sector of schools. While their stated missions and instructional approaches vary from school to school, many tend to emphasize small size, individualized instruction, strong interpersonal relationships, and experiential learning. To date, very few analyses have attempted to evaluate whether microschools deliver in their areas of emphasis. To address this gap, this study sought to expand understanding of family and student experiences in microschools through parent/caregiver surveys, student surveys, and student assessment data.

Summary of Key Findings

Sample characteristics. The schools in this study served substantial numbers of students with unique learning needs. Approximately 40% to 47% of students across the study samples had an identified disability, special learning need, or chronic medical condition, and roughly one in five participating schools explicitly focused on serving students with disabilities.

Academic performance. Microschool students exhibited average academic growth that was generally consistent with expected trajectories, but overall student performance was somewhat stronger in ELA than in mathematics. Approximately 52% of students exceeded their expected annual growth in ELA, compared with 47% doing so in math. Performance varied across schools. As is the case with assessment data, baseline achievement was the strongest predictor of end-of-year performance. Notably, students attending special-needs-focused microschools performed comparably to students in other microschools after accounting for baseline achievement and student characteristics.

Parent/caregiver experiences. Parent/caregivers reported very positive experiences with their children's microschools. Families most commonly said that they selected microschools because of their small class sizes, individualized attention, safe environments, and positive school cultures, with individualized attention emerging as the most important factor for families. Parents also gave high ratings for teacher quality, family engagement, academic and nonacademic skill development, and student safety. Strikingly, 97% reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their child's microschool. Families whose children had transferred from public schools viewed their child's current microschool as safer, more supportive, and more communicative than their child's previous public school. Such overwhelmingly positive responses are unusual in similar surveys of parent/caregivers with children attending private, public, and charter schools (Hamlin, 2021; Hamlin & Cheng, 2020; Thapa et al., 2013).

Student experiences. More than 90% of students in the sample described their microschools as safe, supportive, and close-knit. Nearly all students reported positive relationships with their teachers, a strong sense of belonging, close friendships with classmates, and regular classroom participation. More than 90% reported that their teachers cared about them and their learning. Students who were new to their microschool were particularly likely to report that the current school year was better than the previous school year and that they felt that they had learned more during the current year.

Study Limitations

There are several key limitations to this work. First, participation in this study was entirely voluntary. School leaders opted into each component (i.e., student survey, student assessment, and parent/caregiver survey) of the research project and not all schools decided to participate in all three components. As a result, this self-selected group may differ systematically from the broader microschool sector. For example, schools with stronger academic outcomes, more satisfied families, greater organizational capacity, or more confidence in their programs may have been more likely to participate in the study, knowing that they would fare well. The study selection process thus limits the generalizability of the findings and raises the possibility that the results overstate the average performance of and experiences in the broader microschool sector.

Second, students participating in the ELA and math assessments met expected academic growth trajectories based on their grade levels and prior achievement. The expected growth benchmarks generated from grade level and prior achievement alone may not fully account for the distinctive characteristics of the microschool student population. Many students in the study had disabilities, chronic medical conditions, significant emotional-support needs, or histories of emotional trauma. These factors may affect academic growth but were not incorporated into the expected-growth estimates for students at the start of the school year. Consequently, the analysis used in this study may understate microschool performance if participating students faced educational challenges not captured by students' baseline scores or grade-level growth projections.

Third, this study provides empirical evidence in an area where research remains scant. Nevertheless, the student and parent/caregiver samples are relatively small. The assessment data included students from 27 microschools while the parent/caregiver and student surveys included 36 and 31 schools, respectively. These samples are meaningful given the difficulty of identifying and recruiting microschools for research, but they likely do not capture the full diversity of a highly decentralized sector. Small school-level sample sizes also limit the precision of estimates and make it difficult to examine differences across school models, grade levels, geographic settings, and student subgroups. On the student assessment, there were schools where only 1 to 4 students participated. Larger and more representative studies are needed to determine whether the patterns identified in this work are consistent across the microschool population.

Finally, this work does not use a comparison group of students attending other types of schools (e.g., district-run public, charter, private schools). Parent/caregiver and student reports show that microschool experiences could be more positive than experiences in traditional school settings but without a comparison group in the survey itself, this possibility remains uncertain. In this study, the findings cannot establish that microschools causally produced differences because families selected into these schools and reported retrospectively on prior experiences. Such comparisons are insightful but should not be interpreted as causal.

