Introduction

Based on the public health necessity presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, most U.S. schools closed their physical spaces in March 2020. Early evidence suggests that the closing of schools and migration to online learning has had harmful effects on children’s academic performance. Research on so-called “summer loss” and on recovery from natural disasters (e.g. Hurricane Katrina) also shows that school disruption can slow academic progress and hamper social-emotional development of children. Moreover, the health crisis has surfaced for a broader public what many educators and policy makers have known for decades, namely growing disparities of resources and educational outcomes for historically marginalized, disadvantaged, and underserved students.

Historic inequities make it all the more important to focus attention not only on the near-term needs of America’s 55 million public school students, but on whether and how the education system can continue the struggle for access and opportunity. The coincidence of COVID-19 with the overdue American reckoning with anti-Black violence and racism puts the current and ongoing educational challenge in stark relief.

Separating short-term resilience and crisis management from mending the cleavages that require sustained long-term tenacity creates a false dichotomy: the imperative is to maintain a steady vision of systemic overhaul even as preparations are made for the coming academic year. Immediate decisions need to be framed in such a way as to prevent a return to “normal” from becoming an excuse to abandon the quest for disturbing what has been for too many children an unfair and destructive “normal.”

The National Academy of Education (NAEd) convened groups of scholars, policy leaders, and educators to address the fundamental question: how do we address educational inequities in the face of the COVID-19 emergency, a challenge made even more urgent in the context of the resurgent American crisis of racial justice.

Over a two-week period in July 2020, experts in reading, mathematics, and well-being (the latter signifying our intent to include more than academic achievement in discussions of the sources and remedies for educational inequality) wrestled with the following six questions:

1. What inequities in reading/mathematics/whole person well-being have been exacerbated by the pandemic?
2. What are the biggest challenges for addressing unfinished curricular learning in reading and mathematics instruction?
3. What strategies are you using/recommending/discussing that may be “best bets” for reading/mathematics learning?
4. What are the biggest challenges in addressing the effects of trauma on student well-being and social-emotional health with emphasis on the most vulnerable student groups?
5. For schools using different modes of learning, including in-person, online, and a hybrid, what strategies would you recommend for bolstering/supporting well-being through these different platforms?
6. If schools continue online learning, what are possible strategies for making the experience as successful as possible?

Challenges to Academic Learning and Social-Emotional Development

Although the American public school system has a history of resilience and responsiveness, the education community was not prepared for a global pandemic that has so far infected five million Americans and caused the deaths of over 160,000. Indeed, the attempt at a “seamless transition” to home-based school learning came with many seams, varying substantially across our 15,000 districts and 130,000 schools. By and large, though, all schools and districts had to address technology issues including access to computers and other devices and wi-fi connectivity; their remarkable efforts notwithstanding, basic requirements for distance learning have not been met for all students.

In addition, the drastically different mode of teaching required some districts to negotiate new terms with teacher unions; for example, what were the new requirements for teaching and how would the potential slowing of learning progress be accounted for fairly? As important, how would districts and schools that provide breakfast and lunch for their most vulnerable students address food insecurity and food delivery? These challenges, too, had the most severe impacts on disadvantaged and historically marginalized students.

Since March 2020, with two crises – COVID-19 and the awakening for many Americans of ongoing racial injustice – the American education system as we know it has been disrupted and students’ academic and social-emotional learning have been affected. During the NAEd discussions, practicing educators and researchers identified the following key concerns:

- **Structural impediments and uneven access to online learning**, including problems of technology and the need for new forms of family support;
- **Disruption in student engagement** with school leaders, teachers, and peers that may threaten mental well-being as well as academic engagement;
- **Limited and disrupted access to mental health supports**;
- **Difficulties in online learning for special populations**, particularly young children, children with disabilities and special learning needs, English learners, and students in home environments not conducive to online learning;
- **Barriers to effective communication with families and caregivers**, which cause additional stress on teachers and students;
- **Challenges to teachers and staff** necessitating additional professional development; and
• Attending to well-being of teachers and staff whose lives have been disrupted by the pandemic.

