

# THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

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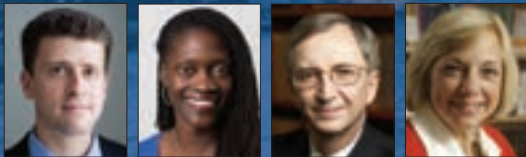
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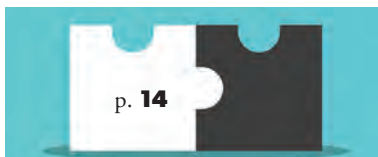
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## ISAY

### Beverly Hutton

Deputy executive director of programs and services, National Association of Secondary School Principals



"Schools are not closed. Buildings are closed.

We're still teaching and learning and leading and working with parents very intensely. So I challenge us as an education community to change the language and stop saying schools are closed, because only buildings are closed. Schooling is still happening."

*From "How to Lead When the Path Isn't Clear," a Learning Forward webinar in response to the COVID-19 crisis, April 16, 2020. Recording available at [learningforward.org/webinar/how-to-lead-when-the-path-isnt-clear](https://learningforward.org/webinar/how-to-lead-when-the-path-isnt-clear).*



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## HERE WE GO

Suzanne Bouffard

**We are all learning, and we are all vulnerable, as we navigate these anxious times and the unexpected transition to distance learning.**

## LEARNING AS MUCH AS WE CAN AS FAST AS WE CAN

**L**ike so many students around the world, my children are learning at home, thanks to the impressive efforts of their teachers, administrators, and school support staff. My 4th grader's teacher recently wrote in one of her weekly updates to the students, "I promise I'm learning as much as I can, as fast as I can, so that we can create a fun approach to distant learning."

I was touched and inspired by her message. In a few words, she made herself open and vulnerable, conveyed her investment in their engagement, and modeled the importance of ongoing learning.

We are all learning, and we are all vulnerable, as we navigate these anxious times and the unexpected transition to distance learning. The need for professional learning has never been more urgent, and collaboration has never been more pivotal. We are "building the plane while flying it," as one of this issue's authors points out, and since there are no manuals for teaching during a pandemic, we are relying on each other to develop the skills we need to be the kind of engineers and pilots our kids need to fly.

This issue of *The Learning Professional* highlights some of the many ways educators are learning, sharing, and evolving to meet the quickly shifting needs of students and staff. Because our readers are in varying stages of school closures and reopenings, the issue aims to address both the present and future of teaching and learning.

Addressing the immediate term, authors share how to support educators' and students' emotional and instructional needs, strengthen teacher-student connections during distance learning, and promote students' self-regulation so they can stay engaged.

Looking to the not-too-distant future, others write about how to plan for the changes and uncertainty that lie ahead. And looking across the shifting stages of crisis and recovery, authors write about maintaining instructional vision and leadership strategies through the ups and downs.

In the Tools section, partner organizations share strategies for keeping relationships with students strong. In the Updates section, we share information about the other forms of support we are providing during this crisis, including timely blog posts and a series of weekly webinars on topics ranging from coaching to self-care to equity for students with disabilities, English learners, and historically marginalized students.

Our At a Glance infographic includes data we've gathered during the webinars about educators' needs, plans, and professional learning during the pandemic.

I'm grateful to all the professionals who contributed to this issue for enthusiastically agreeing to share their wisdom on an impressively short timeline, even as they navigated a host of other challenges, from urgent student and staff needs to ill family members. Their hard work is yet another indication of the way educators go above and beyond to support students and colleagues, even in the very toughest of times.

At the end of her note to the students, my child's teacher added, "I appreciate all of you for working hard and helping me become a better teacher." We at Learning Forward appreciate all of you for helping each other, and us, be better at what we do.

If crisis reveals character, the pandemic is revealing to the whole world the passion, commitment, and excellence of educators that we have the privilege to see every day. ■



**Suzanne Bouffard**  
([suzanne.bouffard@learningforward.org](mailto:suzanne.bouffard@learningforward.org)) is editor of *The Learning Professional*.

# THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

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Equity and excellence in teaching and learning.

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# VOICES



## LEARN TODAY FOR A BETTER TOMORROW

**"S**omething that has stuck with me throughout this pandemic is this idea that we don't want to return to the imperfect education reality that we had. Let's use the lessons learned through this crisis to build for an effective and equitable future. Professional learning is a great place to start as we envision an innovative, more responsive new normal."

— "Aim higher as we move toward a new normal," p. **12**



**This crisis has laid bare the longstanding structural and societal inequities that are barriers to high-quality teaching and learning for all children.**

**Denise Glyn Borders is president and CEO at Learning Forward.**

## CALL TO ACTION

Denise Glyn Borders

# INVESTING IN EDUCATORS IS NOT A LUXURY

**A**long with educators everywhere, Learning Forward is adjusting to the current reality and looking ahead to what the future may hold. While we can't yet document our lessons learned, we know we owe a huge debt of gratitude to educators.

We're witnessing educators committed to ensuring their students are fed, safe, and healthy. Participants in Learning Forward webinars in response to the current crisis tell us how educators are transforming the ways they reach and teach students. The commitment educators are making to continue student learning through changing circumstances reveals their professionalism, passion, and expertise.

We're also seeing that educators are hungry for relevant support. Our webinars stress the importance of learning and community — or, more appropriately, learning *IN* community — and educators are signing up by the thousands for each topic we cover.

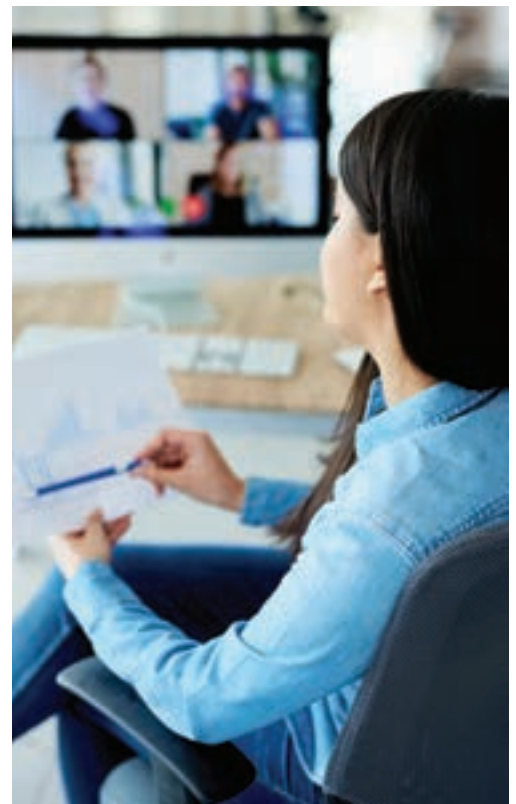
As leaders in your districts and schools, you've experienced or perhaps led the push to ensure you and your colleagues have the knowledge and skills you need to serve students and communities in new teaching environments. Whether this push helps educators navigate a technology platform or adapt instructional materials for a distance learning plan, professional learning plays an essential part.

With educators' persistence and professionalism at such high levels of visibility, the necessity for ongoing support is clear. Society is witnessing both the critical need to ensure educators are prepared to navigate new territory and the importance of a rigorously educated workforce ready to tackle the next global challenge.

This crisis has also laid bare the longstanding structural and societal inequities that are barriers to high-quality teaching and learning for all children. Sadly, such disparities echo the inequities we're witnessing on every front in this crisis, from health care to job loss.

A recent *Education Week* survey, for example, revealed the inequity in students' initial access to remote teaching, with fewer teachers actively teaching in high-poverty districts than in districts with lower percentages of high-poverty students. Reasons cited included disparities in access to technology and delaying teaching because of equity concerns — lack of devices across systems, for example (Herold, 2020). We know also that consistent access to broadband internet for educators and students is not guaranteed, particularly in rural areas (Jung, 2020).

Learning Forward believes that high-quality professional learning grounded in the Standards  
*Continued on p. 10*





## BEING FORWARD

Sue Sarber

# LEARNING WITH A PURPOSE, IN PERSON OR ONLINE

**S**ue Sarber is supervisor of professional learning in the department of teaching and learning for Arlington Public Schools in Arlington, Virginia. She joined the Learning Forward board of trustees in December 2019.

### Why have you made professional learning a focus of your career?

Early in my career, I was a part of a two-year program supported by our state department of education in which a math teacher and a science teacher (like me) paired up, attended professional learning, and supported staff with what we learned. I loved seeing effective instruction inspire teachers and students, and I wanted to continue supporting teachers. As my career developed, I continued to support colleagues in their growth as a technology integration specialist at the central office and at the school level, and then I found my way to the professional learning office.

### When and how did you first become involved with Learning Forward?

In 2006, I attained my dream job — professional learning supervisor. I was excited to be able to positively impact professional learning for teachers across the district. My colleague, Judy Newhouse, who has been a pivotal part of the Learning Forward Virginia affiliate since it was founded, reached out and said, “You need to be a part of this organization.” I quickly found out that she was right. Being involved with the Virginia affiliate has been invaluable in my work and has brought me lifelong friends.

I have also made so many connections and found a community through the national organization. My first Learning Forward Annual Conference was a whirlwind. Everywhere I went, participants were eager to share ideas and engage in dialogue about what they were working on. I had never experienced the “community” feeling at such a large conference, from hotel lobby conversations to deep learning in all-day sessions. It is amazing to learn about what is working in other districts, because those of us in professional learning positions are often the only ones in our districts.



### What are you looking forward to in your role as a Learning Forward board member?

I’m excited to serve Learning Forward with an amazing group of board members to support Learning Forward in being the best it can be. As [the current board] met for the first time, I thought about what I could bring to the group. We all bring different things to the table. To my left was an experienced businessman, to my right were superintendents and university presidents, across the table were university professors. My place at the table is as a K-12 educator and a Learning Forward affiliate member. I look forward to the creative and innovative ways

*Continued on p. 10*

**My first Learning Forward Annual Conference was a whirlwind. Everywhere I went, participants were eager to share ideas and engage in dialogue about what they were working on.**

**Sue Sarber is a member of the Learning Forward board of trustees.**

*Continued from p. 9*

these diverse perspectives can support educator learning through this organization.

**What do you think will be the most pressing professional learning needs in the coming year or two?**

So many things have changed and will continue to change due to COVID-19. I see it as an opportunity to personalize adult learning and meet teachers' needs based on their students' needs. In my district and at Learning Forward Virginia, we've been tossing around ideas about virtual conferences, online fireside chats for small groups to connect, virtual coaching conversations, and brainstorming structures and processes to make learning accessible for all staff.

**You were an instructional technology leader for many years. Can you share some wisdom about how to make virtual learning and**

**Online learning should provide structured opportunities for peer collaboration and sharing of materials, just like in-person learning.**

**teaching high quality?**

I could talk about this all day because it's something I really care about. Online learning is vastly different than in-person instruction, but some of the key ideas hold true for both. That's the case whether we're talking about student learning or professional learning for educators.

Online learning should be purposeful and meaningful (for example, focused on "power standards" or the most important things for students to know and be able to do). It should provide structured opportunities for peer collaboration and sharing of materials, just like in-person learning. It should also take into consideration

the varied range of learner experiences, incorporate feedback, and have varied ways to demonstrate mastery.

In addition, online learning should have visuals and audio options for accessing the content, be organized in small chunks of information, and have clear communication of expectations and directions.

It's important to be kind to yourself and each other in the online learning environment. Online learning can be exhausting. I just read an article that explained that one of the reasons is that we are so used to the physical context that without the usual nonverbal cues, we have to interpret a lot more and fill in lots of information.

Despite these challenges, it is our job as learning professionals to take learners from where they are to where we need them to go. That's what really inspires me to do what I do and to contribute to what Learning Forward does. ■

*Continued from p. 8*

for Professional Learning is the strategy to address these challenges. Such professional learning is an equity strategy and an improvement strategy.

When educators have access to professional learning aligned to students' most pressing learning needs, they are better equipped to ensure that *all* of their students experience meaningful learning. High-quality professional learning can help educators use technology to engage students and deliver on the promise of the student standards-aligned materials many systems use. High-quality professional learning also helps educators understand how to support students with diverse needs and backgrounds and how remote learning situations impact those with special needs.

Sustained, collaborative professional

learning isn't just for teachers. As school and district leaders build long-term plans around multiple scenarios for schooling in the coming months, their learning needs are also intense. They must be in a position to not only support their teachers through new environments but also to create new systems to support students, communities, and colleagues.

Our investment in the professionals who make teaching and learning possible has never been more important. Unfortunately, we know that professional learning is often on the chopping block when the economy experiences a downturn. Making such cuts when the need for professional learning remains so high would be disastrous for students.

We owe so much to educators. Let's continue to strengthen the learning

systems that support them and speak up for the investment they deserve. The structural inequities will only deepen and the academic gaps widen if we fail to sufficiently prepare and sustain continuous high-quality learning for educators.

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## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Sheldon Harvey

# LET'S MAKE SURE ALL STUDENTS CAN REACH THE FINISH LINE

### Current role:

Principal at Lewis Chapel Middle School in Fayetteville, North Carolina

**Years in current role:** 10

### First job in education:

Middle school math teacher in Durham, North Carolina

## NOMINATE A COLLEAGUE FOR MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

We love to feature the voices and stories of passionate learning professionals. If you'd like to nominate a Learning Forward member, email [suzanne.bouffard@learningforward.org](mailto:suzanne.bouffard@learningforward.org) and tell us whom you think we should feature and why.

### How he got interested in a career in education:

I come from a family of educators. All four of my siblings became mathematics teachers. As the youngest child, I wanted to do something different initially. But as I continue in this passion-filled profession, I thoroughly enjoy what I do and would not have it any other way.

### Why he became a principal:

I am a people person and a servant at heart. I am building on the foundation of those who came before me, and I want to help establish a foundation for others to build on. I wanted to have an influence at a different level and affect systemic change.

### Why professional learning is important to his career:

I enjoy being a learner, and I always want to improve. Being able to connect with other professionals and see what has worked in other places is very helpful. I've enjoyed the knowledge base I've gained from professional learning, especially from Learning Forward.

The professional learning resources help me with topics such as giving timely and effective feedback, coaching, and ensuring teachers have appropriate curriculum materials. They help me and my colleagues focus on our district's core values of excellence, innovation, collaboration, equity, integrity, and compassion.

### One of his favorite Learning Forward resources:

The book *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning* by Lois Brown Easton is one of my favorites. I have used it as a tool and support many times. For example, when we were looking at restorative justice practices, the chapter on accessing student voices [by Kathleen Cushman] was very helpful.

### Top professional learning priority right now:

Equity. It is important to foster a collaborative environment in which all students are afforded the opportunity to experience high-quality teaching and learning. In an effort to support teachers as they support students, we are offering and seeking professional learning in culturally responsive strategies, coaching sessions with administration, and conducting observations and walk-throughs. Consistency with our practices is essential. In this race of life, not all students have the same starting line, but it is essential that they are equipped to complete the race.

### Biggest challenges as a middle school principal:

One challenge is that no two days are the same. We can plan one thing, but when we wake up and begin the day, it can be different than expected. However, we know that's part of the work we do. Another challenge is balance. Work-life balance is challenging for all educators and leaders. We need to make sure we're giving complete support to teachers as well as providing ourselves time to reflect and self-care.

### Biggest professional reward:

Building and creating strong and healthy relationships with students and staff. It's very gratifying when you see the results of students and teachers collaborating and working together to achieve success. You can tell when students feel they are in a positive learning environment. When they are collaborating, high levels of student discourse occur and learning targets are met. ■



**Let's use the lessons learned though this crisis to build for an effective and equitable future.**

**Melinda George (melinda.george@learningforward.org) is Learning Forward's chief policy officer.**

## **POLICY POINTS**

Melinda George

# **AIM HIGHER AS WE MOVE TOWARD A NEW NORMAL**

**O**ver the past few months, Learning Forward has convened educators to share support in navigating the COVID-19 crisis. Through webinars, our online community, and individual conversations, we have heard educators' needs evolve week by week. Many education systems focused initially on food and safety and then on internet connectivity and devices.

Throughout these stages, systems have been reducing bureaucratic requirements in favor of meeting the basic needs of students and educators in real time. In early April, Learning Forward — which helped write the definition of professional learning in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) — supported the U.S. Department of Education's decision to waive some funding requirements so districts would have more flexibility in how to use professional learning dollars.

The waivers included a provision that states could offer emergency stopgap training for educators who had not had access to ongoing, job-embedded, sustained professional learning related to distance learning before the pandemic. Along with added education stabilization dollars, this flexibility for how funds could be used was critical.

But this was a short-term measure that helped to address immediate and extraordinary needs. As we move into the next phase of COVID-impacted teaching and learning, Learning Forward will continue to advocate for adherence to the ESSA definition's vision of ongoing, job-embedded, sustained professional learning. The next phase of support must be a long-term investment in the capacity of educators.

As a start, this should include reinforcement of training days or workshops with follow-up learning and support with coaches or among learning communities. This will help educators who participated in the stopgap training be more likely to retain new knowledge and build new skills. This combination of strategies brings us closer to what we know makes a difference in professional learning.

