

April 9, 2020

It is an understatement to say that the Coronavirus (COVID-19) has disrupted American families, culture, the economy, governments, healthcare systems, and your schools as well. Like many other institutions in American life, schools have been forced to make radical changes in day-to-day routines, including ceasing their face-to-face interactions with students. Students now receive instruction, assignments, and tests in their homes using virtual means—with no transition period for teachers, parents, and students.

This letter makes a case that, as soon as possible, independent schools should create plans to:

- Keep your students and staff safe from the virus during the 2020-21 academic year
- Maintain fiscal solvency, including keeping enrollments at desired levels
- Demonstrate to your families that you will provide educational value to their children under the likely scenario that they

On April 6, Dr. Gabriel Leung, [wrote in the New York Times](#) and made this same point:

After achieving a sustained decline ...

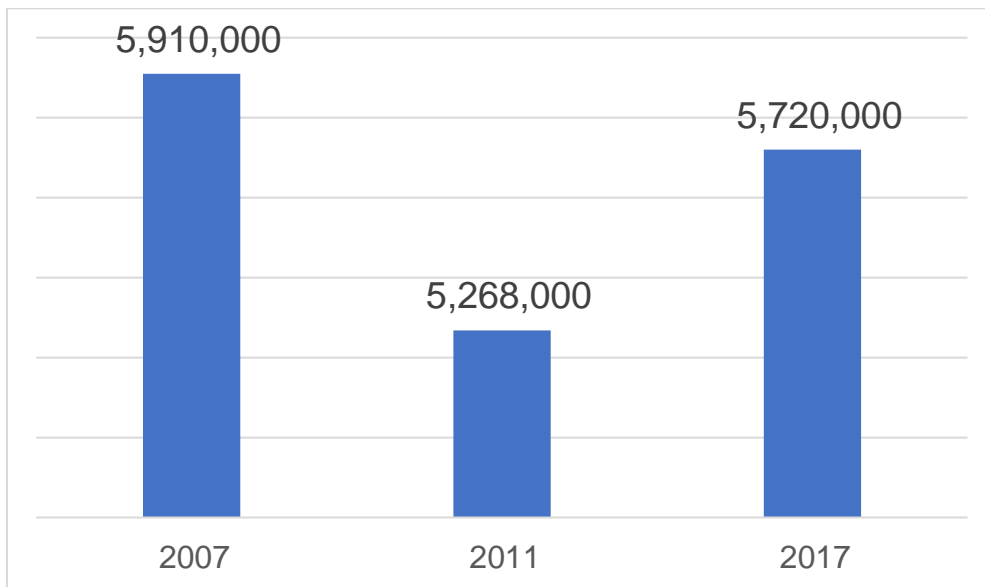
We divide this remainder of this letter into four parts:

- The Coronavirus Macroeconomy and Independent Schools
- Health Considerations for the 2020-21 academic year
- Immediate Financial Considerations
- Educational Considerations for the 2020-21 academic year.

While we do not know if the current economic recession—that surely just began—will be as bad as the Great Recession, it is worth remembering the impact the Great Recession had on the independent school sector.

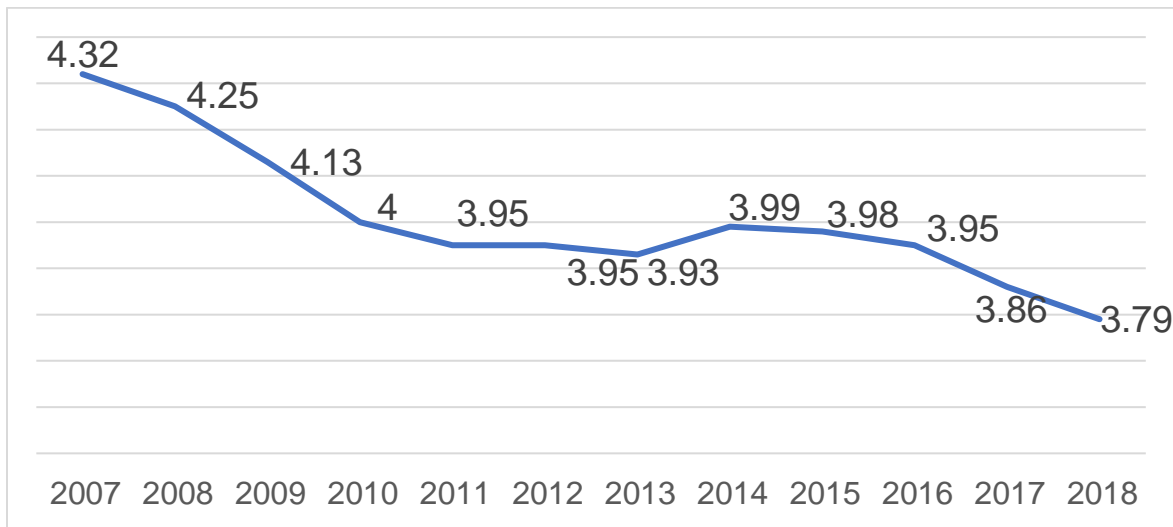
The Great Recession began in December 2007. As shown below, nationwide independent school enrollment declined by about 640,000 students from 2007 to 2011—a decline of 10.9 percent. Enrollments recovered to 5.72 million by 2017.

