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Lowest common denominator: should it apply to pandemic education?

By Steve Bakke  October 12, 2020



I applaud a recent letter reminding us of something very important (“Don’t blame families for adapting”). The writer had picked up on an earlier article dealing with “learning pods” in which parents were gathering together to create learning groups for their children, and often hiring teachers/tutors to improve the quality and enjoyment of the interrupted normal learning process. This was in response to closing schools and on-line learning being imposed because of the pandemic.

Of particular concern to the writer was a quote from a University of Minnesota professor who expressed concern that this technique was “inherently exclusionary” and will “further harm” marginalized students. I agree with the writer that there was a subtle hint of “shaming people for following their paternal instincts.”

Too often in today’s desperate search for equality, some officials and decision makers seem tempted to accept a lower level for all, rather than doing the most possible for as many as possible. That’s what I’m referring to as “lowest common denominator.” Of course, some might suggest that we extend the “learning pod” concept to all affected school children.

I could support that, but then what would we have? We’d have real classrooms, just in a different location. We’d have a “school,” but those are fully or partially closed. Given the existing structure and constraints, that concept would never happen. But think about it. Maybe some creative parents are on to something important for planning future education systems – especially for younger students.