Learning Equitably, Digitally, and Well:

A Report on NYC Schools in the Wake of Covid-19, and What Comes Next

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Executive Summary

In an effort to reduce the spread of Covid-19, the New York City school system converted all instruction to a remote learning model in March 2020. That decision marked an unprecedented moment in public education: all 1.1 million children in the nation's largest school system were now to begin learning exclusively online. For the better part of the ensuing three months, 75,000 educators have taught remotely via a wide array of digital technologies.

At the outset, it was clear that this was a potentially fraught decision. Because some 73 percent of the city's public school students are in poverty, as measured by eligibility for free or reduced lunch or public benefits, the decision to rely exclusively on a remote learning model raised the distinct possibility that it would deepen inequity in the city. Children of color and in poverty, many of whom live in households hampered by the well-documented digital divide in internet access, could well find themselves falling further behind in their studies through no fault of their own.

The City took several steps to prevent such an outcome. The Department of Education (DOE) not only prioritized the distribution of online learning devices to all students; recognizing the important role that school breakfasts and lunches play in the lives of many New York City families, it also distributed free meals to anyone who needed them.

Nevertheless, evaluating the success of such efforts, especially the past three months of remote learning, is a formidable challenge. The standardized tests normally administered statewide each spring – the most commonly applied tool for measuring student learning – were, for obvious reasons, not given this year. Other measures of student engagement and learning have yielded limited data. There has, for example, been inconsistent attendance reporting (and then only citywide attendance statistics have been available). While the City did administer a survey to families and students asking about their experiences with remote learning, the results were not publicly available as of June 19th.

To fill in the gaps left by the relative paucity of data, we decided to ask stakeholders how they experienced remote learning in order to glean insights and recommendations for improving such efforts in the City's schools. This is an urgent task; at this writing it's not clear if the next school year, beginning in September, will be conducted in school buildings, remotely, or in some combination of these two modes. Officials for both the City and the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) have signaled to schools to prepare for "blended learning" models. Blended learning typically refers to teachers' intentional use of instructional technologies to give students more flexibility in completing their work in the classroom and beyond.

We therefore posed two questions: What does the City's response and experience this spring teach us about what to do next? What must schools and the City do to help all students learn equitably, digitally, and well?

In seeking answers to these questions, we interviewed 37 individuals about their experiences with remote learning in New York City this spring: teachers, school leaders, parents, students, researchers, and others. Next, we reviewed the research literature related to K-12 blended and remote learning as well as the research related to culturally responsive-sustaining education (CR-SE). CR-SE is an area of research upon which the DOE based its equity-focused professional development agenda, the implementation of which was interrupted by the pandemic. Finally, we compiled recommendations for different stakeholders.

Key Findings

- The DOE must provide more specific instructional guidance and resources for teaching via blended and remote learning models to teachers and families. The response this spring was an "emergency" mode of remote learning, and did not reflect what teachers using remote learning are capable of when there is sufficient time and support to plan. The rapid pace of change and unstructured nature of the transition to remote learning was especially challenging for students with special learning needs and for families living in poverty, for whom the pandemic added additional economic and emotional stress. Still, in spite of these obstacles, many teachers and school leaders have risen to the challenge and learned invaluable lessons about how to continue supporting and engaging their students remotely.

- Students' social-emotional needs must be prioritized if they are to be prepared to achieve academically. This is always true, and is especially so during a public health crisis. Many teachers reported that in order to effectively teach their students, they had to create space to check in with students personally – to ask about the health of their family members, their own fears, their stresses – and then ease into academic content from there. This was important for students across the socio-economic spectrum.

- The City must engage families, and the public, more frequently and authentically if they are to be expected to support children's learning in the more active fashion that remote learning requires. Interviewees reported feeling confused by the DOE's decision-making process and said that there were too few authentic opportunities to inform that process. When decisions were made, they were inconsistently communicated via a variety of channels.

- Researchers agree it is possible to weave CR-SE into blended and remote learning models, and continue to help create a more equitable school system. To do so, it is essential that the DOE put CR-SE at the forefront of all planning for using blended and remote learning in the fall. CR-SE cannot be an add-on if it is to inform teaching. Rather, the instructional practices that best complement CR-SE should be the starting point for how remote learning technologies are used.

- The goal for many of the stakeholders we interviewed is not to "go back to normal" because the "normal" schooling model was ineffective and contributed to systemic racism, particularly for students in poverty and of color. Planning for the fall is an opportunity to reimagine core aspects of what public education looks like in the city, including how we define assessment, how we assign students to schools, what "counts" as learning, how CR-SE and social-emotional learning (SEL) inform curricula, and how we measure quality learning and teaching.

High-Level Recommendations

Our high-level recommendations, which are fleshed out in more detail in the Recommendations section, are:

- City and district leaders need to provide schools with more specific guidance on curricular, instructional, and assessment practices via blended and remote learning models, while allocating sufficient budgetary resources for planning and implementation, as soon as possible. This includes: pre-built instructional models, curated high-quality content, and ongoing professional development.

- City, district, and school leaders must put CR-SE and SEL at the forefront of instructional and technological decision-making starting this fall and continuing for the long-term. Teachers must have clear examples of what it looks like to weave CR-SE and SEL into blended and remote models of learning, examples that they can adopt or adapt confidently for their own practice. Furthermore, officials must ensure that CR-SE and SEL are emphasized in key accountability documents already in use citywide.

- City, district, and school leaders must provide all teachers the resources they will need to: assess students' baseline academic and social-emotional needs in September; differentiate use of blended and online learning models and CR-SE instructional practices based on those assessments; and explicitly teach students the executive functioning and computer skills necessary to confidently manage their own learning when adults cannot be present.

- City, district, and school leaders must do more to honestly engage families in key decision-making processes, support families in preparing for the fall, and communicate systematically and clearly when decisions have been made.

We believe that there is still time to take the lessons learned from this spring and to act on them. In the coming weeks and months, essential decisions will be made that will affect the trajectories of children and their families for generations. We mean that without hyperbole. This report offers thoroughly researched and highly actionable recommendations that can help stakeholders pose better questions and design better solutions.

It is, in fact, still possible to help all students learn more equitably, digitally, and well.

Introduction

This report responds to a moment, a moment that will ripple and linger throughout New York City for years to come: the rapid transition of the largest school system in the country to remote learning in response to Covid-19.

As a policy center focused on New York, we wanted to help stakeholders take stock, to unpack key opportunities and challenges, and to see the forest from the trees. The odds are, some version of remote or blended learning will be a part of New York City schools from now on. **What does the City's initial response teach us about what to do next? What must the schools and the City do to help all students learn equitably, digitally, and well?**

To answer these questions, we studied the timeline of events surrounding the transition of city public schools to remote learning in the wake of Covid-19. Our research team interviewed 37 teachers, parents, students, school administrators, community partners, and researchers from across the city. We reviewed bodies of research that are essential to understanding what is going on but, heretofore, have not been well integrated with each other. Then we took all we learned, added a dash of our collective experience working in and with city schools for a decade and a half, and distilled our findings into concrete actions for a range of stakeholders. The result is the report you see before you, and it starts with a chronology of events.

What Happened

On Sunday, March 15th, 2020, as a measure to reduce the spread of Covid-19, the Administration of Mayor Bill de Blasio announced the indefinite closure of all New York City school buildings beginning the following day. As a stopgap, all schools transitioned to a fully remote learning model in which teachers would instruct 1.1 million students online. Students were given one week off from school responsibilities so teachers and school leaders could prepare for the new model. Schools reopened virtually on March 23rd. That same day, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) shared guidelines for remote learning with teachers.

From the start, City officials prioritized making sure that children most at risk had basic needs met. The City established a network of school sites that distributed free meals to anyone who needed them, not just current public school students. The City also prioritized making sure all students had devices with which they could learn remotely. It was estimated at the outset that over 900,000 families lacked broadband access necessary for remote learning. The Department of Education (DOE) began distributing over 300,000 iPads to students who did not have device access at home. Additional devices were also provided by non-profit organizations in cases where the DOE devices were slow to arrive or were found to be insufficient.

In the days and weeks that followed, the challenge of remote learning quickly became apparent. For example, confusion ensued as schools appeared unsure of what specific technologies and learning models to employ. Initially, many schools appeared to use a combination of the popular K-12 learning platform Google Classroom

and the video conferencing product Zoom. However, two weeks into the transition to remote learning, the City abruptly suspended use of Zoom for citywide instruction when concerns emerged about Zoom's security and privacy practices. A memo to schools on April 4th listed the only alternative video conferencing product as Microsoft Teams, which would require a cumbersome login process for students to navigate. Use of Google Meet, the video conferencing service most schools could access through Google Classroom, was not immediately cleared for use in schools. When it was ultimately approved, permission was communicated through Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza's own Twitter account on a weekend rather than through more formal communication channels, leaving many teachers and families unaware of the change in policy.

Journalistic reports emerged chronicling teachers' and families' experiences with remote learning. Some reports demonstrated teachers' creativity as they swiftly converted their face-to-face lessons into dynamic remote instruction. Others put the spotlight on the inherent challenges that teachers faced. Students' reactions were similarly varied, with some reporting that learning online involved unresponsive teachers with low expectations of their students while others reported improved learning.

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Device delivery was slower and more expensive than many had anticipated. Two months after the City committed to provide devices to families in need, some students were still waiting for them. Some reports emerged of botched deliveries in which families who did not need devices received them while those who were waiting for devices received nothing. The cost of iPad purchasing and distribution totaled $269 million, leaving critics to wonder why devices that retailed for $429 appeared to ultimately cost the City $897 each. (Only part of this added cost can be attributed to the included wireless data plans and special software setup that all publicly purchased devices receive.)

As the pandemic continued to spread and public health officials warned that reopening society would need to be done cautiously, the mayor and schools chancellor penned a letter to families on April 11th announcing that remote learning would continue through the end of the school year. The same day, a Saturday, Mayor de Blasio announced that schools would be closed for the remainder of the year with all instruction completed online. However, on the following day Governor Andrew Cuomo stated that whether or not city schools would be closed through June had yet to be decided. Messages were mixed.

A week later, on April 17th, the DOE requested that families and students complete a survey about their experiences learning remotely. Available in 11 languages, the survey to families included questions that were mostly focused on operational concerns rather than the quality of instruction. For example, one question read "How much of your day do you spend learning or completing schoolwork?" as opposed to a more instructionally focused question that might have read "How challenging do you find your school work each day?" As of June 19th, the results of the remote learning survey were not yet publicly available.

In May, Governor Cuomo announced that the State would collaborate with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in order to "reimagine" education in New York. Shortly after the announcement, Mayor de Blasio announced his own Sector Advisory Councils concerning re-opening the city post-pandemic, including one for education composed of New York City-based education leaders.

By early June, nearly three months after the City announced the transition to remote learning, Chancellor Carranza updated schools with "key planning decisions" for the fall. His top three considerations were: 1) enhanced health measures; 2) a trauma-informed transition back to school; and 3) blended learning, which he defined as "approaches of both in-person and remote instruction." Concurrently, the city erupted with protests in response to the death of George Floyd, a Black man who was killed while being restrained by police in Minneapolis. Under the banner of #BlackLivesMatter, protests sprouted up in every borough. For many teachers and families who had been mostly concerned about how to sufficiently complete the academic year online, there was now an unanticipated reality to address among students: widespread civic action in response to systemic racism that targets Black Americans. It was likely with these events in mind that the chancellor emphasized the City's commitment to "equity, excellence, and resilience" in his message's conclusion.

In what follows, we first hear from those in schools, communities, and organizations who experienced the city's transition to remote learning, drawing on a series of phone and video interviews conducted by our team. Then we review the research related to both K-12 remote and blended learning and to culturally responsive-sustaining education (CR-SE), identifying both overlaps and gaps. Finally, we synthesize our findings into a series of recommendations customized for a range of New York City stakeholders.

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Section 1: Interview Findings

This section highlights the experiences of 37 teachers, parents, students, school administrators, community partners, and researchers from all over the city as they've grappled with remote learning over the past three months. About three-quarters of the people we spoke with by phone or video represent schools that serve low-income communities, where Covid-19 has hit disproportionately hard and the challenges of remote learning are magnified by pre-existing inequities. We also spoke with people representing several types of schools, including charter schools, traditional schools, progressive schools, community schools, dual language schools, career and technical education (CTE) schools, and also a site specific to students on suspension, to hear how schools with different educational approaches and students across all grades were approaching this unprecedented experiment. Their words reveal the immense array of challenges our city's educators and families have faced during this time period, but they also give us an opportunity to celebrate their heroic efforts and share the lessons they have learned.

