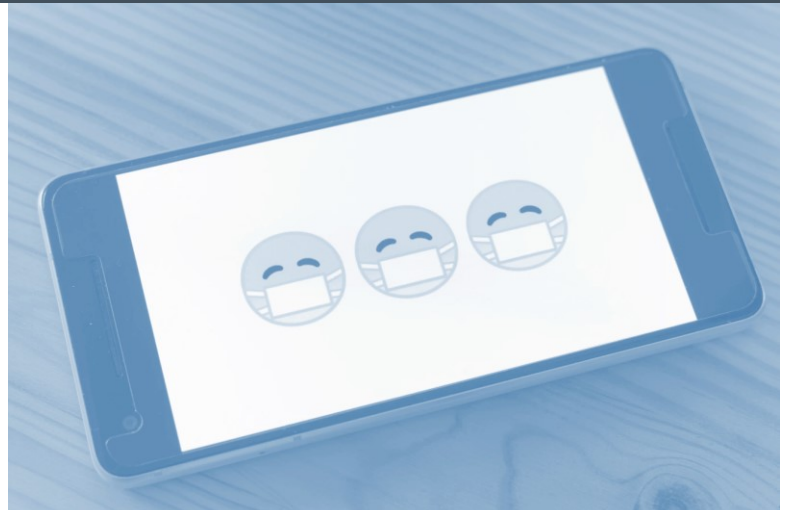# UNCONDTIONAL EDUCATION

IMPLEMENTATION IN A VIRTUAL SETTING

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Unconditional Education Implementation in a Virtual Setting

Introduction

Early spring 2020 was marked by a slow spreading awareness of COVID-19 and growing speculation about what societal shifts might be made to address its transmission. In mid-March, public health entities at the local, state, and federal level acted, resulting in a dramatic new reality for many families across the nation. Seemingly overnight, children were asked to stay home from school and log in to classes via computer or tablet, teachers were expected to learn the art of virtual education, parents were dealing with the impacts of shelter-in-place on their jobs while simultaneously providing childcare 24/7, and schools and districts were scrambling to understand and respond to the following issues:

- What basic needs are keeping students from showing up on the computer screen to participate in class, and what is the school's role in ensuring students have food, shelter, supervision, and access to the internet and relevant technology?
- What guidance and support do teachers need to shift their practice from brick and mortar to virtual classrooms?
- What information and skills do parents need to supervise and support their student's learning from home?

As time pressed on and the long-term reality of these shifts became more apparent, additional questions arose:

- What is the impact of chronic stress, ambiguous loss, and increased isolation on student's well-being and ability to learn? On teachers' ability to sustain in the work? On families' ability to support their children?
- How do school teams stay connected and coordinated in ways that will help address this impact?

For schools that support communities and families deeply affected by the economic, racial, health, and environmental disparities that predate the pandemic, finding answers to the above questions has proven immensely challenging and absolutely necessary. This includes over forty schools in the Bay Area that partner with Seneca Family of Agencies to implement the Unconditional Education (UE) model. The UE model provides an "organizing framework for education leaders who are looking to reshape their schools in order to better meet the broad range of needs of the students, families, and staff" (Detterman, Ventura, Rosenthal, & Berrick, 2019). These schools, by nature of embracing the UE approach, believe that all students can thrive if provided with the necessary support to promote their cognitive, behavioral, and social emotional well-being. UE schools work to provide data-informed, multi-tiered supports that are coordinated by a transdisciplinary team of administrators, educators, behavioral and mental health professionals, and special educators. In spite of (and perhaps in part because of) this holistic philosophy and approach to education, these schools have also grappled with the shift to virtual learning. On the one hand, these schools benefit from a solid foundational belief in providing comprehensive support for students and families, which uniquely situates them to address those needs that have been exacerbated by the pandemic such as chronic stress, instability, and mental health concerns. These schools have worked diligently to develop systems, strategies, and tools to assess student needs and coordinate the

implementation of interventions, with an explicit focus on prevention and early intervention. The challenge then becomes how to translate these systems, strategies and tools to the virtual setting in a meaningful way.

During the spring and summer of 2020, Seneca partnered with these schools to wrestle with the questions posed above and develop strategies to shift the Unconditional Education model to the virtual space, all while maintaining an emphasis on healthy school culture and climate and strong relational trust amongst community members, a dedication to data-informed practice, and a commitment to transdisciplinary supports that are coordinated and integrated into the school day. We have strived to reframe this challenge as yet another opportunity to rethink how schools should operate. How can we leverage this disruption in practice to once again reimagine what it looks like to successfully support students with diverse needs, deepen connection with families via the home to school continuum, and create communities of wellness for all members including students, families, and school staff?

The following pages capture some of the lessons learned, including grounding insights and concrete strategies and tools that have supported these schools to adjust the UE approach to the virtual landscape. As in our original book about the Unconditional Education model, some key themes are woven throughout: efficiency, shared cross-sector responsibility, and local decision-making. It will become evident how these concepts drive UE, but for now we will simply define them:

- *Efficiency:* How can we do more with the resources we have while maintaining or improving quality? Efficiency does not mean spending less, but rather strategically allocating our resources without wasting time or effort on tasks that have little to no impact on the lives of students. Increased efficiency may indeed create cost savings in particular areas, allowing for reinvestment in preventative and early-intervention services to ensure a school's continued progress along the path toward improved outcomes for students. Efficient systems consider how inputs can affect future needs, alongside current needs.
- *Intentional Relationship building:* The foundational strength of any community lies in its network of individual relationships. The nature and quality of these relationships are of paramount importance in completing any collective endeavor. The level of relational trust present within a community has a substantial impact on the everyday experiences of its members. A specific approach to building, sustaining, and repairing relationships is needed for effective change.
- *Cross-sector responsibility:* It is our collective responsibility to ensure the achievement of our communities' most vulnerable youth. Current systems of care are set up in such a way that they create a fractured experience for their participants. Students and families experience incoherent care. Opportunities for meaningful collaboration between professionals with valuable expertise in education, mental health, social welfare, and wellness are few and far between. A transdisciplinary approach is essential to addressing the complex issues facing communities that are highly impacted by poverty.
- *Local decision making:* Those closest to a problem should be actively involved in designing its solutions. Regardless of education, background, or training, individuals and communities are the most knowledgeable about their own needs. Program mandates by outsiders that disregard local knowledge will almost never be effective. Local context matters. The role of professionals is to share expertise while providing structures in which participants can choose the approaches that are most likely to be effective in their own lives.

