

## #94 Pandemic Pods: Parents, Privilege, Power and Politics

**Jennifer Berkshire** Welcome to Have You Heard. I'm Jennifer Berkshire

**Jack Schneider** And I'm Jack Schneider.

**Berkshire** And Jack, welcome back from the woods.

**Schneider** I feel like you are going to do something not nice right now. So I'm not even going to respond to that.

**Berkshire** Well, Jack, while you were spending many days hiking around so deep in the thick canopy that you were unreachable.

**Schneider** Oh, I see. I see. This is not now. Now I understand why you're mentioning it. I've somehow fallen down on the job. Okay. Well now I have now are now all our listeners know that.

**Berkshire** Well, I want to know if you, if these words mean anything to you, private pandemic pod.

**Schneider** Oh Jennifer, what do you think? We talked about four hour a week while we were backpacking in Maine. We were planning our pod the whole time.

**Berkshire** Well, on the one hand, this is sort of an unlikely topic for a Have You Heard episode in that it's really click baity, right? That the, this, this topic took the world by storm and has generated an unbelievable number of, of new stories. Many of which have a sort of depressing sameness. And these will be the stories about, you know, a family, an affluent family casting about... Friend of the show, Mira Debs, who runs the education program at Yale recounted, getting a disturbing number of requests from families. Dear Mira, do you happen to have a grad student available to tutor a gifted child next year?

**Schneider** Never for an ordinary child. Nobody's trying to set up a pandemic pod for their perfectly average kid. Yeah. I had a disturbing number of media requests from reporters who wanted me to comment on pandemic pods. And many of them were surprised that I was really skeptical of them. And that I thought that, you know, this was basically recreating a system of educating children that we had several hundred years ago and worked so hard to get away from because of its devastating inequality.

**Berkshire** OK - first a little bit of context. As you've probably noticed reopening schools as the coronavirus rages is turning out to be, well, complicated. And the fact that there's been no federal leadership or much funding to assist schools is making things even worse. First up in our all-star lineup is Jessica Calarco. She's an associate professor of sociology at Indiana University and the author of a new book called Negotiating Opportunities: How the middle class secures advantages in school. And she says that while the question of what to do about school is

agonizing for everyone, as with everything else in our divided, unequal times, the burden is falling most heavily on parents with the fewest resources.

**Jessica Calarco** And so essentially what that does is it puts parents into Unimpossible set of choices, where they either have to send their children physically back to a potentially unsafe school where they would be putting themselves and their teachers and their community and their family at risk by going to school or parents have to figure out another option instead. And so unfortunately those kinds of choices have the potential to perpetuate inequalities because the families who are going to be most able to make an alternative choice, to send their kid to a private school that has the money to open safely or to keep their child home and homeschool them, or even to do something like hire a private tutor or a private teacher to teach their child from home. Those are primarily going to be affluent white families who have more resources, have more flexibility. You may have a stay at home parents who can do that homeschooling instead, meanwhile, the students who get left behind in these potentially unsafe schools, those who have to attend, or those who have to scramble to figure out how to balance working with doing online schooling, if that's the only option available to them are primarily or going to be disproportionately low income families and families of color.

**Berkshire** Which brings us to the topic of this episode: the private pandemic pod. Jessica attributes the buzz around them to the fact that so many parents are grappling with the same challenge right now. But if the problem is a collective one, the fix is highly individualized.

**Calarco**

**Berkshire** And if enough parents pursue that individualized solution, well the danger is that they end up undermining the entire system of public education.

**Calarco** Part of the problem is that that privatization model or that individualization model of education fuels or aligns very closely with the problems that so many parents and especially working parents are trying to solve right now. And pandemic pods, especially solve for parents kind of three key problems that they're facing with schools continuing online. And that's the problem of the quality of learning that they're worried about. It solves the problem of childcare for many families that are trying to balance work with keeping their kids at home. And it also solves the problem of kind of social interaction for their children. And so this kind of privatized individualized pandemic pod model, it solves a lot of problems, but it does. So in a deeply inequitable way.