Challenges

Responding to new and old traumas

Many students are experiencing a heightened version of the struggles they may have faced before the pandemic, including food insecurity, unstable housing, and fears about their immigration status. Many are coping with the trauma of taking care of or losing loved ones who contracted Covid-19 or didn't receive other needed medical care. Some have a closeted identity at home, so being stuck there without any outlet to express and explore their identities has affected them greatly. Leanne Nunes, a high school senior in the Bronx, said "one of the more harmful things that's happening around remote learning….is this sense that we just need to keep working like it's business as usual, which is very much not the case. This is a public health crisis…. It's very stressful and overwhelming in this time, and could also potentially be filled with a lot of grief."[1]

This is true even at schools that draw from more privileged student populations. As one teacher at a screened middle school on the Upper West Side told us, "Our own school surveys show us that over half of our students have been affected by a parent, family member, [or] someone they know getting sick, and more are feeling affected by the social isolation. Some are suffering in silence, turning in their work every day, but we don't know what the mental health issues are because we can't see it."[2]

But at schools that serve more marginalized students, this crisis has both magnified the intensity of existing needs and made it more difficult for schools to help meet those needs. "This Covid crisis is really a magnifying glass for

> This Covid crisis is really a magnifying glass for challenges we were already facing.

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1 Interview with Leanne Nunes (NYC high school senior and Executive High School Director of IntegrateNYC), April 8, 2020.

2 Interview with anonymous ELA teacher, May 18, 2020.

challenges we were already facing, ills our society was trying to cure," Alexandra Teitel, the community school director at PS 284 in Brownsville, told us.[3] For example, the shutdown has prevented that school from continuing their food pantry and farmers market services for parents. "So," she continued, "we've shifted funds to families that need food urgently so we can send them an Instacart delivery that day. We are approaching this from a trauma-informed lens, not allowing that trauma to prevent you from going forward, but working through it."

> Racism and classism are forms of trauma and we won't just ask our students to work around that.

Since George Floyd was killed by a Minneapolis police officer on Memorial Day, the injustice of police brutality and systemic racism has amplified the trauma of the pandemic and erupted into an unprecedented international movement. Students, families, and educators are now dealing with the impact of compounded grief, fear, and rage. "Racism and classism are forms of trauma and we won't just ask our students to work around that. We've decided that we would move to become anti-racist educators," Harold Turner, the principal at PAVE Academy Charter Middle School in Red Hook, told us in the days after Floyd's death.[4]

For these reasons, many schools we spoke to are prioritizing meeting students' social, emotional, and physical needs over academics. Dan Thompson, an assistant principal at Health, Education, and Research Occupations (HERO) High School in the South Bronx, told us, "Our outreach needs to be less about getting kids to do stuff and more about how to ameliorate the tragic stuff kids are dealing with at this time. Being entirely online misses what the actual work of non-middle-class schools is. We offer services as a school because society is not willing to do these things."[5] Dr. Douglas Ready, an associate professor of education and public policy at Columbia University's Teachers College, pointed out that this is reminding us of the true purpose of schools: "You've removed the primary shared social institution for taking care of youth. It's the societal equivalent of removing hospitals or fire departments."[6]

Dr. David Kirkland, executive director at New York University's Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools, described the importance of creating space to heal in the wake of both Covid-19 and the #BlackLivesMatter response to the death of George Floyd. The healing, for Dr. Kirkland, was not just individual but also institutional: "The first part of this process of healing is acknowledging that something has happened to us. Not just our physical bodies, but also to the souls of our schools. How can we turn the lens of trauma-informed care outward so that we might heal the injured systems that serve our students?"[7]

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3   Interview with Alexandra Teitel (Community School Director at The Gregory Jocko Jackson School of Sports, Art, and Technology, PS 284 and Partnership with Children), May 27, 2020.

4   Interview with Harold J. Turner (Middle School Principal of PAVE Academy Charter Middle School), May 28, 2020.

5   Interview with Dan Thompson (Assistant Principal of Operations and Instruction at HERO High School), May 13, 2020.

6   Interview with Douglas Ready, Ph.D. (Associate Professor of Education and Public Policy at Columbia University's Teachers College, and the Director of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education), May 26, 2020.

7   Interview with David Kirkland, Ph.D. (Associate Professor at New York University and Executive Director of NYU Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity

School staff are managing the double trauma of living through a pandemic themselves while also supporting their students, often without training for how to do so. Ben Honoroff, principal of [MS 50](#) in Williamsburg, told us, "I make personal condolence calls almost daily."[8] Samantha Pugh, chief academic officer of the [Merrick Academy Charter School](#) in Queens, expressed concerns about the long-term

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toll this will take on her students and staff: "I worry about the mental illness that is going to be as a result of this. I worry about the physical abuse. I worry about our parents and I worry about our pain. And I also, with these amount of budget cuts, worry about what we're going to have to sustain as a result of this."[9]

Disparities in technology access and skills

The logistical challenge of ensuring that each student has access to remote lessons and assignments starts with the distribution of internet-accessible devices, but goes far beyond that. "This playing field is so far from level. Putting a device in every kid's hand barely touched on the issues," Jessica Shalom, the assistant principal at [The Computer School](#)on the Upper West Side, asserted.[10] Many families waited until May for DOE devices. Others are still trying to manage with fewer devices than needed, or with broken devices, or unclear directions about the acceptable use of DOE devices. Students who are primarily communicating through cell phones might miss paying a bill and be off the grid for a week. Families reliant on the temporary free internet service offered by some providers hit the two-month introductory limit before the end of the school year. Principal Julie Zuckerman of [Castle Bridge](#) elementary school in Washington Heights, pondered, "Do we take our additional money from the PTA and pay for wi-fi for those families for a month? We can't do that on a long-range basis. But it's absolutely the responsibility of the DOE and the City to have that happen. It shouldn't be put on the schools or anyone else."[11]

Even among families that have devices and internet access, many parents and even older students lack the computer skills necessary to get logged on to applications like Zoom or Google Classroom, download and read PDF documents, or open new tabs in their internet browsers. "Students who are struggling with the daily routines and structures also have low tech literacy. It's not surprising that experiences with those challenges every day have discouraged them from taking the initiative to communicate with us," a special education teacher at a community high school in Brooklyn told us.[12] Zuckerman estimates that at least for the first month of remote

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and the Transformation of Schools), June 9, 2020.

8   Interview with Ben Honoroff (Principal of John D. Wells, MS 50), May 19, 2020.

9   Interview with Samantha Pugh (Chief Academic Officer of the Merrick Academy Charter School), May 16, 2020.

10   Interview with Jessica Shalom (Assistant Principal of the Computer School, MS 245), June 1, 2020.

11   Interview with Julie Zuckerman (Principal of Castle Bridge, PS 513), May 21, 2020.

12   Interview with anonymous special education teacher, May 18, 2020.

learning, "the teachers were spending 60-80 percent of their time on tech issues and not instruction."[13]

The technical capacities of teachers also vary widely, which perpetuates these inequities. With only a few days officially allocated for teachers to transition to remote learning, most reported to us that they still feel like they are scrambling to figure it out as they go along. Shalom said, "One of the things we learned early on was teachers thought they were doing a great job because they were providing all these different resources, but kids were overwhelmed with 100 things to do."[14] Others have found their abilities hamstrung by the technical limitations of the apps their schools have chosen. Dr. Detra Price-Denis, a professor at Columbia University's Teachers College who trains teachers in digital literacy skills, has noticed that "Right now there's a heavy overdose of Google and Google Docs. Other platforms have way more affordances for collaboration than Google Docs, but teachers' time is limited to find and try those apps."[15] For example, teachers might find it's easy to add PDF worksheets to their Google Classroom, but not be aware that students can't do anything to interact with that PDF document without extra software or a printer.

The schools that reported the easiest transition to remote learning in this regard were those who for years have been using instructional technology in their classrooms or to communicate with parents. For example, the NYC iSchool in SoHo was founded on a hybrid model of instruction, where components of some courses like Regents prep or foreign languages have always been taught online. One important way they achieve this is by staying open from 8am-5pm every day so kids who don't have access to computers at home could get their online work done at school using school computers. Knowing which students relied on this resource also allowed NYC iSchool to know before the shutdown which students needed to bring laptops home.[16]

Still, it has proved important not to assume familiarity with online devices, programs, or the internet in general: one successful strategy was sending home a "how-to guide" about the internet and technology that a high school history teacher made after seeing many of her 11th grade students face the same basic problems.[17] Teachers also need more opportunities for training and time to collaborate with colleagues on which apps to use, and how to use them to meet diverse students' needs.

Learning at home: Blurring the lines between school and family, public and private

Several principals we interviewed commented on the shifting boundaries between home and school. This is true not only because schools are now relying on parents in unprecedented ways for instructional support,

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13   Interview with Julie Zuckerman (Principal of Castle Bridge, PS 513), May 21, 2020.

14   Interview with Jessica Shalom (AP of the Computer School, MS 245), June 1, 2020.

15   Interview with Detra Price-Denis, Ph.D. (Associate Professor of Education at Columbia University's Teachers College), June 4, 2020.

16   Interview with Isora Bailey (Principal of NYC iSchool), May 15, 2020.

17   Interview with anonymous special education teacher, May 18, 2020.

but also because of the physical space that learning now takes place in. "The physical building itself and the resources of the school created a certain amount of equality so we could then turn our attention and resources to the equity issues. All the kids had the same amount of space, materials to use, same connection to adults, access to food," Zuckerman pointed out. "What we see now – that we can't do anything about – is that equity is based as much on the square footage per person in a household as anything else."[18] Children in families that are doubled up or have lots of siblings have less of the quiet space and time needed to complete their work. Many have had to relocate temporarily to self-quarantine, causing further disruptions in their access to devices and helpful adults. Thompson of HERO High School admits that "The reality of working in a home for kids at the margins is not conducive to the type of learning we want them to be doing. All the things that make it hard to function in normal school make it even harder in online school."[19]

Lyons Community School Principal Taeko Onishi goes further: "Older kids are essential workers, working full time and trying to do schoolwork around the edges of that. Older siblings are providing childcare and instruction…There's a whole plethora of social issues that will never be possible to equalize. It's not about the kid, it's about the circumstances…. Now we're going into their homes. We have new insights on what's going on in their lives in a way we've never had before. Even when they won't let us in, that's still telling us a lot."[20]

> All the things that make it hard to function in normal school make it even harder in online school.

Opening up one's home environment and self in ways that were not traditionally accessible to classmates or teachers has raised a whole host of issues. Some schools have instituted a strict policy prohibiting student video chats for this reason, so others can't see these disparities or witness any distracting or troubling actions of family members in the background. In other cases, families have expressed their own privacy concerns by opting out of video chats or assignments that require students to screencast or record their face or voice. Students may also feel the gaze of a video chat as an intrusion or an act of aggression, akin to being stared at in a classroom. Successful teachers and schools have navigated these issues by allowing for flexibility in the format of assignments and modes of participation. But we did hear from parents that some schools have been so rigid in their expectations of student attendance, participation, and communication that they resorted to tracking IP addresses of families' devices, a clear violation of privacy. And in the worst cases, parents who failed to meet expectations were reported to the City's child welfare agency, the Administration for Children's Services, thus introducing additional traumas into those families' lives.

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18   Interview with Julie Zuckerman (Principal of Castle Bridge, PS 513), May 21, 2020.

19   Interview with Dan Thompson (AP of Operations and Instruction at HERO High School), May 13, 2020.

20   Interview with Taeko Onishi (Principal of Lyons Community school), May 20, 2020.

Executive functioning and meeting different learning needs

Another challenge that has been less discussed in other reporting on remote learning is the wide disparity in students' executive functioning or soft skills that help them to organize their work and complete it independently. "There's some evidence that on-task-ness even in person, in classrooms, varies by social and academic background. A lot of technology depends on self-motivation. Can you imagine what's happening now?" Dr. Ready asks.[21]

These skills encompass far more than motivation and time management, however: at the heart of the issue is learning how to learn. At Lyons, they have incorporated lessons for their middle and high school students each week on goal setting, how you communicate over email, how to set a schedule, and also on brain development and meta-cognitive skills (How do you know what you know?). "The kids who've traditionally been good students have really good answers to that, others say they wait to see their grade, they don't know until someone tells them," Onishi points out. "It's not like any of these things are new, they've just become so much bigger when you're in this scenario. There's an assumption that because kids like computers you can put one in front of them, but that's not true. Kids learn so much through osmosis, by looking at your neighbor to learn how to start, they used to glean from each other what to do. Or waiting for the teacher to talk to them one-on-one. But when you can't do that without actually raising your hand, the kid just leaves the meeting without knowing what to do. We're just beginning to realize how much we're missing."[22]

These issues are particularly difficult for students with special needs. A high school special education teacher explained that students who have been given an individualized education plan (IEP) often lack typical grade-level independence, so thrusting those students into a type of instruction that depends on their initiative and independence will inevitably lead to struggle without the proper classroom supports. "It's really tested my imagination about how we deliver the services we know work for kids," he said. "Replicating that in an online setting has been really, really tough."[23]

> We're just beginning to realize how much we're missing.

For some students, establishing a routine, set schedule has been key. Kamille Vargas, a parent of a 2nd grader at [Bronx Charter School for the Arts](#) in Hunts Point, told us that her daughter moves seamlessly through a full day of live classes because "the teachers have been telling them the schedule and what's coming next. A lot of repetition has made my life so much easier."[24]

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21   Interview with Douglas Ready, Ph.D. (Associate Professor of Education and Public Policy at Columbia University's Teachers College, and the Director of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education), May 26, 2020.

