THE TEACHERS HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY

Lessons Learned from U.S. PK-12 Teachers During the COVID-impacted 2020-21 School Year

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Executive Summary

“ Nobody has asked. Nobody cares. Even when they do ask, they’re not really listening to the response. And it’s really disheartening to feel that devalued as a human being. ”

— Miriam, K-8 Library Media Teacher

In education, we often trust that leaders of a school building or system have a rich understanding of the experiences of students and teachers in classrooms. Except for the occasional corporate outsider, most superintendents and principals work their way up through the classroom ranks, accumulating valuable experience about what the late Richard Elmore (1996) called the “instructional core”: the intersection of teachers, students, and the educational resources available to them. This intersection is where learning happens in schools.

The pandemic fundamentally upended the instructional core. A thousand underlying assumptions of how schooling functions—that teachers can hand students a piece of paper, that teachers can see when a student raises their hand, that students and teachers can meet together in the same building—melted away in the spring of 2020 in the wake of COVID. This upheaval created an “experience gap” among administrators. School leaders often draw upon their decades in the classroom as students and then teachers to empathize with teachers’ and students’ experiences. But no policymaker, superintendent, or principal in the United States has ever gone to school in a pandemic and, therefore, they suffered from insufficient expertise in teaching during a global public health emergency.

Practicing teachers have a unique vantage on pandemic schooling, and they have the potential to be powerful partners in designing school and district responses to the ever-evolving challenges of COVID. **One of the unnecessary tragedies of pandemic schooling, repeated in schools across the country over the past year and a half, is that teachers have not been valued as partners in designing our educational response to COVID**. Teachers in classrooms have an intimate understanding of their students’ challenges, what policy responses are obviously fated for disaster, and what emerging teaching approaches might be working. To ignore their insights is to squander one of the most valuable resources we have in supporting young people through the pandemic.

Since the earliest days of the pandemic, researchers in the MIT Teaching Systems Lab have interviewed and hosted design workshops with students, teachers, school and district leaders, families, and community members to better understand the lived experiences of school stakeholders. In this report, we present findings from interviews with 57 classroom teachers, working across the country in multiple grade levels and school types, that we conducted in the spring of 2021 as a follow up to our summer of 2020 report, What’s Lost, What’s Left, What’s Next: Lesson Learned from the Lived Experience of Teachers during the Novel Coronavirus Pandemic. **Across our interviews, teachers told us that they felt excluded from the decision-making process as schools proceeded from one pivot to the next in responding to the evolving conditions of COVID**.

The exclusion of teachers from participation in the response to COVID has three important consequences. **First, this exclusion is demoralizing to teachers, especially when combined with worsening working conditions and widening inequalities**. At a moment where schools are calling upon teachers to put in enormous, uncompensated extra efforts to develop new curriculum and new teaching approaches while addressing the vast unmet needs of students, it is unwise to trivialize their concerns and experience. The lack of teachers’ voices being included in decision-making at the school, district, state, and federal level is not a new phenomenon, but the dangers in continuing to ignore teachers were heightened during the past year and a half of the pandemic.

Second, ignoring the concerns of teachers led to policymakers and school leaders advancing several seriously ill-considered ideas over the objections of practicing teachers. For example, simulteaching is when one teacher instructs a group of in-person students in a classroom while simultaneously trying to teach groups of students online. Simulteaching has some attractive administrative advantages, as it allows students to flexibly move between in-person and remote instruction with the same teacher. It has the disadvantage, however, of being totally unworkable in practice, with one group or the other largely ignored by necessity. Teachers warned their building and district leaders that hybrid teaching would not work, many districts pressed ahead regardless, and

student learning and experiences suffered when it predictably failed. Similarly, teachers in the summer of 2020 were eager for professional learning around pedagogical practices for online teaching to be better prepared, but teachers received only limited instruction in tech tools and precious little support in instruction and pedagogy. Additionally, education policymakers and researchers have advanced the notion of "learning loss"—reduced math and English test scores relative to pre-pandemic benchmarks—as the signature concern of the pandemic, and they have advocated for high-dosage tutoring, summer school, and extended school days as necessary responses. For the teachers in our study, "learning loss" is not a salient or sufficient frame for summarizing student experiences. It ignores both the incredible and important learning that students have accomplished during the pandemic along with the social losses that young people feel most acutely. This is not to say that some students will find their development seriously hampered from pandemic schooling interruptions, but teachers will not rally around a policy frame like "learning loss" that doesn't reflect their or their students' lived experiences. **A successful policy narrative for addressing the challenges of the pandemic will be designed with teachers, not imposed upon them**.

Finally, across the country, teachers are developing a variety of effective instructional strategies in response to the challenging conditions of COVID. Teachers are designing new ways of reaching students with technology. They are recognizing multiple categories of students—ranging from the over-disciplined to the underchallenged to certain students with disabilities—that are benefitting substantially from opportunities during remote learning. Teachers and students are finding that building grace and flexibility into the routines and expectations of classroom life has a humanizing potential to build the foundation of wellness upon which meaningful learning depends. Virtual meetings with parents and families are connecting home and school in important new ways. These are tangible learnings and practices that could be woven into the ongoing response to the pandemic in 2021-2022 and to the challenging future of more frequently interrupted schooling that will characterize the age of climate change, as we see in the recent school closings in Tahoe due to fires and in the Gulf Coast and the Northeast due to Hurricane Ida. **But the only way to reap the benefits of these innovations is to incorporate teachers and their students in the ongoing redesign of schools**.

Massachusetts Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley argues for the policy maxim that "the people closest to the pain should be closest to the power." There are two types of people in the instructional core of schools—students and teachers—and they know better than any other stakeholder groups what has been working and what has failed over the last 18 months of the pandemic. In our interviews, teachers repeatedly told us that they felt excluded and ignored in school decision-making processes and, as a result, flawed ideas became incorporated in school policy while valuable innovations have yet to be taken up and supported systemically. As the Delta variant has painfully exposed, the pandemic is not over. There is more adjustment in the year ahead. **The school systems with the most effective approaches to pandemic schooling will be those that listen seriously to the concerns and insights of teachers and include them in design and decision-making**. Listening to the experience of teachers over the last pandemic year is the first step towards better teaching and learning this year, and we present this report in the service of that important goal.

