

On Target

AFT Local #2569

November 2020



Clarence Teachers Make the Difference

A Highly Effective Vaccine Is Likely on the Way. What Does That Mean for Schools and Kids?

Nurse Kathe Olmstead prepares a shot that is part of a possible COVID-19 vaccine being developed by the National Institutes of Health and Moderna Inc., in Binghamton, N.Y., in July 2020. Pfizer Inc. has announced early results that the COVID-19 vaccine it's developing with German company BioNTech is 90 percent effective.

—AP Photo/Hans Pennink

By **Catherine Gewertz** and **Arianna Prothero**

November 12, 2020 | Updated: November 16, 2020

Update: After this piece was published, biotechnology company Moderna also announced that preliminary data show its COVID-19 vaccine to be 95 percent effective. Vaccines from both companies still require approval from the Food and Drug Administration.

News this week that a COVID-19 vaccine on the runway is far more effective than originally predicted has been hailed as a potential game-changer in fighting the coronavirus.

Pfizer Inc. **announced** that early results from clinical trials show the vaccine it's developing with German company BioNTech is 90 percent effective—which would put it on par with the childhood vaccine for measles. Many scientists had anticipated the level of effectiveness would be only about 50 or 60 percent.

Because supply will be limited at first, vaccines will be rationed. **As EdWeek has reported**, it's possible that teachers and other school employees may get priority for vaccinations over some other groups. But the vaccine has not yet been tested in young children, and trials with older children have only just begun. So what could Pfizer's announcement mean for schools? Could they bring more students

into the classroom and ease other mitigation efforts as long as teachers are inoculated? And when will a COVID-19 vaccine that's safe for children be ready?

Education Week put these and other questions to two experts: Dr. Walter Orenstein, a professor of infectious diseases at Emory University School of Medicine and a former director of the immunization program at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Cherise Rohr-Allegrini, an epidemiologist serving on San Antonio's COVID Response Coalition and the CEO of the San Antonio AIDS Foundation.

The responses were edited for length and clarity. Here's what the experts had to say:

If districts are able to inoculate large numbers of their employees, would schools be able to return to full-time in-person learning?

Orenstein: You're asking the right question. It's unclear from the Pfizer data so far what the age distribution of the trial participants is. How effective is it in older people? In younger people? We don't know that yet. If it is 90 percent-plus effective [as Pfizer indicated], and when there is an adequate supply so groups like teachers would be recommended for the vaccine, it would certainly facilitate their coming back. Where they will be **within the priorities [to be vaccinated]** is not yet clear. We know frontline healthcare workers are at the top of the list, then elderly people.

Rohr-Allegrini: Until we have a vaccine for everyone, we will have to follow strict control measures. But it means we can maybe bring more kids into the classroom. So much as well is dependent on community transmission.

Cherise Rohr-Allegrini

Can schools ease up on mitigation efforts like masks and social distancing when vaccinations begin?

Rohr-Allegrini: I think the more people who are vaccinated, that will decrease community transmission, which will allow you to relax some of those mitigation efforts. If the goal is to have as many children in school as possible, we might have to relax on the physical distancing requirements for a classroom, but we keep the mask requirements. Remember, 90 percent effective means that there are still 10 percent who will get the vaccine who are not going to be protected. And then you have the others who can't get the vaccine for medical reasons, so you are going to have people who are still at risk. So you're going to have to be cautious until we have community transmission at such a low level that we can feel comfortable that there is very limited risk.

Orenstein: If there was enough vaccine to vaccinate everybody, including children, and we had a high uptake of it, then I think we could relax the social distancing, mask-wearing, those non-pharmaceutical interventions. But we certainly won't be able to do that right away. We shouldn't expect 300 million doses the first day. We'll have to see the data from Pfizer, [and] what indications and recommendations the FDA gives for its use. Hopefully, we have a number of other vaccines coming down the pike as well. And I hope to see similar efficacies. That would facilitate a highly vaccinated and highly immune population.

