



Our most inspiring lessons have come from practitioners making sense of a time that demands creativity and resilience.

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CALL TO ACTION

Denise Glyn Borders and Steve Cardwell

RESILIENT EDUCATORS DESERVE SUSTAINED SUPPORT

Over the course of the last six months, Learning Forward's weekly webinars have given us the opportunity to learn with educators across the globe, and our most inspiring lessons have come from practitioners making sense of a time that demands creativity and resilience. Now that more and more districts are returning to school, we're eager to share several valuable lessons learned and ask you to join us in taking action on the support educators deserve.

We recognize that educators are faced with massive expectations from policymakers and community members alike. Families know how important schooling is for students, both academically and socially. Education leaders weigh dozens of competing factors to create schooling options for their local contexts, considering safety, accessibility of learning for all families in their communities, support for teachers, and quality of student learning experiences.

As educators have created imaginative solutions in the face of ever-changing circumstances, we've seen four consistent themes emerge. We invite learning leaders to consider how they're supporting educators around these issues and suggest specific actions to advance our collective aspirations for all students.



Attend to the health and well-being of students, educators, and communities.

Safety must come first in schools, and we know that every system is faced with balancing a wide array of demands from policymakers and community members as they determine when and how to open schools for the year. When the pandemic first hit in March, school systems jumped immediately to ensure communities had access to food and sought solutions to addressing inequities in access to health care as well as technology and broadband. Keeping students and educators safe is no less important now, despite the fatigue we all feel with a radically changed day-to-day existence.

Emotional well-being is also essential. We want to recognize the high level of uncertainty and fear educators, students, and families bear in such difficult circumstances, which creates a stressful living, learning, and working environment.

KEY ACTIONS FOR EDUCATION LEADERS:

- Prioritize clear communication with educators and respect them as qualified professionals. Consider how they are part of decision-making processes.
- Assess the level of trust and strengthen your culture to support both innovation and candor.
- Invest in building and sustaining relationships — with and among staff, students, and community members.

Offer challenging teaching and high-quality instructional materials supported by effective professional learning.

Even as educators and policymakers adjusted calendars, grading periods, and specific high-stakes assessment expectations, we heard in our webinars that an instructional foundation tied to college- and career-ready standards serves as the academic backbone to reducing learning loss to serve each and every student well for the future.

Investments in high-quality materials are investments in equity. Remote, hybrid, and face-to-

face implementation of standards and materials will, of course, vary; educators will need agility and support to navigate multiple delivery systems.

Aligned professional learning is the linchpin to success with this priority and others. Educators require sustained support to build their capacity to use and adapt materials and leverage deep content expertise.

KEY ACTIONS

FOR EDUCATION LEADERS:

- Establish and share a systemwide instructional vision that takes into account remote, hybrid, and in-person learning modes.
- Invest in high-quality instructional materials and ensure professional learning at the school and team levels focuses on implementing materials.

Prioritize social justice and equity of access to high-quality teaching and learning.

Each passing week of 2020 has shined a painful spotlight on the entrenched inequities and racism built into so many systems in modern society, including education. From the disparity in health outcomes to the lack of access to technology, broadband, and community support for learning, communities of color are particularly hard-hit by the implications of this pandemic. At the same time, the nonstop violence against people of color has resulted in ongoing demands for social justice in cities across the world.

Within education, the parallel injustices — insufficient representation of communities of color in teaching

and leadership positions, curricula that aren't relevant for students in various cultures, and students' lack of access to high-quality teaching, to name just a few — are also in the spotlight.

There are flashes of hope in this realm, including the increasing number of equity officers at high levels in school systems and a heightened awareness of inequity and commitment to improve among so many educators.

KEY ACTIONS

FOR EDUCATION LEADERS:

- Examine your own privilege, beliefs, biases, and assumptions about race.
- Seek opportunities to build knowledge and skills and shift beliefs for yourself and others.
- Outline actions to dismantle inequities within your sphere of influence and demand change from others.
- Create mechanisms to monitor progress on critical actions to dismantle inequities.

Embrace this opportunity to leverage technology to accelerate teaching and learning.

Education is one of the few sectors that technology had not yet disrupted. Through an impressive pivot, the need to offer remote instruction quickly spurred educators to acquire new skills and build new ways of engaging students and conveying concepts.