Takeaways: Messages and Advice
It would be presumptuous to suggest that the NAEd has “answers” to these daunting problems. However, it is possible to outline a set of “best bets,” i.e., strategies and action steps that are likely to advance the possibility for improved learning as the crisis continues – and beyond. This list is not meant as a “consensus” set of findings or recommendations, but rather as an invitation to continued research and deliberation. If there is a theme that is woven through these suggestions it may be best summarized in the words of Mathew Portell, principal at Fall Hamilton Enhanced Option School, Tennessee, quoted by one of the discussants in the NAEd sessions: “My biggest fear is that everything changes... and my second biggest fear is that nothing changes...”

Basic Necessities
1. Ensure that children who would be provided with meals at school continue to receive food.
2. Reach families that the school has not had contact with since the outbreak of the pandemic ended in-person learning.
3. Ensure access to technology.
4. Focus on the social-emotional well-being of students and staff.

Academic Learning
1. Engage and collaborate with the entire school community to focus on learning. This is a time to better integrate neighborhood resources, family, and schools to determine how to support children in greatest need. As home and communities continue to be settings for blended learning, this is the right time to reimagine how teachers can involve other stakeholders in conversation and collaboration about instructional quality.

2. Recognize that the pandemic will continue to affect schools and school districts differently, and there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution. Districts and schools need to be prepared to offer quality instruction in-person, online, and in hybrid learning environments, and as the presentation will vary across the country so will techniques and strategies vary. Specificities of districts and schools vary, and differences in demographics, language needs, special needs, technology availability, age, and other variables matter.

3. Do not rush to address all unfinished curricular learning needs in academic year 2020-21. It seems likely that for a majority of students, fulltime in-person schooling will not resume consistently during the 2020-21 school year. Efforts to accelerate learning and social-emotional
development should not focus on the 2020-21 school year but should include efforts spanning several school years.

4. Begin curriculum planning by keeping in mind the assets, interests, curiosities, aspirations, and fears of students. Schools need to ensure that students have agency and voice. Engage students by having their learning linked more closely to their lives and environments, including, for example, in this moment discussion of COVID-19, anti-Black racism, economic inequality, and climate change.

5. Provide “grade-level content and instructional rigor.” As suggested by the Council of the Great City Schools, districts and schools might be tempted to use assessments to identify “deficits” and then employ remediation approaches, and schools may be tempted to cover all unfinished topics in a shallow manner. Neither remediation or shallow treatment of subjects should occur. Rather, districts and schools should provide students with grade-level content with appropriate interventions, such as just-in-time interventions or differentiated supports, to address unfinished learning. Districts and schools should identify core concepts for use in teaching so that the focus is on depth and not breadth.

6. Provide teachers with support, professional development, and professional learning communities. Regardless of the environment in which teachers will return, they will need support and professional development to navigate unfinished learning, to deliver in online or hybrid models, and to address the social and emotional strains on students as well as their own persons, families, and communities. Professional development needs to include information that appropriately considers the ages of students. It also, in online and in-person environments, needs to enable teachers and staff to screen for and identify distress and trauma, and to express patience and caring and minimize bias in interactions.

7. Recognize teachers’ efforts as they work to educate children through these challenging times. Teachers should be honored as essential frontline workers and be provided with the equipment and tools to ensure their safety.

8. Use formative assessments to further teaching and learning and provide effective, meaningful feedback to students. Given the online learning environment and the varying level of difficulties students are facing, school districts should provide additional support and guidance to teachers for using formative assessments as teaching and learning tools. With waivers of mandated assessments in most states and
districts, the pandemic provides a unique opportunity to apply quality assessments that focus on student strengths.