We share this work in the hope that it provides helpful guidance for schools that are committed to supporting the diverse and ever-evolving needs of students, families, and staff. Successfully navigating this unique moment in history will require innovation and a dedication to centering the needs and voices of those directly impacted. It has been our honor to partner with schools in this process, and we are eager to share what we have learned so far. We look forward to continuing to learn and grow based on the experiences of the communities we serve

PART ONE: The Foundations

We are living and teaching in an extraordinary time. While a small collection of research exists on effective practices for virtual instruction, schools are largely being asked to design and implement entirely new ways of educating students. The world of synchronous and asynchronous instruction, social-distancing, and pandemic pods is entirely uncharted territory. With so many unknowns, we must draw on what we do know about managing crises and promoting lasting change and apply these principles to this novel and unique context. While troubling in many aspects, the transition to virtual learning and the eventual return to in-person schooling provides a unique opportunity to build a system that centers itself on the needs of the most vulnerable students and, in doing so, more effectively engages and supports all students.

Quite a bit is known about effective change management in the context of under-resourced schools and the ways in which we can organize educational systems to meet the needs of all learners. We know that:

- Supporting and trusting relationships play a crucial role in environments of change.
- School transformation is enabled when a transdisciplinary team is grounded in shared purpose and lends its expertise to create coherent systems of support for students, families, and staff.
- Progress is not linear but using clear and actionable goals to inform planning can keep us moving in the right direction.

Collectively, these insights can inform important discussions not only about the design of systems to manage the current period of crisis but about building a more equitable future of wellness for all. With this framing, the following five principles aim to guide the work of building a virtual system of school interventions that promote safety and are responsive to the needs of all members of their communities.

We are all learning

Virtual education has provided ample opportunity for everyone in the school community to learn something new. Students are learning how to stay connected and engaged in a screen-based classroom setting. Parents are learning how to juggle their work and parenting responsibilities and play a new role in their child's education. Educators are learning how to navigate virtual learning platforms, facilitate instruction, and connect with students through a screen. The learning curve is overwhelming for everyone involved. In this period of rapid learning, schools can benefit from fully embracing a learning systems framework.

Schools that view themselves as learning systems presume that people are capable of learning new things. School teams actively revise what it means to be successful in this new educational landscape. What are appropriate goals for students? For parents? For educators? For the collaboration and communication structures that connect them? Within a learning system, members focus on developing goals, explicitly learning new skills to achieve those goals and reflecting on progress to adjust course

and/or celebrate success. While the learning systems approach always calls for critical reflection through cycles of feedback, these extraordinary times mean that frequent feedback and adjustment are essential. Schools are all trying something entirely new. Promoting a growth mindset and a willingness to innovate, reflect, and revise existing plans ensures that schools can continue to adapt to meet the emerging needs of students. Formal opportunities for feedback such as the surveys and assessments outlined in Part Three should be supplemented with more frequent, informal opportunities for reflection, revision and celebration.

We are in this together

While a sense of safety, consistency and predictability is foundational to the kind of learning just described, the move to virtual schooling has been anything but predictable and secure. So much is unknown about the future, and many parents and caregivers are struggling to acquire resources for everyday living while maintaining the health of their families. Additional stress and worry are prevalent, particularly for children with existing learning or mental health challenges who have experienced prior disruptions in attachment and/or whose families have previously experienced the failure of public systems to support their interests. The current situation has heightened existing internal messages of distrust ("I am in this alone") and insecurity ("the world is a dangerous place"). Alleviating and counteracting this stress is critical the success of any instructional program.

Building a strong relationship between teacher and student is essential, but only the first step. School systems must further foster an approach that equally centers on the various relationships of adults within the system: relationships between administrators and staff, among faculty, and between faculty and parents. Those with social privilege and/or hierarchical power play a key role in fostering relational trust within communities. In the context of schools, it is the school administrator who must take extra care to engage in practices of Mattering (Rosenberg and McCullough, 1981) that convey important messages: "I notice you. I value your efforts. Your fate is important to me. I need you. I will celebrate your successes and be saddened by your misfortunes." Together the aim is to send a message that counters feelings of distrust and insecurity: "we are in this together, and we will support you every step of the way."

We elevate the voices of our community

Virtual instruction takes place not just against the backdrop of the pandemic, but in a moment of cultural reckoning about the ways institutional racism brutalizes communities of color, most presently in the forms of police violence and health inequities. The system of education is not immune to these same systemic impacts, and young people, families and educators are acutely aware of the times in which we live. Schools can change the way they operate, most readily by explicitly rejecting disparaging and inaccurate narratives about people of color and, instead, working to understand and leverage the existing knowledge and lived experiences of community members. With relative institutional power and authority, school leaders and educators hold a unique responsibility for elevating the voices and desires of the families and students they serve.

For students, this can begin with instruction where activities and discussions directly leverage their experiences of the present moment, promote the sharing of perspectives, and make meaning of the challenges and world in which they live. As students juggle schoolwork with outside employment, caring for sick family members, sharing devices, the unavailability of quiet workspace and tending to younger siblings, their assignments must promote student choice to navigate not just the content but the process by which work is completed. By extension, new systems informed by the real and pressing needs that

families are voicing help build opportunities for parents to contribute to the process of shaping the new look of school. From parent surveys, virtual community meetings and representative taskforces, parents must play a key role in defining both the priorities and outcomes of current and future educational programs.

We focus on what really matters

As resources are strained and student needs are intensified during this shift to virtual learning, schools must hone their efforts to support students by adjusting student intervention goals as well as the intervention tools and curricula used to meet them. This approach will ensure that schools are able to responsively evaluate needs and devise a realistic plan for developing tiered interventions. As educators and service providers work to revise expectations and goals for individual students, the voice of students and families should be central to the conversation. Each student and family's current needs, strengths, and challenges within the present context are unique, and goals and plans should be tailored accordingly. The emphasis should be on realistic and measurable goals. As the state of the world becomes more overwhelming by the day, students, families, and educators may understandably find themselves shutting down or giving up all together on the idea of progress. Setting realistic goals that can be attained and celebrated in short amounts of time is crucial in promoting a sense of hope and the courage to continue.

As schools grapple with what services to provide to work toward the identified goals for their student body, they should consider utilizing the mindset of "small but mighty." The Center on Positive Behavior Interventions and Support encourages schools to focus on the successful implementation of a "small number of evidence-based and culturally relevant practices, across social, emotional, behavioral (SEB) and academic domains, that have an equitable and big impact." Choosing a small, well curated menu of intervention offerings is important for building any system, and particularly essential when operating in an environment where there is already a tremendous learning curve. Teams new to virtual service delivery face a two-fold approach: 1) providing interventions that meet the critical basic living needs of their students; and 2) adapting interventions that most closely match those provided during in-person schooling. By focusing first on adaptation, practitioners and teams can build confidence and skill in their execution, and students can experience a degree of continuity in the support they receive. As these become established, additional interventions can be added to or resources shifted within the school-wide menu to meet the changing needs of the school community or fill existing gaps.