Our Research Approach

Our research team conducted an interview-based qualitative study about U.S. PK-12 teachers' experiences during the COVID-impacted 2020-21 academic school year. In April and May of 2021, we conducted 57 online interviews with teachers that typically lasted between 30-60 minutes. Our interview sample was diverse along several dimensions (see Table 1), but we deliberately oversampled Black, Latinx, Native, and Asian teachers working in urban and rural communities hit hardest by COVID, consistent with our belief that we can learn the most from those most impacted by issues of inequity. In order to highlight this diversity of voices, when we first use a direct quotation from a teacher, we identify key demographic characteristics of the speaker including race and/or ethnicity, gender, grade level, subject matter, and geographic location. We list some or all of these categories if relevant when referring to speakers later in the report.

After transcribing these interviews, we used a method called thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify themes that appeared frequently and could best inform the decision-making of teachers, school leaders and staff, policymakers, and communities for the upcoming 2021-22 school year and beyond. To conduct this analysis, we assembled a diverse team of researchers that includes four former K-12 teachers; our analysis is informed by our position as strong supporters of teachers, students, families, and communities and the fact that we are committed to disrupting and dismantling all forms of oppression inside and outside schools. Our hope is that the following findings will provide provocative generalizability, which Fine (2008) describes as "the extent to which a piece of research provokes readers or audiences, across contexts, to generalize to 'worlds not yet,' in the language of Maxine Greene; to rethink and reimagine current arrangements" (p. 227).

School Information			
School Level		**School Type**	
Elementary/PK-8 School	23	Public	45
Middle School	10	Private	7
High School	24	Charter	5

Teaching Level/Subject		
Level	**Subject**	
Elementary/PK-8 School	All Subjects or Specialist	20
	Special Education	3
Middle School	English Language Learning	1
	History/Humanities	2
	Math	3
	Science	1
	STEM	1
	Special Education	2
High School	English Language Arts	5
	History/Social Studies	8
	Math	7
	Science	4

Teacher Demographics			
Gender		**Race/Ethnicity**	
Female	35	Asian	4
Male	21	Black	6
Non-Binary	1	LatinX	13
Trans Masc	1	Multiracial	4
		Native	4
		White	31

Table 1. School and Teacher Information

Findings

Teachers Were Closest To the Issues But Were Insufficiently Heard, Supported, and Valued

> **“I am healing from being in a toxic relationship with my principal and district. I expected to—I’ve been out of my district for about a month now in a new role, new job, new career for almost three weeks. So that has allowed me to heal, I think, or begin the process of healing. I’m now in a work environment, for example, where I’m not questioned and my expertise is assumed. I don’t feel that I’m handcuffed in any way. But because I’m still healing, because teaching was such a big part of my life and my identity for almost 22 years, I don’t know that I have the joy that I once did teaching, but I don’t know if that’s because of the new non-teaching role or if it’s because I’m out. ”**
>
> **— Vanessa, Former 4th Grade Math Teacher**

You may remember Vanessa from our report last summer: she is a Black woman who, at the time, was teaching 4th grade in an urban district in the South and who was known as “The Singing Math Teacher,” weaving songs, call-and-response, and other rhythmic activities into her teaching to help students learn math. These approaches that were so effective in an in-person classroom translated poorly to Zoom/remote learning. In the midst of the twin pandemics of COVID and anti-Black racism in the form of the police and vigilante killings of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd, Vanessa told us: “As a person who identifies as a Black woman, I am angry and terrified. None of these inequities are new and we’ve been saying this for a long time. . . . But especially living where I live, I am scared as hell.”

Vanessa left the classroom partway through the 2020-21 school year because she felt devalued, disrespected, and ignored despite her 22 years in the classroom and widespread national recognition as an expert on culturally-sustaining and effective mathematics pedagogy. Vanessa is representative of many of the teachers in our study who, despite being closest to what was happening in the classroom and with their students and families, were rarely consulted in decision-making processes. In the following section, we outline what teachers experienced in the classroom during the COVID-impacted school year and how they were systematically unsupported by various institutions while also being disregarded and disrespected despite their important local knowledge.

Teachers Were Closest to the Issues

> **My experience teaching during a pandemic has been stressful. It has been a challenge, especially last year. I had to stop teaching my students in March. And yes, we virtually taught for a month. But I didn’t get a chance to tell them goodbye or hug them one last time. And now I can’t even touch my kids. . . . I can’t touch what they’re touching.**
>
> **— Kandace, a Black female kindergarten teacher in the South**

Whether virtual, in person, or some hybrid of both, teachers were closest to what was happening in their classrooms, which meant they were closest to students’ pain caused by what COVID was doing to their lives. As they recounted what their year of teaching during a pandemic had been like, several teachers shed tears during the interviews—something none of the interviewers had experienced in their past work—because of how hard the year was for them and their students. The tears and accompanying words were often an expression of a sense of tremendous loss, including seeing students lose loved ones. Luna, a white high school math teacher in a large

urban district in the West, recounted what it was like when COVID hit her school community hard in late November/early December:

> **We come back from Thanksgiving and it was like every day: "I just tested positive"; "My grandfather died"; "I'm planning my grandmother's funeral"; "I'm helping my parents plan the funeral." And it was almost every day I had a student coming to me saying "This person died, this person died, this person tested positive. My whole family's sick."**

Further, some teachers lost their own loved ones. Heartbreakingly, one teacher told us she lost 11 family members to COVID. Helen, a biracial female social studies teacher in a private school in the South, echoed teachers in our report last summer when she spoke about grief and loss, comparing teaching this year to "the stages of grief."

Beyond the emotional toll of the pandemic, teachers who had to teach remotely told us that teaching online was incredibly difficult, contrary to much of the popular discourse in traditional and social media that promoted the myth that remote teaching was easier. The overwhelming majority of teachers told us that remote teaching was much harder and more time-consuming than in-person schooling, with several veteran teachers telling us they have not worked this many hours since their first year of teaching, which is universally considered to be the most difficult, time-consuming year of teaching. Further, as Brittany, a Latina elementary teacher in a suburban school in the Midwest, shared:

> **Remote learning is so much harder because we are humans and we require human interactions. . . . We did not go into the education field to look at a screen all day long. . . . The amount of prep work that it takes to prep for an entire day of digital learning is insane. It's insane. . . . I've burned out a lot sooner than I usually do.**

Though teachers had experience teaching online in the spring of 2020, starting the year online with groups of students with whom they had no previous relationship coupled with potentially having to switch to simultaneously teach students online and in-person presented challenges that only those in the classroom could deeply understand.