Directions for Future Research

Future studies should recruit larger samples of microschools. Expanding the number of participating schools would improve the representativeness and statistical precision of the

findings while allowing researchers to examine variation across subgroups with more reliability. Moreover, future work should compare microschool students with similar students attending public and private schools. The positive experiences reported by students and parent/caregivers in this study seem to be impressive, but without an appropriate comparison group, uncertainty remains. Studies that compare demographically and academically similar students across microschools, traditional public schools, charter schools, and conventional private schools would provide new evidence about the relative advantages and limitations of microschools that will help to advance understanding of the sector.

Researchers should also develop clearer classifications of different microschool models. Microschools differ in their schedules, structures, instructional approaches, and missions. Future studies should distinguish between full-time and part-time programs, private schools and homeschool cooperatives, academically oriented and project-based models, virtual and in-person programs, and schools serving general or highly specialized student populations. Doing so requires a much larger school sample in order to make these distinctions. Still, more precise disaggregation within the sector would help identify whether there are particular microschool models that are associated with stronger academic outcomes, more positive student experiences, or greater success serving students with specific learning needs.

Finally, microschool students should be followed over longer periods of time. Most existing evidence, including from this study, focuses on experiences and academic outcomes measured during a single school year. Longitudinal research might investigate whether students remain enrolled in microschools, how their academic and social-emotional development changes over time, and how they transition into other educational settings after leaving a microschool. Longitudinal studies could examine high school completion, postsecondary enrollment and attainment, employment, earnings, adult well-being, and other later-life outcomes. Such research would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how microschool attendance shapes students' academic and life trajectories.

Conclusion

One of the main takeaways from this initial descriptive analysis is that microschools appear to serve a distinctive population of students that often have considerable learning needs. High proportions of students with disabilities and chronic health conditions attend microschools, and research has long demonstrated that this subgroup of students can struggle in conventional school settings. It may then be unsurprising that parent/caregivers report seeking safe schools that can provide individualized attention to their children who have unique learning needs and backgrounds. Furthermore, microschool students appear to perform academically at levels that are similar to their peers in traditional school settings, but they report positive experiences across a range of academic and non-academic domains.

Another relevant consideration related to the microschool student population is financial in nature. In states with education savings accounts (ESAs), microschool families of students with disabilities and unique learning needs can often draw from ESAs to pay for tuition and fees at microschools. Since the typical ESA in a state offers families \$6,000-\$10,000 per student per

year (EdChoice, 2026), states may reap substantial savings when families choose to send a child with special needs to a microschool using ESA funds as opposed to a district-run public school. This potential financial implication and its effects should be investigated in future work.

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APPENDIX

Parent/Caregiver Survey (Spring, 2026)

1. Please respond to ALL questions on this survey based on **your oldest child currently attending** [insert microschool name].

Write the first and last name of this child on the line below.

2. Thinking about your oldest child who attends [insert microschool name]...

How old is this child? Write your child's age below (e.g., 13 years old).

3. **How long** has this child **attended** his/her current microschool? Please write your response in school years (e.g., 2 years) or write it in months (e.g., 5 months) if your child has been at the school less than 1 school year.

4 In the past week, about **how many school hours** was your child at his/her microschool? If your child's microschool is online, include hours spent in live/scheduled online instruction.

- 0 to 10 hours
- 11 to 20 hours
- 21 to 30 hours
- 31 to 40 hours
- More than 41 hours

5. Why did you choose this microschool for your child? **Check all that apply.**

- High academic standards
- Small class size
- Safe school environment
- Individualized attention for my child
- Flexible school schedule
- Special school focus (e.g., arts, nature, sports)
- Positive school culture
- Convenient location
- Affordable option for my child
- Dissatisfaction with my child's previous school
- Religious or faith-based instruction
- Hands-on learning
- Recommendation from another person (e.g., friends, family)
- Quality teachers (or guides)
- Focus on non-academic skills (e.g., collaboration, leadership, empathy)
- Other. Please specify. _____

6. Why did you choose this microschool for your child. Now choose the **most important reason. Choose just ONE.**

- High academic standards
- Small class sizes
- Safe school environment
- Individualized attention for my child
- Flexible school schedule
- Special school programs (e.g., arts, nature, sports)
- Positive school culture
- Convenient location
- Affordable option for my child
- Dissatisfaction with my child's previous school
- Religious or faith-based instruction
- Hands-on learning
- Recommendation from another person (e.g., friends, family)
- Quality teachers (or guides)
- Focus on non-academic skills (e.g., collaboration, leadership, empathy)

7. Which of the following appeal to you most about your child's microschool? Choose **TWO** below.

Its emphasis on...