We cultivate collaboration

In the transition to remote services there has been a great deal of attention to the ways in which service delivery looks different now that it is through a computer screen rather than inside a classroom. Behind the scenes, our approach to *how* these services are designed and coordinated must shift to make up for what has been lost. With the move to virtual education, what has commonly been noted are the ways in which communication becomes much more difficult. For one, the informal communication and exchange of ideas that occurs between professionals in the lunchroom or around the copy machine is largely absent when professionals teach from their own homes. Further, the kinds of verbal and observational information we receive from students as they unpack their backpacks or line up from recess is missing in our virtual world. Both interactions provide educators with a wealth of information about how to best serve students in their classroom and, without these connections, new routines must be intentionally developed to facilitate the flow of information.

In schools that have been successful in making this shift, four practices have been common to support an effective system of collaboration. First, instructional schedules have a consolidated instructional time for synchronous learning, often four days per week, in order to provide time for intentional collaboration and planning. Second, collaboration between specialist and general education teachers has improved effective teaming during virtual instruction, allowing for increased opportunities for specialists to participate in "mainstream" educational settings. The use of virtual break-out rooms can provide a seamless bridge between "pull-out" and "push-in" services, and specialists have played a key role in providing much needed instruction and engagement in the virtual space. Third, as parents and other family members have come to play a central role in the delivery of instruction, intentional structures designed to communicate and coordinate with families are an essential part of the continuum. Finally, as schools continue to be the hub of response for the needs of families, schools have had to build new partnerships to meet the needs of their students. Schools have found success when service providers across the child-serving systems of education, mental health, child welfare and juvenile justice can work together. With these collaborations, when gaps in services exist, collective decisions about the redeployment of existing resources to meet new needs can be made in a coherent and effective fashion.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES

Parental involvement has long been highlighted as a key predictor in student success, and the role and responsibilities of adult caregivers intensify when operating in a distance learning format. While family engagement has always been considered important, for the first time in many generations, the role of families in the education of their children is at center stage as adults outside of the school community play an essential role in the functioning of schools. In the best scenarios, this new arrangement provides the opportunity to cultivate increased connection and engagement between educators and parents. However, the substantial learning curve and required renegotiation of roles, without other broad social family support policies, has placed a substantial strain on families. As a result, it is impossible to discuss the ways in which schools can execute successful holistic models of support without focusing first on the ways in which the adults who care for children are at the center of this crisis.

Meaningful support to meet the demands of living

Overnight, parents have been tasked with the new responsibilities of orchestrating their children's daily schedules, monitoring the completion of their work assignments, and overseeing their increased social engagement in an online platform, all while juggling their own work and life demands. Parents who began working from home alongside their children had to negotiate shared space and new work routines built around their children's learning needs. Parents employed in industries where in-person work was required faced a child-care crisis and shouldered the fears and guilt associated with increased risk of infection for themselves and their families. In some cases, parents have had to choose between their own ability to provide for their families by pursuing paid employment and attending closely to their children's remote learning curriculum. In others, families have been afforded no such choice as opportunities for paid employment have dwindled and they struggled to meet the day to day needs of their children. By June, the country had suffered a net job loss of 10% with women, people of color and immigrants bearing the biggest burden of joblessness (Saenz & Sparks, 2020). While federal fiscal stimulus has provided a partial stop-gap measure for some, families who are undocumented have had few options for paid work, leaving a huge gap in their ability to maintain stable housing or access ample food, let alone the technology and space required for focused learning.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the ways in which the conditions of poverty and practices of institutional racism have led to differential health impacts for low income communities of color. While the exact numbers have fluctuated throughout, African American and Latinx communities have been impacted by higher rates of hospitalization and death than their white or Asian counterparts. Communities with higher racial and ethnic minority populations have more workers completing in-person work, higher housing density, more housing insecurity, and more multigenerational households that make social distancing harder. In addition, communities with higher minority populations are less likely to have access to healthy food and more likely to be targeted for marketing of unhealthful products like alcohol, cigarettes, and fast food that may negatively impact chronic medical conditions. Finally, there is emerging evidence that air pollution, which is higher in minority communities, may play a role in COVID-19 severity (Tai, Sha, Doubeni, Sia, Weiland, 2020).Parents need support not only in addressing the physical impacts of health, but in mitigating the social determinants that lead to these outcomes. Additional resources like the following are needed for parents to be successful in supporting their children's virtual schooling:

- *Tangible resources to meet basic needs:* Schools have long understood that meeting children's basic needs is a prerequisite for engagement in the classroom. Teachers have generally relied on informal means of observation and communication to assess children's readiness at school. Remote learning presents new challenges for identifying and attending to these underlying needs. The uncertainty of the pandemic has meant that the needs of families are constantly changing and not immediately obvious through the limited view of the computer screen. New processes from screening and identification in the remote learning environment are discussed in Part Three below. Once these needs are identified, schools must develop strategies to alleviate the impact of these daily living challenges. For example, students who used to receive meals through the school lunch program may not have the transportation required to pick meals up at central distribution sites. Existing school staff can be redeployed to complete these deliveries, or schools can match families in need with others who can provide delivery. Further, schools can help families by acting as a central hub, sharing accurate information on topics such as tenant and immigration rights and referrals to housing and medical resources.
- *Parent well-being:* The compounding impacts of increased financial pressures, aggravated health concerns, new caretaking roles, and the general uncertainty of the current moment has not only exacerbated physical health disparities but increased the stress of parents. In a Kaiser Family Foundation poll from July 2020, 49% of men and 59% of women with children under the age of 18 reported negative mental health impacts due to the worry and stress of the coronavirus outbreak. An intentional approach is needed to address the pressing emotional needs of parents. School psychologists, special educators, and mental health professionals can provide online workshops and support groups for parents with a range of topics that allow parents to be effective partners and supports for their children's learning. Guidance on strategies to cope with stress, anxiety, fear, loss, and parenting guilt, guidelines for daily schedules for students, and parental strategies to motivate and assist students through work completion are among the most pressing needs that can be addressed in workshops provided to families.

Supporting student engagement in academic content
Many families do not have the digital resources they need to engage in schoolwork, and when they do, many students require adult guidance when connecting to their classrooms, completing homework, and

utilizing virtual platforms at home. Further, adult caregivers are unfamiliar with the new technologies and require their own training to navigate the virtual school environment and assist their children throughout the day. In a survey completed by Pew Research Center, 59% of families learning from home at the start of the school year anticipated challenges in being able to complete school assignments due lack of to digital access.

