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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from Out of the Crisis: A Supplement to Breakthrough Leadership by Alan M Blankstein and Marcus J Newsome.

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CURRENT CHALLENGE

Inequities in Access, Inadequacies in the Current Systems Resulting in Disengaged Students

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Collaborative Teaming Focused on Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

CASE SCENARIO

Your instructional team begins to make preparations for the coming year. As a part of this process, you host “town hall” meetings with stakeholders. During your student town hall, you shared several points with the students and asked, “What are the pros and cons of virtual learning for you?” You received these responses from them:

Positive Data Points

1. Students enjoy the flexibility of working from home
2. Flexibility allows adolescents to experience better sleeping patterns by getting up later
3. Opportunities for more quality family time
4. Opportunities for frequent breaks
5. Greater opportunities for choice and control of learning
6. Teachers and students forced to improve technology skills

Negative Data Points

1. Many students feel extremely isolated
2. Students find it difficult to stay motivated with inconsistencies in distance learning expectations
3. Students who have unstable internet access find it very difficult to attend classes online
4. Students put work off until later and then find themselves too far behind to catch up
5. Some students see little point in logging in to do work and stay engaged in school when they cannot see their friends
Positive Data Points

7. Fewer distractions (from other students, intercom announcements, lock down drills, etc.)
8. Assignments are more meaningful and engaging; less busy work
9. Greater access to teacher digital assistance
10. Elimination of transportation problems
11. Students who are pursuing outside interests in the arts, sports, or sciences can work on graduation requirements on their own timeframe
12. Google and Zoom meetings are helpful

Negative Data Points

6. Many students are called upon to care for younger siblings during the day and have little time left for schoolwork in the evenings
7. A significant number of students say they do not have the support they need to complete assignments
8. Many students are confused by the variety of schedules and eLearning platforms
9. Students have to share computers with siblings
10. Students have to do classwork when parents are working and don’t get the support they need
11. 100% virtual learning is not good for students

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How can educators use lessons learned during the pandemic to create a more equitable learning environment for all students, keep the positive aspects of distance learning while mitigating the negative effects, and support students who are marginalized because of lack of internet access and families who are struggling economically and cannot support learning from home?

RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS

Listen to what students are saying and implement their recommendations:

1. Recognize that we have busy lives and need flexibility.
2. Avoid long school days, realizing that we can continue learning outside of school hours.
3. Internet is like running water: we need it, and we need you to fix internet connectivity problems.
4. Continue opportunities for virtual learning once schools return to face-to-face learning.
5. Do not go back to the traditional school model full of peer pressure, drama, and busy work that does nothing to teach us new things.

6. Build time for us to see and interact with our friends.

7. Target support for kids who are struggling with eLearning and with in-person learning.

8. Provide alternate times for school to start and end (both virtually and in person) to accommodate those of us who must work, have family commitments, or whose parents cannot support us during normal school hours.

9. Make social emotional learning (SEL) and social interaction a value and build in time for this throughout the school day.

Based on student feedback, your leadership team categorizes the majority of these comments as advice for structural changes which are addressed in this scenario. (Comments 3 and 7 are specific to connectivity/internet issues and dealt with in scenario 4, while item 9 is dealt with in the final scenario of this supplement.)

You set up a professional development day in which teachers met in collaborative teams to develop creative solutions to the opportunities and struggles highlighted by eLearning in the time of Covid. Through much discussion and deliberation, they decide to alter the school’s instructional delivery plan for the following school year. (Note: The modality and logistics of instructional delivery are the focus of this scenario but are but one set of items to consider in future planning. Changes in content/curriculum, assessments, engagement of all learners, instructional style, and triage for staff and student are also addressed tangentially in this supplement and more fully in Breakthrough Leadership.)

Your staff chooses to pilot a flipped classroom model of instruction. The Flipped Learning Network defines flipped learning as “a pedagogical approach in which direct instruction moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space, and the resulting group space is transformed into a dynamic, interactive learning environment where the educator guides students as they apply concepts and engage creatively in the subject matter” (see Resources for more information). In the flipped classroom model, the initial phases of assignments—tutorials, lectures, guidelines, and practice sessions—are usually presented virtually, and students come together to create, collaborate, and solve problems posed by the curriculum in a project-based learning format.