A second step will include the incorporation of virtual supports for ongoing professional learning — virtual coaching, virtual peer observations, virtual collaboration, and facilitated online communities. Educators need to learn by using the same technology they are using with students. This will increase not only comfort levels with the technology but further discovery of the opportunities and benefits the technology offers.

Learning Forward looks forward to the day when we can take the elements of effective professional learning and the lessons we have learned from the pandemic and combine them for a new long-term strategy. Something that has stuck with me throughout this pandemic is this idea that we don't want to return to the imperfect education reality that we had. Let's use the lessons learned through this crisis to build for an effective and equitable future.

Professional learning is a great place to start as we envision an innovative, more responsive new normal. If we can reach all educators with the just-in-time professional learning that they need and provide it in an environment, in person or virtually, that is collaborative and sustained, we will succeed in not just surviving the pandemic but moving forward as a result of it. ■



EXAMINE. STUDY. UNDERSTAND.

# RESEARCH

## HIGH-IMPACT COMBINATION

In a recent meta-analysis, researchers found that instructional improvement programs that include both professional development and curriculum materials are more effective than those that include professional development or curriculum alone. In the interventions studied that incorporated only professional development or only new curriculum materials, a typical student in the treatment group could be expected to rank about 6 percentile points higher than a typical student in the control group. But in the interventions that included both professional learning and curriculum materials, a student in the treatment group could be expected to score about 10 percentile points higher than a typical control group student.

— *“Strength lies in combining curriculum with professional learning,”* p. **14**



## RESEARCH REVIEW

Elizabeth Foster

# STRENGTH LIES IN COMBINING CURRICULUM WITH PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

### ► THE STUDY

**Lynch, K., Hill, H.C., Gonzalez, K., & Pollard, C. (2019).** Strengthening STEM instruction in schools: Learning from research. (EdWorkingPaper: 19-142). [www.edworkingpapers.com/ai19-142](http://www.edworkingpapers.com/ai19-142).

In a recent meta-analysis, researchers Lynch, Hill, Gonzalez, and Pollard found that instructional improvement programs — an approach combining professional learning and curriculum or instructional materials — had a positive impact on student outcomes. The impact was greater than either professional development or introducing new materials alone.

Amidst a lot of discussion about whether a focus on instructional materials or professional learning is more effective, this meta-analysis offers a productive step forward by showing that strength lies in the combination of approaches.

A meta-analysis, conducted by pooling the findings of multiple randomized controlled trial or quasi-experimental studies to determine the average effect across multiple studies, can eliminate particularities of individual studies, such as those conducted in unique school settings or with a specific set of instructional materials. Its findings, therefore, carry particular weight, especially when it includes a large number of studies like the one discussed here.

This meta-analysis focused on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math). It is a timely and important focus, given the well-documented chronic challenges of U.S. students' STEM performance, as well as the need for STEM professional learning to reduce the inequities of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds tending to have less experienced or out-of-field STEM teachers.

The researchers' goals were to examine the average impact of STEM professional learning and curriculum improvement programs, explore whether such interventions are more or less effective in high-poverty settings, and provide recommendations based on updated research evidence.

### METHODS AND FINDINGS

The Lynch et al. meta-analysis examined 95 studies that met key criteria: a rigorous design (randomized controlled trial or quasi-experimental design), published since 1989, and focused on classroom-level STEM instructional improvements through professional development, curriculum materials, or both.

Researchers determined average impact on student achievement in math and science, as well as whether instructional improvement programs with specific features resulted in larger effects on student achievement.

The overarching finding of the meta-analysis is that instructional improvement programs that include both professional development and curriculum materials are more effective than those that include professional development or curriculum alone.



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The researchers found that student outcomes were “significantly larger among programs that focused on how to use curriculum materials, and among programs that focused on improving teachers’ content and pedagogical knowledge and/or how students learned the content, relative to programs that did not have these focus areas.”

In the interventions studied that incorporated only professional development or only new curriculum materials, a typical student in the treatment group could be expected to rank about 6 percentile points higher than a typical student in the control group. But in the interventions that included both professional learning and curriculum materials, a student in the treatment group could be expected to score about 10 percentile points higher than a typical control group student.

Three professional learning formats surfaced as having positive results on student outcomes: same-school collaboration (teachers in a school engaging in professional learning together), implementation meetings (brief opportunities for participating teachers to reconvene during the course of the program for support and troubleshooting), and summer workshops. Interventions in which these features were part of the professional learning designs showed stronger gains on student assessments than interventions that did not have them.

In contrast, interventions in which the professional learning had an online component had a smaller (though still positive) impact than those without. The latter finding is only briefly mentioned in the report but might be worth additional exploration given the current circumstances and increase in online learning situations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

These student outcomes differences are meaningful in both adding to

the evidence about the impact of professional learning focused on curriculum implementation and in thinking about how a system designs learning experiences for its educators.

The researchers point to three recommendations for practice based on the findings:

- Focus professional development on curriculum materials.
- Focus on improving teachers’ content knowledge and understanding of how students learn.
- Provide teachers opportunities to collaborate and discuss implementation regularly with teachers in their school.

These research-based recommendations can directly inform district and school professional learning decisions and provide clear support for leaders investing in curriculum-based professional learning aligned to the Standards for Professional Learning.

## IMPLICATIONS

Writing about the meta-analysis in a publication for the American Association for the Advancement of Science (Hill & Lynch, 2019), the researchers made an important note about equity that is a reminder of the need for deliberate actions to improve equity actions in professional learning.

“While the programs we examined often took place in moderate- to high-poverty settings, these programs failed to produce more equitable outcomes by improving high-poverty students’ gains at a faster rate,” the authors wrote. “In fact, our analysis suggests a slight trend toward smaller program impacts in high-poverty settings.”

Although it was not in the researchers’ scope to recommend how to address this issue in future interventions, they pointed out the need for further study and systemic action. This is a strong example of what the

**Outcomes standard** of the Standards for Professional Learning calls for in terms of consideration and planning.

In fact, the findings of the study reinforce several of the Standards for Professional Learning. The positive impacts of social supports, peer motivation, and collective efficacy support the **Learning Communities standard**, which spells out why and how collaboration is important for professional learning.

The researchers’ consideration of specific elements of professional development design is consistent with the **Learning Designs standard**, which calls for deliberate attention to how learning experiences are structured for impact.

## BEYOND STEM

Because they show that content and capacity go hand-in-hand, the findings of the meta-analysis have implications not only for STEM but for other areas of teaching and learning. As budgets tighten during the COVID-19 crisis and school closings compel decision-makers to make hard decisions about how to move forward with professional learning, Lynch et al.’s research and recommendations can serve as a guide.

Professional learning spending will come under increased scrutiny — as will the ESSA requirement that programs be evidence-based — so the authors’ recommendations for elements of professional learning that result in a positive impact on classroom instruction and student outcomes can be important for decisions about investments and planning in STEM and beyond.

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# DATA POINTS

## 100,000+ SCHOOLS CLOSED

More than 100,000 public schools in the U.S. have closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Center for Reinventing Public Education created an online database to track how districts are shifting their supports and instruction as they navigate closures. The database, derived from publicly posted plans found through the Council of the Great City Schools, Chiefs for Change, and crowdsourced recommendations, has information for over 80 districts, with a range in size and geography. It is updated regularly, along with new posts about what CRPE staff are learning. [www.crpe.org/content/covid-19-school-closures](http://www.crpe.org/content/covid-19-school-closures)

## 50% LESS LEARNING

As educators consider how recent school closures may affect learning loss, research on the “summer slide” may offer some clues. Previous research shows that students tend to lose academic ground over the summer, and the loss tends to be most pronounced in math, for upper grades students, and among students from less advantaged backgrounds.

Researchers at NWEA examined a national data set of students in grades 3-8, along with previous findings about how much learning is lost during the summer, to calculate projections of how much grade-level progress students are likely to make this year given school closures due to COVID-19. They estimated that students will return in fall 2020 with roughly 70% of the reading gains they would make in a typical year and only about 50% of the math gains they would make in a typical year.

The researchers point out that educators will need to find ways to assess students’ knowledge and skills



when schools reopen. Professional learning leaders will need to work with educators on what to expect next year and how to modify teaching as needed given potential learning deficits and gaps. [bit.ly/2RNx0Hf](https://bit.ly/2RNx0Hf)

## 2 TYPES OF MEASURES

How should researchers measure the impact of professional learning? The answer isn’t straightforward because it is affected by many logistical and methodological considerations. Studies tend to use one of two data sources: teachers’ self-reports of what and how much they learned or observations of teacher learning and practice by school leaders, researchers, or outside observers.

A study from researchers at the University of Southern California Los Angeles examined whether data from those two data sources yield similar conclusions. After teachers participated in math content-focused professional learning, the researchers compared teachers’ self-reported gains in mathematical knowledge with direct assessments of that knowledge. The two measures were not significantly correlated.

The study does not determine which is more accurate, but it

does suggest a lack of consistency between the measures that should prompt careful consideration of which data sources are used in professional learning studies. [journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0022487119899101](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0022487119899101)

## 99% OF PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS

The vast majority of teachers in a national survey reported that they had participated in professional development in the previous year (99% of public school teachers and 94% of private school teachers). However, about one-quarter of teachers reported that they did not have sufficient professional development resources.

According to the results from the 2017-18 National Teacher and Principal Survey from the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, teachers’ perceptions of their professional development were fairly positive, but there was room for improvement. About 84% saw their professional development opportunities as aligned with their school’s performance goals.

A similar percentage believed that what they were learning in professional development would help improve student achievement, with more primary school teachers endorsing this belief than middle and high school teachers.

It’s worth noting, however, that only about 75% believed the professional development was consistent with their own professional goals. A quarter of teachers reported that they did not have opportunities to give feedback about the value and impact of their professional development to school leaders.

[nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020142.pdf](https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020142.pdf)

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WHAT NOW?

## RESILIENCE IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

**“W**hen we found schools closed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of us wondered, ‘When are we getting back to normal?’ A few weeks later, the question changed to, ‘Will we get back to normal?’ And now, we’re realizing the old normal won’t be back, at least not anytime soon.

“There are steps we need to take, starting now, to ensure that our staff members have the emotional resources necessary to bounce back, adapt, and thrive in a new environment that has yet to take shape. By focusing on building resiliency now, educators can not only be prepared to navigate a major transition but also to emerge with stronger professional identities and a more connected, committed campus culture.”

— *“We will be different,”* p. **46**

# AN OPPORTUNITY FOR EQUITY

PANDEMIC SHINES A LIGHT ON THE NEED FOR EQUITABLE TEACHING PRACTICES

BY SONIA CAUS GLEASON AND JILL HARRISON BERG

**W**hen COVID-19 appeared on international radar this year and began its march around the globe, it revealed to any who might have previously denied it that the work to eliminate educational inequities is far from done.

During this pandemic, some students have uninterrupted access to the basic needs of daily life and remote learning requirements such as devices, internet, and a supportive learning environment, while others do not. This pattern is not random; it can be predicted by demographics, including race, income level, and ZIP code, that continue to be shaped by institutional

and structural racism.

Since the first enslaved Africans were brought to the North American continent 400 years ago, a chain of events has created a deep foundation for inequities that are still felt in the United States today (Hannah-Jones & Elliott, 2019). Long-established systems, practices, and beliefs perpetuate — in ways we might not realize — the fallacy that black and brown people have less value and deserve less than those of European descent. Though strides have been made, the work to eliminate inequities is far from done.

During this pandemic, more than ever, many educators are keeping these inequities top of mind. Rather than move online with what we have always

done, we are seeking out professional learning to help us push our practices toward greater instructional equity.

## AN UNEXPECTED OPENING

Crisis shines an unflinching light on inequity. As educators working with students of color and the economically poor know, their students' families disproportionately represent essential workers, and thus are more likely to be exposed to COVID-19 as they keep the rest of the country able to shelter in place (Rho et al., 2020).

Further, historical factors make it more likely that these families have preconditions that increase the risk of sickness and death from this virus (Brooks, 2020; Centers for Disease



Control and Prevention, 2020).

In addition, policies and practices with racism and classism baked into them have lowered opportunities for decent food, housing, health care, and employment (Hanks et al., 2018). And the public education system continues to have laws, policies, and structures that exclude and limit students because of race, class, language, and special needs.

Galvanized by the ugly reality of these inequities during the pandemic, and recognizing that what they can offer right now is not all that is needed, educators remain committed to students and their learning.

Many are ready to disrupt old patterns and seek ways to double down on instructional equity. They recognize that what seemed to work for most of their students was not good

enough. They are looking to establish new routines that can ensure their instruction meets each student's needs.

For example, teachers are wondering: In what ways are my relationships with families opportunities for me to deepen my knowledge of students as people and as learners? How can I create deeper learning experiences that leverage students' own learning environments? How can I expand my instructional repertoire to provide more choices so that students can learn to become effective and independent learners?

At the moment, professional learning efforts to address these questions are uneven, as a result of a range of district planning efforts and resources, wide variation in educators' trust and collaboration, and inconsistent levels of attention to systematic access. Furthermore,

not all social forces within and across communities are unified in an equity commitment.

But many educators are not waiting for school-based professional learning or district workshops to answer their burning questions and address their students' urgent needs.

Educators have quickly organized to teach themselves — individually and collectively — how to take their teaching and learning to a higher level while unable to connect face to face. They are looking to colleagues, national organizations, webinars, articles, and social media, as well as to families and students to establish new student-centered teaching practices.

In doing so, they have lifted their heads, looked beyond their schools, and opened their eyes to a world of new ways to know their students and engage them

as active learners. Keeping equity at the center requires just this kind of collective effort and an intentionality about changing practices. Education will not become more equitable incidentally.

We see three types of practices emerging as starting places for this work: knowing students and families, inquiry-based teaching, and expanding student agency and choices.

#### KNOWING STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

Effective teaching starts with knowledge of students (NBPTS, 2016). Teachers have traditionally engaged with families in student conferences, school events, and possibly even home visits to deepen their knowledge of students. Now this pandemic has closed these doors but opened new channels of communication.

Many educators are taking closer note of families' preferred forms of connection (e.g. email, phone, text), reaching out to talk with families about their needs, partnering with them to design solutions, and using what they learn to inform their efforts to help students learn and help their families navigate these complicated days.

If we're paying attention, we see that this is a new way of learning about the true personalities, living situations, family dynamics, sources of background knowledge, and other individual differences of our students — crucial information to support them effectively. For example, we may discover that there are many family members beyond our primary contact who can be a part of a student support plan, even if remotely by phone. With a commitment to equity, we are driven to seek out ways to use what we learn from families as assets for each student's well-being.

In addition, since colleagues cannot connect in hallways throughout the school day, many schools are developing new routines for logging these exchanges and sharing new knowledge about students with all the adults serving each child.

Equity-minded teams are examining these logs, looking for patterns by race,

**Keeping equity at the center requires just this kind of collective effort and an intentionality about changing practices.**

home language, and economic status, and helping each other to question how their own unexamined biases may be adversely affecting their communication, how the school's traditions may have created cultural barriers, or how historical factors might have led to unexamined structural barriers that could now be examined in light of new family communication data.

#### INQUIRY-BASED TEACHING

The learning environment is an essential factor of the learning and teaching equation. That's why educators invest significant time, energy, money, and thought into creating classrooms that tap into students' interests, build on their prior knowledge, affirm their identities, support them to become independent learners, and help them establish effective work habits. But as a result of the pandemic, suddenly we have a lot less control over the physical environment that surrounds our students.

This may feel like a loss but also can be an opportunity to focus on learning goals. As we are forced to pull the learning goals into the foreground and push the learning context into the background, we begin to recognize many paths to those goals, paths to suit each student. At the same time, we are seeking out new (often virtual) environments and looking with fresh eyes at the environments to which students do have access.

Communities of practice that have already formed around alternative forms of student inquiry, such as project-based learning, place-based learning, and experiential learning, are getting fresh attention. Educators are

exploring online resources, including webinars, articles, and websites that can help them learn to structure paths of inquiry in which students explore and demonstrate mastery of specific standards while drawing on nontraditional learning environments.

Museums, zoos, science labs, and many other institutions have opened their virtual doors, providing unlimited playgrounds for such inquiry-based learning. An equity lens reminds us to also invite students to mine their own homes as rich learning environments. In this way, we don't inadvertently devalue students' homes by always directing them to look beyond them.

#### EXPANDING STUDENT AGENCY AND CHOICES

Remote learning also offers an opportunity to give students more choice — and to support them in learning to become effective decision-makers and independent learners. In fact, some teachers are reporting increases in student engagement with remote learning, as they are thinking outside of the traditional structure of classes and making learning more accessible to more students, including those who previously had lower levels of school attendance and engagement.

What is engaging to one student may not be engaging to another, and students learn best in different ways. Students working in their own spaces and at their own paces can be provided with a wider array of choices for engagement with course material, and teachers can think in new ways about balancing individual learning with that which happens in small and large groups. The only limitation is teachers' own repertoires.

For this, during the pandemic, teachers are increasingly collaborating with colleagues on social media. They have not only created new virtual gathering places, from Facebook groups to Twitter chats to Pinterest boards, but they have made themselves vulnerable by posting urgent questions, offered themselves up to each other

for collaborative problem-solving, and generously shared tools of their own design for others to critically review and adapt for their own use.

