

# Ed.

HARVARD ED. MAGAZINE  
SPECIAL ISSUE—FALL 2020

**The Future of Education in a World Turned Sideways**

“This community  
is capable of amazing  
things.”

Bridget Long, Dean  
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# THE PIVOT ISSUE

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By Barry Blitt

Fall 2020



# Pivot

There was no playbook. No case study to tell us how to virtually change an entire way of teaching and learning and building friendships overnight. But the Ed School, like schools around the world, had no choice but to change. And we did. Going from a fully in-person experience to one fully online, with everyone from our community — students, faculty, staff, and alumni — at home, wherever home was. Starting in mid-March, we began studying at the kitchen table and lecturing from backyards. We Zoomed with our slippers on and joined study groups with our kids doing their own lessons in the next room. We adjusted. We adapted. And we changed. We also did something quickly that is usually slow going in academia: We pivoted. It's this word, this action, that inspired us here at the magazine to reach out to people in the Ed School community to find out how they had pivoted since COVID-19 forever changed what it means to be a student, an educator, and a parent. Their essays, written this summer, follow. (A few others are virtual.) In a special podcast project on the *Ed.* website, you can also listen to six of the writers read aloud their essays and answer follow-up questions.



“They keep learning entire dances with the hope that someday we will reopen and they will get to perform them. But I know they are losing hope.”

**Teresa Bezerra,  
Ed.M'02**

TEACHER

ARLETA HIGH SCHOOL  
LOS ANGELES

I teach and run the dance program at a public high school in Los Angeles. I have dance classes and a dance team.

In a typical year, the dance team performs in the fall at football games, assemblies, and pep rallies. We also hold a winter concert in December that includes all dance classes and cheer (which I also teach). All of these events and performances are canceled. Our school, like much of California and the nation, is starting remotely. I have

little hope of us opening for in-person instruction before there is a vaccine.

I have been holding summer practices for my dance team via Zoom. I thought it was important for the kids to have exercise and also a connection to their team in order to give them some sense of normality. However, Zoom practices bring a plethora of challenges that I expect to continue in the fall.

First of all, in a typical dance studio, the instructor can stand in the front and demonstrate and watch in the mirror as the students follow along behind them. We can give feedback quickly and correct mistakes. In Zoom, I have to back up about 8 feet from the camera in order for the students to see my entire body. This puts me too far from the computer to be able to see the students to give corrections. If I face back so the students don't have to reverse the movement, I cannot see them at all. I

have to approach the camera to watch them, but then they no longer have me to follow. My device also limits me to seeing only nine at a time; I cannot really give great feedback, as I have to scroll to see other students. Finally, the speed of Internet relay means that the students hear the music at different times, so when I go to watch them perform choreography, they are so unsynchronized that it is difficult to my trained eye to watch multiple students at once. My brain is so distracted by the differences in timing that it is hard to override that to see corrections. Maybe I will get better at this as time goes on.

I also cannot accurately assess students in this format unless I watch them individually, which is unrealistic in a class of more than 30. In the spring I had them each record themselves doing the choreography and post videos so I could score them. It took four hours a week to grade per class. This usually takes me 20 minutes when we are in class as I can watch students and easily fill out rubrics to give feedback. This amount of grading is unsustainable. I was on the computer so much that I was getting headaches and not enjoying the job that I usually love.

As any good teacher does, I have been brainstorming ways to fix some of the technology issues. I am purchasing a large mirror to use at home, along with a tripod for my iPad so students can follow me from behind while also seeing the front in the mirror (similar to in-person learning). I am trying to see if I can set up additional devices so that I have one filming and one that I can keep closer to watch students. I still have to figure out how to create sustainable grading practices though.

In addition to my challenges, the students also are challenged. Most have very little space at home. Some are dancing in bathrooms. Some have to move their bed or coffee table to get a few feet to dance in. They often cannot set the camera back far enough for me to see their entire body, which means I can't tell if they are doing it correctly. This is especially a burden for students new to dance who have not yet developed the body awareness of more advanced dancers.

Students are also lacking motiva-





tion. I know this is a problem for online learning in general, but for performers without a performance to prepare for, it can be devastating. They keep learning entire dances with the hope that someday we will reopen and they will get to perform them. But I know they are losing hope. I am trying to somehow create a digital concert that can be streamed for the end of the semester. I am hoping this will give them some motivation. However, I still have to worry about the liability of streaming this, including copyright music issues and parent release forms. We also need to figure out how best to film students separately and bring them together in a video. We may have to just use Zoom to record. It is far from ideal, especially if the timing is still off, but I feel like they need to have some opportunity to perform. This is crucial for their learning.

If we do resume school at some point before the vaccine, I hope to hold classes outdoors. My classroom has no windows to allow for fresh air, and with the heavy breathing of exercise, 6 feet apart is not enough. This will mean holding classes in 90-degree heat, on concrete. I still think that is safer than holding class indoors.

Additionally, until there is a vaccine, I do not see a resumption of our normal concerts, pep rallies, or assemblies that put an audience close together. We may be able to perform on the football field, but with the performers and fans so spaced out, it will be different, to say the least.

Despite all the challenges, there are so many things I am grateful for. I am happy that our district has made sure that arts are included in the reopening plan. Even at the elementary level, all arts instruction will be programmed into the distance learning. I am thankful that I still have my job teaching dance, and that students are still interested in taking my class remotely. I am grateful that we have the technology to do performance arts classes distantly, which could not have happened 30 years ago.

**TERESA BEZERRA** IS A NATIONALLY BOARD-CERTIFIED TEACHER. PROFESSIONAL DANCE CREDITS INCLUDE WILL SMITH, *MTV*, *BET*, SONY BMG, AND WORD IN MOTION DANCE COMPANY.

## “COVID-19 had arrested the world, and nothing — including my May term course — would get away without being impacted. But this was a good thing.”

**Irvin Scott, Ed.M.'07,  
Ed.D.'11**

SENIOR LECTURER

HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL  
OF EDUCATION

CAMBRIDGE

I have been in education for 30 years, and I continue to marvel at the opportunities that I get to learn and grow, provided I am in a mental and emotional space to do so. Such was the case on Saturday, May 15, as I awoke to do my daily Devotions, overlooking Fresh Pond in Cambridge.

My daily devotional time is an opportunity for me to show gratitude as well as center myself in who God is in my life, and what I am being called to do that day, as well as days to come. Over the years I have disciplined myself to use this time as a filter through which the rest of the day must pass through. My thinking? If I start the day with a faith filter, I am more inclined to experience the day in the way that I am called to, as opposed to simply how “I” want to experience it.

In retrospect, I marvel at the power of that centering because, that Saturday in May, I read something on social media that — in the delicate world of academia — “triggered” me.

After doing my devotion, my attention was drawn to a Facebook post by one of my former Ed School doctoral students, **CHERYL CAMACHO, Ed.L.D.'19**. (She welcomes the attention here.) Cheryl is a system-level leader in South Bend, Indiana, where she oversees five schools, 2,100 students, and hundreds of faculty and staff. In her Facebook post, Cheryl was expressing her personal and professional concern





about the recent spate of “returning to school” blueprints that were being published by various think tanks, former practitioners, and thought leaders. Since I was one of the former practitioners that contributed to a blueprint put out by the American Enterprise Institute, I read this post with heightened interest — and in angst.

Cheryl’s thoughtful but candid treatise can be summarized in her own words: What I really want and need, as someone who is responsible for the safety and education of 2,000 kids, is some thought partnership that respects and takes into consideration the specific needs of my families and staff. What I heard in this statement was a desire for those of us in leadership to listen and hear those “in the trenches” who are currently doing the work of educating and leading America’s 50 million children, even as they lead, teach, and support their own households.

While I gave a response that defended the role that thought leaders and former practitioners might play as we plan to reopen school, I acknowledged the need for more listening on our parts. And, I said as much in my response to Cheryl. What resulted was the trigger: I spent the week of March 18, 2020, talking to parents, teachers, students, a principal, and system-level school district, state, and nonprofit leaders from across the United States. What I learned can be captured in the following statements:

► COVID-19 is impacting educators and their families both personally and professionally — and the personal and professional blend is something that

they are having to make sense of daily.

► Those I spoke to do see a few silver linings amid all the challenges.  
► Each of these individuals has strong feelings about reopening schools.

What I learned was invaluable and it reminded me of how critical it is to engage and listen to those who are most proximate to the work of teaching and leading in our schools and in our school systems.

But this was not the only pivot that I made because of COVID-19. The other came when I was preparing to teach this fall — for the first time — my Faith, Education, and Leadership course. This course has always been something that I felt called to do. As I have shared in other online forums, my faith has always played a pivotal role in my life. While I had been thinking about ways to elevate my faith identity in my work at Harvard, my colleague, Senior Lecturer Judith McLaughlin, was the first person to mention the idea of teaching a course about the intersection of faith and education. She and I had the fortune of sitting beside one another at the 2018 HGSE commencement. In a brief conversation during the revelry, I mentioned to her my desires to explore the role of faith in education. “You should consider teaching a course on the topic,” she said. I never forgot that conversation. Two years later, I would plan to do just that. However, I never anticipated that the world would be very different as I started planning, and there were several things on my mind.

First, I wanted the course to be one where students felt safe to explore their personal faith journeys, as well

as hear and understand the journey of others. Second, I wanted students to learn about efforts that are happening already, where faith and education leaders are working together to address student and community challenges. Finally, I wanted the course to be one where students explored and designed strategies to improve outcomes for students and communities.

On March 17, that last goal changed dramatically.

On that day, the HGSE community found out that we would not be returning to campus after spring break. COVID-19 had arrested the world, and nothing — including my May term course — would get away without being impacted. But this was a good thing. What became increasingly clear by mid-April — weeks before the course — is that COVID-19 was having a devastating impact on America’s most vulnerable communities, specifically Black and Brown communities. So, the final goal of the class pivoted to one that was laser focused on seeing how faith and education organizations might work together to address the immediate needs in response to COVID-19. During the weeklong class, students learned of the work being done in Boston and in Baton Rouge, as well as other communities. And, by the end of the class, students were designing other possible interventions, based on their learning in class.

In closing, COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on all parts of our lives. What I learned from these pivots are twofold. First, I was reminded of how important it is to look for opportunities to hear and understand the needs of those educators who are on the front lines in our schools and communities. The work I do as a faculty member in a higher education institution is in service of them. Second, the nimbler my teaching is, the better chance of not only creating powerful teaching and learning experiences, but also making contributions to practitioners and their communities.

IRVIN SCOTT JOINED THE FACULTY IN 2016 AFTER FIVE YEARS WORKING AS THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR K-12 EDUCATION AT THE BILL AND MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION AND 20 YEARS WORKING AS A TEACHER, PRINCIPAL, ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT, AND CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER.

COURTESY OF ANDY ZUCKER

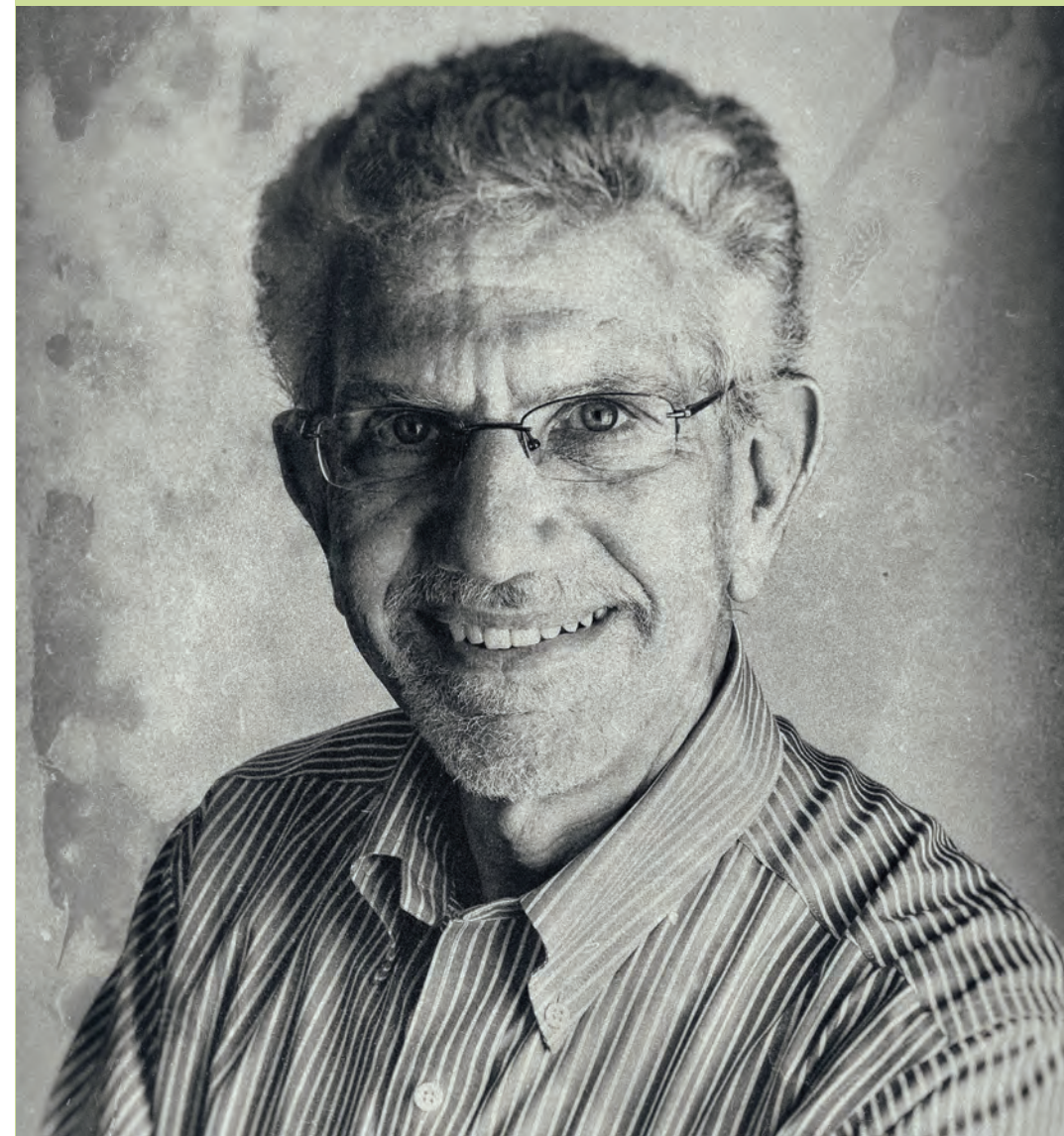
## “It might seem obvious, especially in this pandemic, that teaching young people about viruses, antibodies, immunizations, and vaccines would be an essential part of developing their scientific literacy.”

Andy Zucker, Ed.D.’78

RETIRED

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCHER AND EVALUATOR, TEACHER

CAMBRIDGE



“Having your screen off to the side, instead of straight ahead, could also help your concentration, particularly in group meetings.”

Gianpiero Petriglieri

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AT INSEAD, FROM AN *INSIDE HIGHER ED* ARTICLE ON ZOOM FATIGUE

Although it was initially an unpleasant surprise, my colleague Pendred Noyce and I came to see it as a stroke of good fortune that in February, a respected national education journal rejected an article we had submitted about national science education standards. After three months, the editor wrote, without explanation, “This article is not a good fit for our audience.”

The coronavirus was becoming front page news so Penny and I pivoted, revising the article to connect science education standards with the pandemic. When we submitted our piece to another education journal, *Phi Delta Kappan*, the editors instantly understood that the topic was important. The manuscript was quickly accepted, and the revised article, “Lessons from the Pandemic about Science Education,” appeared May 27.

