

An Opportunity for Paradigm Shifts to Enable Lifelong Learning

Large scale disruption such as we've suffered in recent weeks and months, presents both danger and opportunity. The dangers are obvious, life and death threats including economic catastrophe, job loss, housing instability and homelessness, lack of access to quality health care and personal safety threats. At the same time, dramatically raised public consciousness on matters of equity and social justice do present opportunities for change ranging from minor technical and symbolic tinkering to major paradigm shifts.

This is a complicated time in our nation's life. Not only are we coping with the losses and uncertainties of the Coronavirus, but national consciousness on matters of racism and police brutality has suddenly skyrocketed. Talk of change is in the air everywhere. Yet at the same time, people have been traumatized and are recovering from the loss, anger, frustration and anxiety brought about by Covid-19 and the recent murders of George Floyd of other innocent Black men and women. Some changes need to be immediate and are already happening, literally overnight. Others will take more time. The education sector, for example, has been traumatized by the school closings. It needs to recover its equilibrium before becoming open to embracing life-changing paradigm shifts. Nonetheless, now is the time for urgent, thoughtful contemplation of the ways in which this moment can be turned into a movement for major paradigm shifts. This is the time to call together all voices to envision changes which will, for example, eradicate childhood poverty, attack racism in all its forms, and improve the quality of our systems of child development and education to dramatically increase the wellbeing and educational achievement and attainment of those who our education has least well served. The window for change will not be open forever and those who seek to take advantage of this moment for substantial system change must be prepared.

Here are seven major shifts that I'd offer for consideration:

Building Cradle-to-Career Support Systems to Enable Lifelong Learning:

If we are to prepare all of our children to fulfill their promise and be successful in work, citizenship and family life, then we need to attack poverty and its insidious effects on families and children. Many other nations have long ago concluded that there is both a moral obligation and an economic imperative to have systems of universal health care, early childhood education, paid family leave, housing stability and access to nutritious food as minimum requirements for family stability and children's wellbeing. Without addressing these challenges, it will be virtually impossible for schools, as we know them, no matter how significantly reformed, to be successful in doing what our leaders have appropriately asked schools to do: educate every child to high levels.

Given the rapidly and continuously changing requirements of 21st century work and democracy, nations will have to cultivate human talent as never before. To be successful in the 21st century requires continuous learning through all stages of life. Continuous learning from the earliest stages of life to mature adulthood should be the norm if our citizens and society are to adapt to

the changing economic environment and prosper in coming decades. Individual citizens and the entire society have a shared interest in lifelong learning. For individuals, the benefits are obvious starting with “the more you learn, the more you earn.” There are clear ethical reasons to commit to having every child be given a fair chance to realize their full potential, but we have economic imperatives that necessitate educating our population to the maximum degree so that our nation can prosper and remain competitive in a 21st century, high-skill, high knowledge economy. We also desperately need a highly educated, media literate citizenry capable of discerning truth, recognizing evidence and engaging in sophisticated analytical thinking. We need a much higher percentage of our citizenry to be motivated and prepared to actively participate in the civic life of our challenging democracy. In coming years, human capital will be more important than ever to the prosperity of both our democracy and our economy. America has a long way to go in building a robust, nimble human capital development system to help our young people reach their full potential. Now is the time to redesign and rebuild.

As a starting point, we will need to reconceptualize society’s simplistic idea of education. We must shatter the myth that our current K-12 education system is the great equalizer, single-handedly creating an equal opportunity society in spite of unprecedented inequality in income and wealth. It’s a noble ideal, but the data over more than a century clearly prove that schools alone, even when substantially reformed, are too weak an intervention to deliver on the promise of giving all children a fair chance to succeed. It’s a myth. Now, we must move from an old-fashioned, schoolhouse-bound model of child development and education to a system of robust, flexible learning opportunities coupled with basic supports available from birth through adulthood.

Our current K-12 school model consumes only 20% of a child’s waking hours between the ages of 5 and 18. That’s far too limited a strategy for schools to be expected to achieve world class standards and equalize achievement in a country with huge and widening gaps of income, wealth and access to opportunity and social capital. Much more attention needs to be paid to equalizing children’s access to the supports and opportunities that pervade the 80% of affluent children’s waking hours but are unavailable to their disadvantaged peers. Social mobility is steadily declining in the US, and our systems of child development and education must be strengthened to reverse this insidious trend.