You approve the plan. Teachers could opt in to the model and collaborate to learn and support each other in implementing the new structure. Students have initial assignments that they can do on their own time or they can log on during regular class time if they need support. Then collaborative work sessions are
scheduled for students to work together on projects or solve problems that require them to demonstrate mastery of the identified learning standards.

Students attend school one or two days a week and are in teams with content teachers guiding them and supporting them in completing the assigned projects or problem-solving tasks. In this way, student isolation is mitigated and the so-called 21st century skills of creativity, collaboration, communication, and problem solving are practiced with support. At the end of each instructional unit, the students present their solutions or projects to a team of teachers and other students in a project-based assessment format.

The pilot classroom teachers survey students and families to determine the in-person meeting days and times and offer a distance learning team option for students who continue learning from home. These teacher teams will design content-based online lessons that can be used to introduce basic skills, provide practice lessons, and share video-based content to increase student background knowledge. Then teachers will team across content areas to support students who have opted in to the flipped classroom model pilot.

Student attendance and assignment engagement and completion will be tracked across grade levels, and the team will meet weekly to discuss and problem solve support for any students who are falling behind. Engagement and academic skills will be tracked and compared to the traditional model classrooms, who will also work in content and cross-curricular teams. At the end of the school year, the two models will be compared, and a decision will be made on whether to continue the project.

**ACCOUNTABILITY CHART**

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<tr>
<th>ROLE</th>
<th>IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY</th>
<th>MEASUREMENT</th>
<th>EXPECTED OUTCOME</th>
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| Teacher and Teacher Leader  | • Develop protocols to routinely collect student voice to drive instructional models  
|                             | • Work in cross-content teams to develop project- or problem-based content to engage students | • Protocol tools created and implemented  
|                             |                                                            | • Data collection of student voice  
|                             |                                                            | • Number and quality of projects completed by students | • Student protocols provide teachers with meaningful feedback that improves the teaching and learning  
|                             |                                                            |                                                 | • Increased student engagement and student choice/efficacy  
<p>|                             |                                                            |                                                 | • Increase in use of 21st century skills |</p>
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| **Principal and Staff** | • Incorporate into master calendar student voice routines  
• Create guidelines and expectations for instruction inclusive of collaborative problem solving | • Schedule of events  
• Comparison attendance and participation data for students in the traditional classroom model  
• Project-based assessment grades | • Increased student learning, motivation, and engagement  
• Increased achievement scores |
| **Superintendent and Central Office** | • Establish student-led governance bodies  
• Allow for alternative ways of tracking student attendance data  
• Create class codes that allow for multiple content courses | • Established student governance bodies  
• Established alternative attendance tracking methods  
• Enrollment and attendance in multiple content courses | • Student empowerment  
• Improved levels of teacher collaboration and collegial trust  
• Increase in student performance |
| **School Board and Policy Makers** | • Appoint student representative to school board  
• Support superintendent in policy changes for attendance and new instructional models | • Board of education policy on student representation and changes in policy to support attendance and instructional models | • Student empowerment  
• Positive focus on the pilot project and on increased student engagement |
| **Parents, Family and Community** | • Communicate proactively with teachers  
• Support projects by donating supplies and consider serving as presenter or participants in presentations and projects | • Logs of two-way parent communication  
• In-kind donation trackers  
• Volunteer log of participation in celebrations and presentations | • Increased parent participation  
• Increased community-based support  
• Increased community-based participation |
PROCESS GUIDELINES

Bringing the community together in various contexts to solve problems that are of importance to those impacted by the decisions made is essential. The opportunities in doing so effectively are immeasurable, although the time required may initially seem otherwise. Following are some guidelines for consideration.

Make certain there is equitable representation in surveying that is endeavored. Ensure easy and equal access to participation via multiple modalities of outreach to those being surveyed.

Those who have been traditionally left out will need additional opportunities to engage using multiple layers and avenues of communication. Texting apps, social media, and online meeting spaces that can be easily accessed by phone are ways to provide access to all stakeholders.

Make certain questions being asked are posed in an inviting manner and in the language(s) spoken at participants’ homes.

Feedback to participants should be presented quickly (within a couple of days) in a compiled format, like the chart provided above. Doing so builds credibility and trust that people are being heard.