Our article shows that important elements of scientific literacy are missing from the 2013 U.S. national science education standards, which are called the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). The piece also highlights NGSS strengths, such as including climate change as a topic all students should study.

It might seem obvious, especially in this pandemic, that teaching young people about viruses, antibodies, immunizations, and vaccines would be an essential part of developing their scientific literacy. But none of these topics is a priority in the NGSS. Nor do the standards mention the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the World Health Organization, or any other science-related institution.

Yet the importance of learning about vaccines and immunizations long predates the pandemic. As a recent example, prior to 2020, schools should have been teaching students how the absence of vaccinations in some areas of the United States created the worst measles outbreaks in decades, caused largely by misinformation spread among groups of parents.

At a time when 45% of students say they are online “almost constantly,” misinformation about science is front



page news, including misinformation spread by people in the White House, often using social media. However, the NGSS does not prioritize teaching students how to find reliable sources of information outside a textbook, let alone how to evaluate the many questionable science-related claims everyone encounters in media. (One of my favorite absurd “scientific” claims, found on Facebook, is that wearing a raw onion in your socks overnight drains harmful toxins.)

As a physician, Penny had been concerned about anti-vaxxer misinformation for years. I became interested in misinformation after blogging about psychology and climate change and learning how misinformation spreads. Together, collaborating with PBS *NOVA* staff at GBH, Penny and I developed free instructional materials for grades 6–12 science classes called Resisting Scientific Misinformation. This then led us to investigate, write, and blog about science education standards and scientific literacy, resulting in the *Kappan* article.

Scientific literacy begins with knowing some basic science content and practices but extends beyond that to include the relationship of science to personal and societal concerns. Scientifically literate people make better decisions in their personal lives, such as: Should I wear a mask during the pandemic? If so, when and why? Should my child be vaccinated? Scientific literacy is also vital in a democracy because citizens elect governments that establish science-related policies. For example, why are some vaccinations often required by law?

One aspect of scientific literacy that helps me in the pandemic is appreciating the role of uncertainty. Scientists look for new facts, even if they contradict prior theories. However, scientific knowledge is not based on assertions made without evidence.

The precise meaning of scientific literacy is always open to debate. Now, the COVID-19 pandemic offers Americans a clarifying moment to rethink what elementary and secondary students should learn about science to develop scientific literacy. After all, national science education standards are created specifically to identify ap-

propriate education goals.

But whatever the strengths and weaknesses of national science education standards may be, states and localities are primarily responsible for education under the U.S. constitution. Each state publishes its own education standards. Some states simply copy the NGSS word for word, but many states, including Massachusetts, developed their own standards.

Like the National Science Teaching Association, Penny and I believe that connecting science to personal and societal issues should be a prominent goal in science education, as is true in some states and localities, but not others. In contrast, the main priority of the NGSS is preparing students for college and careers, a very different goal. What do your state science education standards suggest is the primary goal for K–12 science education?

In an era when more people get news online than from any other source, teaching media literacy is essential. Do your state science education standards prioritize students learning to judge what they see, hear, or read in media?

After they leave school, most people continue to learn about scientific topics, including the pandemic, by reading about them. That is one reason that the Common Core State Standards emphasize the importance of having students read more nonfiction, including science. But 2015 NAEP data show that 54% of twelfth-grade students reported never using library resources for science class. Do your state science education standards prioritize the “literacy” aspect of scientific literacy?

Professor Fletcher Watson, who taught at HGSE for more than 30 years, wrote that he made some science education colleagues uncomfortable by prioritizing the word “education” over “science.” His point was that experts need to think broadly, beyond their areas of specialization. Although science educators have some first-rate ideas, one does not need to be an expert to identify many key elements of scientific literacy; that is a task for everyone.

**ANDY ZUCKER**, AFTER TEACHING STEM SUBJECTS IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS, WORKED FOR THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND THEN FOR SEVERAL NONPROFIT EDUCATION R&D ORGANIZATIONS.



“This community is capable of amazing things.”

## Bridget Long

DEAN

HARVARD GRADUATE  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

CAMBRIDGE

In response to COVID-19, on June 3, 2020, HGSE announced our decision to be online for the 2020–21 academic year. While many other schools and universities vacillated during the summer months to contemplate various scenarios of restricted residential or hybrid education, HGSE’s announcement that we would focus on remote learning was comparatively early. Our shift started in the spring and is really a story of many, many pivots — facing a new reality, developing a new mindset, and coming together as a community in new ways with a new purpose. We were motivated to not only continue, but to accelerate, our core mission of improving education, both for our own students and in support of educators and learners around the globe.

Going back to early March, the Dean’s Office was preparing for a well-needed break after a series of high-profile, intense events at the school: the kickoff of HGSE’s Centennial and subsequent Future of Education series; hosting the Harvard Visiting Committee (similar to an accrediting review board); and celebrating the de-



acades of contributions of the Human Development and Psychology Program at HGSE. As I prepared for a long-planned family vacation that was supposed to happen during spring break, I can recall the early disbelief at how quickly things changed, which shifted to despair about things lost and resignation around the constant uncertainty of what would come next.

The cancellation of Harvard's Commencement, which was announced on March 20, was a particularly low point for me. Though I am not a huge fan of big ceremonies, I remember how important that event was for my parents — the pride and joy they had in their eyes to see me walk across the stage to get my doctoral diploma 20 years earlier. I desperately wanted to give that to our students and to celebrate this moment of joy as a community. Just writing the cancellation message was gut-wrenching, and I was powerless to make things better.

It was around that time that I stopped sleeping. At least subconsciously, I was confronting the fact that the HGSE I knew was in jeopardy. I cannot claim to have known how bad things would get, but my spring briefings from epidemiologists as a member of the President's Academic Council hinted that this would not be a short-lived disruption. I increasingly became worried about the health and future of HGSE — a community that has nurtured and taught me as a professional and a person, and to whom I felt tremendous responsibility to protect and uphold.

However, there comes a time when you're just tired of being back on your heels — wondering what the world is

going to throw at you next. After weeks of ambiguity and disappointment, I felt compelled to regain some sense of agency and chart a new way forward for HGSE. This is what I shared with my senior leadership team in early April. During that pivotal conversation, we took a step back and began to look seriously at the longer-term future. Looking at public health data, considering the travel restrictions our international students were facing, and examining projected financial losses, we acknowledged that “business as usual is not possible at HGSE.” This phrase was often repeated during the spring as we began to meet with faculty and staff, but facing this reality was only the beginning.

The most important part of our pivot was driven not by the constraints we faced but instead by the possibilities. The conditions created an opportunity for us to think boldly and to try new approaches to learning, engagement, and community. On April 20, at our first full faculty meeting to discuss the future, we presented this viewpoint: “Given our mission and the challenges we face, we need to be proactive and determined in charting a course for hope and resilience. We can develop a high-quality, innovative set of learning experiences — building from our existing assets and growing expertise.” And with this statement, we began to sketch the vision for something new. Numerous conversations followed, big and small, until every faculty and staff member had been brought into the circle.

Ultimately, I don't think we wanted to compromise anymore. We didn't want to accept another defeat handed

by the pandemic. And the urgency of finding solutions and contributing to larger conversations and efforts to help learners around the world was additional motivation. We were explicit about the need to shift towards an orientation of innovation, collaboration, and support for one another. Priorities had to change, investments were made in the Teaching and Learning Lab, and we combed through data and feedback from students to craft our new model along with seeking out other colleagues to learn from their experiences with online education. While there was still disappointment, the mood slowly began to change.

And then in early June, we made our announcement. As a relatively early decision, we were met with a great deal of surprise, disappointment, and anger from our students. As summer progressed, it became clear that our decision was the right one, but I'm still thankful that our early actions gave us a major head start on pivoting and planning for the year. More than that, it resolved the burdensome uncertainty of having to simultaneously plan for multiple scenarios. It was a gift to be able to run towards a single, new vision rather than wrestling with the consequences of a pandemic that continued out of control.

That's not to say that the weeks thereafter were simple and easy. New questions and new issues emerged almost daily as we began to understand just what it would take to shift to a fully online model. I write this in August, knowing full well that the launch of our remote education model will be filled with highs and lows, numerous lessons, and hopefully, fresh insights and novel ways of connecting. Still, with each new collaboration and the creation of new learning opportunities, my optimism about the future grows. I've stopped sleeping again, but not due to the uncertainty of the pandemic; rather, I anticipate an amazing year as we tackle the future together. This community is capable of amazing things — we have had to make many pivots, but our core mission is the same, and our ability to advance that mission is growing.

BRIDGET LONG JOINED THE ED SCHOOL IN 2000 AND HAS BEEN THE DEAN SINCE 2018.

“What I realize now — what I would tell a first-year teacher this fall — is that my priorities were flipped all along.”



MARY AKIN

## Kenton Shimozaki

MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER,  
HTF COHORT 4 ALUM

A PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL

DENVER

There is a distinct narrative about the first year of teaching: It is notoriously difficult. It's known to be hard because novice teachers tend to have poor classroom management skills, some lack supportive mentorship structures, and many enter the teaching profession unprepared for the context and demands of their schools.

So, when I stood at the front of the classroom last August, I fully embraced that my first year of teaching would be exacting and the results imperfect. Those first few months, I focused on small victories like maintaining some semblance of order throughout my lessons. I watched veteran educators, took ample observation notes, and tried to replicate their demeanor the next day in class. My priority was not on being an excellent educator, merely an above-average first-year teacher.

Still, even first-year teachers have dreams. I imagined that maybe one day in my first year I would have a “perfect class”: every student would be on task and engaged. I envisioned a “perfect week” where I was ahead on lesson planning (instead of hastily drafting the night before) and giving detailed feedback on assignments every day. But, as the fall progressed and the leaves lost their chlorophyll, I also shedded some of my loftier goals.

By early March, in the last weeks of the before times, my desire of sending a positive text to every student's family had never occurred. My intention to design a more engaging reading intervention unit had never gotten off the ground. My hope of rebuilding the relationship with the student I sent out of class a half dozen times had never come to fruition. Even in the pre-COVID era, the demands of licensure coursework, lesson planning, and grading always pushed these oth-

“None of this is easy, but masks and ventilation are the two things I would prioritize most.”

### Ashish Jha

PHYSICIAN AND DEAN OF THE BROWN UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH, GIVING ADVICE TO SCHOOLS FOR THE NEW ACADEMIC YEAR, IN AN EDUCATION NOW SESSION WITH DEAN BRIDGET LONG



er priorities lower on the to-do list to the point they remained unfulfilled.

Then, on March 13, I said farewell to my students. They packed up Chromebooks, I cleaned out the snacks in my desk, and we transitioned to remote learning. Not only was I naive to believe that we would return in person after spring break, but I gave little thought to how my professional priorities would shift.

Initially, it felt as though the year might as well have started over. I had to figure out how to run virtual office hours via Zoom, record engaging lessons at the kitchen table through Loom, and give feedback through the side-panel “private comments” feature of Google Classroom. Adapting to new technology platforms for remote learning was jarring to the point that I put off thinking about what the priority should be as a teacher, novice or veteran, in this novel situation.

Now, however, nearly five months on, I have had abundant time to consider my priorities as a teacher. What I realize now — what I would tell a first-year teacher this fall — is that my priorities were flipped all along. Strong classroom management, planning ahead for lessons, and frequent feedback are all well and good, but they are no substitute for the relationships you build with students and families.

I wish I had sent those text messages home last September to build connections with families early. I wish I had spent that extra weekend creating relevant lessons that bridged academic content with my students’ lives. I wish I had figured out how to reach that one struggling seventh-grader so he could have been successful before and engaged in remote learning later.

The first year of teaching was bound to be challenging with a class of 30 12-year-olds. I could not have imagined how drastically my core beliefs about what it means to teach would have shifted this far in one year. As I think ahead to the first year of starting online, I have reconsidered what the priorities of a teacher should be. Stay connected. Keep engaging. Be concerned.

KENTON SHIMOZAKI IS A HARVARD TEACHER FELLOWS ALUM AND WRITER.

# “Weeks and weeks of remote teaching and learning and mask-wearing made real life seem like an inescapable sitcom. With a dark soundtrack.”

**Christian Long, Ed.M.’01, and Karla Long, Ed.M.’01**

CHRISTIAN, BECKETT (TOP), BERKELEY, AND KARLA

LIFE-LONG EDUCATORS

GRANVILLE, OHIO

So, how have you preserved the memories of teaching and learning from this past spring?

How are you holding onto the moments of your family collectively faking its way through turning living rooms into faculty lounges, flipping kitchens into science labs, accepting bedrooms becoming Zoom conference rooms?

## I imagine an empty box.

Perhaps an old shoe box. Certain to crumble deep within the soil. Perhaps something more elegant, more refined; something worthy of being marveled at generations from now.

But I imagine a box. Empty.

A time capsule.

It’d be something our family would methodically fill with mementos, souvenirs, and talismans from our family’s most unexpected spring.

I try to list the items we’d bury.

Try to imagine the artifacts that’d mark the COVID-19 pivot from our family’s life attending the same beautiful school campus together in Texas before spring break to the awkwardly hacked home campus we rushed into service as teaching and learning went fully remote.





**1.** **First, a for sale sign from the front yard.** Our real estate agent put it in the ground the very same day that our city formally announced a shelter-in-place order. It mocked us. It felt like a bad omen.

We felt dread that nobody would tour our home, masks or otherwise. We imagined that the house would never sell; we'd leave it behind like dust bowl families long ago. We feared that we'd be jobless and homeless. After all, we had just given our notices to move back to Ohio at school year's end. We gave notice only days before COVID-19 forced a run on toilet paper across the country. All job offers disappeared overnight. The decision was right. The timing, awful. Yes, we were still excited to "go home." But with COVID and a mocking hourglass expiring, we were near-paralyzed by the path to get there.

Oh, and we had to quietly feel all of that without sharing with anyone we worked with or taught. We just continued designing curriculum, researching remote agile pedagogies and video methods, juggling hourly/daily shifts in class and meeting schedules, teaching courses, leading departments and divisions, collaborating with colleagues, future-contingency planning on the school leadership team, advising heartbroken 12th-graders, attending a tsunami of Zoom calls with parents, kiddos, colleagues, and outside experts willing to help our students, and keeping our house (and "homeschool") perfectly clean for theoretical homebuyers that might ignore the city's shelter-in-place mandate to come visit.

We were gut-punched that we had selected to change everything seconds before a massive pandemic and social and economic upheaval emerged. We were leaving jobs, titles, salaries, benefits, insurance, predictability. COVID mocked us. Kids and colleagues needed us.

We just crossed fingers and prayed.

The irony was laughable. The nervousness, not so much.

**2.** **A 'to do' list.** Into the empty box, a

carefully crafted to do list. Written in mom's handwriting.

It always began with a list of chores. Then school assignments. Followed by recommended hobbies and lunch-making tips. Finally, it ended with an empty checkbox, a "do something physically active" note.

And a red heart.

Each morning, we dutifully left our fifth-grade daughter and seventh-grade son a note for their day ahead. Yes, we were only rooms away, but we were also running a school, teaching classes, and trying to fake our way through flipping an on-campus school into a remote learning ecosystem. We had little time to see if our own kids were finishing homework, doing chores, or eating a balanced lunch.

So we left them a note.

And a red heart.

We wrote notes for them to read in their morning pajamas. A good morning. A plea to review email inboxes filled with teachers' Zoom directions, assignments, and follow-up forgot-to-tell-you's. A gentle nudge to eat fruit, put dishes away, and make beds. A plea that they juggle a soccer ball or shoot hoops or go for a long bike ride or even co-walk the dogs around the neighborhood.

And we'd add a gentle mention that doing homework didn't mean it had to be done perfectly; grades wouldn't really matter the same way anyway. There was now a do-no-harm school grading policy. We wanted them to show up and learn. We just no longer put stock in their grade point average.