A general view of Pfizer Manufacturing Belgium in Puurs, Belgium, Nov. 9. Pfizer said that early results from its coronavirus vaccine suggest the shots may be a surprisingly robust 90 percent effective at preventing COVID-19.

What are the limitations of the new vaccine for schools?

Orenstein: At the moment there are a lot of unknowns. One big hassle is distributing it. This vaccine needs very, very strict maintenance of the cold chain, at -70, -80 degrees centigrade. Second, there's the number of doses available. Third, we need to develop a process where the vaccine could be administered safely. For example, we wouldn't want to gather people in an indoor stadium or movie theater to vaccinate them. We don't want them coming so

close to each other. We need to assure the public we have good efficacy and safety in all the potential populations.

How important a piece of the puzzle in K-12 schools is a children's vaccine? Can the Pfizer vaccine make any difference for K-12 schools if it can only be used with adults?

Orenstein: I think we need to get to the point where both kids and adults are [getting vaccinated]. It would be concerning to me if we had no vaccine for children. We need to get it, and get it sooner rather than later.

Rohr-Allegrini: Having a vaccine for adults is very important for schools because we can feel more confident that the adults are protected. Teens are as likely to transmit as adults. The youngest ones, it doesn't mean they aren't infectious or perfectly safe, but the risk is lower.

What is the timeline for getting a COVID-19 vaccine for children?

Orenstein: [laughing] I wish I had a good crystal ball. My hope would be the middle of next year, maybe early next year, but I don't know. Children have not been in most of the studies. We're just getting to that now. It will take longer. It's really important to get the data presented and published in a peer-reviewed journal so these questions can be answered.

Rohr-Allegrini: This Pfizer vaccine, they have started to test it in kids as young as 12. I think other vaccine manufacturers will start soon as well. Assuming this vaccine works in children, I suspect it will be ready in six months or so. Not this school year—I would be shocked just because it takes a while to ramp it up and you always roll out a vaccine slowly.

Why is there a delay in producing a COVID-19 vaccine for children?

Rohr-Allegrini: I wouldn't call it a delay—normally a vaccine takes years to develop. That we have a vaccine in less than a year, that's promising—it really is warp-speed, it's incredible. Normally when we develop of a vaccine, we start with the population that is most at risk

but also is relatively healthy because you don't want to test it in people who have other complications.

And we tend to test it in adults first. There are a lot of reasons why we don't want to start with children—ethical reasons. Adults can consent for themselves. Having a parent consent for their child adds a layer of complication.

What are the most important things communities can do to handle “vaccine hesitancy”?

Orenstein: We need to be truthful, show we're not cutting corners, and give the public confidence that the data we present on effectiveness and safety are real and valid. Vaccines don't save lives; vaccinations save lives. A vaccine that remains in the vial is zero percent effective.

How should school leaders deal with vaccine hesitancy among teachers and school staff?

Rohr-Allegri: The messaging has to incorporate enough of the science that people feel confident in getting the vaccine and we need to be sensitive to any concerns, that they're not scared or that they feel forced into getting it.

I don't expect school district leaders to be scientific experts on vaccines. But you rely on the people that are to craft your messaging. We know the questions that come up—we're used to these questions, we get them all the time. We know how to craft these messages in a sensitive way.

11/15/2020

Joe Biden's potential to bring the country together

by Randi Weingarten
President, American Federation of Teachers

Americans came out, in the middle of a pandemic, and voted in record numbers to elect Joe Biden and Kamala Harris. Despite this decisive result, the country is bitterly divided over social issues, race and gender. Fully 56 percent of Trump voters said they support him because he “stands up for America’s values, history and culture.” That is incomprehensible to those of us who both love America and fight to make it fairer and more just. But our divisions mask an important commonality: We all want to feel safe—economically, emotionally and physically. In the midst of overlapping crises—a pandemic, a recession, a climate emergency and a reckoning with racial injustice—most of us don’t feel secure. President-elect Biden will not only confront these crises, he will work to make the country more united, just and secure.



Joe Biden joins Weingarten, AFT members and students at an AFT Votes town hall in Houston on May 28, 2019. Photo by Pamela Wolfe.