22   Interview with Taeko Onishi (Principal of Lyons Community school), May 20, 2020.

23   Interview with anonymous special education teacher, May 18, 2020.

24   Interview with Kamille Vargas (Parent at Bronx Charter School for the Arts), May 22, 2020.

But schools that serve older students are increasingly seeing the need for more scheduling flexibility. Many started remote teaching with an attempt to maintain students' usual schedules, but have since abandoned those plans due to low attendance at live sessions during the regular school day. Instead, they meet students for "office hours" or individual appointments when they can, or respond to texts, emails, and submitted assignments at all hours. "We've got teachers who are communicating with students all night, meeting them at the time they learn best," says Thompson.[25] But this approach inevitably allows some students to fall through the cracks, one teacher told us: "I'm often available on Google Meet, grading work and giving feedback in real time, but it's challenging to get kids to connect. The students who take advantage are the ones who have those skills and practices already."[26]

Not all students are struggling or disengaged right now; several parents told us about the ways their students are thriving. Some are more focused without the distractions of their peers, now that they have "less opportunity to chit-chat and pass notes in class."[27] Others are finally able to get the attention they needed from teachers: "In person the boisterous, rowdy kids get attention. This is allowing us to get to know our quieter kids," one educator said.[28] Some enjoy being able to finish a day's worth of assignments and lessons more quickly than a typical school day. "For some children who have focusing issues or struggle more with social stuff, being at home and only being on with a provider or a teacher by themselves has really helped them focus and move ahead. But that's not the case across the board by any stretch of the imagination," Zuckerman told us. "That's not a reason for remote learning, it's a reason for certain kids to have less-distracting circumstances."[29]

It's challenging to get kids to connect. The students who take advantage are the ones who have those skills and practices already.

25   Interview with Dan Thompson (AP of Operations and Instruction at HERO High School), May 13, 2020.

26   Interview with anonymous special education teacher, May 18, 2020.

27   Interview with Hayley Hernandez (Parent at MS 447 and PS 124), May 13, 2020.

28   Interview with Liza Engelberg (Director of Programs & Education at Edible SchoolYard NYC), May 12, 2020.

29   Interview with Julie Zuckerman (Principal of Castle Bridge, PS 513), May 21, 2020.

Lessons Learned

Prioritizing relationships, community, and student well-being

Every person we spoke to emphasized the importance of prioritizing students' social, emotional, and mental health needs during this remote learning period, and plan to continue doing so in the fall. "That's the most important thing right now," Zuckerman told us. "It's not the instruction…. We can't possibly expect the kind of growth and instructional academic gains that we did before. But right now, it's about a crisis of connection and community."[30] Schools that reported the most success in doing this remotely are ones that have long been attuned to students' social-emotional needs.

Community schools, which integrate student and family supports into their core work, were particularly poised to respond. Teitel, the

> Right now, it's about a crisis of connection and community.

community school director at PS 284 explained, "Having Partnership with Children and me addressing these issues already made us equipped. We were already looking through a holistic lens of providing for students' and families' needs to be ready to learn…Instead of having to outsource the social-emotional support and mental health support, we have it integrated into the school."[31] Takeesha Sheppard, a parent of a 2nd grader and the PTA President at [Brighter Choice Community School](#) in Bedford-Stuyvesant, shared with us how one of the core practices at her community school has been adapted online: "We have restorative circles each week with the principal and school social worker for kids to talk about issues that might be bothering them. It gives them an outlet to see each other, and see the principal they were so used to seeing. We also do it once a month for the family, asking them 'How are you dealing with remote learning?' It allows them a moment of grieving, and lets them know that no one is perfect, we're all in it together."[32]

Restorative circles, where each participant has the opportunity to share their thoughts, are one of many ways that some schools have worked hard to maintain a sense of community and belonging among their students and staff while they're remote from one another. Other schools are hosting weekly all-school meetings, advisory groups, virtual cafeterias at lunchtimes, and virtual spirit weeks that give students a chance to socialize, share how they're feeling, and connect with teachers or other staff they don't otherwise have the opportunity to see remotely. "The teachers are asking kids how they're feeling for the day, kids admit how they're doing emotionally, if they're hungry," one parent told us. "The lack of social interaction had been the biggest shortfall. But now they do breakout rooms on Zoom: they're given a prompt, kids talk on task for a little bit, then they enjoy themselves. [My daughter's] loneliness has reduced substantially."[33]

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30   *ibid.*

31   Interview with Alexandra Teitel (Community School Director at The Gregory Jocko Jackson School of Sports, Art, and Technology, PS 284 and Partnership with Children), May 27, 2020.

32   Interview with Takeesha Sheppard (Parent and PTA President at Brighter Choice Community School), May 26, 2020.

33   Interview with Kamille Vargas (Parent at Bronx Charter School for the Arts), May 22, 2020.

> Maybe we were able to get the kid connected to one teacher or one service provider and that was a win.

This is particularly problematic, however, for students who have difficulties connecting online. "It took us the better part of the first month to make sure that everyone was connected to an adult in some way, so that they're either in touch by phone or they managed to get the kids online," Zuckerman said. "Maybe we were able to get the kid connected to one teacher or one service provider and that was a win."[34] Some students have been forced to transfer schools in the midst of this crisis, such as those at long-term suspension sites that got sent back to their home schools. Robert Antoine, the principal of one such site, told us, "We're sending the student back but what structures are in place to accept the students back in the home school? Even though we sent an email to the principal, are they aware that the student has returned?... I could see in so many cases where that kid would become an afterthought, particularly for students who have difficulties connecting online."[35]

But where schools have been able to surmount these challenges, attending to students' social, emotional, and mental health and maintaining strong relationships with them as individuals has often led to improved academic engagement during remote learning as well. At HERO High, where advisors already had close relationships with their students and families, Thompson has noticed that "any engagement is entirely leveraged through relationships," now that students are working from home.[36] This was echoed by another teacher who said that "social-emotional learning is the most important thing, but doesn't have to be separate from school. Research says that a sense of belonging gives resilience."[37] These sentiments are backed up by the literature on culturally responsive-sustaining pedagogy, detailed in Section 2 of this report, that emphasizes honoring and valuing students as individuals and building authentic relationships with each student in the classroom.

Outreach and communication with families

Many teachers we spoke with validated the sentiment expressed by one of them that "a lot of the work as a teacher right now is to daily get in touch with students, identify needs, respond rapidly. This seems like an endless game, dependent on students' willingness or ability to communicate with us."[38] But the schools that felt they had greatly improved student attendance and engagement over the past three months attributed it to schoolwide efforts to aggressively track which students are logging on, completing assignments, or messaging teachers. This allowed them to focus outreach efforts on students who are most disengaged or most in need of "high-touch contact."[39]

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34   Interview with Julie Zuckerman (Principal of Castle Bridge, PS 513), May 21, 2020.

35   Interview with Robert Antoine (Principal of Brooklyn East Alternative Learning Center), May 21, 2020.

36   Interview with Dan Thompson (Assistant Principal of Operations and Instruction at HERO High School), May 13, 2020.

37   Interview with anonymous ELA teacher, May 18, 2020.

38   Interview with anonymous special education teacher, May 18, 2020.

39   Interview with Dan Thompson (Assistant Principal of Operations and Instruction at HERO High School), May 13, 2020.

Some schools have taken this load off teachers' shoulders and mobilized "outreach teams" of support staff like paraprofessionals, community partners, and even principals to do the work of reaching out to and checking in with families, Teitel explained. "Whether or not the student is coming online for live classes, we still have a big team of support members who are reaching out to check in with them," she said. "Asking them, 'How's everything going? Any other needs you're facing right now?'"[40]

Some have learned that it is important to use a variety of ways to be in touch because not all parents are comfortable texting with teachers and other school staff; some are more comfortable with a 3rd-party app like Google Classroom or Class Dojo. Many agreed that Zoom has become a valuable tool for parent meetings. "We've struggled for years at having meetings at various times and different people being left out because they couldn't travel, schedule, etc. I think Zoom is going to allow us to be more connected in better ways at greater distances," Zuckerman explained.[41] Sheppard says she has seen parent involvement at PTA meetings improve substantially since schools have shut down because the meetings are now all held on Zoom, saying that "being able to engage with more parents online than I've ever done in a school year was eye-opening for me."[42]

Providing relevant, challenging, and culturally responsive instruction

Challenges to remote learning notwithstanding, many schools reported a newfound sense of being able to teach content and skills that are more engaging and relevant to students' lives during the current moment. The cancellation of standardized tests and Regents exams this spring, combined with the new technological limitations and opportunities of teaching remotely, have freed and challenged many teachers to experiment with new topics and assignment formats that attempt to more deeply engage students and meet them where they are. "The silver lining of this pandemic has been the reprieve from mandated testing," according to Dr. Amy Stuart Wells, professor at Columbia University's Teachers College, director of the Public Good Project, and the executive director of the Reimagining Education Summer Institute. "This has allowed some educators to rethink their pedagogy, make it more student-centered, rethink that didactic way of learning where if the students have a slightly different way of understanding a concept because of their life experiences, which are different from those who write the tests, they don't succeed."[43]

> The silver lining of this pandemic has been the reprieve from mandated testing.

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40   Interview with Alexandra Teitel (Community School Director at The Gregory Jocko Jackson School of Sports, Art, and Technology, PS 284 and Partnership with Children), May 27, 2020.

41   Interview with Julie Zuckerman (Principal of Castle Bridge, PS 513), May 21, 2020.

42   Interview with Takeesha Sheppard (Parent and PTA President at Brighter Choice Community School), May 26, 2020.

43   Interview with Amy Stuart Wells, Ph.D. (Professor at Teachers College, Columbia University and Director of the Public Good Project and the Executive Director of the Reimagining Education Summer Institute), May 29, 2020.

At Lyons, this pursuit has taken the form of, "How do we help our young people be better at their lives, as opposed to trying to make them live in our life?" Onishi told us. "A lot have not traditionally been readers at home, so it's not enough to assign three chapters of this book [to read] at home and say we'll discuss it later. So now we've tried watching movies together and asking students to record a conversation about it with a friend or family member and send that to their teacher. If we can get them to do that more critically and thoughtfully, that would be amazing."[44]

> How do we help our young people be better at their lives, as opposed to trying to make them live in our life?

HERO High in the South Bronx has expanded their pre-existing focus on public health to address how society is dealing with the current crisis and how the students themselves can help in jobs like contact tracing. Rather than prepare for Regents exams in core classes, they've taken the opportunity to design new interdisciplinary units, co-taught by five teachers and attended by all students in the grade. Having the extra teachers in those large, live classes allows for one teacher to provide a short lecture on a topic like gender theory while other teachers moderate the chat, respond to students, and "shout out" good responses.[45]

Teachers of younger students have found success with creative forms of hands-on instruction that students can do from home. "One student created a pizza-making lesson with a recipe. Some made their own instructional videos," Mirem Villamil, the head garden manager for Edible Schoolyard NYC, told us. "It's hysterical, adorable, fantastic stuff. There is really learning happening and you're seeing it happen. With remote learning, you really have to engage them. When they respond it's amazing."[46] When students can drive the lesson, and use technology they're already familiar with, "it's really different from how we teach in person. It's showing our staff how tech can be amazing and open doors for students."[47] At the Bronx Charter School for the Arts, teachers had the students record videos for a business pitch, which has inspired some students to actually start businesses selling their artwork and crafts.[48]

What all of these new forms of teaching have in common is that they are "engaging students with digital tools in an integrated way, not as add-ons, but with students as producers and not consumers of multimodal text and media," as Dr. Price-Denis puts it.[49] By extension, this allows students to connect the assignments to their own lives, experiences, and concerns about what's happening around them. We heard repeatedly that students were much more likely to engage in the work if it was delivered by a teacher they knew, designed specifically for their

44   Interview with Taeko Onishi (Principal of Lyons Community school), May 20, 2020.

45   Interview with Dan Thompson (AP of Operations and Instruction at HERO High School), May 13, 2020.

46   Interview with Mirem Villamil (Head Garden Manager at Edible Schoolyard NYC), May 11, 2020.

47   Interview with Liza Engelberg (Director of Programs & Education at Edible SchoolYard NYC), May 12, 2020.

48   Interview with Kamille Vargas (Parent at Bronx Charter School for the Arts), May 22, 2020.

49   Interview with Detra Price-Denis, Ph.D. (Associate Professor of Education at Columbia University's Teachers College), June 4, 2020.

class, and required their active participation, not pre-packaged on a worksheet or by a program. Thompson makes this point succinctly: "Doing this well does not mean using BrainPop. Khan Academy is not the same as teaching."[50]

> Doing this well does not mean using BrainPop. Khan Academy is not the same as teaching.

