



REMAKING TOMORROW

Learning in a Post-Pandemic Future

“One of the greatest dignities of humankind
is that each successive generation
is invested in the welfare of each new generation.”

– Fred Rogers



“Our dreams of equitable, joyful, life-affirming and meaningful learning experiences for every child can feel achingly distant during challenging times. But those dreams serve as our touchstone as we navigate uncertainty. We must remember where we want to go, because when everything seems to be changing, we have some power to direct that change.”

—KnowledgeWorks, *Looking Beneath the Surface: The Education Changemaker's Guidebook to Systems Thinking*

“ Even before COVID-19 arrived at the world's door, scientists, educators and communities had been calling for something different. Society was changing, they argued, and with that change came new challenges, new opportunities and the need for new approaches to learning. For the first time, the whole world had facts and figures at its fingertips – what it needed now were more people who could listen, ask questions and think through complex issues. It needed more people who could work with diverse teams. It needed more curiosity, more empathy, more justice and more love. Our global pandemic has only deepened those needs, revealing their relevance and urgency for all.

So what now? How might we think differently about schools, early learning centers, libraries, museums, out-of-school programs and all of the places – from the virtual to the natural – where young people learn? What new

methods would realize greater justice while producing deeper, more caring relationships for and among learners? Together with colleagues who have been reshaping our learning landscape for nearly two decades, we offer some ideas as we step with you into the future. If we genuinely remake learning, we may just accelerate the healing and inspire the hope that will help all of us remake tomorrow.”

Gregg Behr
Jim Denova
Valerie Kinloch

Gregg Behr, Jim Denova and Valerie Kinloch
Co-Chairs, Remake Learning



THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC has elevated incredible examples of improvisation and emergency responses in and beyond education. Much work remains as this pandemic continues to change and deepen the needs of children, caregivers and educators, leaving those who were previously underserved and harmed by inequitable systems most exposed to its impacts.

The brave responses of learning ecosystem contributors across the greater Pittsburgh region have highlighted how much is possible when people suspend their assumptions about learning and come together to meet young people's and families' needs. The region has seen increased exploration of new forms of learning, assessment, support and connection. Funding has been mobilized more quickly than usual, and organizations have been sharing resources and pushing to provide technology access for every student. Out of necessity, the barriers to change have been weakened in ways that make education transformation seem ever more plausible.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, a longstanding movement toward racial justice has gained additional traction. This confluence of events has thrown into stark relief the need to recognize and dismantle systemic racism affecting Black, Latinx and Indigenous people across American society and institutions. Stakeholders in and around learning must grapple with our understandings of justice and equity in the contexts of both the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic racism.

Having long been fertile ground for learning innovation, the greater Pittsburgh region has much from which to draw from before the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, some emergency measures have long-term promise – if mindsets can shift and sustaining structures and policies can be put in place. Now, the region needs to continue to reimagine teaching, learning and educational leadership while addressing people's timeless needs and advancing justice. The region must guard against the impulse to return to any “normal” that was siloed and unjust and must also guard against the temptation to implement quick fixes or one-size-fits-all solutions.

IGNITING REGION-WIDE ACTION

This publication aims to build on the momentum sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic to inspire stakeholders across the greater Pittsburgh region to shape and reshape a future of learning that is just, equitable and learner-centered. It is informed by the insights and aspirations of the educators, executives and learning scientists who compose Remake Learning's leadership groups and who participated in a Future of Learning Commission convened in May and June 2020 by Remake Learning's Co-Chairs.

THREE ASPIRATIONAL FOCAL POINTS

During workshops designed and facilitated by KnowledgeWorks, Remake Learning's Future of Learning Commission explored ideas for realizing future possibilities related to justice, methods and relationships in education. Together, these focal points, which arose from the Remake Learning Council's April 2020 meeting, suggest qualities of a vision for the future of learning.

Justice

Committing to helping every learner, family and community flourish and to making learning equitable by renegotiating power imbalances, dismantling barriers, promoting anti-racist practices and affording more supports and opportunities to learners of greatest need while working alongside them, valuing their experiences and supporting and honoring their voices, strengths, potential and dignity

Methods

Igniting engaging and relevant learning practices that support learners' and educators' health, wellness and human development and which cultivate their capacity to navigate rapid social and technological change

Relationships

Prioritizing meaningful relationships among learners and their families, peers, educators and mentors; forging engaged partnerships; negotiating power dynamics; and helping learners develop cross-cultural understandings and social capital that unlock opportunities to thrive



ELEMENTS OF A PREFERRED FUTURE

Participants built upon these focal points to identify key attributes for the future of learning. *Some of these attributes have been forefront for regional stakeholders for many years, while others seem particularly urgent in this moment.* Participants envisioned that the greater Pittsburgh learning ecosystem would...