- *Access to Information*: Parents can access information they need when communication is provided in multiple formats that allow them to engage in ways that are in line with their skill, language and cultural preferences. Communication must be clear and streamlined, provided in families' preferred languages, and whenever possible offered in oral format for parents who are non-readers. Prior communication and information should be stored in a way that is readily accessible for reference throughout the year. Parents benefit when communication clearly outlines what is expected of students, including approximate length of time to complete assignments and how and when parents should provide support. The virtual suite of applications available to families should include those that provide daily and weekly schedules, due dates for assignments, schedules for mental and physical breaks, and more informal opportunities to connect with classmates and adults. Parents can engage best when there is a clear and predictable schedule for communication and they are aware of the days and times at which educators can respond to their messages. Similar to current in-person school practices, parents can engage in regular video or phone conferences with educators to learn about their students' progress. These meetings also provide an opportunity for teachers to give parents specific resources and activities that are tailored to their students' challenges and strengths. If scheduling proves difficult, receiving electronic copies of progress reports after each unit with attached resources can help to keep parents connected.
- *Use of technology*: Parents need information on how and where their children can gain access to devices, technology, internet, applications and platforms that students require to actively engage in virtual learning. This information should include contact information, response or wait time for internal and community-based departments and/or organizations that can meet these needs or that provide troubleshooting support. In addition, families may seek training and support in the utilization and navigation of the platforms and applications that schools and teachers will utilize for communication, teaching, and work submission.
- Support with academic content: Parents also need direction on how to support their students with academic skill development. Providing parents with an overview of critical skills, how these skills progress over time, and the focus areas for the academic year can help parents to understand the targeted and expected goals for their students' grade level. Recommended daily activities that parents can complete with their students or games that strengthen these skills along with access to supplemental resources can provide parents with additional ways to be involved beyond helping with work completion. For parents who can provide support with work completion, teachers can provide the student-facing learning objectives in very specific "I can" statements that allow parents as well as students to clearly understand the purpose and easily assess if they are achieving the intended outcome of the assignments. In addition, families benefit when there is a range of options for activities and flexible timelines for completion that align with their schedules and responsibilities. Families and students should not be penalized for incomplete assignments or absences that are beyond the realm of their control. It is important

for parents to understand that educators are an avenue of support for them and their students, especially during this difficult time.

SUPPORTING TEACHERS

For most teachers, the shift to virtual learning in March was the first time they were utilizing technology as their primary mode for instruction. Teachers had to master new digital platforms, contend with the naturally evolving policies and practices of distance learning, find ways to stay connected to their students, and develop new pacing and content delivery methods, all while making their regular preparations for instruction. Many teachers are parents and required to balance these two roles. Educators across the country have demonstrated an incredible resilience and innovative spirit in the ways in which they adapted their instruction and remained connected to their students. Like our understanding of supporting parents, the unique needs of teachers must be front and center in building a holistic system of education for students.

Cultivating wellness

Beyond their work with students, educators are people equally impacted by the disruptions of the pandemic. Our work in supporting students must begin with supporting the educators who care for them.

- *Maximizing flexibility:* In addition to being teachers, many educators are also parents, members of high-risk health groups, and/or caregivers for family members who are isolated by the pandemic. As a result, teachers and school staff require practices that, wherever possible, maximize scheduling and workload flexibility. This may include streamlining administrative tasks, providing robust substitution support, identifying chunks of time that can be flexibly scheduled by teachers and grade level teams to address their prep and planning needs, developing multiple offerings of professional development that allow teachers choice in their learning and schedules, providing multiple weekly opportunities for drop-in support from administrators and intervention providers.

- *Promoting resilience:* As educators spend expansive energy adapting their practice, nurturing their students, and living amidst the backdrop of the pandemic's impacts and a 24-hour news cycle filled with images of racial violence, they need intentional support to cultivate their own wellness. This may include practical steps such as expanding employee assistance programs, providing information on wellness resources, and procuring digital resources. It can also include providing real and meaningful opportunities to connect with and gain support from colleagues who can share deep empathy as a part of the regular workday. For example, schools may host group walking meditation or mindfulness sessions, spoken word or music groups, and/or host affinity groupings where staff who share similar backgrounds or characteristics can gain mutual support on the specific challenges related to their experiences.

- *Deepening reflection:* The pandemic's impact and increased media attention given to police violence have laid bare the ways in which our institutions reproduce troubling systems of inequality, particularly along the lines of race and class. Many educators are drawn to the field with deep commitments to social justice and seek to build a world in which all students are afforded equal opportunity and access. As we explore the future of schools, it is important to spend time deeply reflecting on the ways in which educational institutions and individual educators may unintentionally reinforce this status quo. Does our discipline, special education, and achievement data reveal a disproportionate pattern of exclusion for any particular group? Do

our practices as educators work to lift up the voices of students, families, and the communities we serve? Do our individual actions convey a sense of deep mutual respect for all members of the school community? This work involves providing time, space, and skillful facilitation for staff to engage in self-reflection regarding their personal biases, as well as strengths and areas of growth in social-emotional skills and self- care.

A sense of efficacy

Teachers skills and knowledge along with their own sense of efficacy are directly linked to their engagement and capacity to make meaningful connections to their students (Forsyth, Adams & Hoy, 2011; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). As teachers transform their practice, they need support in several critical areas to find this success.

- *Technical, logistical and instructional support for virtual learning* - Teachers need training and support in developing and delivering effective online instruction that moves beyond just uploading the materials they used in their face to face instruction model. Teachers benefit from explicit guidance on how to utilize chosen virtual platforms, expectations for instructional minutes, strategies for managing a virtual classroom, new policies related to attendance, assessments, discipline and evaluations. Specific guidance on effective online learning practices for K-12 education, strategies for pacing and chunking instruction in a virtual environment, and instructional planning for English language learners and students with disabilities are all additional topics for teacher development.