One of the things that I worry about is this, this, this alignment between the policy priorities that have the potential to create inequities and to privatize education and to dismantle or disrupt the public education system. That because of how those priorities currently aligned with parents' concerns, with concerns that are kind of deeply felt across the spectrum in the U S right now that it will fuel movements toward those kinds of policy priorities, even if it has tremendously unequal and tremendously destabilizing effects for public education.

**Berkshire** And if enough parents pursue that individualized solution, well, the danger is that they end up undermining the entire system.

**Calarco** If they're done in a way that pulls students out of the public school system, or if they pull teachers away from the public school system essentially what that has the potential to do is to undermine the system of public education as a whole, and to prioritize it instead by pulling dollars out of those schools, by undermining the basis that allows kind of a public trust in the quality, even if that's a slightly mythologized version of the quality of public education it kind of threatens to destabilize that whole public education system in a way that could have consequences for policymakers willingness to continue funding public schools at the level that they need to be funded, especially in order to support low income students and students of color whose families don't have those same options

**Berkshire** In her book Jessica documented just how dependent public schools are on affluent families. Well, in a time of crisis, these same families are one again exerting outsized influence - by threatening to leave.

**Calarco** So essentially if you have a quote unquote good public school, often that's a school in an affluent, primarily white community where there's enough tax funding to provide an incredibly high level of education. And where on top of that tax funding, parents are also able to donate considerable amounts of money through the PTA or PTO, where they're able to volunteer in schools and provide all sorts of extracurricular support to really kind of amp up the, the reputation of that school and the financial viability of that school. Privileged parents are in an especially advantaged position to demand that schools cater to their needs. And they're also in an especially privileged position that if schools are unwilling to cater to those needs, they can simply pull their dollars and pull their students out in a way that many other families don't have that same option.

**Berkshire** So Jack, listening to Jessica talk about the outsized influence that privileged parents have in our school system made me want to know about...sort of where...I want to know more about the history of this. We don't really think about our public school system as being held together by this delicate balance where you basically have to get people have means to buy in. And this seems like a debate that's really old and who better to ask about a really old debate than Jack Schneider?

**Schneider** Because he has really stale ideas. Yeah, I think it's really because the early days of the common school system, as it was then known were very much characterized by an effort to get middle class and affluent families to send their kids to the public schools from its origins. This system was built on the premise that a public school system could only work if it was a system for everyone. And I think there are two reasons for that. One is that if you don't have the most advantaged members of your society in your schools, then what you essentially have is what they at the time called pauper schools, right?, which would be deeply stigmatized, and

which many parents wouldn't want to send their children to. There were pauper schools in many cities prior to the advent of the common school era. This is the early to mid 19th century in most states and creating a public education system that everyone sent their kids to eliminated the potential stigma of free schooling, which it had at the time.

And the second important reason is to think about the stability of the system, particularly in terms of funding and taxation, that public education has always had the advantage of being more like Social Security than like food stamps, right? Social Security, people paying different amounts, but everybody gets it. And as a result, there's really widespread support for it. There are all sorts of pot shots we could take at Social Security, but ultimately Americans have always been opposed ever since the advent of the Social Security Administration to anything that would take away their benefits. And because everybody benefits from it, there's really widespread support as opposed to a system that is perceived to be more like welfare, which those who don't receive it are less likely to support

**Berkshire** Jack, one thing that I find just so astonishing about this moment that we're in is that it turns out that once again, historians of education turn out to be really relevant, that the vision for the future of schooling that that is being bandied about right now, turns out to look a lot like one that we started out with down to what you were just describing with pauper schools.

