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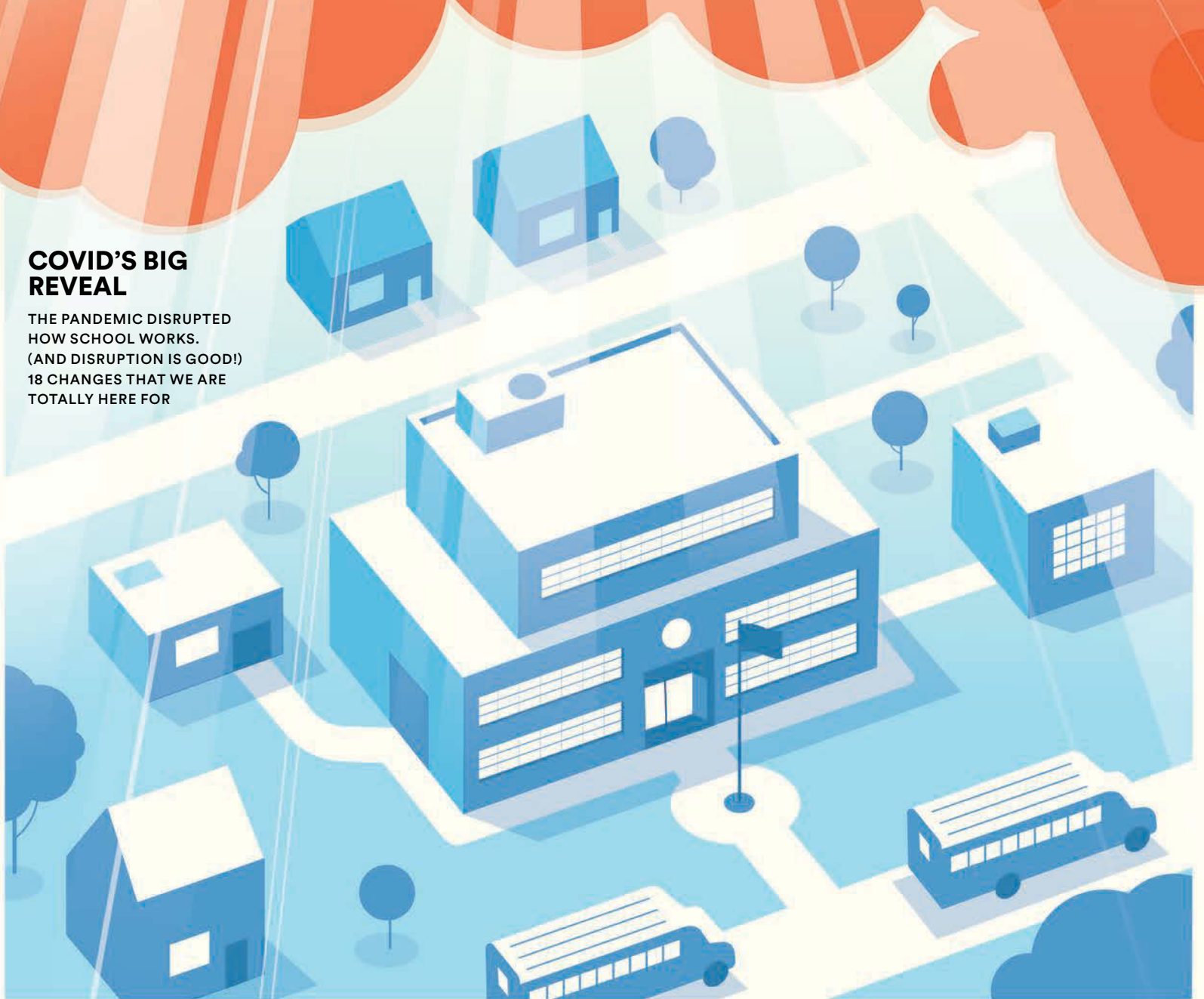
COVID'S BIG
REVEAL

**THE PANDEMIC DISRUPTED
HOW SCHOOL WORKS.
(AND DISRUPTION IS GOOD!)
18 CHANGES THAT WE ARE
TOTALLY HERE FOR**

Ed.

Another Post-COVID Change

When we sat down (online, in our home offices) to begin brainstorming the spring issue of the magazine, there were lots of reasons not to bring up the word that comes around every five or so years in the life of an alumni magazine: redesign. For starters, I was feeling unmotivated after months of being mostly cooped up inside because of the pandemic. We had also just won a grand gold award from CASE, and the magazine already looked great, so why tinker with a good thing?

Well, we were also itching to make some changes.

And so we did. And in a pretty big way, as you'll see as you start flipping through this issue. There are the usual font switches and reimagined use of white space, but the biggest change has to do with the organization. Rather than organize the magazine in the traditional way most alumni magazines are organized (the way we had been doing it) — short pieces up front, followed by longer features and then classnotes — we decided to mix short and long pieces together and group content by the way we think of the Ed School: people, ideas, and practice. It was a fun challenge, and, in a nod to the feature in our practice section, once we figured out how it was all going to work, our get up and go got up and redesigned. Let us know what you think.

Spring 2021

A
People

ASIA MARGO

"In smashing through stigmas by saying the words and inspiring the rest of us, Generation Z is gifting the world with the biggest leap forward ever in mental health advocacy. And they're providing me with a rare, eyewitness master class."

JOHN SCHLIMM, ED.M.'02
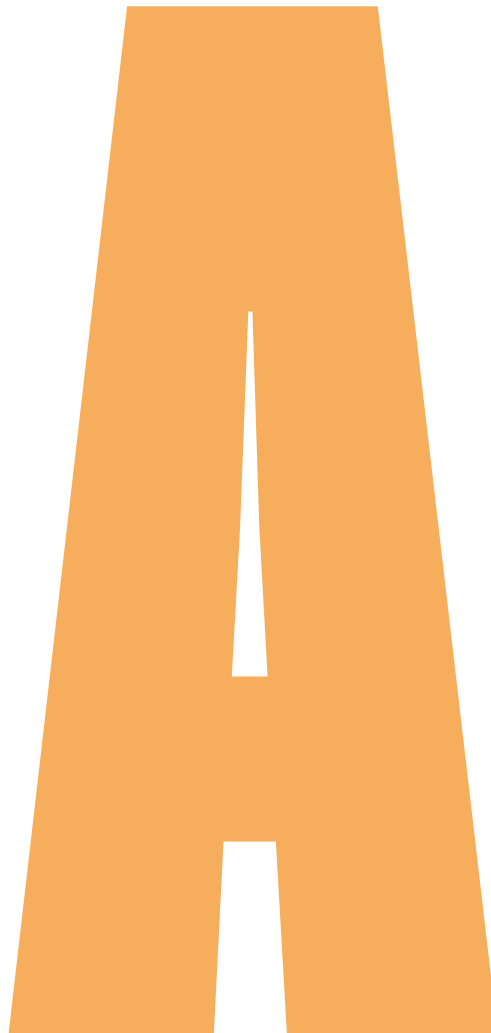
"People were sad and needed some joy. I thought, who is the person who brings joy to our campus and community? Our mascot. He's at all the games. He gives high fives to everyone. People's eyes light up when they see him."

MATT WEBER, ED.M.'11, RIGHT (SEE P. 20)

The Magnum Opus of

ONE OF THE MOST transformational journeys in my life began while I was standing in front of a class of first-year college students at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford in the fall of 2017 with a question echoing in my mind: "Who is Generation Z?"

Four years later, I'm still synthesizing the answer with The Gen Z Time Capsule, a global online participatory project that I recently launched in collaboration with the Learning and Public Engagement department at The Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Like with any great journey or pursuit of an answer, it's not only about the destination; the real magic happens along the winding branches on your way there.

Walking into that freshman seminar course, I thought we were still in the Land of Millennials. I was unaware that we had only moments earlier crossed a new threshold on campus. When I playfully referred to my students as Millennials, they corrected me: "We're Gen Z!"

An unchartered universe suddenly expanded in front of me. I would spend the next several months beginning to decipher this heuristic new tide. And I haven't stopped since.

While at the Ed School in 2001–2002, I had my foray into researching the world of young people — at that time, they were Millennials — when I wrote *Black-Out: Unpacking the Meanings of the Black Clothing Worn by the Youths at the Harvard Square T-Stop* for Mica Pollock's course, Youth Culture(s): Building Difference, Breaking it Down. The weeks I spent interviewing teenagers in Harvard Square planted a seed.

Fifteen years later, Gen Zers — born between 1997 and 2012 — captivated me with their raw honesty in courageously sharing their stories unlike any generation before them, especially pertaining to mental health.

I was now an explorer, determined to excavate layer by layer.

From the start, as essays were handed in and presentations given, my students told me about their anxiety, depression, fears, struggles with sexuality, addictions, bullying, miscarriages, eating disorders, abuse, cutting, rapes, disabilities, encounters with racism, seeing friends gunned down, having to get jobs as their family's main breadwinners, and surviving cancer, as well as the parents, coaches, and teachers who had berated them as "too dumb," "too lazy," "worthless."

And, for the first time in my academic career, a few students confided that they were contemplating suicide. Eventually, one would die by suicide. Yet, the challenges these young people have endured aren't what sets them apart from previous generations. What differentiates them is their fearlessness in speaking aloud "suicide," "anxiety," "depression," "rape."

In smashing through stigmas by saying the words and inspiring the rest of us — for whom such topics were taboo and stifled — to follow suit, Generation Z is gifting the world with the biggest leap forward ever in mental health advocacy. And they're providing me with a rare, eyewitness master class.

Their example emboldened me, a 48-year-old Gen Xer, to go public with my own lifelong struggle with anxiety, as well as to speak about my family's long-hushed history of suicides and the ripples there dating back generations. My students have reinforced for me that we each have a platform, beginning with our voices.

Equally potent is the way in which Gen Zers are processing their traumas to fortify themselves. What they're doing in 18 years to translate challenges into strength has taken me more than four decades to understand.

These were the foundational roots of The Gen Z Time Capsule to come, long before The Warhol Museum and I conceived it. Yet, I was already collecting.

Gen Z

A teacher's journey documenting his students lives led to The Gen Z Time Capsule collaboration with The Andy Warhol Museum

Story by **John Schlimm, Ed.M.'02**
Photographs by **Asia Margo**

Schlimm channeling
his inner Warhol in the
lobby of the museum

At the start of the fall 2018 semester, I handed my new first-year students two blank sketchbooks with only one rule: Nothing is off limits!

Four months later, the sketchbooks were filled with their humor, fears, venting, scribbles, conversations, declarations, scriptures, F-bombs, favorite quotes, tic-tac-toe games, acronyms I had to Google, and, of course, the sketch of a penis that another student later modestly covered with masking tape (which made me chuckle and reminded me that while wise beyond their years, these students were still teens prone to mischief).

I was continuing to discover, layer by layer.

2019. Inspired by the 610 time capsules that Andy Warhol had assembled in cardboard boxes, I kicked off the fall semester by handing each of my students a large manila envelope. I instructed them to fill their envelopes. Just before finals week, everyone shared the contents of their first-year time capsules. Sunglasses. Math tests. A laminated casino card. *Guitar World*. A Nerf dart. SpongeBob drawings. Domestic violence booklet. A parking ticket. More pieces of the Gen Z puzzle fell into place, and I inched closer to the larger oeuvre that soon would spark.

Also, throughout these past few years, any time I've traveled — from spending the day with students at Newtown High School in Connecticut to group discussions at universities across Iowa — Gen Zers everywhere added colorful new brushstrokes to my canvas.

John Schlimm is the author of 20 books and creator of participatory art projects such as *The Smile That Changed the World (Is Yours)* and *A Family Poem for the World*. Connect with him on social media: *JohnSchlimm.com* or The Gen Z Time Capsule: *www.warhol.org/timecapsule/time-capsules/*

However, as I also shared my adulation for Gen Zers with older adults for whom this generation often remains both stereotype and enigma, I realized that I had to be careful to not place them on pedestals like precious figurines to be oohed and aahed at. That would be unfair, and antithetical to who they are: authentically and unapologetically imperfect.

In fact, the more I understand Generation Z, the more questions I have for them, like "What's the real deal behind your Finsta accounts?"; "How has your generation navigated the pandemic?"; and "Since Gen Zers are so open about mental health struggles, then why does your generation have the highest suicide rate?" There's much unpacking left to be done.

On the eve of the COVID-19 pandemic, I shared my Gen Z work with Nicole Dezelon, associate director of learning at The Warhol Museum. I suggested we collaborate on something that would be a living, breathing, evolving portrait of Generation Z and further help these young people reveal themselves to the world.

In the spirit of Warhol's prolific interest in pop culture and personalities, and as a follow-up to his museum's groundbreaking Collecting Youth Culture: 15 Minutes Eternal project, during the fall of 2020, The Warhol Museum and I launched the first phase of The Gen Z Time Capsule project on the museum's website. In that space, we invite all Gen Zers to submit photos and videos of items, activities, places, and people most important to them. In a full-circle moment, my students were among the first to contribute.

The Gen Z Time Capsule is now in an ongoing second phase where we are still collecting submissions while also curating them and populating the time capsule with content, spanning categories like art, music, fashion, gaming, social media, politics/current events, food, and mental health. Our third phase is exhibiting the contents of the time capsule for public viewing online, where it will grow indefinitely, each addition a new clue.

I'm not a social scientist, nor a formal researcher or marketer, so I'll leave the clinical analysis and commercialization of Gen Z up to those folks. My pedagogy as teacher and advocate is much simpler: I always ask my students, "What do you want me to tell the world about your generation?"

The replies are consistent: "We just want respect and people to listen to us."

So, I respect and listen, and learn. In doing so, I find the better angels of my own nature. All the while answering, "Who is Generation Z?"

STAYING CONNECTED TO HGSE

After five years serving on the Ed School's Alumni Council, chair **HANNA RODRIGUEZ-FARRAR, ED.M.'05, ED.D.'13**, will be ending her tenure. Rodriguez-Farrar, chief of staff to the president of Colgate University, spoke to *Ed.* about her current work, the pandemic, and why she chose to stay connected to Harvard.

In your role at Colgate, you get an insider's view of higher education. What's the biggest challenge colleges and universities will face once the pandemic recedes?

Prior to the pandemic, higher education was already grappling with numerous challenges, especially intense pressure on human and fiscal resources. Institutions were already struggling to improve access, opportunity, and outcomes for students. Many will need to reassess their business models as they cannot simply afford to operate the way they did in 2019. How can they strengthen their commitment to their missions when almost every part of the institution is under strain?

How did your many years studying at the Ed School shape your career and your decision to focus on higher education?