As part of her work with the Public Good Project, Dr. Wells has helped several elementary schools conduct a remote storytelling unit that teaches students how to conduct interviews with elder family members or neighbors about their stories of resilience and overcoming tragedy. This requires students to demonstrate several academic and technical skills, like writing, recording, and production, but it's also centered in their own experience and connects back to culturally relevant practices. "We work with schools that are racially and socioeconomically diverse, and a resilience assessment shifts a slight advantage to kids who've had more adversity," she said. "When so much is weighted towards kids who have more advantage, this is a way to counter that. It's always our strategy to help kids learn from each other, shift ways to change the balance of what's normally prioritized."[51]

Arts and enrichment are also an opportunity to connect with students' cultural backgrounds. At Brighter Choice Community School, outside partners are still virtually teaching Flamenco dance and music lessons and African dance and culture.[52] Some schools like PS 284 have learned that only providing these opportunities "after" school has not translated well to the remote-learning context, because students are finished with their coursework before 3pm on most days and often don't log back in. Instead, they've incorporated enrichment programs into the students' daily schedule, so music teachers, for example, can now go into core classes at the end of the live lessons and students can stay logged in to participate.[53] Students at Bronx Charter School

> If you give them a meaningful way that kids can interact with their peers, they're going to want to come.

for the Arts are getting two live periods of arts a day, including dance, theatre, and music. Their teachers are using online drawing tutorials, or watching musicals together with students and encouraging kids to sing along. These arts lessons are tied into core subjects like math as well. All this creative work is made possible by the school's extra investment in art and other school supplies, sent directly to students' houses by Edukit.[54]

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50   Interview with Dan Thompson (Assistant Principal of Operations and Instruction at HERO High School), May 13, 2020.

51   Interview with Amy Stuart Wells, Ph.D. (Professor at Teachers College, Columbia University and Director of the Public Good Project and the Executive Director of the Reimagining Education Summer Institute), May 29, 2020.

52   Interview with Takeesha Sheppard (Parent and PTA President at Brighter Choice Community School), May 26, 2020.

53   Interview with Alexandra Teitel (Community School Director at The Gregory Jocko Jackson School of Sports, Art, and Technology, PS 284 and Partnership with Children), May 27, 2020.

54   Interview with Kamille Vargas (Parent at Bronx Charter School for the Arts), May 22, 2020.

A large part of teaching in culturally relevant and sustaining ways is collaborating across lines of difference. Some schools are finding it challenging to encourage students to collaborate remotely. One teacher told us that because of flexible schedules and limited technical skills, "learning has become hyper-individualized, which goes against my philosophy of teaching and our philosophy as a school."[55] But other schools have found some success encouraging collaboration because of the technological possibilities. As Samantha Pugh at Merrick Academy Charter School told us: "Using the breakout rooms, and having the ability to pull small groups and share screens… has really turned things around."[56] Again, this ties back to the relevance of students' lives, one teacher told us. "If you give them a meaningful way that kids can interact with their peers, they're going to want to come."[57]

Authentic assessment and timely feedback

Many teachers and school leaders we spoke with discussed how remote learning has improved their approach to assessing what students are learning. "Now anything we give them they can Google, so it's hard to check on content acquisition. You have to design everything open book, so you're really needing to hit higher-order kinds of questions, out-of-the-box thinking, and self-design," Shalom at the Computer School told us.[58] Research in K-12 remote and blended learning, summarized in the next section, agrees that these types of assessments are far better at boosting student outcomes than multiple-choice quizzes that only test rote learning.

One benefit of using online platforms is that they automatically track students' completion of assignments and help streamline communications with students. Once he had the appropriate software, Andrew Fitts, a math teacher at NYC iSchool, began sending each student a daily email that shows their assignment completion rate. But he admits that this kind of micro-tracking of student work can backfire and demotivate students if it's seen as a high-stakes assessment, so it's important that teachers strike a balance between the goals of completion and assessment. Since NYC iSchool uses a mastery-based approach, students have multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery of the skills taught, whether it's by answering questions accurately in a cumulative assessment given at the end of a unit or through additional assessments they may take that measure the same skills. "It matters less when they do it, so long as they eventually do it, which works well with online/remote instruction," Fitts said.[59]

Some teachers have found that responding more quickly than ever before to student work is a helpful tool to engage students. "Lots of teachers give immediate feedback. They get the ding on their computer and try to respond immediately. The kids are texting, calling, emailing at 2am, and the teachers

Every student is getting a different amount of instructional and learning time.

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55   Interview with anonymous special education teacher, May 18, 2020.

56   Interview with Samantha Pugh (Chief Academic Officer of the Merrick Academy Charter School), May 16, 2020.

57   Interview with anonymous ELA teacher, May 18, 2020.

58   Interview with Jessica Shalom (Assistant Principal of the Computer School, MS 245), June 1, 2020.

59   Interview with Andrew Fitts (Math teacher at NYC iSchool), May 20, 2020.

actually respond because they feel like the moment when a kid reaches out is so magical that they don't want to miss out on it," Onishi says.[60] Of course, this is an unsustainable burden for most teachers to bear, especially those supporting remote schooling for their own children or taking care of sick loved ones at home.

Although teachers are working hard to maintain high expectations, they universally acknowledged that "every student is getting a different amount of instructional and learning time," as Teitel said. At her school, they are "trying to address it by providing rigorous instruction through Google Classroom, providing assignments that are feasible, but also really engaging with the families and emphasizing the importance of academics at this time, and that we're partners in this together."[61]

Recognizing the need for flexibility

From the outset of this remote-learning experiment, the need for flexibility in instructional formats, scheduling, and technology use has been apparent. While the lack of central leadership on remote learning has frustrated many of the people we spoke with, they admitted that this has allowed each school and teacher the freedom to experiment and figure out what works for their students and families. Robert Antoine, principal of the Brooklyn East Alternative Learning Center, told us, "I value the things we've done to reinforce the flexibility of how we operated, how we did not become prisoners to our titles, or to the protocols and systems that sometimes people hide behind….There was this rigidity in many of our schools and throughout our systems and suddenly now this pandemic is saying, 'Guess what, all this does not matter. What matters most is the needs of the student and you should be flexible enough to assess your system.'"[62]

> What matters most is the needs of the student and you should be flexible enough to assess your system.

In many schools, this meant adapting schedules and protocols for every individual student. Zuckerman told us, "One of the first things we had to do was develop a separate plan and schedule for each child who had an IEP in conjunction with a parent. For children who need time for sensory breaks, to get up and move around, some parents have opted to reduce the number of times they see a therapist or counselor, or just keep with those sessions and not do as much of the regular class activities because we can't schedule it all in."[63]

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60 Interview with Taeko Onishi (Principal of Lyons Community school), May 20, 2020.

61 Interview with Alexandra Teitel (Community School Director at The Gregory Jocko Jackson School of Sports, Art, and Technology, PS 284 and Partnership with Children), May 27, 2020.

62 Interview with Robert Antoine (Principal of Brooklyn East Alternative Learning Center), May 21, 2020.

63 Interview with Julie Zuckerman (Principal of Castle Bridge, PS 513), May 21, 2020.

At Lyons, students, families, and teachers started the remote learning period with student-led conferences, where they planned what it was going to look like for each student. "For some kids [attending live lessons on Zoom] is mandatory because they need that overt structure. [For] some it's more optional."[64] At NYC iSchool, it has long been a part of the school culture that teachers get to innovate and try different ways of teaching. Some teachers record lessons or have live video sessions with small groups of kids. Others prefer to do more whole-class sessions and then kids use other content to do their work independently.[65]

Parents were also happy to be given such flexibility. "From friends in private schools, I know their live instruction might be four hours during the morning. The kids are locked in," said Sheppard, a parent and PTA president. "At first, I thought I wanted that, but I don't think that's the best way to go about the whole remote learning concept. I like the way my school is doing it. Give a set amount of assignments and break it up with live instruction so it's not so monotonous, so they're not just sitting in front of the computer for so long."[66]

> Giving kids more time is a human flexibility, which doesn't lessen expectations or rigor.

Shalom framed this need for flexibility in terms of fairness: "Giving kids more time is a human flexibility, which doesn't lessen expectations or rigor. We have tremendous flexibility around time frames, about being on for live lessons, knowing what resources kids have in their houses. We don't need to be bound by our old schedules. We don't need to fill time when you're done, so if it's a lesson that doesn't take the full period, that doesn't matter."[67]

Leadership, professional development, and preparing for fall

Teachers shared with us a full range of confidence, or lack of it, in the administrative leadership of the online learning effort. Some feel abandoned and left to figure out remote teaching without any guidance or support. Others have been proud of the work their schools have been doing to adapt over the last three months and begin preparing for the fall.

At those schools, principals and assistant principals, as well as the district superintendents over them, have prioritized professional development, one-on-one coaching, and opportunities for teachers to learn from each other. At MS 50, for example, Principal Ben Honoroff runs a staff classroom to communicate with teachers, show them ways to use Google Classroom, and discuss lessons they taught.[68]

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64   Interview with Taeko Onishi (Principal of Lyons Community school), May 20, 2020.

65   Interview with Isora Bailey (Principal of NYC iSchool), May 15, 2020.

66   Interview with Takeesha Sheppard (Parent and PTA President at Brighter Choice Community School), May 26, 2020.

67   Interview with Jessica Shalom (AP of the Computer School, MS 245), June 1, 2020.

68   Interview with Ben Honoroff (Principal of John D. Wells, MS 50), May 19, 2020

> My discussions with teachers have changed too. It's all about the task, what type of work, why did they assign it.

At [Brooklyn Scholars Charter School](#) in East New York, Principal Roxanne Thomas explained how classroom observations are easier now that they are remote: "I can open five tabs and go to five different classrooms, without leaving the office. I can have professional development without getting substitute teachers to find coverage."[69] PS 284 has established a Distance Learning Leaders "cabinet" including the principal, assistant principal, instructional coaches, and the community school director that meets twice a week to talk about how things are going and plan for the future.[70] These new opportunities have allowed for deeper pedagogical conversations, according to Nicholas Paarlberg, principal of the [Hostos-Lincoln Academy of Science in Mott Haven](#). "My discussions with teachers have changed too. It's all about the task, what type of work, why did they assign it, as opposed to starting the conversation with, 'Johnny forgot his homework or Johnny is acting out.'"[71]

In some cases, this is occurring at the district level too. One principal in District 2 told us that her superintendent Vivian Orlen "is doing a great job hosting weekly meetings for principals where they share best practices and learn new technology."[72] And Dennis Herring, principal of [The Science and Medicine Middle School](#) in Canarsie, acknowledged, "As the weeks have gone on the guidance that [the District 18 superintendent's team] has given us has been really, really helpful. The people that they're bringing in to partner and give us guidelines and ideas are helpful. They deserve a shout out for working hard to make things a little clearer for us."[73] Other interviews suggested that this level of district support is not happening across the board, however. Many schools are turning to other network affiliations (i.e. New Visions for Public Schools) to learn from other schools and access much-needed supports. Unfortunately, the majority of our city's schools are not formally affiliated with such networks, so they have been left largely on their own due to what they describe as a vacuum of district and DOE leadership.

Almost across the board, there is little faith in the DOE's central leadership, leading to high levels of anxiety and uncertainty about the next school year. Lyons principal Onishi told us that "We're going to need so much more support. This is so much more work—it's breaking some teachers. I'm worried about sustainability in the fall and budget

> I'm worried about sustainability in the fall and budget cuts aren't going to help.

69   Interview with Roxanne Thomas (Principal of Brooklyn Scholars Charter School), May 19, 2020.

70   Interview with Alexandra Teitel (Community School Director at The Gregory Jocko Jackson School of Sports, Art, and Technology, PS 284 and Partnership with Children), May 27, 2020.

71   Interview with Nicholas Paarlberg (Principal of the Hostos-Lincoln Academy of Science), May 15, 2020

72   Interview with anonymous principal, May 21, 2020

73   Interview with Dennis Herring (Principal of The Science and Medicine Middle School 366), May 26, 2020.

cuts aren't going to help. I know intellectually that I'm supposed to be planning for next year, but I'm still struggling because I feel like someone is still going to slip the rug out from under us. It would be good to know what things are going to look like."[74]

The issue of budget cuts has loomed large over any talk of preparation for the fall. Sheppard, PTA President at Brighter Choice Community School, told us that the school and parents are already searching for grants to compensate for expected budget cuts: "I feel as if I'd be living in a beautiful fantasy world if I relied on DOE to do this."[75] One of the cuts will likely fall on organizations like the District-Charter Collaborative, which facilitate knowledge sharing across schools. Michael Stoll, its director, shared the fear that "the inability to connect physically could cause schools to isolate from each other" and in so doing, weaken collaboration efforts citywide.[76]

Many are also concerned about how scheduling changes to account for social distancing are going to work in the fall. Every parent and most school leaders we spoke with said they would rather stay with entirely remote learning than attempt a staggered schedule with students physically attending school in half or alternating days because of the daycare and other logistical concerns that would result. One central DOE employee we spoke with on the condition of anonymity also highlighted the instructional problems that would arise from such arrangements: "This was a challenge to begin with, and now that's going to be exacerbated where we not only have to figure out what are the best intervention strategies, scaffolds, etc., but also have to figure out how to do them in two or three different modes, in remote learning and in-person learning." He also admitted the fear that "culturally responsive-sustaining education is going to take a backseat, and that's going to default back to education centered in the dominant mode of thinking….The ways that the system is making progress towards breaking that down and creating something new will be lost."[77]

These concerns highlight the fact that we are witnessing a watershed moment in public education with ramifications that will reverberate far beyond the upcoming year. As Dr. Kirkland of NYU declares,

> Now is a moment to rethink everything. And as we rethink everything, we have to center equity.