**Schneider** As you and I detail in our forthcoming book, Jennifer, the push for essentially just a total privatization of the education system is one that libertarian-oriented conservatives have been making for the past several decades. And they're finally beginning to score some policy victories at the state level. And now of course, the secretary of education is sympathetic to their cause and is actually one of their leaders. And the idea here is to return to a system prior to the advent of the public education system, one in which all families would be responsible for paying for their own children's education for seeking out a product in a competitive marketplace. And that those who are enabled to do so would receive some sort of basic public assistance. And we can see this would cause exactly the problems that common school reformers like Horace Mann were trying to address a couple of hundred years ago.

**Berkshire** If you don't know our next guest you should. His name is L'Hereux Lewis-McCoy. He's an associate professor of sociology of education at NYU and the author of *Inequality in the Promised Land: Race, Resources, and Suburban Schooling*. And he's spent much of the summer following conversations about private pandemic pods - including some pretty close to home.

**L'Hereux Lewis-McCoy** As I started to poke around in these groups and started to get some emails, I even got a call from my sister and she said, Hey, I've been hearing about these pandemic pods, right? These groupings of maybe three to five families where they'll get together daily a couple of times a week, and you'll have a little bit of childcare and you'll have some interaction for your child. And oftentimes there'll be a tutor or a teacher who's going to lead them through the curriculum. And sometimes that curriculum is the one that's assigned by the school.

And sometimes among these spots, it's a curriculum that's outside of, what's assigned on the schools. And it gave me pause because as someone who's been interested in equity and researching and writing around this for awhile, it reminded me of opportunity hoarding and opportunity. Hoarding is one of the central ways that I think about why any, how inequality is transmitted in the 21st century. And I said, well, wait, how can we actually think about what we can do in this moment differently around schools? Because one of the largest challenges is that oftentimes people are trying to figure out how to take her out the edges of schooling, but we don't realize that there are some fundamental inequalities that are already present

**Berkshire** More on this notion of opportunity hoarding in just a second. But first I couldn't help myself I had to ask L'Hereux what he told his sister.

**Lewis-McCoy** I told her, I said, well, let's talk about it, but I want to know who you're inviting in. And I also want to know why you're doing it. And that actually gave her a little bit of pause. I said, I get the idea of why you're educating your child in this way, but have you thought about the people who you'll invite in? And as she started to tell me who she was dividing in, I said, you know, I noticed that everyone you've mentioned they're coming from college educated background, is that actually the background of most of the kids at your son's school? He's like, it's not. And I said, well, okay, well that may mean you have to do a little bit more stretching if you're actually committed to trying to do this kind of equity work, rather simply taking care of your child. And, and my sister is a wonderful dynamic person. And she was like, wow, I hadn't thought about that. And I started to think about more and more how this conversation has taken off quickly. And most people aren't thinking about the multiple levels that inequity can play out here.

**Berkshire** Back to the concept of opportunity hoarding. Earlier we heard Jessica Calarco talking about the leverage that privileged parents exert over public schools. Well opportunity hoarding is also about leverage - in this case the extraordinary lengths that advantaged parents will go to try to secure advantage for their kids. Including during a pandemic.

**Lewis-McCoy** It's an ugly picture. It's an ugly picture of kind of what becomes almost a classic Americana value of doing for yourself to the exclusion of others. The way I describe it as that, if we imagine that were in the ocean and there's something tragic that has a befall on our ship, there are some folk who are dealing with trying to keep their head above water, right? They're boating and they're barely surviving. And those are often the families that are living in near the poverty line, right? Distance learning from the beginning, online learning with the challenge. So they may not have steady internet. They may not have adequate access to the type of formats that you need. So when you're trying to participate in online learning and you're using your cell phone and a wireless connection, it's really not set up for that starting in the spring. And even before that, they had trouble in those connections.