- ✓ Acknowledge the ways in which learners of color have been systematically harmed by education policies, practices and mindsets and develop anti-racist education cultures
- ✓ Allow flexibility across space and time
- ✓ Recognize many forms of success, enabling each learner to succeed regardless of race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status
- ✓ Provide authentic, culturally relevant and culturally sustaining learning experiences
- ✓ Align assessment and accountability with stated values
- ✓ Be personalized and competency-based
- ✓ Recognize children and youth as individuals
- ✓ Provide each learner with technology access
- ✓ Emphasize whole-person development and civic participation
- ✓ Value educators, providing them with flexibility, development and support
- ✓ Favor skill and disposition development
- ✓ Involve community members in meaningful ways through shared decision-making
- ✓ Prioritize relationships, surrounding children and youth with supportive individuals
- ✓ Reflect humanizing mindsets and narratives
- ✓ Operate in ways that put people at the center

Workshop participants identified the strategies and action steps that appear on the next few pages as key ways to realize a future of learning with these characteristics. As you read about these strategies and the associated actions, ask yourself: What role might you (or do you) play in creating the future of learning? Which of the strategies and action steps might you be able to adopt? What other strategies or action steps might you pursue?



CO-DESIGN SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

To realize this preferred future, educational accountability must move from the current top-down and test-driven system to a more expansive view of school quality that is both co-created and co-facilitated by communities. The new approach must focus on stakeholders' holding one another accountable for creating just, equitable and learner-centered education systems. Learning communities can and should take the lead in reimagining accountability systems as opportunities for shared responsibility. These new systems should enable broad stewardship of the learning ecosystem and encourage shared decision making. They also need to make space for innovation and continuous improvement. Ultimately, shared accountability systems should provide stakeholders with comprehensive and useful information to inform ongoing change.



What if community advisory boards provided direct input on education policy?

These inclusive boards would consist of learners, families and community members. They would guide school districts and their boards by analyzing the potential impacts of proposed policies, recommending viable approaches and articulating hyperlocal narratives of success.

ACTION STEPS

- Redefine student success and measurement, moving from a focus on standardized test scores to authentic assessments of competency and identifying meaningful and appropriate ways of reflecting the development of core social-emotional skills and other facets of whole-person development. Use deep collaboration across all levels (local, regional and state). Seek input from learners, families and community members through authentic conversations.
- Establish systems for communicating student progress in transparent ways, enabling families and other stakeholders to hold school districts accountable for ensuring learning continuity and for addressing learning gaps and student needs (including emotional, academic and overall well-being) resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Use the data from such systems to inform community conversations about quality assurance.
- Redistribute power, ensuring that it is shared among educators, learners, caregivers and communities and that decisions are made in direct consultation with people affected by them. Focus on ensuring that people who have been historically marginalized by education systems are centrally involved. Seek ways of repairing relationships and building trust.

ENABLE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PERSONALIZED LEARNING

School districts and state departments of education need to collaborate closely with learners, families and communities to ensure that each learner has a culturally responsive, personalized learning pathway that reflects the learner's interests and aspirations. These pathways must be built around the core belief that each student is capable of deep learning. They must also be designed to treat differences as unique assets for learning. The pathways should enable authentic learning situated in community while honoring and supporting each learner's unique identities, cultures, interests and goals. They should be managed actively, with regular check-ins and updates.



What if each student had a real-world learning portfolio?

Each student – not only “gifted” students – would have opportunities to engage in robust, interest-driven, project-based learning during each school year. Students would receive support in nurturing their interests and would demonstrate what they had learned through relevant performance assessments and tangible evidence of growth.



ACTION STEPS

- Co-create a personalized learning plan for each student in deep consultation with that individual and their parents or guardians. Actively use these plans to help guide learners' journeys, understand learning progressions and identify learning gaps.
- Take a broad view of student support, emphasizing learners' development as whole people. For example, establish a learning advisory board for each student. Designed to provide learners with access to people and experiences that they do not encounter in their daily lives, along with people who share aspects of their identities, such boards would provide broad support, including help with wayfinding, advice and motivation.
- Establish authentic assessments that align to state standards, articulate transparent learning expectations and enable learners to demonstrate mastery of skills and content knowledge in meaningful ways as they navigate learning pathways that reflect their interests and career aspirations.