The unrelenting march of the coronavirus pandemic—from early outbreaks on the coasts to nearly every state being in the red zone—has blanketed the country in fear.

The economic downturn has cast 8 million more people into poverty. Even before the pandemic, 40 percent of Americans said they couldn't cover a \$400 emergency. Many people who never worried about their financial security feel very vulnerable now.

The murders of innocent Black Americans, the peaceful protests in response, and the false characterizations of those protests as “mobs” reveal we have much hard work and healing to do. Racism—in law enforcement, healthcare, education and the environment—is so pervasive that public health experts say simply being Black can be harmful for your health. Race played a role in the elections, from dog-whistle warnings of voter fraud to outright voter suppression and disenfranchisement.

The thing that families place so much hope in—their children's education—now causes so much angst. We worry that children will contract the virus at school or unknowingly bring it home; we see our children losing out academically with remote learning and growing isolated and depressed as the months drag on.

Healthcare workers are exhausted, angry and, yes, very afraid. Many still lack necessary protective equipment as infections rage. Hospitals across the country are reaching capacity and face dire staff shortages, leading North Dakota's governor to make the outrageous declaration that healthcare workers who test positive for COVID-19 can continue working.

President-elect Biden knows that to revive our economy and achieve any of our priorities, the United States must get the coronavirus under control. Experts on the Biden COVID-19 task force are already at work on plans to reduce the spread of the virus, ensure vaccines are safe and implement basic virus control measures scientists have long begged for: a national system for testing and contact tracing, targeted closures when necessary, and promoting mask-wearing as both a safeguard and a patriotic act.

Protecting Americans from the coronavirus will make it possible to pursue other priorities, such as in education. This has been the most challenging school year most of us have ever experienced—from the lack of consistent safety guardrails and guidance, to the shortage of resources, to the limitations of hybrid and remote learning, despite educators working harder than ever.

President-elect Biden is committed to working with Congress to pass a COVID-19 relief package with robust aid to schools, towns, cities and states, so they

can invest in safeguards to reopen schools safely. In addition to public health components, the relief package will provide crucial funding to help schools recover from the devastating academic, social, health and nutrition effects of the pandemic on children.

The Biden-Harris education plan fulfills the promise and purpose of our public schools as agents of opportunity and anchors of our communities by pledging to fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and triple funding for Title I to help low-income students. It will provide high-quality universal prekindergarten for all 3- and 4-year-olds. It will expand community schools, which is vital to help a generation of students recover from the effects of COVID-19 and this recession. It will restore the mission of the Education Department's Office for Civil Rights. And Biden and Harris have pledged to provide much-needed relief to borrowers crushed by student loan debt.

Their economic recovery plan will create millions of jobs in manufacturing, innovation, infrastructure, clean energy and education. These are jobs you can support a family on, jobs that will help restore hope that there is a better future ahead.

The Biden administration will protect and build on the Affordable Care Act, giving Americans more choice, reducing healthcare costs, protecting those with pre-existing conditions and expanding coverage.

The American people have spoken. We want leaders who care about our well-being and will unify all Americans with better leadership, honesty and integrity, justice and equality, caring and respect. Joe Biden and Kamala Harris are the leaders we need.