Additionally, in-person teaching was unlike teaching prior to the pandemic, whether teachers began the year in-person or came back once vaccines were widely available. The use of masks, plexiglass, social distancing, cohorts of students to minimize contact and exposure, and other measures prevented a lot of the human contact—between teacher and student as well as among students—that marks the joy of going to school. It also meant challenges in doing group work and engaging in cooperative teaching strategies such as think/pair/share, or in handing out and using manipulatives—small plastic or wooden block-like tools that teachers use with students to learn math concepts. Many teachers reported having to start from scratch and teach or re-teach classroom procedures, and to build or rebuild a classroom community in the middle of or late in the school year when they returned to in-person schooling. Some teachers had hit a stride with online learning only to find decision-makers far from classrooms deciding teachers needed to return to school buildings without consulting them on how that could impact their classroom dynamic. Further, as Elton, a white male high school history teacher in the South, recalled when having to go back to in-person learning: "When we go back, we're going to re-learn what it takes to be in a building together, to be a learning community together, to be a group of people who struggle to make meaning together." In short, the return to in-person classrooms was nothing like the classrooms teachers knew before and was far from "normal."

Teachers had a unique perspective on the conditions of teaching during a pandemic, whether in person, remote, or hybrid. Policymakers and administrators at every level would have done well to learn from teachers—the experts on the ground—and to include their voices in the decision-making process. However, when asked if decision-makers were soliciting their voices and learning from their experiences, several of our teachers told us members of our research team were the first people who had asked them about how the school year was going.

The Demoralization of Teachers

> **I think people think they know what they're talking about when they try to give teachers advice, but it's one of those things that you don't know it until you're in it, especially during a pandemic.**
>
> **— Brittany, a Latina elementary school teacher in the Midwest**

Instead of being asked for their insights and experiences gleaned from their classrooms—virtual or otherwise—our interviewees repeatedly noted they felt a lack of respect for them as individual teachers and for the teaching profession as a whole. This disrespect included a lack of input from teachers in decision-making processes throughout the pandemic. Many teachers had a hard time understanding how highly qualified and degreed professionals who are experts in their fields had so little say in decision-making processes about everything from online learning management systems to curriculum choices to the best arrangement of teaching and learning.

Merlin, a Latino teacher in an urban school district in the South, talked about a disconnect between policymakers and teachers in the classroom. Whether it was at his school board or his state capital, he felt that "very few of them actually go in the trenches and know what it's like on the ground." Roberto, a Latino male teacher in the West, described an instance where teachers informed their principal that the hybrid model was not working for teachers and students alike, but the principal completely ignored the teachers' feedback while telling the district hybrid teaching was going well. He noted that teachers had "pretty much unanimously said this is exhausting and this is not tenable" but then the "teachers' voice was ignored, the district ignored that feedback, and pretty much within a week they rolled [the hybrid model] out to the rest of the district."

Kira, a Native female teacher in the South, described an instance where she brought her background from her master's degree program and former research experience to explain what was effective in terms of second language instruction but her administration insisted she do the opposite. A first-year teacher who told us her school decided not to bring her back based on her performance during pandemic teaching—which 20-year veterans told us was incredibly challenging—Kira said: "I mean [it's] just stressful knowing that I'm not doing my best work just because I feel like it's so difficult to try to do your best in a different context than you're used to. . . . I've been telling people that if I had a word to describe this year it would be the word 'disappointment.'" Finally, Trace, a Black male 8th grade algebra teacher in an urban district in the Southwest, had this to say about administrators who demanded teachers be in schools while they worked from home:

> **[The administrators are] still working from home. It's May and you have not been to a campus, you ain't been to your office, but I've been here since October? So . . . how do you think I feel when I've been going, listening to all these policies and you've been telling me I got to do this and I got to make sure I'm vaccinated? I'm doing what I'm supposed to do, but you've been at home. You've been so far detached from what's actually going on that I don't think that they see—I don't think they see what we're saying. They're looking at this screen . . . and trying to get a great gauge on what's going on and you can't. You don't know the water's wet until you put your hand in it.**

Further, some teachers described a scenario in which they finally hit a stride with online learning only to be told by those above to suddenly transition to a hybrid or in-person setting, with no input from them. For example, Emilio, a biracial Asian and white ESL teacher in an urban school district in New England, expressed frustration at the one week's notice his district gave him in their decision to come back to in-person schooling that had very little teacher input. The timing—one week before winter break—was disruptive, according to Emilio. He felt that the transition was rushed and potentially unsafe as a result. Further, students had a choice about whether to remain remote or not, but not teachers. During this school year, Emilio's school has received a lot of new curricular programs that are mandated by the district and no one asked teachers about them, he notes. He's a first-year teacher but has observed how expert, veteran teachers are not consulted either in such decisions.

The Toll of Widening Inequalities and Society's Inadequate Response

> **Why isn't our government taking care of our situation? Why are you blaming me?**
>
> **— Anne, a white middle school special education teacher in the Southwest**

In addition to feeling demoralized by many within the field of education, teachers spoke about being blamed for problems that should have fallen under the purview of institutions besides schools. Many teachers said that while their administration at the school level stepped up to provide technological access along with food drops, book donations, hotspots, and other learning and living necessities, it was often not enough to overcome existing inequities exacerbated by the pandemic. Teachers were vocal about what they saw as failures from various governing bodies—from their local governments to Washington D.C.—to manage a serious public health crisis that was then placed on their shoulders. Teachers and schools were expected to play the role of food providers, tech support, childcare providers, mental health experts, and other roles on top of quickly becoming expert digital instructors. Bearing the brunt of these failures added an extra layer of stress to teachers. Representative of these sentiments, David, a white male high school history teacher in the rural South, told us:

> **But we're doing as much as we can and, really, more than we ever have. And from my perspective, the larger "us" has failed kids, not teachers or schools specifically, because we haven't made it a priority to make school safe enough to have in person, that we haven't done enough to try to mitigate COVID spread. Our vaccination rates are not high enough and folks have been mad at us for something that is totally not [within our] scope of problems we can solve.**

Other teachers spoke to inequalities outside of school reflecting those inside schools, which only widened during the past COVID-impacted school year. Tina, a white female elementary special educator in the Southwest, describes the challenges faced by one of her students who shared a small two bedroom household with her guardian and nine other children. She stated it was difficult for the student to focus, especially with her learning disability. Living in an urban district with a state government that often failed to take the threat of COVID seriously, the family understandably chose to stay home and keep all children home out of a fear of getting sick with COVID. Pilar, a Latina second grade teacher in the Northeast, noted that our educational system was "broken many, many years before COVID came along" but COVID has shined a "magnifying glass on the fact that there are inequities within our system."