To be sure, a critical eye is needed, as content available on social media varies widely in quality. However, discerning educators are learning to use educator-created content to hone their skills for asking critical questions and expanding their ideas about what instructional moves are needed to help each student learn.

In fact, many educators are sharing their learning with school and district colleagues and inviting them to join the collaboration. Where there is a history of collaborative professional learning, teachers are experimenting with numerous new teaching and learning resources, expanding their tool kits, and equipping themselves to offer their students a more diverse array of student choices.

## CHANGING OUR BELIEFS, PRACTICES, AND SYSTEMS

In a previous article for *The Learning Professional* (Berg & Gleason, 2018), we wrote about three dimensions of equity that need to evolve in concert:

- Our **beliefs**: mindsets, biases, expectations;
- Our **actions**: professional practices and routines; and
- Our **systems**: policies and structures.

This pandemic is an important time to revisit these dimensions, because as we make necessary changes to practice, this prompts us to re-examine our beliefs and our systems.

It's a time to ask: How might our beliefs empower us or hold us back from seizing this as an opportunity to make the kind of changes students really need? What systems changes might be called for, as we shift our practices? What systems don't exist, and which bump up against efforts to advance equity?

Working deliberately to change all three interrelated dimensions is essential

**It's a time to ask: How might our beliefs empower us or hold us back from seizing this as an opportunity to make the kind of changes students really need?**

for students of every race, gender, language, and special need to experience equitable and high-quality learning. Over time, educators can build momentum and help public education make good on its promise to educate all students with equity and excellence.

## EMBRACE OPPORTUNITY

While the three practices described here are worthy of attention in our professional learning plans in any school year, they stand out during the pandemic as entry points to increasing instructional equity in the longer term. At a time when our nation experiences the reality of stark inequities we have built into our democracy at every level, these practices stand out as the kind of changes that can be catalysts for larger changes to our beliefs, our systems, and to other practices.

In this way, painful realizations we're making about society today can propel us to deepen our learning about what's needed and respond with deliberate attention to how our beliefs, practices, and systems need to change. As we do this work and build on it together with purpose, we can reframe the beliefs, practices, and systems in a way that ensures each child is able to learn and thrive. More than ever, we know we need to — for all of us.

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**Sonia Caus Gleason (sonia@soniacausgleason.org) consults and coaches on collaborative adult learning and measurement efforts that pursue equity, innovation, and continuous improvement. Jill Harrison Berg (jhberg@gmail.com) is a leadership coach, researcher, and consultant on teacher leadership and systemic improvement. ■**

**E**llie Drago-Severson and Mary Antón have known each other for more than 20 years and have worked together in different capacities to support educators through the lens of adult development. They recently spoke with *The Learning Professional* about how coaching can help leaders at all levels navigate the COVID-19 crisis and grow in ways that will help schools and students for years to come.

Drago-Severson is a teacher, consultant, coach, facilitator, author, researcher, and developmental psychologist. She is professor of education leadership and adult learning and leadership at Teachers College, Columbia University, where she also directs the Ph.D. program in education leadership and the Leadership Institute for School Change. Her recent research focuses on the intersection of internal, developmental capacities, and leadership on behalf of social justice.

Antón is a veteran school principal, equity coach with the Reimagining Integration: Diverse and Equitable Schools (RIDES) project at Harvard Graduate School of Education, and the founder of Learning • Leading • Becoming Equity Leadership Consulting. Her work focuses on supporting leaders of color and on systemic school change geared toward dismantling racism.



Ellie Drago-Severson



Mary Antón

# THE ULTIMATE ADAPTIVE CHALLENGE

HOW WE CAN COACH SCHOOL LEADERS TODAY, TOMORROW, AND POST-COVID19

BY SUZANNE BOUFFARD

**Q: Why is coaching so important as we all navigate the COVID-19 crisis?**

**Ellie Drago-Severson:** One of the great gifts of coaching is to be in the position of caring for others. What a privilege it is to be present with educators right now and hold space to help them manage the complexity, ambiguity, and fear we are all experiencing.

Listening is the essence of coaching, but it's not enough, by any stretch of the imagination. An important part of coaching — always, but especially now — is listening to how people are making meaning of their experience and differentiating the support we provide based on both their ways of orienting to the world and their current circumstances.

Context certainly matters — and so do our internal capacities. This COVID-19 crisis is the ultimate adaptive challenge for all of us. Everyone is struggling to make sense of it in his or her own way.



**Q: How can understanding adult development help coaches support educators during this crisis?**

**Drago-Severson:** It's essential right now to recognize the fundamentally different ways this crisis is affecting different people. The burden and the resources aren't the same for everyone. Coaching should look and feel different based on these different, urgent needs.

Applying a developmental lens can help us to be present for each person in powerful and meaningful ways. For example, a developmental framework helps us understand that, according to research, there are three most common ways of knowing among adults. These are: the instrumental, socializing, and self-authoring ways of knowing.

Each way of knowing has developmental strengths and also areas for growth, or what I call growing edges. Using a developmental framework, we can meet people where they are in their meaning-making and offer appropriate supports and challenges. These challenges, or stretches, can help them grow to better manage the complexity and ambiguity of work and life — and of the current COVID crisis.

Instrumental knowers orient to the world in a very concrete way and are most comfortable when following what they see as the “right” rules and processes. In this crisis, they will have a need for tangible resources and clear guidance about how to proceed.

Socializing knowers orient to the

**“This COVID-19 crisis is the ultimate adaptive challenge for all of us. Everyone is struggling to make sense of it in his or her own way.”**

— *Ellie Drago-Severson*

world in a relational way and tend to value and need the approval of teammates and authorities. These knowers adopt external authorities' assessments, opinions, and values as their own. For them, it's important to have a supervisor or valued colleague's permission to do something. In addition, leaders extending gratitude, compassion, and care for them is especially important right now.

Self-authoring knowers have the internal capacity to generate an ideology and a set of standards that govern how they behave, how they make decisions, and what actions they take. While they are keen to learn from others' perspectives and consider them when making decisions — especially in a crisis situation — in the end, they will look inside themselves to discern what to do. They may also be readily poised to help and support others, and they do best when they have opportunities to share their expertise and ideas.

It's important for coaches and leaders to tap into that. But now can also be a moment to help self-

authoring knowers look beyond their own expertise toward some of the more systemic challenges and interdependencies at hand.

**Mary Antón:** While I was a principal for 18 years, I used this developmental framework for supporting teachers as the foundation of my practice. Now, as a principal coach focused on equity and inclusion, I stress its value to other leaders. Understanding the developmental capacities of teachers is a critical piece for principals to intentionally plan spaces in which teachers experience a sense of belongingness, connection, and potential for growth.

One of my most important goals for school leaders is developing teacher leadership. When leaders are intentional, teachers grow. And when teachers grow, they create growth spaces for children. Now is a time for growth for everyone. All of us, whether we are a coach, principal, teacher, or other role, can encourage others to learn and grow as we get through this together.

**Q: How does physical distancing affect the way we support one another?**

**Antón:** This crisis hits our connections to one another. We need to ask: What spaces can we create now to connect people and hold people so they can talk about how they are managing? And how do we do that in a developmental way that is responsive to different needs?

When this crisis started, I looked

at what was needed for leaders, and I started assembling online groups for leaders from different parts of the U.S. to come together and share thoughts and ideas. These groups are holding spaces so leaders can talk with and learn from people who might have ideas that are different from them.

We have an opportunity right now to create spaces with a lot of fluidity in them. For example, you can set up voluntary meetings around specific topics of interest, where people can drop in, almost like pick-up basketball games or unconferences. Another example I've seen is a principal organizing virtual coffee breaks. In these informal meetings, people are invited to come, but there is no requirement or expectation. They have been very popular; the school's teachers union representatives even emailed the principal and asked that the events continue. Opportunities like these can set up certainty in a time of uncertainty.

**"This is a time to encourage teachers who have a skill to share it. Someone who knows how to use the computer may be helping someone else, and this is a chance for her to become a leader."**

— *Mary Antón*

**Drago-Severson:** What we shouldn't lose from this time is that when people are coming together in virtual groups, sometimes from across schools and outside of their usual networks, they're making some really important shifts in the sources of information and ideas. Stepping outside of their own schools or systems

has allowed people to experience ideas they've never experienced before. People I have the honor of coaching are feeling incredibly fragile and vulnerable right now, and those seeds of vulnerability and courage can help us come together in new ways.

**Antón:** Another thing that's different, and positive, right now is that when you're on a video call, you're letting someone into your home. When you're in each other's homes, you begin to see each other's lives in different ways. You connect when they are in their most comfortable location, where they feel most held.

There is a level of authenticity around how people bring their whole selves when sitting in their bedroom or home office or on their deck. I see it shifting and changing some essential relationships, allowing people to feel a little safer and more connected in ways that seem completely counterintuitive.

Working with principals, I'm

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thinking about how do we capture and keep those essential relationships and opportunities for belonging going forward? What have we learned about people who are different from us, and how can we use that to rethink some of our structures?

**Q: What other learning opportunities do you see right now?**

**Drago-Severson:** I've been thinking a lot lately about how many people interpret the Chinese word for "crisis" as the combination of the symbols for danger and opportunity. Over the past several weeks, I've seen that leaders, in response to the very real dangers and inequities of the moment, are implementing a lot of promising adaptations of the four pillar practices for adult development and collaboration I developed: teaming, providing leadership roles, collegial inquiry (engaging in meaningful conversation), and mentoring or coaching. These are practices that bring people together, which feels especially important right now.

In terms of strategies, I encourage leaders to start team meetings with quick, fun, and voluntary check-ins, using a pass-or-play approach to help everyone feel comfortable. I also encourage people to use surveys to bring peoples' voices together in new ways. With teacher surveys or parent surveys, you can help leaders within and across different roles and organizational levels in the community understand the pulse of the community.

**Antón:** I'm also seeing people putting structures in place that are building leadership capacity. This is a time to encourage teachers who have a skill to share it. Someone who

**"What can we learn and do now that will set up structures that will be likely to allow us to make some fundamental changes going forward?"**

— Mary Antón

knows how to use the computer may be helping someone else, and this is a chance for her to become a leader.

As coaches and leaders, we should be thinking about: Whom could you encourage to do this and how? We should begin to build some of those pillar practices for helping people grow within their developmental stage, such as asking questions about what people are learning and trying. This can help people reimagine their roles and take roles that they might not have taken before.

**Drago-Severson:** One thing I have found fascinating in this new world is that people are becoming more willing to take leadership opportunities than they were at the beginning of the crisis. One principal told me that she invited her teachers to share what they are learning during staff meetings. After one week, only one teacher did so, but the next week, two other teachers offered to share, and it grew from there. People can become more comfortable if we create the conditions where it's voluntary and it's OK to say no or not right now.

It's amazing what planting those seeds can do. One teacher last week told me, "Now I have a voice that matters."

She had never felt that way before. She's a young teacher on a team with many senior teachers, and she didn't always feel comfortable to share. But now she sees that they are valuing her technology knowledge, and it has been very affirming for her.

**Q: Looking ahead to when school buildings reopen, what do you expect will be some of the most important coaching needs?**

**Antón:** My coaching is primarily around equity and inclusion, so I'm very focused on that. I've been asking how people are supporting others in this time when we know there are lots of inequities, and that work will continue to be incredibly important. What can we learn and do now that will set up structures that will be likely to allow us to make some fundamental changes going forward? And then how can we keep those structures going?

**Drago-Severson:** Our work as coaches is about growing the growers. But when we come back together, it's going to be about holding the holders. We're going to have to hold each other in different ways. In my experience, people who are being coached are learning in new ways about how to hold other people. And if we can do that better when we come back together with real hugs, that's what's going to carry us into the future in new ways. The depth of our understanding about social justice, equity, and diversity of all kinds can help us create a new world in schools.

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# LONG-DISTANCE LEADERSHIP

PRINCIPALS SUPPORT TEACHERS AS THEY DIVE INTO REMOTE LEARNING

BY JENNIFER GILL

**A**llyson Apsey, principal of Quincy Elementary School in Zeeland, Michigan, was looking forward to the second Friday in March. It was to be a half-day for students so she and her teachers could spend the afternoon collaborating

on spring lesson plans and planning the next academic year.

Then, at 11 p.m. the night before, Michigan announced that all school buildings would close after Friday to stem the spread of the coronavirus. Rumors of a closure had been swirling for days, but the announcement still

came as a shock.

Apsey and her staff dismissed students at noon as planned, then huddled for an hour to eat and share their worries before heading home to tend to their own needs. To try to lighten the mood, someone decorated the dessert table with rolls of toilet

Allyson Apsey, principal of Quincy Elementary School in Zeeland, Michigan, has adopted several strategies to support her school's teachers during the shutdown. One is the Monday morning staff check-in, a one-question survey to gauge how teachers are feeling about the week ahead. "Teachers' underlying fear is that they're not doing enough," says Apsey.



paper. They left the building that day thinking they would see each other again after spring break.

It didn't play out that way. Michigan, following other states, shuttered schools for the rest of the year, presenting principals like Apsey with a host of challenges that no leadership course could have adequately prepared them for. Chief among them: How to effectively support teachers from afar as they adjust to a new way of teaching at such an uncertain and scary time.

Four of five teachers surveyed by *Education Week* in April said their job is more stressful than before the pandemic (Kurtz & Herold, 2020). "Teachers' underlying fear is that they're not doing enough," says Apsey. "They don't have a picture of what great instruction looks like virtually, so when they see other teachers doing something, they're wondering, 'Should I be doing that, too?'"

Apsey, like other principals, has adopted several strategies to support her school's 33 teachers during the shutdown. One is the Monday morning staff check-in, a one-question Google survey that she sends teachers to gauge how they're feeling about the week ahead. Apsey actually started doing this earlier in the year after a teacher

#### MONDAY MORNING CHECK-IN (COVID-19 EDITION)

HOW ARE YOU FEELING?

- We are doing well. I feel good about our plan for the week.
- We are doing OK, thankful we are not sick.
- We have sick family members, but we are doing OK.
- Please call me, I need some TLC.
- Please tag me in to remotely work on a project. I am going stir-crazy.
- I would love to connect virtually to learn together (book study, etc.).
- I am not doing well at all, either physically or emotionally, and would love some help.
- Other:

suggested that faculty members could benefit from routine check-ins as much as students.

When the pandemic struck, she tweaked the multiple choice answers to reflect teachers' new reality. Responses now include: "We have sick family members, but we are doing OK" and "Please tag me in to remotely work on a project. I'm going stir-crazy." Apsey tracks responses and flags those needing

follow-up.

When a few teachers expressed interest in taking an online class about helping kids cope with trauma, for example, Apsey gave recommendations. The weekly staff check-in has been so useful that Apsey launched a similar one for school families so she could respond to their needs, too. Roughly 40% of Quincy's families routinely answer.

When Quincy teachers meet with their classes on Zoom, the focus is as much on connecting as teaching. The school's 550 students all receive weekly remote learning plans prepared by the district's curriculum team and are free to ask questions during the virtual class, but Apsey doesn't expect teachers to hammer on multiplication drills and grammar rules. Instead, she loves seeing them get creative in building community online.

One 4th-grade teacher asked students to give 30-second reviews of books they're reading, while in another Zoom room, 3rd graders introduced their dogs and stuffed animals to classmates. These simple interactions, she believes, give kids the social and emotional support they crave right now. Many apparently can't get enough: One 5th-grade teacher, new to Zoom, told Apsey that his class lasted 90 minutes. The suggested time is 30.

## LEAD WITH LEARNING

The rapid shift to remote learning has come with a steep learning curve for many teachers. Ryan Daniel is the principal of Chillum Elementary School in Hyattsville, Maryland. Some of her school's 17 classroom teachers, particularly in the lower grades, had no experience using tools like Google Classroom.

While her school district, Prince George's County Public Schools, offered some training, Daniel supplemented it with videos of herself using different features in Zoom and Google Classroom to help her staff get up to speed faster. Based on district guidelines, Chillum's 389 students have

two virtual lessons daily in core subjects with assignments due at the end of each week. On Sunday night, teachers send Daniel their lesson plans, which are based on topics set by the district, and she maps out which classes she's going to visit.

Daniel is also a co-teacher in Chillum's virtual classrooms so she can see the assignments teachers post and the work students submit — things she would easily see if she walked into their classroom at school. Knowing such details has come in handy: Once or twice during informal Zoom observations, Daniel has had to take over a lesson when the teacher's internet connection dropped.

She averages two to three observations a day and sends digital postcards to tell her teachers how great they're doing. She picks two staff members a day to call or text, just to see how they're coping with all the changes and commiserate about life on the home front — Daniel and her husband, an essential worker, have two school-age children and a six-month-old. "I don't feel like I'm the instructional leader I'm used to being, but I'm giving myself grace, the same grace that I'm giving my teachers," she says.

## SHOW PATIENCE AND COMPASSION

Indeed, principals stress that this is no time for extra meetings or to hold teachers to impossible standards. After all, teachers, like everyone else, are facing enormous stresses in their personal lives, too. They may have a sick loved one, a partner who lost his or her job, or children who need support

with their own schooling.