At HGSE I identified where I wanted to make an impact and why. Specifically, I want to make a difference at a college or university because they changed the trajectory of my life. Reflecting on how my alma maters have affected my life has sustained me throughout this pandemic and during other hard times.

What initially made you get involved with the Alumni Council?

At the time I joined the alumni council, I was living in California. Joining the council was a way to stay connected to the Ed School when I was on the other side of the country.

Any advice for Ed School alumni, new or long-standing, who want to get involved and volunteer with the school but don't know where know to start?

Start by perusing the alumni website for the kinds of opportunities that you can easily plug into, such as joining the HGSE social media sites or have a career conversation with a current student. The HGSE community is one of the school's greatest strengths, so commit to being proud of that community in the world. I think you'd be surprised how many HGSE grads are out there wanting to connect.

Hanna Rodriguez-Farrar at graduation in 2013

JILL ANDERSON

WHAT WILL YOU REMEMBER THE MOST FROM THIS BIZARRE YEAR OF LEARNING VIRTUALLY?

Melanie Shimano, Ed.M. (TIE)
BALTIMORE

I'll always remember late night paper revisions and lecture viewing party sessions with my learning pod from Education Policy Analysis with Professor Reimers. We always started off doing work, but then ended up doing something totally unrelated — heading on a Target run in Texas, talking about the latest gossip from WeChat in China, or watching my dog dress up in different sweaters in the "cold" California winter. All three of us were based in different time zones and were also working while taking classes, so we had to get creative with our meeting times, but we always ended up having fun regardless of the hour!

Julia Steinberg, Ed.M. (HDP)
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

I am a part-time student living in Princeton, New Jersey. I will always remember the friendly relationships I have made with my professors, in spite of never meeting in person. It's amazing how a view into a person's home office with passing pets or children can help you feel connected over the miles!

Jessica O'Donnell, Ed.M. (TIE)
TORONTO

In the fall, I took a course taught by Eileen McGivney, The Virtual Self: Identity, Culture, and Learning in Digital Worlds. My peers and I received VR headsets, and we had multiple opportunities to interact with each other in various virtual worlds. Although I was unable to physically meet my classmates on the Harvard campus this year, these interactions in virtual reality and the advancements in avatar design provided me with the opportunity to connect with my peers in an innovative and remarkable way.

April Flores, Ed.M. (EPM)
BROWNSVILLE, TEXAS

This past semester, I was enrolled in Dr. V's Ethnic Studies class and I'll remember the Ethnic Studies Symposium. While we could not attend physically, my family, friends, and current/former students attended our presentation which, for me, became a more impactful experience.

Friends Who Zoom

Clara Choi, Ed.M. (AIE)
LOS ANGELES

I will miss being able to sleep in until one minute before my morning class starts and calling in from the comforts of my bed.

Jeannette Garcia Coppersmith (Ph.D.)
LOS ANGELES

I'm a first-year Ph.D. student. One of the most memorable parts of this year of virtual learning was getting together on Zoom every Monday evening with my reading group for one of our required courses. We were supposed to be discussing our readings and sharing notes, which we did, but only after checking in personally, sharing updates about baby panda Xiao Qi Ji at the National Zoo, and posting funny memes for about an hour. Having this unstructured time to laugh and connect during this strange year was one of the highlights of the fall for me. (Shout out to my reading group: Caroline, Julian, Lily, and Kemy!)

What inspires us? More often than not, it's the people around us. At the end of last year, the school's centennial, more than a dozen alumni and faculty gathered in pairs and trios on Zoom to talk about the important friendships they developed with one another over the years, friendships that offered mentoring and opportunities for the exchange of intergenerational knowledge. The Zoom series, called CrossGen, was taped and can be accessed online. Conversations included:

● **GEOFFREY CANADA, ED.M.'75** and **CLINT SMITH, PH.D.'20,** (shown above) talked about educational equity, the impact of COVID-19, and what inspired them to become teachers.

● **PROFESSOR SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON, ED.D.'81, MATTHEW KRAFT, ED.D.'13,** and **HEATHER PESKE, ED.D.'05,** shared how they connected through the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers and the way research and policy support teaching.

● **SENIOR LECTURER JAMES HONAN, ED.D.'89,** and **RICHARD REDDICK, ED.D.'07,** talked about their collaboration on the Institute for Educational Management and how the Ed School has fostered generations of relationships.

● **SENIOR LECTURER KATHRYN BOUDETT, PROFESSOR ELIZABETH CITY, ED.D.'07,** and Professor Richard Murnane, the founders of the Ed School's Data Wise Project, reminisced about the project's growth over the last 20 years.

● **EVE EWING, ED.M.'13, ED.D.'16,** and **PROFESSOR SARA LAWRENCE-LIGHTFOOT, ED.D.'72,** talked about role models, their mutual admiration for one another, and the inheritances that have shaped their lives and life's work.

● **DENNIS HOLTSCHNEIDER, ED.D.'97,** and **SENIOR LECTURER JUDITH BLOCK MCLAUGHLIN, M.A.T.'71, ED.D.'83,** exchanged observations about their careers, working with college presidents, and the life-long support they have received from their Ed School colleagues and one another.

Watch the conversations here: *hgse.me/3v3d3DZ*

Morgan State University
President David Kwabena Wilson

IT'S LONELY AT THE TOP

It's never been easy to be a college president. This past year, with a pandemic in full swing, the job became that much harder.

Story by **Grace Tatter, Ed.M.'18**
Photographs by **Walter Smith**

IN DECEMBER 2019, <u>**DAVID KWABENA WILSON, ED.M.'84, ED.D.'87**</u>, was on a train cutting across the periphery of Wuhan Province in China. As the president of Morgan State University, he leads trips to China for other presidents of HBCUs, sometimes twice a year. One of his priorities is forging global connections for his students and faculty. As he looked forward to 2020, he was excited to finalize plans for a partnership in Ghana.

But it wasn't long into the new year when Wilson realized everything about his job was going to change.

At the beginning of March, he was forced to make the hard decision to ask Morgan State students studying abroad — for many, a landmark experience of their college careers — to come home. That was the first of many difficult decisions that would come every day in the coming months. Within a week, the university announced the suspension of in-person instruction for all 7,000 students. The bustling Baltimore campus that had defined the past decade of his career was a ghost town.

"I realized that life for me as a university president would not be the same when I started coming to the campus almost every day, and I was the only one here," he says.

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Even in the calmest of times, the job of a college president is a juggling act. According to the most recent American College Presidency Study from the American Council on Higher Education, the top five responsibilities of college presidents nationwide are budget/finances; fundraising; managing a senior level team; building governing board relationships; and enrollment management. That's not to mention overseeing personnel matters, academics, research, and students, from undergraduates to law and medical, and being the face of the university.

"If you look back at job descriptions for presidents, they were always looking for somebody who could do so many different things at once," says **JUDITH BLOCK MCLAUGHLIN, M.A.T.'71**,

> "College presidents have always felt pressure, but I would argue that the pressures have become more acute. Many colleges around the country were already feeling quite strained and stressed. And then COVID came in."

Judith Block McLaughlin, senior lecturer on education and the educational chair of the Harvard Seminar for New Presidents

ED.D.'83, a senior lecturer on education and the educational chair of the Harvard Seminar for New Presidents.

What's more, some of the qualities expected of a college president can even be contradictory. "We want someone who can work successfully with the academic governance of the institution and be a decisive decision-maker," says McLaughlin. "A person might be able to do both, but they have to move between the two roles, successfully knowing when to engage with campus constituencies, and how and when to make decisive decisions. It's not a job with a single focus."

It's a job that was already becoming steadily more challenging against a backdrop of mounting higher education costs, less higher education funding, and a more politically polarized nation.

"College presidents have always felt pressure, but I would argue that the pressures have become more acute" in recent years, McLaughlin says. "Many colleges around the country were already feeling quite strained and stressed. It was already getting more and more challenging. And then COVID came in."

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At the onset of the pandemic, all of the preexisting responsibilities of college presidents were significantly complicated. And one colossal, new responsibility became central to their jobs almost overnight: managing an unprecedented, ever-shifting public health crisis.

For college presidents, the decision to suspend in-person classes and operations in March was just the beginning. Every day, presidents had to make decisions about whether to plan for any sort of in-person commencement. About resource allocation for online learning. About events and initiatives that had been planned long before 2020. About personnel and layoffs. And they had to make all of these decisions with rapidly changing information about the virus, and minimal national leadership. (The Trump Department of Education never offered COVID guidelines for colleges and universities; the Biden administration re-

leased higher education guidance on January 21.)

"Decision-making in this period has to be nimble and agile," Wilson says. "The first challenge is to make sure that you, as a president, are OK with the fact that you make a decision at 9 o'clock in the morning and you may have to revisit that at 5 o'clock that afternoon."

And while college presidents don't make decisions alone, relying on cabinets and experts throughout their university communities, McLaughlin says that "the person who is most visible when the decisions come out is the president."

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At Morgan State, Wilson and his leadership team ultimately decided not to welcome students back for in-person classes in the fall semester. At Lasell University in Newton, Massachusetts, President Michael Alexander made a different choice. Students were given the option to return or stay home. Those who came back to campus were asked to adhere to strict safety guidelines—which required detailed planning to implement.

"The COVID work," Alexander says, "is not optional.

Among the top frustrations named by college presidents in the American College President Study is a resistance to change. Alexander, who completed his education doctoral coursework at HGSE, says that his career as a college president has offered few opportunities to make decisions that please students, faculty, and staff alike. And getting the entire community to act as a team was especially daunting when the pandemic necessitated distance and remote communication. But, to his surprise, he met almost no resistance to the new demands borne from strict safety procedures on campus and a mixture of teaching and learning online and in-person.

"Everyone stepped up, adjusted to new technology, wearing masks, adapting to new procedures," he said. "As a result, we kept people learning and progressing toward their degrees. They appreciated our ability to keep people safe and keep people learning at the same time."

Lasell University President Michael Alexander (above) and Senior Lecturer Judith Block McLaughlin (left)

Still, there was a significant financial cost to the adjustments. Students who returned to campus submitted to twice-weekly testing, made possible through a partnership with the Cambridge-based Broad Institute. Lasell administered 30,000 tests over the fall semester, costing the institution millions of dollars. The university allowed students who opted not to return to campus to receive a discount on tuition — another hard decision asked of college presidents nationwide. According to a poll of college students by the study platform OneClass, 93 percent of the 13,000 students surveyed thought that tuition should be discounted for an all-online education. Lasell was one of the very few institutions to agree.

Lasell has fared better this past decade than many other small, private colleges in its region. According to August 2020 data from *The Hechinger Report*, a nonprofit news organization devoted to education, 30% of four-year colleges are bringing in less revenue from tuition than they did a decade ago. In New England, where the college-aged population is dwindling, competition for students is especially fierce. Eight colleges have closed or merged in Massachusetts since 2016, more than in any other state. Despite a relatively small endowment, and a commitment to serving students who often can't afford the full tuition, Lasell has maintained a balanced budget.

But the pandemic forced even the wealthiest schools into positions of financial precarity. Public schools dealt with almost-certain budget cuts from financially strapped state governments. And nearly all colleges saw costs rise and tuition revenue fall, forcing impossible choices.

At Morgan State, Wilson pushed to invest in mental health services for students and extra technological resources, despite facing a drop in public funding.

"You have to follow the science, and sometimes when the science presents itself to you, it runs counter to some of the things that we may have learned in graduate school, like fiscal responsibility," Wilson says. "What does it mean to be a fiduciary of your institution, and how do you embrace innovation and to do it in a way that will still enable the institution to function at a very high level?"

"There is not a campus, no matter how rich, that hasn't been deeply affected by the financial costs associated with this," says McLaughlin. New costs include testing, personal professional equipment, and sanitation, all paired with the loss of tuition revenue from students who decided to pause their education until a return to stability. To make budgeting even more difficult, uncertainty has ruled the day, with constantly shifting case numbers and state and local policies.

"This year, over the summer, we ended up doing five different budgets," Alexander says. Lasell's budget quickly became obsolete as they had to adjust expectations of how many students would be in residence on campus. And the whole summer, the possibility that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts would not allow students to return at all loomed. In the end, Lasell had a worst-case budget, a best-case, and everything in between. "That's an enormous amount of work on top of what we normally do," says Alexander.

It still isn't clear when that work and the associated costs will go away. Even as the vaccine becomes more widely distributed, new variants pose new threats. Students and staff will likely still require new, more expensive sanitation practices to feel safe living and working alongside one another. And some students will have become accustomed to the flexibility afforded by online classes — and perhaps less willing to pay top-dollar for the residential experience.

Questions about tuition and online education were already among the pressures on institutions before COVID. The cost of higher education in the United States has climbed at a much faster pace than the country's median income, according to a 2019 report from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. In 2018, more than half of students took on some debt to go to college, according to the Federal Reserve. More and more, students and families are wondering if the price tag of the traditional American college experience is worth it — and those doubts have perhaps only been

Wilson on the Morgan State campus this past spring

"The first challenge is to make sure that you, as a president, are OK with the fact that you make a decision at 9 o'clock in the morning and you may have to revisit that at 5 o'clock that afternoon."

David Kwabena Wilson, president, Morgan State University

UVA President James Ryan

deepened in a school year where even much of the residential college experience has been mediated through screens.

"Many small colleges were stressed financially already, and now the pandemic has made everyone stressed," Alexander says. "There is an interaction between the issues of cost, of access, the financing of higher education, and the pandemic, and what the policy reactions are to the pandemic."

This only makes more urgent questions that were already monopolizing many college president's waking hours, especially at schools like Lasell, that serve a predominately low-income student body. While the middle and upper middle class fared well economically during the pandemic, at least 8 million lower-income Americans fell into poverty, according to research this past fall from Columbia University's Center on Poverty & Social Policy.

"We have to figure out a way to still provide high-quality education at a significantly lower cost, because what it costs today, [students] simply cannot afford," says Alexander.

"The events of last spring and summer have created a momentum for change, or increased the speed of change, in ways that one would not have seen otherwise," says McLaughlin.

And college presidents are the ones charged with steering their institutions through these new waters.

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The pandemic not only changed what college presidents do. It also changed how they do it. Wilson estimates that he used to spend up to 40% of his time traveling to maintain partnerships abroad, meet with board members, attend conferences, and fundraise. When he was on campus, he put a high premium on meeting in person, and putting names to faces. At a time when he needed the trust of his community like never before, the pandemic forced distance that made new relationships harder to form, and could have cooled pre-existing ones.

"You are not connecting with your students face-to-face. You're not connecting with faculty. You're not there," he says. Wilson says he's grateful that the pandemic happened more than a decade into his career at Morgan State. "I think for me it was much easier because the university community had gotten to know me and they trusted the decisions that I made."