The Toll of Public Criticism

> **We had parents calling in to school committee meetings saying how selfish the teachers were. . . . it was really painful.**
>
> **— Anisa, a white female middle school math teacher in the Northeast**

The final piece of the puzzle that was incredibly disheartening for teachers was criticism they got from parents, though most teachers said it was a small but extremely loud minority of parents who had attacked them in traditional media, via social media, and in other public forums. At the start of the first in-person school shutdown in spring 2020, many parents and caregivers—who were expected to become homeschool teachers overnight—got a glimpse of just how difficult being a teacher is. Social media was flooded with praise for teachers, with quips such as "Teachers should be paid a million dollars a year!" being tossed around. However, as the pandemic continued on beyond a few weeks into months and then a new school year, many in the general public grew weary of homeschooling and some turned on teachers, with their voices being amplified by both social media and traditional media. Miriam, an Asian-American library media specialist in the Northeast, explained how the anti-teacher narrative unfolded in her state:

It strikes me as unconscionable that [the state education department] cherry-picked [COVID] data in August and never bothered to revise it or go revisit the guidance. I think that's inexcusable. But once the narrative got set, it just stayed. And we became the complainers and the selfish ingrates who didn't want to—who were just looking out for ourselves and not for kids.

Many of our teachers really struggled with the abrupt turnaround from heroes in the public's eyes to villains. Victoria, a white female high school English teacher in a rural district in the West, said the nation collectively praised teachers and then pivoted to attacking them when teachers wanted to continue with online teaching because "we don't want to die of this completely preventable disease." She also said it was especially aggravating because the vitriol came from the same people who trusted them in the previous spring to get their children through this difficult moment. The sentiments were echoed by Anne, a white female special educator in the Southwest, who told us:

Anne: [P]arents have called us selfish for not wanting to die. That just [laughter]... I don't know, the cruelty of the world has become really apparent this year in a way that...

Interviewer: There was that one wave of "Support front-line workers, support teachers"...

A: Yeah. For two weeks. [laughter] And then it's like, "You evil, selfish, lazy assholes, why don't you go back to work?" And I've been working. I've been working my butt off over the school year.

Anne continued on to say that COVID really brought into relief for her the idea that some, perhaps even many, in the general public see teachers simply as "babysitters" where "they can put their kids for eight hours a day—and that's gross."

Other teachers expressed how awful it was to be attacked for supposedly not working as much or at all during the pandemic. Olivia, a Latina high school science teacher in the South, talked about the problematic rhetoric of teachers having summers and breaks off and being more babysitters than having an actual profession—mythmaking that was repackaged to criticize teachers during COVID. In reference to the alleged extra "free time" (which he referred to in air quotes) of teaching from home, Phanjanit, a male Asian-American 3rd grade teacher in an urban school district in the Northeast, said he was spending his "free time" talking to students who were struggling because of the pandemic or working on reframing his curricula since everything was different now. Returning to Olivia, she told us she believes administrators and district leaders "need a reality check sometimes, and the pandemic might have been a reality check of just how much their teachers are doing and the lack of support that we have. . . . [A] lot of them haven't been in classrooms for a very long time."

It is worth noting that while some teachers in our study expressed substantial frustration at the criticism of the teaching profession, recent survey evidence suggests that parents were overwhelmingly supportive of the work of their children's teachers. Even though 57% of parents felt that their students learned "a lot less" or "less" than in a typical school year, 78% of parents were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the instruction and activities provided by their child's school (Henderson, 2021). Given the circumstances, that is an overwhelmingly positive endorsement of the teaching profession during a trying period. The sharp criticism that echoed so loudly in our interviewee's memories and experiences does not appear to have been representative of parents as a whole.

Teaching during the pandemic was hard—emotionally, pedagogically, and in so many other ways. That said, decision-makers at all levels as well as the general public as a whole could have learned from teachers' experiences to make an incredibly tough situation better. Instead, teachers told us they felt ignored, devalued, and unsupported and, to top it off, attacked in the public discourse. As a result, opportunities to make pandemic teaching more effective were missed.

Missteps Could Have Been Avoided Had We Listened to Teachers

Interviewer: People in higher up positions, are they talking to you? Are they asking you what you need and what you've learned and so on and so forth? And I see you're shaking your head. It sounds like that's not the case where you're at either, right?

Anastasia (a white female 4th grade teacher in the North): Not at all.

In a once-in-a-century pandemic, we in the U.S. turned to epidemiologists to help us understand how diseases travel and mutate. We turned to doctors to understand how to treat people who became ill due to COVID. Unfortunately, by and large, we did not turn to teachers to understand how to teach and support students to learn during pandemic schooling. In the following findings section, we outline evidence of how policymakers and administrators at every level failed to listen to what teachers needed or what they were saying students needed to successfully learn, particularly online and in hybrid situations.

Teachers Wanted to Prepare During Summer 2020 but Were Hampered by Limited Professional Learning

Teaching online is hard and it requires training and most of the teachers out there did not get training. A lot of districts, or my district for example, provided training [for] apps when really what we needed was training in virtual teaching and virtual pedagogy.

— Silvia, a Latina high school ELA teacher in the Southwest

In our report last summer, we documented the struggles teachers had moving all of their instruction online overnight when COVID shut down schools across the nation. Summer 2021 provided a great opportunity for districts to support teachers in developing their online teaching pedagogy. However, many of the teachers in our study expressed disappointment with the professional development they received to teach online. Many voiced their frustration over the minimal professional learning that was provided in transitioning to online learning management systems, which were often chosen and mandated with little teacher input.

The challenge of teaching online and creating an environment of remote learning was often marked by little preparation for the transition and a lack of support for teachers on how to effectively teach online. There was much more focus on securing hardware and software for students, providing internet access, and/or on purchasing online learning management systems than there was on professional development on effective pedagogy for online teaching and learning. Although not all teachers struggled with transitioning their plans and instructional materials to an online format, many reported that they did and would have appreciated time and training to do so.

Additionally, few teachers reported receiving professional development in the actual pedagogy of online teaching and learning, though teachers were expected to quickly adapt to these challenges. Olivia, a science teacher mentioned previously, said she and her colleagues were sent webinars on how to use Zoom, which she did not find very useful. The webinars also came in late, way past the moment teachers were already transitioning to teaching online. The tendency for preparations or even changes to come at the last minute came up in other interviews. Anisa, a white female 6th grade math teacher in a suburban district in the Northeast, found out the day before students were set to come back that she needed to become a classroom teacher for the upcoming school year (she was originally an instructional coach). With no time to prepare, she said, "the first three weeks were just painful and exhausting." When asked about professional development for the online platform she was using, she answered, "They gave a little bit, but I did a lot of it on my own."