PRESIDENTIAL

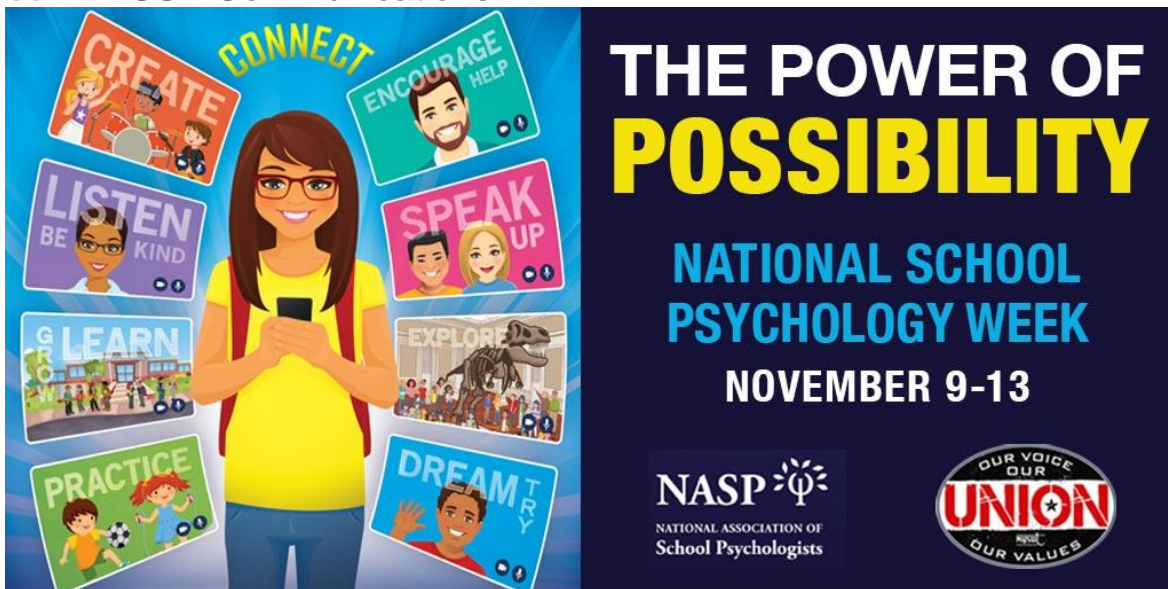
★ RACE RESULTS ★

November 09, 2020

Pandemic heightens need for school psychologists

Author: Liza Frenette

Source: NYSUT Communications



In Newburgh, school psychologist Kelly Caci is putting together an in-person and online bereavement group for students who have lost a family member or friend due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Two students lost a parent and another a coach in a community league. Students have lost grandparents and friends to the virus.

The role of school psychologists has expanded in need and importance as students struggle with drastically changed lives due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, isolation, family addiction issues, an increase in poverty, and adjusting to hybrid learning. During **National School Psychology Week Nov. 9–13**, the spotlight is on school psychologists' heightened role and the work they do to help students thrive.

“Life is nowhere near ‘normal’ anymore. The pandemic has definitely caused an increase in anxiety and depression,” said Caci, a member of the Newburgh Teachers Association and of NYSUT’s Health Care Professionals Council. Additionally, she noted that online learning requires a lot of independence and some students struggle with that.

“School psychologists fill a number of roles within a school,” said Beth Rizzi, a psychologist with the Wappingers Congress of Teachers and president of the 900-member New York Association of School Psychologists. “We provide both mandated and non-mandated counseling services, crisis intervention, teacher consultation, assessment for eligibility of special education, data collection to assist in decision-making, intervention and instructional support, collaboration with families, and collaboration with colleagues.”

Today, there is much reason for educators and school psychologists to be on high alert.

“The stress during the pandemic is clearly leading to an increase in substance use leading to addiction and overdose,” said Caci, noting one of her students lost a parent to an overdose.

A bereavement group allows children to process feelings in a safe and caring setting, said Caci. “The loss of a parent is devastating. It is one of the most stressful and traumatic events a child will experience. This also applies to caring adults who may not be related — coach, teacher, etc.”

To help students cope with a world that has been spinning with change, Rizzi said she frequently promotes mindfulness practices, meditation, breathing practice and following a routine — depending on the student’s individual needs and stressors.

“Each situation has its own unique challenges,” Rizzi said. “I have worked with students over the phone rather than utilizing Google meet. Additionally, I try to ensure that the student has relative privacy to access their services. It is so important to ensure that the student trusts that you have their best interests at heart.”

Resources

This year’s theme for National School Psychology Week is “The Power of Possibility.”

- [New York Association of School Psychologists](#)
- [National Association of School Psychologists](#)
- [NASP Podcast](#)

Long Island school psychologist John Kelly said the prolonged nature of the pandemic, along with a lengthy, tense election season, an increase in poverty, and racial unrest have created more stressors for students.