Yet meeting on Zoom rather than in person does have its advantages. Wilson expanded his cabinet from about 15 people to 60, a number of people unlikely to fit around a conference table.

"I felt that we were about to go through a period where we had to make tough decisions and resources were becoming parsimonious, because we are a state institution and the state revenues are not coming in. We have to talk about remote education and what that entails for the institution, and we have to deal with some issues of technological challenges on the part of our students, and just a lot of thorny issues. And I did not feel that the model that I had in place would be representational," he says. "I would basically be only listening to the senior leadership and relying upon the senior leadership then to convey the way decisions were being made to others in the institution." In a pandemic, transparency and communication are key, he says — and that meant adding leaves to the virtual table.

James Ryan, the dean of the Ed School from 2013 to 2018, had only been the president of the University of Virginia (UVA) for 18 months when the pandemic started. While he had previously served as dean of UVA's law school, he was still meeting people across the 22,000-student institution. He could not rely on the long-standing relationships that presidents like Wilson had built over more than a decade.

"I was still getting to know people and learning how to organize the work," he says. "[The pandemic] disrupted that."

But, he recognized that even if he'd had more experience as president, he would still be operating without a blueprint. "The work that was facing us was not work that the university normally has to deal with."

> "Many small colleges were stressed financially already, and now the pandemic has made everyone stressed."
>
> **Michael Alexander, president, Lasell University**

Like Wilson, he expanded the number of people he worked with and regularly consulted. "The tasks that were presented to us didn't fit squarely into student affairs or communications or the COO's office," he says. "It required thinking about — OK, who has the relevant bits of knowledge, and who has the capacity to implement what we're going to do? We had to create all of these cross-functional groups of people that normally didn't work together anyway."

He hopes that after the pandemic, it feels normal for people across the university to work together. "I hope we take that forward when we're thinking not just about how we deal with a pandemic, but how we put together the right group if we're thinking about a new initiative." Ryan says. "Rather than thinking, 'Well, we have to find the office that we assign this to,' instead we think, 'How do we bring the 10 best people across the university who would be the very best at figuring out how to do this and how to implement it?'"

The political and cultural context of the pandemic will also perhaps permanently change what it means to be a college president. The coronavirus pandemic put a spotlight on the country's history of white supremacy. College and university communities were grappling with the police killing of George Floyd as well as the virus — and they looked to their leadership to partake in the conversations and represent them to the outside world.

Presidents are often viewed as the moral conscience of their universities, says McLaughlin. "When do you decide to speak on behalf of your institution, and when do you not? The one thing you can be sure of is, whatever you say, there will be some constituents who think you said the wrong thing."

When a Black Lives Matter protest planned to cross through Morgan State's campus this summer, Wilson put on his mask and joined it.

"You have to walk the walk as well as talk the talk," he says.

The belated national racial reckoning might also push boards selecting future college presidents to be more inclusive. The American Council on Higher Education's *American College Presidency Study* shows that the profile of the American college presidents is shifting very slowly. When the data was collected in 2016, 70% of college presidents were men and 83% were white. Those numbers diverge sharply from the profile of American college students. In 2016, nearly half of American undergraduate students did not identify as white. The events of 2020 underscore the need for college presidents of all races to be prepared to address racism and racial inequity head on.

In the meantime, the college presidents of today have more storms to weather. Wilson said that a crucial lesson of leading during the pandemic has been self-care.

"In very stressful situations, you have to find some time to disconnect and you've got to find some time to exhale. You've got to find some time, if you will, to laugh," he says. At one point, he invited the university's counseling center staff to his 60-person Zoom cabinet meeting, so they could all get a tutorial in taking time for themselves. "It was just so amazing. We needed that one hour or so of kind of basic care, of 'here's how you take care of yourself.'"

And while dozens of college presidents stepped down during the 2020–2021 school year, or announced plans to shortly after its conclusion, others are committed to seeing their institutions through the instability. Alexander of Lasell University had originally planned to depart next school year, but his board extended his contract to 2025.

"I — and I hear this from my colleagues...we want to see it through. We want to see it through the other end of this challenge. If things become more stable, I think there will be a lot of presidents retiring. But I think it will take years to recover from this," he says.

"I can't see abandoning this job."

Grace Tatter is an associate producer for NPR's *On Point*, and a former writer for *Usable Knowledge* and *Chalkbeat*

FOR MASTER'S STUDENT Manya Steinfield, it was clear: If the Ed School hadn't gone fully virtual this year, or offered a part-time option, she would not have been able to attend. Instead, she would have had to quit her full-time job and move back to the United States from Germany, where her husband had been offered a promotion and where she had been teaching humanities and psychology at a school in Hannover since 2019.

Virtual and part-time were clearly the best options for her.

"I love the fact that I can keep teaching full time and take the program part time," she says. "I can live in Europe and be with my husband, continue working, and do the degree."

What's been especially useful (and something grad students rarely get to do) is apply what she's learning at Harvard directly to her teaching in real time, and vice versa.

"There are so many opportunities where I learn something at night at Harvard and it's in my class the next day," she says. For example, mirroring her Ed School experience, "I use breakout rooms now with assigned roles and note catchers like Google slides or a group Google doc — thank you, Professor Bondie! — and I use the chat to capture ideas and then ask students to see commonality amongst the responses." Being a virtual student has also taught her some of the nuts and bolts about what works (and doesn't) in online teaching, like being clear about the order she wants students to participate and giving students time to think before they're asked to speak. She also realized early on that it was important to let her students know this was all new for her, too.

"I am open with them that I am learning how to teach online just as they are learning how to learn online," she says. "The HGSE professors were open with us as well and I appreciated that." In the end, "To be able to quickly apply what I learn has made me a much better teacher in just a short time."

An added bonus, she says, is that she can also take lessons from her teaching back to Harvard.

"This probably happens once a week. During one of my Harvard classes, I will bring up something that happened in my teaching," she says. "For example, I took the J-term equity course on language. We discussed how important it is for students to be able to express themselves in their mother tongue and feel their culture has a place in school. That same week, one of my students was doing a research project and used his grandma as a resource." At the Ed School, she talked about how, at one point, she wouldn't have considered a grandma to be a reputable source but then realized she was using the wrong standards with her students. "She knows more about the city than any of us and it gave him the opportunity to connect to his grandma. How special."

Steinfield has found other positives to being at a grad school that, despite having to go fully virtual, made it a priority early on to connect people. From day one, "HGSE presented itself as super intentional, thoughtful, and organized," she says. "There was a sense that they wouldn't do this if it wasn't right for learning." She looked into another, closer program but it was limited to her communicating with just a tutor, not other students. "I need people and conversations to learn and HGSE made it clear they were going to make that a priority."

Since then, she says she's benefited from having classmates from all over the world.

"In my Deeper Learning class, for example, we had several students from India who shared the struggles they have with teacher training and teacher development," she says. "They brought to our attention the need to back up and think about people before they even get into the schools and what the system is like. I also had a classmate in Nigeria and during the unrest there, it was so valuable for me to hear a first-hand account of life there during that time."

Steinfield says that being part time also allows her to spread out into two years what is normally a one-year program.

"I like that I can really focus on the classes I am taking and apply what I am learning more slowly," she says. "With just half the workload of a full-time student, I still feel like I am drinking from a fire hose sometimes. There is just so much to learn!" **LH**

Virtual Works

Steinfield at the Georgengarten garden in Hannover, Germany

A CAVALIER ATTITIUDE ADJUSTMENT

An alum dons a beloved costume during COVID to make a campus smile

DESPERATE TIMES, as they say, call for desperate measures, so when **MATT WEBER**'s boss asked for ideas last spring to keep spirits high after COVID shut down the university where they worked, there was only one thing to do: Stretch his 6'3" frame into a "Jefferson" blue and "rotunda" orange muscle suit, throw on an 8-pound head made of dense foam, and become Cavman.

"People were sad and needed some joy," says Weber, Ed.M.'11, a special assistant to University of Virginia (UVA) President James Ryan. "I thought, who is the person who brings joy to our campus and community? Our mascot. He's at all the games. He gives high fives to everyone. People's eyes light up when they see him."

After unearthing the swashbuckling cavalier costume from an athletic storage shed where it had been in hibernation, Weber started his Random Acts of Cavman project by sending out a message that started: Need some Cavman in your life during these uncertain times?

That first night, more than 150 requests came in from the Charlottesville community asking Cavman to deliver messages and cheer, in person and on Zoom. His first visit was to a senior living community in town, where he did a socially distanced dance outside to the UVA pep song. He sent birthday greetings, congratulated high school seniors, and gave a "Wahoowa" at virtual alumni events. Weber also stood on the roof of a building across from the hospital's COVID ward. Over time, thousands of requests came pouring in. Weber learned how to communicate without speaking (Cavman doesn't talk) and cheer up slightly nervous little kids, including his own, who didn't quite understand what daddy was doing. Eventually, after a thorough costume cleaning, other UVA staff members stepped into the Cavman rotation.

It's an experience, a marker in time, that Weber won't ever forget.

"When Cavman showed up, people would cry and people would laugh," he says. "It was like Ed McMahon showing up at your house — but without the check." **LH**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **SANJAY SUCHAK**

Ideas

B

"I was raised by a village of parents, educators, church members, aunts, and uncles who taught me from an early age that their investment in my development wasn't only about achieving upward mobility. They instilled in me a belief that my purpose was linked to my community's purpose — that our destinies and aspirations were intertwined."

ROB WATSON, ED.M.'18

Anti-Racist Teaching at the Ed School

A new initiative helps
Ed School faculty
think through their own
assumptions and
expectations

"**THE SHIFT TO** anti-racism does not happen overnight or after one professional development session: It happens through a process of self-discovery, healing, and learning to reject and call out racist ideas, people, and structures. Anti-racist teaching is not a teaching approach or method, it is a way of life," writes author and professor Bettina Love in a piece shared with Ed School faculty this past fall for the launch of the Anti-Racist Teaching and Advising (ARTA) initiative.

Started with support from the Teaching and Learning Lab (TLL), and built on a foundation laid in large part by HGSE students, alumni, faculty, and staff of color, the initiative is a multiyear project designed to work with faculty members to develop the knowledge and skills they need to not only engage in anti-racist teaching and advising practices that will empower students to do the same in their work,

but also, as ARTA background material explains, "help reduce harm done to our students in our classrooms and to help instructors better repair harm when it occurs."

In order to do this, the initiative will help faculty members think through and challenge racist ideas and behaviors in themselves, racism at Harvard, and racism in society overall. Through group professional learning and individual instructional coaching, faculty will be asked to look at their course content, their instructional methods, and their interactions with students and peers. Several monthly learning communities — Conversations on Race and Racism, Faculty of Color Affinity Spaces, and Developing as Anti-Racist White Educators — have already been formed to explore these practices and provide space for restoration and fellowship.

"I have been inspired by the engagement, reflection, and insights

in these spaces thus far, and I am excited about HGSE's commitment to continue expanding this work," says **JOSH BOOKIN, ED.M.'08**, TLL's associate director of Instructional Support and Development.

"Our faculty at the Ed School are talented educators," says Professor Adriana Umaña-Taylor, "who have a steadfast commitment to simultaneously providing a nurturing and intellectually stimulating experience for students at Harvard, and I am thrilled that our school is taking serious steps with this ARTA initiative to ensure that all of our faculty are equipped to meet these goals with an emphasis on racial equity and justice.

"This will not only impact our immediate community of students," she says, "but also it will have reverberating effects on our society as these students carry this work forward in their personal and professional lives."

JAMES GRAHAM
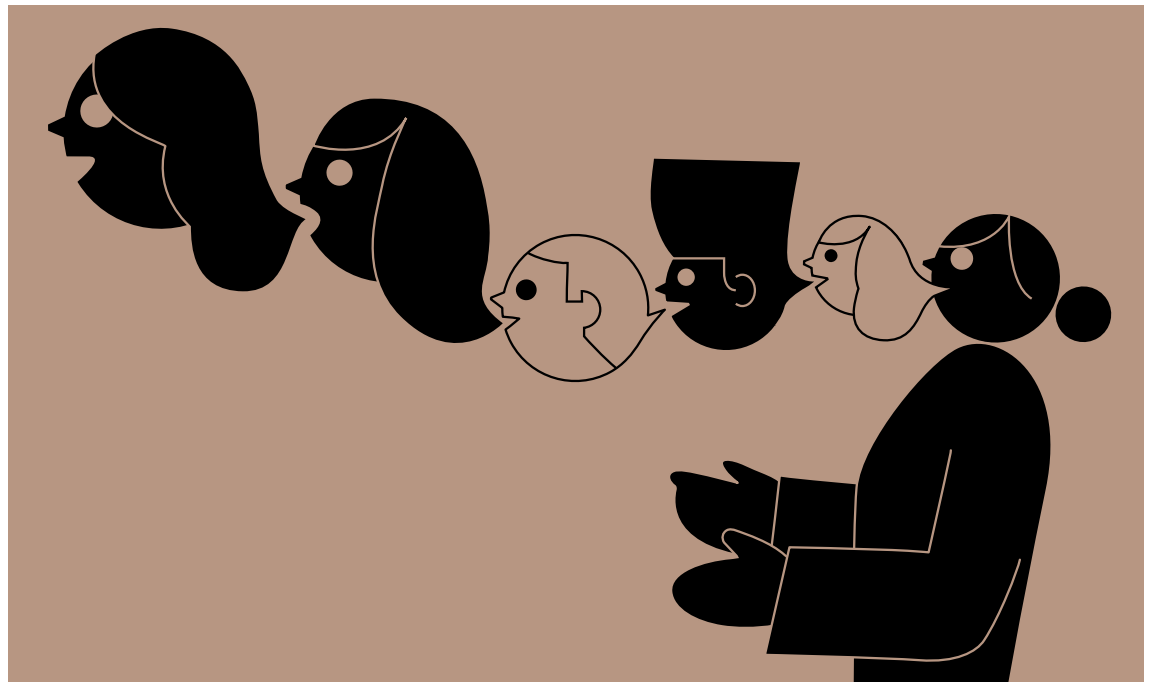
2020-21: The School Year in Review

OUR ANNUAL A-TO-Z LOOK BACK AT THE MEMORABLE EVENTS AND MILESTONES FROM THE PAST ACADEMIC YEAR

A
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PANDEMIC

This year, there was one word — and memory — that we all shared and that no one will ever forget.

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When the pandemic recedes and schools reopen, in an attempt to go back to "normal," we shouldn't just scrap all of the adjustments that were made. Some of these changes should have been made long ago, some revealed gaping inequities, and some made crystal clear what really matters in education — and what doesn't.