Few teachers reported receiving internet, Wi-Fi hotspots, or general technical support during the online learning months. Brittany, a Latina 6th grade teacher in a suburban school district in the Midwest, explained that if a teacher did not have good Wi-Fi at home, they had to teach from the school building, even during the national lockdown. Most teachers interviewed were not provided hotspots, as students had been. Kandace, a Black kindergarten

teacher in an urban school district in the South, said her principal asked her to stop at a local Wi-Fi provider when she reported that her internet kept crashing. She eventually had to pay for better internet service so she could fulfill her role as an online teacher but did not get reimbursed. Before Kandace upgraded her internet, many families of her kindergartners would assume school was done for the day when her internet would temporarily crash.
In order to be successful teaching students online, teachers in our study told us they needed supports beyond hardware and software and how-to videos demonstrating how to use them. The most powerful professional learning is often driven by teachers and tailored to what they want and need (Noonan, 2019). The summer of 2020 was filled with uncertainty in most places around the country about the format of schooling—in-person, hybrid, or remote, with many teachers being asked to prepare for all three—when that time should have been spent asking teachers what they needed to support students to learn effectively during a pandemic.

Hybrid Teaching: The Worst of Both Worlds

Teachers pretty much unanimously said this is exhausting and this is not tenable.

— Roberto, a Latino high school teacher in the West

Hybrid teaching meant that teachers were teaching groups of students online and in-person, and it often involved an arrangement in which teachers were teaching students in-person and online simultaneously, or simulteaching. Although in some cases, it involved alternating days of in-person and online teaching, many of our teachers reported having students in front of them while having to livestream their lessons at some point during the school year. This arrangement, compared to fully online teaching or fully in-person teaching, was the one teachers had the most complaints about and felt was the most ineffective. Many teachers who had to teach hybridly described having to have two sets of lessons and learning experiences planned—one for those students attending school in-person and one for those learning at home.

This hybrid model overwhelmed teachers, as they were basically asked to do the work of two teachers at once, which unsurprisingly often led to burnout. Townes, a white male high school English teacher in the Northeast, described hybrid teaching as follows: "My colleagues that [taught in this model] were pretty endlessly frustrated by that process and that was something that was forced upon us that we actually rejected, but it didn't matter. And nobody wanted to hear that you can't be in two places at the same time." Trace, a Black male veteran middle school math teacher, told us that simulteaching was like going back to his first year of teaching: "I knew how to teach. I knew how to do classroom management. But the format was completely different. Timing was different. Everything was different." Finally, Roberto described it as follows: "It was absolutely exhausting. The analogy that I've used in the past is you know sometimes your computer's running slowly and you hit control+alt+delete and look at the task manager and your CPU is just maxed out? That's what it felt like. It felt like I was running too many tasks simultaneously."

The issues with hybrid teaching, especially simulteaching, is again an instance where teachers being consulted and then listened to may have made a big difference. Elvia, a Latina high school history teacher in the Northeast, talked about how her school set up a hybrid teaching model based on A and B days, where half of the students came in person on A days and the other half came on B days. Given that structure, if you saw your A day students on a Thursday, you would not see them again until the next Monday, which Elvia explained made it challenging to do extended lessons that previously she could split over two days. This problem was exacerbated by her class periods being cut from 72 to 50 minutes due to COVID scheduling. In speaking to what might have been possible had administration included teachers in the decision-making process about how to structure hybrid teaching: "I think that we could have been a lot more successful if teachers had an opportunity to sort of design what that was going to look like."

There is very limited evidence about the prevalence of hybrid teaching across the United States, but from our conversation with teachers, our sense is that its use is less prevalent at the start of this school year than last spring when schools pushed to get students back in-person. However, that may change, as Delta forces more and more districts to offer remote learning options (Dusseault & Pillow, 2021). Simulteaching was an obviously flawed idea that teachers warned against, school systems tried, and was proven to be seriously flawed. Instead of rushing back into hybrid learning models like simulteaching this school year, policymakers and educational leaders would do well to consult with teachers about alternative ways to provide remote and in-person learning offerings.

"Learning Loss" Narrative As Simplistic and Unhelpful

> **I've had little ones learn to read and write and do everything that a kindergartener in person would accomplish over the course of the school year. So who said there's learning loss?**
>
> **— Justine, a Black female kindergarten teacher in the Southwest**

Over the past year, the term "learning loss" has been widely adopted by educational policymakers and pundits as a narrative to summarize the effect of the pandemic on student learning. Typically, learning loss refers to the idea that student standardized test scores are lower in 2021 than we would expect from similar cohorts in 2019—the last year states gave standardized tests. Learning loss can also refer to the idea that in a typical year, school systems expect that teachers will cover a certain amount of standards-aligned content in courses, and this coverage was necessarily reduced during the pandemic. Advocates of learning loss frequently recommend that schools address these testing and content gaps by focusing on these areas of concern, for instance by offering additional tutoring on materials in reading and math that are evaluated on standardized tests.

In our interviews, teachers routinely rejected the "learning loss" narrative as a useful way of understanding the experience of students and teachers during the pandemic. Teachers in our study like Jeff, a biracial Latinx 4th grade special educator in an urban district in the Northeast, found the test score-based definition far too narrow: "I hate the word 'learning loss' because it feels like everything associated with learning loss is measured or associated with one of, basically, the scourges of education in my mind which is standardized testing and whether a student is at a skill score of 502 versus 522, for example." Further, several teachers noted that students have successfully engaged in many standards-aligned topics, and some students actually thrived in virtual environments. For example, Miriam, a library media specialist, told us: "I think there genuinely were some positives for some kids. I had more than one kid who presented in in-person learning with a lot of distractibility and a lot of struggles in academics, and suddenly they're coming up with these beautiful, profound [pieces of academic work]." In addition to his sixth graders solving Fermi problems in virtual schooling this past year, Kyle, a trans masc math teacher in an urban district in the North, told us that he also asked students to calculate real-world math problems using estimation strategies in order to figure out the average time a commuter waits for the subway. Another teacher, Mara, a white female learning specialist in a private school in a large urban district in the Northeast, talked about both her 3rd-6th grade students and her own children at home in virtual school learning the names of flowers when going on walks, learning math while cooking, and learning about racial justice movements in the US, with some students changing their backgrounds on Zoom to Black Lives Matter images. This, of course, is learning within Earth science, mathematics, and social studies, respectively.

In describing how to address important topics and concepts, Mara rejected the idea that we need to go back and reteach everything students have supposedly not learned this year:

> **We don't need to teach the second grade curriculum to third graders [next year]. We can just do what you do when you teach, which is check out where they are and then kind of scoop them when you need to scoop them. Fill in a lesson here and there. So I hope that that voice gets heard because I'm tired of reading about learning loss.**

Here, Mara argues that the kinds of differentiation strategies that teachers use every year in schools can be used again this year to ensure that students continue their academic progress.