TAKE A FRESH LOOK AT EDUCATOR ROLES, PATHWAYS AND SUPPORTS

The current moment provides the opportunity to think anew about who serves as an educator and to extend educator pathways and supports. Systems of learning need to recognize the many caring adults who contribute to learners' journeys and need to implement new educator roles designed to increase support for learners and staff. They also need to create new educator preparation pathways and encourage Black, Latinx and Indigenous people to enter education while developing professional cultures that encourage them to stay. Lastly, ongoing professional development needs to refocus its emphasis and incorporate personalized content and delivery.



What if each school had a full-time Director of Relationships? This administrative-level position would focus on building relationships in support of learners' holistic health and well-being. The person holding it would foster a sense of belonging and would help learners and educators build social capital.

ACTION STEPS

- Design and implement new educator roles that support learners' unique needs and foster connections. Such roles would cultivate positive climate and culture in schools and other learning environments and would foster connections, understanding and knowledge exchange across the learning ecosystem (including school districts, out-of-school time organizations and universities). They would also facilitate communication with families and link children and youth to learning experiences beyond their communities.
- Expand and modernize educator preparation programs and ongoing professional development to improve support for educators in meeting the needs of the whole child and in building meaningful connections across lines of difference. Diversify pre-service pathways, normalize the various ways in which people come to education and incorporate residencies into the teacher training process. Form a community-based teaching corps to provide additional student supports, encouraging participation from across communities.
- Personalize educator supports to deliver relevant, timely and engaging forms of capacity building and to provide the flexibility, time and space to learn. For example, collaborate with other stakeholders such as school districts, intermediary units, out-of-school-time organizations and universities to hold open office hours for professional learning, or create personalized, virtual professional development for teachers and administrators.

MOVING FORWARD, TOGETHER

Many stakeholders across the greater Pittsburgh region have a long history of working to make learning just, equitable and learner-centered. To pursue the recommendations outlined in this paper, meet learners' timeless needs and enable responsive adaptation as the world keeps changing, stakeholders need to continue considering several dynamics related to education changemaking. These dynamics reflect workshop participants' overriding concern that how the region continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and shape the future of learning is as or more important than what strategies it pursues.

“Often when you think you’re at the end of something,
you’re at the beginning of something else.”

–Fred Rogers

IT IS TIME TO QUESTION ASSUMPTIONS

Realizing a future of learning that is just, equitable and learner-centered will require deep transformation. Stakeholders need to let go of some established approaches and institutional processes. The COVID-19 pandemic has called into question many assumptions – including that education will always be slow to change. Those willing to make space for transformation have a fresh canvas upon which to design and pursue a preferred future while preserving effective practices. As a starting point, stakeholders can extend and operationalize the innovative mindsets that the COVID-19 pandemic has sparked.

THE FUTURE IS EVERYONE’S BUSINESS

Pursuing transformative shifts will require broad groups of stakeholders to think about future of learning continually and collaboratively and to cultivate public will for change beyond the current disruption brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. That does not mean simply seeking support for an institutional path. It means taking the opportunity to reset relationships with learners, families and communities; authentically involving them in decision-making from this point forward; and attending to the harm that past exclusion and trauma perpetuated by education systems have caused.

SOCIAL JUSTICE IS A PRIORITY

Education and society have a long history of structural racism and resistance to change. As the future of learning advances and change accelerates, stakeholders need to find ways of ensuring equity for each learner and educator. They need to make today's problems visible and push on old paradigms that fail people. They need to dismantle barriers and avoid building more. They need to weave social justice through education, treating it as a principle for decision making and a focus of student learning, not as an extra-curricular or a hoped-for byproduct.

NEW NARRATIVES CAN ENABLE NEW SOLUTIONS

Narratives reflect what people believe to be possible and true and what society expects from education. To change education in deep and sustainable ways, stakeholders need to shift current narratives about school and its purposes. Developing new understandings about education and new language to describe what happens in and around learning can broaden people's understanding of success, elevate the importance of whole-child health and human development and underscore the importance of cultivating an engaged citizenry with the knowledge and skills to pursue justice.

DISRUPT WITH INTENTION

As highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic and by the current, necessary uprising against the nation's longstanding systemic racism, there is an immense need to renegotiate the power dynamics surrounding education and to enable broader, more equitable participation in decision-making. Stakeholders must design intentionally for equity as they steer the region's learning ecosystem through the next phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, address systemic racism and collaborate to transform the learning ecosystem for the future. They must identify new approaches to learning that respect and address the realities experienced by Black, Latinx and Indigenous people. The window of opportunity has never been more open in our lifetimes; the need for change, never more pressing.





Remake Learning is a network that ignites engaging, relevant and equitable learning practices in support of young people navigating rapid social and technological change. Learn more at RemakeLearning.org.



KnowledgeWorks is a nonprofit organization that partners with learning communities to create the future of learning, together. Learn more at KnowledgeWorks.org.



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