And then you have folks who are a little bit better off people who may have internet connections. People who may have multiple computers or tablets that they can use. And those

folks when knocked off the boat are trying to get into the lifeboat. And sometimes that lifeboat will be helpful. But then there are some of us who have been knocked off of this boat who are not getting in life rafts, but they're actually hopping in speedboats. All of a sudden they've built out a system of functionally private education. That's going to accelerate their child. Whereas many folks who are getting in the life raft are just barely surviving. And the folks who are in the water, unfortunately, they're doing far too little to talk about their needs and to address what they will need. So I'm concerned about this moment because it is classic Americana, but the implications of how much this will probably drive things further apart. I'm not even sure we're fully aware of.

**Berkshire** We mentioned at the top of the show that pandemic pods have gotten an extraordinary amount of media coverage. Well L'Hereux was quoted in the Washington Post story that launched a million other stories. And his quote is one I'm still thinking about. He said "Most parents will act in the interest of their child, and you can't tell them not to." I say, 'Act in the interest of your child, and add some equity to it.' So what does it look like to add some equity to something like a private pandemic pod? Well L'Hereux says it's important to first recognize what it doesn't look like.

**Lewis-McCoy** If you aren't interrogating why your networks are racially, ethnically, linguistically, economically segregated. I'm willing to bet that that child who gets invited into a pod that hasn't interrogated these things will feel like an outsider. You may feel good because you've made a commitment to inviting someone in, but you probably won't tend to all the dynamics that need to happen in that pot to make it successful and inclusive. I think about the reality of many kids who are probably going to be invited into the pod. They are probably coming from families that may be multigenerational coming from homes where adults are essential workers. And so that means they're vulnerable to COVID. They're more likely to be exposed. So when I think about that child coming in on a Wednesday morning in October, and they've got a cold, I think about other families literally saying, is it a cold or is it COVID? And should we kick the child out? Because the truth of the matter is if you're not holding equal stake, then all of a sudden you're turned into a beneficiary. And the whims of those who have more control can actually transform the entire experience.

**Berkshire** In other words, the solution to a collective problem, can't be individual, no matter how well intentioned the individuals are.

**Lewis-McCoy** I think one of the things that well-intentioned people may also do is to recognize that even if we invited one child into each pod, like, let's assume we have a four person pod, and we invite one child. Well many districts have more than 25% of children who are economically disadvantaged. Even if everyone invited one child in, you wouldn't be able to cover the needs. So we owe it to ourselves to discuss with our school leaders, to discuss with our districts, what are the possibilities of building out sets of support for the families that have the

fewest resources in this moment? And that may mean that you're a part of a district that historically has had a very active PTA every year. You do a fundraiser and the bar keeps on raising and raising, and you've been able to reinvigorate the library. You've been able to make sure that they have one of the most fantastic graduation trips ever. You may actually have to shift and say, what can the PTA do to put resources into supplementing the needs of families who have less.

**Berkshire** Listening to L'Hereux just there refer to what we're going through as sort of a classic Americana story. You were talking earlier, Jack, about how we're watching a very old story unfold, but there's also a more recent element. And I'm thinking about the description of opportunity hoarding that we just heard about. And you have, you know, you have affluent Americans sort of scrambling for whatever advantage that they can get. And when I listened to that and I think about, you know, like, wow, even in the midst of a pandemic, you have people who are really thinking about it in terms of, you know, how can I use this to my advantage? And in some ways that's a recent development, but it is also a very American story.

**Schneider** Yeah. We for, you know, as long as any of us remember have used the education system as the ostensibly meritocratic battleground for determining social and economic privilege and advantage. Now, of course, we know not just from common sense, but from lots of research, that those who are most well situated to succeed in the educational system are those from racial privilege, economic privilege, other forms of social advantage and economic advantage. But we pretend as a society that everybody enters into the schools on an equal footing, and those who acquire the most education and achieve the highest, those are the children. And eventually the adults who are the most able who have the most merit and who therefore are the most deserving of society's rewards, as long as we pretend that the schools are the place where it is fair to sort out these kinds of advantages, we will see people with privilege angling to use the schools as a way for getting their kids ahead. Now, how many alternatives do we have? Not a lot, because we live in a country that has both a powerful myth of equality, opportunity and meritocracy. And on the other hand, radical inequalities in terms of social advantage and economic power.