At Elk Grove High School in Elk Grove Village, Illinois, principal Paul Kelly has kept staff meetings to a minimum since the closure. He carved out time in the schedule for his school's professional learning communities to meet weekly on Zoom but did not make attendance mandatory because he recognizes that the time may not work with everyone's home life.

"I need to lead in a way that I want our teachers to treat our kids," he says. "Every communication a teacher has with kids should start with patience and compassion, even more so now. It's a lot easier for staff to do that if their boss takes the same approach."

Many principals also have a newfound appreciation for their own professional learning circles. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) produced a six-part virtual town hall series for school leaders to share their experiences about leading through the crisis. Within weeks, the series garnered nearly 90,000 views; a video from NASSP typically gets a couple hundred.

"Principals need their own community to share best practices, discuss their most pressing challenges, and be open and vulnerable," says Beverly Hutton, NASSP's deputy executive director of programs and services. "The more they're able to share and reflect, the better they'll get at this."

## STAY CONNECTED

When Pilar Perossio, principal of Bancroft Middle School in Long Beach, California, feels tapped out, she taps



*Thank you for  
being a member.*



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her phone for some encouragement. She and the seven other middle school principals in the Long Beach Unified School District created a group on WhatsApp to stay connected. Calling themselves the Survival Group, they've brainstormed ideas for end-of-year 8th-grade activities, suggested ways to celebrate Teacher Appreciation Week, discussed platforms for making a faculty video, and shared concerns about students who've gone missing since the closure.

About 85% of Bancroft's 1,000 students log in regularly, and Perossio's support team follows up with calls and emails to the rest. Working with district curriculum leaders, Perossio and her teachers have modified learning plans to focus on the most essential standards so students are ready for the fall. Like principals across the country, she wonders what school may look like

then. Will schools have to limit the number of students in a class? Will they have to rethink how kids move between classrooms?

While there are many unknowns, Hutton believes there will be a silver lining to the school closures. For one, the pandemic shined a light on inequalities in student access to technology at home and ways to remedy it. Teachers who once balked at using online tools are now proficient, or at least more comfortable, with them. Principals have discovered new ways of communicating with key stakeholders.

One school leader told Hutton that in the prepandemic days of in-person community meetings, she was lucky if 25 people attended. When she hosted a Zoom call after the school closure, 150 parents joined. The strong turnout may have stemmed from the uncertainty surrounding the shutdown, but

Hutton is hopeful that newly forged connections like this stick.

After all, educators tell students all the time that they're teaching them to be lifelong learners. Now the field has a chance to model that practice for them. "If we look at this crisis as a prolonged interruption until we get back to the way things used to be, we're missing the opportunity," she says.

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**If students are to become self-directed math learners, we must invest class time — whether in person or online — in explicitly teaching the skills of self-directed mathematics learning.**

# MOMENTUM FOR MATH

HELP STUDENTS BECOME ACTIVE LEARNING PARTNERS IN ONLINE CLASSROOMS

BY SUE CHAPMAN AND MARY MITCHELL

**P**eek into a math classroom, virtual or physical. What are students doing and saying about their math learning? Are they engaged? Are they thinking critically — evaluating solutions, assessing their understanding, revising their strategies, explaining concepts, and connecting mathematics to real life?

According to the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, “When students take an active part

in monitoring and regulating their learning, then the rate of their learning is dramatically increased” (2007). The meta-cognitive abilities to think about what they currently know and don’t yet understand and the skills of setting learning goals and monitoring progress toward achieving these goals are vital to students’ success today and tomorrow.

Helping all students become more self-directed in their mathematics learning is especially necessary in the online environment in which we find

ourselves today. To be successful in a virtual learning environment, students must learn how to deal with distractions and manage time. They must develop the skills of recognizing and signaling when they need support. They also need a tool kit for self-scaffolding — strategies, tools, and human resources they can draw from when learning becomes challenging.

Building these skills is an equity issue. In her book *Culturally Responsive Teaching & the Brain*, Zaretta



Hammond tells us that “many culturally and linguistically diverse students are ‘dependent learners.’” They haven’t yet developed the skills needed to “facilitate their cognitive growth” and “activate their own neuroplasticity” (Hammond, 2015, p. 14). At a time when inequities are more pronounced and concerning than ever, helping students learn how to “accelerate their own learning, meaning they know how to learn new content and improve their weak skills on their own” is an important equity strategy (p. 15).

Although many of the strategies for fostering self-directed learning are similar in physical and virtual classrooms, there are some differences to consider and plan for. Below are some concrete ways to help students grow these learning proficiencies in virtual classrooms as well as or instead of physical ones.

### WHAT SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING LOOKS LIKE

Self-directed learners adopt and maintain a learning stance toward challenges that are a natural part of all types of learning. They are reflective, self-aware, and equipped with strategies for learning more. The box at right lists specific student competencies for self-directed math learning.

If students are to become self-directed math learners, we must invest class time — whether in person or online — in explicitly teaching the skills of self-directed mathematics

learning. Each of the competencies in the list can be introduced to students in a minilesson and then reinforced as students engage in math learning activities. For an example of a minilesson on the student competency “I can use strategies to persevere with challenging problems,” see the PDF version of this article on Learning Forward’s website at [learningforward.org/the-learning-professional](https://www.learningforward.org/the-learning-professional).

We also need to provide opportunities for students to practice these new skills and receive feedback. Many of the actions that we recommend teachers take can occur regardless of physical location (see the table on p. 32). Certain actions, like facilitating peer feedback, may require an additional step of setting up a process for connecting online, but the task does not change fundamentally.

### SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING IN ONLINE ENVIRONMENTS

While these processes can happen online or in person, there are some specific considerations for promoting self-directed learning in an online environment. The table on p. 33 identifies three challenges to facilitating math learning online and offers strategies for addressing these challenges.

### SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING IN ACTION

For an example of how to facilitate self-directed learning in math during

## PARTIAL LIST OF STUDENT COMPETENCIES FOR SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING OF MATHEMATICS

- I can use math vocabulary to explain my math thinking.
- I can ask questions if I don’t understand.
- I can ask for help if I need it.
- I can restate another student’s idea.
- I can use different strategies to solve problems.
- I can work independently.
- I can work collaboratively.
- I can represent my math thinking visually.
- I can use strategies to persevere with challenging problems.
- I can prove my answers make sense.
- I can learn from my mistakes.
- I can use feedback from others to improve my math work.
- I can set goals for my math learning and track my progress.
- I can reflect on my math learning.
- I can explain what I need to know and be able to do on assignments.
- I can use my math journal as a learning tool.

remote learning, take a look inside this hypothetical virtual 3rd-grade class as the students learn about measurement concepts and procedures. (This vignette is a composite of multiple experiences in online classrooms we have worked with.)

After greeting her students and welcoming them to their online class session in Google Meet, Grace Sun reminds her 3rd-grade students to

EXAMPLES OF TEACHER ACTIONS TO PROMOTE SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING IN MATHEMATICS	
Teacher actions to help students take ownership of their learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide clear learning targets and success criteria. Allow students to set personal goals in support of these learning targets.</li> <li>• Have students collaborate in developing “I can” statements, checklists, rubrics, and other tools that build understanding of success criteria and allow students to track their progress.</li> <li>• Help students set up and learn to use a personal glossary of math vocabulary they can refer to in writing explanations of their math thinking.</li> <li>• Use menus of learning options to give students choice in how to achieve learning targets.</li> <li>• Select or design mathematics tasks that allow students to use multiple approaches, explain their math thinking, and make connections.</li> <li>• Give students opportunities to apply mathematics to real-world problems that are relevant to their lives.</li> </ul>
Teacher actions to help students use feedback to strengthen their learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide opportunities for students to revise their mathematics work based on feedback.</li> <li>• Teach students how to give actionable feedback to each other. Actionable feedback describes in specific terms how the work meets success criteria and how it can be improved.</li> <li>• Use protocols for giving feedback such as Two Stars and a Wish, in which students make two positive comments and one suggestion about a peer’s work.</li> </ul>
Teacher actions to help students articulate what they are learning and why it is important	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have students solve the same problem at the beginning and end of a unit and then compare the two pieces of work.</li> <li>• Have students keep work portfolios that include written work samples as well as photos and video artifacts that demonstrate learning.</li> <li>• Invest time in brief check-in meetings with students and student-led parent conferences.</li> <li>• Have students keep a math autobiography as a tool to reflect on their math learning over time and reinforce their identities as developing mathematicians.</li> </ul>

upload a photo or Google doc of yesterday’s math homework to their Google Classroom site.

The homework assignment read: “Choose an object in your home to measure in as many ways as you can. You may use nonstandard measurement tools as well as standard measurement tools. Record your measurements. Remember that each measurement must include a number and the unit of measure. Answer the following questions: 1) What are you learning about measurement? 2) What is one question you have about measurement?”

Sun presents a quick poll using Poll Everywhere to spark reflection about their learning. She asks: “Which word best describes how you felt as you were doing yesterday’s math homework?”

She shares the poll results above.

As the class reviews the poll results, students are invited to share noticings and wonderings related to the data.

Later in the day, Sun will review students’ homework and design

WHICH WORD BEST DESCRIBES HOW YOU FELT AS YOU WERE DOING YESTERDAY'S MATH HOMEWORK?								
Joy	A				4			
Interest	B							8
Pride	C					6		
Amusement	D				5			
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6
								7
								8

additional learning experiences based on their questions and interests as well as what their work reveals about their understandings related to measurement.

Next, Sun talks to her students about their upcoming student-led conferences with parents and the roles they will play. She has scheduled a 15-minute virtual session with each student and a parent or caregiver to celebrate students’ accomplishments and keep parents informed about students’ next steps in learning.

Sun has seen how these brief conferences reinforce students’ ownership of their math learning and their identities as math learners. They

also allow parents to experience the same technology-supported learning tools that children are using. Sun is convinced that these conferences strengthen her partnership with families.

During the conferences, students will share a progress chart showing their growth toward learning targets and a piece of problem-solving work they have chosen from their digital portfolio stored in a Google folder. Referring to success criteria that the class developed together, students will explain how the work demonstrates their learning. Finally, students will share a personal learning goal they will work toward during the upcoming unit on fraction concepts.

MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF FACILITATING MATH LEARNING ONLINE	
ONLINE CHALLENGE	STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS CHALLENGE
<p><b>FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT</b></p> <p>Teachers do not have access to the wealth of learning data that can be gathered through face-to-face observation of students. As a result, teachers need to be even more intentional about monitoring students' math understandings and mindsets when teaching online. They also need to develop new formative assessment strategies and routines.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do a quick check-in with students after each chunk of learning. For example, using emojis, respond to the following questions in the chat window:             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I understand the ideas we just talked about.</li> <li>2. I feel confident about my learning.</li> </ol> </li> <li>• During each online class session, identify one student to observe. After the session ends, take a few minutes to jot down anecdotal notes about evidence of the student's engagement in learning (Knight, 2019):             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Behavioral engagement: Did the student participate in class activities? Were there distractions in the home environment the student had to contend with? Is the student turning in assignments and, if not, what are some possible reasons?</li> <li>○ Cognitive engagement: Did the student show evidence of thinking about learning activities? Is the student making learning connections? If not, what scaffolding might be needed?</li> <li>○ Emotional engagement: Does the student feel safe to share math thinking with the class? Does the student appear to feel connected to the class and positive about the learning experience? If not, what forms of personal contact might be needed?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>CLASSROOM DISCOURSE</b></p> <p>Facilitating online discussions is challenging because nonverbal cues are not readily available, and virtual classrooms don't offer easy options for partner talk. Teachers need to develop new discussion protocols to allow for equitable participation in small-group and whole-class discussions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include response activities that allow all students to share their thinking without extensive talking or writing, like sentence frames or questions requiring one-word responses.</li> <li>• Instead of partner talk as preparation for whole-class discussion, pose an open-ended question as a journaling assignment for homework. Begin the next class session with a discussion of this same question.</li> <li>• Use breakout groups or schedule small-group sessions for students to work collaboratively on problem-solving tasks. This is an excellent time to listen in and provide feedback related to one of the student competencies for self-directed learning.</li> </ul>
<p><b>MANIPULATIVE MODELS</b></p> <p>Most students don't have access to the manipulatives and mathematical tools available in face-to-face classrooms. Teachers need to think creatively about ways to allow students to see and represent mathematical ideas in concrete and pictorial forms.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free sources of virtual manipulatives are readily available. Remember that students need opportunities for free exploration of virtual and concrete manipulatives before using them as learning tools.</li> <li>• Teachers can guide students through the process of creating a needed manipulative (e.g. ten frame, ruler, fraction model) as a learning experience.</li> <li>• At the start of the next school year, provide students with a set of math manipulatives to keep at home for use with homework and in case learning must transition back online.</li> </ul>

Sun expects students to do most of the talking during the conferences, but she has a few questions ready to offer if needed, including the following:

- How is learning math in an online classroom similar and different from learning in our regular classroom?
- How are you becoming more self-directed in your learning because of your experiences learning online?

Students will respond to these

**MATH PROBLEM**

- Chris and Viktor found a broken ruler and decided to use it to measure some objects.
- First, they measured a pair of scissors.
- Chris said the scissors were about 10 inches long.
- Viktor said the scissors were about 8 inches long.
- Who is right? How do you know?



reflection prompts in their math journals before their conferences. They will also practice talking about their learning with a classmate in a breakout room before the actual conference.

Next, Sun works through a math problem (on p. 33) with the students.

Students use the hand-raising tool in Google Meet to show that they would like to share their thinking. Nakia turns on her mic and begins the discussion, stating that she agrees with Viktor because the tip of the scissors is near 2 and the edge of the handle is near 10. The difference between 2 and 10, Nakia explains, is 8.

Sun asks students to indicate whether they agree or disagree with Nakia using a thumbs-up or thumbs-down signal. Some students agree, but others are not sure, and a few disagree. Sun asks whether someone can represent Nakia’s strategy on the virtual white board.

Arthur draws a number line and shows eight individual jumps between the numbers 2 through 10. Sandra adds on by representing the problem with the equation  $2+8=10$ . Students debate whether the ends of the scissors fall precisely at 2 and 8, leading to a discussion of what it means to be “about 8 inches long.”

Sun wants to identify students who do not yet have full understanding of the measurement concepts behind this task. These students will participate in an online guided math lesson tomorrow. Knowing that all students need practice articulating their math thinking, Sun asks students to explain and justify the answer they believe is correct in their online math journals.

As students are writing, Sun sets up breakout rooms in Google Meet for the next part of the lesson. She introduces the math task above and then sends students to breakout rooms to work together.

Sun checks in on each of the breakout groups. When she sees that a group has a plan for its investigation, she helps the group brainstorm some tools they might find at home to

### JUMPING JACKS MATH TASK

1. How many jumping jacks can our whole class do in one minute? Make an estimate.
2. Compare and discuss your estimates with your group.
3. Talk about some ways you might gather data to help answer this question. Record your plan here.
4. Your homework for tonight is to gather data to help solve this problem.
5. Tomorrow you will share the data you collect with your group and prepare to present your investigation findings to the class.
6. Be ready to talk about what this investigation has to do with measurement.

measure a minute. They come up with the following ideas: a clock or watch with a second hand, cell phone, a timer on the microwave, even a sibling or a parent counting “one thousand one ...” up to 60 seconds.

As she closes the session, Sun challenges students to think about some ways they might use measurement over the next week to help family members. She ends class with this send-off: “See you tomorrow, mathematicians.”

In this lesson, Sun leverages technology to use many of the same strategies for self-directed math learning she would use in a physical classroom. But she also builds in scaffolds that are particularly needed in an online environment, like the preparation for the student-led conferences. As a result, her students develop the skills they need for learning in this setting — and any other.

### EXPANDING OUR GOALS

Teaching for self-directed math learning is more important now than ever. It sets students up for success

in future math learning settings — whatever they might look like — and in life. Math education leaders Jeane Joyner and Mari Muri write, “The emphasis on students taking increased responsibility and becoming more engaged in assessing their own work is not an abdication of our responsibilities as teachers. Rather, we are expanding our goals for teaching and learning mathematics to include more emphasis on student metacognition and the development of work habits that will become lifelong skills for our students (Joyner & Muri, 2011, p. 168).”

Students learn more when they become active partners in their own math learning. Even more important, the skills they acquire along the way equip them to thrive in a changing world and prepare them for whatever the future holds.

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# STUDENTS ARE STRESSED. EDUCATORS CAN HELP

SCHOOL COUNSELORS OFFER STRATEGIES EDUCATORS CAN USE  
TO ADDRESS STUDENTS' WELL-BEING

BY KWOK-SZE RICHARD WONG

**C**hildhood and adolescence are stressful, even in the best of times — and these are not the best of times. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased already-high stress and anxiety levels among students. In addition to the health dangers of the virus, and the sense of worry

and hopelessness some families are experiencing due to job losses, school closures have caused many students to lose a source of stability and support.

All plans to support students, both during distance learning and the eventual return to classrooms, should include a focus on students' social and emotional health and well-

being. Like all of the other challenges we're navigating right now, this will take professional learning to do well. Fortunately, teachers, and those who lead and support them, can learn from the strategies of professionals trained to help students navigate challenging times: school counselors.

