Unexpected Opportunities
The coronavirus pandemic suddenly pushes innovation forward

By L. Earl Franks, Ed.D., CAE

Today’s school leaders are no strangers to change. Over the past decade alone, principals have navigated tremendous shifts in school turnaround strategies and policies for teacher and principal evaluation, initiatives such as Common Core State Standards, and calls to integrate 21st century skills and deeper learning, to name a few. At every turn, principals have been at the forefront of execution, ensuring that teachers and staff are well-prepared and that the students in their care benefit.

Now, in steadying their school communities amid the coronavirus pandemic, principals are facing what is possibly the most intense trial of a generation. More than ever, our educational system is being called upon to develop innovative solutions to new challenges.

At the time of this writing, at least 124,000 K–12 schools across the country are closed, affecting at least 55.1 million students. Some states have already announced that schools will not reopen this school year, and more states will likely follow. And according to a national survey of principals conducted by NAESP, principals are concerned about a lack of internet access for students, additional costs to implement digital learning, and the need to continue to provide school meals off-site.

Yet, widespread school closures have exposed unexpected opportunities to accelerate innovation. We can look to the Consortium for School Networking’s (CoSN) recent report, “Driving K–12 Innovation: 2020 Hurdles + Accelerators,” for guidance on the trends that schools will need to manage and conquer. A few stand out as particularly relevant in the current state of affairs: building the human capacity of leaders, scaling innovation and sustaining it over time, addressing digital equity and the technology gap, and evolving teaching and learning to accommodate distance (see left for details).

With guidance from the NAESP National Coronavirus Taskforce, we are making every effort to help you navigate this “new normal” with innovative solutions. During this time of uncertainty, it’s important to know that NAESP is committed to supporting you and your school community. If you need assistance from me or the NAESP staff, please don’t hesitate to reach out.

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