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<https://www.wsj.com/articles/wealthy-families-stick-with-full-time-tutors-hired-early-in-pandemic-11662543002>

## U.S. EDUCATION

# Wealthy Families Stick With Full-Time Tutors Hired Early in Pandemic

Upper-middle-class families, dissatisfied with K-12 schools, are signing up for the instruction as well



*By Douglas Belkin*

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Jean-Francois Gagnon and his wife, Genevieve, watched their two teenage children grind through six hours of remote learning every day in spring 2021, as the pandemic rolled into its second year.

The classes were inefficient. The schedule was inflexible. The children weren't engaged.

So while the family traveled for work between California and Europe, they hired private tutors at a cost of roughly \$15,000 a month to teach each child individually. The children loved it, their parents said.

"We don't hear them say they aren't interested in learning anymore," Mr. Gagnon said.

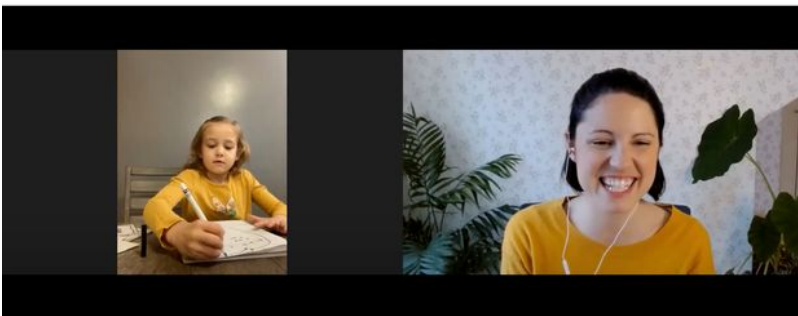
During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, more wealthy families hired personal tutors instead of enrolling their children in school, largely to avoid the worst of remote learning.

Now, as the pandemic disruptions wane, many of these families aren't going back, opting instead to stick with personalized curricula and private instruction. The model, once limited to the very wealthy, is being adopted by families in the upper middle class, according to private-tutor placement companies and their clients.

Many children have endured months of stalled academic progress as a result of the disruptions caused by the pandemic. Last week national fourth-grade reading and math scores revealed the worst decline in decades, one that some educators said could hobble a generation of children.

That stalled progress, combined with teacher shortages, school-board political divisions and classroom disruptions, has for many fueled a flight out of K-12 schools to home schooling and private schools.

Adam Caller, who founded Tutors International in Oxford, England, 23 years ago, said too few schools impart the skills necessary to succeed in a rapidly evolving society, and his clients want a more forward thinking approach to prepare their children to be leaders.



Traditionally, he said, most of his clients have had a net worth north of \$100 million, and tutors often traveled between homes with families, as part of their entourage. He said one such client is discussing hiring a tutor to drive down the coast of South America in a recreational vehicle and teach lessons to the children in different ports as the family sails down the coast in their yacht. The cost for the tutor's services would be about \$400,000.

During the pandemic, Mr. Caller said his client base doubled as he started fielding more calls from a class of people who might have a second home but no yacht.

“There are more families who are wealthy but not moguls; surgeons, venture capitalists and CEOs who founded a business and then sold it for \$5 [million] or \$10 million,” Mr. Caller said. “They have money, and they want to travel with the children, and this is what they’re willing to spend it on.”

Pacific Preparatory, a 20-year-old San Francisco-based school that advertises itself as offering “Exceptional Individualized Education,” has grown to about 100 students from 20 in 2019. The school sends teachers to the homes of students or works with them online to build individualized curricula. Tuition tops out at roughly \$90,000. Teachers work at a student’s pace and on a student’s schedule.

The pandemic presented a logistical nightmare, especially for dual-income families. Initially parents were worried about contracting Covid-19, and then they were flustered by remote learning and changing hybrid schedules, said Staci Stutsman, operations director at Pacific Preparatory.

“The one-on-one model gave them an option, and now they don’t want to lose it,” said Dr. Stutsman.

Families who enroll their children full time at Pacific Preparatory generally have household annual incomes of more than \$350,000, Dr. Stutsman said. Among the school’s clients was Carolina Musselman. Last year she was a high-school senior in Louisville, Ky., who was dissatisfied with the remote classes she took during junior year at her private high school.

Ms. Musselman worked online with several different Pacific Prep tutors for 12 hours a week. She used the time she wasn’t in school to babysit, work out and rock-climb.

Her tutors lived in Ecuador, Cuba and California. She said her math teacher covered her Algebra 2 syllabus so quickly that by February they started on the math curriculum she is now covering as a freshman at Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colo.

“It was pretty intense,” Ms. Musselman said. “When you go to class, you have to be ready to talk. At my high school, I was ready to sit in the back of the class and not say anything.”

Her mother, Layla George, runs a nonprofit organization in Louisville. Her father is an investor and owns a farm. They paid \$45,000 to Pacific Prep for the tutoring, about twice the cost for most of the region’s private high schools.

“Every parent I know is trying to get their child the best education they can—that’s universal,” Ms. George said. “The families that were able to get their kids help, and they advanced, and everyone else fell behind.”

Americans are showing less faith in public schools. This year 42% of Americans said they are satisfied with the quality of K-12 schools in the U.S., the lowest level since 2000, and a decline from 51% in 2019, according to a Gallup poll released recently.



Students who remain in the public system are increasingly more likely to be poor. In the two decades leading up to the pandemic, the number of students eligible for free or reduced-price school lunch climbed to 52% from 38%, according to the federal government.

In Los Angeles, Tiffany Sorya founded Novel Education Group in 2014, five years after she graduated from college. The company places private tutors with well-to-do families. She built a clientele in the entertainment industry, through word of mouth.

Covid-19 dispersed her clients, many of whom rode out the pandemic away from Los Angeles. As they socialized with other families whose children were taking remote classes through public or private schools, she said her phone started ringing and within a few months business doubled.

Clients with tutors through her agency generally pay between \$65,000 and \$100,000 a year.

“A lot of these kids are doing private lessons in art or they’re athletes and school is getting in the way of them doing something they are really passionate about,” Ms. Sorya said.

The Gagnons engaged her company last year after they became dissatisfied with the remote-learning classes their kids were taking as part of a private school. They found the company through an internet search. It solved the problem of having to work around the fixed schedule of a school as the family travels between time zones for work.

The children are in class online three or four hours a day, and the teachers have designed the courses around their interests, which include photography and videogame design.

Mr. Gagnon said both his children will stick with private tutors through graduation.

“I don’t see us ever going back to a regular school,” he said.

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