

NAVIGATING THE CRISIS

Brave Spaces for Dialogue and Action

In March of 2020, COVID-19 shuttered the world, unleashing torrents of change that continue to profoundly impact public schools and the children and families they serve. Education leaders pivoted to crisis response and taking care of basic human needs, only to find they would need to navigate unprecedented challenges – medical, moral, educational, and political.

Education leaders continue to confront crises every day, including public-health contingency planning and staffing shortages, while addressing unfinished academic learning. As if these immediate concerns aren't enough, profound, existential questions are in overload: about the purpose of public education in our pluralistic democracy, the role of schools in addressing racism in our society, how to resource schools to access child and family supports amid burgeoning mental-health struggles and chronic food and housing insecurity, and more.

It is the most challenging and consequential time for education leadership in generations.

The decisions we make about schools in the 2020s will reverberate for many decades to come in the citizenry and society we become. No specific priority – accountability, whole child, science of reading, culturally responsive teaching – is adequate on its own to meet this moment of peril and responsibility, and all of us need to see our specific initiatives in the context of a coherent whole. Our actions will determine if we stitch our society back together, or stitch it together in justice for the first time; public schools are the most important and contentious proving ground on which these issues will be addressed.

Leaders need space to reflect on first principles and enduring values, engage in dialogue across lines of difference, and advance courageous, visionary leadership.

What follows are examples of how we helped leaders navigate this crisis by marshalling our deep knowledge of how the education sector works, our longstanding and explicit commitment to equity, our credibility with leaders across ideological divides, and our expertise as facilitators to create brave spaces for dialogue and action.

We are committed to supporting leaders to continue recovering in ways that renew the promise public education represents to society. Join us in this journey of learning, leadership, and service.

Ross Wiener

Executive Director,

Aspen Institute Education & Society Program



In May of 2020, the Aspen Institute Education & Society Program released *Recovery and Renewal: Principles for Advancing Public Education Post-Crisis.*

These principles served as a values-based framework for education leaders to make decisions during the pandemic. It also served as a framework for the Education & Society Program. In addition to a webinar series, the principles were featured in Education Week Commentary and referenced by Zaretta Hammond in AFT's American Educator Magazine.

Five Principles for Advancing Public Education Post-Crisis

Ensuring Equity & Engagement

Using Holistic View to Set a Coherent Strategy

Guided by the Science of Learning

Taking a Long-Term View of Student Success

Setting an Agenda for Innovation & Improvement

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Guided by Five Principles

1

Ensuring Equity & Engagement



Facilitated student voice organizations *Our Turn and Student Voice*

to discuss requirements and best practices for authentic student engagement with state education agency leaders in ESSER plans.

Convened roundtable conversations with education leaders and policymakers across political lines in

40+ organizations and state offices

to discuss heightened public discourse related to race and education. Developed **United We Learn** to help leaders enact research-based policies related to treatments of race and racism in education.

20+ Aspen team briefed chief academic and talent officers in 20+ state education agencies

through CCSSO Network on the research and implications of *United We Learn*.

"[United We Learn] has already been so useful as I speak about how to discuss race in schools."

–State Superintendent of Public Instruction

2

Using Holistic View to Set a Coherent Strategy

Released guidance for governors & mayors to make sure schools have access to resources to support the health and well-being of students and families.

NPR moderated and C-SPAN carried our release event, which featured Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers, Albuquerque Mayor Tim Keller, and Aspen Ascend parent advisor Waukecha Wilkerson.

Aspen facilitated the **Albuquerque Children's Cabinet**. Albuquerque mapped city government children and family-facing service locations, including schools, libraries, and rec centers, to optimize and make learning hubs and food distribution sites for constituents.

"So much of what I learned along the way came from Aspen. The opportunity to dig deep and ask questions was vital as a congressional staffer... I really credit Aspen with the Education Committee being able to function on a more bipartisan basis and getting policy enacted."

–State Policymaker

3

Guided by the Science of Learning

Supported practitioners, policymakers, and education leaders in districts and states to embrace and enact school climates where youth can experience safety, belonging, and meaningful learning.

Galvanized support from

40+ national organizations & **30+** states

on the need for state leadership on school climate.

Convened a roundtable on culturally and linguistically responsive education to improve student achievement and experiences during the pandemic.

Brief endorsed by

40+ field leaders, including:

Layla Avila, Sharif El-Mekki, Zaretta Hammond, and Roberto Rodriguez

"I had a view with SEL and academics and I came out with a very different view based on exploration on race, identity, power, and privilege... It was wildly successful for me. I wanted to come home with an action plan and came back with something greater."