"Now is a moment to rethink everything. And as we rethink everything, we have to center equity."[78] There has rarely been so much agreement about the need for change, while at the same time facing unprecedented fiscal and logistical constraints. "This might be a Sputnik moment with no Sputnik money," Dr. Ready told us.[79]

74   Interview with Taeko Onishi (Principal of Lyons Community school), May 20, 2020.

75   Interview with Takeesha Sheppard (Parent and PTA President at Brighter Choice Community School), May 26, 2020.

76   Interview with Michael Stoll (Director of the District Charter Collaborative), May 19, 2020.

77   Interview with an anonymous central DOE employee, May 16, 2020.

78   Interview with David Kirkland, Ph.D. (Associate Professor at New York University and Executive Director of NYU Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools), June 9, 2020.

79   Interview with Douglas Ready, Ph.D. (Associate Professor of Education and Public Policy at Columbia University's Teachers College, and the Director of

There are also major concerns about the larger direction of reform. "Many of us are concerned with Gates and Cuomo getting together and putting everything online. That's horse pucky," Zuckerman believes.[80] Dr. Wells agrees: "There's always a problem when people who don't have a background try to fix education: they focus on mechanics, administration, technology, but the heart and soul is the teaching, learning, theory, social-emotional, psychological understanding of what all that means."[81]

What is clear from these interviews is that teachers, families, and school leaders who are currently doing this work on the ground, meeting students' needs and sustaining their developmental and intellectual growth against great odds, are the ones who should have the greatest say in the sweeping policy changes to come. "We need real leadership, people who do understand what's happening and the lift that it takes."[82]

> We need real leadership, people who do understand what's happening and the lift that it takes.

the Consortium for Policy Research in Education), May 26, 2020.

80   Interview with Julie Zuckerman (Principal of Castle Bridge, PS 513), May 21, 2020.

81   Interview with Amy Stuart Wells, Ph.D. (Professor at Teachers College, Columbia University and Director of the Public Good Project and Executive Director of the Reimagining Education Summer Institute), May 29, 2020.

82   Interview with Dan Thompson (Assistant Principal of Operations and Instruction at HERO High School), May 13, 2020.

Section 2: What the research tells us about how students learn equitably, digitally, and well

The previous section shared some of the struggles and successes that New York City teachers, school leaders, and parents have faced and the lessons they've learned during the past three months of emergency remote learning. Some of these struggles stem from thrusting educators and their students into the new and unfamiliar territory of remote learning without adequate time for training and preparation. But many of the challenges they faced are heightened versions of the inequitable conditions that have long plagued urban education. Longstanding resource disparities have widened the digital divide. Too many schools lack a relevant, challenging curriculum and teachers prepared to teach it. And the disproportionate concentration of students by race and socioeconomic status at so many of our schools has forced educators to first address the many out-of-school needs that their students bring with them to the classroom – virtual or otherwise – every day.

As a result of this crisis, we are once again in a moment of "reimagining" public K-12 education, faced with both a practical need and a political incentive to change the way it operates. There are some who want to take this opportunity to finally bring education into the digital era and take advantage of the several billion dollars in investments that have been made in education technology over the past two decades. Others have emphasized the need to fully embrace culturally responsive-sustaining education (CR-SE) in order to address the way that public education reproduces structural inequality, which would center student agency and identity, and challenge unjust structures like school segregation, disciplinary injustice, and other forms of marginalization.

This section reviews the rigorous academic research about both of these avenues of reform (K-12 remote and blended learning and CR-SE research), and critically examines how, or whether, both can be pursued at the same time. One of the key limitations of K-12 remote and blended learning research is that it often fails to account sufficiently for CR-SE, a gap that puts the City's attempts to increase educational equity in danger in an age of remote learning during and post-pandemic. At the same time, little research has been done to understand how to enact CR-SE practically via instructional technologies, though our interview findings suggest that this is a ripe area of exploration, and a necessary one as we plan for some version of remote learning through the fall.

> How do we imagine an education system that is removed from logics that penalize, that create punitive discourses and project deficit perspectives on the bodies of some of our students?

What is Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education (CR-SE)?

CR-SE draws upon several related fields of study, including culturally-responsive pedagogy, critical education studies, and educational equity, to call for a view of teaching, learning, and human development that recognizes diversity and cultural difference as assets and sources of knowledge. It also acknowledges the systemic factors at play that perpetuate racism and inequity. For instance, Dr. Kirkland asked the question: "How do we imagine an education system that is removed from logics that penalize, that create punitive discourses and project deficit perspectives on the bodies of some of our students? If we do particular things, we will more likely be able to envision systems or a set of environments that are welcoming and affirming to all of our students, particularly our most vulnerable students."[83] In addition, CR-SE emphasizes "the importance of being in a relationship and having a special emotional connection to the student in order to create a safe space for learning."[84] In this way, CR-SE is a vehicle to increase academic connectedness and deepen student understanding, which many posit best meets students' needs and boosts academic performance.[85] Across these literatures, a variety of practices and goals are attached to CR-SE, which can be broken up into micro and macro perspectives.

> CR-SE is a vehicle to increase academic connectedness and deepen student understanding, which many posit best meets students' needs and boosts academic performance.

Researchers taking a micro approach to CR-SE focus greatly on individual experiences and interactions in schools and communities. Rather than viewing students through a colorblind lens, students are viewed as individuals whose cultural backgrounds are a necessary asset to learning and teaching[86] and with pre-existing "funds of knowledge"[87] upon which they draw to learn. In addition, CR-SE research often promotes a strengths-based perspective with regard to students' abilities, both their academic strengths and equally (if not more importantly) their social-emotional strengths.[88] For instance, a student who might struggle with chemistry but loves hip-hop should have opportunities to marry hip-hop culture with academic content by writing and performing rapped verses that explain states of matter and intermolecular forces. Also, researchers emphasize that the relationship

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83   Interview with David Kirkland, Ph.D. (Associate Professor at New York University and Executive Director of NYU Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools), June 9, 2020.

84   Hammond, Z. (2015). *Culturally responsive teaching and the brain: Promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students.* California: Corwin Sage Publications.

85   Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But That's Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. *Theory Into Practice*, (34)3, 159-165.

86   Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *Educational Researcher*, 32, 465–491; Paris, D. (2012). Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A Needed Change in Stance, Terminology, and Practice. *Educational Researcher,* 41(3), 93–97.

87   Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D. & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, 31(2), 132–141.

88   Muhammad, G. (2019). *Cultivating genius: A four-layered framework for culturally and historically responsive literacy.* Scholastic.

between students and teachers must be one of authenticity, based on mutual cultural appreciation, reflection, and trust.[89] Finally, students' voice, agency, and creativity are regarded as essential elements of effective instruction,[90] for example, via school assignments that include choice, are relevant to current issues in students' worlds, and even leading to real-world action.[91]

Researchers taking a macro approach to CR-SE contend that institutional structures and high-level policies directly impact the quality of education for communities in poverty and of color.[92] These researchers

> Students' voice, agency, and creativity are regarded as essential elements of effective instruction.

have challenged the notion of the "achievement gap" as it is traditionally defined, arguing instead that an "opportunity gap" disproportionately impedes both students of color and students in poverty.[93] Over the past four decades, economic segregation has resulted in an uneven distribution of resources across households, communities, and schools.[94] Families who live in poverty are susceptible to morbidities associated with health, education, crime, access to nutritious foods, economic hardships, and overall wellbeing.[95] And because race and class are inextricably linked, children of color are more likely to be adversely affected and start school at a disadvantage.[96]

Such observations support what some policy researchers have said for many years, specifically that improving schools requires addressing non-school or "out-of-school" factors, most notably poverty.[97] Others argue that the major cause of disparate outcomes for children of color is a result of a long history of racism and

89   Emdin, C. (2016). *For white folks who teach in the hood... And the rest of y'all too: Reality pedagogy and urban education.* Beacon Press.

90   Morrell, E. & Collatos, A. M. (2002). Toward a critical teacher education: High school student sociologists as teacher educators. *Social Justice*, 29(4), 60–70.

91   Sealey-Ruiz, Y. & Greene, P. (2011). Embracing Urban Youth Culture in the Context of Education. *The Urban Review*, 43(3), 339–357.

92   Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). *The flat world and education: How America's commitment to equity will determine our future.* Teachers College Press.

93   Welner,K. & Carter, P. (2013). "Achievement Gaps Arise from Opportunity Gaps." In P. Carter and K. Welner (Eds), *Closing the Opportunity Gap: What America Must Do to Give Every Child an Even Chance* (pp. 1-10). New York: Oxford Press; Kozol, J. (2005). *The Shame of the Nation: The restoration of apartheid schooling in America.* New York: Crown Publishers.

94   Hamilton, D. & Darity, W. (2017). The Political Economy of Education, Financial Literacy, and the Racial Wealth Gap. *Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Review.* 99. 59-76; Reardon, S. & Bischoff, K. (2011). Income Inequality and Income Segregation. *American Journal of Sociology,* 116(4), 1092-1153.; Shedd, C. (2015). *Unequal city: Race, schools, and perceptions of injustice.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation; Johnson, H.B. (2006). *The American Dream and the Power of Wealth: Choosing Schools and Inheriting Inequality in the Land of Opportunity.* New York: Routledge.

95   Kozol, Jonathan. (1991). *Savage inequalities: Children in America's Schools.* New York: Crown Publisher.

96   Shedd, C. (2015). *Unequal city: Race, schools, and perceptions of injustice.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

97   Berliner, D. C. (2009). *Poverty and potential: Out-of-school factors and school success.* Boulder and Tempe: Education and the Public Interest Center & Education Policy Research Unit; Noguera, P. (2003). The trouble with Black boys: The role and influence of environmental and cultural factors on the academic performance of African American males. *Urban Education,* 38(4), 431–459; Neuman, S. B., & Celano, D. C. (2012). *Giving our children a fighting chance: Poverty, literacy, and the development of information capital.* New York: Teachers College Press.

disenfranchisement along the lines of both race and class.[98] Features of the school system like high-stakes tests operationalize the oppression of communities of color and in poverty,[99] both in the ways they attempt to "objectify" knowledge and learning,[100] and in the cultural knowledge that is presented on examinations as commonplace.[101] For instance, a test question that includes references to backyards, houses, and lawns might resonate with students who live in suburban settings, but might well be lost on students who live in urban areas.

The micro and macro approaches to CR-SE are, however, not so neatly separable. It is necessary to view CR-SE with what researchers call "critical bifocality,"[102] which argues that in order to fully understand and address issues of systemic inequity, one must view them with conceptual bifocals—observing simultaneously both macro institutional forces and micro individual lived experiences. The "Five 'Rs' of Real Integration," a framework developed by the student advocates of IntegrateNYC and later adopted by the mayoral-appointed School Diversity Advisory Group, captures this critical bifocality well. This framework acknowledges that school integration efforts need to go beyond the issue of Race and enrollment (the first "R"), because research has

> In order to fully understand and address issues of systemic inequity, one must view them with conceptual bifocals.

shown that diverse schools are not all truly integrated or equal.[103] To reach the goal of real integration, schools and policymakers must work on the micro and macro levels towards a fair distribution of 2) Resources,[104] 3) adequate teacher Representation and preparation,[105] and 4) Restorative justice, meant to counteract the disparity of disciplinary sanctions.[106]

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98   Bond, J. (1991). Reconstruction and the Southern movement for civil rights- then and now. *Teachers College Record*, 93(2), 221-235; Johnson, H.B. (2006).*; Lewis, A.E. & Diamond, J. (2015). *Despite Best Intentions: How Racial Inequality Thrives in Good Schools.* New York. Oxford Press; Taylor, E. (2016).*Foundations of Critical Race Theory in Education.* New York, Routledge.

99   Madaus, G., F. (1994). A technological and historical consideration of equity issues associated with proposals to change the nation's testing policy. *Harvard Educational Review*, 64(1), 76–95.

100   Behizadeh, N. (2014). Mitigating the dangers of a single story: Creating large-scale writing assessments aligned with sociocultural theory. *Educational Researcher*, 43(3), 125–136.

101   Giordano, G. (2007). H*ow testing came to dominate American schools: A history of educational assessment.* New York: Peter Lang.

102   Weis, L., & Fine, M. (2012). Critical bifocality and circuits of privilege: Expanding critical ethnographic theory and design. *Harvard Educational Review*, 82(2), 173–201.

103   Lewis, A.E. & Diamond, J. (2015). *Despite Best Intentions: How Racial Inequality Thrives in Good Schools.* New York. Oxford Press; Anderson, E. (2010). *The Imperative of Integration.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

104   Kozol, J. (2005). *The Shame of the Nation: The restoration of apartheid schooling in America.* New York: Crown Publishers.

105   Darling-Hammond, L. (2013). "What will it Take to Close the Opportunity Gap?" In P. Carter and K. Welner (Eds), *Closing the Opportunity Gap: What America Must Do to Give Every Child an Even Chance* (pp. 1-10). New York: Oxford Press.; Darling-Hammond, L. (2004). Inequality and the right to learn: Access to qualified teachers in California's public schools. *Teachers College Record*, 106, 1936–1966; Emdin, C. (2017).; Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, (32)3, 465-491.