COVID certainly doesn't care about grade point averages.

**3.** **Art supplies, thread, recyclables, random bits.** Tubes of acrylic paint. Misshapen cardboard pieces. Expensive, high-end sneaker soap. New iPad pencil. Duct tape. Sewing needles and thread. A DIY bird's nest. A massive stack of Walmart fabric purchased in a COVID-panicked buying frenzy one March afternoon.

**Moment one:** Our daughter climbs a tree out back during class time. Carefully places the bird's nest high up in the branches. An art and

science project. Carefully built from trash found in nearby streets. Impressive construction. Hands-on, experiential learning. School at its very best.

**Moment two:** Our pre-teen son stands eagerly at the front door during his reading time. Waiting for the mailman. Expecting a shoebox to be delivered. In it: a previously worn pair of "hypebeast" (aka: heavily sought-after; very expensive) sneakers he had just "won" on eBay. Planning to carefully refurbish them. Then post the pair on his new shoe resale business Instagram page. Instead of dutifully underlying history notes or typing an essay, COVID gave him space to start his first business at 13. Making money and keeping the mailman really busy.

**Moment three:** Our young daughter sits us all down at the kitchen table. Carefully guides us through a slow, finger-pricking process of hand-sewing DIY masks. The masks would let us go to the grocery store in a community slow to accept the changing world around it. Found myself imagining society forever changed. The power grid going down. Living off the land. A *Little House on the Prairie* family ready to hand-sew all that we wore. Led by an 11-year-old girl with common sense and a gentle touch.

**Moment four:** Our 13-year-old son hand paints a "No Justice No Peace" cardboard sign. School year nearly over. He had maintained straight A+'s. Received several well-earned academic and community awards. But none of that seemed important. George Floyd mattered more. He held his sign above his head for hours at a busy intersection near our home. His first protest. No homework done that night. But plenty of "work to be done."

The kids created. Made messes. Became entrepreneurs. And daydreamed bold futures.

**4.** **Cookbooks, and board game boxes.** Depending on the room of the house you'd walk through, you'd see cookbooks on every table top. You'd also see forgotten puzzles boxes. Board games from various closets. Shoeboxes.

And you'd undoubtedly see a laptop or iPad situated on top of any of those stacks.

Whatever it took for your face to be level with the screen. It didn't matter how you were sitting, standing, or laying. Just needed to be eye-level.

Screens filled with Zoom grids, Google Meet video faces, and Face Time laughter. Awkward beginning-of-class waves. Customary "can everyone hear me?" questions. Pondering which classmates had bad Wi-Fi or were falling asleep. Panicking that you had emailed the wrong video link the night before. Breakout rooms of kid teams brainstorming school projects. All-grade faculty meetings discussing kids falling way behind. Friday evening English department remote dinner parties. Admins crafting graduation events and lowering admissions rate contingency plans.

**5.** **A DVD of NBC's *The Good Place*.** Sprawled across the couch, we'd laugh at the limitlessly comical reasons Ted Danson, Janet the robot, and mismatched protagonists remained philosophically imprisoned in the bad place. No plot or scheme changed their situation. Ironically feeling something similar. Weeks and weeks of remote teaching and learning and mask-wearing made real life seem like an inescapable sitcom. With a dark soundtrack.

We'd binge-watch *Ozark* long after the kids fell asleep. Roll our eyes at the annoying marketing advice from YouTube families making six-figures opening boxes of random items sent to them by advertisers. Play Minecraft, Roblox, and endless hours of Fortnite. Stare in awe at hours of CNN live-reporting protests. Research drive-in movie theaters open within 500 miles for a spontaneous family night out.

Sometimes we'd just stare at the ceiling. Wondering what day of the week it was. Wondering what episode we were in. Wondering if the boundary between TV and reality existed.

**6.** **A Google map combining student homes and anonymous families.**

They were spread across the city. Gated communities sounding of tennis and golf carts. Worn downtown duplexes. Repetitive track homes. Sprawling ranches with fence lines to the horizon. Apartment complexes. Mini-mansions on tiny lots. Modest houses reminding you of your not-so-flashy grandmother's loving home.

We spent many afternoons coming to campus to pick up freshly made meals by a joyful school kitchen team. Meals for families that could not yet come back to campus. Meals for families without anyone to check on them or the resources to eat well. We'd deliver meals to families in all neighborhoods, poor and not-so-poor. We'd smile. Say hello. Stand 6 feet away. And tell them we were thinking of them. They'd smile. Say thank you. Stand 6 feet away. And tell us what a nice surprise it was.

Other afternoons we caravanned in a line of faculty cars. Celebrating soon-to-graduate 12th-graders. Honking horns. Singing. Taking photos. Handing out schwag bags of school gear to near-alumni. Putting "congrats" signs in the front yard. All from a safe social distance, just shy of their front door.

Driving home, we'd sometimes wonder if we should quickly head to Sam's Club to just-in-case hoard-buy cooking and cleaning supplies. Other times we'd daydream of selling everything, moving into an RV, just in case everything fell apart. More often we just felt gratitude to see our students and new friends: mask to mask, door to door, home to home, street to street, neighborhood to neighborhood.

**7.** **Photos of all types.** There would be countless pics. Random b-roll captures. Blurry candid. Lots of day-in-the-life snaps. Quirky homeschool moments. New normal portraits of all types.

There would be a photo of all four of us — parents and kiddos — sitting at the dining room table, attending four separate Zoom meetings at the same moment, none of us thinking it the least bit surreal.

But it was surreal.

And the new normal.

A photo of Karla dressed to the nines. Standing at a podium on the school campus. Leading a formal live video middle school awards ceremony. Her students in a grid of photos, lounging on their beds, attending from home, including our son on the same call up in his own bedroom.

A photo of our daughter in tears on the first day of remote learning.

She began with near Christmas morning excitement. Fired up for virtual school after an extended spring break to give teachers remote-teaching prep time. Wide awake. Pencils lined up. Thirty minutes later, she felt overwhelmed. Avalanched by loving, well-intentioned teacher emails. Filled with paragraphs of we-miss-you's, remote learning advice, class expectations. More than a dutiful fifth grader could carefully take in. We hugged her deeply. Told her to take a break.

It was day one of remote learning. Our lover of all things school was already drowning.

Also a photo of the four of us going on a long bike ride in the middle of the school day. We needed a break. School felt optional at times. Often. Even as school administrators and teachers and parents.

And a photo of us packing our house into boxes. Preparing to move back across the country. Uncertain employment. Uncertain social dynamics. Uncertain political shifts. And much uncertainty about whether school would ever return come fall.

And certainly many photos of us laughing at dinner time. Leading and attending Zoom classes in pajamas. School baseball mitts and travel soccer cleats gathering dust in the garage. Two dogs who never had so many middle-school-day neighborhood walks in their lives.

KARLA AND CHRISTIAN LONG WERE ENGAGED IN THE FALLING SNOW AT THE HARVARD SQUARE T-STOP AND MARRIED TWO YEARS LATER IN MEMORIAL CHAPEL. KARLA WAS THE HEAD OF MIDDLE SCHOOL AT ALL SAINTS EPISCOPAL SCHOOL IN TYLER, TEXAS. CHRISTIAN WAS DIRECTOR OF THE SCHOOL'S CENTER FOR INNOVATION AND THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT CHAIR. BERKELEY AND BECKETT WERE TWO OF KARLA'S MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS. THE FAMILY, TWO HOUNDS, AND A HERMIT CRAB JUST MOVED BACK ACROSS THE COUNTRY TO THEIR PREVIOUS COMMUNITY OF GRANVILLE, OHIO.



# Draw the Student\*



BARRY BLITT



SM

SIMONE MASSONI



DAVE CALVER



ALISON SEIFFER

\*Anyone remember the ads printed on matchbook covers and in magazines like *Reader's Digest* and *TV Guide*, urging aspiring artists to "draw me"? Sponsored by the Art Instruction Schools, the ads showed a pen-and-ink example to duplicate — Tippy the Turtle or a cowboy in silhouette, even Bob Hope's head — and asked readers to send in their sketch for a professional critique and the possibility of winning a free scholarship to the Minnesota-based correspondence school. (Apparently this is how *Peanuts* creator Charles Schulz got his start when he was in high school.) We asked a dozen well-known illustrators to try their hand at our version of the "draw me" exercise. However, instead of simply copying our student (drawn by David Cowles, who got his big break at *The Village Voice* and has been a regular contributor to *Entertainment Weekly*, *Rolling Stone*, and more), we asked the illustrators to put their own spin on Cowles' student for a new COVID/Zoom/racial division/who-knows-what's-next world.





REGAN DUNNICK



ANTONY HARE



ANDREW BANNECKER



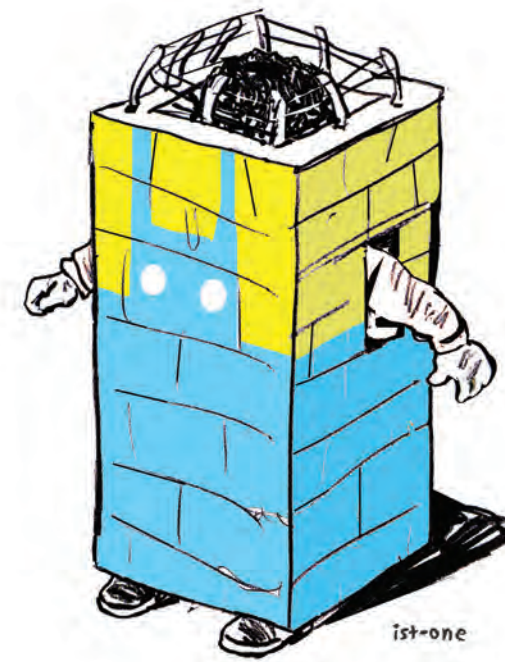
AUDREY MALO



MELINDA BECK



ROB WILSON



ISTVAN BANYAI



ELWOOD H. SMITH



“It’s exhausting.  
I’m exhausted.  
I feel like a machine  
having to  
recalibrate to  
stay on track  
every time  
something new  
pops up.”

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### Mckenzie Parkins

CURRENT STUDENT

EDUCATION, POLICY, AND  
MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

ATLANTA

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Every time I look at my 2020 vision board, I roll my eyes, laugh, and think “what a joke.” Smack in the center of my board are big letters spelling HARVARD and a trail of dots underneath leading me to Massachusetts. My plan was simple: apply, get accepted, have the best year in Cambridge, and be set up for my next steps in life; however, 2020 had other plans.

Harvard Ed.

Upon acceptance, I was excited as anyone else and instantly went into planning mode for my summer transition and life in the fall. I started connecting with my colleagues and sought out housing. How lucky I thought I was when I secured housing with a family friend and cut my costs down by thousands. I researched hangout spots, knew what restaurants I wanted to try, and talked to alumni about the best gear to help me endure a Boston winter. (Thank God I didn’t buy anything!)

As quickly as I began to solidify my plans, things began to change. Once the welcome events were canceled and current students were asked to vacate the school, I realized my plans and what I imagined my HGSE experience to be like would radically change. I said goodbye to walking through Gutman Library, tailgating for the Harvard v. Yale football game, and the thoughts of giving tours to my sisters or my aunt who already had plans to visit and explore the campus. I began to question if I would receive everything I wished for when I made my vision board. I worried myself into early gray hairs and questioned, “Will I get the world-renowned Harvard education and experience if Harvard opts to move online?”

Waiting for fall plans to officially be announced led to the most intense anxiety and loom of uncertainty I’ve ever experienced. March turned to April, which turned into May, then into June and still — I knew nothing. It felt like I was frozen. Things were happening, people were moving, the world was changing, but I had to remain still ... and wait.

Finally hearing that the program would be completely virtual, I had a small sense of relief and thought I could go back into planning mode and reimagine my HGSE experience. But, with so many unknowns and nowhere to get solid answers, I remained still. There is no one to ask if paying full tuition without the in-person experience is worth the value. I have no way of knowing the quality of classes, or the strain of a year’s worth of “Zoom-ing” on my body. Who can I ask if meaningful and lasting relationships could solely be made virtu-

KYLE WALCOTT





ally? No one. We would be the first.

One month after hearing the decision, I think I'm still reimagining. What do I want out of my HGSE experience? What will it look like for me? It's hard to ground myself and plant my feet in an answer, when it feels like the ground is still being built. I'm making decisions on leaps of faith and hope, and it's scary.

Every decision I have to make right now feels like opening a war field in my brain. I'll have a question, nowhere to get an answer, so both sides battle it out, and at the end of it all, I still have no answer.

"Should I move to Boston?" "Will proximity to the campus lead to more opportunities or possible in-person meetups?" "Most of the jobs posted on the Hub are in Boston." "Plenty of people are still making the move." "But wait, it's a global pandemic. Moving isn't safe." "Why risk being quarantined in a city without your family?" "Full time or part time?" "Dive-in heads first, go all-in, and be a full-time online Ed.M. student. Why not? That was the original plan and you can make the most out of this!" "But I could also be a part-time student, continue to have income, and at least hope for the possibility of a real graduation in 2022."

It's exhausting.  
I'm exhausted.

I feel like a machine having to recalibrate to stay on track every time something new pops up.

I would love to say I have a final decision, but I don't. I'm practicing grace and adding the word flexibility to my vision board. As I continue to reimagine, I know I'll keep the promise to myself to be a Harvard graduate student. Whether full time or part time, in Boston or not, I'll get the degree. It's my hope that even remotely, I'll have a great year, and I'll be set up for my next steps in life as I initially planned.

**MCKENZIE PARKINS** SERVED AS A SPECIAL EDUCATOR, YOUTH ADVOCATE, AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZER IN NEW ORLEANS FOR FIVE YEARS AND FOUND JOY IN EMPOWERING YOUTH TO USE THEIR VOICE THROUGH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT. SHE DECIDED TO STAY IN GEORGIA AFTER ALL AND ATTEND THE ED SCHOOL AS A FULL-TIME STUDENT. SHE PLANS TO STUDY IN ATLANTA UNTIL DECEMBER, AND THEN MOVE TO THE DMV AREA IN JANUARY TO MEET AND STUDY WITH HER NEWBORN NEPHEW.

**“My job is to stay in contact with my kids. To make sure they are safe and healthy. That was always part of the job, but now I’m dependent on all of our cell phones working.”**

**Svati Mariam Lelyveld,  
Ed.M.'12**

EIGHTH-GRADE SOCIAL  
STUDIES TEACHER

BRONX SCHOOL OF YOUNG  
LEADERS, MS 331

NEW YORK CITY

It's the final week of March. We are doing our best to get a rhythm with "remote learning." The city has promised wi-fi enabled iPads that will alleviate the opportunity gap, and some students have received them, but many are still communicating with teachers via cell phone.

I have called all 110 of my eighth-graders at least once. The 27 families in my homeroom are now frequently used contacts in my phone. We have a rapport, via phone. Some families like to chat about the kids' sadness, others about their own disappointment for canceled events and sources of income.

The phone being my primary mode of contact doesn't feel great for my work-life balance, but this is an emergency. By now my roles as literacy instructor and history educator are null. My job is to stay in contact with my kids. To make sure they are safe and healthy. That was always part of the job, but now I'm dependent on all of our cell phones working.

It's the last week of March, and after weeks of calling dozens of families every day, there is a glaring gap in my work: Haleema still hasn't logged on



Photograph by **Walter Smith**



to my Google classroom. The office administrator has sent me all of the phone numbers listed on Haleema's emergency card, and after weeks of calling all of them, I am becoming increasingly worried about the child. Haleema is slipping through the cracks that occur when an over-exhausted system is asked to work even farther beyond capacity. With no tutor, no WI-FI, no guardian at home for dinner time, an overwhelming number of children are relying on our New York City public schools.