Our current, somewhat sentimental ideas about schooling have severely constrained our conception of education. We need to break down the barriers of time and space that lock us into the narrow confines of schools by preparing for an education system that provides learning opportunities literally anytime, anywhere. We now have the technological tools and internet availability to do this even if in the education sector, we haven’t yet learned to use those tools very effectively. As we develop the ed tech facility and capacity, we can begin to consider how we alter the structure and strategies of in-person education to maximize the value of critical learning relationships by creating structural and incentive changes to deepen and extend learning opportunities. Schooling conducted face to face, in person, at least in part will always be with us, but it needn’t be the entirety of what we consider education.

A place to start building a new conception of education is in our utilization of time. We could begin by acting on the strong research evidence showing that access to summer learning matters:

those who get it surge forward, those who don't fall back and suffer learning loss. Access to summer learning is generally controlled by family wealth and social capital. Instead, we should be designing a system in which summer learning and enrichment are available to every child, not just to those fortunate enough to receive access through the accident of birth and family wealth. The same applies to learning opportunities after school, weekends, and holidays. It's time to bury our agrarian school calendar and substitute flexible, year-round learning (see [Chiefs for Change](#) and the [Texas Education Agency](#) for recent proposals on this topic). It's time to have a school schedule that reflects the realities of American family life in the 21st century. A 19th century approach to the use of school time won't do it. Schedule changes are a prerequisite but not a substitute for major shifts in curriculum and instruction to deepen and broaden access to high quality, engaging learning opportunities. To do all of this, we'll need to contemplate changes in teacher roles and schedules, new educational personnel, utilizing part-timers and community members while modularizing various elements of the curriculum and other learning opportunities.

We'll need to much more aggressively partner with individuals and organizations in our communities who care about and have capacity and experience in supporting and educating young people. Education and child development can no longer be seen as the exclusive responsibility of the school system. Entire communities need to become involved in addressing the needs of young people by providing the learning, support and opportunities children require to become full, contributing adults. Our local communities are closest to the young people and chock full of talented individuals and experienced youth and community-serving organizations which can contribute to building, together with the school system, high-functioning cradle to career pipelines, lifelong learning systems that take full advantage of community assets.

Finally, we'll need to move beyond school boards to shape and govern a lifelong learning system. Our current systems of governance are too fragmented. Having separate boards for early childhood, K-12 and higher education to say nothing of health and employment means that our human development system is siloed, not integrated or comprehensive, not user-friendly and readily accessible to youth and families. Another problem is that these governance sub-systems are frequently, so heavily influenced by various constituencies that children's interests take a back seat. Our governance systems need to be more representative, broader in scope, and more seriously engaged in matters of policy, accountability and connecting with the community.

New cross-agency, governing bodies such as [Children's Cabinets](#) and "backbone" organizations should be created to design and implement cradle-to-career support systems, overseeing formal and informal systems of education, and systems of support and opportunity needed to assure that all children are prepared to succeed. Creating a "children's cabinet" and a robust coordinating organization offers a powerful solution to the challenge of educating all children to high levels. A children's cabinet is an action-focused, executive-level collaborative body that brings together agencies and organizations to create a coordinated agenda for children.

The children's cabinet is the lynchpin of the cross-sector collaboration, with responsibility for identifying top priorities and common goals, defining the role each entity can play in achieving them, developing strategies for carrying them out, tracking progress towards the goals, leveraging new resources, holding parties accountable for making progress, and communicating

this progress to the public. A variety of cabinet models exist. We favor cabinets led by the mayor which include the superintendent and representatives from other entities with responsibility for or interest in children's education, opportunity and support. Creating a children's cabinet has both practical and symbolic value. When agency heads, community leaders, philanthropy heads, and other executives join the cabinet, it signals the high priority the community's leaders are putting on the welfare of its children. Structurally and programmatically, cabinets reshape the way communities serve children by bringing together leaders across sectors to make children's success a community-wide responsibility rather than one that rests primarily with schools.

Many powerful organizations across the country have worked on designs to advance some version or various aspects of the lifelong, holistic, integrated supports vision described above. A few examples are [StriveTogether](#), [Communities in Schools](#), the [Coalition for Community Schools](#), [Children's Aid Society](#), [Harlem Children's Zone](#), [Say Yes to Education](#), [The Forum for Youth Investment](#), the [Social Genome Project](#), and the [Promise Neighborhoods Institute at PolicyLink](#). These, and many others, are pointing the way to the theory, practice and evaluation of a "broader, bolder" conception of what needs to be done to guarantee that every childhood has sufficient education, support, and opportunity—in short, every child has ready access to a real pathway to success.

