

# District-Operated Microschools: The Option Missing from Most Choice Portfolios



*Students engaged in the Model of Instruction for Deeper Learning.*

Most choice portfolios are built around themes and programs such as STEM academies, dual language, arts, or International Baccalaureate tracks. What is missing is a fundamentally different option—one that attracts families that have largely remained out of reach for public schools.

Today's parents and guardians are seeking something other than what they perceive as "institutional public school." District-operated public microschoools offer a new category of choice: small, personalized, and designed to feel like a boutique "private" school inside existing public schools.

# The Missing Boutique Experience in Choice Portfolios

In a survey of parents, the number one motivator behind their decision to leave traditional public schools was to pursue better personalized education opportunities for their children (Lake Research Partners, 2023). Even robust choice portfolios can struggle to reach these families that seek a “boutique” school experience—one that is personalized to their child’s needs and highly responsive.

The 2025 report [How Public Schools Can Build Better Microschools and Win Back Families](#) (Toth & Grego) details the research behind what parents perceive as institutional vs. boutique.

Perceptions of “Institutional” School Experience	Perceptions of “Boutique” School Experience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on test preparation</li> <li>• Teacher-centered instruction</li> <li>• Larger class sizes</li> <li>• Often-excessive use of educational screen time</li> <li>• Students may feel lost in the crowd</li> <li>• Parents may feel a lack of timely responsiveness and frustration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on developing the whole child</li> <li>• Student-led deeper learning</li> <li>• Smaller, more personalized setting</li> <li>• Extended learning tasks with social interaction</li> <li>• Students feel connected in a tight-knit community</li> <li>• Parents feel engaged in a partnership around their child’s learning and skills development</li> </ul>

## A Licensed Microschool Model That Expands Choice Portfolios

District-operated microschoools are not replacements for magnets or other choice options—they add a **new category of choice** to the portfolio. By providing the small boutique “private” school experience families are seeking, they retain and recruit those who might otherwise choose private schools, homeschooling, charter schools, or other alternatives outside the public system.

For a rapid and successful launch of this emerging choice option, Instructional Empowerment’s research team designed [Certified Microschools for Deeper Learning](#).

These district-operated microschoools operate inside unused classrooms within existing public schools and leverage district staff, facilities, and systems, while keeping 100% of per-pupil funding in the district.

Turnkey support in the licensed model includes:

- Extensive training, coaching, and credentialing for teachers, including a dedicated expert certified coach from Instructional Empowerment who helps teachers ensure rigorous academics, deeper learning skill development, and personalized attention
- A team of Instructional Empowerment expert specialists for marketing and recruitment, expanding the district's reach to hard-to-attract families
- An onsite customer experience specialist provided by Instructional Empowerment and focused on family communication and the boutique experience
- National certifications to ensure quality, consistency, and accountability

The model is designed to operate cost-neutral to revenue positive in the first year.

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***“This is powerful, going out and promoting this boutique experience: how it benefits students and families to win back families that are not currently in the public school system. That's the goal here: to bring back families that have left the system or have not considered the public system and their choice offerings.”***

**- Michael D. Toth**, *Award-winning education author and CEO of Instructional Empowerment*

**From the recorded national webinar:** [How District-Operated Microschools Can Win Back Families](#)

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Through [Certified Microschools for Deeper Learning](#), districts gain a fully supported choice option that is structurally distinct from other programs—one that fulfills unmet family demand, strengthens the district's choice portfolio, and keeps families in public schools.

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## References

- Lake Research Partners. (2023). *Voter survey*. [https://hunt-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/report.THI\\_Voter-Survey-2023.f.2023.09.05.pdf](https://hunt-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/report.THI_Voter-Survey-2023.f.2023.09.05.pdf)
- Toth, M.D., & Grego, M.A. (2025). *How public schools can build better microschoools and win back families*. Instructional Empowerment. <https://go.instructionalempowerment.com/microschools>