Towering at least four inches above me, Haleema has a personality that can captivate any audience. She is easily identifiable as the eighth-grader who can influence an entire cohort of students. Since the first day of school in September, I have had quick conversations with her every morning. Brief reminders that she is smart and beautiful, and can lead her whole crew in the right direction. She sits in the first row of class every day, eventually volunteering her drafts for extra feedback and revision. Her focus starts to spill into her other classes. Her grades are improving. She is getting in trouble less often. That was before the pandemic. Now I can't find her. I have had no news of Haleema since March 13, 2020.

I've been calling her family for weeks, desperate to verify that she is okay. Finally, I send a text message to all of her contact numbers: "Haleema is missing school. The city will have to come make sure she is okay." I knew the words would be shocking.

An uncle called me in response to the text message. Grateful to be in contact with him, I implored, "I must make sure Haleema is okay. Please ask her mother to call me." Within the hour, I received a phone call from Haleema's mother. She didn't know why I didn't have her cell phone number, but in any case, she has been laid off and is home, full time. Thank goodness.

My relationship with Haleema's mother ended up being one of the greatest successes of parent outreach in my eight years as a NYC public school teacher.

Haleema submitted assignments through her mother's phone until the city delivered the iPad we had requested for her to continue her schoolwork. The iPad arrived six weeks later, and she was able to use it and excel in her schoolwork for the last two months of the school year.

Haleema's mother and I texted every day to confirm what assignments had been completed, or to communicate gentle reminders to get them done. In the months of May and June, Haleema was celebrated at our monthly academic awards ceremonies as a student who had perfect attendance, and near perfect scores on all of her work. Those last few months of middle school ended on a high note for everyone, with Haleema's mother having the time and resources to monitor and nudge her daughter's remote learning.

Other families, sadly, were not so fortunate. By mid-May, two months into NYC's shutdown, more and more

parents are asking for help with groceries. Some say they already receive one form of food assistance, but it's not enough. With so many undocumented workers losing their jobs, more families are sharing already strained resources.

Before March 2020, parents had made quick trips to the Caribbean, Central America, and Africa, to visit loved ones, say goodbye to elderly generations, check on family members or homes. All things that immigrants do. But now, with lockdowns, restrictions, loss of income, they can't come home to New York City. Cell phones are going out of service. A child who was supervised by an older sibling or neighbor for two weeks is now going on the second month without a parent in the house. The students complain of sleep deprivation, inactivity, depression.

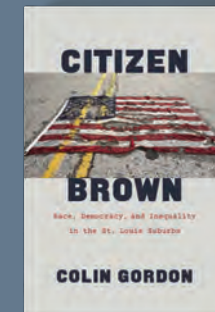
The stress is showing on the children. In our Friday social-emotional check ins, they express hopelessness, sadness, and fear for family members who keep our city going as unprotected essential workers. We do our best to continue supporting students through the summer months, connecting families with food pantries and other public health resources. Even as New York City has begun a slow re-opening, the outlook for many families has not improved, as most jobs and community resources are still closed.

It's now the end of July, and I'm still in regular contact with half a dozen of my homeroom students, sharing income and education opportunities as text messages, and admiring their tech savvy emojis and gifs. The resilience of systemically under-resourced communities is not magic, or even luck — it is the power of continuous collective care. And cell phone continues to be our primary mode of communication and connection.

**SVATI MARIAM LELYVELD** BELIEVES THAT BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS, FOOD, CLOTHING, SHELTER, AND MEDICINE ARE NECESSARY PREREQUISITES FOR AN ADEQUATE EDUCATION. SHE IS VERY PROUD OF THE STUDENTS WHO HAVE MADE ACADEMIC PROGRESS AS THEY CONTINUE TO LEARN ABOUT AND ADVOCATE FOR THEIR BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS.

WATCH A PANEL DISCUSSION ON SCHOOL-FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS IN A PANDEMIC THAT INCLUDED LELYVELD: [GSE.HARVARD.EDU/ED](https://gse.harvard.edu/ed)

# What We're Reading (While We're Physically Distancing)



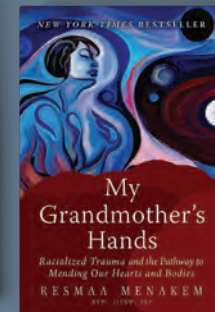
**Francesca Purcell**  
SENIOR LECTURER, FACULTY DIRECTOR (HEP)  
*Citizen Brown: Race, Democracy, and Inequality in the St. Louis Suburbs*  
BY COLIN GORDON

This book analyzes the 2014 murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, through the lens of public policy decisions over decades, which led to long-standing neighborhood inequities and segregation. The book demonstrates how Brown's murder is interconnected with local systems of institutional racism that adversely impact housing, schooling, safety, transportation, and healthcare for Black Americans. It challenges and reminds me about the breadth, depth, and insidiousness of racism in our country and that, while I choose to focus primarily on equity issues in post-secondary education, I have to continually educate myself on how racism plays out in many different arenas.



**Tony Jack**  
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR  
*How Long 'til Black Future Month?*  
BY N.K. JEMISIN

I am reading this series of short stories by speculative fiction writer N.K. Jemisin. Her writing awakens a yearning to pick up a pen. From the intimate to the epic, each story invites you to leave behind the world, or at least what we think we know about it, even if for a moment. But in an almost haunting manner, you return with permission to imagine new possibilities. As with all of Jemisin's writing, Black excellence is etched into every page of this great book.



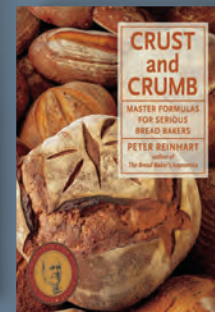
**Christina "V" Villarreal, Ed.M.'05**  
LECTURER, FACULTY DIRECTOR (TEP)  
*My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*  
BY RESMAA MENAKEM

This book is an important reminder that dismantling white supremacy requires more than a purely cognitive approach; it requires painful and necessary mind, body, and soul work. Menakem writes, "For the past three decades, we've earnestly tried to address white-body supremacy in America with reason, principles, and ideas — using dialogue, forums, discussions, education, and mental training, but we've focused our efforts in the wrong directions. We've tried to teach our brains to think better about race. But white-body supremacy doesn't live in our thinking brains. It lives and breathes in our bodies." He offers concrete questions and somatic exercises to guide readers towards addressing ... racial trauma. This book has been instrumental in my teaching and in my own healing journey.



**Liz City, Ed.M.'04, Ed.D.'07**  
PROFESSOR  
*American Spy*  
BY LAUREN WILKINSON

I read *American Spy* because I've been deliberately choosing books, poems, and movies by Black authors and artists to help deepen my understanding of racism in the United States through art. I'm also reading books more directly about anti-racism, but there is something quite different about reading a poem or listening to a fictional character or watching a movie, all of which speak emotional truths in powerful and different ways. I chose this particular book because I needed a "crime" or "mystery" novel for the summer reading challenge at my local library, which my daughter and I are doing, and *American Spy* fit the bill. It's a page-turner. I read it in two delightful days.



**Joe McIntyre, Ed.M.'10, Ed.D.'17**  
LECTURER  
*Crust and Crumb: Master Recipes for Serious Bakers*  
BY PETER REINHART

Since the public library closed and I stopped commuting (that's where I did the majority of my reading), I haven't been reading a lot. But I'm going to go with *Crust and Crumb* by Peter Reinhart. He's a great author, the recipes are fantastic, and he gets into some of the underlying science. A lot of people seem to have started baking or baking more recently, and this is a great place to get started. Just be aware that you can reduce the complexity of some recipes and still get a good result; there's no need to buy a lot of new equipment. Baking can be really therapeutic, especially when it involves kneading and long wait times, so although this book isn't really about what's going on right now, it could absolutely be helpful.



**Alex Hodges**  
DIRECTOR, GUTMAN LIBRARY  
*Education and Social Change: Contours in the History of American Schooling*  
BY JOHN RURY

I'm grateful for my summer enrollment in a History of American Education course, which, through this text, has helped me situate and connect my reflections on the past, our current dilemmas, and what is still ahead.

FIND OUT WHAT BOOKS PROFESSOR JAL MEHTA AND ASSISTANT PROFESSOR PETER BLAIR SPENT THEIR TIME READING AT GSE. [HARVARD.EDU/ED](https://harvard.edu/ed)



“**Make a calendar. Help children see the extent of time from now to when school starts and talk through the time. Have children draw pictures about their memories of school. Older children might even draw a map... this will help them talk through the where/who/what of school.**”

**Melissa Butler**

FORMER TEACHER AND FOUNDER OF THE CHILDREN'S INNOVATION PROJECT. DURING AN EDUCATION NOW WEBINAR ON HOW TO HELP KIDS TRANSITION TO A NEW AND VERY DIFFERENT SCHOOL YEAR



## “When the pandemic hit, my clients needed support and strategies – not jokes.”

**Mara Schanfield,**  
Ed.M.'08, C.A.S.'09

SENIOR TECHNICAL  
ASSISTANCE  
COORDINATOR

AMERICAN INSTITUTES  
FOR RESEARCH

ST. PAUL, MINN.

*“Why is it hard to trust an atom?  
Because they make up everything.”*

Laughter brings joy to a learning environment. Humor increases engagement and encourages the brain to retain information. As an education consultant specializing in social and emotional learning (SEL), I have found that even the corniest joke can improve participants' learning.

When the pandemic hit, my clients needed support and strategies — not jokes. So I started using more trauma-sensitive strategies like deep breathing, and body awareness in SEL trainings and meetings with school district staff. For example, a deep breath calms the nervous system and allows us to stay in our “thinking brains.”

This worked well until Memorial Day 2020 when George Floyd was murdered by Minneapolis police.

A week later, I co-lead a video call with a small rural school district in the South. I began the session with a moment of silence for Floyd. We continued with an activity where participants acknowledged and named their feelings after looking at an array of emoticons. I have done this activity dozens of times on Zoom since March, typically resulting in a wide distribution of emotions. But this time, participants identified with the sad face over and over again. One participant simply drew a broken heart on the screen.

Later, I learned that many mem-

bers of the district staff had spent the morning waiting for someone to acknowledge their pain, their despair, their need to grieve, and cosign their resolve. Instead, they were faced with a grave omission — district meetings reflected business as usual. Several staff members later told me that the shared moment of silence had been particularly meaningful with tension running high as confederate statues began to topple nearby. This brief moment of silence, in fact, broke a silence on issues of race and racism. Since then, the district has started to call on their collective commitment to SEL to enter into courageous and necessary conversations — to really listen to each other talk about their own experiences and perspectives. While they haven't made any lasting changes yet, they have begun the challenging work of unpacking the inequities baked into their system. I admire the district staff for the courageous way they are leaning into SEL as a tool for adults to confront the proverbial “elephant in the room” that is systemic racism in education.

This contrast between a moment of silence and systems of silence urged me to reflect on the different ways silence can engage and disengage us. Silence can be respectful and contemplative. Silence can be afraid. Silence can be spiteful or even deafening. When people in power stay silent, they dismiss and inhibit the kind of meaningful conversation that leads to growth. In contrast, silence can provide space for looking inward to better understand our emotions, reflect on our behavior, and examine the impact we have on others. The absence of noise allows us to hit pause on external inputs and go within ourselves to listen. Understanding our own thoughts and feelings precedes individual as well as collective change. And sometimes silence is needed for constructive dialogue to begin.

**MARA SCHANFIELD** SERVES AS AN EDUCATION CONSULTANT FOR A NATIONAL NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION. SHE RESIDES IN ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA.



# “Someday, God will help us make sense of the mess, I thought. Yes. Everything was going to be all right.”

## Akinyi Williams, Ed.M.'16

FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

HOPE FOR THE CHILD

KISUMU, KENYA

A brisk breeze blustered into the back seat as I cranked the mechanical window down vociferously. The two-day journey I had just concluded from Minnesota to Kenya's Kisumu International Airport was forgotten. My father, in the front seat, muttered something about heavy rains and the crop that was bound to be bountiful this year. Children splashed in puddles outside the Nyawita slums we were driving past on our left. The vaguely visible train tracks that ran along the road, in disrepair, were the only vestige of a seemingly prosperous past. Piles of garbage were strewn around from the slum dwellers that had nowhere to dispose of their waste.

“The train has not come to Kisumu for a long time,” my father lamented, slightly discomfited. One of the children peeled away, pulled down his tattered shorts, and squatted to relieve himself on the tracks. He swiftly pulled them up and scuttled along to catch up to the rest who were keen to get away from their smelly friend; they disappeared into the shanties. Down the road, men were washing their bodaboda taxis in a large, muddy pool, ridding their scooters of the thick grime. Across them were cattle, necks stooped low, lapping while littering as their herder whistled, frustrated, lashing their backs with a stick, hustling

Harvard Ed.

the straying heifers to rejoin the flock.

Soon, a uniformed guard pulled open the gates at Arise N Shine Community Academy. We were greeted by second graders, singing and dancing. The sun beat down on the backs of the dancers, jiggling in a trance, sweat streaming down their brows, oblivious of the dust provoked by their pounding feet. Onlookers clapped, cheering them on. Tears flowed as I hugged the kids, teachers, staff, and Mama, sitting under a shady neem tree.

Fourteen years ago, with seven children, we turned one of Mama's bedrooms into a daycare center. Today we run two schools in Kisumu town and in Nyamila Rural Township, an hour away. We have graduated 3,000 students, pre-K to fourth grade, 300 annually. They were largely from the surrounding slums. Thanks to donations from Hope for the Child (HFTC), a Minnesota-based nonprofit I established in 2007, tuition was largely free. HFTC's mission was simple: provide access to quality education to marginalized children to alleviate poverty and promote advocacy. We remove barriers to access by feeding them, and providing basic health and sanitation, such as vaccines, running water, and toilets, to prevent disease spread. Secondly, we promote safety and wellness. Two teachers are sponsored annually to train in early childhood development. We were impacting lives. I was humbled.

This was October 2019, before COVID-19. Paltry government assistance after schools shut down in March was sobering. Minnesota, where I lived, had already switched to distance learning and I was a kindergarten teacher to my 5-year-old at home. In Kenya, however, there is no infrastructure to effectively support this or any type of distance learning for the masses. Teachers lamented that government radio and television programs undermined feedback and exchange, critical rudiments for learning. Television needs electricity. Learning packets developed by the Ministry of Education were cost-prohibitive to print and disseminate. Teachers feared for their lives in the face of police brutality during the draconian lockdown and dreaded

Photograph by Caroline Yang





contracting the virus doing outreach programs.

And so we prioritized nutrition, then safety and wellness, and learning last. Basics such as maize, beans, avocados, or yams procured from the school farm incentivized caregivers to pick up free rations and learning packets at the school, three times a week; a bonus if they brought the child in. Completed packets were returned in exchange for new material and replenished rations. Unfortunately, we could not track the children who had been sent away by their caregivers to rural homes to live with surviving grandparents and alleviate hardship — at least until September, when schools would reopen.

Hopes turned dire when the Ministry of Education announced in early July that schools would remain closed until January 2021 and all students would be held back to restart their current grade.

Education was abandoned.

Any future investment plans in infrastructure, cell phone towers, electricity, and subsidized data packages did nothing to assuage the burden of delivering the education and nutrition desperately needed today. This class war meant winners would be those in the upper echelons of the economic pyramid or persons with pure grit to prioritize learning for their children.