**Berkshire** Well, Jack, you're already seeing at the state level political leaders starting to call for basically just giving the money to the parents. For example a state senator in Iowa said, you know, I think it's just time to give parents their \$7,000 plus of state funding. And, you know, people think, you know, it's like a flat tax, right? And so imagine the difference that, that if you're, if that's the only money you have to work with versus you're a family of means, and you've just received 7,000 extra dollars that you can now put towards hiring a private tutor from Yale.

**Schneider** This has essentially been the argument against vouchers for years and years, right. That people who already have opted out of the system. And that's about 9% of families who are not participating in the public education system and educating their children, that we would essentially just be giving them a major tax refund and that those dollars would flow directly out of the public education system and never return. And what we're talking about here is something

even more potentially disastrous. And that is not only 9% of funding disappearing, but many more families who presently educate their kids through the public education system potentially saying, you know what? This made sense during the pandemic for us to take these dollars and do our own thing, but now we're set up this way. Maybe we'll just continue doing that. And so what we'll see if we go down this road, is that policies crafted for a short term emergency could have very long-term consequences for the system as a whole.

**Berkshire** Jack, as I was watching this story play out. I was desperate to confer with an education historian to know, you know, are there, are there recent examples we can draw upon, but alas, you were in the woods. And so I had nobody.

**Schneider** You shined the bat signal and someone else answered it.

**Berkshire** Well, thank goodness...

Earlier, we heard L'Hereux Lewis-McCoy describing pandemic pods and the phenomenon of opportunity hoarding that they're so bound up with as a classically Americana story. Well, John Hale, who is an associate professor of education history at the university of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign says that they're part of the oldest Americana story of all. That would be the great debate that has simmered for centuries over who gets to call the shots when it comes to educating kids, the family, or the state?

**Jon Hale** That question goes to the founding of education, right? And you can trace that very question back to 1647, right?, to the Old Deluder Satan Act, the first sort of educational policy that we have in this country is just that. Parents have the responsibility to educate their children. And every sizable town of 50 or more households has to organize something and their parents have to lead the charge. Right? So our system is sort of founded on that principle and it never really escapes us. Right? And Robert Gross in his work talks about this, that in fact, our system is essentially a private system and this whole public thing comes later. So that is the question. So we're just seeing, I think a reiteration of this question, a different manifestation of this question. In the pandemic. So that's the question that we've been toiling with this question for centuries.

**Berkshire** Hale is the author of a forthcoming book on the history of the school choice movement called *The Choice We Face*. He says that starting in the 1950's you start to see parents fleeing a public system that they believed was in crisis.

**Hale** The second thread is a much more insidious mechanism of white parents using their privilege to avoid a system that they see as in peril. And that is that this is a sort of history of segregation academies, where they literally, you know, in Prince Edward County, they are founded in the basement of a church before they can build this sort of Christian private campus. Right? We see this all throughout the American South. We even see this in the city of Boston, right? We see three public or rather three private schools developed during the Boston bus



busing crisis. One of them my research was looking at was in the basement of an old hospital. Just any space they can get to just get out of the system. So again, there's this perennial older question and this intersection with one of privilege right now, and that's what basically is creating the pandemic pod.

**Berkshire** As Hale chronicles in his book which you can probably tell I'm very excited about, the story of school choice in the US has always been incredibly politically complicated. But perhaps what's most difficult to untangle right now is that you have people from what seem like opposite ends of the political spectrum embracing what began as a fundamentally libertarian cause.