106   Arcia, E. (2006). Achievement and enrollment status of suspended students: Outcomes in a large, multicultural school district. *Education and Urban Society*, 38, 359–369; Ferguson, A. A. (2000). *Bad boys: Public school and the making of Black masculinity.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press; Gay, G. (2006). Connections between classroom management and culturally responsive teaching. In C. M. Evertson & C. S. Weinstein (Eds.), *Handbook*

CR-SE falls under the final aspect of the framework, 5) Relationships, highlighting the micro needs for students to have authentic relationships with teachers and peers across lines of difference, but also pushing for CR-SE as a critical piece of systemic policy reform.

In January 2018, the New York State Board of Regents convened a panel of experts and stakeholders to develop a [framework](#) for CR-SE, spearheaded by Dr. Kirkland. The City DOE under the de Blasio Administration has also [adopted](#) a commitment to CR-SE, and, before March and the closing of the schools, districts and schools had begun hosting workshops and actively incorporating CR-SE into their planning, instruction, and assessments. CR-SE was a mayoral priority that was steadily building momentum. But as the DOE responded to Covid-19, and to protests in support of #BlackLivesMatter citywide, they risked losing the ground gained, not only because the pandemic was turning the school system on its ear, but specifically because of the DOE's choppy transition to remote learning.

What we know (and don't know) about K-12 remote and blended learning

Similar to the literature on CR-SE, the research about online learning encompasses a broad range of overlapping topics and subcategories, including remote learning, blended learning, personalized learning, instructional technology, and critical software studies. A key distinction is made between instructional models that are designed to be entirely remote and a much wider variety of models, programs, and instructional tools that are designed to be blended with or used as a supplement to face-to-face instruction, either through supervised use in the classroom or independent use at home.

Although we and many others have described this post-pandemic period of schooling as remote learning, it bears little resemblance to what the research on remote learning (also called distance or virtual learning/ schooling) examined before this crisis. That research has exclusively focused on the use of formal remote learning models, designed in advance to be implemented in learning management systems like Coursera or Blackboard that automate or facilitate many aspects of a teacher's practice like content delivery, tracking engagement, and grading assignments. Even Google Classroom, which is being used by almost all the schools we spoke with, is not designed as a formal learning management system for fully remote learning. It is designed to be used, as the product name suggests, in an actual "classroom." As a result, most schools and teachers are cobbling together a variety of instructional technologies meant for blended learning and virtual communication and adapting them to remote learning on the fly.

of classroom management (pp. 343–372). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum; Gregory, A., Skiba, R., & Noguera, P. (2010). The Achievement Gap and the Discipline Gap: Two Sides of the Same Coin?. *Educational Researcher*, 39(1), 59-68; Townsend, B. L. (2000). The disproportionate discipline of African American learners: Suspensions and expulsions. *Exceptional Children*, 66, 381–391.

This may not be a bad thing, however, because the rigorous academic research on full-time, formal remote learning models has shown consistently poor results compared to traditional face-to-face instruction, especially for K-12 learners.[107] It is important to note that none of these studies have observed

> The rigorous academic research on full-time, formal remote learning models has shown consistently poor results compared to traditional face-to-face instruction.

attempts to convert a whole, large urban school system to entirely remote learning, especially not in a time of crisis when the alternative is no schooling at all. Instead, all of the studies have either focused on small-scale implementation for single courses across a sample of traditional schools, or on the outcomes of entirely virtual private or charter schools. For example, one of the most common uses for remote learning in K-12 schools is online credit recovery for students to make up courses that they had initially failed. Several studies have found that those can actually hinder students' long-term understanding or success.[108] For students who take all their classes remotely, as in a virtual charter school, outcomes are often equally poor. Even a pro-charter advocacy organization concluded that virtual charter schools perform worse than traditional public schools.[109] While some students are successful in these remote courses or virtual schools, they tend to be the ones who already

> It is too often incorrectly assumed that teachers' traditional pedagogical skills and content knowledge will translate to a remote context.

had an "independent orientation towards learning," high intrinsic motivation, strong time management, and technology and literacy skills, all of which are typically found more in adult learners than K-12 students.[110] Among K-12 participants in such studies, the ones who already read and do math at grade level, have consistent parent support and guidance, are self-directed, learn well from visual materials, and are comfortable asking for help tend to be the most successful.[111]

107   J-PAL Evidence Review. (2019). "Will Technology Transform Education for the Better?" Cambridge, MA: Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab.

108   Heppen, J., Allensworth, E., Sorensen, N., Rickles, J., Walters, K., Taylor, S., Michelman, V., & Clements, P. (2016). Getting back on track: Comparing the effects of online and face-to-face credit recovery in algebra I. Chicago, IL: American Institute for Research; Stevens, D., & Frazelle, S. (2016). Online credit recovery: Enrollment and passing patterns in Montana Digital Academy courses. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest.

109   Barbour, M.K. (2019). "The Landscape of K-12 Online Learning: Examining What Is Known" in Moore and Diehl, Eds, *Handbook of Distance Education*: 4th Edition. Routledge.

110   Cavanaugh, C.S., Barbour, M.K., & Clark, T. (2009). Research and Practice in K-12 Online Learning: A Review of Open Access Literature. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 10 (1), p. 6.

111   Smith, R., Clark, T. & Blomeyer, R.L. (2005). A Synthesis of New Research on K–12 Online Learning. Learning Point Associates.

But for the typical student, research has documented many challenges with remote learning.[112] Students are expected to use new skills not required in traditional classrooms or by textbooks, like learning how to locate information, engage with it digitally, and communicate with teachers and classmates in new ways. Teachers and students in remote courses report a feeling of disconnect, stemming from not being able to see each other's reactions, fewer opportunities to work collaboratively, and barriers to picking up on verbal or nonverbal clues. Many students perceive their remote teachers to be less involved, supportive, and concerned with their progress compared to their face-to-face classroom teachers. Further, remote learning models too often lack an emphasis on active, engaged learning and fail to integrate evidence-based knowledge about effective teaching and learning. Similarly, remote teachers are not always supported by evidence-based professional development and training specific to remote learning; it is too often incorrectly assumed that teachers' traditional pedagogical skills and content knowledge will translate to a remote context.

> **Blended or hybrid learning, by contrast, has consistently performed better than entirely remote learning, and in some cases, better than traditional in-person.**

Blended or hybrid learning, by contrast, has consistently performed better than entirely remote learning, and in some cases, better than traditional in-person learning.[113] Typical blended learning models use software on individual devices or in small groups during part of face-to-face class time to allow students to move at their own pace (as in personalized learning models) or pursue different topics or activities of interest under the supervision of a teacher. The positive outcomes associated with this type of learning may be partly explained by the fact that students are receiving additional learning time or instructional resources beyond what traditional classrooms can usually provide, while still benefiting from face-to-face instruction and interactions with peers. Other possibilities include the specific practices that instructional technology allows for in a blended context, like providing immediate feedback, making use of more visual tools and manipulatives, or the opportunity for students who are less likely to speak up in a traditional classroom to participate in discussions or ask for help, which can contribute to closer relationships between students and their teachers.[114]

Some teachers "flip" this model on its head, using after-school hours for independent work on online assignments or lessons, and dedicating class time to group work, discussions, or creative projects. If New York City schools return to a staggered schedule of in-classroom alternating or half-days for students in the fall, many would likely employ a flipped model of blended learning to maximize hands-on, collaborative instruction when students are in the building (and at a social distance). However, this model is much less frequently explored in the research, due to the fact that it can't easily be standardized across teachers or schools. Another possibility is that most students will attend school in-person every day, but some will have to stay home periodically

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112   *ibid.*

113   J-PAL Evidence Review. (2019).

114   Smith, R., Clark, T. & Blomeyer, R.L. (2005).

because of exposure to the virus, or consistently if they or their family members face a higher risk of illness. No research thus far has considered a K-12 blended learning model where some students in the same class receive online instruction while others receive it in person.

Successful outcomes depend greatly on how the online learning curriculum is designed, delivered, and supported.

What is clear from the research about online learning – be it blended or remote – is that successful outcomes depend greatly on how the online learning curriculum is designed, delivered, and supported, along with the characteristics of the participating students.[115] Expanding access to computers, the internet, or "canned" online learning applications alone does not improve students' grades or test scores.[116] Key elements of successful programs are approaches like student-centered teaching, collaboration in small groups, problem-based learning, and performance-based assessments.[117] A meta-analysis by the United States Department of Education found that giving students control of their interactions with the material (e.g. personalized or responsive software, student-driven inquiry-based projects, or simulations) and prompting students to reflect on their learning, self-monitor their understanding, or set goals for what they will learn enhanced learning outcomes.[118] Researchers have found no clear difference between teaching "synchronously," with students and teachers together in real time, and teaching via "asynchronous" recordings or assignments.[119]

What does not appear to enhance outcomes, however, is adding videos or multiple-choice quizzes to remote or blended instruction.[120] Similarly, educational games were found to have a high impact on vocabulary learning in foreign languages, but there is less evidence related to their use in other subjects.[121] Rather than rely on such pre-packaged content and a one-size-fits-all approach, teachers must be able to reshape and differentiate the online content and activities, which forces them to reexamine the content's organization and pedagogy while enhancing and developing its instructional design.[122] This requires training the educator in both facilitating remote and blended learning and creating pedagogically sound curricula designed for online environments.

115   Barbour, M.K. (2019).

116   J-PAL Evidence Review. (2019).

117   Smith, R., Clark, T. & Blomeyer, R.L. (2005).

118   U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development (2009). Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning: A Meta-Analysis and Review of Online Learning Studies. Washington, D.C.

119   Education Endowment Foundation. (2020). Remote Learning, Rapid Evidence Assessment. London: Education Endowment Foundation.

120   U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development (2009).

121   Education Endowment Foundation. (2020).

122   Smith, R., Clark, T. & Blomeyer, R.L. (2005).

Opportunities and challenges for CR-SE in remote and blended learning

This brief review of the research about remote and blended learning suggests that, despite a long history of claims to revolutionize education, instructional technologies often fall short of their promise. But the research also shows that it can be successful when teachers are centering their students as individual learners, allowing their needs and interests to drive the curriculum, and giving them opportunities to show how they are building on their own skills and assets through authentic assessments. Dr. Gholdy Muhammad, associate professor at Georgia State University who has trained New York City teachers and administrators on CR-SE, sees the crux of the issue as this: "The real question is: Are equity practices and culturally responsive practices possible in remote learning?"[123] The research suggests it is indeed possible. Core tenets of good instruction in the traditional or online classroom are also core tenets of CR-SE. So although the online learning literature largely fails to acknowledge the role of CR-SE, and the CR-SE literature has only begun to discuss ways it can be applied to online learning, there are ripe areas of intersection between the two, as well as important ways that CR-SE can help us better understand and implement remote and blended learning.

> "The real question is: Are equity practices and culturally responsive practices possible in remote learning?" The research suggests it is indeed possible.

Opportunities

Personalized learning

One such intersection is the notion of personalized learning. In the context of educational technology, personalized learning often refers to remote or blended learning software that uses artificial intelligence (AI) or adaptive algorithms to respond to students progressing at their own pace through a course or unit. Personalization is also an important part of CR-SE, but it is used in the context of teachers adapting content or delivery to each student's strengths and interests, or allowing students to adapt it themselves, rather than technology doing the adapting. There is an overlap in goals here, if not in pedagogical strategies used to reach them. So how can these strategies become more aligned? Acknowledging that AI may never have the same sensitivity to cultural difference and students' individual assets that teachers can, personalized learning models should build in more space for teachers and students to interpret their own progress, pursue their own interests, and define their own instructional goals, while still potentially benefiting from the higher-level analysis or opportunities that instructional technology can provide. For example, one parent of a 2nd grader in the Bronx told us about how her daughter's school uses video conferencing to attend to individual students' needs: "The teachers are

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123   Interview with Gholdy Muhammad, Ph.D. (Associate Professor of Education at Georgia State University), June 4, 2020.

asking kids how they're feeling for the day, kids admit how they're doing emotionally, if they're hungry….The teachers are really in tune with the differences in their students. You can see when they're having an issue with an individual kid, they move them into a [video conferencing] breakout room to talk with the kid and the parents."[124]

Relationships

Another area of overlap between CR-SE and online learning is the importance of relationships. For CR-SE, meaningful, authentic relationships with each student are critical to learning. In remote learning, building such relationships is far harder but our interview findings suggest that it is equally if not more important. Lyons principal Taeko Onishi illustrated this point well when she said, "Even if we had the kids watch our math teacher do the exact same lesson as Khan Academy has, they'd watch him a thousand more times because they know him. The only reason we've done as well as we have is because of the connections we have to students."[125] This may explain findings from the remote and blended learning research: that canned or prepackaged content like videos are far less likely to lead to successful outcomes. Even if students are hearing the exact same words as a prepackaged lesson, if they are delivered by a teacher they know and trust (and if it shows that he put time and effort into creating it *for them*) they are more likely to respond.