Mama Kambua, a 23-year-old single mother of four, all under the age of seven, lives in Nyawita. With schools closed, the lockdown, and being laid off, feeding the kids daily was a struggle she accomplished by any means necessary. Pregnant at age 15, she dropped out of school herself. She did not know where her kids were most of the time and had no time to pick up packages. She felt alone, overwhelmed, and out of options. Wiping her sweaty, tear-stained face with shaky fingers, she sank into a chair and whispered a prayer for her children's safety, wherever they were. She will send them to grandmother's in the morning.

Mama Otenga is a 32-year-old. Her husband, a manager at a marketing firm, makes enough for her to stay home in a nicer side of town. For an additional fee to the school, she streams

classes online for their kindergartner and second grader. She has even hired help to do household chores and private tutoring while she ran errands.

The impact of the virus for these two families is distinctly different.

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The window purred as it slithered down my car door, letting an autumn breeze in, its chilly feel portending the Minnesota winter. The road wound into a beautiful backdrop of trees, rich, chestnut trunks with deep, rustic-red leaves that seemed ablaze at the tops, burning orange and yellow hues. I turned into my driveway and stopped the car. The garage door slowly opened, revealing no fanfare — no teachers, no drummers nor dancers, and Mama was not sitting under the crabapple tree in front of my house. The freshly mowed grass in the serene suburb that I called home looked pristine. A longing to do more for Kenya overwhelmed me, leaving a deep hole in my chest.

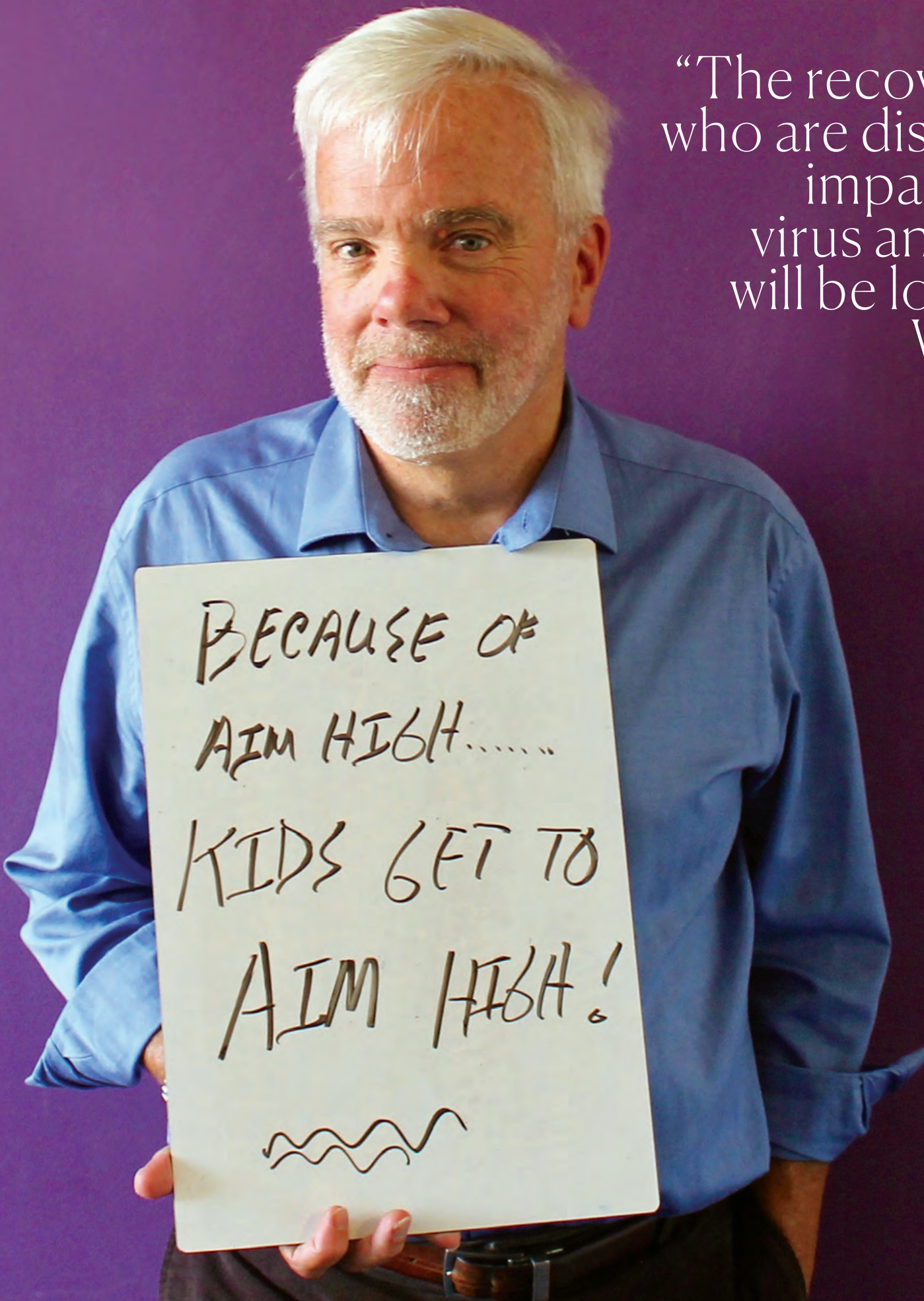
Would donors continue to support a closed school? What about the dropouts? Those children sent out by reckless caregivers to earn a wage or sell moonshine, the ones who endure unchecked abusers or pedophilia; the disenfranchised boys driven to the streets where they smoke glue to escape. What about their pangs of insatiable hunger?

Slumped over the steering wheel, I said a prayer and wept — for a while. I pondered ways to keep everyone on payroll. Layoffs would cause hardship. Perhaps the staff could be farmhands, teachers could be evangelists, safely spreading COVID-19 education with Mama a missionary and the school an altruistic sanctuary for the whole neighborhood.

Irresolute, I felt a quiet knowing. Someday, God will help us make sense of the mess, I thought, pulling into my garage. Yes. Everything was going to be all right.

**AKINYI WILLIAMS, ED.M.'16.** FOUNDED HOPE FOR THE CHILD TO ALLEVIATE POVERTY AND PROMOTE ADVOCACY BY PROVIDING EDUCATION ACCESS TO POOR CHILDREN. STARTING IN HER HOME COUNTRY, KENYA. SHE CURRENTLY LIVES IN MINNESOTA AND TRAVELS FREQUENTLY TO KENYA TO SUPPORT THE TWO SCHOOLS.

COURTESY OF AIM HIGH



“The recovery for students who are disproportionately impacted by both the virus and racial injustice will be long and arduous. We are not going anywhere.”

**Alec Lee, Ed.M.'85**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

AIM HIGH

SAN FRANCISCO

Aim High opened its doors in June 1986, one year after I graduated from the Ed School. Many of my memories of the early years of Aim High are hazy, but I vividly remember the first day. I stood on the sidewalk outside our inaugural school campus in San Francisco early in the morning. There was plenty of excitement and energy but also a high degree of nervousness and uncertainty. Would the kids show up? Would our teachers step up? Would the Morning Circle work? Would our curriculum and activities resonate for kids? The answers to all of those questions turned out, much to my delight, to be yes. Over the ensuing years, Aim High's free summer



academic and enrichment program has grown to serve more than 2,300 low-income, first-generation Bay Area middle school students annually across 18 campuses.

Thirty-four years later, on June 22, 2020, standing in my kitchen, I felt that familiar anticipation as our team launched our first-ever virtual learning program, Aim High at Home (AH@H). Just two months earlier, in April, we announced to our families that Aim High could not safely operate our traditional, in-person summer program as planned in 2020. In the absence of physical spaces for us to gather, we made our first pivot.

As I have said often during the past four months: Our mission, goals, and values remained exactly the same. Each summer, Aim High offers middle school students five weeks of rigorous academic classes, outdoor education, enrichment opportunities, social/emotional skill building, and college/career exploration to prepare them for the upcoming school year and the eventual transitions to high school and college. What changed this summer was our delivery.

There was never a question about staying the course and stepping up to meet the needs of students and families during this fragile moment. But, we knew that we could not simply take our traditional model and stuff it into a Zoom call. We had to reimagine.

Our first step was to conduct a needs assessment of our students and families. What we heard: community and engagement matters most. From there, we created a set of principles to guide our work. One example: See a bigger world, starting with our book

club curriculum, which was designed to help students see beyond the walls of their homes by reading and analyzing excerpts from several works including Erika Sanchez's *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*.

Our work this summer became more critical and urgent after the brutal murder of George Floyd.

Our pre-program week of professional development with 125 educators focused on preparing our staff to respond to this moment. As a result, when AH@H began, all of our teachers were ready to offer students a safe space to process their pain, anger, grief, fear, and frustration. As a white man, my only job during these conversations was/is to listen and learn from our communities of color. We recommitted ourselves to hearing, seeing, and honoring our Black students, their history, and their lived experiences.

After months of sheltering in place amidst the heaviness of this extraordinary moment, middle school students missed their friends and teachers, and our families told us how important it was to reengage with Aim High. And so, the heart of our model was the imperative to build community and connection, even while physically apart. Students received opportunities to process their thoughts and feelings in our Issues & Choices social/emotional youth development course. They also participated in project-based learning — STEAM challenges and book club — to regain lost academic ground and thrive when school begins again.

In addition to academics, we created video-on-demand activities for

easy viewing and access, like coding, snack-making, and outdoor adventures, and many live activities in the afternoons, thanks to some incredible partnerships with the American Conservatory Theater, Women's Audio Mission, and Circus Center, among others. At the end of one of the live yoga classes, the teacher asked students to describe how they were feeling in the Zoom chat box. One student wrote, "I am grateful that I have people who love me."

On July 24, our students celebrated the last day of AH@H and our 300 ninth-graders graduated from the program. The early returns are in: It worked! Every day, kids saw teachers they knew and loved. Every day, they were learning with trusted peers and friends. And every day, they had fun. That's what matters most in 2020. There was another bonus, too. Our 125 summer faculty are returning to their schools across the Bay Area equipped with a toolbox to strengthen their virtual teaching skills.

We learned a ton this summer and we'll take these learnings forward as we look to stretch and deepen our impact in 2021 and beyond. This fall, our top priority is to imagine and implement "Beyond Aim High" to support our students as they return to virtual school and learning. One of our long-time Aim High educators and alumna, Michelle, said: "I just want to embrace all of my students and let them know that there is Aim High love that's going towards them, there is hope that's going towards them. I want students and families and educators to dream big — dream vividly, dream in color, and be ready to take this world by storm."

I am rock-solid certain that innovative, nurturing summer learning will matter more than ever in 2021. The recovery for students who are disproportionately impacted by both the virus and racial injustice will be long and arduous. We are not going anywhere.

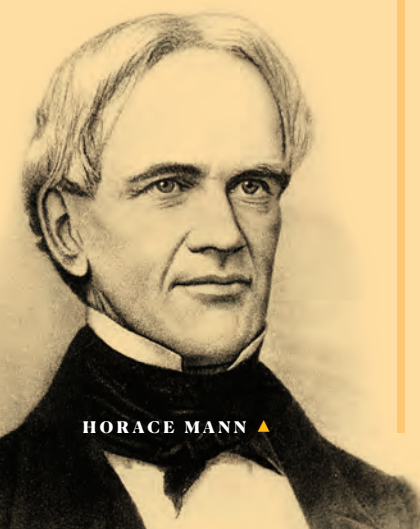
**ALEC LEE** WAS A HIGH SCHOOL HISTORY TEACHER BEFORE STARTING AIM HIGH. HIS SON, KELLY (SEE PAGE 57), A HIGH SCHOOL HUMANITIES TEACHER IN CALIFORNIA, ENROLLED AS A MASTER'S STUDENT AT THE ED SCHOOL THIS FALL.

# This Is Not Our First Pivot (It Won't Be Our Last)

Throughout the history of education in the United States, we've seen trends and fads (like open classrooms in the 1970s) and areas in which we seem to flip back and forth (such as phonics in reading instruction), but there have also been some key pivots that have had an impact, both massive and subtle, on how we think, how we teach, and how we learn. Sometimes these pivots have been for the better, sometimes not. Here are just a few.

■ **1800s**  
Remember *Little House on the Prairie*, with all of the students from Walnut Grove learning together in one room with one teacher? That changed for the most part in the mid-1800s when reformers like Horace Mann pushed for **age-graded schooling**, where students progressed with their grade based on their age, regardless of aptitude. It's a system we still follow in most public schools today.

■ **1857**  
**Historically black colleges and universities** were created with the intention of primarily serving the Black community. Most of these institutions were founded in the years after the American Civil War, but a few were established prior, including the first, Cheyney University of Pennsylvania in 1837, followed by Lincoln University, also in Pennsylvania, in 1854.



HORACE MANN ▲

■ **1859**  
By the mid-1800s, widespread education reforms led to an emerging public school system (called **Common Schools**) and professional training institutions for teachers (called **Normal Schools**). In 1839, the first normal school opened in Lexington, Massachusetts, in an effort to produce high-quality, standardized methods for teaching. Prior, the teaching profession was primarily male, but as the Industrial Revolution lured young men to higher paying jobs, women became a new source of labor for schools. Today, women make up the majority of the public school teaching profession — about 76%.

■ **1852**  
In 1852, Massachusetts began requiring that children between the ages of 8 and 14 attend school for at least 12 weeks. Violating the Act Concerning the Attendance of Children at School resulted in a fine of \$20. By 1918, every other state had passed similar **compulsory attendance** legislation.

■ **1857**  
The first **teachers union**, the National Education Association, was founded in 1857 in Philadelphia and focused on raising teacher salaries, child labor laws, and retirement benefits.

■ **1948**  
**The Universal Declaration**, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948, was the first time that countries agreed on a comprehensive statement of inalienable human rights, including in article 26 the right to be educated, not just "schooled."

■ **1954**  
**Brown v. Board of Education** in 1954, considered one of the greatest Supreme Court decisions of the 20th century, stated that the racial segregation of children in public schools violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The ruling also laid



▲ LINDA CAROL BROWN

the foundation for the passage in 1975 of the federal **Education for All Handicapped Children Act** (now called the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act**), which required access to a free, appropriate public education for all children with disabilities. Before 1975, about 1 million American children with disabilities were receiving no education from the public school system.

■ **1957**  
The Soviet Union's history-making launch of the satellite Sputnik sparked a **revolution in scientific education** as the United States tried to regain technological ground it felt it had lost to its rival. This included pouring billions of dollars into the National Defense Education Act in 1958. The law dramatically increased federal funding in the areas of science, math, and modern foreign languages, and offered low-interest loans to college students.

■ **1972**  
The passage of **Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972** prohibits federally funded educational institutions from discriminating against students or employees based on sex, including in sports. Prior, athletic scholarships for women were rare, pregnant female teachers weren't legally protected, and sexual harassment was easily dismissed.

■ **1985**  
**A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform** was an 85-page report put out by the U.S. National Commission on Excellence in Education. It spoke of failing schools and American students being outperformed by their international counterparts. It also created a narrative of declining educational standards that became an entrenched part of the debate over schooling in the United States for decades to follow. As one NPR guest noted during a segment on the report's 35th anniversary, *A Nation at Risk* marked the beginning of a "moment of angst" about the state of schools in our nation.

■ **Ongoing: Tech**  
**Technology** has had a huge impact on education. It's impossible to capture all of the pivots, but once some of these inventions were used in school, learning and teaching were forever changed: Wooden paddles with printed lessons called Horn-Books during the Colonial days, chalkboard (1890), pencil (1900), overhead projector (1930), headphones (1950), photocopier (1959), handheld calculators (1972), the computer (97% of classrooms had one or more computers by 2009), and Internet access (93% of class computers had Internet access by 2009).