Story by **Lory Hough**
Illustrations by **Harry Campbell**

FOR KEEPS

THE PANDEMIC TURNED education in the United States upside down, nearly overnight. We were left with closed schools, virtual learning, canceled extracurriculars, kids without access, kids not showing up, desks six feet apart.

In other words, a bit of a mess.

But from that mess, it's possible that schools could emerge even better if some of the changes made during these impossible months don't disappear once we say goodbye to masks.

The big question is, what changes should we keep and what's best left behind? We asked members of the Ed School community to share their thoughts. Here are a few that stood out.

1. Cultivate Trust

We have struggled with trust during the COVID-19 pandemic at every level of the education system. My hope is that active trust-building emerges as a necessity in education — a foundational tenet through which we perform all of our work.

The concept of relational trust in schools is not new, identified by Professors Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider in 2003 as an essential ingredient for school improvement given the mutual dependencies that exist between principals, teachers, and parents. As they explain, trust is built when we discern respect, personal regard, competence, and personal integrity in one another. According to author Zaretta Hammond, a former teacher, active trust-building is also crucial in classroom communities as students will not engage in the productive struggle of learning without it. It is not just a concept; it is a strategy, a way of being and doing our work.

COVID-19 has required tremendous leaps of faith, and hence enormous trust, as we have realized just how interdependent we are. We must be able to count on one another.

Where trust is low, it seems these acts of reliance have been more challenging. Just look at the conflicts that have arisen between unions and administrators about school reopening and the pressing concerns expressed by many families of color about their children's safe return. These issues reveal where trust within our educational institutions is lacking, where we find it difficult to believe the other will follow through on their obligations. Where trust is higher, we have done better. This seems most evident in classrooms, virtual or in-person, where teachers have emphasized community, providing their students space to process recent events and share concerns.

The pandemic has reminded me just how important it is to listen, care for one another, seek perspectives, solve problems together, stay true to core values, and follow through. These are acts of ongoing trust-building that I hope we carry to the future.

JENNIFER PERRY CHEATHAM, ED.M.'06, ED.D.'10, is a senior lecturer and cochair of the Public Education Leadership Project

2. Rethink Grading

The pandemic has revealed how inapplicable, and even inappropriate, our traditional grading is when students have fewer resources, more instability, and a weaker safety net — characteristics which describe so many of our students over the last year.

One example is the common practice of including a student's "participation," which during remote learning has been called "engagement" in the grade. When we're teaching our students entirely through screens, it's not only impossible to perceive, and therefore to evaluate, the "how" of learning (Are they looking at us or at another window? When they aren't contributing to the chat, are they paying attention?), but it's also a waste of our teaching time and instructional power to award daily points for students' behaviors when what we actually care about, and what we want our students to care about, is their learning. We've seen the unfairness and stress we create by awarding or subtracting points for behavioral "performances" that fit our arbitrary and subjective model of what learning looks like, such as turning their video on, submitting an assignment by an inflexible deadline, and attending the Zoom meeting on time, when many students are enduring family deaths, food instability, econom-

ic hardship; have feared for their safety; and have younger siblings to care for — all circumstances outside students' control.
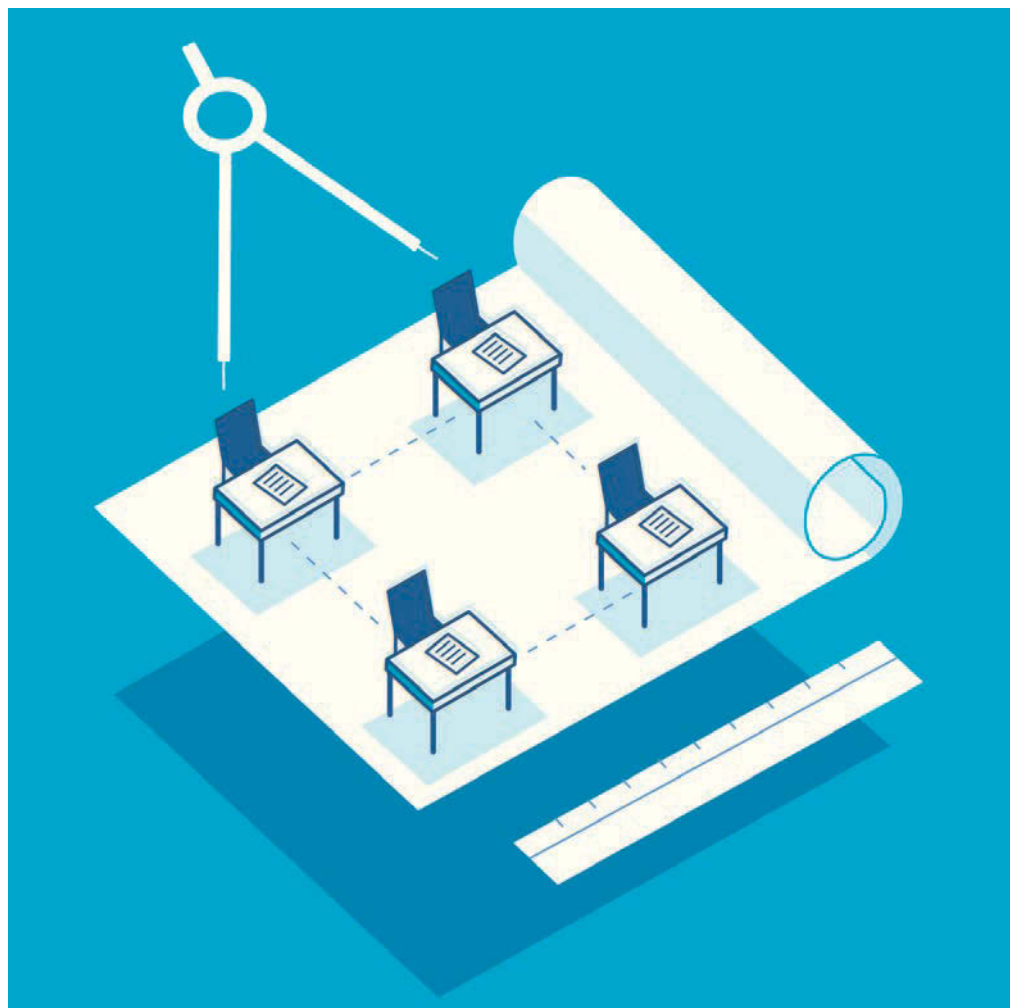
Even more importantly, we must realize that our century-old inherited grading practices have *always* disproportionately punished students with weaker support nets and fewer resources, students of color, from poor families, with special needs, and English learners. It's just that the pandemic has rendered so many more students — more middle class, white, and general education students — victims of the harms of traditional grading such that the dramatic rise in D's and F's now seems worthy of structural remedies. Students consistently at the lower end of the achievement and opportunity gaps, whose D's and F's seemed intractable and even "normal," have, over generations, been docked points because of our own imperfect perceptions of how they learn, our implicitly biased judgments of their behaviors against "mainstream" norms, and our incorporation into grades circumstances outside their control. Hopefully this pandemic makes us more conscious of how our century-old grading practices perpetuate achievement disparities, and that we are compelled out of moral conscience and professional obligation to use more equitable grading practices.

JOE FELDMAN, ED.M.'93, is the author of *Grading for Equity,* and a former teacher, principal, and district administrator

3. Stop Walling Off Families

The one educational change I'd like to see us keep after we emerge from this soul-pandemic is the new visibility parents have into what kids are learning, what teachers are teaching, and how schools are using their time. Perhaps the thing I've heard most often from parents during the past 12 months is: "I had no idea." They had no idea this teacher was so organized, that their child was so confused about parts of speech, or how little learning actually occurs during their kid's school day.

Over time, school systems have evolved routines that have walled parents off from classrooms and corridors. For all the pieties, schools have seemingly gotten into a habit of treating parents as a nuisance. Whenever possible, school leaders prefer to give the gentle brush-off to parents concerned about discipline, special education, or testing. Tellingly, a running tension of the Common Core contretemps was educators dismissing parental complaints that they found the math confusing and couldn't help their kids.

COVID HAS MADE IT CLEAR: WE CAN DO BETTER

Story by **SIMON RODBERG, ED.M.'14**

Education — the raising of children to be functional adults — is different from schools. Both 20,000 years ago and 200 years ago, most humans educated children without the institution of schools — within families, with informal tutors, through apprenticeships. Between 1820 and 2020, schools went from rare, even in the United States, to basically universal. In the past year, for most children, in-person school disappeared. In its absence, we should ask: What was school?

School was a place where large groups of children of similar ages gathered to be taught by a much smaller cohort of unrelated adults. It served four functions: custodial (to keep children safe and meet their basic needs for food, water, and shelter); job readiness (to teach them skills that would allow them to thrive economically); developmental (to prepare them for well-rounded adult life outside the workplace); and democratic (to ensure they could participate in virtuous citizenship). These functions existed before schools, in different forms: children always had to be protected and fed, trained for adult work, taught the ways of their culture, and prepared for citizenship. Schools, uniquely, brought these functions under one roof and hierarchical organization.

Our endless arguments about schools' shortcomings (Why can't Johnny read? Should Janey's sex ed be abstinence-only? Is there enough time for PE, for art, for civics?) are, in large part, arguments about the prioritization and definition of these functions. When we cram so much into one building, with a mere six hours a day and 180 days a year, no wonder not everything fits; when we experience such diversity and constant change in what job readiness and culture mean, no wonder we argue so much about what to teach.

The arguments changed during the pandemic. Mostly, of course, that's because of the overriding debate about reopening. But it's also because our society unbundled how education worked. For well-to-do people, it worked well. My son has learned English and social studies, remotely, from his public school teachers. He's also done science outdoors with a local nonprofit and physical education with his flag football team. He's practiced math on Khan Academy and drawn along with Mo Willems on YouTube. I don't see any signs of learning loss; in fact, I think he's likely learned more — except in his socialization! — not being at a physical school.

That's due to parents who could work from home, pay for tutors, and find resources to supplement remote schooling. The pandemic exacerbated inequality, but it's worth noting, even pre-pandemic, how much education well-to-do parents ensured for their children outside of school. From learning apps to tutors to afterschool programs to summer camps to high school internships, the education of well-off children was not contained to those six hours a day, and it didn't stop during school vacations. (Well-off people can also afford child care that matches work schedules.) More money and more time leads to more fulfillment of those four functions for the children of privilege, because the privileged don't need to rely on school alone to meet their needs. Working class children learn outside of school, too; learning is an unstoppable activity of young humans. But their out-of-school learning usually isn't systematized by adults to grow their capital in the wider society.

As a wider society, we should unbundle and remix what we provide to children. Community resources for custodial care that meets parents' needs; tutoring for job-readiness functions such as literacy and math; arts, exercise, and health education programs that match family values and desires; and in-person interactions with teachers and peers for practice in democratic habits such as collaboration and debate — these are forms that will better meet the functions we wanted school to serve. Everything that matters is not going to be delivered in a 1:25 ratio, in a single place, by employees reporting up through a single structure. Healthy communities don't work like that; they include multiple actors fitted to multiple niches.

Post-pandemic equity will require public investment in child care centers, in community organizations, and in tutoring at a massive scale. Some of that money can come from schools' current budgets if we simultaneously reduce what we ask schools to accomplish. But equity will also require, simply, more. Healthy communities don't work when some children, through parental resources, can get their needs met through a wide variety of educational experiences, and other children are left to the limitations of a single institution that is overwhelmed by multiple priorities, despite the hard work of its educators, and meeting none of them well. For public education, we can do better than school.

Simon Rodberg, Ed.M.'14, was a public school teacher and principal. He now consults with school leaders and is the author of *What If I'm Wrong? and Other Key Questions for Decisive School Leadership*

All of this was turned inside out last spring. When schools needed parents to help kids get online, supervise them, and serve as teacher aides, parents were no longer a nuisance. Meanwhile, parents charged with printing out materials, managing asynchronous platforms, and putting out fires suddenly enjoyed a front-row seat into what students are doing.

The transparency has had all kinds of ramifications. Zoom classes and cameras in hybrid classrooms allow parents to appreciate terrific teachers, see what a child is learning, and intervene when necessary. For teachers, as well as parents, such things have a lot to recommend them. Of course, piping teachers directly into kitchens and dining rooms has also meant that those inclined to deliver soapbox speeches or promote personal agendas can no longer do so in the comfortable solitude of their classroom.

There's great power in all this. This kind of openness can strengthen school communities, enable valuable oversight for what schools are doing, and provide students more of the support they need. Here's hoping that we find a way to keep it, long after the kids are out of the kitchen and back in the classroom.

FREDERICK HESS, ED.M.'90, is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and author of the *Education Week* blog, *Rick Hess Straight Up*

4. Learn From the Positive Anomalies

A popular narrative, that admittedly holds some semblance of the reality of the abrupt transition to distance learning, says that students who were underachieving academically prior to the COVID-19 pandemic struggle more with the introduction of digital learning from home. However, while in 19 out of 20 cases this may hold true, there are the 5% who actually perform better. Maybe it is the truncated direct instruction time, the streamlined curriculum, or the absence of the social stimuli of being constantly surrounded by other students, a few students who had previously struggled for months, or possibly

years, prior to virtual learning are now doing better, if not exceptionally.

Through anecdotal evidence from my time as a school principal, we all too often focus our time and energy on developing solutions to pernicious problems while ignoring the obvious solution that lies in front of us — positive academic anomalies. As an assistant principal, I would often rack my brain trying to develop strategies to motivate groups of disengaged students from marginalized groups (for example, students from low-income homes, students of color, English language learners) to attend school more regularly, stay out of trouble, or turn in homework more often. However, while I was intensely focusing on this group of students, I often overlooked other students from these same marginalized groups who were doing well in every area. If I had taken the time to study the conditions that allowed the positive academic anomalies from these marginalized groups to thrive, I may have come to a solution previously unconsidered.

As we transition back to the schoolhouse and move away from distance learning, I hope school and district leaders are making a concerted effort to identify and learn from positive academic anomalies. What is it about the distance learning environment that has helped them turn the corner and how can we preserve these strategies as we return to traditional, in-person instruction?

TRACEY BENSON, ED.L.D.'16, is the founder of the Anti-Racist Leadership Institute and author of *Unconscious Bias in Schools: A Developmental Approach to Exploring Race and Racism*

5. Stop Teaching-by-Telling

In the era of the pandemic, educators have found that remote instruction centered on teaching-by-telling has left many students unengaged — even to the point of skipping school. Classroom-based methods of motivating students to listen to talks and to read textbooks have been ineffective in distance teaching. As a result, many teachers have shifted their practice to involve

students with active forms of problem-based or project-based learning.