**Hale** These parents are sort of acting on the same impulse as these, these liberty protestors or these anti-masking protestors at state capitals, right? They are enacting the same right and claiming the same right. But very different parts of the political spectrum, but acting in the same way. That they're pulling these kids out, it's their right to do that. We're just going to take the bull by its horns and going to educate our own kids. And this is their right to do so, but they're making the same claim essentially as these anti-masking protesters, these liberator protesters who were at capitals before the George Floyd protests. At the surface, that seems bizarre. But when you look at the libertarian notions of school choice, that's exactly what they're doing. And progressive white parents are leading the charge, but we have to, I think, put them in the same category as the liberator protests, because they're saying the same thing and they're doing the same harm to our public systems that we actually need.

**Berkshire** I think that's such an interesting point that Jon just mentioned, that you have this complicated history where you have parents pulling away from the system for all kinds of reasons. For example, the first family that I ever met that homeschooled their kids were, they were leftists, and they pulled them out because they were really unhappy with the kind of boosterism around the first Iraq war that they felt was just dominating the conversation in their public school. And so they pulled the kids out to give them a more progressive education. And I think what we just heard from John is that when you look at this history, you see these complicated tendrils, all woven together.

**Schneider** I think homeschooling actually gives us a useful case for thinking through what John Hill was talking about. Homeschooling has often been pursued by people who are at the margins in terms of their political beliefs, their religious beliefs you know, their attitudes towards society at large. And the reason why it has always been a very small fraction of overall school enrollment. So about one or 2% historically, is that it has come at a steep cost that in withdrawing their children from the public education system, that parents are aware in most cases of some sacrifice that they're making. And we know from the very limited research available that kids tend to get a much narrower curriculum because their parents, of course, aren't trained in a variety of different subjects. They have much less contact with other kids. They, you know, have less exposure to extracurricular opportunities. And the funding available is a big one where, you know, parents are often making a kind of financial sacrifice by homeschooling their children.

This has begun to change over the years and many conservatives right now, I think rightly see the pandemic as a kind of once in a lifetime opportunity to use homeschooling, to really wedge open this issue where they have long been making the case. And that is that schools do not let individuals exercise their own individual choices and educate their own children as they see fit well, that's true, right? And in many cases we can feel sort of grumpy about that, that, you know, I'm not entirely happy with what my kid is learning in school or how he or she is being educated.

But in many ways we should feel really good about that because it evens out the extremes in our society, right? Every kid isn't being educated and indoctrinated in their own particular way. And so right now, conservatives, and again, this is particularly the libertarian wing of the conservative faction are pushing for money following children, whether it be for homeschooling or virtual schooling or something else to enable a private market in which individuals pursue their own private aims. And we want once and for all to get rid of this system that smacks to many of them as socialism and collectivism.

**Berkshire** One of the questions I asked of everyone I spoke to for this episode is what worries them about the pandemic pod phenomenon. Jessica Calarco says that she's concerned that the media frenzy over pods is obscuring that the term can actually mean lots of different things. In Indiana where she is, pandemic pods aren't a thing, but homeschooling is - and so are for-profit online academies which have been flooding the airwaves with advertising. Jessica says it's essential to draw a distinction between the quote unquote solutions in order to understand the impact they'll have on the public system.

**Calarco** I think it's important to know, especially with the pod discussion, that that term is being used in so many different ways. That it's important to be clear about what we mean when we're, when we're criticizing parents who are trying to form pods for their kids. In my view, the most problematic forms of pods are those where families are pulling their kids out of public schooling, because they often take the dollars with them when they go. And also when they are trying to hire private teachers or private tutors to either teach their kids instead of public schooling or supplement the education that they're receiving from the public schools. Because if those kinds of private learning models that have the potential to really amplify inequities between students with more resources and students with less during the pandemic.

**Berkshire** Jon Hale is concerned that parents won't just leave the public system, but they'll start to demand public resources for the cost of privately educating their kids. In other words, that overlap between progressive parents and libertarian school choice advocates will all start to merge into a single demand: give us the money.