**We don't have to replace every single hour, particularly when we're giving one-on-one attention to our kids. It's really engaged time in academic learning that's creating the learning, not necessarily the number of academic minutes in a school day."**

**Jennifer McCombs**

SENIOR POLICY RESEARCHER, THE RAND CORPORATION, IN A HARVARD EDCAST ON LESSONS LEARNED FROM SUMMER LEARNING LOSS THAT CAN BE APPLIED DURING VIRTUAL LEARNING





# #hgsewfh

IN BETWEEN HELPING KIDS WITH ONLINE HOMEWORK AND TEACHING THEIR OWN VIRTUAL CLASSES AT THE ED SCHOOL, HALF A DOZEN FACULTY MEMBERS POSED FOR “PORCH-RAITS” OUTSIDE THE PLACE THEY’VE CALLED THEIR OFFICE SINCE MARCH: THEIR HOMES

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JASON GROW

It was a few weeks after this pandemic took hold. Jason Grow, a photographer whose work has appeared in *Ed.* several times over the past few years, was feeling restless. Spring assignments had been canceled. The chance of getting new jobs, at least for the short term, was pretty slim. He was, as he says “stuck in COVID limbo.” But he had a plan. He knew that many families in the Cape Ann community on the north shore of Massachusetts where he lives were out of work and needed help. He also knew that many people were also feeling restless after being cooped up inside. So Grow, along with three other local photographers, started a family “porch-rai” project to benefit a local food pantry. Families gathered on their porches and stoops, in adirondack chairs and front yards, while the photographers stood a safe distance away on sidewalks and walkways, cameras in hand. Initially they thought they might get 50 or so families, but by the time they finished, they had photographed 250 families and organizations and raised about \$30,000.

As we were thinking about this issue of *Ed.*, we knew it would be fun to do something similar — a series of porch-raits showing faculty members at home with their families. We gave Grow a list of six facul-

ty members. We wanted a mix of people and family types, and ended up with one faculty member who has been affiliated with the Ed School for more than four decades (Pamela Mason), two who joined the community in the last few years (Junlei Li and Peter Blair), and another who has been here for about a dozen (Mandy Savitz-Romer). We also got a two-for-one porch-rai with one of our faculty couples (Heather Hill and Jon Star).

Incredibly, Grow shot all of the photos in one day in early September, just as the virtual fall semester was kicking off at Harvard, racing from two locations in Boston to two in Arlington, then back again to Boston. One of the upsides of having most K-12 schools also virtual (or partly virtual) is that the younger children of faculty members were able to take part in the photo shoots. (Pamela Mason’s adult children had, unfortunately, just left Boston.) We ended up with a great snapshot of another side of our faculty we rarely see, wearing jeans and shorts and standing in driveways with kids nearby.

This, of course, spurred another idea: Have alumni submit their own porch-raits. Nearly 100 did. You can find them online: [gse.harvard.edu/ed](https://gse.harvard.edu/ed).



**Peter Blair**

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR | EAST BOSTON

“At first working from home felt unfamiliar. A few weeks in, I mastered the art of switching between the dining room and living room throughout the course of the day to create variety in my workspace. Working from home I grew to enjoy long walks in the park and time of stillness and reflection in the Boston Harbor.”





LI (FAR RIGHT) AND HIS FAMILY (FROM LEFT): AGGIE, ANNIE, AND KAREN

**Junlei Li**

SENIOR LECTURER | ARLINGTON, MASS.

“Working from home has been a daily reminder to reach out and connect with people intentionally, even if we cannot intuitively reach out and connect in person.”



**Pamela Mason, M.A.T.'70, Ed.D.'75**

DIRECTOR, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY PROGRAM; SENIOR LECTURER | SOUTH END, BOSTON

“As a creature of habit, working from home has made me rethink what boundaries are necessary, nice, and just plain ridiculous. I still get dressed for work but more casually. I still separate my work emails from my personal emails. I still try not to work on Saturdays. Making time for family and friends remotely has been a priority for me. Just between us, I do miss Larsen Hall and Appian Way. HGSE is an important community to me.”





SAVITZ-ROMER (BOTTOM LEFT) WITH HER FAMILY (FROM TOP LEFT): RUBY, SYDNEY, LILLY, AND TOBY, ED.M.'01

**Mandy Savitz-Romer**

DIRECTOR, PREVENTION SCIENCE AND PRACTICE PROGRAM; SENIOR LECTURER | ROSLINDALE, BOSTON

“My kids attend the Boston Public Schools, which are largely remote. As a result, I have gained three new work colleagues and we are together all day, every day. An unexpected benefit has been the ability to eavesdrop on my kids’ classes and witnessing up close the adaptability and creativity of Boston’s teachers and students. Don’t get me wrong, my new colleagues are a major distraction and I miss my real work colleagues A LOT. However, working alongside them has given me a wider window into how K-12 is adapting to new challenges brought on by the pandemic.”



THE STAR/HILL/STARHILL FAMILY (FROM LEFT): NORA, JON (HUGGING SETH), NATHAN, AND HEATHER

**Jon Star, Ed.M.'93. and Heather Hill**

PROFESSORS | ARLINGTON, MASS.

“We are lucky to have plenty of space in our home, kids who (mostly) get along, schools and teachers that stepped up, and understanding colleagues. All in all, not so bad. Jon did have to re-install ethernet cables, however. And when you’re trying to concentrate on work but hear voices in your head, you’ve got to remember that it’s just the four other people in your family on Zoom calls.”



“It is my hope that the humanization of students, their families, and their communities will be more than a ‘best practice’ and seen as common knowledge.”

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**Kwame Adams,  
Ed.M.'20**

PROGRAM MANAGER

OFFICE OF SCHOOL  
TRANSFORMATION, BOSTON  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

BOSTON

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Since graduating Wesleyan University in 2014, I have taught math within the Boston Public School system. Teaching math has been rewarding, not only because of the growth I have seen students achieve, but because of the ways I was able to shift how families saw math curriculum. What does it mean to have students be able to identify with a course they were often labeled a failure in? How do you get families engaged in the classroom to the point where they will engage beyond parent-teacher conferences? How do you make people feel affirmed and valued in your classroom? These are questions I grappled with on a daily basis. I wanted to ensure my students had the mathematical literacy that would enable them to achieve social mobility.

During my time at HGSE, I thought of the ways in which my practice

could extend beyond the classroom and took courses that would further develop my leadership and strategic planning skills.

As I am beginning my new chapter as a member of central office staff, I not only keep those same questions in mind but push leaders to think of them as well. We are in the midst of a pandemic and there are global protests to highlight the ways in which Black lives matter; it is important for leaders to ensure their actions match their words. When you identify as an anti-racist but feel uncomfortable talking about race, how many missed opportunities to build trusting relationships with families and community members go unexplored? How can you identify as anti-racist but feel as though your students are not progressing because they do not like school and no one in their home holds them accountable, rather than critically reflecting on your classroom practices? What are some meaningful ways you are engaging families in your virtual classroom? Human interaction has changed in this climate, and it is important for respect, care, and vulnerability to still be expressed. Families were struggling before the pandemic and “a new normal” has not been established. As a Black man, it is my hope that the humanization of students, their families, and their communities will be more than a “best practice” and seen as common knowledge as we begin to rebuild and reshape our society post-COVID.

Though I have shifted from classroom educator to managerial work, I am still invested in making sure educators see students as humans first, students second. Though students are in that building or video window for hours daily, that is not the most important part of their identities. You cannot safely explore the identities of others until you explore your own through critical reflection. This work is challenging for a number of reasons, considering the lack of human interaction, or the ways in which Google Hangouts, Zoom, and other apps do not allow for a transfer of energy between people. The ways in which we can hold people has shifted also, but we must remember that meaningful human engagement will





look the same virtually or in person.

One of the tasks I do to challenge perceived power is I push educators to think of a student or family they had during the school year that they would label difficult. Then I ask them to think of the additional challenges that come with learning virtually. Would your bond be stronger or weaker given the lack of physical space? Most reflect and recognize that a lot of their relationships would falter and attendance would be low. Other teachers have built such strong relationships that family members say hi or check in with them during class meetings. The reasons why their relationships flourish is because of their consistency, high expectations, and desire to get to know students lived experience beyond the schoolhouse.

Educators and school leaders must recognize the ways in which families offer value to school climate and culture. They must recognize the ways in which they uphold and combat racist and/or white supremacist ideologies. If a teacher asks a student during a video call, "Why is your house so loud?" they are showing bias. They are trying to exude power in a space that is not their classroom. A number of students do not have a quiet place in their home, and quite frankly, some of my colleagues lack those spaces also but that does not lessen the quality of their work. It also does not permit anyone to question the conditions they are working under if they do not have an immediate solution to the problem. Rather than making a student feel ashamed of their home environment, educators should think of ways to gauge the conditions students are working under and adjust. We must also continue to push educators to understand how their need for power is rooted in bias, and how these power dynamics do not lead to establishing trust, expressing vulnerability and high expectations, or allowing students and families to have input on curriculum. These power dynamics seek to keep the teacher in control.

**KWAME ADAMS** CURRENTLY WORKS IN SUPPORTING SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION EFFORTS IN BOSTON TO ENSURE THAT STUDENTS HAVE ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATORS AND AFFIRMING CURRICULUM.

# "I let the 'academics' go in favor of 'play.' Instantly our days became more relaxed."

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## Jill Anderson

HOST, HARVARD EDCAST

HARVARD GRADUATE  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

CAMBRIDGE

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It's 9:06 a.m. My 5-year-old sits across from me in the kitchen, stuffing dry Cheerios in her mouth, twirling her finger in a cup of milk without a care in the world, especially that my morning staff meeting starts in less than 24 minutes.

"Let's plaaaaaayyyyyy," she yells.

"I have to work. I have a meeting," I say, deadpan.

"Arrrrggghhhhhhh," she groans, disappointed.

I'm running late already, even though all I have to do is click a button now. I catch my breath, thinking, "Someday you'll look back on this and remember it as a special time." I've said those words to myself a lot over the past five months. FIVE MONTHS!

Most days I've lost track of how much time has really passed since the pandemic quarantined my daughter and me at home. Actually, I stopped counting around week 14, which surpassed the most time we'd ever spent together during maternity leave. Because my partner is considered an essential employee who still reports to the office every day, I'm now stay-at-

Photograph by **Thad Merritt**





home/full-time-working mother trying to manage both.

When the quarantine initially began, I imagined the 20+ years of education reporting under my belt meant I had everything under control. But truthfully, I didn't really know how to pivot. Luckily, her prekindergarten emailed reminding us of the importance of routine and sticking to their schedule. I immediately went to action, creating a schedule to mimic the preschool day with circle time, literacy, free play, lunch. Right away it became clear that I was in over my head with no clue what I was doing. I didn't know the manners song, or the days-of-the-week song, or the months-of-the-year song, or the rules, let alone how to introduce a concept word.

"That's not how Ms. Rose does it," my daughter refrained, as I once again asked her to tell me how to do X.

Beyond exposing how little I knew about teaching my own child, or early childhood, I realized there was a lot I didn't know about my daughter's daily life too, like the beloved gray plush owl — "Ollie" — their class mascot.

By week 4, we were both miserable. "You make learning not fun," she wailed. Inside I crumbled.

Meanwhile, when I wasn't attempting "teacher," just 10 steps away in my home office, I spoke with education experts for work, churning their knowledge into articles offering guidance to families or for the Har-

vard EdCast, the HGSE podcast I have hosted since 2018.

During a conversation with Senior Lecturer Junlei Li about how parents adjust to life at home with children, I nervously revealed how poorly things were going in my home, particularly my daughter's declaration that I ruined learning.

Li seemed concerned, pausing and staring intently at me through the Zoom screen. Then, with his soft-spoken voice, he talked about the importance of play and enjoying being with each other. "Instead of trying to be everything at all times, think about the small, even brief, kind of quality moments of play we can have with our children," he advised.

Still, I stuck with the preschool schedule, determined that my daughter wouldn't regress. A week later, after another failed circle time and frustrations mounting along with my guilt of relying too much on the screen, I thought about what Li said. By now the Usable Knowledge article featuring Li about how China's families coped with coronavirus had published, and I laid awake wondering why I wasn't following his simple recommendations.

Then the next day, I threw the preschool schedule away. I started over. I altered the work schedule, dedicating midday hours to my daughter (working earlier and later hours). I let the "academics" go in favor of "play."

Instantly our days became more relaxed. We painted, listened to music, read stories, did crafts, took nature walks, did imaginary play. Once I saw learning less as a checklist and more than her remembering the months or days or numbers, we settled into a space and routine that was workable. Of course, workable but still challenging because 5-year-olds are well, 5-year-olds, and master interrupters.

She crashed nearly every remaining episode of the EdCast last season, no matter how hard I tried to arrange time around taping them, or forewarned her that I had an interview and needed privacy. She ran across my Zoom meetings too many times, giggling, in various stages of dress/undress, or erupted into the loudest singing just when I hit the "unmute" button to respond.

Life moves at a different pace now. Work is on and off, woven in through the fabric of motherhood. Some days I stay up extra late to finish writing after she's gone to bed. Some days I go to bed with the laptop on my nightstand so I can start work early without going downstairs into the office and risking waking my daughter up.

Some days I comfort myself thinking she probably won't remember any of this (because how much does anyone really remember from age 5?). Then, other days I marvel at all the things we've done together: constructed mermaid tails and trees from paper towel rolls, painted a ton, gone on scavenger hunts, listened to The Beatles and Hamilton, made Zucchini bread and scallion pancakes, read The Velveteen Rabbit, played silly games where dragons chase us around the block, made paper cameras and taken pics in the backyard, planted wildflowers from seed and watched them grow. The list goes on and on.

As a full-time working mother, there is no other way I would have this much time with my young daughter. It's bittersweet. So even though I struggle to find balance between these competing worlds, most days I hope we can both look back on this and remember it as a special time. I will.

JILL ANDERSON IS THE HOST OF THE HARVARD EDCAST AND A SENIOR WRITER IN THE ED SCHOOL'S COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE.

# Taking a Pivot Inventory (But Who's Counting?)

# 74

The percent of the 100 largest school districts choosing remote learning only as their back-to-school instructional model, affecting more than 9 million students.

(EDUCATION WEEK, AS OF SEPTEMBER 23)



# 2,475

Number of applications submitted this summer when the school opened up a second round of admissions for our master's program.

# 340

The number of Harvard freshmen who deferred their enrollment to next year, representing more than 20% of the freshman class. Between 80 and 110 students take a gap year under typical circumstances.

(HARVARD CRIMSON)



# 3,279,535



# 85

Number of new courses developed at the Ed School this summer, many about real issues facing the education profession today, including COVID and in the context of continuing anti-Black racism.

# 619,028

Number of gallons of hand sanitizer ordered for districts by the state of Texas for back-to-school.

(TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY)



The number of disposable and reusable face masks purchased by the state of South Carolina to distribute to schools. (An additional 87,000 face shields were also ordered.)

(SC DOE WEBSITE)

# 321,000

The number of iPads the country's largest school district, New York City, bought and distributed to students when schools went virtual last March.

(CHALKBEAT NEW YORK)



# 346,000,000

Number of school children worldwide who missed out on school meals after COVID shut down schools in the spring.

(UNESCO)

**“With COVID-19 exacerbating existing inequities in our country, and with the heightened visibility of state-sanctioned anti-Black violence in this moment, it is more important than ever for us not to return to business as usual and to instead take a definitive stand against the injustices of the status quo. This is a moment for us to invest fully in remaking schools as spaces for community, healing, and liberation.”**

**Lecturer Gretchen Brion-Meisels, Ed.M.'11, Ed.D.'13; Jessica Fei, Ed.M.'15, Ed.D.'19; and Deepa Vasudevan, Ed.M.'15, Ed.D.'19**

AUTHORS, AT OUR BEST: YOUTH-ADULT RELATIONSHIPS IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME SETTINGS, IN A USABLE KNOWLEDGE STORY



“The first thing I did was set up my study area to resemble a Harvard classroom with a little bit of a personal touch!”