For example, studying what is happening in their communities because of COVID-19 is engaging for students and offers opportunities for socioemotional support as well as cognitive learning. Experiencing science, technology, engineering, and mathematics through making and experimenting with materials available in their homes is motivating for learners. This also builds their confidence that they could play these roles as adults. Finding that their caregivers can serve as mentors for academic subjects helps students to see the relevance of knowledge and skills in the curriculum to what workers do.

The pandemic has toppled the firewalls between classroom activities and out-of-school learning. As the virus recedes, building on the strengths of the new types of pedagogy that have emerged from educators working with the community is important. Let's not give up the powerful, novel models of learning and motivation that are a silver lining on the dark cloud of this human tragedy.

Professor Chris Dede is cofounder of a pandemic-inspired initiative, Silver Lining for Learning, that celebrates bottom-up innovations in online instruction all across the world

6. Continue Creatively Assessing
One change in education over the past year I'd love to see kept in a post-pandemic world is with standardized testing. I noticed last March how quickly these tests were thrown to the side, notably as an equity issue during the pandemic. Post pandemic, people must continue to see it as an equity issue.

It has been exciting to see schools be creative in shifting how to assess student growth and hold teachers accountable, and I hope this continues across classrooms. I work at a progressive independent school in Manhattan and we have relied almost entirely on using current events to assess student learning. For example, after the insur-

rection at the Capitol in January, a seventh-grade class at our school had a mock impeachment trial of former president Donald Trump and went through the entire process as it is outlined by the U.S. Constitution. Another way is providing student choice in how they demonstrate their understanding. This provides flexibility for students and also engages them more meaningfully, rather than something that is imposed upon them.

To be clear, I believe there's still very much a place for standardized testing, but as one tool rather than the be-all, end-all that it has become over the past couple of decades.

TYLER TARNOWICZ, ED.M.'17, is a social studies teacher at City and Country School in New York City

7. Keep Doors Open to Higher Ed
The pandemic has heightened awareness and spurred action about the vast inequities of college admission. From unconscionable disparities in access to high-quality counseling to the role of high-stakes standardized testing in perpetuating bias and limiting opportunities, it has required that we as educators be called to action. In response, since last spring, colleges have created robust virtual visit programs that allow more exposure to college options for all students. Institutions at every level of selectivity have adopted test-optional policies. High school counselors, admission deans, and application platforms are acknowledging a need, and collaborating, to find better ways for students to communicate context, family responsibilities, and other circumstances that impact their educational opportunities. Admission professionals are engaging in important conversations about who is being left behind. My hope is that once we are able to remove our masks and move closer together, we will not simply slip back into complacency and continue to allow college admissions to unfairly favor the wealthy, well-connected, and others who have historically had more access to higher education. Ideally we

will keep some or all of these practices and hold each other's feet to the fire as we work to level the playing field for all students.

Brennan Barnard is the author of *The Truth About College Admissions* and the college admissions program manager at Making Caring Common
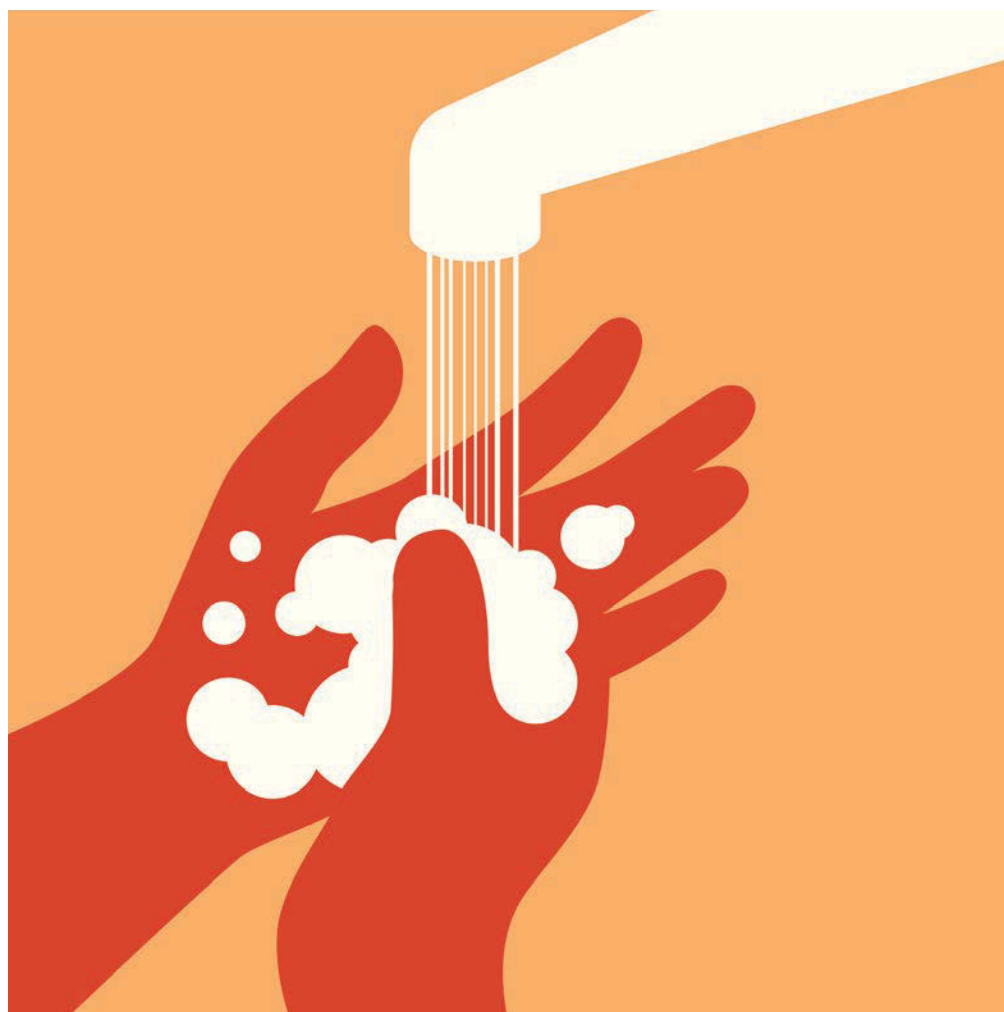
8. Rethink Attendance Policies

Chronic absenteeism plagued school districts this past year like never before. Most of the nation's largest districts are teaching remotely. Thousands of students, often learners on the margins, have gone missing. Schools have faced tough decisions on how to reengage students who struggle to connect to online lessons or dealing with jobs or caregiving responsibilities.

I lead a team of researchers tracking pandemic responses in more than 100 large school districts. Some districts are taking the opportunity to rethink how they approach truancy from a student wellness lens, and modelling leadership that makes sure no district slips back into a "business as usual" approach to student absenteeism.

The best practice is a system of tiered absenteeism interventions: basic strategies to encourage good attendance, early help for students at risk of chronic absenteeism, and intensive support for students facing the greatest challenges.

But the pandemic is also prompting leaders to ask more fundamental questions. What if districts also eliminated punitive absenteeism policies? What if, instead, schools collaborated with parents and community partners to find missing students and bridge technology gaps? What if districts asked schools to provide advisory and counseling systems that ensure every student can build at least one consistent relationship with a caring adult at their school? What if schools could give options — like evening classes, flexible schedules, or independent study pathways — to students whose circumstances don't fit a conventional class schedule?

To enable this transformation, states must rethink pre-pandemic rules that link school fund-

ing to the time students spend in class, rather than student learning or wellbeing. For example, states could link funding to course completion or content mastery instead of instructional time — and provide additional funding for students who face greater barriers to attending school.

The solution to chronic absenteeism does not revolve around truancy boards or court dates. We need to incentivize schools to use wellness-centered approaches that hold students to

9. Expand Learning Time

The pandemic places American school systems at a new juncture. The urge to "return to normal" is strong and we all feel it. But in a post-vaccine world, school districts can't go back because for so many students and families, the status quo wasn't close to working. One area that will need to be addressed is that many students — those who were already struggling and those who found online learning too remote — have lost months of learning because of the pandemic. By next fall, some estimates suggest that students living in poverty will be an additional grade level behind.

Luckily, some schools, like Brookside Elementary in Indianapolis, and some districts, like Salem, Massachusetts, are showing the way to a "next-level normal" by trying out promising new ways of organizing staff and technology to expand and target individual attention and learning time inside and outside of traditional school hours. We must keep this going next year and beyond.

What would that look like? We can increase learning time through extended school days and years, intersessions, intensive "high-dosage" tutoring, and other afterschool learning opportunities, like Brookside and Salem have done. While schools and districts will need an infusion of resources to do this, much can be accomplished by reorganizing current levels of staff, time, and technology.

KAREN HAWLEY MILES, ED.M.'91, ED.D.'97, is the CEO and president of Education Resource Strategies in Watertown, Massachusetts

10. Ask What Matters

It was a wild ride. We were teleported into breakout rooms where we found ourselves taking solace in a familiar face or marking time in a silent standoff, waiting for someone to initiate the conversation. In this two-dimensional, waist-up world, we realized that the back of our hair didn't matter anymore and that we could

high expectations but avoid punishments that only set them back. If students are not showing up for class, schools must be allowed to ask why and offer unique solutions tailored to unique student circumstances.

BREE DUSSEAULT, ED.M.'07, is a practitioner-in-residence at the Center on Reinventing Public Education in Seattle

show up to class barefoot. We learned that "I had an unstable internet connection" was the new "my dog ate my homework," and that the effort required to click "unmute" somehow made us feel like whatever we said had better be worth it — most of us, anyway. We discovered that vibes transmit through WI-FI and we can feel them without ever knowing how a person moves through the world.

We learned alongside our professors that we can no longer rely on our experience, assumptions, or evidence derived from research about in-person — or even pre-pandemic virtual — learning and teaching. So many new variables demanded radical flexibility, forcing us to try what we would have resisted before, to fail, then to try something else. We learned how to learn again in this bizarre here and now.

And to both our chagrin and delight, this year inspired us to ask and really mean it: What matters now in education?"

As we prepare to depart Zoomland to return to classrooms or embark on new endeavours, may we remember to never stop asking this question, and to mute ourselves to listen for the answers. And if we are lucky enough to work with students, let's not forget the tenderness we felt when someone greeted us warmly by name when we arrived in class — and how sometimes it was the only proof we had that we were actually here, in person or not.

Kelsea Turner is a current student in the Learning and Teaching Program

11. Rethink Schedules

Smart schools are making significant organizational changes to become more human. Some high schools are moving away from semesters with seven-period days — unsafe in person, unmanageable at home — to a quarter system where students take no more than three subjects at a time. This frees teachers to focus on half as many students (reducing their loads to, often, about 80 from 160), which has given them the time to build the relationships that students need — particularly in a pandemic, but always.

Jal Mehta is a professor at the Ed School. This is excerpted from "Make Schools More Human," an opinion piece he wrote for *The New York Times* in December. For more of Mehta's ideas on changes we need to keep and make post-COVID, see this issue's feature story about motivation

HERE ARE A FEW OTHER IDEAS WORTH CONSIDERING — AND KEEPING:

● School space matters: More than ever, we realized that how students move in a building, and how we use the spaces in schools, matters.

● Bathrooms need soap, every single day!

● Teachers need to focus on their students' mental health as much as their grades. Prior, it was considered a nice "add-on" or only for certain students. We learned that *all* students need this. Teachers need this, too. If the adults in classrooms aren't doing well, socially and emotionally, their teaching won't be as effective.

● Including student voices in decision-making as we plan for going back — and once we're fully back — is critical.

● For many students, schools aren't just places to learn. It's where they get their main meals every day. During the pandemic, many school districts offered not only free lunch, but to-go dinner bags for entire families.

● Continue bringing more guest speakers from around the world into schools virtually.

● We learned that access to technology is wildly uneven, but shouldn't be. Millions of students don't have computers or access to the Internet. Most are reachable, though, by smartphone.

Poughkeepsie on the Rise

Alum learns it's never too late to come home — and have a lasting impact on students and schools

● **POUGHKEEPSIE FACTS**

Poughkeepsie,
Duchess County, New York

Founded 1686

Population 32,736

POUGHKEEPSIE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT:

Schools 7
(1 HS, 1 MS, 5 ELEMENTARY)

Students 4300

Staff 850

Economically Challenged Students 73%

Four-year Graduation Rate 60%

SOURCE: *FROM PROMISE TO FULFILLMENT*, MARCH 17, 2020

"**YOU NEED TO** get out of here. Leave and go anywhere else. This town doesn't have anything for you. Leave and don't look back."

It was my senior year of high school when one of my old football coaches shared these words of advice. He was responding to my impassioned soliloquy about going off into the world to gain the experiences I needed to come back and transform my hometown of Poughkeepsie, New York. His words were the convergence of dozens of individuals and coming-of-age moments throughout my childhood and adolescence that pushed me to think that the best thing I could do with my life was "get out of the hood" and escape the quicksand of my community.

Growing up in a small city can be a source of great pride: I was raised by a village of parents, educators, church members, aunts, and uncles who taught me from an early age that their investment in my development wasn't only about achieving upward mobility. They instilled in me a belief that my purpose was linked to my community's purpose — that our destinies and aspirations were intertwined.

But a small city can also be a place plagued with hopelessness and insecurity. Like many people from little known communities, I had a chip on my shoulder and was defensive about where I came from. It was the classic, "I can talk about my momma, but you can't talk about my momma" disposition.

A city of 30,000 people, Poughkeepsie is literally at the end of the line: the last stop on the commuter train line out of Manhattan's Grand Central Station. Located about 80 miles north of New York City on the Hudson River, Poughkeepsie is where the suburbs of New York City meet that vaguely defined and mostly rural territory New Yorkers know as "upstate."

In the city of Poughkeepsie, one in four children grow up in poverty. Our majority-minority public school system is consistently ranked as one of the state's worst and our educational outcomes are well below high-poverty peer districts. Data on upward mobility reveals that someone who grew up in my old neighborhood will have

Story by **Rob Watson, Ed.M.'18**

a median income of $24,000 as an adult. For a number of years, we had the second-highest violent crime rate per capita in New York. As a post-industrial city suffering from a decline in young professionals across key industries and the lingering impacts of brain drain, it has often felt like our best days were behind us.

Growing up, parents and students from neighboring towns looked down on us at music and academic competitions. Kids from New York City confused us with all-white affluent Westchester County towns. Year after year, we lost to better resourced communities in the state football and basketball playoffs. I had something to prove and Poughkeepsie did too.

It was with that motivation that I left home for Harvard College with big dreams of harnessing this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to learn from the world and bring it back to my city. It's what I dreamed about growing up in public housing, and what I had made plans to do over countless late night hangouts on the banks of the Hudson River with my boys.