Professionalize, Full Access, High Quality, Early Childhood Education:

Lifelong learning, as a right, should begin at birth. For years, brain science has shown that early childhood experiences significantly impact longer term health, educational and economic outcomes. The evidence is still incontrovertible: the most highly leveraged investments in education come in early childhood when children's brains are growing, developing and vulnerable. Yet, the early childhood sector is the least adequately funded, least accessible and least professionalized component of our education system. The closures of childcare centers due to the pandemic and the new safety requirements will mean many underfunded centers will close making the already financially strapped sector even more fragile. The gaps in access and quality are well-known and seldom addressed. Early education teachers and personnel are woefully underpaid and, consequently, staff turnover in this field is unacceptably high while attracting talent to the field is extremely challenging. States struggle to promote quality improvement systems yet the lack of staffing continuity and general underfunding of the sector makes it difficult to enact high standards of quality.

Chronic, gross underfunding of this sector is the central problem. To wit, the most influential paradigm shift in this sector would be to raise teacher salaries and place them on a par with those of K-12 teachers. However costly, salary parity would bring about a sea change in the field. Secondly, early childhood, because of the shaky state of its finances, is too often thought of as important for 3-5-year-olds, but as a luxury from ages 0-3. While 80% of childhood brain growth occurs before age 3 and approximately half of children living in poverty in the U.S. begin school unequipped with foundational knowledge and skills, we do not have policies and supports to create anything approximating full access to the necessary supports and development interventions in the earliest years.

These are also the years in which children's brains are highly susceptible to trauma. We know that the fewer adversities a child experiences, the more likely they are to develop into a healthy adult. Much more protection and prevention work needs to be done with this age group, not only for the children, but also for and with families of our youngest people. Trauma sensitive schools and other related organizations will be essential in the recovery from this Covid crisis. Organizations like [Turnaround for Children](#) have provided strong leadership in the theory, science and practice of trauma sensitive practices and learning environments.

To advance this field overall, greater federal, state and local funding and policies are needed as are philanthropic investments. Community organizations, like Children's Cabinets, can provide leadership, coordination and advocacy for the appropriate policies and investments. The business community has been a powerful ally and champion for increased attention and funding to the early childhood sector.

Some promising examples of proven policies and programs include maternal health care, paid family leave and home visiting programs.

Maternal Health Care: Without access to health care, a mother is less likely to receive the prenatal health support that enable healthy births. Access to health care must be a universal right.

Paid Family Leave: The United States is one of the only countries in the world—and the only OECD member—that does not require businesses to offer paid maternity leave to employees. Longer maternity leave is associated with a reduction in post neonatal and child mortality.

Home Visitation: High quality home visiting programs have proven to be effective in improving positive health and educational outcomes for children and parents. As an example, one of the most effective early childhood support programs is the [Nurse-Family Partnership](#), which helps young first-time moms-to-be starting in early pregnancy and continuing through the child's second birthday. Another program with an impressive track record can be found at [HIPPI International](#). For thought leadership in this domain, the [Center on the Developing Child](#) (Harvard) has done extraordinary work. Forty years of research evidence shows that these kinds of programs yield significant reductions in child abuse and neglect, reduction in ER visits, and fewer behavioral and intellectual problems in children at age six.

Integrated, Personalized Education and Support:

Perhaps the biggest shift of all would be to discard our factory system, "one size fits all", mass production approach to education replacing it with one that meets each child where they are and gives them what they need to be successful inside and outside of school. Such a personalized, customized approach begins with each child being seen and understood by adults within the education system, with families and educators coming together to decide what that child needs both inside and outside of school in order to thrive, achieve wellbeing and be successful. This approach would require major restructuring of the existing systems, moving to a case

management model, more like a medical system. It requires a mindset that distinguishes equity from equality and focuses on equity, a fair system that is responsive to each child. Equality is giving every child the same, while equity is giving each child what they need to achieve success. This kind of customized system requires great cultural sensitivity given the diversity of our country. This will be a major reach for the education system, but is a prerequisite for educating each child to his or her full potential.