The American School Counselor

Association has developed many resources and teamed with organizations such as the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; the National Association of School Psychologists, and the American Academy of Pediatrics to provide assistance for helping students with social and emotional needs during and after the COVID-19 crisis.

While we encourage leaders and teachers to leverage school counselors' expertise in working with students directly, we also want to share some strategies and advice that you, and the educators you support, can apply in everyday ways.

### UNCERTAINTY BRINGS STRESS

Despite the way school is portrayed in coming-of-age films and books, most students enjoy going to school. Many students view school as a safe harbor that provides a stable environment for cognitive, emotional, and social growth as well as physical safety.

For some, school is a respite from a volatile home life, especially in extreme cases such as homelessness, food insecurity, undocumented status, or abuse by a family member. Some students feel school is a place to be their authentic selves — for example, LGBTQ youth who have not come out to their families but have affirming peer

relationships at school.

Most schools have instituted distance learning to continue the educational process, but the uncertainty of working in a new environment may bring heightened stress. That may be especially true for students who do not have the necessary resources, must share a computer with other school-aged siblings, do not have space conducive for school work, or are expected to take care of younger siblings, perform household chores, or work at the family business. Such disparities may highlight the inequities for students who already feel disadvantaged relative to their peers.

Even with distance learning, all students are at greater risk of feeling lonely and isolated. They miss their friends and the routine of school. At the same time, they may feel more stress from being in close quarters with their family members without the opportunity for breaks.

### START BY CONNECTING AND LISTENING

The first step to supporting students in this time is to communicate with students frequently and show concern for them. Asking about their well-being regularly shows students empathy and compassion, and one caring adult in a student's life makes a world of difference.

Personal contact, even virtually, helps alleviate their sense of isolation

and loneliness. You may want to share some of the following strategies with the educators you support to help them cement the connections that are so important right now.

When conducting distance learning classes, take a minute before starting the lesson to ask students how they're feeling and discuss any questions they may have. Provide relevant information without unnecessary details, and always try to present it in a positive but realistic way. Similarly, avoid negative terms when possible because negative terms tend to foster negative thoughts.

It's also important to communicate with students individually via email, the chat function of the distance learning platform, or phone. Show concern for students by asking questions. Learn their fears and concerns. It's hard to reassure students when you don't know what's making them anxious or afraid. Don't try to answer all their questions in one conversation.

Don't tell students they shouldn't be worried. Instead, legitimize students' feelings and help students manage their fear and uncertainty by identifying behaviors caused by their fears and changing their behaviors so they don't act out of fear. They can't control their feelings, but they can control their behavior, which can change their feelings.

Teachers have many opportunities to teach self-regulation skills. A social and



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emotional learning (SEL) curriculum is one option, but there are other everyday strategies that help, too. You can start each class (whether in-person or online) with a check-in that helps students learn to recognize their mental and emotional states and share strategies that are helping classmates cope.

You can lead mindfulness exercises by asking students to take a minute to breathe deeply and slowly and to be aware of their surroundings. You can also use guided imagery by asking students to close their eyes and envision their favorite place, or teachers can describe a tranquil place such as a beach or a forest.

In addition to relaxation and mindfulness that help students replace anxious and fearful thoughts, you can explore other strategies for addressing stress and overall wellness. One way is to encourage students to engage in a hobby.

Many activities are currently unavailable to students, but they can engage in reading, journaling, blogging, painting or drawing, playing music, or practicing TikTok dances with friends online. This can be a good time to learn a new skill or find a new hobby.

School leaders, as well as teachers, can encourage students (and their families) to establish a predictable routine at home to help reduce uncertainty in daily life. Students should also keep in touch with friends virtually. And even though they should keep their distance from others, they should exercise as much as possible to remain physically fit and expend energy. All these activities provide a healthy distraction from their stressors and promote expression of their feelings.

### LEAVE SPACE FOR LOSS

A consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic is grief. Grief can come from any loss, not just the death of a loved one, which many students (and staff) are experiencing. Students are also facing loss of mobility, loss of companionship with their friends, loss of their daily routine, and, for many, loss of life events they'd anticipated

### Although educators should not be expected to be grief counselors, they can support students by recognizing these signs and identifying when students are struggling with grief.

for years, such as graduation and promotion ceremonies. Grief can have a significant impact on students' learning, school performance, and social and emotional development.

Students experience and exhibit grief in different ways. They may have trouble sleeping, experience difficulty with concentration and be distracted easily, become confused or overwhelmed by school assignments, lose interest and motivation, or have outbursts of anger or despair. They may be unable to request help because they can't imagine what might make them feel better. They may withdraw and become isolated or feel embarrassed by their strong feelings.

Although educators should not be expected to be grief counselors, they can support students by recognizing these signs and identifying when students are struggling with grief. You may want to share these strategies with the teachers and other staff you support so they can be of greatest help to students:

**Acknowledge the loss.** Adults often avoid talking about death and loss because they feel awkward, don't want to cause more pain for a student inadvertently, and don't know what to say. Unfortunately, silence may send the message that the student's loss and grief aren't important and that the adult doesn't care or isn't willing to provide support. A simple, straightforward comment, such as, "I was so sorry to hear about your loss. I'm thinking about you and your family" can make a big difference.

**Ensure school is a safe place, not a source of additional stress.** Grieving students typically struggle with

classwork, some for the first time in their lives. This can create anxiety and frustration. Many schools have relaxed grading procedures during shutdown and distance learning, which is helpful to students. School staff should be flexible in assignments, grading, and overall policies so grief, loss, anxiety, and stress will not have a negative impact on student performance, both during the shutdown and after schools reopen.

**Be aware and refer.** It's important to help students and their families access resources that can help them cope. Administrators, school counselors, school psychologists, school nurses, and school social workers are usually trained to provide this type of support. Since many students only have contact with one teacher right now, rather than the range of specialists and support people they usually interact with at school, it's especially important for teachers to help make these connections.

### CHANGE CAN LEAD TO GROWTH

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus said that the only constant in life is change. That's an important lesson that many students are just beginning to learn. Throughout their lives, students will be confronted with problems that require them to learn to manage and accept changing situations.

The COVID-19 crisis, while probably the most serious global problem they'll face, is the beginning of many unanticipated challenges. Supporting students' social and emotional development will help students develop the underlying abilities to cope with any situation as well as help them get through the current situation.

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# A NEW ROAD MAP FOR SCHOOLS

3 STRATEGIES CAN HELP YOU PLAN FOR AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

BY THOMAS ARNETT AND CHELSEA WAITE

**T**his spring, as schools grappled with sudden closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the phrase “building the plane as we fly it” was no exaggeration. Practically overnight, schools had to figure out an entirely different modality of instruction. And though the 2019-20 school year is behind us,

it’s looking like new challenges are likely in the cards this fall, ranging from requirements to follow social distancing guidelines to rolling closures in response to localized COVID-19 outbreaks.

As researchers of K-12 innovation, our last decade studying digital learning has taught us that there’s no one-size-fits-all blueprint, even

in normal circumstances. The varied and unpredictable effects of the global pandemic on schools and families further underscore this reality.

So rather than lay out the nuts and bolts of what all schools’ fall plans should look like, we offer research-backed strategies for responding to any new challenge brought about from dramatically shifting circumstances.



These strategies can help school leaders have more predictable success as they respond to the pandemic or to other more common causes of school closure, such as floods, hurricanes, blizzards, and fires.

### 1. CONSIDER HOW YOU FRAME YOUR CHALLENGES.

Research shows that how we frame a situation — as a threat or as an opportunity — impacts how we respond (Roberto, 2016). When people encounter a significant threat, a response called “threat rigidity” sets in. They cease being flexible, double down on well-established routines, and rely on hierarchical command-and-control decision-making.

In a moment of crisis — such as the sudden school closures this spring — threat framing can be appropriate. It produces immediate and efficient responses when time is of the essence — such as when districts prioritize making sure students who depend on school for meals don’t go hungry. But

constant threat framing also stifles the creativity needed for effectively responding to unknowns.

Compared to the crisis of this spring, school systems have a bit more time to prepare plans for the fall. But with that time, how do educators make the mindset shift from seeing school closures as a threat to seeing them as an opportunity? It starts by looking for the potential upsides of the current reality.

For example, the necessity of remote or blended learning can be an opportunity to improve the communication channels between schools and families, figure out mastery-based progression so that learning is the constant and not seat time, and discover new ways to incorporate high-quality online learning tools into instruction.

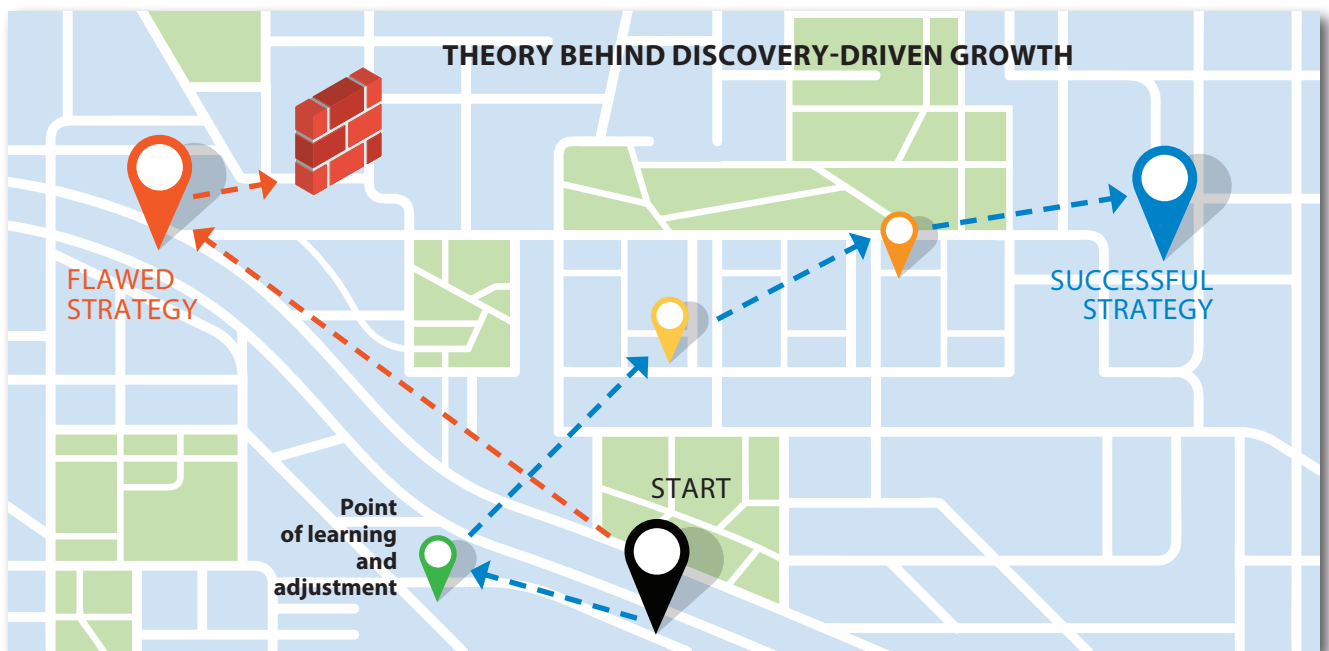
### 2. ORGANIZE YOUR TEAMS TO MAXIMIZE SUCCESS.

During normal times, organizations often structure themselves according to well-defined functions — such as human resources, business

services, information technology, and curriculum and instruction departments. When day-to-day work follows consistent patterns, dividing up that work across functional teams is highly efficient. Common norms and procedures minimize the need for coordination.

But when teams face circumstances that their roles, norms, and procedures were not designed to handle, the functional approach breaks down. Developing coronavirus-contingent learning plans requires a higher degree of creativity and collaboration among educators, staff, and families, which in turn necessitates a different type of team structure. When organizations need to develop completely different processes and approaches for tackling a new challenge or opportunity, they need to organize what we call **heavyweight teams**.

For example, when Toyota developed its Prius hybrid car, it couldn’t use functional teams because the hybrid necessitated a completely



different product architecture. The company needed to develop new components — such as large batteries and electric motors — that needed to interface with other components in novel ways. The internal combustion engine needed to coordinate propulsion responsibility with an electric motor. Braking couldn't just slow the car; it needed to generate electricity. This in turn completely altered the role the battery would play.

To solve this problem, Toyota pulled key people from each department and put them together in a completely new unit to serve as a heavyweight team. They brought their functional expertise — such as engineering, product design, safety, and marketing — to the team, but their role was not to represent the interests or needs of their respective departments. Instead, they needed to engage in intensive collaboration to come up with a new architecture for a new type of car.

A heavyweight team enables its members to transcend the boundaries of their functional departments and interact in different ways. To be effective, members of heavyweight teams often must step away from their prior responsibilities, and a manager with significant clout must lead the team.

Members bring their functional expertise with them as they join the heavyweight team, but their mindset must never be to represent the interests of their departments during the team's deliberations. Rather, they think of themselves as having collective responsibility to figure out a better way to knit things together to meet the overall project's goals.

Just as Toyota couldn't invent the Prius by merely upgrading the components of a gas-powered vehicle, good coronavirus-contingent learning plans are not just a matter of putting conventional instruction online. As such, districts need to organize heavyweight teams if they hope to develop successful learning experiences amidst the constraints imposed by COVID-19.

Who should be involved in a district's heavyweight team to figure out new approaches to instruction?

- District or outside experts on online learning;
- Conventional classroom teachers who will be leading virtual instruction for their students;
- IT staff members; and
- District communications leaders.

Lastly, but most importantly, districts need to include parents with various work arrangements — e.g. stay-at-home parents, work-from-home parents, and full-time working parents — who will need to support at-home learning.

When students learn at home, their home circumstances dramatically affect their educational success. Given that families' circumstances are different, one-size-fits-all solutions aren't going to work for all families. To account for these varied home circumstances, districts need to ensure that families are part of their heavyweight teams.

### 3. DISCOVER YOUR WAY TO SUCCESS.

As schools develop coronavirus-contingent learning plans for the fall, one of the major traps they can fall into is defaulting to conventional approaches to planning. Conventional planning operates on the premise that it's possible to extrapolate future results from a well-understood and predictable platform of past experience. In this scenario, deviations from the plan are a bad thing because they risk leading away from circumstances that leaders understand well.

Our school systems are accustomed to conventional planning: Teachers often confirm a curriculum scope and sequence for the entire semester or year, and many schools submit annual accountability plans to the district or county.

But in unknown, uncertain, and evolving circumstances, conventional approaches to planning just won't

work because knowledge is scarce and uncertainty is high. Instead, educators must make do with assumptions about the possible futures on which their current decisions are based.

Fortunately, that doesn't have to mean defaulting to the Wild West. A different approach to planning, called discovery-driven planning, is in wide use by start-ups and new ventures as a way to be systematic about planning when little is known and much is assumed. The approach imposes disciplines different from, but no less precise than, the disciplines used in conventional planning.

Here's how heavyweight teams can use discovery-driven planning as they develop coronavirus-contingent learning plans:

#### **Align on a SMART goal.**

Faced with sudden closures, any educator's gut reaction is likely to be: "Figure out how to keep kids learning." But to iterate on plans that optimize for a North Star, it's important for the goal to be SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, results-based, and time-bound.

In normal circumstances, a SMART goal should target an outcome like achievement or student engagement. During this unprecedented time, a teacher's goal might be: "Measure an average of 4 out of 5 stars on weekly family satisfaction surveys." A district might set out to "ensure 100% of our students are able to participate in coronavirus-contingent learning."

As educators consider possible SMART goals, an opportunity framing (as noted in strategy 1 above) can be key to helping heavyweight teams think outside the box. Rather than setting goals just to address the threat of possible closure, consider how goals and plans can also help advance educational opportunities during normal times.

For example, a district might set a goal to create an online learning department that can serve an important purpose even after the pandemic, such as to serve medically homebound

students, homeschool students, or students who want to take elective courses that are hard to offer at brick-and-mortar campuses.

Alternatively, consider goals for building teachers' confidence with basic blended-learning practices — perhaps using the online professional development resources from the Modern Classroom Project ([learn.modernclassrooms.org](http://learn.modernclassrooms.org)), the iLearn Collaborative ([www.ilearncollaborative.org/pd-catalog](http://www.ilearncollaborative.org/pd-catalog)), or the Relay Graduate School of Education ([www.canvas.net/browse/relay](http://www.canvas.net/browse/relay)) — all of which will also give teachers a huge leg up if and when they need to take their classes fully virtual.

**Make an exhaustive list of the assumptions that must prove true for the goal to be realized.**

At their outset, coronavirus-contingent learning programs can carry many assumptions, some of which may not prove viable. Assumptions may be “students have access to devices and the internet,” “parents will be on board,” “teachers know how to facilitate online instruction,” and so forth. The heavyweight planning team should brainstorm an exhaustive list of all the assumptions behind its initial plan. Many discovery-driven planning teams document as many as 100 assumptions to start.

**Rank each assumption in terms of both risk and confidence.**

When all the conceivable assumptions are identified, rate each assumption according to its risk level and its certainty, then average the scores for each assumption. Next, sort the assumptions according to their average scores, with the riskiest and least certain assumptions at the top of the list. An example could look like this: See table above.

**Develop plans to test the highest-priority assumptions first.**

Assumptions with scores closest to 1 should be tested first, and immediately.