But as the years went by, Poughkeepsie retreated from the forefront of my ambition. The

words of my football coach re-emerged in new forms. At Harvard, I quickly learned that Goldman, McKinsey, the White House, and the United Nations were the gold standard. Big dreams for small towns wasn't exactly written on any of the Latin inscriptions across campus. Going back home to do anything seemed like failure or a lack of ambition.

After spending several summers abroad in college studying in Spain and doing public service work in Argentina, I doubled down on pursuing my passions to explore the world. I pursued a career in international development, served with the Peace Corps, and later worked on big projects supported by the UN, the World Bank, and USAID. But even in the moments where I felt most proud, I kept thinking back to Poughkeepsie and what I had left behind.

From afar, I read newspaper headlines about the murder of my neighbor's son and my former

high school's 48% graduation rate. I heard from my younger siblings about their struggles to navigate the college admissions process without the type of coaching that the rich kids in nearby districts received. I wondered if I'd ever have a real shot at doing something about Poughkeepsie's original sins that drove me into the world in the first place.

Eventually, I returned to the United States and to Harvard for a master's in education. I had more clarity on the issues of civic engagement that really interested me and found a great community of scholars and practitioners that supported my professional journey. At the same time, everywhere I looked, there seemed to be no room for the Poughkeepsies of the world. Students wanted to go to Harlem, the Southside of Chicago, Buenos Aires, or other communities that had real struggles but also the fame and renown to attract top talent. Faculty partnered with big foundations that were concerned with the scale of big cities or the isolation of rural areas. There wasn't much interest in small cities, especially those sitting in the shadow of New York City.

I remember reaching out to several professors and leaders from national nonprofits about the possibility of expanding the reach of their work to my hometown, making the case that we had all the problems of big cities but lacked the institutional firepower to address them. I was politely turned down; they weren't interested and we didn't seem to matter, even in spaces that were geared towards fighting for the forgotten.

Despite a few setbacks, I continued to spend time exploring potential opportunities to stay connected to home. In a chance encounter with my former guidance counselor, he encouraged me to reach out to Michael Murphy, an architect and Poughkeepsie native who had recently led the design of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice and opened a satellite office of his organization, MASS Design, in Poughkeepsie. He had a dream of telling the story of why Poughkeepsie mattered spatially.

Through conversations with Michael, I was introduced to James Watson, another Pough-

keepsie native who had worked for *60 Minutes* and was partnering with a Culinary Institute of America-trained chef to reimagine food access in our public school system. We joined forces with Kylynn Grier, a social justice practitioner and Poughkeepsie public schools graduate who was working on issues of educational equity for girls and women of color in New York City.

Together, we connected with local leaders constructing new narratives about our city through their work in early childhood development, sustainable infrastructure, youth empowerment, and community wealth creation. I realized that there was a new generation of civic leaders committed to Poughkeepsie's revival, striving to learn from those who came before, and eager to position our city in a national and global context.

By rekindling old relationships and cultivating new ones, a conversation turned an idea into a catalytic opportunity. With Kylynn and James, we hosted the Poughkeepsie Summit at Harvard, convening 25 local leaders to reimagine public education and youth development in our city. The meeting was the genesis of The Poughkeepsie Children's Cabinet, a collective impact organization geared towards establishing a citywide cradle-to-career agenda for children, youth, and families. Since its inception, the cabinet has received major support from the Ed School's EdRedesign Lab and their By All Means initiative. This convergence of thought partnerships has helped bolster the cabinet's role in coordinating COVID-19 response in our city and creating a common vision for addressing the socioeconomic determinants that impact learning. The summit also led to the creation of Lead for Poughkeepsie, a new two-year public service fellowship program to recruit young people to stay or come back home and work on issues of community development.

Through our efforts, Poughkeepsie is starting to gain national coverage and be included in conversations with communities whose shadows we always lived in. We're beginning to make the case that "fringe cities" like Poughkeepsie can become "demonstration cities" with an ideal scale for ad-

dressing social inequality through innovative approaches to civic renewal and collective impact.

My entire life I've been chasing the idea of homecoming. It's only now that I've realized that home isn't just about moving back. It's a mindset. Poughkeepsie doesn't have to be a place to build once I've made my mark elsewhere. It can be the place where everyone comes to build. Homecoming can bridge our life's lessons, adventures and hopes for society with the people and communities we're closest to. None of us have to make the false choice between moving on from where we're from and going off to engage with the world.

The jury is still out on what the future of our city holds and if our efforts can be sustainable over time. What is clear is that we have an emerging critical mass of citizens, institutions, homecomers, and newcomers who stand poised to take us further than we've ever been before. I hope you'll join us. It's never too late to come home.

Rob Watson, Ed.M.'18, is the By All Means Poughkeepsie liaison. He is also the director of student programs at the Institute of Politics at Harvard Kennedy School, where he is pursuing his master's in public administration

Carrie Conaway, Senior Lecturer

This past winter, Senior Lecturer Carrie Conaway, a former chief strategy and research officer for the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, talked politics, messages from Betty Friedan, and reading in front of her fireplace.

What are you currently reading?
I am just about to finish President Barack Obama's latest book, *A Promised Land*.

What drew you to it?
I wanted to understand what motivated Obama to run for office and what he viewed as his successes, failures, and missed opportunities as president. Since I worked for many years in the public sector to bring more research into policymaking, I was also curious how he navigated the political environment to get policy passed while not losing sight of what science and data can contribute to the policy process.

What was your favorite book as a child or as a teenager and why?
One book that stands out from my teenage years is Betty Friedan's *A Feminine Mystique*, which I read on the recommendation of my high school AP U.S. history teacher. It was the first grown-up book I read by a feminist, and the first one that showed me how social structures can create and reinforce inequality of all kinds. I ended up majoring in sociology with a focus on gender inequality in college, so its message clearly stuck with me.

Is there a book on your bookshelf that you keep meaning to read but can't quite get to?
I never seem to get around to all the great books written by my colleagues! I have at least two on my shelf right now: *Where Teachers Thrive* by **SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON, M.A.T.'69, ED.D.'81**, and *The Privileged Poor* by Tony Jack.

What book do you assign to your Ed School students that you think all educators should read?
Not to be self-serving, but I wish every educator would read my book, *Common-Sense Evidence*. The evidence we build through research has much to offer to educators, but educators are rarely trained on how to use research to inform their work, let alone how to build their own evidence. Our book shows educators how to evaluate whether evidence is convincing and relevant for their needs, as well as how to use evidence from existing research and their own analysis to improve their work over time.

My spring course focuses on how to harness the power of data and stories to inspire change. Two of the books I use in that course — William Zinsser's classic *On Writing Well* and Dona Wong's *The Wall Street Journal Guide to Information Graphics* — would benefit everyone who needs to communicate about data (which is to say, everyone). Both are concrete and clear about how to communicate ideas effectively, whether through words or data displays, and provide plenty of examples and illustrations.
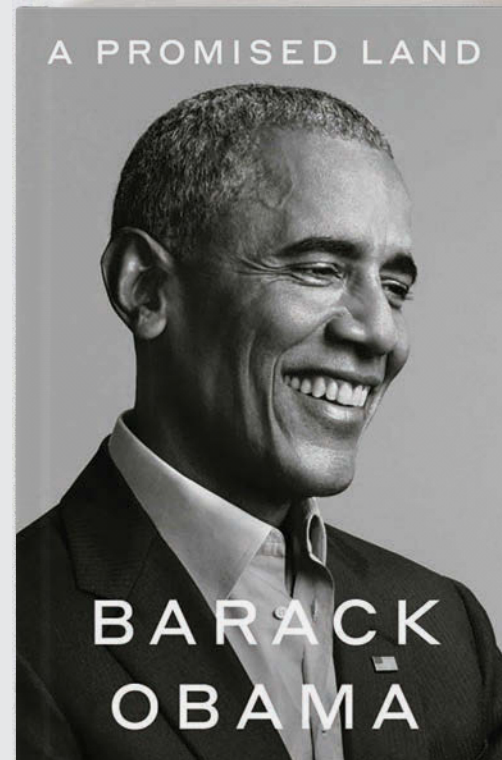
Favorite place to read?
In front of my fireplace, with my feet up on an ottoman.
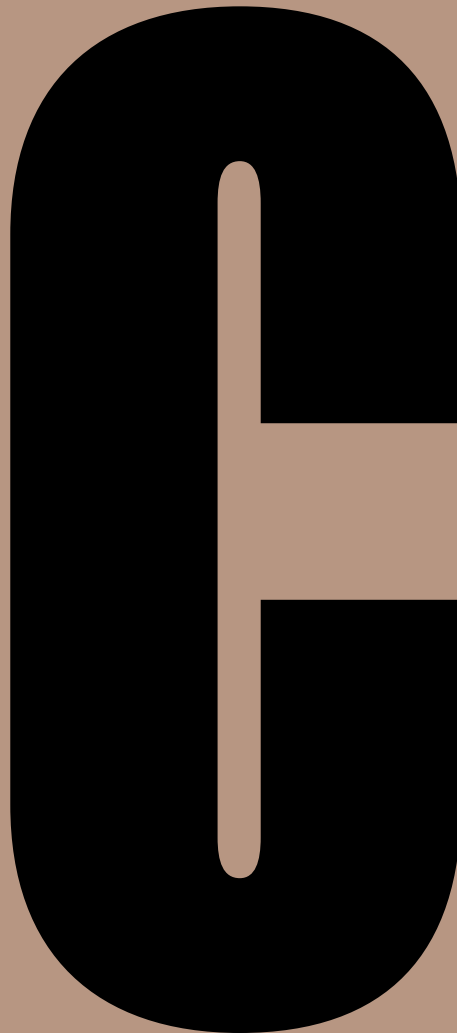
What's next on your reading list?
Next up is Caroline Criado Perez's *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*, recommended to me by one of my students from last year.

● **Read an excerpt from Conaway's new book, *Common-Sense Evidence*:** *gse.harvard. edu/ed*

Practice

C

"Should students even be required to have their cameras on?
Their lives have been upended, why not let them control the camera?"

**LIZ BYRON LOYA, ED.M.'08 **

Masking the Problem

How Ken Lim, Ed.M.'99, taught kids to understand why masks matter

IT DIDN'T TAKE long for **KEN LIM, ED.M.'99**, a research scientist at the National Institute of Education in Singapore, to jump into action after his country temporarily closed schools last spring because of CO- VID. Lim had been approached by a group of math teachers who told him they were having trouble get- ting students to understand con- cepts like how viruses transmit and why wearing masks and physically distancing made a difference. In response, his team created a video game for students, primarily teens, to learn from. Recently, Lim spoke to *Ed*. about avatars, following pro- tocals, and SORBET.

**Why was a project like this necessary?**

The COVID-19 pandemic has pre- sented society and schools with many challenges. One such chal- lenge is the need for all of us — young and old — to invest the self- discipline to develop the relatively new habit of practicing social dis- tancing. As we go about our daily lives, whether on public transport, in schools, or at our workplaces, we

are regularly exhorted and encour- aged to maintain a safe distance from each other. Children and ad- olescents are encouraged to do so, too. Sometimes, children and ad- olescents will comply in terms of their behavior, without necessar- ily buying in to the intent behind the message. At other times, more willful individuals may choose not to comply.

Complying isn't enough?

Our youth, growing up as we do in an East Asian/Confucian context, are generally quite acquiescent in

terms of following socially obli- gated protocols. There really is a problem. I was trying to encour- age them to follow these protocols because they sincerely want to, as opposed to just doing so because someone else tells them to do so. Our decade of collaboration with teachers in the design of learning environments has helped us un- derstand that many teachers are increasingly less content with ac- cepting students' answers at face value, because they are often text- book responses, and are interested instead in going beyond these ex-

JAMES GRAHAM
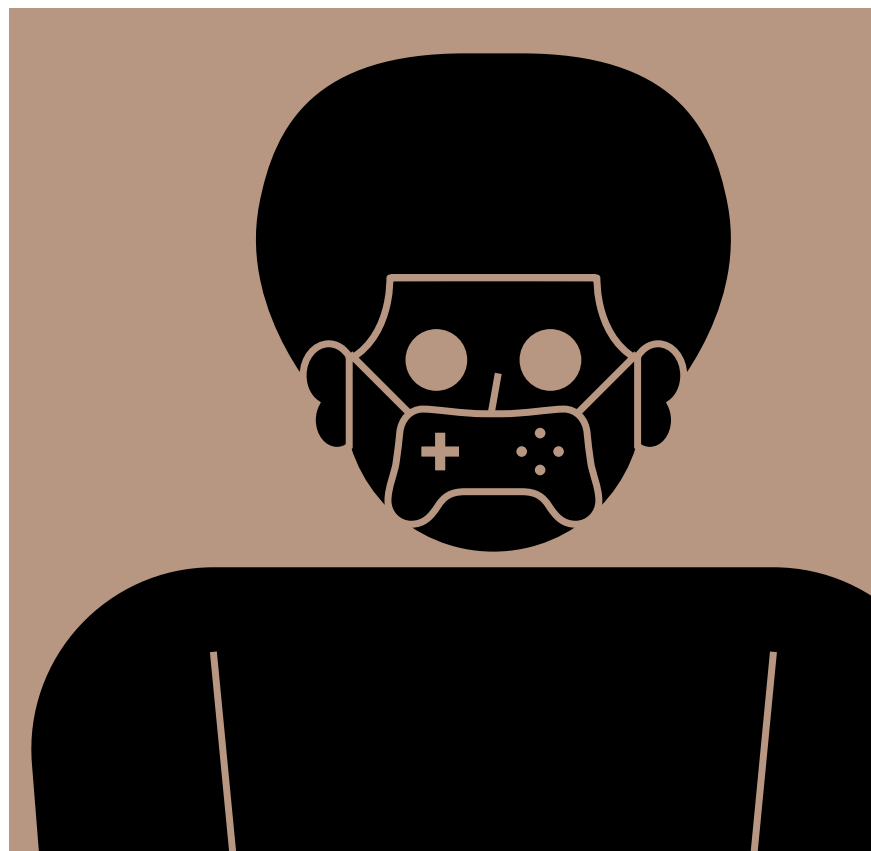
pressions to the root of conceptions and misconceptions.

Teachers contacted you?
Teachers approached us because over the years, our team has developed a reputation for successful collaborations with teachers in Singapore in terms of helping them better understand the affordances for learning of immersive environments and virtual worlds.

How does this game work?
During the first half, students — be they from the comfort of their homes, or in face-to-face settings at school — explore a virtual environment in which a virtual virus is being transmitted, from one student's avatar to others. The activity of this first half is just like what happens "in real life" when each of us, adults and children, go about our daily business, making decisions along the way about how we choose to interact with others.