A personalized system is not exclusively or even primarily focused on academics, but also takes into account social and emotional learning and children's widely varying circumstances outside of school. Such considerations, in themselves, are a major shift for our education systems, however, this is not work for schools alone, because schools generally do not have the scope or capacity to solve pressing out of school challenges that impede student learning. In consequence, schools, operating on their own with a predominantly academic mission, have definitively proven not to have the capacity to equalize opportunity for young people in the US. Mountains of data attest to this, not least of which are the data that persistently show the correlation between children's socio-economic status and their educational achievement and attainment. Our only hope of breaking this iron law correlation is an individualized strategy that customizes education, opportunity and support to meet the unique needs of each child.

A paradigm shift to personalization, to individual success planning for each child, will require a community-wide, comprehensive system beginning with integrated student supports i.e. coordination between the education system and a wide array of child and youth-centered partners who deeply and regularly collaborate to meet young peoples' needs.

Integrated student supports (ISS) a concept that has been in use for decades, was further described in a book entitled "[Broader, Bolder, Better: How Schools and Communities Help Students Overcome the Disadvantages of Poverty](#)," which my colleague Elaine Weiss and I published in 2019. We describe how various communities are coming together to offer children the kinds of supports and opportunities that are always available to children born into privilege, but often denied to disadvantaged children. ISS envisions a system in which every child receives the nurturance, health care, support and stability they need to come to school every day ready to learn. Further, ISS pushes to provide students the kind of out of school learning opportunities in summer and after school that are not equitably available. The basic theory of action is that until we do for all children, in the way of opportunity and support, what those of us who have privilege do for our own, then there is no hope of schools, by themselves, preparing all children for success.

Personalized [Success Plans](#) (Harvard's [Education Redesign Lab](#)) tailored to each and every young person are an especially promising strategy, and there is a growing body of research about their impact. These personalized plans are tools as well as processes for capturing the full range of strengths and needs of children and youth in order to connect them with tailored, seamless, and equitable services and opportunities. Conceptually, the plans represent our commitment to meet all children and youth where they are and give them what they need, inside of school and out, to be successful. Practically, Success Plans are logical tools with which to build new systems focused on *individual* needs. The development of Success Plans for each student is a major undertaking with serious implications for staffing, data gathering and privacy to name just

several of the biggest challenges, but the benefits to students, teachers and families are substantial. Strategically, the adoption of a student success planning approach signals the end of the factory model of education and the start of an era in which each child is seen and matters.

Equitable, Online Learning:

The crisis has catapulted a reluctant education sector into the 21st century world of educational technology. We've always been laggards when compared to the private sector or medicine. Now, it's time for catch up. Whether students physically return to school in the fall or not, we've now been forced to recognize the power and potential of online learning. We now have to transition from the early stages of emergency adaptations we have seen this spring to effective, intentional best practices to be implemented in the fall. In order to do this, we'll need to get everyone the equipment they need to participate online, then every student's home will need Wi-Fi/internet access, then districts will need to make informed decisions about platforms, applications and curricula to be delivered online, while teachers will need training, and families need technical support to get hooked up and educational guidance in how to best support their learners. Finally, we'll need tutors, curators, and other new educational role players to support the operation of a 24/7, 365-day learning system. This is a heavy lift and will not be fully accomplished by the fall, but necessity has dictated progress, and the field is already making headway.

It's impossible to overstate the impact of the sudden but profound shift to online learning brought about by Covid-19. The genie is now out of the bottle in the world of education, and it's a safe prediction that things will never be the same. The advent of online learning will open up a vast array of opportunities, while at the same time presenting school systems, teachers, families and students with an overwhelming number of choices about technical and substantive education matters—choices many will not have the capacity, the information, expertise, and experience to make. National organizations, federal and state governments, and entrepreneurs of all kinds can be helpful in curating the choices and supplying evidence to help key players make informed decisions. District leaders are going to have to commit to a substantial investment in professional development to help teachers, many of whom have highly limited experience in this area, to adapt to and ultimately embrace new tools and modalities.

The embrace of contemporary educational technology must be guided, as have been initial efforts during the Covid crisis, by relentless attention to all the dimensions of equity raised by greater reliance on technology. All the dimensions of tech adoption from equipment, to internet access, to training and support, to parental capacities and access, to technical assistance have the potential to either close or widen the “digital divide.” Great care must be taken to close that divide and use these new tools to create a better, fairer distribution of learning opportunities.

A sequenced embrace of educational technology is a multi-year process and requires thoughtful staging. Demands will be high in the near term for school systems to shift from the emergency tech adaptations made in the face of a precipitous crisis to a more intentional embrace of best practices and the development of a permanent, integrated system of educational technology.