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**Amreen Poonawala**

CURRENT STUDENT

TECHNOLOGY, INNOVATION,  
AND EDUCATION PROGRAM

TORONTO

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*“We live in a time of rapid change — change that is often unpredictable and not always positive. My experience with development, as an observer and a practitioner, has led me to the conclusion that the best way to manage change, whether positive or negative, is to prepare for it and that there is no greater form of preparation for change than investments in education.”*

This quote by His Highness The Aga Khan from 2003 is still relevant 17 years later. This pandemic has drastically changed our lives. From remotely facilitating workshops with new clients to wearing a mask every time I leave my home in Toronto, this pandemic has made me realize the many things we take for granted, including community gatherings, our health, and education.

When the various schools at Harvard announced that classes would be delivered online, I was initially shocked. I was confused. I was upset. “How am I going to make the most of my Harvard experience?” I asked myself. “Should I defer or should I continue? Is it worth it?”

After days of contemplating, speaking with my parents and mentors, and listening to words of inspiration from my role models, I took a step back and reflected on the reality. More than 1.2 billion students were impacted due to school closures. Teachers and school boards have faced multiple challenges delivering quality education remotely. I felt grateful to be part of an academic institution that is



pushing the frontiers of education in research and innovation to combat the inequalities and hardships that COVID-19 has surfaced. Looking at the silver lining, I decided to pursue this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to educate myself in an ecosystem of the highest quality and to turn this crisis into an opportunity. These are the three ways through which I am “pivoting to the new”:

### 1. Harvard@Home

The first thing I did was set up my study area to resemble a Harvard classroom with a little bit of a personal touch! Whether it is drinking tea in my HGSE mug or purchasing “study from home” essentials from Amazon, I felt it was important to change my study space to look and feel like Appian Way. One advice that I was given was that going to Harvard is like drinking from a firehose. There are a tremendous number of events and opportunities to be a part of; staying organized and focused is key. I decided to use a flipchart and some sticky notes to create a Kanban board to stay on track with my academic and extracurricular tasks and deadlines. Another unique aspect of remote learning is the ability to study from anywhere on this globe. For me, it means being able to tune into lectures and do my work from the beautiful Aga Khan Museum across the street. While I may not be walking from one HGSE building

to another, I hope to walk from one exhibit to another to get an artistic refresher! Who knew that a museum could serve multiple purposes?

### 2. Global Knowledge Bridges

A couple of years ago, I co-led an initiative called the Time and Knowledge Nazrana (TKN) in Canada. TKN is a global framework that provides members of the Ismaili community (a subset of Shia Islam) a platform to share their expertise and best practices to improve the quality of life of individuals across the world. Because of this pandemic, even though the world is physically distant, we are much closer together. I wanted to leverage the learnings from TKN to build global knowledge bridges and create partnerships for impact. From Tokyo to Toronto, Badakhshan to Boston, I have been engaging in insightful conversations with Harvard alumni and professionals to understand how they are transforming their educational practices and how I can contribute. Since most interactions are through video, my cohort and I have also been virtually bonding. It is truly unique to have a global community of friends who are resilient, passionate, and “learning to change the world.”

### 3. New Problems = New Opportunities

I recently learned that Sir Isaac Newton also had to study remotely due to

the Great Plague, a major pandemic during that era. During this time, he continued to work on his mathematical theories and flourished. Though it is not necessary for a pandemic to bring creativity and invention, stories like these are reminders that one can still make a positive impact, despite the circumstances. COVID-19 has not only created new problems but has also surfaced existing issues, such as lack of education equity. As an engineer and digital consultant, I am a huge advocate of leveraging technology to improve experiences. Through my coursework and research projects, I look forward to collaborating with classmates and faculty from Harvard. Already, I have participated in a virtual challenge by MIT where 1,800 participants from around the world came together to work on education, health, and economic solutions to combat current issues. My team and I developed a winning solution to analyze and improve student engagement and personalized learning through the use of machine learning. While at HGSE, I am excited to continue working on this idea.

This is not the year anyone had imagined. I had not imagined attending lectures from my room. I had not imagined talking to my professors over Zoom. I had not imagined doing an internship remotely. But I had also not imagined the acceleration of digital learning experiences and how the world would need educators and innovators now more than ever. This quote by Dean Long from the 2020 commencement ceremony provides both inspiration and a positive course of action for me. “As we have recently been shown, this is a time when old assumptions have been thrown out the door,” she said. “Let new ideas combine with evidence on what works and come together in new collaborations, breaking down traditional barriers because we’re all in this together.”

**AMREEN POONAWALA** RECENTLY FOUNDED ED2ENGAGE, AN EDUCATION ANALYTICS STARTUP THAT AIMS TO IMPROVE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT DURING REMOTE LEARNING. AT THE ED SCHOOL, SHE WILL BE FOCUSING ON STEM EDUCATION AND THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION AND WORK. SHE IS ALSO CO-LEADER OF THE HGSE INNOVATION AND DESIGN CLUB.

## The Pivot Glossary, 2020 Edition

**hy·brid** | \ˈhī-brəd |  
*adjective*

Hybrid became the buzzword late in the summer when school districts and colleges announced plans for the fall. Some schools went all virtual or fully in person, but many opted to combine online learning with face-to-face. Of note: blended learning isn’t technically the same. Blended uses online resources to supplement face-to-face instruction, while hybrid uses online resources to replace parts of students’ instruction that would otherwise be delivered in person.

**new nor·mal** | \nüˈnɔr-məl |  
*noun*

Applied broadly, the term “new normal” has always meant a previously unfamiliar situation that has become the standard. Following 9/11, for example, removing shoes and belts at airports became commonplace. Early last spring, with COVID, we all assumed that remote learning and canceled school plays would be temporary. Unfortunately, when school started again in the fall, much looked the same in districts across the country and our new normal became either masks and two kids to a lunch table or virtual classrooms and empty auditoriums.

**pan·dem·ic pod** | \panˈde-mikˈpɑd |  
*noun*

Pandemic pods, or small clusters of families who create their own in-home mini-classrooms, became popular this summer when families were faced with the uncertainty of the upcoming school year combined with childcare and safety needs. Some pods are formal, with hired tutors and set schedules; others are less formal, with parents rotating as teachers in the backyard.

**syn·chro·nous** | \ˈsɪŋ-krə-nəs |  
**asyn·chro·nous** | \ˈā-sɪŋ-krə-nəs |  
*adjective*

Synchronous is live, online or in-person learning, versus asynchronous, which is self-directed, assignments accessed any time through videos, readings, and pre-recorded lessons. In the spring, when schools had to pivot quickly with little prep time, most learning was asynchronous. With the summer to plan, more schools in the fall started offering a blend of both.

**zoom fa·tigue** | \ˈzūm fəˈtēg |  
*noun*

You know that worn out feeling you have after *yet another* online meeting or class session? Sure, you didn’t have to commute to school and you’re spending the day (again) in your pajamas, but this Zoom fatigue, as it’s known, is real. Experts say it’s mostly because we have to work harder to process nonverbal cues like eye contact and facial expressions. Plus, with everybody looking at you, there’s a lot of pressure to perform.



**If we make the most of the crisis by way of what we can learn, not just from our own practice, but around the world, and how we can do a better job of personalizing, customizing education to meet the needs of our students and families and use the tools and technology ... then we have a chance of making this a turning point.”**

**Professor Paul Reville**

IN A JULY HARVARD GAZETTE STORY ON EDUCATION DURING COVID

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“My students needed a more accessible learning experience far earlier than the onset of COVID-19. That I began to provide it for them began as a response to the pandemic, but cannot end with it.”

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**Melanie Shea, Ed.M.'20**

HISTORY TEACHER

MADISON PARK TECHNICAL  
VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL  
BOSTON

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“Trial by fire” was an understatement. Six months into student teaching and six weeks into my first U.S. history class, the mayor announced that Boston Public Schools would close to prevent the spread of COVID-19. It’s not how I would’ve chosen to complete my practicum, but I had still learned more than I could have ever imagined.

So when we divided into breakout groups at a staff meeting to share our favorite tip for remote learning, I proudly went first: relax submission standards for assignments and give students multiple ways to complete the work. I joked that I’d typically give students a hard time for texting me their answers, but at this point I’d take anything. How could I expect students to handle the onslaught of information and spend hours at a computer when I could hardly manage myself?

We have to be gentle in this stressful time, I reasoned, and prioritize engagement over procedure.

“Yeah, I do that all year,” my colleague Gina said. That wasn’t the answer I was expecting. I assumed I’d have to defend my stance against a small tide of naysayers warning me that I was lowering expectations, and yet here I found I was actually behind. As a special education teacher, Gina is constantly breaking down barriers to access for students, and this was no different. She challenged my reasoning for this being an emergency-only policy: Why did it matter how the work showed up if that wasn’t part of the assessment? Was I measuring their grasp of the content or was I assessing their ability to submit a Google Doc? In other words, she said, don’t set up barriers to completion and then be surprised when your grade book starts populating with zeroes. The kids are the ones who suffer for it.

I started taking stock of my shift to remote learning during COVID. What had I held on to and what purpose did it serve? What had I let go of and why was it so easy to lose? I realized that for the most part, I’d taken my original curriculum and just threw everything online, worksheets and all. And as the crisis continued and students struggled, I left behind formatting requirements, hard deadlines, and even



certain assignments. Obviously, they weren't as integral to learning as I'd originally thought if they could be discarded so easily.

Where previously I'd felt magnanimous about removing a barrier in the face of overwhelming circumstances, now I felt somewhat ashamed. I was grateful but a little embarrassed at having to be pushed to critically reflect on my curriculum and practice. As a teacher-education student at HGSE, it felt like I'd been doing that all year! Why had it taken a public health crisis for me to make this connection now that I was finally in the classroom?

In truth, I had found it much easier to take the path of least resistance, to adopt what was readily available instead of thoughtfully planning for the students in front of me. I'd sworn up and down, as early as my HGSE application and as recently as the night before this staff meeting, that I would do better. My purpose in returning to Boston Public Schools as a teacher was not to inflict the same dehumanizing experiences that I suffered in the very same district. In my stress and in my inexperience, I was desperately clinging to a default that wasn't justifiable in the first place.

This emergency required me to get down to the bone of what I felt was important for students to know and be able to do. The pandemic didn't cause the inequities I was seeing in my classroom; it merely exposed the fault lines that were already there. My students needed a more accessible learning experience far earlier than the onset of COVID-19. That I began to provide it for them began as a response to the pandemic, but cannot end with it.

As I head into my first year of teaching, I need to ask myself: is this healing or harmful? Am I starting at the roots with my students' needs in mind or am I leaning on last-minute adjustments to get through the year? With nothing but more uncertainty ahead and our children's lives at stake, I need to critically reflect on these questions from the start, continuously, and not just in the face of disaster.

MELANIE SHEA IS A DORCHESTER NATIVE AND GRADUATE OF BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS (BPS). SHE RETURNED TO BPS THIS FALL TO TEACH HISTORY.

## “The engagement that had been waning over the weeks leading into this project increased drastically when students were given agency over their learning.”

Robin Loewald,  
Ed.M.'19

NINTH-GRADE ENGLISH  
TEACHER

MELROSE HIGH SCHOOL

MELROSE, MASS.

Since March 13, the date that still remains on my classroom blackboard and the date when my ninth-grade English classes finished reading *Lord of the Flies*, there has been a huge shift in communication with students and their engagement in school. The relationships that I was able to build and foster over the course of the year with students no longer held the sway that they did when we saw each other every day. The struggle to get students to engage with me in any way, not to mention English class material, was consistent and constant. What I had relied upon, my relationships with the student who came into my classroom every day shouting “GOOD AFTERNOON MS. LOEWALD,” or the student who sent me English memes every other day, was gone and there was a need to pivot, to change the way I was interacting with students, knowing that the things that they needed from me had drastically changed as well.

I transitioned away from teaching them how to write an essay on *Lord of the Flies*, knowing that my students really needed me to think of them as whole people instead of only students, and knowing that I (as a person and not just a teacher) also, at the moment, did not want to grade 80 of those essays.

In collaboration with other ninth-grade English teachers, I switched the curriculum and my “ask” for engagement from students. I had students writing, reading, reflecting, and cre-

CONTINUED ON P. 63

Photograph by Jonathan Kozowyk

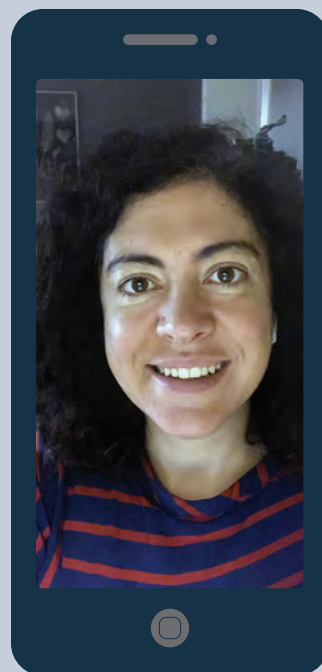




# What is one way you've pivoted since COVID started?

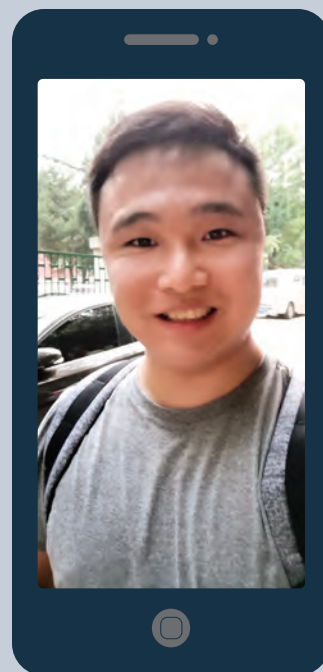
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As the fall semester was about to start, we had one question for our new students.



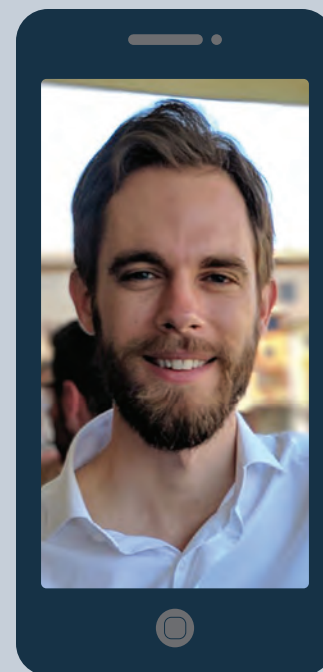
I have learned to be kind to myself.”

SIMA HADDADIN,  
ED.M. (TIE)



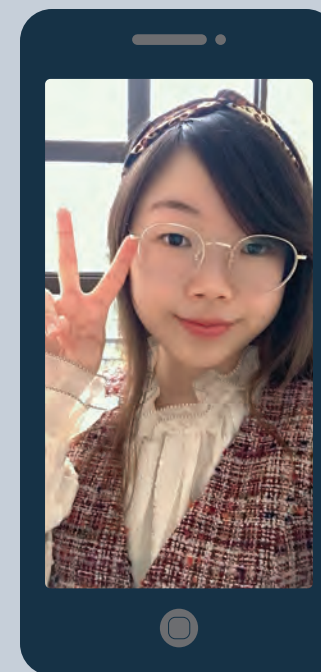
Because of COVID, instead of just me moving to Cambridge, my mother and I came to British Columbia where she cooks for me as I complete my online program in a rented apartment. Of course, I help her in the kitchen whenever I am free.”