Students start by picking an avatar. Is the goal to get from point A to point B or to not die?
Yes, they play as an avatar. We do not tell students in advance there's a virus going around. We give them the impression it's a treasure hunt, or similar activity. So they think their objective is to explore the environment collecting tokens. Some of my student interns did not do it as a treasure hunt. Their target audience was their own peers, older adolescents, so they did it as a simulation of one's daily commute, and they built and scripted their own transit system within the environment. Another group of student interns built and scripted a soccer game. Very cool stuff, and as usual, the coolest stuff comes from the learners and not us teachers.

It's only after they explore that the big reveal is made.
After this first half, students are able to access a webpage showing not only their interactions from the first half, but also how quickly or slowly the virtual virus spread among themselves as they were interacting with each other. The teacher can then engage students in conversation about the conse-quences of their decision-making and behaviors on the well-being of others. This second half is critical, because in real life, we are unable to get immediate and targeted feedback on our individual choices. Instead, we only get the case numbers about COVID as released by the authorities after a time lag of several hours to a day. There is basically a disconnect between our personal choices and the feedback we receive on our choices. The Socially Responsible Behaviour through Embodied Thinking (SORBET) Project, as the learning activity is called, aims to give teachers and their students an easy and meaningful way to address this disconnect.

Along the way, students also learn about math?
Yes. Descriptive stats (mean, median, mode), graphical literacy (what kinds of charts to represent what kinds of data), probability models (cumulative frequency, probability outcome tables).

What about other subjects?
Teachers and officers from the Ministry of Education have also recognized that the same approach can be applied in a variety of other subjects, such as geography (the spread of a virus over a given area), science (the epidemiology of a virus and its spread), and the critical subject of character and citizenship education. This is because, at its heart, the SORBET project is all about trying to help children of all ages develop positive social habits, by understanding that the time and effort needed to develop these habits really makes a difference to society at large.

What's next?
The game is played on Macs, PCs, and laptops. The team will be increasing its accessibility by making it available through tablets and smartphones, as a scaling project to be completed during 2021–2022. Also, the development of the SOR-BET mobile app was one of the case studies that Ed School Adjunct Lecturer Christine Reich offered to her students this semester in T523: Formative Evaluation for Educational Product Development. **LH**

Read about the collaboration with T523 and Christine Reich: *gse.harvard.edu/ed*

What I Learned From Teaching Algebra on TikTok

LAST SUMMER, Harvard Teacher Fellow Olivia Phillips (*@miss.phillips*) was about to begin her first-year at Chelsea High School in Chelsea, Massachusetts, teaching algebra 2 virtually. Knowing students might need help getting back up to speed after an iffy pandemic spring and summer, she came up with the idea to create algebra refreshers on TikTok. In no time, she amassed a huge following — especially for an educator. As she explains…

I was homeschooled through fourth grade, where my experience with education technology began. In third and fourth grade, I watched a video curriculum for my coursework, and all growing up I was inundated with educational television shows and computer games.

I find it ironic how educational technology continues to play such a central role in my life, as I'm now teaching high school math fully remotely at Chelsea High School. I began my education learning from home, and now I'm beginning my career teaching from home.

I was reflecting on how the start of the year often seems like such an obstacle for students to remember what they were learning before the summer, and how this could only be exacerbated by the insanity that this last year has brought. My sister is a high school senior, and both hearing from her and preparing for my own students got me thinking a lot about gaps in mathematical literacy.

My sisters were actually on TikTok a whole year before me, and one of them had a huge following before I even got started. Watching her create videos inspired me, because I realized that if I wanted to reach more students preparing to go back to school, TikTok is where I could find them. I created a video introducing students to my new series of algebra refreshers and encouraged them to follow me as they prepared to go back to math

class in the fall. And apparently a 100,000 students took me up on that offer!

The biggest thing I've learned from teaching on TikTok is how to focus on the bare bones of a lesson. TikToks are only up to one minute long, so you have less than 60 seconds to teach the main idea you're trying to get across. Making videos has taught me how to think about math topics super granularly, without trying to put too much into a single video.

Keep things fast-paced, add in humor whenever you can, and keep up with whatever effects and sounds are trending on the app!

There's no such thing as "math people!" I watched a TED Talk recently by Eddie Woo, and I'll echo one of his main points. If someone can't see well, they don't shrug it off and say "Well, I guess I'm not a seeing person." No! They get glasses to help them see the world around them.

Math is something that comes more naturally to some people than others, but that doesn't mean it isn't for you. I'm an atrocious runner, but just because I'll never win the Olympics doesn't mean I can't enjoy a run (let's be real, a jog) around my block.

I'm just a diehard math nerd! I was a weirdo who did prime factorization for fun in middle school and cracked nerdy jokes with fellow mathletes on the way to math meets in high school. I can't imagine teaching anything other than math.

I've always had this ingrained assumption that I'd teach one day. I remember sitting in my fifth-grade classroom, taking mental notes of things that my teacher was doing to file them away for when I became a teacher.

High school students are not morning people. First period is rough.

Teenagers are procrastinators. I have had too many students submit assignments at 3 or 4 a.m. I'm always impressed and concerned when I see the timestamps.

Expect the unexpected with high schoolers. From the most random messages in the Zoom chat to hearing that one of my students built his own PC, they never cease to surprise.

I have learned an absurd amount of patience teaching virtually. Wait time online means not just giving think time, but giving typing time as well.

I'm still waiting on Zoom to create a "dot-dot-dot-so-and-so-is-typing" feature. I never know if a student is typing or asleep, or their Wi-Fi cut out or my Wi-Fi cut out, or they're straight up ignoring me.

Huge shout out to Mr. Kelly, my American literature and AP language teacher in high school. Classes were discussions rather than lectures, and he taught us about life and how to think deeply even as he taught us the themes in *The Great Gatsby* or how to avoid dangling modifiers.

I remember staying after school one day long after the teachers were required to stay as Mr. Kelly helped me diagram my life on the whiteboard in an effort to come up with a topic for my college essay. It was through his encouragement that I let go of my fear of failure and took a poetry course in college. And he still helps me to this day, giving great teaching advice and sharing his own new-teacher-struggle stories when I'm venting about my first year.

Have *so much grace* for both your students *and* yourself. Nobody's perfect. When a lesson flops, don't dwell on it. Make note on what you'll change for next time, and keep going. Teaching is an iterative process, full of ups and downs. Don't give up when those downs come.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **TONY LUONG**

Lights! Camera! ... uh, *Camera! Hello?* Action!

Ten ways to get students to turn on their cameras

THE SUDDEN PIVOT to remote teaching created many instructional obstacles and unexpected teaching experiences. Staring into a grid of black screens became a commonly perceived challenge perplexing teachers seeking classroom community and connection. Then a debate amongst educators began to brew: should students even be required to have their cameras on? Their lives have been upended, why not let them control the camera? Oth-

Story by
**Liz Byron Loya,
Ed.M.'08**

er educators wondered, how would we gauge student learning, engagement, attendance, and create an authentic community without physically seeing students?

My philosophy, as a classroom teacher, is that both sides of the debate can be appeased with universally designed instruction. We can offer students options to show what they know without requiring the camera while also implementing strategies to encourage camera use and community engagement. For example, students can convey their learning by electronically submitting a variety of assignment types, participating in the chat or polls, unmuting themselves, or submitting prerecorded videos. When these options are presented, in most scenarios, cameras don't have to be on to demonstrate learning.

There are, of course, exceptions for specific learning goals or subjects that require a teacher to visibly see students' physical capabilities. For the purposes of building classroom community, students would ideally have their cameras on. (We are already physically dis-

tanced, do we also have to be physically invisible, too?) Just as we can provide students options to participate that do not involve the camera, we can proactively embed options that encourage camera use. If having cameras on is an important part of your virtual classroom, then consider these strategies to encourage camera use, keeping in mind that engagement and learning is not equated with camera usage.

My top 10 ways to encourage camera use with students during remote instruction:

1. Root your request to turn on cameras in the language of community, not compliance.
Avoid using teacher-centric language such as, "I want, I expect...," and extrinsic motivation like extra credit for camera use. Instead, aim for student-centric language and prompt students to consider what strong classroom engagement might look like.

2. Build relationships with students focused on trust.

Relationships need to be cultivated between the student and the teacher and among students. In my experience with remote instruction, trust comes into question more among student-to-student interactions: Will my peers record me? Photograph me? As teachers, we need to create a safe space within our virtual classrooms. How to do this? That's a whole other top 10 list.

3. Survey students.
Ask students what are their barriers to camera use? When you can identify the barrier, you can proactively plan to reduce it. Consider asking students for their ideas for alternatives to camera use.

4. Be empathetic.
Is your camera always on during meetings? Share with your students times when your camera has been off during a meeting and talk about why. Your humanness creates an authentic shared connection.

5. Admit a few students before class starts. "Arrive" to class early and admit 1–4 students for a small group check-in.
Ask to have cameras on for this check-in or inquire why they are off. Students are more likely to turn them on in a small group setting. They also can be camera leaders. When the rest of the class is admitted, students will see several cameras already on and a snowball effect can take place.

6. Use Zoom features.
Try the "ask to start video" feature, which nudges students to turn on cameras, or encourage them to play around with virtual backgrounds.

7. Brainstorm camera use expectations with your students.
Co-create a list of predictable times when it is fine to have the camera off and when it is best to have it on.

8. Allow students to show only a portion of themselves.
Let students dip their toe into on-screen time by adjusting the camera to show only the top of their head or a shoulder. If you call on them, they can give a quick wave or pop their head into the frame.

9. Let students submit a prerecorded video.
If students need to visually demonstrate a skill, consider offering the option of individual submissions via a platform of student choice like YouTube, Flipgrid, or even TikTok. If this is an option, it doesn't mean all students will fill your inbox with video submissions, but those who'd prefer a camera off during whole-class instruction will have a means for demonstrating a skill.

10. Use icebreakers/play games/visually vote.
Consider activities that inadvertently require cameras to be on for participation, everything from rock, paper, scissors to voting with a thumb up or down.

Liz Byron Loya is a pre-K–8 visual art teacher in the Boston Public Schools

JAMES GRAHAM

My Get Up & Go

Got Up & Went

With a pandemic that has gone on for more than a year, how do students and teachers stay motivated?
Story by **Andrew Bauld, Ed.M.'16**   Illustrations by **Brian Cronin**

EVERYONE KNEW learning during a pandemic wouldn't be easy, but could we have guessed it would be quite this hard?

Schools are still battling everything from poor internet service to low attendance. Parents are overwhelmed in homes that have also become workplaces and classrooms. Teachers are demoralized. And students are exhausted, burned out after hours of online classes, and that is if they even show up at all.

The result is students — and teachers — who have lost so much of what used to keep them motivated. Without the ballast of most extracurricular activities like athletics, drama, and band to keep them engaged, many students lost the motivation this year to turn in homework or turn on cameras during remote lessons. Teachers are burnt out, many discouraged by not keeping up with curriculum standards and constantly having to find new ways to keep their students invested in their learning.

Some schools have gone back, but with a return to "normal" school unlikely for many districts until the fall of 2021, teachers and students are having to find new ways to stay motivated to learn during a school year unlike any other.

The Science of Motivation

ABIGAIL WILLIAMSON ED.M.'15, teaches English Language Development on Martha's Vineyard. Her middle school students are brand new to the United States, working hard to learn a new language, many of them also taking care of younger siblings at home during remote learning while their parents are at work.

But for five minutes every day, students put aside the challenges they are facing and turn on their favorite song. Some students don sunglasses or fun hats, others grab stuffed animals to join them onscreen for their class DJ Dance Party.

"I wanted to give the kids jobs to keep them engaged and give them some ownership," says Williamson. "The dance party offers some lightness and fun, but I believe also contributes to our strong attendance and participation."

Especially during these stressful times, it is important for teachers to think about how students are doing not only academically but also emotionally, and to find ways to inject joy into their lessons.

CHRISTINA HINTON, ED.M.'06, ED.D.'12, founder and CEO of Research Schools International, which partners with schools to carry out collaborative research, says lessons like the DJ Dance Party can make a huge impact for students.

"There's a misconception that learning can either be rigorous or fun. That's not what we're finding in our research," Hinton says. "The more they are flourishing and happy, the better, on average, students are doing academically."

Happy students are also motivated ones. Research has found that motivation is driven by a combination of a person's earliest experiences and innate biological factors. According to a recent report from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University and the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, there are two types of motivation: one that seeks out pleasure (known as approach motivation) and the other that avoids danger (known as avoidance motivation).

Both of these types of motivation develop early in childhood, and both are influenced by intrinsic (like a child's desire to explore or master a skill) and extrinsic factors (external validation from grades or awards). A healthy motivation system is one built on intrinsic drivers supported by positive extrinsic feedback.

For teachers and parents, there are many ways to encourage motivation. Activities like the DJ Dance Party that provide children space for playful exploration help fuel intrinsic motivation. Activities that appropriately challenge students are also great, but they must be carefully selected as students will lose motivation when an activity is too hard or too easy. Students are also more motivated when they feel a sense of ownership over their work.

These types of activities can also spur in students a sense of curiosity, another good driver of motivation. Ed School associate professor and

HAPPY STUDENTS
ARE MOTIVATED STUDENTS

Research has shown that the strongest predictor of happiness — more than even money or physical health — is the strength of your social connections. That's true for adults and children.

CHRISTINA HINTON ED.M.'06, ED.D.'12, knows all too well the importance of happy students and teachers after nearly a decade partnering with schools around the world to conduct collaborative research in classrooms as founder and CEO of Research Schools International.

When she was a doctoral student at the Ed School, Hinton found in her study on happiness that for students from elementary school to high school, happiness is positively correlated with motivation and academic achievement. She also found that creating strong relationships with teachers and peers plays an important role in student happiness.

Now more than ever it is crucial to discover ways to encourage happiness and connection when so many are still apart, and Hinton says it doesn't take that much to do. "You can do really small things and they can have a big impact on happiness." Some of her suggestions include:

● **Find the right balance of challenge.** Research has shown that too little challenge can lead to boredom, but too much challenge and a person will become discouraged. "There is an optimal level of challenge where people are engaged but not overwhelmed called the Zone of Proximal Development," says Hinton. During remote learning, setting realistic goals is important. Teachers need to remember that students aren't going to move at the same pace as they could in the classroom, and to also adjust goals for students in unique circumstances.

● **Provide social connection.** All students are going to need extra emotional support this year, and it is important to make a special effort to build community. Hinton says teachers, especially those still teaching virtually, should find new ways to connect, such as offering virtual office hours or fun end-of-year virtual social events. Hinton also says to remember to practice compassion, especially with students who are disruptive. "Everyone is experiencing stress right now. You don't know what they are facing at home. Offer compassion, understanding and support. Instead of punishments, set clear boundaries with natural consequences."