Nevertheless, 2017 enrollment was still down by 3.2 percent when compared to 2007—a decline of almost 200,000 students.



https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_205.10.asp?current=yes

Any adverse impacts on enrollment due to the Coronavirus recession that surely began in March 2020 are going to be in addition to adverse enrollment impacts due to demographic changes in America. As shown below, the number of births in the United States fell by 12 percent from 2007 to 2018—from 4.32 million in 2007 to 3.79 million in 2018.



Without any action on your part, fewer births over the past 12 years and the poor Coronavirus macroeconomy will likely lead to significant enrollment decreases in the independent school sector, for fall 2020 and beyond. Of course, some schools and some regions of the country will be impacted more than others.

Given the Coronavirus economy we are in, and given the likelihood that students will toggle between learning at school and learning at home, for at least large stretches of the upcoming school year, we recommend that you immediately begin conversations with your school community on the following six questions:

In this letter we provide the questions, and some guidance. But, you and your individual school communities will have to decide on the answers for yourselves—given your specific situations and given health updates that will be forthcoming over the summer months.

Next, we briefly discuss each of these questions in turn.

Health Considerations for the 2020~~1~~ Academic Year

- 1) How can we—credibly—convince our school community that we will provide more safety against the coronavirus relative to public schools

We do not know to what extent instant testing or N95 masks will be available, or how effective homemade masks are. As doctor's offices are doing now, are schools prepared to take each person's temperature and ask them health questions before deciding whether to let them into the school building each day?

Depending on a school's population, and the possibility of a partial but incomplete lifting of distancing rules, school leaders may consider using a hybrid-style schedule for part of the year.

5) How can we make our work environment better for our teachers and staff, when they and their children will be toggling between school/home/school/home?

Maintaining a coherent – but flexible – schedule for students, parents, and teachers is important. Imposing singular demands on the specific technology platforms teachers use will be difficult, as individual teachers have a variety of comfort levels with this level of technology and online instruction, especially on short notice. Some schools are currently requiring use of a particular platform while others vary based on subject area or preference. Teachers should be required to have some kind of live check-ins with students online. At least weekly is best; daily check-ins may become onerous for families. Maintaining some kind of meeting schedule is important; some teachers may want to meet online more than others, but the times allotted for these class sessions should be clear and predictable for students and parents to avoid conflicts. Some hybrid home schools, which only meet 2-3 days per week under normal circumstances, have mostly kept their normal work routines going in the online environment. Tuesdays and Thursdays, for example, might be considered “class days,” while the rest of the days are considered “home days,” in which students complete work (assigned by their teachers) at their own pace. This also gives teachers dedicated, predictable time to do their grading, preparing, and to conduct their family lives—especially when they may have their own children with them at home. This “hybrid” model may be best for conventional independent schools as well.

Students will have to do more research projects, as appropriate given student ages and expertise, and will spend more time on virtual creative activities like preparing and delivering presentations, creating artwork and music, creating videos, etc.

Students will do more writing on their own, and re-writing of their marked-up work on their own, as appropriate.

Students will be asked to discuss concepts with their family members as part of their lessons.

To get a fuller educational experience, students cannot be glued to a screen all day doing lessons, and so those lessons will incorporate more time with outdoors, hands-on, or interpersonal activities.

More suggestions from hybrid home school practices are discussed [here](#) and in *Little Platoons: Defining Hybrid Home Schools in America* is possible that work done at home, guided by a

We wish we had better news for you, but the Coronavirus is with us—until we get wide distribution of a vaccine and/or herd immunity 16 months, or so, from now. For prudent risk management, it is best if independent schools create health, fiscal, and educational plans for the 2020-21 academic year now—to offset likely negative effects of the Coronavirus on your schools.

Notes: Not all state revenues are enrollment driven. That is, not all funds depicted below present the increased per-student costs to state budgets when public school enrollment increases by one student. However, for most states, the vast majority of these state funds are directly tied to enrollment. For the District of Columbia, we used local funds. 2016-17 was the most recent year available, and for almost all states, state funding for public schools has increased significantly in more recent years.

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_203.20.asp?current=yes