Teachers also argued that students made substantial, important learning gains in domains that are not typically evaluated by school systems. Leslie, a white female 5th grade teacher in a rural district in the West, admitted that her students were not able to get as far in terms of academic material as she had hoped for, but that her students "learned different things this year than we planned to have them learn." She talked about students having come "leaps and bounds" in their ability to use technology and in their ability to self-manage—something she considers a life skill. Anne described her students as having become more compassionate and having developed important socioemotional skills during the pandemic. Additionally, she pointed out the computer skills her students have gained; whereas they had never sent an email before, many can now take a picture of an assignment, upload it as an attachment, and email it to her with no difficulties. They've also learned to be responsible for their own time as they manage multiple online classes. "So I'm super proud of my kids," she says, "and I wish people would stop . . . making them feel like they haven't done anything this year."

No teachers in our study described the learning loss narrative as particularly useful or salient in their plans to return to school this year. If policymakers and education leaders are trying to use the idea of learning loss to motivate particular approaches from teachers, it does not appear to be working. Moreover, many teachers in our sample actively rejected this framing. Stefanie, a white female 6th grade social studies in a large urban district in the Northeast, in speaking to state and local leadership that tried to get back to "normal" as soon as possible instead of using this year to create new, more humane models of learning, said:

> **People who work in the district and the state—they're the ones with learning loss this year, so they're the ones who need to go back [and re-learn]. They had the big learning loss this year because they could have learned a lot if they had just listened and stopped being in control."**

Like the professional learning needed last summer and the failed experiment of hybrid teaching, if policymakers had spoken to teachers and learned from their experiences in the classroom, they likely would have developed more informed policies to meet the needs of teachers and students

Teachers Learned, Innovated, and Created In Ways That Point to Better Ways Forward

> **Teaching I did always embrace technology but then this definitely led me to do it more, and also led me to have more room for freedom with the students because I'm not in the same room as them. I've been doing a lot more projects where I just kind of set them free and they go work on something on their own time rather than me giving instruction throughout my whole class period. There's a lot more . . . asynchronous work. And that I definitely think will carry over because students are able to make more choices . . . and have more agency.**
>
> **— Michelle, a white female elementary music teacher in the South**

Despite it all during the 2020-21 school year—the disrespect, the lack of input in decision-making, the lack of support, the misguided policies and narratives—teachers and their students had important successes this year that can help inform how schools might move forward in the upcoming year and beyond. This is particularly true for remote teaching and learning, though there are lessons for in-person schooling, too. By November of last year, about a fifth of schools were fully remote with another 45% using hybrid models that included remote learning (Ferren, 2021). We should state upfront: all of the teachers told us remote schooling was a significant challenge for themselves, students, and families. However, many teachers told us they started to get better at remote teaching a month or two into the school year. Further, students started to figure it out, too, and parents and teachers were able to connect in new ways, at times and in spaces that were convenient for both parties via videoconferencing.

Flexibility and Grace for Students and Teachers

> **I did a lot of reflection over the summer. . . . I really kind of got to this place of we're officially at this point in time with mathematics instruction where I have to figure out a way to make this much more engaging and relevant to my kids because when given the choice, they've made it very clear if they're not a captive audience, then they're not tuning in to my show, right? . . . [T]hat drove a lot of my reflection over the summer. How do I adjust what I'm doing so that when given the choice—because you can't force a teenager to do anything, right?—when given the choice, they choose to turn on my TV show basically.**
>
> **— Luna, a white female high school math teacher in the West**

None of the teachers in our study said that, in the absence of COVID, remote learning was preferable to in-person teaching, either for them or their students. That said, contrary to popular narratives that remote learning was a "disaster" for all students, all the time, teachers told us that there were often benefits to virtual schooling, particularly for students who had struggled within the constraints of in-person schooling. Further, as Luna stated above, teachers had to learn to do things differently in an online environment, which led to surprisingly positive results at times.

Despite often good intentions, schools can be inflexible and sometimes oppressive places for both students and teachers with their tight schedules and 7-8 periods of instruction a day, rigid grading policies, standardized tests that eat into valuable instructional time and produce results with dubious accuracy and usefulness, strict rules and norms about when both students and teachers can go to the bathroom and eat as well as what they can wear, and so on. Remote learning changed all that for both students and teachers. As our colleagues wrote about students in a companion report for the MIT Teaching Systems Lab: "Over the past year at home, students walked out of Plato's cave and saw the light of freedom and autonomy." Based on what our teachers told us, we would argue that teachers walked out of the cave, too. In turn, two of the words we heard over and over again about teaching and learning online during a pandemic were grace and flexibility—for students, for teachers, for families, and for everyone else.

Because they were teaching and students were learning outside the literal and figurative constraints of a school building, teachers started to question some of the rigid policies and practices that many inside schools had taken for granted as normal and good. Teachers who embraced flexibility and grace met students where they were at in their learning trajectory while refraining from being punitive over behaviors that did not directly impact their learning. Emilio, for example, refused to track tardies and also allowed late work without penalties, while Joey, a Latino high school ELA teacher in the Southwest, told us he ignored his district's mandate to give students no credit if they did not log-in to the learning management system but they still handed in work. Other teachers told us they started questioning grading policies as well as the value of standardized testing and traditional final course exams. Further, teachers told us they put a greater focus on mental health and overall student well-being, without which learning cannot occur. For example, Anne successfully advocated for a 20-minute break every hour during virtual classes to give students and herself a rest from screen time, which she says allowed her to be more focused in her lessons. Other teachers also incorporated these short break times and reported that it was effective for both their teaching and their students' well-being. Justine, a Black teacher who teaches kindergartners in the Southwest, expressed that she wasn't going to "cause a child to hate schools and need glasses because you want them staring at a screen."