While the coming months may eventually allow us to return to what we once called normal, educators have an opportunity to expand on what they've accomplished with technology and go so much further, exploring possibilities

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VALUABLE RESOURCE TO SUPPORT REOPENING

The Council of Chief State School Officers has created a comprehensive suite of guidance documents for school and district leaders as they navigate reopening schools in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The documents assist educators in making decisions for their local contexts with a wide range of adaptable tools and resources.

Specific sections on academics highlight suggestions, implications, and references geared toward planning and supporting professional learning aligned to school and system goals. The professional learning guidance encompasses an overview, actions for professional learning providers, critical knowledge and skills for teachers and school leaders, and a self-assessment for teachers and school leaders.

A frame for crafting a professional learning scope and sequence includes customizable templates. The guide also includes a template to support collaborative learning time.

Learn more at ccsso.org/coronavirus and navigate to the "Academics" section to focus on professional learning.

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for combining the best of all learning platforms and virtual tools, without abandoning the importance of social interaction in schools.

KEY ACTIONS

FOR EDUCATION LEADERS:

- Explore teaching and learning tools systemically to identify options for innovation.

- Hold technology platforms and tools to high standards.
- Build educators' capacity in leveraging technology for student learning and professional learning alike.
- Advocate for technology systems and solutions that will advance district goals.

Clearly, this year's back to school isn't what we all grew up with or

anticipated. Yet, despite the many challenges educators face right now, we are hopeful that these challenges will reveal new avenues to excellence and equity in teaching and learning. Our greatest hopes are inspired by the educators we see leading the way every day. Learning Forward is here to support you at every step. ■

BEING FORWARD / Linda Chen

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What are some of the biggest needs that remain in professional learning, aside from the immediate needs caused by the pandemic?

The biggest needs are at the intersection of adult and student learning. Professional learning has to be about adults feeling they have agency and empowerment through knowledge and experience, but it must also be inextricably tied to impact on student learning. It is our responsibility to ensure that every student thrives through the experiences we provide, and are able to do grade-level work and beyond to prepare them for their future.

Even in the context of this pandemic, there is quite a bit of focus on technology skills. How do we engage in professional learning — largely in a new mode virtually — to ensure that, as a result of our connection as adults, we can fully leverage opportunities to greatly advance student learning within this environment?

We have the opportunity to connect with students in a different way, in a more personalized and inclusive way, because we are teaching them directly into their homes. We

have the ability to know them better and tailor work through the efficiencies technology can provide.

What readings or resources have had a large influence on your career?

There are so many, but I'll start with the earliest reading that influenced my thinking on racial equity. During an undergraduate sociology course at the University of Washington, I was assigned a short article called "White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack" by Peggy McIntosh.

That piece impacted me and ignited the fire in my belly, if you will, around the importance of equity in education. It wasn't just the article itself; it was the rich discourse that my professor carefully designed and facilitated around it.

A few other more recent books include *Courageous Conversations About Race* by Glenn E. Singleton and *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* by Zaretta Hammond.

Another area that is important in my work is instructional leadership, and one reading I recommend is *Student-Centered Leadership* by Viviane Robinson. It centers on research showing that, of all the things principals

do, leading teacher learning and development has the biggest impact on student learning.

As a systems leader, I deeply believe that principals are the greatest lever to ensuring the success of every student at scale, particularly those students who have been historically underserved and marginalized.

What was one of your own most meaningful professional learning experiences?

By far, the best professional learning experience for me was when a staff developer came into my classroom and did demo lessons with my students. That showed me what was possible with my own students and showed me how to enact in my own classroom what I was reading and discussing in professional development.

That experience was powerful in the context of all the other professional learning pieces that allowed me to read, learn, discuss, reflect, teach, and ultimately have a positive impact on my students, which is what professional learning is all about. ■

COACHES NOTEBOOK / Joellen Killion

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They have the vital task of ensuring that the infrastructure of the coaching program is sound, coaches have the necessary preparation and ongoing professional learning they need to succeed, there are both formative

and summative measures in place to continuously assess and evaluate the coaching program, and coaches have coaching and other forms of support to succeed in their roles.

In most cases, the responsibilities of a coach champion — often a central

office staff member — are added to an already-long list of duties.

For coaching to have its desired effect, the overall program must be sound and fully functioning. Clear roles and responsibilities are the first step. ■