These changes won't happen overnight, but, in time, they will have a profound effect on learning possibilities and access to opportunity for children all across the country.

Not only will the delivery of education change, but the content will change (see section on Deeper Learning) while new challenges such as nurturing the relationships at the heart of education will be front and center. Thought leaders in this domain include [Summit Learning](#), [School of One](#), the [Christiansen Institute](#), the [Florida Virtual School](#), and [Next Generation Learning](#).

Design for Nurturing Relationships:

The biggest casualty of school closings has been relationships between students and their peers and their educators. Top priority must be given this fall, whether schooling is conducted in person or online, to designing our education systems to prioritize high quality interpersonal relationships. Education, as reflected in the Mandarin language, is about teaching and nurturance. Our current education system is populated by teachers who care deeply about nurturance, but generally the structures and incentives of the system ignore the necessity of relationships. A paradigm shift in this area will require new roles for teachers and staff, new, more flexible personnel, changes in accountability measures to also prioritize students' wellbeing and connectedness as well as changes in structure, particularly in middle and secondary schools, where current structures often mitigate against quality relationship formation. No student should go through a school year anonymously. Practices like 1:400 guidance counselor to student ratios, teachers seeing 150 students a week, students juggling six or seven classes at a time must be reconsidered and replaced.

Each child needs an educator advocate who follows that child for the duration of their experience in a particular school. Secondary school homerooms should all be converted to "advisories," periods of time when teachers and students interact for a few hours each week on respective journeys through the education system, their challenges, their families, their hopes and needs as they navigate through the turbulent waters of adolescence in a changing society. Teachers crave deeper relationships with their students and tools like success plans provide processes for permanently building those relationships.

Extracurricular activities are critical also. They are often the chief motivators drawing young people to school and should be prioritized, rather than cut the moment budget pressure increases. These activities from sports to music to community service are powerful means for building student confidence and motivation. They are also ideal venues for developing high quality, working relationships between students, their peers and the adults in their communities. Through intensive, extended engagement, students will draw strength and resilience from their relationships with peers and educators.

This emphasis on nurturing high quality educational relationships, especially mentoring and advocacy for each individual student, is not just a response to this crisis but a necessary, permanent reform to our education system. This need will also increase in direct proportion to our utilization of remote learning tools and processes.

Family Engagement:

For too long, the education system has, with some notable exceptions, given lip service to the importance of family engagement. In reality, most schools, most of the time regarded family engagement as a “nice to do”, secondary or tertiary task. In the worst cases, schools sometimes ignored family engagement altogether, trivialized it by over focusing on parents’ attendance at meetings or simply regarded family involvement as a nuisance. Suddenly, the Covid-19 crisis has irretrievably thrust families into the very center of the education equation. While educators have long recognized that families are the first and long-term teachers of the children, too little has been done to enlist the partnership of parents in the educational mission of the schools. With all children learning at home in the fourth quarter of this academic year, we’ve learned that if a “one size first all” approach doesn’t work very well for students, it works even less well for families because of the wide variability in family circumstances, home environments, parent/guardian availability due to job requirements, language barriers, technology familiarity and general education background.

There is an urgent need now to establish mechanisms of communication, relationship-building, guidance, support and technical assistance - all targeted toward helping parents to be effective supporters and nurturers of student learning. Family empowerment needs to be a top priority for leaders, school accountability systems and educator training. Many challenges of language and culture exist in this field, and cross-cultural competency for educators will be of paramount importance and should be essential parts of pre-service and in-service training. Again, in this area, we are blessed by examples of many schools which already have fully engaged, parent partnership programs. There are also outstanding examples of individuals and organizations from the [National PTA](#) to Karen Mapp (Harvard) and her [Dual Capacity Framework](#) to [1647: Connecting Families & Schools](#), the [KIPP Schools](#), and many more who have long track records in trying to build effective school-family partnerships. Now is the time for a breakthrough in this area. Now is the time for genuine, communicative, collaborative partnerships between educators and parents.

The kinds of changes being proposed here are generational in nature, just as the opportunities and interventions designed to achieve equity and excellence in education must be extended over generations. Those working on family centered, multi-generational support and development are leading the way in a broader concept, beyond a simply school-based strategy, for assuring the health and wellbeing of students by recognizing and acting on the idea that in order for the child to flourish, the family must be healthy and stable. Interventions targeted at parents and guardians are critical. The work of the [Northside Achievement Zone](#) (Minneapolis) and [EMPath](#) is exemplary in this field.