**Whole Person Well-Being**

1. **Make the social-emotional and mental health needs of students and staff the top priority.** Whole person well-being is critical to academic and life success. When returning to schooling – in whatever form – the social, mental, and emotional health of our students must be thoughtfully and methodically addressed.

2. **Build social-emotional learning into the school curriculum for all students.** Social and emotional skills should be embedded in instruction and tied to academic competencies.

3. **Provide ongoing consultation to teachers and families on challenges that they are facing in responding to children’s needs.** Districts and schools should have counselors/social workers/psychologists available to help teachers and families address these needs.

4. **Provide group and individual sessions with mental health personnel (counselors, social workers, school psychologists) for students experiencing distress.** Equitable access to school-supported social, emotional, and mental health needs of students is necessary.

5. **Determine strategies for maintaining, strengthening, and developing relationships in a virtual environment.** For students returning to school virtually in the fall, teachers need to work to build, and in most cases develop, new relationships in largely unfamiliar environments. Teachers will need to build a new skill set in order to develop relationships and assist with peer relationships in virtual environments.
List of Useful Resources


  - Restart & Recovery: Considerations for Teaching & Learning Overview.
  - Restart & Recovery: Serving English Language Learners During COVID-19.

  - Addressing Unfinished Learning After COVID-19 School Closures.


Steering Committee Members

**Michael Feuer (Chair)**  
Dean and Professor, Graduate School of Education and Human Development  
*The George Washington University*

**Hyman Bass**  
Samuel Eilenberg Distinguished University Professor of Mathematics & Mathematics Education  
*University of Michigan*

**Dorothy Espelage**  
William C. Friday Distinguished Professor of Education  
*University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

**Gloria Ladson-Billings**  
Professor Emerita, Department of Curriculum & Instruction  
*University of Wisconsin-Madison*

**Susanna Loeb**  
Director, Annenberg Institute at Brown University  
Professor of Education and International and Public Affairs  
*Brown University*

**Annemarie Sullivan Palincsar**  
Chair of Educational Studies  
Jean and Charles R. Walgreen Jr. Professor of Reading and Literacy  
Arthur F. Thurnau Professor  
*University of Michigan*

**William F. Tate IV**  
Provost and Executive Vice President of Academic Affairs  
Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Family and Preventive Medicine  
*University of South Carolina*

**Frank Worrell**  
Professor and Director, School Psychology  
Faculty Director, Academic Talent Development Program  
Faculty Director, California College Preparatory Academy  
Affiliate Professor, Psychology  
*University of California, Berkeley*

**Stanton Wortham**  
Inaugural Charles F. Donovan, S.J., Dean  
*Boston College*
Addressing Inequitable Reading Loss in the Midst of COVID-19: Mitigation and Learning Acceleration Strategies
Tuesday, July 7, 2020

Panelists

Shannon Campion
Chief of State Operations
*Stand for Children*

Michael Casserly
Executive Director
*Council of Great City Schools*

Deborah Cromer
President
*Wisconsin State Reading Association*

Susan Goldman
Co-Director, Learning Sciences Research Institute
Professor, Department of Psychology and Department of Education
*University of Illinois, Chicago*

Robin Hall
Director of Language Arts and Literacy
*Council of Great City Schools*

Susanna Loeb **
Director, Annenberg Institute at Brown University
Professor of Education and International and Public Affairs
*Brown University*

Gigi Luk
Associate Professor, Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology
*McGill University*

Annemarie Sullivan Palincsar *
Chair of Educational Studies
Jean and Charles R. Walgreen Jr. Professor of Reading and Literacy
Arthur F. Thurnau Professor
*University of Michigan*

Jason Sachs
Executive Director, Early Childhood Education
*Boston Public Schools*

Catherine Snow
Patricia Albjerg Graham Professor of Education
*Harvard University*

Ebony Elizabeth Thomas
Associate Professor, Literacy, Culture, and International Education Division
*University of Pennsylvania*