RANKING ASSUMPTIONS IN TERMS OF RISK AND CONFIDENCE			
Assumption	Risk	Confidence	Average score
Teachers and students can attend online classes synchronously as scheduled.	1	1	1
Parents will be on board.	1	2	1.5
Neighborhood Wi-Fi hot spots will remain operational.	2	3	2.5
Risk: 1 = Being wrong will be catastrophic to the project. 2 = Being wrong would be a medium-sized problem. 3 = It's not a big deal if we're wrong.	Confidence: 1 = No confidence that the assumption is correct. 2 = Medium level of confidence. 3 = High level of confidence.		

Tests initially should be simple and cheap, such as running a quick poll or calling a colleague at a virtual school who has experience with the issue to see if his or her experience supports your assumption. As time goes on, tests should increasingly be run in the field by monitoring the results of actual implementation. For example, a district might pilot an online learning summer STEAM camp as a way to test online learning options.

**Determine if the assumptions are holding true at predetermined checkpoints, and adjust if they don't.**

If assumptions hold true, keep moving forward with that aspect of the plan. If they don't, make changes or reimagine your approach. As you make adjustments and iterate, you may find that your methods for achieving your SMART goal look very different from what you originally imagined — which is evidence of converting assumptions into knowledge.

As plans change, remember that you can introduce new assumptions, so don't be afraid to add to or adjust your assumptions list. As opposed to a static plan that can be filed away once it's approved, a discovery-driven plan is a living document. See diagram on p. 39.

As the year continues to shape up under evolving circumstances, the thought of trying to ensure quality education under the constraints

imposed by COVID-19 can be overwhelming. In circumstances like these, instead of worrying about plans being imperfect and things not working out, define success as getting from assumptions to knowledge as quickly as possible. And to avoid the gridlock of endless debate over the hypothetical benefits of different approaches, prioritize the fastest and cheapest ways to convert ideas to real evidence.

With opportunity framing, heavyweight teams, and a discovery-driven approach to planning, education leaders can greatly improve their odds of success when responding to possible school closures. At times like these, when conventional practices fall short and known solutions are scarce, the best answers will emerge from those who leverage sound strategies to guide their work.

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BY JODY GUARINO, ROSSELLA SANTAGATA, JIWON LEE, DUANE COX, AND JOHN DRAKE

**L**ike many others around the world, we have moved our busy lives and our research-practice partnership to the planet of distal learning and remote working. While the news about the spreading of the pandemic and the dire economic consequences entered our homes, we did not want to lose what had brought us together in partnership this year: a focus on collaborative and responsive teaching and learning.

In August 2019, our group of researchers and local school district educators joined a collaboration between the University of California,

Irvine and the Orange County Education Advancement Initiative. Our problem of practice was how to create a vision for student-centered instruction.

Working primarily at Rea Elementary School in the Newport-Mesa Unified School District, we centered our partnership on schoolwide improvements in mathematics. In this effort, we agreed to collaborate to transform what often is the *individual journey* of a teacher trying to improve his or her teaching into the efforts of a *community of learners*.

As we unexpectedly moved into distance learning in March, a new problem of practice emerged: How

could we maintain our focus on responsive math teaching and learning, while also adapting to teaching in ways that none of us had ever experienced? How would we continue to be a community of learners in settings unfamiliar to many of us?

In a short time, we have learned a lot about how to maintain our collaborative work through distance learning. We tell our story of transition to distance learning here not to share best practices, but to narrate our learning together and offer an opportunity for others to reflect on their own journeys during these challenging times.

## **MAINTAINING COMMUNITY AND FAMILIAR ROUTINES**

Because our effort to improve instruction relies on working together as a community of learners, we knew that maintaining our connections would be essential. We re-created the collaboration routines we had used in our in-person meetings during the year: working in small groups, generating ideas, and sharing out to learn together. The only difference was that we weren't physically together.

Before the move to distance learning, Wednesday afternoons were sacred staff time. The staff met weekly for one hour, with one of these hourly sessions per month focusing on mathematics teaching. We decided to keep this structure in place during distance learning. We planned our first session around the importance of *connecting* with one another and re-creating our collaborative learning community online.

Our first synchronous online learning experience began with team members viewing a slide with several images expressing various emotions and, in small breakout groups, sharing which image(s) they identified with and why. This offered an opportunity to reconnect on a personal level and think about the importance of connecting, not only with each other but also with students and students connecting with each other.

Next, we continued our tradition of doing math together, which we believe

is an important way of experiencing our instruction from the perspective of our students. We engaged in the activity that had launched our work back in August: counting collections. In small breakout groups of five to six people, we asked everyone to take a picture of something in their homes that they could count and upload the image into a slide deck.

We thought doing this activity was important to re-create a sense of familiarity for students and families. Children had engaged in counting collections several times at school, and families had become familiar with the activity at a family math night at the school site. Counting collections also allowed children to share images of things in their homes that were important to them, which could provide reassurance during this stressful time.

Working together, we found a way to communicate to students and families that counting can happen anywhere and homes can be transformed into classrooms. Each week, we collaborate on other strategies, growing our repertoire. As Leina Dingle, a 2nd-grade teacher at Rea, said, “[The weekly sessions] give me more ideas on how to connect to my students and have students show their work.”

## **ESTABLISHING A SHARED INSTRUCTIONAL VISION**

Early in our work together, we had realized the importance of creating a professional vision for student learning.

Now we recognized the need to develop a shared idea of what distance learning experiences could look like and sound like to continue communicating our vision of high-quality math instruction.

We realized that distance learning could happen in three ways (depending on access to technology and connectivity). Student learning at home can be synchronous, asynchronous, or independent with limited or no technology. We needed to be ready to offer inclusive experiences tailored to the affordances and challenges of each.

This led to collective problem-solving around each format (see tables on pp. 44 and 45). We brainstormed what teaching and learning could look like in each approach, allowing space for unanswered questions and evolving thoughts. Then we brainstormed how to maintain the principles of responsive teaching that we've been developing all year in each type of learning. We shared ideas about specific technology platforms that could be helpful for each.

In these conversations, teacher voice and agency have been important, just as student voice and agency are important in teachers' work. During our weekly staff meetings, teachers share artifacts of their work (e.g. pictures, images, student responses) through slides and screenshares. As Myuriel Von Aspen, who supports Rea and other schools in her role as teacher on special assignment in Newport-Mesa Unified School District, put it, “I think

**GROUP BRAINSTORM: DEVELOPING A VISION FOR LEARNING ACROSS PLATFORMS**

MIXED GRADE-LEVEL TEAM

**What does an ideal synchronous experience look like for a child?**

- Students able to interact back and forth with us.
- Students being able to interact with each other.
- They are able to see their work during the session.
- 1:1 Zoom meetings with kids supporting their technology use.

**What do we need to learn more about to achieve this vision?**

- How to support kids to interact and deal with connections challenges.
- How to do foundational reading in this setting.
- How to support students to participate.

**What does an ideal asynchronous experience look like for a child?**

- Students turning in work on Flipgrid.
- Solving problems on Seesaw, students can talk, hear their voice.
- Students analyze each other's thinking, they reply to each other. Part of assignment can be solve and share with two others (Flipgrid).
- Answering and engaging in reading questions/discussion.

**What do we need to learn more about to achieve this vision?**

- How to support students to respond to each other.

**What does ideal independent work look like for a child?**

*(Group ran out of time before answering this question.)*

**What do we need to learn more about to achieve this vision?**

- How to support students who don't have help at home.  
Idea: Create office hours.

the more we learn together, we can be more responsive to students. As we learn together, we can support each other. We can have the same language and goals. And all this helps us to be more supportive and responsive to our students.”

During each staff meeting, we highlight and celebrate the work being done and create a space to learn with and from each other. We also include teacher input and exit surveys in every session. The feedback is shared with everyone. This allows us to make visible to teachers the process of planning we engage in, modeling for them responsive instruction. It is designed to encourage teachers to make feedback, input, and voice a central part of their work with students.

**LEARNING FROM A STUDENT PERSPECTIVE**

We can't teach effectively with a tool unless we have learned with it ourselves first. This is especially important as we implement new technology.

In a recent experience, Rick Costello, a 5th-grade teacher at Rea,

created a math story problem for us to solve and explain in short videos using Flipgrid. We then watched each other's videos and commented. We experienced the role of students learning to use Flipgrid.

Next, we worked in teams to consider the affordances and limitations of online platforms with student learning and thinking as a priority. Two core practices of responsive teaching guided our final discussion: eliciting and responding to student thinking and engaging students in each other's thinking (see table on p. 45).

Each week, new ideas, wonderings, and lessons emerge. For example, a few hours after this meeting, we all received an email from another teacher with a screencast of how to do even more with Flipgrid, building on what we had done together. The sense of urgency to respond to the emergency has amplified collaborative efforts. Teachers have taken even more active roles, sharing their efforts and leading meetings.

Working with the technology ourselves before using it with students also allows us to anticipate challenges and be prepared with strategies for

solving them. We can empathize with students and families who were learning to navigate new spaces and try new things, and we can identify challenges before they occur with students.

For example, the counting collections experience revealed some of the challenges that likely lay ahead of us with students. When we launched the task, group members immediately had many questions about how to upload a picture to an online slide deck, something we did not anticipate.

Some members tried to help by saying, “Here's my phone number. Text me the image, and I'll upload it for you.” But when they received messages with images, they were from unfamiliar numbers, and there was confusion about whose picture was whose. In less than a minute, we saw the importance of engaging in the work ourselves before asking teachers to do it with students.

We reflected on what kinds of things we would need to consider in asking elementary school children to complete similar tasks. As Nancy Vera, a 1st-grade teacher at Rea, explained, “These sessions have ... allowed me

**GROUP BRAINSTORM: ATTENDING TO CORE PRACTICES OF RESPONSIVE TEACHING IN SYNCHRONOUS, ASYNCHRONOUS, AND INDEPENDENT LEARNING**

**HOW MIGHT WE:**

**Elicit and respond to student thinking** through Seesaw or Flipgrid?

- Lower grades use Seesaw.
- Upper grades use Flipgrid.
- On Flipgrid, students and teachers can respond to others' thinking.
- On Seesaw, teachers can respond to students' work and change the settings so students can respond to each other.

**Orient/engage students in each other's thinking** through Seesaw or Flipgrid?

- Flipgrid lets students respond to each other.
- In Zoom breakout rooms, they can interact with a small group and show their work.
- Sharing student work in Zoom.

One size doesn't fit all. What are pedagogical considerations for choosing a particular platform to support responsive teaching? What can students access? Read or hear? Seesaw is better for primary.

to put myself in my students' shoes to understand what they are experiencing with distance learning."

**LEADING FOR LEARNING**

Through this year's work on responsive teaching in mathematics, the role of school and district leaders has been crucial. From the outset, leaders eschewed the kind of top-down direction, evaluative feedback, and directive communication that is often typical in school settings. Instead, they joined the teachers and students as learners. At Rea Elementary, it's not unusual to see a lesson co-taught by a classroom teacher, assistant superintendent, and math coordinator, or to observe students solving problems and sharing their thinking with not only their own classroom teacher, but also teachers from other classrooms, a university researcher, or the principal.

During distance learning, leaders at Rea have asked: How do we continue this focus on collaborative teaching and learning? Principal Duane Cox, whose active participation in all learning spaces has shaped the culture of learning at Rea Elementary, continues to share his infectious enthusiasm for learning and attention to individual students' learning.

Cox maintains the school's long-term goals and vision while making sure that logistics are taken care of to free up time for teachers to focus on

learning. In times of crisis, leadership can unfortunately default to directing and controlling, but Cox continues to work as facilitator of the community of learners.

He begins every staff session as he has since the beginning of the school year, with words of encouragement and support. He reminds his teachers about the importance of continuing to look at, talk about, and learn from student work.

Recently, the 1st-grade team met on Zoom. Based on student work they had collected the day before, the teachers discussed their students' mathematical thinking, knowledge, and abilities associated with two-digit addition and agreed the students are ready to focus on subtraction.

They developed a story problem for all 1st-graders to engage in the coming week. The principal and the math coordinator will participate in synchronous online learning experiences alongside 1st-grade teachers and students. At its next meeting, the group will share and discuss what they learned from student work.

**A COMMUNITY PATH**

Through all of our work, we strive to continue our focus on equity and improve how we connect with children and their families during these extremely challenging times. Our focus remains on student learning. Cristina

Kuehn, 2nd-grade teacher at Rea, sums it up by saying, "It's really cool to see that we were able to still do CGI [cognitively guided instruction] even though it's distance learning. It's been really fun to see the kids still thriving and still totally understanding ... in this kind of situation."

We aspire to extend this work to other schools in the district by engaging school principals and district directors to join our community of learners. We are just at the beginning of our path for successful distance learning, and we have many unanswered questions ahead of us. For educators, as for students, questions are a vital part of growth, and there's no better way to tackle them than in a community of learners.

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# MENTOR TEACHER ACADEMY



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We focus on four core areas of effective mentoring:



Diagnosing teacher instructional strengths and areas for growth



Developing coaching skills to meet those needs



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We want to help you support your new and beginning teachers and provide leadership opportunities in your schools.



# WE WILL BE DIFFERENT

LET'S START NOW TO BUILD TEACHERS' RESILIENCE TO BOUNCE BACK AFTER CRISIS

BY SHARRON HELMKE

**W**hen we found schools closed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of us wondered, “When are we getting back to normal?” A few weeks later, the question changed to, “*Will* we get back to normal?” And now, we’re realizing the old normal won’t be back, at least not anytime soon.

Still, we will eventually return to our campuses, students will once again walk through our doors, and in-person schooling will resume. But that doesn’t mean we can pick up where we left off. Things will be different, and it won’t just be because we might be wearing face masks. *We* will be different.

There are steps we need to take,

starting now, to ensure that our staff members have the emotional resources necessary to bounce back, adapt, and thrive in a new environment that has yet to take shape. By focusing on building resiliency now, educators can not only be prepared to navigate a major transition but also to emerge with stronger professional identities and a more connected, committed campus culture.

## **ACKNOWLEDGE TRAUMA**


The COVID-19 epidemic is happening to all of us, even those of us who aren’t directly impacted by the virus. We are all impacted by the quarantine and the lifestyle changes that it has brought about. Educators are on the front lines of one of those major

changes — suddenly taking education online.

We are remote from our students, but also remote from our colleagues, our support staff, and our guiding voices, lacking the frequent face-to-face collaboration that many of us have come to rely on.

We and our staffs have suffered a trauma, and trauma leaves lasting scars that can manifest in surprising ways, even to people you might consider your most reliable, steady, and dedicated professionals.

Research has shown that the stress of trauma isn’t processed through the rational mind, but rather that it triggers more primitive parts of the brain and can create the familiar responses of fight, flight, or freeze — responses



**Researchers have learned that resilience isn't an inherent character quality that individuals either have or lack. It's fostered by environmental conditions that help individuals develop internal resources to draw on in times of stress.**

we've all seen from overtaxed faculty members, even before the latest stressor (Graham, 2013).

Definitions of trauma vary, but one emerging definition stresses that a traumatic event does not have to threaten life, or even health, but rather that it “challenges a person’s ‘assumptive world’: her belief in how people behave, how the world works, and how her life will unfold” (Begley, 2019).

Certainly our assumptions about how school works have been challenged, but for some of us, even more fundamental beliefs may have been challenged: the fundamental nature of what our work is and how (and where) we do it; the personal role that we play in making a difference for students; our relationships to content, educational standards, and pedagogy; and perhaps even to our professional identities as “good” or “successful” teachers.

## **BUILD RESILIENCE**

Fortunately, researchers have shown that it's possible to foster resilience after trauma — if the environment provides enough support (American Psychological Association, 2020). Resilience is the ability to bounce back from setbacks, including the ability of people to “find a way to change course, emotionally heal, and continue moving toward their goals” in the face of adversity and struggle (Psychology Today, n.d.). Given the challenges and stresses of our jobs as educators, resilience can benefit all of us long after the pandemic has ended.

Researchers have learned that resilience isn't an inherent character quality that individuals either have or lack. It's fostered by environmental conditions that help individuals develop internal resources to draw on in times of stress. Hanson and Hanson (2018) group the necessary environmental conditions for developing resilience into three broad categories: safety, satisfaction, and connection.

In the time remaining before we welcome back faculty and students,

**It will also be more important than ever to help individuals feel comfortable to take risks and to be gracious about mistakes that could cause embarrassment to linger.**

and in those early months following our return, we can focus attention on ensuring those resources are readily available. In doing so, we increase the likelihood that people will not only bounce back from the disruptions of stay-at-home orders, but also that we're building resilience against future stress, like the everyday pressures of successfully educating hundreds of students amid ever-increasing demands.

## **SAFETY**

Obviously, physical safety is important, and it would be wise for districts and administrators to be transparent and direct about health precautions that lower everyone's risk of catching any illnesses, including the germs that normally circulate through our buildings.

Beyond that, emotional safety depends on a sense of calm despite uncertainty, clarity about what's going on and what's expected, and feeling settled. These might sound like simple steps, but in the haste to complete our enormous to-do lists, we can sometimes make choices that inadvertently undermine emotional safety.