LI (JERRY) XIE,  
ED.M. (L&L)



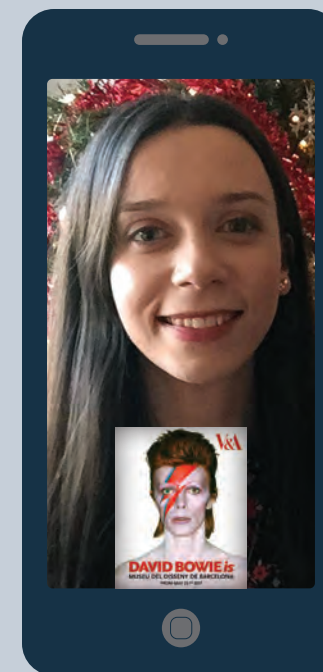
I taught myself virtual reality software development, and started designing learning experiences in immersive virtual environments.”

AARON APPLETON,  
ED.M. (TIE)



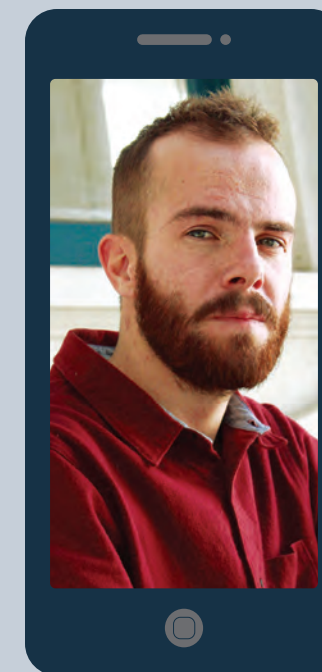
Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in January, I worked from home for four months as a chemistry teacher in China. I transferred all of the teaching and coaching work to a completely virtual environment through videoconferencing until everything went back to a new normal in May, when I began going to work in-person with a mask.”

ABBIE CHEN,  
ED.M. (L&T)



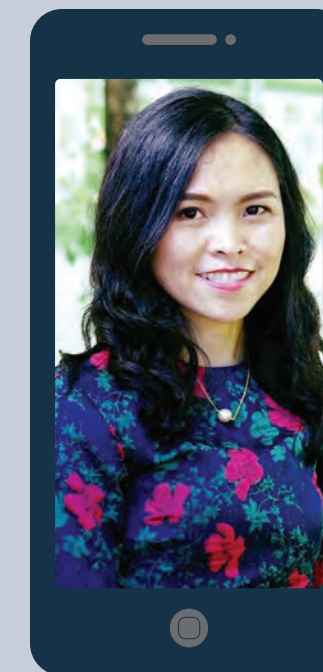
I essentially live in my bedroom now and I never imagined so many people would see my space! At least my new colleague, David, is pretty interesting and is always a talking point on Zoom calls!”

EMMA WARD,  
ED.M. (IEP)



I've poured more energy into building systems, routines, and curriculum that keeps all of my students engaged and part of the conversation.”

KELLY LEE,  
ED.M. (L&L)



Before the official memo to close our schools came in March, our schools prepared to take our classrooms outside of the four walls, making live videos of teaching available to everyone and preparing monthly SEL kits to ensure learning continuity.”

MAW MAW KHAING,  
ED.M. (IEP)





“I won’t hear the waves of the West Coast, and I’ve had to say goodbye to Trader Joe’s cinnamon buns, but this pivot has brought me closer to family, which feels like the right choice for me, now, in this moment.”

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**Felicity Burgess, Ed.M.’20**

DIRECTOR OF LITERACY

A SECONDARY SCHOOL

LONDON

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I can’t hear the word pivot without hearing echoes of Ross screaming at Rachel in a hallway, “Pivot, pivot, PIVOT!”

Much like trying to drag a giant couch up a Brooklyn stairway, pivoting in a pandemic has proved every bit as stressful.

Okay, so we weren’t looking to bring home the perfect couch, but we were looking to bring home our perfect career. We’d diligently done our shopping at networking events throughout the semester. We’d scoured the catalogue and circled the positions that we most wanted. We thought about whether the job would be comfy. Would it be stylish? Would it fit with the growing vision of ourselves? Did it need to accommodate a growing family? Did we, like Ross, seek advice from our ex-partners? We had nailed down the precise job spec we wanted, and if

we hadn’t, we at least had a pretty good sense of what we were aiming for.

Five months on from the moment we left Appian Way, many of us still find ourselves in a crammed metaphorical stairwell holding a couch that, despite our best efforts, won’t budge. We’ve pushed, pulled, sweated and stalled — yet we are no closer to landing that dream job (or any job!). The call to “PIVOT” has attacked us loudly from all manner of well-meaning directions. Parents, professors, siblings, and careers counsellors have all been shouting “PIVOT!” and this cacophony of advice, sometimes confusing, sometimes contradictory, has done little to lift the weight of the sofa.

Spoiler alert: At the end of the *Friends* episode, Ross unceremoniously returns his couch to the store. It’s ripped in half and, no, the store won’t do a refund.

My personal pivot has had its challenging moments. My applications to high schools in Oakland were left answered by this new form of career ghosting to which many of us are now well acquainted. (It’s worse than dating.) Staying in the United States began to feel increasingly complicated by the president’s sporadic visa tweets. What’s more, the difficulties of navigating health insurance without a stable job began to feel insurmountable. (As a Brit, my deep love for the NHS has never been greater.)

I’ve subsequently pivoted to a school leadership role back in the UK, where I get to work for a phenomenal head teacher at a turnaround school in Enfield, North London. I won’t hear the waves of the West Coast, and I’ve had to say goodbye to Trader Joe’s cinnamon buns, but this pivot has



brought me closer to family, which feels like the right choice for me, now, in this moment.

Over summer, I've picked up some consultancy projects, which I've been working on from my childhood bedroom in my parents' house in the English countryside. Now I have to navigate two distinctly different identities on a daily basis. One: put-together millennial woman killing it on conference calls. The other: my sixteen-year-old angsty teenage self to whom I seem to revert to whenever I visit my parents. On Day Two of working from home, my dad kindly asked if I needed a lift anywhere for my meetings. I politely declined while laughing at the idea that the Liberian education minister would arrive in my village mid-pandemic! On Day Three, my mum slipped a hand-drawn takeaway menu in front of me while I was on a Zoom call to ask what I fancied for dinner. Her beautiful act of kindness threatened my ability to maintain separation between my distinct identities of both professional and child. Throughout the summer, I've been wearing a shirt on top and yoga leggings on the bottom, a physical manifestation of the different identities I am holding during this weird time.

My life is now punctuated by long dog walks, no mobile phone signal, and the fish and chip van that comes to the village every Wednesday night. This is not the post-Harvard catalogue life I had dreamed for myself, but I must admit that, despite the "PIVOT!" I'm quietly content.

*Note:* I write from the ludicrously privileged position of being healthy and having no family directly affected by the virus.

**FELICITY BURGESS** IS A SCHOOL LEADER COMMITTED TO TRANSFORMING BRITAIN'S SCHOOLS BY TRANSFORMING THE WAY WE THINK ABOUT TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE 21ST CENTURY. SHE IS PASSIONATE ABOUT BUILDING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURES GROUNDED IN EQUITY AND SCALING PRACTICES AND SYSTEMS THAT ALLOW STUDENTS FROM ALL BACKGROUNDS TO THRIVE. LOOK OUT FOR HER FUTURE SCHOOL! SHE HAS DESIGNED AND LED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN RWANDA, BURKINA FASO, NEPAL, LIBERIA, AND SIERRA LEONE. SHE CAN MOST EASILY BE FOUND IN COZY CAFES, WHERE SHE WILL BE LOST IN THE PAGES OF A BOOK THAT SHE WILL EAGERLY RECOMMEND TO YOU. WARMING HER FINGERS WITH A CUP OF EARL GREY TEA.

# "It matters to show up and be there for our youth in a real and personal way."

**Jodi Rosenbaum, Ed.M.'02**

FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MORE THAN WORDS

BOSTON





For the 16 years before COVID-19 hit Massachusetts, More Than Words was a beehive of activity, filled with young people working, learning, and engaging. We are a nonprofit social enterprise that empowers youth who are in foster care, court-involved, homeless, or out of school to take charge of their lives by taking charge of a \$3.7 million dollar business. Youth work part-time jobs in our retail and online used bookselling businesses while simultaneously working a second paid job focused on advancing personal goals to transition to other jobs and education. Youth went out on trucks to pick up books, put books in inventory and shipped our orders, and attended group seminars. All this job training and youth development programming was inherently in-person.

On March 13 we closed our stores and offices and our entire program changed overnight. However, our mission remained the same: empowering and showing up for our youth. The innovations we developed to retain this core while changing all the “trappings” have fundamentally altered the way we will operate going forward. We have learned not just to pivot, but also to knock down walls and build an even stronger More Than Words.

The first step was to ensure we stayed connected with our young people and did whatever necessary to ensure they survived, which meant also being a basic needs program. We completed a needs assessment with all the youth within our network, seeking to understand whether our young people had access to housing, food, cleaning products, and medications. We went from an organization that never had a street presence to one ordering pallets

of food from Costco, packing bags, doing home visits. What we learned: it matters to show up and be there for our youth in a real and personal way. When we hand out laptops, turn on cell service, help stand up for emergency housing, or drive by in a “joy parade,” it shows our young people how important they are in this world. As the world opens up again, we’ll continue to be there in new ways.

Like so many other businesses and nonprofits, we transitioned our programming to Zoom. Individual case management with youth development managers, workshops, team meetings — it all happened remotely. We tested our relationships and young people’s commitments and found they stuck. We have retained nearly all of our youth through this crisis, and re-engaged many into our program who had left before. And we innovated: while past workshops were on important but dry topics like financial literacy and giving and receiving feedback, staff were now developing offerings around areas of personal interest. Our team gathers for cooking classes, meditation, health and wellness, creative expression, and makeup lessons. What we learned: relationships, community, and connection matter more than anything.

We had a hard look at our financials and our values. We rely on our youth-run business for 50% of our budget, and our highest margin business lines — retail, events, pop-up shops — were completely shuttered. We didn’t and still don’t know the future of government funding and philanthropy. Our first commitment was to continue to pay our youth even though work shifts were suspended.

Our youth, and their families, have extremely limited savings, and are at high risk of experiencing significant and compounding challenges associated with lost wages. Overall, we paid more than \$50,000 per month directly to our young people through this crisis. To do this, we’ve had to pivot our businesses. We took a small pilot program in sourcing textiles and selling them wholesale, and have launched a new business line selling clothing, shoes, and accessories online. What we learned: this is a hugely profitable venture with new and exciting skill building opportunities for youth. We are going all-in and growing this line in the coming year.

But through all this, our young people continued to struggle. Our youth continued to be impacted by system failures and white supremacy, compounded by the danger and threat of COVID and the trauma kicked up by the murder of George Floyd. This crisis hits the most vulnerable among us the hardest. We went all in on a growing strategy of individual advocacy and policy work, shouting from the rooftops when our youth need us. When young people see cases closed by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) making them homeless, we are meeting with DCF, saying no, and when our youth are criminalized by a justice system that views children as adults, we are showing up in court, convening prosecutors and defenders to learn about the brain science of emerging adults, and (virtually) storming the state house to raise the age on the justice system, moving emerging adults into the more developmentally appropriate juvenile system. What we learned: It matters when the bookstore speaks up.

These pivots and innovations have made us stronger. We’re not trying to “go back” to normal, we are building forward into a new, bolder, and stronger model.

**JODI ROSENBAUM** STARTED MORE THAN WORDS IN BOSTON IN 2004 AS AN ONLINE BOOKSELLING VENTURE WITH SEVERAL TEENAGE BOYS IN FOSTER CARE. SHE HAS SINCE GROWN THE BUSINESS INTO A RETAIL AND ONLINE BOOKSTORE, MARKETPLACE, EVENT SPACE, NATIONAL TRAINING GROUND, AND A PLATFORM FOR YOUTH TO RADICALLY TRANSFORM THEIR LIVES.

CONTINUED FROM P. 54

ating memes about their experience with quarantine. I offered students weekly emotional check-ins where the questions remained consistent, but their answers, and the ones who answered, changed from week to week. In an attempt to create more buy-in and model vulnerability, I answered the check-in questions each week and posted silly pictures of myself reading, baking, and gardening.

Due to all of these changes, I was also able to provide the space and a forum with which to process the social justice protests and movements happening in that moment. I additionally offered weekly video calls where we answered other check-in questions, played games, commiserated together, and discussed different academic concerns. The calls themselves were bittersweet because although there were very few students who joined in, I was able to connect more deeply with the few who did call in precisely because the groups were so small. I also realized that having students read *Macbeth*, just as having them write their *Lord of the Flies* essay, was not very likely to encourage students who were already struggling to engage in the work and with me. Instead, I built an independent reading unit where students got to choose from a list of almost 30 texts that were online and then read and discuss (virtually and with each other) what they read. The engagement that had been waning over the weeks leading into this project increased drastically when students were given agency over their learning. Almost every one of my students chose books, found quotes from their texts, and commented on each other’s posts every week for four weeks. I was thoroughly impressed, and my mantra became choice, choice, choice.

And still, even with my desperate attempts at adjusting and changing to meet students’ needs, I found that I did not always know exactly what they needed. I still struggled to keep them engaged and I knew that that was because the routines, expectations, relationships, and jokes that we had all relied on over the past year were gone. There were too many

students who I heard almost nothing from. Students who would come into class telling me about their sports teams and how they found a symbol in the reading for homework in February now almost never engaged, even in the nonacademic opportunities that I, sometimes desperately, offered. Individualized emails to them helped occasionally, but not always. At times, the only way to get in touch was by emailing them and including their parents, which I know in some families was an extra stressor in a time of already increased anxiety.

Engagement and meeting students’ needs was my goal over those months and although there were students who I missed and many moments where it did not work, there were also shining bright spots in the midst of that struggle. One of the particularly poignant moments of success was the ability to conference one-on-one with students. There were a few students who really could have benefited from more personalized instruction around their writing over the course of the year. Since I didn’t have 28 students in the room requiring 28 different things from me at the same time, I was granted the space and time to have individual video chats with these students to guide them through the work. I was able to tangibly see students’ confidence and self-advocacy skills grow directly because of those conferences.

Engagement with students will continue to change and adapt in this coming year; I hope that we will have the ability to establish new routines and build new and even stronger relationships so that the engagement that was so lacking and hard to maintain in the spring will be more consistent in the fall. Relationship building while learning remotely is not an easy task, and will be vital to the work that we do as educators to ensure students feel supported, cared for, and engaged as both students and as whole people over the course of the next year and in years to come.

**ROBIN LOEWALD**, AFTER STUDYING SPANISH AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERACY AT MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE, CONTINUED TO PURSUE THOSE PASSIONS BY TEACHING ABROAD, GETTING HER MASTER’S, AND NOW TEACHING ENGLISH.



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“The key idea is to just focus on the essential knowledge and skills that kids need to learn in a given year, and then let go of some of the rest.”

#### Professor Jal Mehta

DISCUSSING A REPORT HE COAUTHORED CALLED *IMAGINING SEPTEMBER: PRINCIPLES AND DESIGN ELEMENTS FOR AMBITIOUS SCHOOLS DURING COVID-19*





# We're Wrapping Up Our Centennial in December!

Join us for a festive celebration where you'll get a chance to virtually meet and mingle with a great lineup of Ed School alumni and faculty. During this multi-day event, you'll hear the great stories of our school, reconnect with former professors, and reflect with your classmates on your own Harvard experience.



You've Zoomed for meetings. You've Zoomed for debates. Now Zoom for something that makes you happy.

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“Weeks and weeks  
of remote teaching  
and learning and  
mask-wearing made  
real life seem like  
an inescapable  
sitcom. With a dark  
soundtrack.”

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