Deeper Learning:

The core of the education portion of child development is and should continue to be teaching and learning. However, our current models of curriculum and instruction have proven, well before

the current crisis, not to be effective with significant proportions of our students. The advent of large-scale online learning has only compounded the need for radically redesigned approaches to curriculum and instruction. There is no shortage of theory, research and best practice examples to inform this shift, but a shift must happen. Students need to be engaged, to be connected, to experience rigor and relevance in their schoolwork. For too many children, that's not happening now.

It's time to enhance student agency in learning, to individually customize curriculum and instruction, to focus on real world applications of knowledge and skill, employing projects, simulations and utilizing students' local environments. As mentioned above, it's time to be intentional about creating environments and incentives for building meaningful, ongoing student-teacher relationships and positive group and team-building dynamics among students. All the while, education needs to be substantially increasing the emphasis on the interpersonal and social emotional skills employers are now demanding. Organizations and models to lead the way in this kind of work are virtually unlimited: Jal Mehta's work on "[Deeper Learning](#)", [Jobs for the Future's](#) initiatives on career pathways, [Year Up](#), [The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading](#), [CASEL's](#) framework on social and emotional learning, [Big Picture's](#) experience in community-based and project based applied learning, [High Tech High](#), mastery learning, [Next Generation Learning](#), the [Center for Curriculum Redesign](#), [BELLxcel](#), [Summit Learning](#), [Teach to One](#) and countless others can point the way.

Teaching will change dramatically with the advent of online tools and platforms. Teachers will need extensive professional development opportunities in order for them not only to transfer their curricula online, but, even if school is in person, to learn how to use the tools of technology to enhance instruction and extend learning opportunities to students in non-school hours. Our schools are generally well behind the curve in adopting 21st century tools for instructional purposes. Now is the time to surge forward.

Professional development will also be required for teachers to develop new curricula, applied learning opportunities, parent engagement strategies, personalized student success plans and strategies for nurturing student relationships. New approaches to staffing and scheduling and a more flexible, nimble professional structures must be developed. This kind of professional learning will take time, and must be teacher led, designed by and for teachers, but drawing on the expertise of early adopters, experts and tech leaders from other sectors. These changes in teacher role and practice are essential for any of these paradigm shifts to work, but in order for changes in roles and practice to happen, schools must emphasize learning for the adults every bit as much as for the children.

It is time to envision significant shifts in how the delivery of education is organized. Once again, the current crisis creates a "necessity is the mother of invention" moment. With schools for the foreseeable future operating in limited and interrupted ways because of the Covid-19 threats, schools and entrepreneurs are already contemplating the modularization of education, offering new packages of content in new ways, contemplated by educators in different roles. Math education might come through one channel, while science education comes through another. One sub-contractor might specialize in arranging virtual internships while another might develop a set of online simulations. Organizations like [City Year](#) with national service corps members

might supply talented young, aspiring educators to be the connective tissue between schools, teachers and families, offering support on everything from technical, internet connections to off-site tutoring. On the other hand, states might strengthen already promising efforts to offer state-wide classes by some of the top teachers to be curated and supported locally by resident teachers and aides. Building on the experience of innovative online providers like [Southern University of New Hampshire](#), K-12 educators can begin to redesign a system for the future, one that will have value and endurance well beyond the current crisis.

Leadership

In order to take advantage of these opportunities, we will need:

Leadership: We must have leaders with a special blend of traits and skills including courage, social justice values, persistence, interpersonal skills, empathy, listening, imagination yielding vision, trust and political acuity to move an agenda of change.

Especially important will be:

Vision: Leaders will bring clarity to the challenge of system redesign, seeing that poverty, race and disadvantage matter and must be addressed; that schools alone are not enough to provide children with equal opportunity; that a new social compact is needed between communities and families; that society has paramount moral and economic imperatives to educate all children, and all means all, to high levels; that our ideals of excellence and equity are not being realized but could be if we created a system intentionally designed to achieve that equal opportunity society. Throughout the process of change, the vision must sustain our ideals of an excellent and equitable society that prepares all its children for work, citizenship, family life, lifelong learning, and personal fulfillment.