● **Help students to flourish.** When students are flourishing, they are more motivated and more effective learners. Hinton says there are a number of ways to promote flourishing during in-person or remote learning, such as:

Practice gratitude. "Research shows that low-lift strategies that promote gratitude can have a big impact on happiness," Hinton says, like having students write down one thing they are grateful for in a Zoom chat or before an in-person class begins.

Support others. "If you want to be happy and flourish, you should focus on supporting others," Hinton says. Encouraging students to engage in acts of kindness in their daily lives is a good place to start, or teachers can choose a cause to work on together as a class.

Incorporate humor. Finding something to laugh about this year might be difficult, but it's worth it. "Research shows that laughter not only boosts well-being and happiness, but also physical health," Hinton says.   **AB**

cognitive research scientist Elizabeth Bonawitz says that curiosity is a core drive that all human beings are born with.

"It's a drive like hunger or thirst, and it can get us learning very rapidly," Bonawitz says. Under particularly stressful environments, however, say like during a global pandemic, the body must balance all its needs. "Do I have time to be curious or am I worried about my next meal, or if grandma is going to get sick? If you're under a lot of duress, you don't have time to indulge your curiosity," so actively finding ways to encourage curiosity in the classroom is so important.

Williamson came up with the idea for the dance party at the beginning of this unusual school year, trying to think of ways to replicate traditional classroom management techniques for online learning. Some of her more hesitant learners were hooked from the beginning. Besides the opportunity to get up and move around, it also provided students a chance to show a bit about their personalities, connect over shared interests, and extend their learning, since the songs they choose have connections to the vocabulary they are learning.

Williamson says this break in the day has also given her a unique insight into her students. In her first year at a new school, Williamson says she was initially worried about building connections with students she had never met, but she says the same theories for building community when in-person apply to remote learning.

"Their creativity in activities like the dance party motivates me to find more ways to let them express their personalities," Williamson says. "I ask students about their lives and listen and incorporate that into my lessons. You can have deep relationships with students even online."

Find New Ways to Connect
Those relationships are a critical component of motivation. As Bonawtiz has found in her research, humans are social beings with minds designed to learn from other people. When students lose those important relationships with

teachers and peers, they are far less likely to be motivated to learn.

The pandemic and remote learning have seriously disrupted those important connections, resulting in huge numbers of students losing the motivation to even show up for virtual classes, let alone participate. Bellwether Education Partners, an education nonprofit, estimates that between 1 million and 3 million U.S. students haven't attended school since pandemic-related school closures began in March 2020, hitting high-risk groups including homeless students and children with disabilities particularly hard.

And there is no silver bullet to solving the problem. Sruti Sriram is a current Ed School student and teaches English to 11th- and 12th-graders at a boarding school in Pune, India. Sriram says her school has tried different ways to keep students engaged, trying to find a balance between learning models. While there was early success with each new attempt, student engagement would inevitably drop off.

"We launched weekly asynchronous modules that students were encouraged to complete at their own pace," she says. At first the response was incredible, but two months later, students were exhausted. "We then tried to shift to synchronous classes, but attendance would be very high for the first week and then drop off the second week for a variety of reasons," including family constraints and limited Internet access.

Sriram says from her own positive experience as a student in her Ed School classes, she has been inspired to be more intentional using tools like virtual breakout rooms to build relationships. She's also recognized that, this year especially, the emphasis needs to be on how students are doing emotionally, not just academically.

"My students are going through so much at home. I've realized how important it is for students to feel supported in the classroom before I can harangue them about incomplete homework or give them a lot of corrections," she says. "That's always been true, but in remote learning it's an even more apparent reminder that the job is to care for the whole student."

Even during normal times, these relationships are important to academic development. During the pandemic, they are crucial. Research has shown that when teachers can build a good rapport with their students, those students are more motivated to do well in school. To build that rapport, students need to believe that their teacher has a good sense of their abilities.

"It's critical to learning that a teacher has an accurate understanding of their students," says Bonawitz. "When a child thinks a teacher doesn't have a good sense of their abilities, it totally shapes what kind of exploration and projects they think they can pursue."

In one lab experiment, Bonawitz has found that when children as young as 6 think their teacher is overestimating their abilities, they will choose less challenging work, while if a teacher underestimates their abilities, they will seek work that might be too difficult for them.

With the pandemic removing much of the one-on-one time for students and teachers to get to know each other well, it's important for teachers to find new ways to show their students they know them.

"Reciprocity is really critical to make sure there is maximum engagement," Bonawitz says. "Regular feedback and mini-assessments can help so that students know the teacher is aware of their current place and the teacher is using that information for tailoring the learning."

Hinton says making room to provide students extra emotional support this year is so important, and finding additional opportunities, like through virtual office hours, can make a big difference for students and teachers to build relationships while apart and maintain motivation.

JILL GOLDBERG, ED.M.'93, credits her students staying motivated thanks to recognizing new ways of building relationships. Goldberg, who teaches sixth grade English language arts in upstate New York, says it was challenging at first teaching to static profile pictures of students or empty black rectangles because her district, like many across the county, does not require students to turn on cameras when remote.

But then students, some shy or just unwilling to turn their cameras on during full class activities, started to reach out in other ways. Many found their voice over email. Others requested private Zoom breakout meetings to connect between classes or after school, sometimes to talk about academic work, other times just to share something personal, like a pair of twins in her class excited to share news of a new pet.

"It's wonderful how many kids are so much more comfortable and proficient and proactive in initiating contact" over digital platforms, Goldberg says. Remote learning has also given Goldberg and her students a change of pace to their normal in-person schedule that left little time in the day to connect. Now, students have breaks between periods and teachers can use that time for extra help sessions or just one-on-one check-ins.

Professor Jal Mehta isn't surprised that some students and teachers are finding positives during remote learning. Mehta says that while traditional in-person school can be exhausting for students required to be "on" and engaged all day with teachers and peers, remote learning has given some students a chance to slow down.

"Teachers have reported more contact and conversations with students and families. I think some people have experienced that there's less rush and a chance to do things in more depth," Mehta says.

Caring for the Adults in the Room

Of course, not everyone is finding remote learning a happy new environment. In November, the *Education Week* Research Center found that nearly 75% of teachers say their morale is lower than it was before the pandemic. Trying to learn new technology, keep students invested, and deal with the challenges of their own lives is leaving many teachers burnt out.

With teachers feeling dejected from not keeping up with curriculum standards or blaming themselves for students falling behind, Hinton says now it's more important than ever for

teachers to not only show compassion for their students but also for themselves.

"Teachers have to treat this as a totally different year and be patient with themselves," she says. "A great rule of thumb for practicing self-compassion is to treat yourself the way you would treat a best friend."

That change in mentality was important for **IAN MALMSTROM, ED.M.'10**, a middle school history teacher and athletic director in Illinois.

"The most discouraging thing was realizing I wasn't going to accomplish as much as I have in past years. That bothered me at first, the feeling I wasn't doing as well as a teacher. But putting that stress on myself wasn't going to work. I've accepted that," Malmstrom says.

Malmstron isn't alone. A survey by the RAND Corporation found in its American Educator Panels Survey in October that most classrooms are not proceeding at their normal pace, with 56% of teachers saying that they had covered half, or less than half, of their normal curriculum, and only 1 in 5 teachers saying they were on the same schedule as years past.

Rather than putting pressure on themselves to jam as much of the old curriculum into this year, experts like Mehta are advocating a "Marie Kondo" approach to curriculum, borrowing from the Japanese tidying expert. In his recent *New York Times* opinion piece, Mehta encourages teachers to accept a "less is more" attitude by "discarding the many topics that have accumulated like old souvenirs, while retaining essential knowledge and topics that spark joy."

At her school in Providence, Rhode Island, academic dean **KAITLIN MORAN, ED.M.'20**, has worked with faculty and administrators to reduce their academic program to the most essential content and setting realistic learning goals. The school day itself has been shortened and longer blocks of instruction in subjects like math, science, and social studies have been shortened to accommodate students, including taking into account time spent on screens.

"I think what has helped students and teachers feel more motivated is by setting bite-size achievable goals that work towards a grade-level standard. As much as we can collaborate on best practices, that has also helped keep our team engaged and motivated," Moran says.

To that end, Moran has also worked with teachers to implement targeted learning goals to address missed learning from the spring by having each student complete a diagnostic assessment, allowing teachers to know which areas of instruction to focus on to help close gaps.

Not everything can simply be replaced virtually. One of the biggest losses since the pandemic hit has been extracurriculars. Malmstrom says athletics have been virtually nonexistent in Illinois since the start of the pandemic, and without them, many students have just given up.

"My students have just been starved for athletic opportunities," Malmstrom says, citing several academically thriving students who have lost their motivation to do well in school. "We have more time, but people don't have the desire to do as much as we used to. I have students who were mainly doing schoolwork to stay eligible for sports, and they've quit trying."

Malmstrom and his colleagues have tried to find some replacements. In the fall, when the weather was nice, they started an afterschool running club, which had a great turnout of students eager to do any sort of outdoor activity. His school also launched a virtual chess club and quiz bowl team, offering online practices.

Malmstrom is realistic that these activities are only stopgaps until students can return to regular activities, but they have been helpful in keeping morale and motivation up.

"The students aren't going to be interested in everything, but our hope is that each student can find something that engages him or her in addition to their regular classwork," he says.

Eventually, the world will return to some new normal, and schools with it. While there are many challenges that students and teachers have faced during this year, there are some areas of remote learning that might endure.

Researchers like Mehta say the lessons learned during remote learning and the changes made to support students and teachers should spur an even greater effort to reimagine and rebuild schools.

"Schools weren't working well for students pre-pandemic. To put things back exactly as they were is ignoring inequities and disengagement," says Mehta.

When schools can be fully reopened, Mehta says leaders need to think about areas that helped keep students motivated this year and amplify them, including giving students greater agency over their learning and providing more time for teachers to connect with families.

"How do we create the space to do more of those things when we come back to regular school," he says, "and what do we want to let go of to allow those things to grow? I think those are the questions I would ask everybody."

Andrew Bauld, the communications coordinator at the Berkeley Carroll School in New York City, is a frequent contributor to *Ed.*
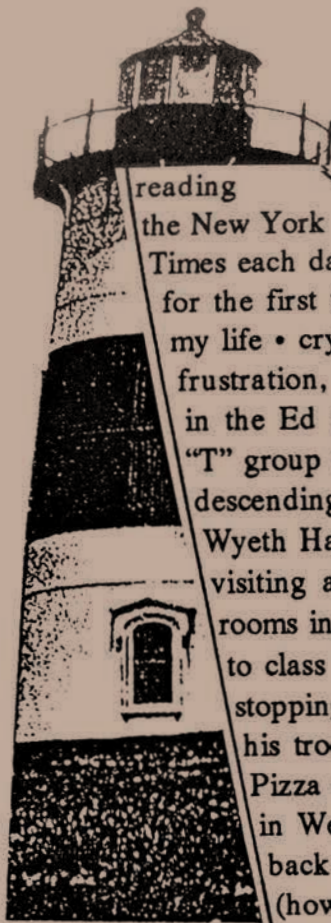
Master Plan

This year, the school's master's programs will see big changes: a major redesign. The redesign of the master's program has been in the works for several years. Last fall, the final cohort of students enrolled in the 13 "legacy" programs like Specialized Studies and Language and Literacy. This fall, the school's new master's curriculum will launch, starting with the four "foundations" courses that all students will take: How People Learn, Evidence, Equity and Opportunity, and Leading Change. These courses will be required of all master's students, no matter what program they choose to study or personal pathway they plan on following after graduation.

The idea, says Professor Meira Levinson, that "education should be built up as a profession, like medicine or law. These professions all have common foundational knowledge and skills." Everyone who goes to medical school, for example, takes courses in anatomy regardless if they plan on becoming a surgeon or a psychiatrist.

Beyond the foundations courses, students will also choose one of four "programs of study" (Education Leadership, Organizations, and Entrepreneurship; Education Policy and Analysis; Human Development and Education; and Learning Design, Innovation, and Technology), with the option to personalize with one of five "concentrations" (arts and learning; early childhood; global, international, and comparative education; higher education; and literacy and languages).

● For details: *gse.harvard.edu/masters*

When **DIANE SPEARE TRIANT, ED.M. '71**, realized that this year marked the 50th anniversary of receiving her master's degree, she went into her basement and found the dusty album she kept as a student. Tucked inside was a sketch she made that year. Across the top were words she had written that some of this year's graduates may relate to:

"The intensity, the challenge, and the vitality that is Harvard was only mine for an academic year — the time required to earn a master's degree in education. Yet those brief 10 months have remained a beacon in my mind, illuminating each decade of my life with an ever-expanding radius of light. Here are some memories of that seminal year."

● What did you save from your time here? Let us know: *Lory_hough@harvard.edu*

reading the New York Times each day, for the first time in my life • crying tears of frustration, then happiness in the Ed School's sensitivity "T" group sessions • ascending or descending to the "men's" floors in Wyeth Hall for bridge and conversation• visiting and comparing kindergarten classrooms in Roxbury and Newton • riding a bike to class through Cambridge Common and always stopping to see where George Washington trained his troops • dining at Natalie's, Midget's, and College Pizza • being hired as consultants to the public schools in Weston, for classroom credit - donating these "salaries" back to Harvard • cross-registering at a Business School class (how strange, after the Ed School, to be one of three women in Dr. Zaleznick's class of hundreds) • crossing the river to watch a riveting performance of the Metropolitan Opera's Madama Butterfly • holing up in a cozy carrel in Hilles Library • listening to Sheldon White's two hour weekly lectures - with fascination • "commencing" in Harvard Yard in 1971, when, for the first time, all women received degrees bearing the Harvard name.

Diane Speare Triant Ed.M. '71

A behind-the-scenes look
at how our stories get made,
featuring our writers,
photographers, illustrators,
editors, and designers.

I drove alone to Baltimore for the shoot. Having an assistant wasn't necessary, as I enjoy the old-school quality of doing it all by myself. Keeps you humble, or at least it does me. We tell stories, about children, jobs, history. Doing this kind of work is easy for me. It's a conversation and my life is one big conversation. David was a very sweet and thoughtful man to photograph. The picture I wanted to take was one of our first hello on the sidewalk in front of the building. He was dressed in a dark sweater and jacket and was perfect. His gaze and confidence would have easily trumped his not being in a suit. There was an informal formality to him that I appreciated and looked to have in the photograph. Full of easy confidence. He spoke with Larry Jones from public relations (pictured) for most of our shoot. This always works for me because I can pick and choose what I'm looking for with the portrait."

Photographer Walter Smith on his shoot with Morgan State University president David Kwabena Wilson
(SEE THE STORY ON PAGE 10)