**Hale** The new term that concerns me the most is that these pandemic parents, if you will, are going to once financial or fiscal relief or tax breaks, that the political, cultural, and political and social capital that these white parents exercise that they're going to use that to say, you don't, we're going to do this on our own. And we're going to completely separate from the system.

That's my fear is that we have this progressive left seeing this private option as viable legitimate. And if they want to be compensated for that, that will be a devastating blow to the public system.

**Berkshire** As for L'Hereux Lewis-McCoy, he has something else on his mind. He's concerned that our conversations about education in the time of COVID-19 will continue to be dominated by a narrow focus on privileged parents. Like we've been doing in this podcast for example. What if for example instead of churning out endless feature stories about well-to-do opportunity hoarders we looked at how, say, essential workers have been pooling their resources to make it through the pandemic?

**Lewis-McCoy** I wish that the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* said, look at what folks who are keeping us alive are doing. They're not only keeping the society afloat, but they're also creating environments for their children to thrive and strive. Now that is not to suggest that I think when folks who are low income and come together around mutual aid, when they do it, that is equivalent to someone who's going to pour \$3,000 a month into a private educator. I think those are two very different things.

If we're not careful, much of our conversation simply looks at what affluent people do and it assumes lower income people, minoritized folks are in deficit, right? That they don't have capacity. I wish that many districts and many schools would actually say, how do we connect to the communities that have figured out how to survive in the myth of Granville with vulnerability tied to poverty and where they live and how do we plug into those networks to make sure some of those holes are plugged more thoroughly? How do we actually support the workers? Right? So they may not be licensed daycare workers, but how do we support the folks who've been holding these kids down now for months on it, and that conversation hasn't emerged, but I think it will also, if we, if we change the lens of analysis and change our orientation, we can learn some lessons and also figure out how to build out something that is much more robust in this very uncertain time.

**Berkshire** A big thank you to Jessica Calarco, L'Hereux Lewis-McCoy and Jon Hale for giving us some big picture perspective on the pandemic pod craze. And Jack and I will be right back to talk about why conservatives have pod fever and to reveal the subject of this episode's In the Weeds feature for our Patreon subscriber. Here's a hint: the year 1619 is involved.

[Music]

**Berkshire** So Jack, you touched on this a little bit already, and that is the tremendous excitement that we're seeing on the right and the libertarian, right in particular about not just pandemic pods, but really this once in a lifetime opportunity to finally get rid of a system that they just abhor. And you touched on a couple of, you talked about the push to have money follow the child, but I thought that this would be a really good opportunity for us to just sort of run down some reasons why the right would be so excited because I'm not actually seeing a lot of talk about this in the press, right? That we're seeing endless feature stories about affluent parents,

trying to decide what they're going to do, you know, with little Morgan and little Fairchild next year, but not, you know, not so much the political analysis.

So I'll start us off the first time that I ever heard of a pandemic pot, it wasn't called that at all. It was called a homeschooling co-op and the people who were so excited about it were the Cokes and the reason that they were so excited about it was that we have all these, you know, new there's all this new technology that makes it a lot easier for parents to band together and pull out of the public system. And they were already just tremendously enthusiastic about this as a way to move parents and resources out of a system that they can't stand. And one of the reasons that they can't stand it is that they don't like the taxes to pay for it.

**Schneider** Another would be the discussion of channeling, either federal dollars or state dollars to families directly. If kids are not enrolled in face to face instruction in public education. And the first place that I heard of something like that, other than if we go way back in time, is the education debit card in Arizona, which conservatives, and again, particularly libertarian conservatives have been very excited about for years. And they were excited about it for two particular reasons. Now, often they talked about, you know, enabling choice and empowering families, but really what they were excited about was bleeding the public education system of funds. And they actually didn't care at all about abuse. They in fact, made it impossible to track how those funds were being spent. So we know from good reporting by reporters at the Arizona Republic and other publications in the state that parents were often just socking the money away and then continuing to pay their own private school tuition or buying products, quote unquote educational products, returning them, keeping the money and then enrolling their kids in public school.