Gwen Warniment
Deputy Secretary for Teaching & Learning
*New Mexico Public Education Department*
Addressing Inequitable Mathematics Loss in the Midst of COVID-19: Mitigation and Learning Acceleration Strategies

Thursday, July 9, 2020

Deborah Loewenberg Ball
Arthur F. Thurnau Professor
William H. Payne Collegiate Professor of Education
Research Professor, Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research
University of Michigan

Maxine McKinney De Royston
Assistant Professor, Curriculum and Instruction
University of Wisconsin-Madison

David Barnes
Associate Executive Director for Research, Learning, and Development
National Council of Teachers of Mathematics

Judit Moschkovich
Professor, Social Sciences Division
University of California, Santa Cruz

Hyman Bass *
Samuel Eilenberg Distinguished University Professor of Mathematics & Mathematics Education
University of Michigan

Levi Patrick
Assistant Executive Director of Curriculum & Instruction
Oklahoma State Department of Education

Robert Q. Berry III
Samuel Braley Gray Professor of Mathematics Education
University of Virginia

Heidi Schweingruber
Director of the Board on Science Education
National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine

Michael Casserly
Executive Director
Council of the Great City Schools

John Staley
Coordinator of Special Projects
Baltimore County Public Schools

Linda Ruiz Davenport
Director of K-12 Mathematics
Boston Public Schools

William F. Tate IV **
Provost and Executive Vice President of Academic Affairs
Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Family and Preventive Medicine
University of South Carolina

J.R. Green
Superintendent
Fairfield County School District

Mona Toncheff
President
National Council of Supervisors of Mathematics

Gloria Ladson-Billings *
Professor Emerita, Department of Curriculum & Instruction
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Denise Walston
Director of Mathematics
Council of the Great City Schools

Trena Wilkerson
President
National Council of Teachers of Mathematics
## Panelists

**Fostering Student Well-Being in the Era of COVID-19**  
*Wednesday, July 15, 2020*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whitney Allgood</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer, National School Climate Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Damon</td>
<td>Professor of Education, Stanford University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pia Escudero</td>
<td>Executive Director, Los Angeles Unified School District Student Health and Human Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorothy Espelage</td>
<td>William C. Friday Distinguished Professor of Education, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Grandson</td>
<td>Chief Equity &amp; Strategy Officer, Boston Public Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pak Tee Ng</td>
<td>Associate Professor, Policy, Curriculum and Leadership, National Institute of Education, Singapore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yetunde Reeves</td>
<td>Principal, Paul Laurence Dunbar High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric Rossen</td>
<td>Director, Professional Development and Standards, National Association of School Psychologists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol Ryff</td>
<td>Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Wisconsin-Madison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howard Stevenson</td>
<td>Constance E. Clayton Professor of Urban Education and Africana Studies, Director, Racial Empowerment Collaborative, Human Development and Quantitative Methods Division, University of Pennsylvania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger Weissberg</td>
<td>Board Vice Chair and Chief Knowledge Officer, Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank Worrell</td>
<td>Professor and Director, School Psychology, Faculty Director, Academic Talent Development Program, Faculty Director, California College Preparatory Academy, Affiliate Professor, Psychology, University of California, Berkeley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanton Wortham</td>
<td>Inaugural Charles F. Donovan, S.J., Dean, Boston College</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* denotes steering committee member  
** denotes moderator and steering committee member
Endnotes


5 Participants and their biographical information can be found at the end of this document.

6 Curricular learning refers to subjects learned through a school-based course of study, in contrast to informal learning.


**Additional Information**

**Suggested Citation:**

For inquiries, contact Amy Berman, Deputy Director ([aberman@naeducation.org](mailto:aberman@naeducation.org)), or Dian Dong, Senior Program Officer ([ddong@naeducation.org](mailto:ddong@naeducation.org)).

*This study was supported by a grant from the Spencer Foundation. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the National Academy of Education and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Spencer Foundation.*