- *Additional strategies to meet the emerging wellness needs of students* **-** As with in-person school settings, learning cannot occur unless schools first meet the social, emotional and mental health needs of students. In the virtual world, teachers need support to adapt their current practices for wellness into the virtual learning environment, including the creation of healing centered classrooms, strategies for building relationships, the delivery of social-emotional learning curriculum, and implementing restorative and equitable discipline. Further, as teachers have stepped through a virtual portal directly into students' homes, they have gained valuable new perspectives on the lives of their students. These new insights can prompt new ways to make learning meaningful and relevant but also require that teachers employ new skills for navigating from this unique vantage point. As families face mounting economic and daily living pressures and the related escalation of stress, incidents of domestic and community violence have increased (Boserup, McKenney, & Elkbuli, 2020). For example, prior experience has not prepared a teacher with an adequate response to witnessing an incident of domestic violence in the background of their kindergarten zoom circle. Nor do most existing school policies establish protocols for working with other child serving entities that are needed to intervene when children are at home. Teachers must have support in exercising deep curiosity and personal reflection on their own biases when encountering family living situations and dynamics that are different from their own. In addition, they need tools to identify and manage circumstances in which children are facing real danger and in need of immediate intervention. As schools think more deeply about the various levels of support students may need during this time, they must develop an expanded repertoire of practices for teachers that includes crisis response, child protection, and virtual or distant techniques to assess for risk and safety

SUPPORTING STUDENTS

In spite of the many challenges that students face in their daily lives, they have been tenacious in their dedication to learning. So many have weathered the trials and tribulations of the transition to remote learning and make the most of their school opportunities in spite of the tremendous barriers. Some students, particularly those who demonstrate great intellect and creativity but previously struggled to maintain attention or motivation in a standard 6-hour school day, have come to thrive in the flexibility of a virtual learning setting. But some students, including those who have previously experienced trouble at school and/or are struggling with mental health challenges, the shift in school has exacerbated difficulties at engagement and connection within the school environment with one in seven parents reporting worsening behavioral health for their children since the pandemic began (Patrick, Henkhaus, Zickafoose, Lovell, Halvorson, Loch, Letterie & Davis, 2020). All students benefit when they can develop relational connection across physical distance and when there are clear and consistent practices to guide their engagement in the virtual setting.

Cultivating relationship, connection, and wellness

We have previously understood the ways in which positive relationships with adults at schools are a crucial factor in determining student success (Sacks, Murphey, & Moore, 2014; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003), and with physical distance in a virtual learning setting the quality of these relationships becomes all the more critical. Distance learning limits the level of informal communication that naturally occurs between students and their teachers. The physical separations can impact the level of rapport between students and teachers and limit the ways in which teachers obtain clues about the overall emotional and physical well-being of their students unless teachers build intentional approaches to building relationships into their instructional plan.

A new challenge that educators must grapple with is determining how to create a positive digital classroom climate with students and families who are strangers. When the shift to distance learning occurred in March, foundations of relationships, social norms and interactions that had been cultivated for approximately seven months in face-to-face interactions were used as a catalyst to promote continued positive interactions and feelings of safety in a new environment. In the new academic year, students and teachers who have never met or who may never get the opportunity to interact in person, must build relationships. To do so, intentional actions, words, norms, and processes that increase feelings of trust and safety foster the vulnerability needed for effective teaching and learning.

- *Individualized connections and relationships:* In addition to whole-group instruction, relationships between students and teachers can be building time with individuals and/or small groups into the instructional plan. A variety of communication tools can be employed with students who are struggling, including utilizing the platforms favored by students. One strategy to ensure that all students have meaningful relationships with one or more school-related adults is for student support teams to engage in relationship mapping. Through this exercise, schools can review all students or just those who are struggling with attention and engagement and identify which adults they connect with at school. For those connections, intentional practices can be used to strengthen these existing relationships. If a gap is identified for a student, one or more school staff can proactively work to build relationships with the student through the exploration of shared interests or activities. In some cases, the student themself may identify an adult with

whom they would like to connect, and time and attention can be given to cultivating this relationship.

- *Authentic sharing:* Relationship is built on authentic connection, which is far less natural in the virtual space. Students have the opportunity to share their unique experiences in the classroom, and educators can structure activities that allow students to showcase their background as individuals but also how their experiences shape their views of the world. Interactions within the virtual classroom should begin with building deeper connections among and between students and teachers. Class time can be dedicated to exploring students' emotions, addressing lingering questions and concerns, and creating moments of joy and vulnerability that help promote a positive, safe, and welcoming classroom community.

- *Opportunities for connection and in support of wellness:* Opportunities to connect beyond instructional time can occur through responsive or proactive community circles. Virtual time can be allocated for students to engage in fun peer to peer interactions to heighten the joy and reduce the stress of virtual learning. This can include games, virtual recess, "get to know you" activities, or online challenges. Extracurricular or enrichment teams and clubs that already exist should schedule regular times to meet and maintain connections as well discuss ways to positively impact their school community.

Positive behavioral supports in a virtual environment

Within a virtual world, students continue to need support in the development of social-emotional skills and structures that will cultivate a positive classroom environment. Given how the educational environment has changed, students will require new and explicit instruction on the ways in which appropriate participation in virtual learning may look similar to or differ from in-person instruction.

- *Clear expectations that align with values:* Schools who have previously embraced PBIS models can shift their articulations of the ways in which their school values play out in the virtual environment. These guidelines will provide students and families with a foundation of how to engage and interact on their virtual platforms. These must be co-created with students and agreed on by all participants to ensure the expectations are culturally relevant and reflect the diverse backgrounds of students in the classroom.

- *Explicit instruction:* As with behavioral practices and routines in the in-person classroom, students need to see, model, and have reinforced clear expectations for how students should act and respond in their specific virtual settings. School schedules should explicitly set aside time to periodically revisit and revise these expectations so that new situations can be addressed as they arise. In addition to explicit instruction on behavior, continued implementation of a school-wide social-emotional curriculum can be integrated throughout the school day. In some cases, mental health staff record these lessons that can then be shared by individual classroom teachers, freeing up classroom teachers to focus on preparing lessons for the instructional core.

- *Positive reinforcement and restorative responses:* To help students maintain the established values, schools can develop a reinforcement plan that is feasible within a virtual environment. Given the financial and resource challenges that schools are experiencing, these reinforcement plans should include additional time to connect with preferred adults and peers or privileges within the virtual classroom such as choosing the mindful or movement activity for the day or selecting the class game during virtual recess. When challenges do occur, the restoration of

relationships within the community becomes all the more essential during this time of physical separation.

The pages ahead have been developed to support school teams in enacting the above principles into the day to day practice of their work. Part Two explores the shifts needed for a high-functioning virtual Coordination of Services Team (COST) that can be responsive to both the ongoing needs of students and emerging needs dictated by the pandemic. Part Three provides practical solutions for adapting assessment practices to support teams in developing a positive school wide culture and measuring the impact and effectiveness of their collective work. Throughout, the effectiveness of these practices is predicated on the maintenance of effective relationship and connection across time and space in the midst of a world governed by physical distance.

PART TWO: Coordination of Services

The transition from facilitating an effective service coordination process in person to virtually requires an expansion in the general function of the Coordination of Services Team (COST). In the past, a COST has been largely tasked with providing students with academic, behavioral, and social-emotional support so they can thrive in a classroom space. Now that schools are utilizing distance learning or a blended model for instruction, the processes must more readily include a whole-family approach. Since the start of the pandemic, families have had to confront increased stress, changes in employment, increased health challenges, and experiences of loss. To ensure that students are successful, caregivers and not just students need increased access to resources. Caregivers, more than ever, have become a key lever of success for students. Caregiver engagement is essential if inventions delivered by the COST are accessible, reasonable, and able to be supported at home. This changes the COST process in a few important ways.