Kelly, a member of the Commack Teachers Association, **appeared on a CNN town hall** in May with Anderson Cooper on the effects the pandemic may have on children. ()

Students are also concerned about exposure. School psychologists work to help students maneuver this world.

“We talk about being responsible, gathering in smaller groups, meeting outside, and wearing masks,” Kelly said. “The vast majority is trying to be responsible.”

He said the increase in poverty, spiked by job losses due to COVID-19, “is almost like a silent pandemic.”

Navigating COVID-19 restrictions creates challenges for providing help to students. Some students can be met with in person on days they attend school — many districts use a hybrid model. But using personal protective equipment can make the connection cumbersome.

Meeting in groups — such as Banana Splits, for students whose parents are divorced — is close to impossible, Caci said, because of the need for social distancing.

Some families have opted for all online learning, so psychologists meet with those students online or by phone.

Challenges in teletherapy include making sure students have access to technology, difficulty reading emotions, and limits to hands-on activities and therapeutic games.

“It is also difficult if a student becomes upset or needs additional support and shuts off their camera or disconnects from the session. This is in addition to the technology issues such as sound or cameras not working, or internet instability,” Caci said. In some areas, access to the internet is unavailable.

Above all, however, technology has allowed school psychologists to continue helping students.

“The plus for me has been the ability to maintain contact,” said Kelly, who took professional development classes in providing virtual services and using different platforms. He then worked with a school social worker and teachers to create a socio-emotional toolkit with strategies to infuse in the classroom or use virtually.

November 19, 2020

As COVID-19 cases ramp up, nurses urge vigilance

Author: Liza Frenette



The demands on hospital and school nurses continue to rise as COVID-19 cases surge again, closing many schools this week and bringing more sick patients to hospital beds.

“The problem is morale. The problem is exhaustion,” said Anne Goldman, a United Federation of Teachers vice president who oversees the union’s Federation of Nurses. Many hospital nurses who worked long, crushing hours through the first intense wave of COVID-19 in the spring now feel defeated as the number of people infected with the virus is again soaring, she said. Some nurses have left hospital care to move on to other, less stressful and less life-threatening nursing jobs.

The combining factors of people refusing to wear masks, gathering in large crowds, and students returning to their families and towns from college are all contributing to the spike.

“The numbers will continue to go up,” said Goldman, who chairs NYSUT’s Health Care Professionals Council. “We’re surrounded by the flu also.”

Unlike other disasters, this pandemic never completely stopped, and its ongoing public limitations restricted tired nurses from being able to relax and regroup. Now cases are rising again.

In Staten Island, hospital cases of COVID-19 are rising rapidly, said nurse Nancy Barth-Miller, Federation of Nurses/UFT and a longtime member of the NYSUT Health Care Professionals Council.

“We had 32 inpatient cases last week; it was up to 52 in two days. Now it’s up to between 70 to 80,” she said.

The hospital network has separated into COVID-contained treatment at Staten Island North, and other illnesses and surgeries at Staten Island South.

“We’re trying to keep the heavy-duty PPE concentrated cases in one area,” Barth-Miller said. While in the spring there were problems getting enough personal protective equipment for hospital nurses, school nurses, first responders and other health care providers, Barth-Miller said the nurses have been getting enough supplies and shields for now.

NYSUT helped deliver thousands of masks downstate during the shortage.

The pandemic also contributed to the Staten Island Hospital ending its chemical dependency detox and rehab services, Barth-Miller said. Mitigating factors included finances and to avoid having increased foot traffic in and out of the hospital. This has meant not only a shortage of services for those battling addiction — which has been on the rise during COVID-19 — but also nursing layoffs.

The union contract will ensure training is provided to those nurses who were absorbed in other departments, Barth-Miller said. “There’s been a lot of reorganization,” she said.

Citywide, the UFT is providing free mental health services through virtual counseling for members in need. NYSUT has resources available through its Social Services program.