–State Superintendent of Public Instruction

4

Taking a Long-Term View of Student Success

Released *Looking Back to Accelerate Forward: Toward a Policy Paradigm that Advances Equity and Improvement*.

Urged education leaders to reflect on what worked and didn't over 40 years of education policy and define the next education policy agenda to help ensure all children receive the education they need to thrive in school and beyond.

Presented at the Education Writers Association conference to brief

50+ national & local education reporters

on trends in 40 years of standards-based education providing context and story ideas for more nuanced coverage.

Created off-the-record learning forums for urban superintendents on education and the future of work with experts Camille Farrington, Zaretta Hammond, Gloria Ladson-Billings, and Alfred Tatum.

"The workforce development information was really compelling and challenged me to think more about opportunities in that area. Also, all of the problems of practice challenged my thinking and helped me to consider ways of improving our work."

–Urban Superintendent

5

Setting an Agenda for Innovation & Improvement

Partnered with the National Center for Assessment to write recommendations, published in October 2020, that call for more OTL data and guidance on measurement and academic assessment.



Briefed the Biden transition team and Congress on the guidance.

Several states added OTL to statewide data collection efforts and cited our recommendations as the key driver in supporting state action.

For example, Pennsylvania used the guidance to collect additional student-level data



on delivery of remote, in person, or in hybrid learning; access to technology, hardware, and reliable internet service; educator experiences; and food and housing insecurity. As a result, the state is better equipped to understand student experience.

"I have a different opinion on things like state accountability systems, testing, metrics, etc. but Aspen has helped challenge my thinking to these approaches. I may not always agree with the issues, but Aspen does a great job at providing information and space without dictating how people should think."

–Non-Profit Leader

BRAVE SPACES FOR DIALOGUE AND ACTION

Bringing together leaders across difference for learning, reflection, growth, and action.


We convened district superintendents, chief academic officers, chiefs of schools, and other leaders from

16 urban districts | **50+** times


in professional learning communities to provide just-in-time support in response to disruption, stress, and dynamic change during the pandemic.

Together these systems serve **1.2M+** students

We convened **290+** education leaders through **10+** closed-door conversations on a range of leadership challenges confronting the sector.




The majority of our participants were leaders of color.



47.8% of participants identify as White

52.2% of participants identify as people of color

We convened congressional staff leaders **13 times** to make connections between education and workforce development, housing, and access to food and nutrition.



Sponsored a special series of briefings on pandemic response including **5 sessions** featuring members of our Urban Superintendents Network.

Partnerships & Publications

APRIL 2020	JUNE 2020	AUGUST 2020	JANUARY 2021	MAY 2021	AUGUST 2021	FEBRUARY 2022
How Schools Ensure Social Connections During Physical Isolation	The Five Guiding Principles to Combat Inequities Before Schools Reopen <i>Commentary in Education Week</i>	Coming Back to Climate: How Principals Can Use School Climate Data to Lead Improvement with <i>EducationFirst, Turnaround for Children, EduDream, TNTP, National Equity Project, Transforming Education Chicago Consortium on School Research</i> and 3 Urban School Districts	Creating Conditions for Student Success: A Policymakers' School Climate Playbook with <i>ExcelinEd</i>	On Brown v. Board anniversary, White Americans must still wrestle with legacy of racism in <i>USA Today</i>	Black Boys and Men Need More Appreciation and Less Stereotyping in <i>EdPost</i>	Strong and Sustainable Children's Cabinets with <i>Forum for Youth Investment</i>
MAY 2020	JULY 2020	OCTOBER 2020	APRIL 2021	JUNE 2021	OCTOBER 2021	
Recovery and Renewal: Principles for Advancing Public Education Post-Crisis Fostering Connectedness in the Pandemic Era: Policy Recommendation to Support Social, Emotional, and Academic Development	How Governors and Mayors Can Support Schools So Schools Can Support Students broadcast on <i>C-SPAN</i>	THIS IS NOT A TEST, THIS IS AN EMERGENCY: Special Considerations for Assessing and Advancing Equity in School-Year 2020-21 with <i>National Center for Assessment</i>	Looking Back to Accelerate Forward: Toward a Policy Paradigm that Advances Equity and Improvement with <i>Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching</i>	Roadmap for Student Engagement in ARP ESSER Planning with <i>Our Turn</i> and <i>Student Voice</i>	United We Learn: Honoring America's Racial and Ethnic Diversity In Education with <i>Dr. Francesca López</i>	