Use the outcomes of the surveys. Leadership teams, and, as appropriate, community and students’ representatives can use the data to brainstorm possible actions. Prioritize which items are most critical to act upon based on impact, visibility to the community, speed with which they can be implemented, or whatever criteria are most appropriate for your context.

Make certain that underrepresented voices within the surveyed results are also heard, considered, and addressed. Sometimes they come from genius that is initially written off yet would otherwise provide a brilliant solution to a challenge. Other times, those voices may come from dire situations that

RESOURCES

- EL Education. (n.d.) https://eleducation.org
need a different level of action than the majority. Sometimes it’s both. In all cases, there must be differentiated approaches to addressing different needs.

Student agency and voice seem to be an important missing process in narrowing equity gaps. “When it comes to student engagement, there is a predictable and well-documented downward trajectory as students get older” (Benner, Brown, & Jeffrey, 2019). According to a 2016 Gallup poll that measured student engagement, about three-quarters of fifth graders—an age at which students are full of joy and enthusiasm for school—report high engagement in school. By the time students advance to middle school, just over one-half of the students report being engaged (Calderon & Yu, 2017).

High school students demonstrate a steep drop in engagement, with approximately one-third reporting being engaged (Calderon & Yu, 2017). Similar to the drop in engagement, a recent poll from The New Teacher Project (TNTP) found that students see less value in their work and assignments with each subsequent year of school. There is a direct relationship between students who value their education and student engagement.

Yes, the acknowledgment of these realities, and the attending inadequacy overall of our schooling and the society which it reflects to understand, let alone accommodate the growing diversity of our students via instruction, curriculum, policies, or budgets, are all becoming starkly clear.

Let the larger school community know of the plan, likely timelines, and assessments of efficacy underway. Consider using students and families as communicators of the plan.

Provide regular updates and assessments as a means of enhancing trust, improving the actions underway, and making yourself and staff accountable to the larger community.

**CONCLUSION**

We have given a disproportionate amount of space to this section because we believe children should drive all our decisions. We have used an example of student voice to drive decision making. If doing so in this crisis becomes a part of the new normal, Covid-19 will have been the catalyst to an enhanced learning environment for students now and in the future. Breakthrough leadership can turn this crisis into an opportunity using the opening created by this transformative moment to create equitable, student-driven learning, and setting the needs of all students at the center of future actions.

Student responses in this section are not framed in professional terms about pedagogy, theory of action, curriculum and instruction, social emotional
learning, trauma, and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), etc., yet they provide pure articulation of student desires and needs for educators to rethink and revise the traditional school day. Such restructuring must also consider several factors: implementing best practices on how students learn, authentic pedagogy, tiered support, and school organizational teacher and staff capacity.

In previous school reform efforts, policy makers believed they could embarrass schools into improvement by mandated state government school takeover, giving failing grades for schools falling short of arbitrary passing pass rate targets, sending in highly paid short-term turnaround specialists, or outsourcing education to private companies. Families with means often fled these failed constructs for educating their children, thereby further decreasing public support and funding for public education.

We have more than two decades of results to prove that these strategies were short-sighted solutions. Furthermore, they have proven that we have a broken process for funding public education, which in the United States is heavily dependent on local property taxes. Communities that do not have the per capita affluence to generate the level of taxes wealthy communities produce will never experience parity.

What have we learned? Students want flexibility. The level of flexibility needed and requested will require a restructuring of the traditional school day. This will not be a simple task. It will likely include rewriting the curriculum, asynchronous instruction, and blended learning as well as investments in new technologies, retraining staff, re-thinking long capital improvement plans and school designs, building community support, and restructuring a century-old funding model for public education.

Students also have articulated for decades that they need to see the relevance in what they are learning, lest schooling become “boring.” They seek curriculum reflective of their interests, heritage, culture, and aspirations. What is taught and how it is delivered is also taken up in coming scenarios and more fully in Breakthrough Leadership.

Students have the greatest stake in their education but little to no say in how it is delivered. This lack of agency represents a lost opportunity to accelerate learning and prepare students for a world in which taking initiative and learning new skills are increasingly paramount to success. (Benner, Brown, & Jeffrey, 2019)

If we are going to take student voices seriously, we must seek to understand the deeper meaning of their words and to resist quick and short-term solutions. We must continue to leverage this crisis to achieve meaningful and enduring reform that comes about by creativity, innovation, and deeper thinking.