- College preparation
- Project-based learning / Experiential learning
- Arts and performing arts
- Self-directed learning
- Nature or outdoor activities
- Cultural heritage
- Relationship-Building / Relationship Development
- Classical education
- Socio-emotional and mental health
- Serves Unique Learning Needs (e.g., neurodiversity, dyslexia, gifted)
- Traditional or back-to-basics
- Faith-based or religious
- STEM or maker school

8. How good is your child's microschool at developing...?

	Very Poor	Poor	Good	Very Good
Math ability	☐	☐	☐	☐
Reading, writing, and literacy	☐	☐	☐	☐
Technology skills	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hands-on workforce or vocational skills	☐	☐	☐	☐

9. How good is your child's microschool at developing...?

	Very Poor	Poor	Good	Very Good
Leadership skills	☐	☐	☐	☐
Communication ability	☐	☐	☐	☐
Self-discipline	☐	☐	☐	☐
Creative thinking	☐	☐	☐	☐
Positive mental health	☐	☐	☐	☐
Compassion for others	☐	☐	☐	☐
Understanding of different cultures	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ability to cooperate with others	☐	☐	☐	☐
Relationships among peers in school	☐	☐	☐	☐

10. My child's microschool provides the following for my child...

	Never	Rarely	Often	All the time
Leadership opportunities	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hands-on learning	☐	☐	☐	☐
Learning outdoors or in nature	☐	☐	☐	☐
Community projects	☐	☐	☐	☐
Internships or apprenticeships	☐	☐	☐	☐
Learning with local experts (e.g., businessperson, artists, health professionals)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Meaningful homework or school projects at home	☐	☐	☐	☐

11. Rate the following questions about your child's microschool.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I trust my child's microschool to make decisions in the best interest of my child.	☐	☐	☐	☐
My child's microschool often connects my child with professionals/mentors that my child would otherwise never meet.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I often communicate with other parents about school (e.g., carpooling, homework help, organizing events).	☐	☐	☐	☐

12. Rate the following questions about your child's microschool.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel welcome at my child's microschool.	☐	☐	☐	☐
My child's microschool provides opportunities for me to develop new skills/knowledge related to my child's education.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am involved in decisions about my child's education.	☐	☐	☐	☐
My child's microschool regularly updates me on my child's progress.	☐	☐	☐	☐

13. Describe your child's experience at his/her microschool...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
My child has close friends at school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
My child is NOT lonely at school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
My child likes his/her teachers (or guides) at this school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
My child isn't bullied at school.	☐	☐	☐	☐

14. Please answer questions about your child's main **teacher** at his/her microschool. A teacher can also be a "guide" or "mentor".

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am treated with respect by my child's teachers.	☐	☐	☐	☐
My child's teachers care about my child.	☐	☐	☐	☐
My child's teachers try to do what is best for my child.	☐	☐	☐	☐
My child's teachers care about my child's learning.	☐	☐	☐	☐

15. Please answer the questions below about your child's microschool.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
My child is safe at school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Most people at school know who my child is.	☐	☐	☐	☐
My child wants to be at school every day.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Most of the time my child is excited about what he/she does at school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
My child has quality friendships at this school.	☐	☐	☐	☐

16. Please answer the questions about your child's microschool.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I can afford the school's tuition and fees beyond this year.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel that my child will be prepared for life by attending this school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
This school offers enough academic programs for my child.	☐	☐	☐	☐

17. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your child's microschool?

	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Overall level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the school	☐	☐	☐	☐
Quality of Teachers	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cost	☐	☐	☐	☐
Facilities	☐	☐	☐	☐
Extracurricular Activities	☐	☐	☐	☐
Academics	☐	☐	☐	☐
Non-academic skills (e.g., creativity, collaboration, leadership)	☐	☐	☐	☐

18. Did your child go to his/her current microschool during the previous school year?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If "Yes", proceed to Q21.

If "No", continue to Q19

19. PAST SCHOOL EXPERIENCE Before your child's current microschool, what best describes your child's previous school?

- My child previously attended a local public school
- My child previously attended a private school
- My child was previously homeschooled
- My child previously attended a fully online school
- My child's current school is the only one my child has ever attended
- Other. Please explain. _____

20. PAST SCHOOL EXPERIENCE Compare [insert microschool name] with your child's previous school.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I get more support to help my child learn at home.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I communicate more with my child's school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
My child is safer.	☐	☐	☐	☐
My child has better friendships.	☐	☐	☐	☐
My child is learning more.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am more satisfied.	☐	☐	☐	☐

21. **ALMOST DONE!** We ask the following short questions to make sure that our survey covers all families. Has your child who is attending [insert microschool name] **ever** been identified as having special learning needs (e.g., an Individual Education Plan, a 504 plan, or learning difference)?