TEAM PARTICIPANTS

In addition to the standard COST participants, it is crucial to ensure that the following two roles are fulfilled by new members, if these roles are not already present on the team: 1) someone who is functioning in the role of a community outreach worker or school social worker and can easily engage with, provide resources for, and build relationships with families; and 2) an attendance clerk, or whomever is responsible for conducting outreach to families in regard to their child's participation in distance learning. Including a community outreach worker or a school social worker in the COST process supports the COST in accessing community-based interventions and leveraging relationships that support families to access these resources. Similarly, including an attendance clerk in COST meetings can help integrate resources for attendance and shed light on why certain families may or may not be participating in distance learning.

UNIVERSAL SCREENING

The following adaptations to a school's data-based universal screening processes can be made to facilitate the virtual identification and referral of students with additional support needs.

Basic needs screening

Surveying families for basic needs becomes a critical part of the COST process when students no longer physically attend school. While access to basic needs may have come up sporadically for students in the past, most schools do not yet have a systematic, coordinated way to ensure that all families have the basic supports needed to ensure their children are able to access online learning, including stable

housing, food, reliable internet, and a working tablet or computer. Using a basic needs screener can help track conversations with families, quickly identify which families have which needs, and show trends across grade levels or classrooms. The process for using this can be developed by the school to fit the needs of the community, however, an effective process for some sites has been to train each classroom teacher in how to use the screener, and then have teachers and classroom support aides make calls to check in with each family and determine if any support needs are present. Teachers and aides mark down which needs are indicated by the screener and let the family know that someone from the COST will follow up with them in a predetermined amount of time (e.g., one week, or however long the COST decides would be reasonable). The COST then reviews each classroom screener and facilitates the necessary linkages to community/district resources. Whether these students are entered into formal COST monitoring cycles is dependent upon the intensity of presenting need. For families who have single needs (e.g., reliable internet) and whose students are relatively well engaged in schoolwork, referrals should be followed up on until action steps are completed, but formal monitoring cycles are generally not needed. If a family is presenting with a variety of basic needs, and a student is also presenting with academic, behavioral, and/or social-emotional concerns, then a full COST monitoring cycle should be initiated.

The basic needs screener should be completed once at the beginning of the year to assess the readiness of each student to participate in online learning. After the initial, whole-school screening is reviewed by the COST, any subsequent basic needs for families should automatically prompt a referral to the COST process for intervention and follow up. A sample basic needs screener is available [here](#).

You may find that screening and providing for basic needs takes up the bulk of the COST meetings. This is just fine. Screening for and ensuring access to basic needs establishes the necessary conditions for students to meaningfully engage with online learning. Without first providing for basic needs, effective learning is not possible.

Social emotional screener

The Social Emotional Screener (SES) is a helpful tool for assessing the social-emotional needs of all students at UE partner schools. Historically, this universal screener is completed by teachers in October of each school year, ensuring they have time to get to know their students before completing it. Using this tool, teachers report on the strengths and challenges each of their students within about a dozen different dimensions of social-emotional well-being. While all of these dimensions may not be easily assessed in an online environment, encouraging teachers to use this screener as a way to assess the needs of their students is helpful in 1) having them consider their students' behaviors and needs and 2) potentially creating more opportunities for teachers to build relationships with students that have identified social-emotional needs. The COST team should review this data and use it to identify students for Tier II and Tier III interventions. Students with particularly high scores should be entered into the COST process for individual plan development and monitoring. If there are trends among grade levels of classrooms, this data can be used to assign students to Tier II intervention groups staffed by a qualified facilitator or the school's mental health counselor.

An example of the SES used by Unconditional Education school partnerships includes a four-point scale (0 = never, 1 = rarely, 2 = sometimes, 3 = frequently) to rate students on several areas of internalizing (e.g., "withdrawn, sad affect") and externalizing (e.g., hyperactivity/impulsivity) behaviors. In a traditional school environment, teachers would be able to assess students for both internalizing and externalizing

behaviors. You can view a copy of the screener for elementary school (K-5) students here, and for middle school (6-12) students here. Some additional descriptions have been added to each category to help provide guidance on how this might look in a virtual setting. Schools may want to include some additional framing for teachers that acknowledges the challenge in screening students in a virtual setting and creates parameters for their assessment. An example could look like this:

Screening students in the virtual learning setting may be challenging in that your level of interaction with students looks very different outside of a physical classroom space. In addition, you inevitably have more direct exposure to the home life of students than you have in the past. As you complete this screener, please remember that we are all adjusting expectations to flexibly meet the needs of students and families in this challenging time and focus on the behaviors of the student and **the extent to which any challenges are impacting their learning and/or social experience.**

Using the SES in combination with the Student Needs Screener (below) is a good way to obtain data on both the internalizing and externalizing behaviors of students while engaged in distance learning and generate a comprehensive view of a student's overall social-emotional needs.

Student needs screener

Utilizing a universal screener that can identify and measure students' behavioral and social-emotional needs becomes necessary to support an effective COST process. This is more challenging in distance learning environments where relying on teacher reports and observation is often not enough to uncover the real story about what is going on for a child. Utilizing a mix of student self-reports and teacher/family reports can help identify students in need and highlight where "missing" students may need to be followed up by the COST to assess for safety and determine if services are required. Surveying students directly in grades 3+ is a useful way to address the challenge of teacher assessments in a virtual setting by soliciting information directly from students and families to supplement the observations of school staff. Students can be questioned on how well they can focus on and engage with schoolwork in their home environments, as well as their personal levels of stress regarding the virus and the health and well-being of their family members. Ratings scales for different emotions can also help the COST assess a student's baseline needs. Teachers can support students in completing these surveys during class time, and either teachers or COST members can follow up with students who did not respond to the surveys. A similar survey can be used in grades TK-2 but should be modified for parent input and insight. Once the surveys are completed and submitted, the COST coordinator can aggregate data and present it to the team to help them identify trends and develop interventions.

The Student Needs Screener should be administered at the beginning of each school year to assess the social-emotional needs of all students in third grade and up. A version of this survey can be adapted for parental response and should be utilized for students in TK-2nd grade. Panorama Education offers a variety of options for screeners that meet these needs. Here is an example of one.