For opponents of the public education system, that's a perfectly fine activity because it gets them closer to the ultimate aim of rendering the public education system. So unstable that it collapses another reason why they favor the education debit card as a model is that it radically reduces expenditures. So rather than having to pay for facilities and licensed and trained teachers in various subjects for feeding children, for transporting them, you now only have to pay for, you know, the bare necessities for educating kids outside of school. And so even if education continued to be publicly funded, you would be able to really slash the amount that was going from tax dollars towards the education of young people.

**Berkshire** That's such a good point because there's an argument that I see online that's fundamentally misleading, right? That you have proponents of this basically making the case that if we just got rid of this horrible system, all the money would go to teachers, right? That you'll see things like, Oh, teacher could make \$125,000 a year just by working with a pandemic pot. But the, the, the whole aim is to spend, you know, much, much less money, right? Not the same amount of money.

So those are, we were going down our list of, of reasons why the right is so excited. Another one is that you, the teacher's union can't do anything with pandemic pot, right? And so you

undermine the union. You, you radically reduce the amount of money that's going to support Democrats and their causes. And you mentioned teacher licensure already. You're starting to see people make the, that we don't need, there's no reason that you should have to have a license to teach if you're working with kids through a pandemic pod. This is a long, long standing aim of conservative crusaders. And they see this as their moment to drive forward. All kinds of policy changes, rolling back, both teachers unions and licensure would be two more,

**Schneider** A final longstanding conservative aim that something like a pandemic pod advances is this idea that the content of education that what is actually being taught to young people should be determined, not by a democratically elected school board or a set of bureaucrats at the state or district level, or even by teachers, but rather by parents and families that individuals should get to decide for themselves what their kids learn. That's long been. One of the reasons that the libertarian conservative faction has favored homeschooling, and it's one reason that they would be in favor of these pandemic. Pods would be advancing this idea that nobody ought to be able to tell you how to educate your kid. It's a long standing debate in the U S and it's one that I would expect will explode over the next year.

**Berkshire** Well, Jack, I'd like to take this opportunity to compliment you on your EDU preneurialism. Because once again, you have set me up perfectly to make our regular pitch, to get listeners, to support us through Patron. You should see Jack rolling his eyes. We do a regular feature for our Patreon subscribers called In the Weeds. And our topic is the conservative obsession with the New York Times' reexamination of slavery known as the 1619 project. We're going to be taking a look at their particular fixation on keeping the 1619 project out of the schools. If this interests you just go to [Patreon.com/HaveYouHeardPodcast](https://www.patreon.com/HaveYouHeardPodcast) and you'll see all of the cool extras you can get just for sending a few dollars our way each month - like a custom reading list and entry into the Weeds. Your support helps sustain the show and earns you our eternal gratitude.

**Schneider** For those of you who are interested in supporting the show without participating in the capitalist economy, there are lots of ways to do so. I think though, I have no evidence to support this, that a personal message to someone saying here's an episode you might like is probably the best way to do so. We also think that going on and giving the show a few stars, wherever you've downloaded it from whether that be iTunes, Stitcher, or someplace else helps people find us. And then we always love when people engage with the show's Twitter handle at, have you heard pod, we've gotten some ideas for episodes there, and it's also just fun to get people's reactions.

**Berkshire** And Jack, we've gotten a couple queries of late people want to know when it's 60 seconds of sunshine coming back and it'll be back as soon as schools do or do not open

**Schneider** That if they open, it'll be 60 seconds of something. I don't think we have anything else to talk about right now. So I think that's it. Yeah.

**Berkshire** I think you can tell Jack's eager to get back into the woods.

**Schneider** I'm Jack Schneider.

**Berkshire** I'm Jennifer Berkshire. This is, have you heard.