> Teachers must be able to reshape and differentiate the online content and activities.

Further, prioritizing relationship-building over content, at least at first, may also prove to be more important in a remote or blended learning context. "I had always learned since becoming a teacher that building relationships is the foundation to running your classroom. The management will come, the teaching will come. But you need to have relationships with every single student that walks through your door," Kaitlyn Zwicke, a math teacher at [Queens High School for Information, Research, and Technology](#) in Far Rockaway, told us. "So, when we were posed with this remote learning challenge, I kind of took it back to Day One. I said, 'OK I have in-person relationships with my students – but now I have to create virtual relationships with them.' I made a welcome video for my students that I put in Google Classroom before I posted any assignments. I reviewed the structure of how Google Classroom would work. But then I was just honest with them and told them 'I have no idea what is going to happen in the next couple of months, but I care about you first. The math will come. But as long as you are healthy and your family is healthy, I want to make sure that everyone is OK. Then we will deal with the math.'"[126] She put this into practice by always starting with checking in with her students about their personal and family well-being instead of just asking them why they hadn't turned in a math assignment. After doing that, her responses went way up, *and* the amount of completed math assignments did too.

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124   Interview with Kamille Vargas (Parent at Bronx Charter School for the Arts), May 22, 2020.

125   Interview with Taeko Onishi (Principal of Lyons Community school), May 20, 2020.

126   Interview with Kaitlyn Zwicke, (Math teacher at Queens High School for Information, Research, and Technology), May 13, 2020.

Inquiry-based learning

Centering student voice and agency through inquiry-based learning is another potential opportunity for intersection between CR-SE and remote or blended learning. While research has found that the latter often fails to prioritize these pedagogical strategies, it has identified strong positive outcomes for the remote or blended learning models that give students control of their interactions with the material through inquiry-based projects and prompt students to reflect on their learning and self-monitor their understanding.[127] Dr. Price-Denis explained: "Things we know that don't work are long videos with no interactivity built into them. Just sitting there listening for 20 minutes is not effective. The peak is six to eight minutes. Even within that, you have to use a platform or software where you can build in questions, polls, discussion boards so that as students are watching, everyone has to stop at a certain place and do an activity. That way you're getting them to stop, reflect, think. Anything to break up that passivity and engage with the content as much as possible."[128]

> Things we know that don't work are long videos with no interactivity built into them. Just sitting there listening for 20 minutes is not effective.

And given the vast array of ways that students already use to express themselves online, teachers need not limit them to traditional assignments. Dr. Price-Denis suggests letting students choose the medium to make online content like a video in response to a text or lesson, which allows them to show skills that are often dismissed, and taps into the spaces they are already in to talk about what they are learning and reflecting on. Importantly, these kinds of non-traditional assignments can still be submitted to teachers via a school's learning environment, like Google Classroom. It's not a case where it's either/or. Rather, there are subtle ways that teachers can get the best of both worlds: innovative assignment creation and flexibility, while ensuring a single space where teachers and students can manage the logistics of learning consistently.

Rethinking outcomes, rigor, expectations

Remote and blended learning technologies make it possible for teachers to engage with students in some new ways that might help shake up the traditional dynamics between teacher and student, teaching and learning. For example, an increasing number of platforms allow teachers to pursue alternative forms of grading that track discrete skills and competencies students demonstrate. Some platforms even eliminate traditional metrics in favor of game-like achievements, including experience points (XP) and badges. A student's success in a class is based on doing things rather than absorbing information. The potential is for remote and blended learning technologies to usher in a new era of K-12 schooling that moves away from the one-size-fits-all culture

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127   U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development (2009).

128   Interview with Detra Price-Denis, Ph.D. (Associate Professor of Education at Columbia University's Teachers College), June 4, 2020.

> Even if we had the kids watch our math teacher do the exact same lesson as Khan Academy has, they'd watch him a thousand more times because they know him.

of curriculum delivery and assessment that so many students experience today. To be clear, a rationale for the kind of high-stakes testing we see today was originally to improve schools for students of color and in poverty by increasing public accountability. Accountability has increased, yes, but the high-stakes nature of the tests has also reinforced narrow and rote curriculum and instruction. A central DOE employee, speaking on the condition of anonymity, shared with us, "How do we rethink longstanding paradigms – grading being the one for me? I think people just need to go back to the drawing board…There has to be a move towards grading [that reflects] what students do or don't know and what skills they have or haven't acquired. Moving away from competition, towards grading as a reflection of knowledge and growth."[129] While remote and blended learning technologies hold some promise for helping teachers reimagine their curriculum, instruction, and assessments, they will find that challenges persist if the broader education system does not shake its reliance on current academic standards, curricula resources, and testing instruments.

Challenges

Despite these opportunities for harmonizing CR-SE and remote or blended learning, several challenges remain that need to be more fully explored in the research and the policy conversation.

Technology Design

To start, there are subtle ways in which technology design itself affects the kinds of pedagogy made possible, while also providing hidden channels for data collection and monetization.[130] Digital technologies are not neutral instructional instruments like pencils and paper; they are dynamic, created by human beings whose assumptions about the world are literally encoded into software and can perpetuate inequity in unforeseen ways.[131] For instance, software developers might design instructional technologies that privilege the collection of marketing data

> Digital technologies are not neutral instructional instruments like pencils and paper.

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129   Interview with anonymous DOE employee, May 16, 2020.

130   Williamson, B. (2015). Governing software: Networks, databases and algorithmic power in the digital governance of public education. *Learning, Media and Technology,* 40(1), 83–105; Selwyn, N. (2014). *Distrusting educational technology: Critical questions for changing times.* Routledge.

131   Frabetti, F. (2015). *Software theory: A cultural and philosophical study.* New York: Rowan & Littlefield Education. Berry, D. (2011). *The philosophy of software: Code and mediation in the digital age.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

like users' gender, age, and zip code rather than sound pedagogy. Methods for critically analyzing the hidden ways software design impacts pedagogy exist, though are not yet widely applied.[132] For example, when schools used Zoom for live instruction at the start of remote learning, they were mostly unaware that students' data, including voices, images, and even names, were sometimes made publicly accessible. The problem originated not in teachers' use, but in the default settings that Zoom's product designers put in place. The teachers used the product exactly as Zoom intended. The company, however, wanted users to be able to seamlessly install, launch, and use their product – all of which go much faster when security measures are relaxed.

Cultural bias

One of the core tenets of CR-SE is that teachers work with students to create curricula and assessments that are authentic and responsive to the challenges students face in their real lives. That can be a problem, however, when so much of the digital content available and the assessments required by the City and State are not designed with CR-SE in mind. Lyons Principal Taeko Onishi noted that if digital content "reflects our kids and something they are interested in...and not the Western canon" then there's a greater chance students will learn deeply from it, that they'll want to engage.[133] Such curricular decisions, however, cannot be separated so easily from assessments. In many schools, high-stakes standardized tests too-often dictate curricular and instructional decisions. Whereas such tests are supposed to provide an empirically objective measure of what students learn in order to help schools improve the quality

> The high-stakes nature of the tests washes back into classrooms and influences what and how teachers choose to.

of instruction, the reality is that high-stakes tests have what researchers call a "negative washback" effect on curriculum and teaching.[134] The high-stakes nature of the tests washes back into classrooms and influences what and how teachers choose to teach. In schools where test scores are good, less negative washback occurs, less narrowing of the curriculum and teaching methods. In schools where test scores are low, more negative washback occurs. This has caused school leaders and scholars like Dr. Wells to rethink the role that standards and traditional assessment paradigms play. "There is a growing backlash against standardized testing," she said. "A good example is the many colleges no longer accepting SATs. People are over-tested, starting to step back and say what have we done to this whole generation?"[135] In short, while there is no shortage of digital content and testing instruments available to schools, such resources do not often appear to reflect the principles of CR-SE, which might complicate teachers' efforts to make remote learning culturally responsive.

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132   Lynch, T. L. (2015). *The hidden role of software in educational research: Policy to practice.* Routledge.

133   Interview with Taeko Onishi (Principal of Lyons Community school), May 20, 2020.

134   Behizadeh, N. (2014). Mitigating the dangers of a single story: Creating large-scale writing assessments aligned with sociocultural theory. *Educational Researcher*, 43(3), 125–136.

135   Interview with Amy Stuart Wells, Ph.D. (Professor at Teachers College, Columbia University and Director of the Public Good Project and the Executive Director of the Reimagining Education Summer Institute), May 29, 2020.

Saturation points

Enthusiasm for using technology in education has a long history,[136] one that documents compellingly that technology adoption alone seldom improves teaching practice, resulting in technologies being "oversold and underused."[137] Furthermore, well-intentioned and -funded programs to provide computers for each student often fail to account for socio-cultural factors that comprise the acts of learning and teaching.[138] While it can be tempting to regard technology as a panacea, making any technology usage successful in schools requires patience, nuance, and persistence. When it comes to bolstering online learning with CR-SE practices, the challenges will present themselves on two fronts. First, it is challenging enough to launch a large-scale technology initiative, especially for 1.1 million students and 75,000 teachers. Everything from devices to internet access to logging in to forgotten passwords, it all has to be planned for and overseen. Second, if CR-SE practices were not already in place in schools, expecting teachers to embrace such new practices while juggling so many other changes to their work might not be realistic. Dr. Muhammad of Georgia State acknowledged the reality of teachers' capacity in this time of crisis: "If equity and culturally responsive practices weren't happening before remote learning, it's very likely they're not happening during remote learning. Teachers who may have just gone to packets and worksheets a lot as their go-to learning mechanism in classrooms, probably would go to that during remote learning. That problem just transferred over to a new platform of learning."[139] The sustained nature of the crisis response will push some teachers to their saturation points at different paces. No technology can fix that, but creating a supportive professional culture with the right resources and support systems might help teachers cope.

> Well-intentioned and funded programs to provide computers for each student often fail to account for socio-cultural factors that comprise the acts of learning and teaching.

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136   Cuban, L. (1986). *Teachers and machines: The classroom use of technology since 1920.* Teachers College Press.

137   Cuban, L. (2001). *Oversold & underused: Computers in the classroom.* Harvard University Press.

138   Philip, T. M., & Garcia, A. D. (2013). The importance of still teaching the iGeneration: New technologies and the centrality of pedagogy. Harvard Educational Review, 83(2), 300–319.

139   Interview with Gholdy Muhammad, Ph.D. (Associate Professor of Education at Georgia State University), June 4, 2020

Section 3: Recommendations

This report comes at the tail end of an unprecedented moment, as the 2019-20 school year ends and families, school staff, and central administrators have time to pause and reflect on what just happened. Our findings highlight the many challenges they must now address to prepare for some version of remote or blended learning moving forward. But they also reveal key opportunities for how schools, school districts, and central DOE and City leadership can advance the goal of culturally responsive-sustaining education (CR-SE) to help all students learn equitably, digitally, and well.

This section now turns to the specific high-leverage actions that stakeholders should take to help ensure CR-SE continues to expand throughout the city via remote and blended learning models. It's not meant to be exhaustive; it's meant to be strategic. The recommendations focus on equitable instruction, rather than safety protocols, scheduling logistics, admissions policies, and other concerns post-Covid-19 that have been well-documented by the other resources we list in the Appendix.

While we direct our recommendations and sub-recommendations to specific different audiences (i.e. City leadership, DOE leadership, Schools & Districts, and Families), there are a series of principles that are woven throughout:

- City and district leaders need to provide schools with more specific guidance on curricular, instructional, and assessment practices via blended and remote learning models, while allocating sufficient budgetary resources for planning and implementation, as soon as possible. This includes: pre-built instructional models, curated high-quality content, and ongoing professional development.

- City, district, and school leaders must put CR-SE and SEL at the forefront of instructional and technological decision-making starting this fall and continuing for the long-term. Teachers must have clear examples of what it looks like to weave CR-SE and SEL into blended and remote models of learning, examples that they can adopt or adapt confidently for their own practice. Furthermore, officials must ensure that CR-SE and SEL are emphasized in key accountability documents already in use citywide.

- City, district, and school leaders must provide resources for all teachers to administer assessments to determine students' baseline academic and social-emotional needs in September; differentiate instruction via blended and online learning models based on those assessments, as well as CR-SE instructional practices; and teach explicitly the executive functioning and computer skills necessary for students to confidently manage their own learning when adults cannot be present.

- City, district, and school leaders must do more to honestly engage families in key decision-making processes, support families in preparing for the fall, and communicate systematically and clearly when decisions have been made.