Assessing behavioral needs via "office discipline referrals"

During distance learning, it is likely that schools will not have access to traditional forms of assessment in regard to behavior or discipline. Gathering meaningful data that highlights behavioral needs will require schools to more fully revise the process by which expectations are developed, problem behaviors are defined, and responses to behavior challenges are articulated (addressed in part one). For many schools this means revising their approach to Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

We must adapt our current office disciplinary referral (ODR) system so that it can be useful in an online platform. Paper referrals have little value in a distance learning system. Instead, consider what ways a

teacher might be able to signal to administration that behavioral expectations are not being met in their classroom. What online platform could support this? What adjustments need to be made to the office disciplinary form, if any, to ensure that online learning environments and behaviors are adequately captured for documentation? For schools using the PBIS SWIS platform for Office Discipline Referrals, this link provides useful guidance on adopting an online referral form process.

Shifting the disciplinary system to be supported in an online context requires us to not only look at the form, but the process for referrals in general. In a digital space without immediate access to administration, the line between classroom/teacher-managed vs. "office"/administration-managed behaviors becomes less clear. Consider: how do school-wide expectations need to be revised to account for virtual learning, and what behaviors in an online setting should trigger an office disciplinary referral? Just as with in-person schooling, once identified, these behaviors should be well defined and clearly understood by all staff; and when these behaviors occur, there should be an explicit process for a teacher or staff member to follow to ensure the behaviors are addressed appropriately. How will those referrals result in responsive support for students so that they experience opportunities to learn and practice acceptable behaviors to meet their needs? Outlining common responses across all classrooms for when behavioral expectations are not met is useful, since it allows students to predict what will happen when expectations are not followed and experience a sense of consistency with their peers. Just as important, how can a virtual ODR system enable COST members to review and respond to school wide trends, for example, times of day with an uptick in referrals or certain virtual classrooms where managing student behavior seems to be difficult. Once these systems are aligned and adapted to support online learning, ODR trends among classrooms or grade levels may become apparent so that COST members can develop responsive systems of support to address the highlighted needs.

INDIVIDUAL STUDENT PLAN AND DEVELOPMENT

Small organizational shifts in the way a team reviews and develops individual support plans can ensure effective team communication and service delivery for students.

Universal form updates

The universal COST referral form should be updated to include a category for basic needs. These should include housing, food, internet, healthcare, or technology (tablets, computers, etc.).

An effective online database

Social distancing protocols likely require a virtual COST meeting. While COST protocols can largely remain the same, the need for an effective, secure online database becomes incredibly important. Paper referrals become cumbersome and unsafe, and tracking progress and goals must be accessible to all team members virtually. A useful online database for monitoring COST processes should include the following features:

- *HIPPA/FERPA compliance*: The safety of student information should be a key factor in selecting a database.
- *Individual or universal logins for teachers*: Teachers and staff must be able to access a full list of students to make referrals. While the majority of referrals will come from an individual student's classroom teacher, administrators, support staff, and other school personnel should be encouraged to make referrals as well. All teachers and staff should have access to the COST referral form and be able to make a referral for any student within the school.

- *Individual or universal logins for COST members:* COST members should be able to log in and access COST referrals that have been submitted, regardless of who submitted them.
- *A tracking system or COST dashboard:* A report that lists all COST referrals and their current status is useful for tracking where each student is within the COST process. This can be a simple grid or a database of submitted forms, as long as it includes the step where the student is within the COST process (i.e., referral submitted, triage, intervention cycle 1, intervention cycle 2, exited from COST)
- *Meeting notes:* For each COST referral, the database should include the capacity for team members to write and store notes from meetings for easy access by all members. These meetings would include triage, initial planning, 1-week follow-up, and 6 to 8-week follow-ups. Meeting notes should include a place for goal development and follow the outline of the COST agenda (e.g., an area for strengths, areas of growth, clarifying questions, intervention planning, goals, and next steps).
- *Assigning and tracking action items:* A key part of the COST process is ensuring that action items are assigned and followed up on so that students can access interventions. An effective COST database will include the ability to assign action items to different individuals (both on and off the COST) and mark them as complete. These action items should be reviewable by the COST at any time, regardless of their status. Also helpful is the ability for COST members to run a report, filterable by staff or student, that shows which action items are still pending and which have been completed.
- *Progress monitoring:* The database should include an area to determine whether students have already met or are on track to meet their goals.
- *Reports:* The ability to run reports is critical to ensuring COST fidelity. Helpful reports include: a list of all submitted referrals; current status of referrals; a list of students who have exited the COST process and their reasons for exit; a list of students who were triaged but referred to community-based services and their reasons for referral; and action item completion.

Thematic meetings

The shift to online learning will inevitably present challenges for students and their families, but it will likely bring challenges to teachers and intervention providers as well. Holding thematic COST meetings focused on supporting teachers to implement effective online learning or culture/climate improvement activities can be a meaningful use of meeting space. During traditional school days, looking at the number of office discipline referrals coming in and the content of those referrals would be good indicators for the need of a thematic meeting. In distance learning, students may choose to opt out entirely. Looking at attendance data and looking for trends among grade levels and classrooms will be an important source of information for determining where effective interventions for teachers should be developed and disseminated. Thematic meetings may focus on specific teaching strategies for effective online learning, ways to engage students in culture and climate building in a digital space, or how to effectively connect with families if students are struggling with attendance or work completion. Suggested topics for professional development are covered in Part One, and thematic meetings can be used to develop a plan to go deeper into these topics for individual teachers or teams that need additional support.

This section has focused on assessing the needs of students in order to plan proactive tiered interventions and supports. Equally important is a school's focus on assessing the overall school culture and climate as well as feedback on the tiered interventions that are put in place.

PART THREE: Formative Assessment for Schoolwide Program Planning and Improvement

The UE model intentionally uplifts the importance of assessing school-wide practices with the aim of creating welcoming spaces that promote a sense of safety and belonging for all members of the community. Some questions that schools may be grappling with as they adapt these practices to the virtual setting include: What assessments can we implement that effectively take student, family, and staff voice into consideration? How do we measure the impact of our interventions outside of the school building? The following chapter outlines some considerations, best practices, and suggested tools for moving forward in this important aspect of our work.

CULTURE AND CLIMATE ASSESSMENT

A core belief of the UE approach is that a healthy culture and climate provides the necessary foundation for successful, tiered interventions. What is "culture and climate" in the context of virtual learning? How can we continue to intentionally assess culture and climate and set meaningful goals for improvement? Upon reviewing our own assessment practices, we realized that it only requires some small revisions to the existing tools and processes to make culture and climate work meaningful in the virtual setting.

The School Climate Assessment Instrument (SCAI)

The National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environment, funded by the US Department of Education, maintains a compendium of valid and reliable surveys, assessments, and scales of school climate that can assist educators to formally assess school culture and climate. Many UE schools use one of the tools on this list called the School Climate Assessment Instrument (SCAI). Tools like SCAI can still be administered yearly to track measures of culture and climate, but now adaptations must be made to account for the new virtual learning context. The delivery method of the survey will need to be adjusted as well. For example, instead of utilizing paper surveys to question families, online surveys will likely need to be used. Ensuring that families have access to the internet and tablets to complete this survey is crucial to obtaining equitable, useful data that can be used for culture and climate planning and reflection. Each school site can determine which dimensions would be relevant to their current state of operation. Here are examples of revised SCAI survey questions for a school operating entirely through distance learning.

The Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Tiered Fidelity Index

The multi-tiered framework developed by the National Technical Assistance Center on PBIS is still a valid, relevant tool for measuring fidelity in the implementation at all three tiers during distance learning. Some slight revisions can be made to ensure that the approach to positive discipline is adapted to the context of distance learning. An example of an amended version is available here.

The Trauma Index

Assessing school systems to ensure that they are trauma-informed becomes even more important during a global pandemic, when creating healing-centered spaces can help address the stress and isolation that everyone is feeling. The amended Trauma Index helps to support a review of systems, policies, and practices to ensure a school site is mitigating triggers and supporting students as effectively as possible. The amended Trauma index is available here.

Data analysis and development of the Annual Implementation Plan

The Culture and Climate Committee (C3) is the driving force behind the development and achievement of a school's culture and climate goals. Ensuring that a robust team can still function through distance learning supports schools to continue moving forward in creating a positive and supportive culture and climate during distance learning. In a virtual setting, the school's work is still informed by the data-driven goals in the Annual Implementation Plan. These goals, and the C3's work in general, must be adapted to a distance learning environment.

A functional, virtual Culture and Climate Committee (C3)

The C3 should continue to meet virtually at least monthly to 1) develop an actionable Annual Implementation Plan for the school year (more on that below) and 2) measure progress toward the goals identified in the plan. Following the identification of goals and action steps, the team should meet regularly to review progress towards the identified goals. An effective format for maximizing meeting time can be to split the team up among working groups that are each assigned a goal. The first 15 minutes of the meeting can be spent reviewing the goals and action steps and updating the team on progress made since the previous meeting. The following 35 minutes of the meeting can be spent in work groups, where team members are planning, organizing, and actually doing the work described in the action steps. The last ten minutes of the meeting can be spent on reporting back from the work groups, reviewing next steps, and closing with appreciations.

The Annual Implementation Plan (AIP)

Creating an effective AIP that can guide the culture and climate work of the school during distance learning can be challenging but is still an effective means of driving forward the work of the C3 without losing momentum. Balancing day to day needs with long-term goals is a worthy effort. When planning an AIP during distance learning, the C3 team must ask itself what needs to change and be defined for now, and what additional work can be done to continue strengthening the school's systems for the long-term?

First, it is important to consider what new needs have arisen because of online learning. Do new rules/responsibilities need to be identified in a behavior matrix that addresses online learning spaces? If a school is operating under a hybrid model, what new social distancing protocols require new procedures for transitions, social interactions, and existing in the classroom space? Creating a goal to update and implement new strategies to align PBIS with distance or hybrid learning is an effective strategy for ensuring this work happens as efficiently and effectively as possible. Our experience is that additional common areas of focus within culture and climate that are meaningful during distance learning include family engagement, staff relationships, and overall practices that promote a sense of connection and trust among students, family members, and staff.

Once schools identify one to three priorities or goal areas, the development of concrete action steps and reflection processes may take some creative thinking and innovation. Consider: how can we develop action steps toward these goals that can be implemented virtually? What new and creative strategies can we use to engage parents and students in these processes? Also consider the pacing of cycles of review, and how these goals will be adjusted if and when your instructional delivery methods change. For example, if schools move into a hybrid model mid-year, how will this change your action steps? What process will the C3 team undergo to review and evaluate action steps and how to build them out for in-person engagement? Setting aside a portion of the C3 meeting to review action steps and determine what needs to be updated or revised based on changing distance learning or social distancing practices.

Regardless of what phase of implementation your school is in, prioritizing family engagement, connection, and communication is key to ensuring that students are included in the implementation of these goals, and that families are as connected as they would be if school were in session pre-COVID.

FEEDBACK LOOPS AND PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

A theme of the UE approach is to center solutions based on the experiences and feedback of those who are most directly impacted by the challenge. Gathering feedback from students, families, and staff will become even more crucial as schools participate in ongoing adaptation to meet ever-evolving needs. Many of the same tools that are traditionally used for these types of feedback loops can still be implemented virtually, with some minor adjustments.

Tier 3 student and family survey

Distance learning or hybrid models almost guarantee a shift in how Tier 3 individualized services are provided to students and families. By surveying them about their experiences with these services, we can engage in an iterative process of refining them so that they best serve students' needs. Shifting to online learning is a big change for everyone, but this is be especially true for students who have been regularly engaged in more intensive, Tier 3 supports. Collecting feedback on new strategies and modes for implementation becomes critical in ensuring that we are still serving the highest needs students to the best of our and their abilities. Here is an example of an amended questionnaire for students and caregivers.

Staff experience survey

Similarly, staff are experiencing virtual or hybrid learning for the first time as well. Teaching in this context is a new experience for most, if not all, adults on campus, and surveying them to see where we succeeded and where we continue to grow is critical in ensuring that staff feel supported, listened to, and understood. An example of questions to collect feedback on staff experience is available here.

Leadership reflection

Finally, collective leadership reflection on the implementation of distance or hybrid learning can create an intentional space for administration to weigh the successes and areas of growth for this model and share and learn from each other. Creating these intentional spaces for reflection forces consideration in a way that staff and administration may not have time to do themselves and can lead to stronger program implementation overall. Suggestions for leadership reflection questions are included here.

It is only through continuous cycles of reflection, assessment, and program improvement that we have the ability to successfully tackle the immense challenges presented by the shift to distance learning.

Looking Ahead

The COVID-19 pandemic has created the greatest disruption of this century for the education system. While challenging in many ways, the ingenuity and resilience of so many demonstrates the capacity our education system has to adapt to the changing world. In addition, this time has highlighted the ways in which institutional racism plagues our nation and how our education institutions play a part in creating the resulting inequities. It has been a time of great learning for all and as schools begin the eventual transition to in-person instruction, we must capture these important lessons to advance the work of education and racial equity. First, the most struggling students need more support, and it will require an approach that brings together resources not just from the education system but from across a network of

child-serving agencies, including mental health and social services, to create a truly comprehensive system of care. Second, teachers are at the heart of the work of educating children, and practices that promote efficacy and professional sustainability can only help to more effectively meet the needs of students. Finally, more must be done to build effective partnerships between schools and families by cultivating policies that allow families and whole communities to contribute to and prioritize the education of their children. It is only by considering the needs of the most vulnerable students first that effective systems can be built to meet the needs of all children.

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