Strategy: To build an equal opportunity society which levels the playing field between those who enjoy the learning benefits of privilege, financial and social capital and those who don't is a monumental challenge and will require sweeping changes and highly effective strategy. Such a system resembles a cradle- to-career pipeline with highly functioning, core, component systems of early childhood, K-12 and post-secondary education. These sub-systems must be full-access and high quality. Wrapped around the core pipeline are complementary systems of support and opportunity that make it possible for each child to have what they need to show up to school each day throughout the K-12 years "ready to learn" and to take full advantage of an optimized schooling system. Strategy selection will be key to making all this happen.

Timing: Leaders will need to know what to do and when to do it. Leaders will understand when the opportunities for change present themselves and when the people are too weary and traumatized to consider change. They will know that trust is essential to moving change, that change often means loss, shedding old ways, and that addressing the anxiety of embracing new ways and creating safety for those willing to do it is essential. This is especially true in a time of crisis such as the present.

Challenges

To make any, let alone several of these changes, will require attention not only to the leadership characteristics mentioned earlier but also to an array of potential challenges and potential impediments. Among them:

Scarce, highly contested resources: Needs are urgent in all fields of government and human endeavor right now. The competition for scarce resources will be fierce and the economy is likely to be struggling for some years to come. Taxpayers and policymakers will have agonizing decisions to make about budgets. While some believe that significant change is best precipitated in times of recession when organizations are forced to do more with less, others worry that the lack of financing for capacity building and program development will guarantee that recovery looks a lot like a restoration of the status quo. It will be impossible to generate the necessary resources to assure equitable systems for all children to succeed without changes in tax policy. Philanthropy should not be funding basic services and supports in our society.

Focused attention, urgency: Like financing, public attention is a scarce and valued commodity. Urgent needs for rebuilding the economy, bringing back jobs, attacking racism and police brutality, homelessness, food scarcity, criminal justice reform and health care, to name a few, will compete for the public's attention with the redesign of our child development and education systems proposed in this paper. Furthermore, we cannot have an effective education system if the population's basic human needs are unmet. Education should not be competing for funds with children's and family's health care or nutrition. However, human capital development systems which is what our outdated school systems are, urgently need attention. We must recognize that building human capital is an essential long-term investment for which today's leaders must make a compelling case in order to focus the public's near-term attention on these needs.

Adult interests: There is always some measure of both overlap and tension between the interests of children and the interests of adults when considering fundamental change in basic systems. The biggest enemy of reform is complacency and the inertia of the status quo, the tendency of reform to be modestly incremental and complement existing structures, interests and power relationships within existing systems. To overcome resistance from change that arises from virtually all constituencies in the education and human development sector, leaders must create a compelling value proposition for working differently and a safe environment that allows people on the front lines to embrace change. For example, the kinds of paradigm shifts described above will require unprecedented levels of flexibility, imagination and innovation from both management and labor unions in education.

Governance and accountability: Big shifts involving big changes in "business as usual" and significant investment of public resources will require oversight, reconsideration of governance mechanisms and new tools for assessment and accountability. For example, it would be worth examining whether our existing structures for governing the work of educating and developing children are best suited to the kind of lifelong learning, holistic view of child development

advanced in this paper. To take the schooling system alone, saying nothing about all the child welfare agencies, our governance mechanisms are generally fragmented into early childhood, elementary and secondary and higher education silos. Wouldn't it make more sense to create an overarching governance system providing oversight and integration that is consistent and complementary across all levels? Or, wouldn't it be better, as suggested above, to have local children's cabinets, in every community or region to coordinate policy, resources and programs to optimize healthy child development and effective education?

At the level of service delivery, many of the proposed paradigm shifts would require new, different, more refined instruments of assessment and evaluation which would serve as the basis for a broader and deeper accountability system. In education, for example, there is a growing awareness of the need to nurture children's social and emotional development, to enhance their interpersonal skills which are essential to workplace success, to strengthen their relationships to teachers and mentors and their capacities to work in groups as they will in future jobs, yet we lack valid and reliable assessment tools to measure how schools are contributing to children's growth in these and other areas. To be sure, there is promising national work going on in organizations like [CASEL](#) and [PEAR](#) on these topics, but the state of the art is early stage and adoption of these tools is the exception rather than the rule. We continue to need ever more sophisticated tools for measuring students' academic progress, for both diagnostic and accountability purposes. However, to shift the paradigms, we'll need a much more robust system.