A lot of flexibility and grace came in teachers' ability to reduce the amount of content prescribed by the curriculum or what was taught in past years. Teachers—especially in math where pacing guides often demand unreasonable content coverage—talked about "streamlining" their curriculum to focus on only the most important topics and ideas, given that their instructional time with students was often cut by half or more. Victoria, who teaches in a rural district in the West, made her work "more targeted" by reducing the amount of work she'd typically assign and strategically choosing what mattered most. She recognized that she was food-secure and income-secure but knew some of her students were working to help support their families, especially those where parents had lost jobs, and could not reasonably or justifiably be expected to engage in as much schoolwork as a typical year. Jared, a high school math teacher in the West, soon began to see remote teaching as an opportunity to change how he and his colleagues taught math:

> **It facilitated a lot of change that we've been trying to make just by forcing us to survive and coming up with ways to modify well, How do we want kids to learn? What's the best way for them to learn? How do we present the information online, in person, whatever it is, but how do you get the information in front of the kids and what do you want them to do with it? So it really caused us just to refocus on everything. And so we took that and said: "OK, it's an opportunity. Let's fix this." Because education is significantly broken. We're not reaching every kid.**

Finally, in speaking to prioritizing her students' need for community and healing over covering the academic content, Elvia told us:

> **I could have tried to cram more things in, but I think it was the right thing to do to try to make that space for students. And I think that's an important thing to consider as we go into the fall, is to not have this kind of obsessive focus on making up for learning loss but to really create space for students to build connections and heal and be safe.**

Luna, a high school math teacher, who we heard above comparing zoom math class to a TV show, took this freedom given to her in a highly atypical year to develop creative alternatives to textbook learning and standardized assessments in math class. Asking herself "what is essential for all students to know in math," Luna told us: "As I approached the fall, I really had to rethink what I was doing, strip away a lot of what I considered to be nonessential kinds of pieces." An art history major in college, Luna said that she brought in videos and images of Islamic art and artists like Escher for her geometry class where students were working on transformations of shapes, including rotation, translation, and tessellation. For their end-of-term projects, students were asked to create their own piece of art that involved transformations of geometric shapes and to present it using Google Slides while using at least one new tech tool. One student learned to use video editing software which she used to capture her process of making geometrically-informed art. Another student created images that were similar to the stained-glass rose windows of the Notre Dame cathedral, while another created black-and-white images reminiscent of the Op Art movement. In speaking to the results of a fundamentally different approach to teaching math spurred on by the pandemic and remote teaching, Luna said:

> **I was thrilled with the results. And I gave a survey to the kids when they came back from winter break: "What did you think? Did you like it? And what did you learn?" And the coolest thing was that students would say things like, "You know, I didn't think I was going to like it at first but I really got into X, Y and Z" or "I really learned a lot about how different kinds of rotation will create symmetry or what kind of shapes will create tilings and which ones don't." And I was like, "You learned about the topic? And you know that?! In your reflection you actually then recognize that you've learned and really worked through the standards that this project addressed?" And that was kind of mind-blowing too, that really metacognitive place that they came to . . . of what they were doing, why they were doing it and what they got out of it.**

Luna's arts-based, student-driven, project-based geometry assessment is an example of what is possible with digital technology coupled with the freedom for teachers to do what they do best: create engaging learning experiences for students.

Finally, while hybrid models where some students learned in-person while others learned online simultaneously were largely panned by teachers, the one upside was that with only a half or a quarter of students in the classroom, teachers had de facto smaller class sizes. The freedom provided by these small class sizes was, again, a view outside of Plato's cave at what could be if this were the norm. Roberto, who regularly had only 10 to 12 students in his history classroom, told us that he finished his history curriculum a week early. He said that this was likely due to a few factors, including small class sizes but also the freedom that the pandemic year allowed: "Maybe it's the smaller class sizes; maybe it's a more relaxed approach from teachers less rigid and less concerned with grades generally." Of course, as Roberto mentioned in his interview, his success with small classes was the result of a substantial portion of his students who stopped showing up at all.

Further, Pilar, an elementary school teacher, told us, "I wouldn't be sad to see smaller class sizes and I wouldn't be sad to never see the sort of pipeline-to-prisons that I think so many public education systems have created." She explained that with having just 11 students back, she felt relaxed on her school's rules about "quiet lines" and "hands up on your temple" and other ways teachers police students' bodies in the name of behavior management. To this point, several teachers told us that they believed many of their students of color in particular thrived outside the daily aggressions of racist teaching and schooling practices.

That said, teachers had the flexibility to create new realities in the virtual and in-person spaces while giving that same flexibility along with grace to their students because of the pandemic. Once Delta and the pandemic overall are under control, these experiences for both teachers and students appear to have important lessons for how we might recreate school during "normal" times.

Some Students with Disabilities Thrived in Remote Schooling

> **I work with a wide variety of students with a wide variety of learning disabilities or other disabilities. And there were some students for whom this is the solution that we didn't know we needed for them.**
>
> **— Deidre, a white female special educator in the Northeast**

One group of students—those with disabilities—was often singled out in popular discourse as being unable to learn in remote schooling (Camera, 2020; Frick, 2021; Turner, 2020). However, the story was far more complicated according to many of the teachers in our study. While some students with disabilities struggled in even accessing the curriculum online, other students with disabilities and students who learn in non-traditional ways thrived. Unsurprisingly, and like all students regardless of dis/ability, students with disabilities who were able to thrive in remote learning were often those whose parents and other caregivers had the resources and ability to stay home to support their learning.

That said, teachers shared that many students with various disabilities and students who are neurodiverse thrived outside the constraints of loud, crowded classrooms that often lead to sensory overload and other challenges. Pilar, an elementary school teacher, described the positive effects that removing the stimulation of a typical classroom—"light and sounds and students"—had on her students with learning needs ill-suited for crowded classrooms. She revealed that these students have been "markedly more successful online" and many chose to stay home when their district gave them the choice to return in person. Deirdre, a middle school special education teacher, shared that "for some students remote learning gave them a chance to shine academically where they'd never been able to do so [before]," specifically referring to her students with anxiety disorders who thrived from the decreased daily social demands. Finally, Peter, who teaches high school students, explained that some students, "especially students with emotional disabilities . . . have thrived online compared to in-person because of, I think, what typically proves to be distractions." He said the same scenario applied to students who have social anxiety: many of these students were better able to focus on academics.

Arguably the most surprising thing teachers told us was that some students with significant behavioral and intellectual disabilities were able to succeed in remote settings. Tina shared the story of one of her students who has a substantial emotional disability that often leads to violent outbursts, and he hardly ever completed any work in the previous year. At home, where he always had at least one parent present, he was able to take breaks or naps when he was about to have an outburst. By the end of the year, he had turned in 70% of his work. She conducted home visits with a therapeutic dog on a weekly basis to build a relationship with this student and to give him a chance to practice some social skills.

