

## Lessons We've Learned

Marcia Baldanza

We sure have learned a lot since mid-March when school as we know it stopped. Having lived through several leadership-testing crises in my tenure as a school leader, this one tests all of the lessons I learned on 9/11 as a principal three miles from the Pentagon, sheltering with the DC Sniper, dealing with the aftermath of hurricane Katrina and Wilma in South Florida, accepting refugees after earthquakes in Haiti are a few. These 3 Big Ideas are clearer to me in this new COVID time and I think can guide us out into a new and better educational future.

**Resilience is a Way of Being.** Humans are wired for social connection and have at our core resilience. These COVID months have clearly demonstrated this and shown the depths we will go to connect, innovate, and persevere. The news is full of these feel good and heart wrenching stories of perseverance and resilience. I've come to appreciate our resilience as a global population and as leaders in every field. I read a wonderful set of three articles by Deloitte. In this installment of *Deloitte Insight*, the authors define resilient leaders; they write that resilient leaders in COVID crisis times are defined by who they are and what they do across three critical time frames: Respond, Recover, and Thrive. Being resilient is not a destination; it is a way of being. A resilient organization is one that is transformed in attitude, beliefs, agility, and structures, not one that returns to where they left off before the crisis. So, where does this leave us as educators? We will not return to teaching and learning where we left off—too much has happened to change that. As a group, we educators made a pivot to online learning in days. We connected with our students and their families to provide materials, information, support and food. Just as new businesses are emerging from COVID (telemedicine, home delivery for everything, schooling will emerge differently. **Speaking of Psychology: The Role of Resilience in the Face of COVID-19** is a podcast with child development specialist Dr. Ann Masten that offers a needed perspective on the role of resilience today. Let us as educators use our resilience and innovation to determine our path forward.



In the Deloitte article series referenced, the authors propose our mindset shifted from frenetic activity in the early stages of the virus to a more settled, albeit uncomfortable, sense of uncertainty. Here is a summary of the main points and their implications as

## Going from Response to Recovery

	Response		Recovery
<b>Situation</b>	Unpredictable	⇔	Interim Normal
Question to Consider: How will we define our new destination?			
<b>Focus</b>	Inward-Looking	⇔	Forward Facing
Question to Consider: How will we communicate the new destination to our stakeholders?			
<b>Management</b>	Crisis Management	⇔	Restored Future
Question to Consider: How will we develop our new needed skills?			
<b>Leadership</b>	Safety	⇔	Relational Trust
Question to Consider: How will we demonstrate positive relationships, consistency, and exercise good judgement and expertise? *			
<b>Planning</b>	Contingency Planning	⇔	Scenario Planning
Question to Consider: How will we model our future?			
<b>Attitude</b>	Reacting	⇔	Reinventing
Question to Consider: How will we energize teams by imagining and embracing a new future?			

**Be Forward Looking and Leading.** Your followers expect and need you to be thinking about the future. Great leadership requires even greater followership. You must plan now for later by considering several changes: \_

- Changes in how society sees education- I believe that this is a time when educators can reframe their work. Families have been more involved with education than ever in the past. Let's leverage this involvement into a true partnership. "[CASEL CARES: SEL Resources During COVID-19](#)" and **Forbes'** "[Parent Involvement Has Always Mattered. Will the Covid-19 Pandemic Finally Make this the New Normal in K-12 Education?](#)" offer compelling ideas.
- Changes in our roles and rules- I believe a needed change in our roles and rules can be learned from how we are assessing learning in these times. The topic of grading equity Joe Feldman's thinking on grading for equity is reflected in **Harvard Ed. Magazine's** "[Grade Expectations: Why We Need to Rethink Grading in Our Schools](#)" and **Just ASK's** "[Achieving Equity in Grading](#)" is long overdue in my opinion. Let's use this time as a springboard to insist, invest and implement more equitable grading practices.
- Changes in how we lead. Leaders have always inspired teams, but this is different—more urgent. Leaders need to inspire teams to navigate the uncertainties (safety, jobs, life, homes, food) basic [Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](#) and to do this



successfully, trust is a necessity. I've written on and taught about the topic of relational trust before and rely on Byrk and Schneider's **Ed Leadership** article "[Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for School Reform](#)" and am now reaffirming that strong relationships need trust with these two elements:

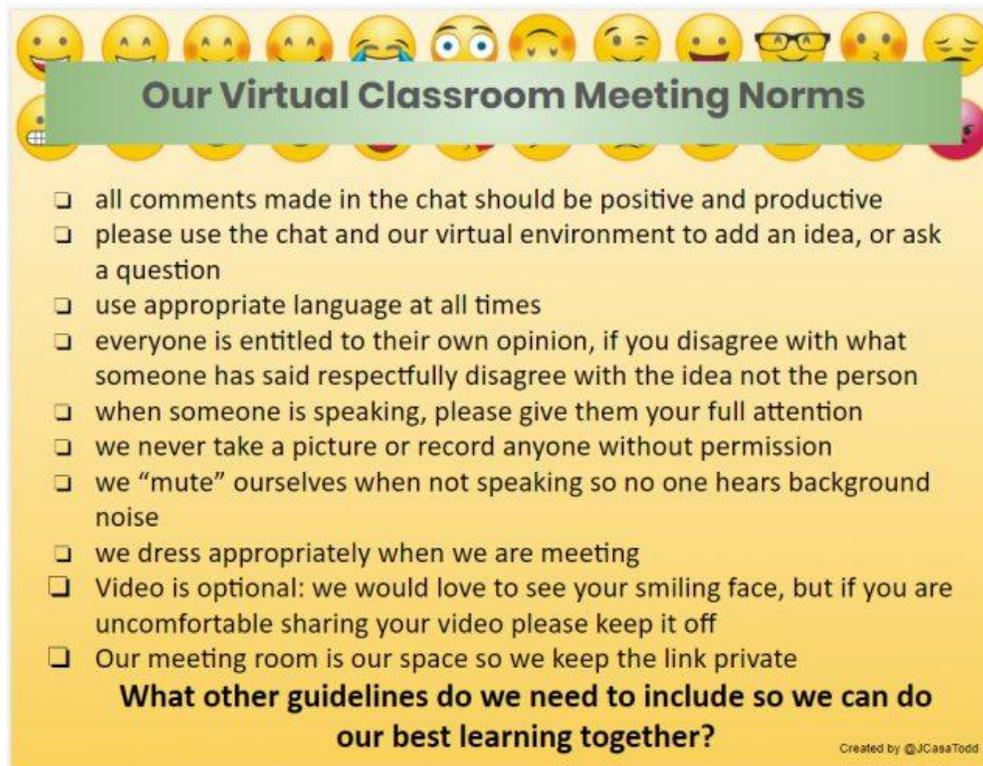
- **Trust is a tangible** exchange of value that grows through repeated affirming experiences.
- **Trust is actionable** and includes physical, emotional, financial, and digital dimensions. Resilient leaders consider these questions:
  - Which dimensions matter most to our students, families, and teachers as we Respond and Recover to the closures, and what will matter to them as we shift into Thrive?
  - Are we communicating our intentions clearly and transparently to our students, families, and teachers—even when we don't have the answers?
  - Can we competently deliver on what we are promising? Kouzes and Posner coined DWYSYWD and Kouzes explains it in "[Top 10 Leadership Lessons](#)" as a critical leadership value, where "doing" beats "saying" two to one.
  - How are we monitoring and measuring our progress in addressing the needs of our students, families, and teachers?

**Mind the Gaps.** There were students, families and teachers you were worried about before shutdown in mid-March, right? To be totally honest, you've probably been worried about them for some time. Like most of us, we thought we'd have time to position our interventions of support, then we closed our doors. In these months, we've been justifiably focused in the here and now (getting food out, materials in place, graduating seniors, and so much more). I believe it is time to reflect on what worked and didn't because we'll likely need it again and reframe to moving forward...from Responding to Recovery. Mike Mattos in a recent **Solution Tree** webinar "[Mind the Gaps Session 1](#)" discussed what could be and needs to be done now! Minding these gaps is urgent. Mike suggests that you prepare the master schedule (elementary, middle, and high school) for **all** students to have access to grade level **essential** curriculum. Build into the schedule flexible time for **some** students where identified gaps can be filled. Plan for 2-5 times a week for 30 minutes. Finally, those **few** (or even many now) who are lacking foundational skills need daily time allocated to these skills. Keep in mind that the interventions occur **in addition** to quality essential grade level curriculum not instead of it.