Be intentional about maintaining stability. Take care to avoid making changes in the ordinary bell schedule, scheduling unexpected meetings, or requiring sudden changes in procedures or assigned duties unless necessary. Such changes could exacerbate ongoing feelings of stress over uncertainty. In contrast, predictability contributes to feelings of calm and clarity and allows us to reserve our internal resources to meet occasional unexpected challenges as they arise.

As leaders, we would also do well to allow teachers' choice whenever

possible. While this is always a best practice with adult learners, it's critically important when people feel like much is out of their control. Loss of one's sense of agency can result in a feeling of helplessness, potentially followed by disengagement and isolation, and possibly even depression or explosions of anger (Hanson & Hanson, 2018). Offering choice (with support) can counteract that loss of agency.

It will also be more important than ever to help individuals feel comfortable to take risks and to be gracious about mistakes that could cause embarrassment to linger. Helping people move past these difficult moments is critical because neurological research has proven that humans have a “negativity bias,” an evolutionary bias for remembering the negative while quickly forgetting the positive (Graham, 2013).

As leaders, we can counter this by paying attention to the positive. Take opportunities to call your staff's attention to what went well and spend even a bit longer talking about it than you might otherwise, since it takes longer for positive memories to imprint.

Encourage teachers to tell each other about their positive experiences and let the energy from those successes fill the room and be intentional about pointing it out.

In doing so, we aren't just helping people feel better momentarily. We're helping to form new connections within their minds — associating challenge with opportunity (Hanson & Hanson, 2018).

## **SATISFACTION**

Satisfaction leads to contentment as well as feelings of motivation to keep moving forward. Conversely, a lack of satisfaction can create feelings of frustration, boredom, and disappointment (Hanson & Hanson, 2018). Contrary to the way we usually think about satisfaction, research shows these feelings come not from achieving goals, but from working toward them.

Satisfaction can be enhanced by promoting gratitude, which allows us to step outside of our experience and appreciate our role in something larger than our own challenges (Hanson & Hanson, 2018). Genuine gratitude contributes to a sense of connection and belonging and contributes to feelings of meaning and purpose. It also fosters a sense of feeling good *now*, rather than waiting for a distant or elusive condition (like returning to “normal”), which can lead to depression, burnout, and a loss of agency.

You can foster gratitude by encouraging teachers to leave words of appreciation on a community gratitude board (either physical or digital) or bringing a stack of thank-you cards to a meeting and giving teachers time to take one and write a message inside.

Another way to encourage feelings of satisfaction is to focus attention on progress rather than outcomes. When we celebrate progress, no matter how small the step, we are encouraging the noticing of positives experiences to offset the brain’s natural tendency to focus on the negative, and we are fostering an increased sense of agency by focusing on short-term goals.

Be sure to set and frequently discuss process goals that address how people wish to conduct themselves in pursuit of the outcome goals. “*Whom do we want to be as we stretch for this outcome goal?*” is a motivational question that addresses purpose, meaning, and personal fulfillment.

## CONNECTION

Schools are communities, and true community is based on a shared set of beliefs rather than a physical location. Those beliefs hold school communities together whether they are scattered throughout a large area or they come together every Monday through Friday in a house of learning.

Now is the time to remind everyone that your staff, faculty, and students will always be a community, no matter what the future holds. Do this by putting the campus or district’s mission

**You can foster gratitude by encouraging teachers to leave words of appreciation on a community gratitude board (either physical or digital) or bringing a stack of thank-you cards to a meeting and giving teachers time to take one and write a message inside.**

statement and beliefs front and center and celebrating them as the foundation of your shared purpose and your guide for daily interactions.

When you return to campus, consider an activity during which teachers are invited to choose one of those shared core values and write a brief account of how he or she enacted or manifested it during the period of remote learning. Consider encouraging students, and even parents, to do the same. Share the stories and ask educators to reflect on all the ways the values were maintained.

Then gather the stories and spend time turning them into one collected story of the campus community’s response to the stay-at-home crisis — a story that says, “This is who we are; this is why it’s important; and this is what it meant for us.” Circulate it to celebrate a shared version of the community’s story and reframe a narrative of crisis, challenge, struggle, and perhaps even loss into a story of resilience, connection, and gratitude for all the ways the community rose to the challenge and displayed their best selves.

A story like this helps the community see the bigger picture, and it instills a sense of order and meaning to replace feelings of chaos and unanswered questions (Barr, 2018; Newman, 2016).

## RESILIENCE FOSTERS RESILIENCE

These steps are time-consuming but worthwhile, even when so much work

needs to be done to make plans for recouping lost instructional ground. If you don’t attend to the emotional well-being of your most valuable resource — your teaching staff — you could end up spending far more time dealing with burnout and staff attrition.

As Hanson and Hanson (2018) note, resilience built now creates future resilience to draw on when needed. These powerful practices will not only speed recovery from the trauma of recent months, they have the potential to make your faculty even more capable of handling the struggles that lie ahead.

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- 
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DISCUSS. COLLABORATE. FACILITATE.

# TOOLS



## CONNECTIONS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

**"A**s educators, the most important thing we can do for students during this stressful time is maintain emotional closeness despite physical distance. Similarly, an essential role of education leaders right now is to maintain connection with teachers, support staff, and other colleagues."

— "Stay connected during crisis," p. **59**



## TEACHER AS NOTICER

### UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO STUDENT CUES

BY YVONNE GODBER

Improving educators' abilities to recognize and respond to signals that indicate students are upset, confused, or disengaged is a powerful but often underused strategy for ensuring that all students are accessing rigorous learning. Research has shown that when adults respond to students' social and behavioral cues for help in a timely, proactive, and sensitive manner, students are more able to get back on track with important learning tasks at hand. Such supportive responses have been linked to increases in student achievement, peer relationships, and engagement, and decreases in exclusionary disciplinary practices (Gregory et al., 2016), all of which can help schools achieve important equity goals.

Are you and your colleagues prepared to recognize and meet all

students' needs?

Teachstone, a company using education technology to improve the ways teachers interact with students, has developed practical tools that can help teachers notice and respond more quickly and effectively to student academic and social-emotional cues. The tools are grounded in the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), a framework underlying teacher professional learning models that grew out of research conducted at the University of Virginia. CLASS is an evidence-based method for measuring, evaluating, and improving teacher-student interactions that helps teachers cultivate supportive, structured, and engaging experiences for children and adolescents from birth through high school.

CLASS pulls out and measures complex **classroom interactions** as the key determiner of students' social,

emotional, and academic outcomes. The framework describes how students benefit when they:

- Feel emotionally connected to adults and peers (**connection**);
- Understand the organization and routines of their environment (**organization**); and
- Are appropriately challenged, engaged, and curious (**challenge**).

One aspect of the CLASS framework identifies specifically how adults and peers cultivate warm and supportive relationships with one another. The ways adults and peers respond to a student who struggles in some way (academically, socially, developmentally, behaviorally, emotionally) influence whether that student is able to get back on track to the task of learning or, instead, his or her issue escalates and interferes with

his or her ability to grow and learn socially or academically. In other words, responsiveness matters.

## WHY DO WE NEED TO ASSESS INTERACTIONS?

Classrooms are busy places. Planning and implementing thoughtful learning experiences is challenging, even without simultaneously watching student responses and cues to make sure students are really benefiting from the intended strategy. Yet those responses are essential for the carefully planned lesson to succeed as planned. Even though a pilot sets a flight plan before taking off, adjustments occur in flight, based on weather, traffic, plane functioning, or passenger needs. Similarly, even the best planned lesson can get off course if adults are not aware of and responding to the many diverse needs students bring with them each day.

At times, students manage to get the help they need on their own by using their own skills, peers, and developmental resources. At other times, though, they rely on adults to notice and attend to their needs to get back to the task of learning and the instructional activities planned for them.

Without a doubt, observant and supportive teacher practices are requisite for students' engagement and ability to learn, benefit from, and contribute to instructional content. Luckily — with support, feedback, and practice — these are skills that teachers can learn to refine while enhancing responses to better match student emotional needs and get students back to the important learning goals at hand.

## ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

Teachstone created the following professional learning activity (pp. 54–58) to encourage teacher reflection and support adult awareness of and responsiveness to students' needs and cues.

This resource is designed to be used

## COACHING PROJECT FOR MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS

Learning Forward, Teachstone, and American Institutes for Research are collaborating on a federally funded Education Innovation Research grant to refine and scale a validated, strength-based supplemental coaching program for middle and high school teachers based on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). For further information visit [www.secondarycoaching.org](http://www.secondarycoaching.org).

Early validation research on this program, the MyTeachingPartner (MTP) 1:1 Video Coaching Model for teachers, showed a nine-point achievement gain for secondary students (50th to 59th percentile), and the model has been recognized in the What Works Clearinghouse (Allen et al., 2011).

independently or in conjunction with other social and emotional learning (SEL) professional learning strategies that address SEL and teacher-student relationships. It can be used in many different ways, depending on the teacher and contextual needs. For instance:

- Individual reflection and planning;
- Promoting a coaching conversation;
- A guide for professional learning community discussions; and
- Larger staff meetings.

The objectives of this activity are to help teachers:

- Reflect on how students let those around them know that they require additional support to meet their academic, behavioral, developmental, or social-emotional needs;
- Practice identifying both student cues and teacher responses; and

- Plan for more effective, sensitive, and timely responses to student cues.

The activity includes two sections:

**PART 1:** Part 1 asks teachers

to reflect on how their students demonstrate various academic or social-emotional needs and recollect specific scenarios in their classrooms to describe how they responded to these needs at the time.

If used in conjunction with one-on-one coaching, a PLC, or a staff meeting, Part 1 can be completed ahead of time in preparation for a shared conversation.

**PART 2:** Part 2 includes several brief online video clips of real classroom footage at different age levels. Teachers follow a link to a web page to view a clip of their choice where they identify student cues that they need some type of help or support and the degree to which the teacher responded in a way that supported students' academic, behavioral, or social-emotional growth.

Part 2 can also be completed individually or as part of a group learning experience.

The activity ends with a reflection on why sensitive and timely responses are important to student development, along with goal planning to increase the quality of timely and sensitive responses.

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# INTERACTIONS MATTER: IDENTIFYING AND RESPONDING TO STUDENT NEEDS

**Purpose:** Practice noticing and responding to student cues for support.

**Uses:** Individual reflection, coaching conversations, PLC, staff meeting.

**Grade levels:** K-12

This activity guides you to reflect on your students’ needs and think about how you respond to their cues in the moment. The goal is to help you identify student needs and strengthen the quality of interactions by adjusting your response to better match their cues. When our responses reflect students’ emotional needs, their academic engagement increases and they learn more.

## PART 1

**Directions:** Use the space in the chart below to write your reflections to the following prompts.

ABOUT YOU		ABOUT YOUR STUDENTS
In moments when you as an adult feel insecure, bored, or disconnected, how do you let others know that you need additional support? How do you let them know verbally and nonverbally?	What do others do that helps you feel better and get back on track?	Brainstorm: What do students in your class need from their classroom environment to learn and grow socially and academically?

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## INTERACTIONS MATTER: IDENTIFYING AND RESPONDING TO STUDENT NEEDS, continued

Whether adults, children, or adolescents, individuals communicate their needs in different ways. Take a moment to think of two students who show their stress or needs in very different ways from each other.

Write their names at the top of the chart below in the columns for Student 1 and Student 2. Next, think about something they recently said or did (consider both verbal and nonverbal cues) and how you responded in that moment. Write your reflections in the space provided for each student.

Reflection prompts	Student 1	Student 2
Describe one of the ways each student lets you know that he or she needs something from you, peers, or the classroom environment. <i>Example: She puts her head on her desk when she is frustrated.</i>		
When you notice this need, how do you tend to respond?		
Which of these students do you find it easier to respond to in a sensitive or effective manner? Mark your response with a check mark (✓).		
Which of your own beliefs, experiences, and skills makes it easier for you to respond to the student you marked with the check above?		
Now, consider the other student whom you did NOT mark with the check above. Which of your own beliefs, experiences, and skills makes it <i>harder</i> for you to meet these types of student needs?		
Continue to Part 2. Return to answer the next reflection questions <b>after</b> completing Part 2.		
Brainstorm ideas on how to respond more effectively (quickly or sensitively, for example) to each specific student need you described in row 1.		
Set a strong and feasible goal describing when you will test out your new response.		

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INTERACTIONS MATTER: IDENTIFYING AND RESPONDING TO STUDENT NEEDS, continued

PART 2

<p>The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) focuses on classroom <b>interactions</b> as a key determinant of student outcomes. Research shows how students benefit when they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feel emotionally connected to adults and peers (connection);</li> <li>• Understand the organization and routines of their environment (organization); and</li> <li>• Are appropriately challenged, engaged, and curious (challenge).</li> </ul> <p>We all find some of these needs more difficult to address than others. To take a broad view of student needs, reflect on which are easier and harder for you.</p> <p><b>Circle</b> the student need that is generally hardest for you to catch and respond to in the moment: connection, organization, or challenge.</p>	Student need	Example responses
	Connection	Cultivating warm, supportive relationships with our students.
	Organization	Organizing students' time, attention, routines, and behavior.
Challenge	Encouraging students to try new things, analyze, talk, and engage.	

As you engage in the following video activity, pay particular attention to the type of student need you identified.

VIDEO ACTIVITY

**Directions:** Visit [teachstone.com/student-cues](https://www.teachstone.com/student-cues) to watch a brief video clip of a real classroom. There are several age-level clips available. Choose the one that is closest to the ages of the students in your setting.

Watch the clip once, paying close attention to student cues that communicate the need for support. Watch for both subtle and obvious cues. These might be verbal or nonverbal, at the individual or group level, or focus on a broad range of concerns such as academic, behavioral, or social-emotional. Write your observations in the box below.

My observation notes:

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## INTERACTIONS MATTER: IDENTIFYING AND RESPONDING TO STUDENT NEEDS, continued

Now that you've recorded some observations about student needs in the classroom video, let's look at how the teacher responded to those cues for support.

1. In the first column (Student needs) in the chart below, summarize each student cue you identified in the clip. List each of the cues separately in the rows provided in the first column.
2. Rewatch the video, this time paying close attention to the teacher's actions.
  - a. In the second column, Teacher response to student(s), note how the teacher reacted to each need. What did she do to support the student(s)? Did she see the cue? Was a cue missed?
  - b. In the final column, Resolution, note if each student need was effectively addressed and how you know. For example, the student(s) could return to the learning activity because their need had been met or their problem was resolved as a result of the teacher's attention and efforts.

Student needs	Teacher response to student(s)	Resolution
<p><b>Example A:</b> A student has her head on the desk.</p> <p><b>Example B:</b> The class is asking a lot of similar questions about the assignment; students seem confused.</p>	<p><b>Example A:</b> The teacher notices and then walks over to ask how she's doing.</p> <p><b>Example B:</b> The teacher notices and says, "Hold up everyone. Let me try to re-explain what you're supposed to do."</p>	<p><b>Example A:</b> The student sits up and gets to work.</p> <p><b>Example B:</b> Students nod and get started on the assignment.</p>
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

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INTERACTIONS MATTER: IDENTIFYING AND RESPONDING TO STUDENT NEEDS, continued

REFLECTION

Why is it important for teachers to notice and respond sensitively to students’ academic, behavioral, and social-emotional cues?

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Return to the last rows in the Reflection Prompts table from Part 1 on p. 55 to revisit the two students you described earlier and consider:

- How can you increase your awareness of the needs they present in your classroom?
  
- How might you try responding differently the next time they indicate a specific need?
  
- When will you try this response?
  
- If in a group, discuss and share your ideas.

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# Stay connected during crisis

BY AMY NICHOLSON AND KATIE BRACKENRIDGE

The novel coronavirus is disrupting the way we live, work, and experience school. To halt the spread of infection, to be *physically safe*, we must distance ourselves from many of the people in our lives. But to be *emotionally safe*, we need to maintain social connections.

As educators, the most important thing we can do for students during this stressful time is maintain emotional closeness despite physical distance. Similarly, an essential role of education leaders right now is to maintain connection with teachers, support staff, and other colleagues.

The Virtual Banking Time Tool is a strategy modified from a tool for in-person connections to help maintain relationships during school closures. It is based on a similar tool for tracking in-person connections. It was designed for scheduling and tracking check-ins with students, but it can also be used for check-ins with staff.

## WHY PRIORITIZE RELATIONSHIPS?

Neuroscience gives us a peek into why relationships are so important, particularly during this stressful time. Learning happens in the limbic system of our brain. It includes the prefrontal cortex (control center), hippocampus (learning and memory), and the amygdala (emotions and reactions). These parts are interconnected and cross-wired, which helps explain why cognitive, social, and emotional development are interdependent.

The limbic system is loaded with receptors for two types of hormones, one responding to stress and one that responds to love and trust. Under stress, high levels of the hormone



cortisol flood the limbic system and prevent the three parts from working together. The amygdala — emotional reaction center — is quick to take over, keeping the individual from planning, remembering, regulating, and learning. This reaction is particularly hard for children (and adults) who experience frequent or chronic stress.

Fortunately, the other hormone — oxytocin, which is released when people experience trust, caring, and love — counteracts the effects of cortisol. It allows the limbic system to get rebalanced so that cognitive, social, and emotional functions can be restored. Because caring relationships trigger the release of oxytocin, they are very important for buffering stress, especially now.