Finally, Demi, a non-binary educator in the Midwest who teaches students in grades four through eight who have both intellectual disabilities and who are learning English as second or third language, was adamant that their students learned important things through remote learning, again challenging the learning loss narrative:

> **They really gained in other areas. And like I say, part of it is they just got older. But part of it is their families are like, "No, you're part of this family and your job is to"— this one girl's job is to line the shoes up by the door—"and you're going to do that every day. And you're going to put them in pairs." And so that's matching, right? "And no, you're not going to do it willy-nilly. You're going to go from smallest to biggest, right?" So that's comparing. . . . And if you're just looking at standardized tests, you're not really looking at the gains that people make.**

For many students with disabilities, in-person schooling will remain a centerpiece of effective support and instruction. But teachers' creative efforts to support students with disabilities at a distance revealed some of the ways that typical school practices are inhibiting development for some young people. In some cases, the best possible future for young people is not a return to the old normal but using insights gleaned from the pandemic to support new kinds of effective practice.

Using Videoconferencing To Connect With Parents and Caregivers

> **I think that Zoom offers some really great opportunities for . . . parent outreach. I've had meetings with families that would otherwise not have been possible without Zoom. So I think that is huge.**
>
> **— George, an Asian-American high school science teacher in the Northeast**

Normalizing virtual connections with parents and families was another COVID necessity that is likely to have a much larger role in the future of schools. Coming to schools to meet teachers in-person can be logistically challenging for parents and caregivers; further, schools can be intimidating settings for parents and caregivers for a lot of different reasons, including not having been successful in school yourself, not speaking English fluently, and so on. While communicating with parents and caregivers at convenient times without them having to come to the school was possible before COVID with phone calls, several of our teachers said there was something qualitatively different about meeting with parents using videoconferencing; plus, most parents and caregivers are now used to videoconferencing due to the pandemic.

Elvia, a high school teacher, said that while she misses in-person events with parents and caregivers where people would bring food and develop a sense of community, she did see the potential benefits of connecting with parents via videoconferencing. She told us: "It felt like [videoconferencing] was much more convenient for families to be able to participate in. . . . If you just have a 30-minute break from work, you don't necessarily have time to drive to the school . . . So I think that that was something that was helpful because before, we weren't doing parent conferences that way." Similarly, Jeff, a fourth grade teacher, told us: "I have been in communication with my students' families more than any year before because they have my information. . . . They know that if they need to interrupt the lesson to let me know about something or type something in the chat, they can—and they have done so numerous times."

Finally, returning to Vanessa (the Singing Math Teacher), she admitted that before she left the classroom mid-year, she still had students sing via videoconferencing, as out of sync and painful to listen to as it may have been for all involved. However, she said the following about videoconferencing's ability to bring parents into her teaching and learning:

> **I think because of the remote thing and because of being so involved with their parents so early, I became more of one of the family. So I was like an auntie. So it was almost like I had this respect that I usually don't earn that early yet, so there's this thing of not wanting to disappoint me and having the kids know that I really would call their parents, like I wasn't bluffing: "You see me on the screen. Do you want me to . . . OK. Yeah, mom said . . . uh-huh" and then all the kids hear mom in the background. But I mean, not to abuse that, but it was just a thing. I was part of the family.**

Vanessa connecting with her students' parents in a loving, familial way is reminiscent of Angela from our report last summer who told us she brought community educators, artists, and activists to her Zoom sessions with her students, and parents and grand-parents would be learning over her students' shoulders in the background. Given the continued danger of meeting in person due to Delta, plus the logistical challenges of parents and caregivers coming into schools, it seems that videoconferencing is another aspect of pandemic schooling that should stay when the threat of COVID is eventually over.

Discussion

Though schools have already opened their doors amidst a third pandemic-affected year, it is not too late to begin seriously and systematically incorporating teachers' voices into decision-making that impacts their practice. It is not too late to advocate for a cultural shift that values teachers as the qualified professionals that they are and to bring them in as partners in decision-making processes. Like all imperfect people, teachers are not always right; however, they are always there, in the instructional core, collecting essential observations about how classroom instruction is working or not working.

In our interviews with over 50 classroom teachers, we heard all too often that we, as interviewers, were among the first people to talk with teachers and listen to them about their experiences, their challenges, and their innovations. Over the last year, schools and policymakers have made missteps—an insufficient emphasis on preparation for remote learning in the summer of 2020 and the adoption of the untenable model of simulteaching—that practicing teachers warned leaders to avoid. From national op-ed pages to policy prescriptions, education experts have argued that "learning loss" is central to understanding how to respond to the challenges of the pandemic. That term and frame were widely rejected by many of the teachers we interviewed and enthusiastically adopted by none of the teachers with whom we spoke. There are serious challenges ahead in education, and none of them are going to be solved without the active support of practicing teachers. The only way to solve the problems we face is to listen to teachers to understand them and work with them to frame those problems and possible solutions.

At this moment in time, including teachers in decision-making processes is urgent because of the evolving nature of the pandemic. Schools will need to pivot and adjust, and we need teacher insight and wisdom to guide those changes. But sadly, as we write, while there are schools in Texas, Utah, and other states closed due to COVID, there are also schools closed in Louisiana and New Jersey because of devastating floods, and schools have delayed their opening in California because of out-of-control wildfires. As we face a climate emergency with more floods, fires, freezes, and disease events, we face a future of more frequently interrupted schooling. The emergency pivots that seemed so novel in 2020 and 2021 will become much more common in the future. To prevent unnecessarily straining teachers, it is essential to put practices and systems in place to allow these professionals to have more agency over how to pivot their teaching practices during these emergencies. Genuinely incorporating teachers into decision-making can also prevent teachers feeling devalued and unsafe—a morale implication that can impact their ability to teach effectively. Educators cannot teach well if they feel unsupported and under attack, especially during a public health crisis or any other emergency.

When school leaders do partner with teachers in the design of emergency response, they will find that teaching professionals are incredibly resilient, flexible, and creative in solving problems associated with the transition to online learning. Teachers have found new ways of engaging students remotely and supporting their independent learning, they have found new channels for connecting parents and caregivers with school, and they have found populations that surprisingly thrived during the pandemic, giving us new insights into how to best support all students.

In the United States, seeing teachers as thought partners in decision-making about how schools should be designed and run may be a novel concept and a challenge in a culture that does not value teachers as highly-degreed experts in their respective field of practice. However, such a paradigm shift might be what is necessary in order for more humanizing—and more effective—practices to be put in place, especially as we witness ever-increasing interruptions to schooling along with societal changes that accelerate faster than changes in the classroom. At the very least, as one interviewee put it, "What I want the world to know is don't wage war against teachers . . . It is one of the most selfless careers in the world." We hope our report inspires principals, school leaders, district leaders, and policymakers to include teachers' voices in their decision-making processes this year and every year going forward.

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