Victory Report: Microschools

How an Innovative School Model Can Deliver Better Education at a Lower Cost

Executive Summary

The conventional K-12 public school model costs American taxpayers almost $1 trillion a year yet leaves most students underserved because of its one-size-fits-all, advance-by-grade-level model. Public trust in these schools has collapsed to historic lows.

Microschools have emerged as one of the most promising alternatives. These are small, independent, and innovative schools that teach mixed-age students at a fraction of private school cost. They now serve between 1–2 million American children and show early signs of strong academic achievement.

> ***In addition to outperforming many other school models, microschools are inexpensive due to their extremely small faculties, facilities, and administrations.***

The growth and feasibility of these microschools depends almost entirely on publicly funded school choice, especially universal Education Savings Accounts (ESAs). This is also what makes them vulnerable: ESAs have been repeatedly challenged in state courts and at the ballot box. Even states friendly to school choice often require that ESA funding goes to accredited institutions (effectively shutting microschools out) and fail to reform their zoning and building codes to accommodate microschools.

Although several organizations have helped spread the microschool model, Primer offers the clearest proof that the model works at scale. Founded in 2019 by Ryan Delk, Primer has grown to 48 schools across about twenty localities, with its largest cluster in Florida. Its Liberty City campus in Miami, for instance, enrolls about 100 students across grades K-8 in a historically underserved, predominantly black neighborhood. By handling facilities, enrollment, compliance, and administrative operations itself, Primer allows local teachers to focus on the classroom. These classrooms pair mastery-based academics with hands-on “pursuits,” and keep tuition within reach through ESA’s and the Primer Foundation’s own scholarships.

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