## WHY SCHEDULE CHECK-INS?

In the midst of a crisis, we're all juggling many responsibilities. Despite our best intentions to connect with all of the people we care for, it can be easy to lose track of those we have — and haven't — talked with and when.

The Virtual Banking Time Tool can help you organize individual, virtual check-ins to ensure consistent

and predictable time for personal connections, whether with students or staff.

Some key principles of this tool are:

- The check-ins you schedule should be short but happen on a regular schedule; the key is that they are dependable.
- The check-ins should focus on social support, not instruction or evaluation.
- These connections should be noncontingent; they should not be related to behavior or performance, and not used as rewards or punishments.
- They are intended to be youth-directed (or staff-directed if you are conducting a leader-staff check-in) as much as possible. You may need to do some prompting and offer options to start, but be sure to gradually release control.

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# VIRTUAL BANKING TIME TOOL

**DIRECTIONS**

1. Set up time to meet with individual students (or staff members) for 10 to 15 minutes, one to three times a week depending on their need. You may choose to use the calendar below to schedule these opportunities. Record the scheduled time. You can highlight meetings that didn't occur to remind yourself to check back in with the student or staff member. *Reminder: Be sure to confirm that the times you outline work for them (and their families).*
2. The point of the session is to designate a sacred time to provide informal connection and social support.
3. Follow the student's (or staff member's) lead and do not attempt to teach. Listen, narrate what the person is experiencing, and validate emotions.
4. You may choose to leverage and share other tools during these conversations to help the person establish new routines, structure his or her time, or manage emotions.

Here's how it might look for a teacher or support staff member to use the tool with students:

- Call every student every week or, if you don't have enough time, choose a few students who particularly need help. Record the name of the student and the phone number in the tool to help stay organized.
- You can start the conversation by asking questions, inviting the other person to ask you questions, playing a game, or reading a story. You can suggest these options and let the student choose.
- Some students may need additional prompting to get started. Here are some basic questions you can ask. Note that they are not about schoolwork but intended to tap into something the student is interested in.
  - o What was the favorite thing you did today?
  - o Who are you spending time with? What kinds of things are you doing?
  - o What games have you played recently?

If you are meeting with many students or many staff members, you might also want to record a few notes about the conversation. This will help refresh your memory when you talk the next week and allow you to demonstrate genuine care and engagement.

BANKING TIME SCHEDULE					
Time slots	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday

CONNECT. BELONG. SUPPORT.

# UPDATES

## WE'RE HERE FOR YOU

**C**COVID-19 impacts educators and students across the world. We know that Learning Forward members are coping with an unprecedented situation. Learning Forward is here to help with webinars, blog posts, resources, and an online community. Here's where to find the support you need:

- **WEBINARS:** Experts offer strategies and tangible ideas. [learningforward.org/webinars-2](https://learningforward.org/webinars-2)
- **BLOG:** Contributors tackle relevant topics. [learningforward.org/blog](https://learningforward.org/blog)
- **RESOURCES:** A clearinghouse for the support you need. [learningforward.org/supporting-educators-during-covid-19](https://learningforward.org/supporting-educators-during-covid-19)
- **ONLINE COMMUNITY:** Share and engage in dialogue with other practitioners. [learningforward.org/groups/covid-19-support/forum](https://learningforward.org/groups/covid-19-support/forum)



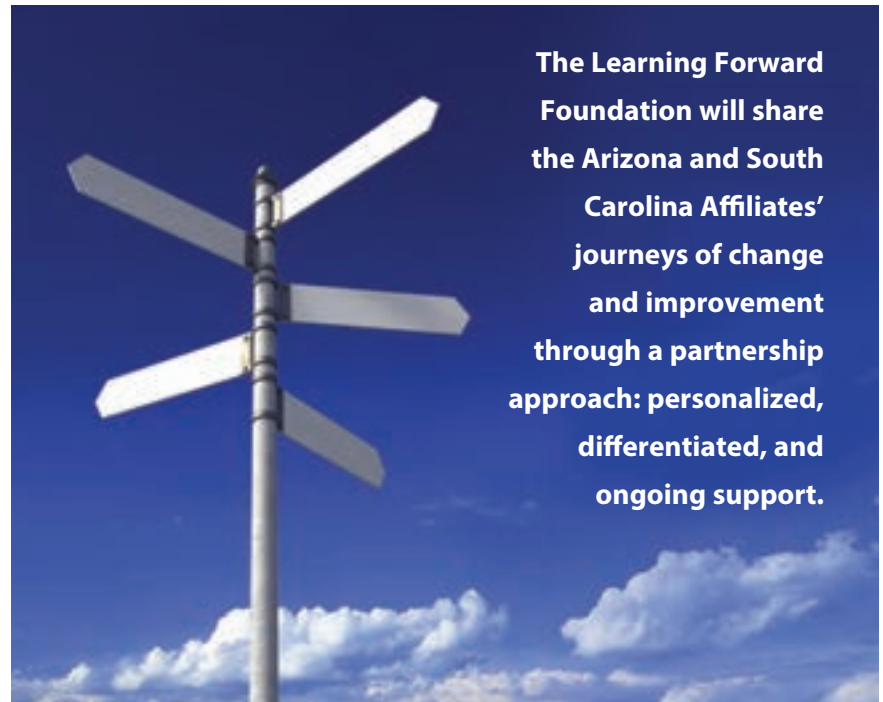
# UPDATES

## NEW LEARNING FORWARD ACADEMY CLASS ANNOUNCED

Learning Forward welcomes the Academy Class of 2022, under the coaching direction of Joe McFarland and Barbara Patterson Oden.

The Academy is Learning Forward's flagship deep learning experience. Members spend 2½ years working with expert coaches and practitioners from around the world to construct knowledge, improve practice, create better learning conditions for colleagues, and improve results for students.

Thanks to the Academy's generous sponsors, the Learning Forward Foundation, and the Learning Forward Texas Affiliate, this year's class has six scholarship recipients. Constance Easton from SD 38 Richmond in Richmond, British Columbia, Canada, and Sheri Milkowski from Burncoat Public Schools in Worcester, Massachusetts, received the Learning Forward Foundation Academy Scholarship. Noline Martin from Richardson ISD in Dallas, Texas, received the Patsy Hochman Academy Scholarship. Natasha Gray from Ardsley UFSD in Ardsley, New York, and Laura McDuffie from Houston ISD in Texas received the Stephanie Hirsh Academy Scholarship.



The Learning Forward Foundation will share the Arizona and South Carolina Affiliates' journeys of change and improvement through a partnership approach: personalized, differentiated, and ongoing support.

## DALE HAIR AFFILIATE GRANT RECIPIENTS

The Learning Forward South Carolina Affiliate and the Learning Forward Arizona Affiliate are recipients of the Learning Forward Foundation's 2020 Dale Hair Affiliate Grant. The grant supports affiliates to rebuild, reorganize, or generate a stronger organization to advance Learning Forward's mission and vision of professional learning.

Terry Pruitt, director of the South Carolina Affiliate, says the group will use the award to build strength in the recently reorganized Affiliate through its diverse board of 18 K-12 and higher education state leaders. Goals include developing its mission statement and a long-range strategic plan that will increase South Carolina educators' knowledge of Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning and promote systemic change in educational leadership.

Mary Bouley, director of the Arizona Affiliate, says the group will use the award to reactivate Learning Forward Arizona to build a statewide community of leaders dedicated to the mission and vision of Learning Forward. The group's focus is on establishing a new board, developing affiliate infrastructure and membership, and building financial stability.

The Learning Forward Foundation will share the Arizona and South Carolina Affiliates' journeys of change and improvement through a partnership approach: personalized, differentiated, and ongoing support that includes monthly check-ins, touchpoint reflective conversations, and caring presence.

The Dale Hair Affiliate Grant honors educator Dale Hair, who has had a major impact on the success of Learning Forward Affiliates. For decades, Hair has devoted her time and passion to providing personalized support for each affiliate to grow strong organizations that build capacity for thousands of educators to lead professional learning.



# Standards revision

A first step in the process to revise the Standards for Professional Learning is to review the relevant research studies that have been conducted since the standards were last released in 2011.

To that end, Learning Forward is working with the American Institutes for Research to conduct a literature review related to the current standards as well as to areas that have been identified by key stakeholders as areas of emerging interest, such as curriculum implementation. Study screening is based on rigorous design as well as findings of impact on both instruction and student outcomes.

Additional phases of research with different parameters may take place depending on findings from the first literature review and discussions with the standards research team.

The standards research team, a small, diverse group of expert researchers, will meet periodically over the next 18 months to discuss both the content and process of the research that informs the standards revision and provide input related to the implementation resources and tools.

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## RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP NOW

Like you, we know that high-quality professional learning is key for ensuring that students have equitable access to high-quality learning during these challenging times. Our support for the field over the last couple of months has included free webinars and guidance on best practices for leading remote learning during this crisis.

To continue our support for you, all educators, and students everywhere, we are asking you to reaffirm your commitment to professional learning by renewing your membership this month,

even if you are not due for renewal.

Renewing early means you are helping other educators get access to just-in-time resources to respond to COVID-19, keeps you on top of professional learning's best practices, and continues your member publications, benefits, and discounts.

Stretch this year's budget dollars even further with extended two- and three-year membership plans that will continue your access to our professional community no matter what circumstances may arise.

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## FEATURED SOCIAL MEDIA POST

Follow us on social media. Share your insights and feedback about *The Learning Professional* by using #LearnFwdTLP.

**Genèvieve Légaré**  
@ebpquebec

View Guskey's article on change: "Experience shapes teachers' attitudes and beliefs (not the other way around)." @tguskey #LearnFwdTLP learningforward.org/?p=34850 via @LearningForward

**Flip the script on change**  
Experience shapes teachers' attitudes and beliefs (not the other way around).  
learningforward.org

## LEARNING FORWARD MICHIGAN OFFERS SERIES ON MANAGING CHANGE

Learning Forward Michigan is creating a series of virtual learning opportunities for learning professionals to connect and explore key ideas and strategies for managing current and anticipated changes. The sessions are open to all, inside and outside of Michigan.

Participants are invited to share their stories, concerns, and questions, while well-known practitioners, authors, and researchers share insights from their work. Janice Bradley, Nancy Colflesh, Ann Delehant, and Frederick Brown are just a few of the educators joining in the conversations. For a list of speakers and dates, visit [learningforwardmi.com](http://learningforwardmi.com).

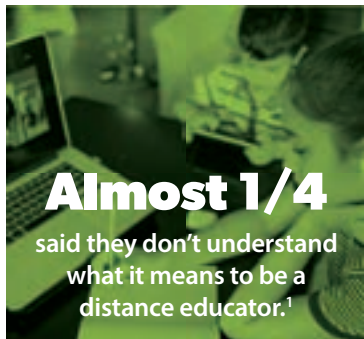
## ANNUAL CONFERENCE UPDATE



We're looking forward to coming together as a community at the 2020 Learning Forward Annual Conference Dec. 5-9 in Chicago, Illinois. This year's theme, Innovate for Impact, is especially timely. We received over 750 concurrent session proposals and accepted about 300 sessions. Keynote speakers include Dan Heath, Valerie Kinloch, Anthony Bryk, and Barbara Schneider.

Because circumstances around COVID-19 are changing rapidly, we will monitor developments in consultation with local, state, and national health officials. In the meantime, we offer risk-free registration for all attendees. Take advantage of early registration discounts now and, if necessary, you can receive a full refund for written cancellations received by Nov. 9.

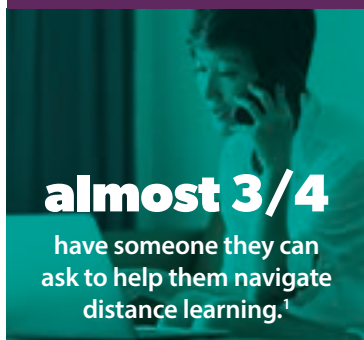
# AT A GLANCE



**Almost 1/4**

said they don't understand what it means to be a distance educator.<sup>1</sup>

*But...*



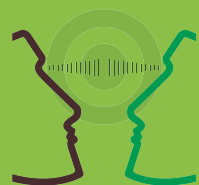
**almost 3/4**

have someone they can ask to help them navigate distance learning.<sup>1</sup>



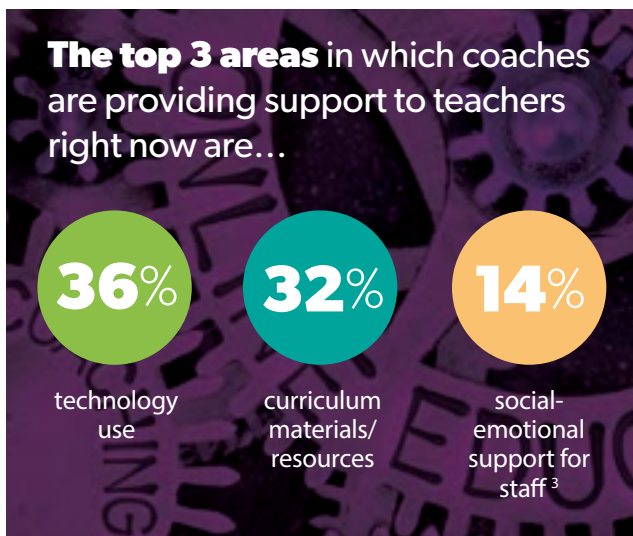
**98%**

98% said **coaching roles are different** when supporting teachers **online versus face-to-face**, with **38%** calling the roles different, and **60%** calling the roles **extremely different**.<sup>3</sup>



## PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN A PANDEMIC

Recent Learning Forward webinars have focused on helping educators navigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on teaching and learning. We posed survey questions to webinar attendees, and here's what we've learned about their professional learning needs and opportunities.



<sup>1</sup> n = 490 Data collected on April 9, 2020. | <sup>2</sup> n = 551 Data collected on March 26, 2020. <sup>3</sup> n = 526 Data collected on April 23, 2020.

**77%**

believe that professional learning is more important than ever.<sup>2</sup>



**82%**

said this crisis will change the professional learning topics they pursue in the future.<sup>2</sup>



**98%**

have learned things recently that they will continue to use after the crisis is over.<sup>2</sup>

# THROUGH THE LENS

OF LEARNING FORWARD'S STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

## LEARNING FORWARD'S STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

*Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students ...*

### Learning Communities

... occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.

### Leadership

... requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.

### Resources

... requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.

### Data

... uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.

### Learning Designs

... integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.

### Implementation

... applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change.

### Outcomes

... aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.

Many of the articles in this issue of *The Learning Professional* demonstrate Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning in action. Use this tool to deepen your understanding of the standards and strategies for implementing them.

Ways you might use this tool include:

- Discuss the questions in a professional learning community;
- Share one or more articles from the issue with your staff and facilitate a conversation; and
- Do a self-assessment of what you have learned from this issue.

<p><b>STANDARD:</b> LEARNING COMMUNITIES</p> <p><b>IN ACTION</b> <b>Connection and collaboration are at the heart of learning communities. Colleagues don't need to be in the same physical location to learn from one another. As Sharron Helmke (p. 46) writes, "True community is based on a shared set of beliefs rather than a physical location."</b></p>	<p><b>TO CONSIDER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How has working remotely changed the way you think about what it means to be part of a learning community?</li> </ul> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are you staying connected with your colleagues during distance learning? What more can you do to nurture your learning community?</li> </ul> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p><b>STANDARD:</b> LEARNING DESIGNS</p> <p><b>IN ACTION</b> <b>With distance learning, we need to be more thoughtful than ever about how adults and young people learn in different contexts and how we are designing learning experiences.</b></p>	<p><b>TO CONSIDER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In "Learning together when you're apart" (p. 42), the authors write about the value of taking students' perspectives on learning experiences to anticipate challenges and make learning more accessible. What strategies could you try to gain insight about students' learning experiences during distance learning?</li> </ul> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In "Momentum for math" (p. 30), Sue Chapman and Mary Mitchell point out the importance of fostering students' self-directed learning, especially in online learning environments. Which strategies can you use for this purpose, either those recommended by the authors or those you have developed yourself?</li> </ul> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Learn more about Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning at [www.learningforward.org/standards-for-professional-learning](http://www.learningforward.org/standards-for-professional-learning).



THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

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## LEARNING FORWARD IS HERE TO SUPPORT YOU.

We are a community of professional learning leaders who come together as members, affiliates, and allies. Your collective expertise, creativity, determination, and commitment to serving all students and all communities will get us through the challenges we face today.

Because you and your educators are preparing lessons in unfamiliar digital environments, we have created a growing set of free resources to support you during this difficult time. Go here for our latest blog posts, webinars, and a collection of resources focused on supporting your work:

[learningforward.org/COVID](https://learningforward.org/COVID)

### Our free webinar series includes:

- Adapting high-quality instructional materials for a virtual teaching context
- Remote but accessible: Reaching students of all abilities during distance learning
- Learning without barriers: Supporting English learners during distance learning
- All means all: Equity challenges and opportunities during the COVID crisis
- The 'new normal' of professional learning
- Supporting students in stressful times
- How to lead when the path isn't clear



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