

Introduction

COVID-19 may have given us the best opportunity to create a new normal of schooling. You have the potential to change the grammar of schooling as we know it and magnify the effective practices from the past while leveraging the lessons learned during pandemic teaching. You have the opportunity to lead the rebound for your school or school system. Think of it as a once-in-a-lifetime chance to improve the systems that serve our students.

Of course, schools need to open safely. The information from public health officials has been incorporated into district and state guidelines, so we will not focus on that advice here. Yes, it is important to ensure the safety and health of our staff and students. But our roles are more complex and require that we also attend to the learning occurring with teachers and students.

We also need to attend to the well-being of our staff and students. Thus, social and emotional learning (SEL) needs to be more prominent in the curriculum and not relegated to an extra-curricular event. We need to rebuild the agency of many of our students and staff. In too many cases, children, youth, and adults have come to believe that their efforts are not making a difference and that anything they do results in failure. As leaders, we may be feeling the same lack of impact. But there are good things happening and we need to harvest those wins and ensure that more success is experienced by educators and students.

Our attention must be focused on prioritizing learning. There is a fairly significant focus on learning loss in the media. There are debates about the amount and truth to these claims, but the fact is that students have things to learn from the experiences that their teachers plan. Our focus should be on learning leaps rather than on learning loss. This requires a careful analysis of current student performance and interventions that accelerate rather than remediate learning. And it requires thoughtful instruction and assessment that are linked to the learning needs of students. Most students will require interventions to be successful, and we have the opportunity to develop and implement new systems of support that result in significant gains for students. In some cases, we need to win back parent support, while in others, we need to maintain the relationships that were forged between parents and teachers during pandemic teaching.

As part of our collective focus on learning, we need to ensure that the environments that are created are supportive of students. Given the length of time some students have been away from physical school, we expect that there may be some problematic behaviors. Some students did not learn or have the opportunity to practice their pro-social skills. Thus, engaging restorative practices will be increasingly important. We just may change the very nature of discipline and help students come to understand the impact that their actions have on others.

**IN TOO MANY CASES,
CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND
ADULTS HAVE COME TO
BELIEVE THAT THEIR
EFFORTS ARE NOT
MAKING A DIFFERENCE
AND THAT ANYTHING
THEY DO RESULTS
IN FAILURE.**

**OUR FOCUS SHOULD
BE ON LEARNING LEAPS
RATHER THAN ON
LEARNING LOSS.**

There is likely to be an increased focus on the reasons that students cannot learn. As a profession, we often look to outside forces to explain the gaps in learning. Certainly, the impact of poverty, racism, and lack of opportunities to learn is real. But teachers are powerful in changing the learning trajectory of students who they believe will learn. Thus, it is important that we interrupt the tyranny of low expectations, and challenge each other to hold high expectations for students while providing the support for them to achieve. We must develop and implement effective attendance programs and ensure students are engaged in meaningful learning. And we must recognize and confront the cognitive barriers to learning that students face. That requires recognition that students have been punished with grading systems that do not work.

To accomplish all of this, we will need to invest in effective professional learning communities, provide teachers feedback, and be honest about their performance. It's time to focus on teacher learning as well as student learning. Too often, in education, we are waiting to reach agreement with a majority of staff to implement an initiative. The pandemic created opportunities to act quickly in order to implement what research tells us is needed. It taught us how quickly we can act to implement necessary changes. Having said that, it's still important to build consensus and create a positive culture. When staff feel supported and work in a culture of appreciation, the climate contributes to student learning. Together, we can future-proof students and staff so we are ready for any crisis or opportunity that presents itself in the future.

You will notice throughout this book that we include effect sizes when they are available. We draw on the decades of research that John Hattie has collected, known as Visible Learning®. The effect sizes reported in this book are based on meta-analyses, or summaries of research, that identify the power of a specific influence. At this point, there are over 1,800 meta-analyses in John's database, representing more than 300 million students. You can search the database at www.visiblelearningmetax.com for updates on the effect sizes, as John keeps the information current as new meta-analyses are published.

If there ever was a time to step up and lead, it is now. We need you. Your teachers and staff need you. The students in your school need you. There are things that you simply must do to rebound from the crises that society has confronted. Believe in yourself; we believe in you.