City leadership

1. **Allocate sufficient funding for key goods and services essential for ensuring CR-SE is realized via blended and remote learning models**, including
   a. devices, maintenance, and internet access for all families in need citywide
   b. school- and district-based curriculum planning and ongoing professional development in
      i. blended and remote learning models
      ii. translating CR-SE principles into blended and remote models
   c. increased mental health and wellness counseling resources for students
2. **As soon as possible, confirm policy guidance with the State** regarding
   a. attendance and required hours for instruction
   b. class size flexibility
   c. parents' rights to keep their child home if they feel school will be unsafe due to Covid-19
3. **Communicate key decision points and rationales with the public in a regular, consistent, and authentically transparent manner**
   a. live stream and archive public events meant to engage families and the public
   b. transcribe public events in multiple languages and archive transcripts for community reference in the future
4. **Advocate, via the Mayor's Education Sector Advisory Council, that the Board of Regents and State Education Department begin to reimagine new parameters for**
   a. graduation and promotion requirements
   b. State-mandated testing
   c. achievement standards that reflect the values of CR-SE

DOE leadership

1. **Appoint a Deputy Chancellor for digital learning to oversee the City's broader digital learning strategy to ensure quality instruction.** The Deputy Chancellor would
   a. collaborate with the Division of Teaching and Learning leadership to ensure the academic goals of the DOE can be rigorously, sustainably, and equitably implemented, by
      i. identifying and implementing evidence-based professional development initiatives that overlay the following priority areas
         1. CR-SE
         2. blended and remote learning methods
         3. social-emotional learning
         4. trauma-informed therapeutic strategies, such as the Life Space Crisis Intervention (LSCI) model
         5. serving students with disabilities, language learners, and other special populations for whom remote learning is especially hard and for whom face-to-face contact with teachers and specialists is so vital

    ii.   leveraging existing centralized infrastructure, like WeTeachNYC, to ensure that there is a single consistent space where all DOE stakeholders know they can share and find high-quality professional support and resources, including online professional communities

    iii.   using central instructional teams to design blended and remote "Start of School" two-week introductory unit for every grade level and content area that can be customized at the school level, which would

        1.   help teachers assess students' social-emotional needs

        2.   set a tone of culturally responsive-sustaining education

        3.   help students strengthen executive functioning needed for blended and remote learning

        4.   save teachers throughout the city thousands of hours of preparation time, and

        5.   provide teachers with "breathing room" at the start of the year to get their bearings, build relationships with students, and adjust their practices to unknown challenges

b.   in addition to supporting schools' use of platforms that have proven effective for their students this spring, also pilot a catalog of citywide virtual courses (i.e. building on the existing infrastructure of the iLearnNYC program) taught by well-trained online DOE teachers, and supported by teachers at students' current schools, which will

    i.   provide a safety net for students whose learning is interrupted, ensuring that they have access to high-quality remote instruction without putting additional responsibility on current face-to-face teachers

    ii.   provide a safety net for teachers who are unable to teach in face-to-face settings due to health concerns

    iii.   offer opportunities for students across the city to take a la carte courses that might not otherwise be available in their schools (i.e. Advanced Placement courses, second languages)

c.   require all schools to have a staff member with "Ed Tech Specialist" certification within 2 years (this can be attained through individual pathways or teacher education program; it does not require additional headcount)

d.   collaborate with the Chief Information Officer in the Division of Instructional and Informational Technology (DIIT) to ensure alignment between the DOE's instructional and technological strategies. For example:

    i.   establish a system for distributing and maintaining devices, including ongoing internet access for families

    ii.   manage ongoing professional development for schools' Ed Tech Specialists, including both instructional and technological training related to blended and online learning

    iii.   offer ongoing training and resource supports to ensure data ethics and privacy are prioritized at the school-level

e.   create support materials for parents who are tasked with facilitating their children's learning at home, including

      i.   launch regular support groups in multiple languages that convene via conference call to minimize technical requirements for participation, structured by central team but facilitated by districts and schools

      ii.   create online training courses in multiple languages for parents that help them better understand how to support their children's learning

      iii.   launch a centralized parent hotline and "help desk" email so there is one place where parents can always reach out with questions about supporting their child's learning if their schools do not respond sufficiently. Centralizing this kind of support has the added benefit of

1. taking some pressure off schools if they are overwhelmed and cannot manage swells of issues
2. giving central offices insight into what kinds of supports parents need, which makes it more likely to respond efficiently
3. protecting against parent concerns getting lost as they are communicated up the chain of command from school to districts to other offices

2. **Reimagine citywide accountability structures to ensure that students' needs post-Covid19 drive key decision-making and resource allocation at the district and school level.** For example:

    a. renovate the current Quality Review process to account for blended and remote learning practices, particularly through the lens of CR-SE

    b. revise Comprehensive Education Plan templates in order to

      i.   be written in a more family-facing tone

      ii.   include a new "blended and remote learning" section

      iii.   be submitted via a central information system so all reports are available publicly and can easily be searched and compared

    c. sharpen systems for reporting key data publicly to help ensure the public remain informed and that stakeholders can support DOE officials in continuously improving the school system. Data might include:

      i.   attendance (accounting for student and family need during periods of remote learning)

      ii.   help requests (i.e. help desk ticket tracking) from students and families who need assistance with their devices, internet access, and blended and online learning

      iii.   survey data recently collected related to families' experiences with remote learning, including periodic follow-up surveys that gauge improvement

      iv.   new survey questions related to blended and remote learning planning and implementation in the Annual School Surveys

      v.   school-level bandwidth data rather than building-level bandwidth data

      vi.   inventory of devices (i.e. iPads, Chromebooks, desktops, interactive whiteboards) assigned to every school

      vii. inventory of software applications being used to operationalize blended and online learning, including mobile apps used to communicate with families

3. **Redouble efforts to build trust by engaging families at key decision points and in an ongoing manner**, including
   a. assess the efficacy of Community Education Councils (CECs) across the city and invest in maximizing them as key sites of parent and community engagement. For example:
      i. identify which CECs are most effective and codify what they tell us about how CECs should best be managed
      ii. strengthen the relationships between CECs and other parent involvement mechanisms at schools like the PTA and PA
      iii. deepen community-based organization participation in CECs
      iv. live stream CEC meetings so families that cannot attend in person can still participate, making an audio and written transcript (in multiple languages) available to the public
   b. convene public meetings or town halls when key decisions must be made in a timely manner to ensure multiple family perspectives inform the DOE's thinking. For example:
      i. when deciding what next year's school model should look like, parents of Pre-K and elementary aged children might be more eager for face-to-face school to be an option because parents of younger children rely more heavily on child care to work, whereas parents of older students might be more comfortable with creative blended or hybrid models—especially if it lessened the amount of time students would spend on mass transit in the wake of Covid-19
      ii. for all official public dialogues with families, whether convened by a district or central offices, audio and written transcripts (in multiple languages) should be provided by the DOE as a way to archive the discussion for future reference and to build trust with families
   c. make strategic updates to the process by which family information is collected and shared. For example:
      i. digitize the "blue card" process by which schools collect family contact information to ensure it is up-to-date and efficiently accessible
      ii. streamline mechanisms central and district teams use to communicate regularly with parents, including coordinating messaging clearly across multiple public channels like DOE website, Twitter, and Facebook

Districts & Schools

1. **Plan for the year's curriculum, instruction, and assessments with explicit and ambitious goals to put CR-SE at the forefront of blended and remote learning models.** For example:
   a. District leaders should
      i. update goal-setting documentation to operationalize explicit and ambitious goals that reflect the challenges and opportunities in realizing CR-SE practices in blended and remote instruction
      ii. adjust instruments used for superintendent visitations and walk-throughs to emphasize how CR-SE is operationalized via blended and remote learning models

iii. help schools translate best practices as articulated in the Danielson Framework for blended and online learning models

iv. convene school leaders to learn from experts and each other about the best ways to operationalize CR-SE via blended and remote learning models

b. School leaders should

i. consider blended models of instruction that can be "dialed up" for remote learning or "dialed down" for face-to-face instruction, as needed

ii. design a school wide process for orienting new students, and for building community in blended and remote contexts

iii. work with teams and community partners to identify specific ways to translate CR-SE practices into a caring pedagogy that puts students' social-emotional learning (SEL) needs first

iv. assign effective blended and online teachers as lead teachers to adapt curriculum (delivery and differentiation) and support colleagues

v. deploy non-instructional staff and community partners creatively to support students and community-building in a remote or blended context

vi. organize rotating schedule of virtual intervisitations and meetings within and across schools

vii. establish school-wide communication protocols for how teachers and staff communicate with families, including coordinating across grade levels and disciplinary teams

viii. lead your community in discussions about what terms like "rigor" and "achievement" mean in a post-pandemic and blended and remote learning school model, including alternative forms of grading that might better indicate students' learning needs, such as mastery- or competency-based learning and portfolio-based assessments

ix. invite feedback from families about remote learning in your school, what worked and what could be improved

c. Teaching teams should

i. identify baseline assessments that can be used to determine personalized student learning needs—both academic and SEL

ii. emphasize methods of differentiation in all classrooms, based on academic, SEL, and linguistic needs

iii. create space in curricula to explicitly teach students key academic and SEL skills they need to manage blended and remote learning, including

1. executive functioning skills that can help prime students to be independent, self-driven learners

2. basic computer skills as well as specific skills related to the technologies and practices at a specific school (i.e. how to access Google Classroom, keep track of one's assignments, and submit an assignment via photo)

2. **Embrace creative approaches to budget and human capital that transform funding constraints into innovative solutions.** For example:
    a. compensate teachers to meet and plan for online learning over the summer; if funding is not available, explore creative alternatives like Continuing Teacher and Leader Education (CTLE) credits
    b. leverage existing budget lines to meet new needs that have emerged (e.g. use funding for a data manager to compensate Ed Tech Specialist, combining those roles if needed)
    c. work with key internal stakeholders to identify new ways for teachers and staff to contribute to the community in the event that they are unable to be in the school physically
3. **Audit school websites to ensure that information about the school is clearly available to families so families can confidently support their children's learning at home**, including
    a. family-friendly letter of welcome from school leaders and grade/content-area lead teachers, specifically describing the school's plan for blended and remote learning
    b. links to important technology applications the school uses, including what data companies have access to
    c. privacy guidelines for families and teachers based on a review use of teachers' current practices using digital technology with students
    d. curriculum maps for all grades and content areas
    e. clear information regarding other communication channels like Twitter and Facebook

Families

1. **To ensure the school understands and meets your child's needs, reflect with your child on the quality of learning they experienced and share feedback with your child's principal.**
    Questions to consider might include
    a. Was my child clear on what was being expected by their teachers each day?
    b. Did my child have a communicative relationship with their teachers, and were the teachers responsive when contacted?
    c. When my child engaged in work for school, did it seem like a "throw away" assignment or did the teacher appear to thoughtfully frame an activity that challenged my child?
    d. What was the quality of feedback that my child received from the teacher? Did the feedback identify what my child did well and what my child specifically needed to do to grow further?
    e. Did the school create social opportunities for students to connect online, like they would at school?
    f. How clearly did my child's teachers and staff communicate with our family? What could be improved so everyone gets the information they need efficiently in the future?
    g. How confident was I as a parent in helping my child manage remote learning, both the technologies and the academic content?

2. **To prepare for the fall, begin planning now for the possibility of alternative school day scheduling,** using questions like
    a. What kinds of precautions must the school take for make me feel comfortable sending my child back in September—from a physical and emotional health perspective?
    b. How is my child doing emotionally and what kinds of counseling or support will s/he need from school?
    c. If my child only attends school for parts of days or for fewer than five days a week, how will I manage the child care needs?
    d. How effective was the device we used for remote learning this spring? If it was insufficient, what can my school or district do to help us secure a more appropriate device for learning?
    e. Are we sure we will have adequate internet access every month going forward? If not, what can my school or district do to help us figure out how to secure internet access?
    f. Does my school have our family's most up-to-date contact information? (If not, reach out to your school's parent coordinator.)

Appendix: Additional resources

On Reopening Schools Post-Covid-19:

Return to School Roadmap by Opportunity Labs, April 2020

Framework for reopening schools by UNESCO, April 2020

A Blueprint for Back to School by John P. Bailey and Frederick M. Hess of the American Enterprise Institute, May 2020

On CR-SE:

Guidance On Culturally Responsive-Sustaining School Reopenings: Centering Equity to Humanize the Process of Coming Back Together by Dr. David E. Kirkland, Executive Director of the NYU Metropolitan Center For Research On Equity And The Transformation Of Schools, May 2020

Reimagining Education: Teaching, Learning and Leading for a Racially Just Society Summer Institute at Columbia University's Teachers College (*This July's conference will be held virtually. NYC Educators can get 2-for-1 pricing and earn 30 CTLE credits)*

Guidance on Culturally Responsive Sustaining Remote Education: Centering Equity, Access, and Educational Justice by Dr. David E. Kirkland, Executive Director of the NYU Metropolitan Center For Research On Equity And The Transformation Of Schools

Guidance on Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Remote Education: Centering Equity, Access, and Educational Justice by NYU Metro Center

Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education by Pamela D'Andrea Martínez at the NYU Metro Center

Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework by the New York State Education Department, January 2018

On K-12 Online Learning:

Exploring the Evidence on Virtual and Blended Learning by the NYU Research Alliance for New York City Schools, May 2020

Remote Learning: Rapid Evidence Assessment by the Education Endowment Foundation, April 2020

Evidence Review: Will Technology Transform Education for the Better? by the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), 2019

Strategies for Implementing Personalized Learning While Evidence and Resources Are Underdeveloped by John F. Pane of the RAND Corporation, October 2018

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