**Remember What Works.** Some of the great practices, procedures, and protocols we have in place for our face-to-face instruction can be applied in a distance setting. [Synchronous vs Asynchronous Learning](#) by Jennifer Casa-Todd reminds us that, "The act of verbalizing helps students build bridges between different ideas and concepts, thus helping them retain information more effectively." I have always paid attention to the Mary Budd-Rowe's [10:2 Theory](#) and built into my lessons active processing. **Clock Buddies** is a favorite and one that I continue in a virtual setting. Students are paired by time and share their phone numbers, so that when I say, "Meet with your 3:00 buddy and discuss..." they meet on the phone, and I can watch via Zoom. Jennifer's article poses many questions, concerns, and potential solutions



related to feedback from parents, students, and teachers. I love Jennifer's **Virtual Classroom Meeting Norms** which she invites readers to adapt and use. I plan to adapt these for my graduate students.



**Our Virtual Classroom Meeting Norms**

- all comments made in the chat should be positive and productive
- please use the chat and our virtual environment to add an idea, or ask a question
- use appropriate language at all times
- everyone is entitled to their own opinion, if you disagree with what someone has said respectfully disagree with the idea not the person
- when someone is speaking, please give them your full attention
- we never take a picture or record anyone without permission
- we “mute” ourselves when not speaking so no one hears background noise
- we dress appropriately when we are meeting
- Video is optional: we would love to see your smiling face, but if you are uncomfortable sharing your video please keep it off
- Our meeting room is our space so we keep the link private

**What other guidelines do we need to include so we can do our best learning together?**

Created by @JCasaTodd

**Determine What's Essential... Really Essential.** I mentioned the importance of the master schedule add here what to plan for in your master schedule. You and your schedule must ensure that no student misses out on essential grade level content. Now, focus on the essential curriculum for a few minutes. You will need to revise the essential standards for each grade level and course. What you did before won't be helpful now. You need only a few essential essentials. Plan to collaboratively teach this at least twice; agree on what is going to be taught and assessed; communicate clearly with the next grade and be selective, really selective, about what's essential. Recordings of an important webinar presented by Mike Mattos can be found at: **Mind the Gaps: Planning Now to Target Learning Gaps Next Fall**. To capture what Mike lays out in the webinar, let's use mental imagery to visualize what we need to do. See an empty jar as representative of a school day or year waiting to be filled. Next, picture a pitcher filled to the brim overflowing with state learning standards out of which we must identify the essential standards we will pour into a substantial but limited in size drinking class for all students to master. And finally, visualize a smaller glass filled with the contents (learning standards) we will blend in as a “smoothie” for some



learners to fill the gaps from missed learning opportunities and to provide additional power for others.

In the second session of this three-session webinar series, Julie A. Schmidt, Jeanne Spiller, and Heather Frizelle use the metaphor of “settling the ball” from soccer. First, we settle the ball, position it, see the field, and decide where to go next to score. They remind us that while COVID closures are out of our control, we can and must control our individual and collective readiness. We can and must move from fear, anxiety, and scarcity to proactively developing a strategy using solid information. They use a flashback and flash forward approach to help get clear on missing prerequisite skills. You can get this resource from the webinar link above when you view the webinar. Here’s another tip when deciding what’s essential: to be an essential skill (aka prerequisite) you spend a lot of time teaching it; you spend time assessing it; you will hold data driven conversations about it; you will intervene on it; and a student cannot move on without it.

***Lessons Learned, Parts I and II, was originally published in the June 15 and June 19, 2020, issues of EmpowerED 3.2.1***  
**<https://justaskpublications.com/empowered-321>**

