

Forward Focus

Teaching and Leading in a Post-Pandemic World

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the U.S. in March 2020, it changed education forever. Principals, faculty, and staff met the challenge with a laser focus on student learning and wellbeing. When parents were forced to play a bigger role in their child's learning at home, it showed them—and the rest of the country—what had been lacking in the nationwide education system. Inequities in education had gone under the radar for far too long, and the pandemic shone a bright light on these issues. With a new understanding of what schools should prioritize—and a boost in federal funding to get them started—it's time schools stop doing what wasn't working and focus instead on changing education for good.

So what does education look like as schools move on from the pandemic and work toward a new normal? As administrators close out one school year and look toward the next, school teams can use this guide to reflect on the lessons learned from the pandemic and map out a strategy to begin building schools for the future that focuses on the needs of all students, faculty and staff, and school families.

Determine Lessons Learned

The first step in building a strategy for moving forward is asking for input from all school stakeholders—teachers, administrators, students, and families. People experienced education during a pandemic in their own ways, and each experience is valuable in developing a plan to move forward.

The overall question is the same: What lessons did we learn during the pandemic? Overarching themes of equity, whole-child education, student growth, and preparation are sure to come up. Use these questions to dig deeper and find commonalities among responses before developing a plan to move forward.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1 What went well over the past year that would continue to serve students, staff, and families moving forward?

2 What didn't work well over the past year, and what were the major reasons for the lack of success?

3 What did the pandemic reveal about equity and accessibility in our school?

Highlight Urgent Priorities

Once you and your team get a better understanding of what priorities are important to your school community, it's time to prioritize what's most important and develop strategies to execute the plans to support those priorities.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1 What are our priority standards for the year? Consider options for each grade level.

2 How do we create a trauma-informed school? Take into consideration the differing needs of students, staff, and administrators?

3 How will we support equity and access for all learners? What policies and practices do we need to revise to reflect our beliefs about equity?

4 What professional development do teachers and administrators need to achieve these goals?

Looking Back and Planning Forward

Innovation is often born of necessity, and COVID-19 certainly made it necessary that we find multiple ways to serve students and deliver instruction. Slipping back into pre-pandemic habits is not an option. Schools that want to see—and make—real change must focus on innovation to ensure their school systems, programs, and processes are designed in sustainable student-centered ways. Gone are the days of asking students to fit into the system we designed; we need a system with students at the center of it.

To make this happen, schools need to consider the insight from all stakeholders—teachers, administrators, students, and families. Use the questions in the table right to dive deeper into the needs of your school community and how those needs differ based on the person you ask.

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	Teachers	Administrators	Students	Families
Mental Health	How can we support the mental health and needs of our staff who experienced challenges and trauma during the pandemic?	How can we support our mental health and identify resources to support our staff who experienced challenges and trauma during the pandemic?	What do I need to feel healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged?	Does my child need academic support, behavior support, counseling, or support with anxiety and depression related to challenges they faced during the pandemic?
Transitions	How will we help students transition to a new grade level?	How can the master schedule and other school decisions offer support to students who need additional time and support with grade level expectations?	What are my strengths, and how can I focus on them so I can continue to grow as a learner?	How can I advocate for my child? What does my child's teacher need to know about their learning experience during the pandemic?
Trauma-Informed Classrooms	How can school staff provide trauma-informed classrooms?	What is our school's plan for supporting students who experienced trauma?	How can teachers and school staff help me as schools reopen and I enter a new grade level? Do I need to speak with a counselor or social worker?	Has your son or daughter experienced trauma during the pandemic? How can teachers and school staff help your child as they enter a new grade level?
Equity	What did the pandemic reveal about equity in our school?	What did the pandemic reveal about equity in our school?	What frustrations did you have during the pandemic? Did you find it hard to complete assignments? What do you want your teachers to know about the challenges you faced as a learner?	What do you want your child's teachers to know about the challenges they faced as a learner during the pandemic? What would you change about school?
Innovation	What will teaching and learning look like in the next 5 years?	What will teaching and learning look like in the next 5 years? What does our staff need to do to plan for it? What goals have we identified for our school and our students?	What should schools stop—and start—doing? Do you have any suggestions for changing school and the way students learn?	What should schools stop—and start—doing? Do you have any suggestions for changing school and the way students learn?

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