- Yes
- No

22. Has your child who is attending [insert microschool name] **ever** been identified as having emotional support needs (e.g., a behavioral plan, counseling services, or other formal emotional support)?

- Yes
- No

23. Has your child who is attending [insert microschool name] ever been identified as having medical or health-related needs (e.g., medical fragility, chronic health conditions, medication administration, or a health care plan)?

- Yes
- No

24. What is your **highest level** of education?

- Less than high school
- High school diploma or GED
- Some college
- Four-year university/college degree
- Graduate degree (e.g., master's, professional, or doctoral degree)

25. Which of the following **best describes** your child's current living arrangement? **Choose one.**

- Two-parent household (biological, adoptive, or step-parents)
- Single-parent household
- Lives with a parent and another adult (e.g., grandparent, relative, partner)
- Lives with relatives or guardians (not parents)

26. What is your child's race/ethnicity? **Check all that apply.**

- Asian / Pacific Islander
- Black / African
- Hispanic
- Native / Indigenous
- White / Caucasian

27. Do you have any other comments to share?

Student Survey (Fall, 2025 and Spring, 2026)

1. Write your first and last name below.

2. What is the name of the school you are going to now? Please write out the full name of your current school below.

3. Did you go to this school last year?

- Yes
- No

4. Last year what was the name of your school? Please write out the full name of the school you went to last year below.

5. Please answer the questions below about the school you go to now.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I get one-on-one time with my teacher at school almost every day. (Note. A teacher can also be a "guide" or "mentor").	☐	☐	☐	☐
When I'm at school, I often learn in small groups with other students	☐	☐	☐	☐
I like my school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I participate in my classes most of the time.	☐	☐	☐	☐

6. This year has your school helped you learn about different jobs by giving you a chance to talk to an adult who does those jobs?

- Yes
- No

7. Please answer the questions below about the school you go to now.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have close friends at my school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can make friends easily at my school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have friends at my school whose families are different from mine.	☐	☐	☐	☐

8. Please answer the questions below about your teacher at the school you go to now. A teacher can also be a "guide" or "mentor".

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am treated with respect by my teacher.	☐	☐	☐	☐
My teacher encourages me to say what I think.	☐	☐	☐	☐
My teacher cares about me.	☐	☐	☐	☐
My teacher tries to do what is best for me.	☐	☐	☐	☐
My teacher cares about my learning.	☐	☐	☐	☐

9. Please answer the questions below about the school you go to now.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel safe when I am at my school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel I am part of my school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Most people at my school know who I am.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I want to be at school every day.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Most of the time I am excited about what I do at school.	☐	☐	☐	☐

10. Please answer the questions below about the school you go to now.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I learn about different cultures at my school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I learn about my own culture at my school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I learn about people who speak a different language than I do when I am at school.	☐	☐	☐	☐

11. Please answer the questions below about the school you go to now.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Sometimes I get into physical fights at my school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I worry about being bullied at my school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel lonely at my school	☐	☐	☐	☐

12. Please answer the questions about you.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I like hard problems more than easy problems.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I like activities that challenge my thinking.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I enjoy situations where I have to think about something.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I enjoy thinking about new solutions to problems.	☐	☐	☐	☐

13. Please answer the questions about you.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I can become smarter with hard work.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can learn anything with effort.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can do well in a subject even if I am not good at it at first.	☐	☐	☐	☐

14. Please answer the questions about you.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I know ways to make myself feel better when I'm having a bad day.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I know how my mood affects how I treat others.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I know how I can calm myself down.	☐	☐	☐	☐

15. Please answer the questions about you.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I listen carefully to other people's points of view.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I respect the opinions of others even when I disagree.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can describe my thoughts and feelings in a way that other people can understand.	☐	☐	☐	☐

16. Please answer the questions about you. **Only Spring**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
This school year was better than last.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I learned a lot more this year than last year.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel more confident this year than last year.	☐	☐	☐	☐

17. How old are you? Write your age below (e.g., 13 years old).

18. What language does your family usually speak at home? Write the language (e.g., English) your family usually speaks at home below.

About the Author

Daniel Hamlin is Presidential Professor in education policy and Faculty Director of the Oklahoma Center for Education Policy (OCEP) at the University of Oklahoma. He is the founding director of OCEP, Editor-in-Chief of the Oklahoma Education Journal, and Research Affiliate at the Program on Education Policy and Governance at Harvard University.

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