It will be especially challenging to develop evaluation tools to measure the "value-added" of our formal institutions of child development and education in terms beyond relatively simple measures of academic achievement. For example, what kinds of tools and protocols would be necessary to measure how and to what degree a particular school effectively cultivates strong working relationships with parents, high levels of student engagement and successful student teamwork on applied learning projects? How do we determine whether each child has an effective adult mentor/counselor or whether student advisories are adding value? Ultimately, how do we do a much better job of determining the degree to which our schools are preparing our young people to be successful in college and career, allowing them to attain at least middle-class status by middle age? Assistance in the area of evaluation can found at the [Center for Education Policy Research](#) (Harvard).

Policy, politics and public will: Many of the paradigm shifts proposed can be advanced in various ways by existing policies such as Medicaid or the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). At the same time, changes in existing policies will also be required. For example, the return to school will necessitate significant shifts in ESSA policy about assessment and accountability. Some established policies make room, if thoroughly examined, for a number of the kinds of changes envisioned in this paper, as do various state and local policies. Leaders at all levels commonly under-utilize their own existing powers to make change because the resistance to change is often formidable and usually has political costs. At the same time, new policies will be required to enact many of the contemplated paradigm shifts and in order to engineer such policy changes, leaders will have to be thoughtful and strategic in crafting language and building coalitions to support the kind of sea changes that will bring our education and human development systems into the 21st century.

The Covid-19 crisis coupled with the George Floyd murder and aftermath have revealed profound and disturbing realities to the general public, creating a moment of opportunity for change and advancing equity. True leaders will know how to seize this opportunity to make change whether it's as simple as guaranteeing that every family has the education technology and internet access to make online learning an effective strategy for all or whether it's as complex as assuring that all of our citizens, especially our children, have access to quality health care and nutrition.

All of these endeavors will require the building of public will. Organizing and listening to the public, the parents, students and community members, the presumed beneficiaries of the proposed paradigm shifts, will be an essential departure point. Incorporating their perspective in final policy products is imperative. People support what they help create.

There are natural and deep constituencies for some of the proposed changes while others will be met with stiff opposition. Not everyone agrees, for example, that schools have any business in developing children's social and emotional capacities in spite of employers' insistence that these skills matter. Opponents will complain of government over-reach. Others will fight for the interests of adults, of privilege, of race, of jobs, money and other prerogatives. Skillful leadership and widespread public demand can overcome such resistance, but not without deep strategic thought and organizing. The kinds of changes proposed here will only be successfully implemented if they are made top priorities rather than incidental things to accomplish. Adopting measures like these will require visionary leadership, the kind we have seen in our work, and in communities all across this country.

There are numerous thought-leading organizations in the policy and finance space. To name just a few: the [Learning Policy Institute](#), [Education Resource Strategies](#), the [Center on Reinventing Public Education](#) (University of Washington), the [National Center on Education and the Economy](#), the [Children's Funding Project](#), and the [Center for Educational Equity](#) (Columbia). One state which has taken the lead with some exemplary legislation is Maryland and its Blueprint for Maryland's Future. Indicative of the political challenges facing bold policy making, the bill has not been signed by the Governor, but it has substantial political support throughout the state.

Conclusion:

I wish there were easy solutions to the challenges described above, but obviously there aren't. Meeting these challenges is the stuff of leadership. We desperately need leaders to envision, embrace and enact a bold new agenda for preparing our young people to be successful in work, citizenship and life.

Each of the potential paradigm shifts described in this paper will require monumental effort to enact. Any one of these changes would have substantial impact on the young people's prospects for success. Taken together, any combination of multiple shifts has the potential to dramatically magnify the positive impact on children.

To conceive of learning as lifelong, to bolster a neglected system of early education, to approach our children as unique individuals and customize education to meet their particular needs, to deepen learning by making it more engaging, student and project centered, to intentionally cultivate and celebrate relationships between students and their teachers, to meaningfully engage families for the first time ever, and to embrace and capitalize on the tools of technology – all of these shifts, taken together, would revolutionize education and child development in the US. These paradigm shifts would provide the foundation for migrating our outdated, outmoded system away from its early 20th century roots and into the bright light and new challenges of the 21st century.

Through it all, we must firmly fix our sights on building a system that is both excellent and, above all, equitable. We cannot do this without taking into account factors like poverty, racism, special needs, immigration and the challenges of learning English. We can do far better than what we are doing now. This crisis gives us an unprecedented opportunity to seize the moment and create a movement to redesign our strategies and structures for developing and educating our children. Let's not miss the opportunity and revert by defaulting to the status quo ante. Let's move forward!

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