As the holidays approach, there are even more concerns about cases spiking with more individuals planning to travel — across the state or across the country — and spending time indoors in large groups. Nurses on the frontlines urge vigilance. Protect yourself and others by wearing a mask, maintain social distancing and avoid large gatherings.

|Nov 30, 2020,03:25pm EST

Whether We Like It Or Not, Online Teaching Is The Future, So Let's Start Learning How To Do It Properly



Enrique Dans Senior Contributor

Teaching and consulting in the innovation field since 1990



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A [study](#) published by Fairfax County Public Schools in Virginia, and [The Washington Post's interpretation of it](#), shows the dangers of trying to analyze change, in this case, the transition from traditional teaching to online delivery, prompted by the pandemic. According to the study, there was an 83% increase in the number of high school and college students who failed at least two subjects, rising from 6% to 11%.

To try to extrapolate from such results some kind of problem with online versus face-to-face education is misleading at best, but is one of the most common symptoms of resistance to change: to conclude that after an isolated test, a new method does not work as well as the previous one.

Online teaching, as delivered during the pandemic, is obviously not as good as face-to-face teaching. Anything else would be a miracle: it was carried out under emergency conditions, in which practically any type of innovation in methodology was rejected, and with students and teachers typically lacking in equipment and training. Where have the worst results been produced? In children whose temperament, socioeconomic level or family situation made it difficult for them to perform adequately academically. And that in Virginia... if we had included in the study [children in Indonesia](#) or [India](#), who have to walk to certain places or even climb trees to get cellular connectivity, the results would have been, surely, even more conclusive.

We are faced with a common problem: that technology is magic and will automatically improve results by itself, simply by doing the same thing as before. If we really want to develop online teaching, [using computers to actually replace classrooms](#), rather than [a mere substitute at times of crisis](#), we will have to go about things very differently. [Do students hate online classes?](#) Yes, when what they are being taught is not adapted properly, and is instead merely a reproduction of the classroom and involves listening to a person talking to a camera for an hour. Under these conditions, [learning is not just hard work](#), so is staying awake. That said, not all children hate it: [for some, it works very well](#).

[The future of online learning](#) involves more than simply doing the same thing we do in a face-to-face class, mainly because it is superior in terms of possibilities. But it means creating content adapted to the medium that takes advantage of those possibilities, creating interactive models that avoid prolonged unidirectional delivery, real-time analytics that evaluate attitude and progress, and even devices that allow the development of more immersive environments and reduce distraction. We will have to [create new tools](#), which are not necessarily an extension of the traditional ones, and [develop literacy in those tools](#) that will allow all those involved, both students and teachers, to handle them with total ease (it really isn't rocket science: technology makes the tools increasingly easier to use).

Developing online teaching implies re-education in the use of technology, unlearning mindset that assume that screens are not for in-depth reading, but a quick scroll from the headline to the end of the paragraph. This will mean learning how to make the most out of digital channels, creating new methodologies and communication approaches, and not recreating on a screen what we used to do in a class.

The possibilities of the online medium are, by its nature, much greater than those of a face-to-face class, and anybody who doesn't understand this will never be able to take advantage of them. Better access to information, more ways to create attractive formats, to personalize them, to generate involvement, to click on an opinion or to evaluate performance. Even the social aspect of learning can be enhanced.

I have said it many times: if you want to teach online properly, teachers have to do much more work than in a face-to-face session. A face-to-face class is prepared, an online class is produced. If we simply sit in front of the webcam and start talking, or if we just post essay titles by email, we are not giving online class: as the saying goes, if you fail to prepare, you are preparing to fail. It's not the fault of the online medium.

Editor's Note

Each month the On Target will come out near the end of the month.

If you have something that you would like included, please send as a Word document by the 20th of the month to: lpunek@clarenceschools.org

Items that could be included are: Articles dealing with education/unions, Good ideas for teaching, something humorous/light dealing with education, Information for sharing, Opinion pieces on education, Advertisement for a service you provide.

Thank you,
Lisa Panek

Opinion

Is This Where We Are, America?

Some people oppose student loan forgiveness because they want others to suffer, too.



By Roxane Gay Contributing Opinion Writer

• Nov. 20, 2020



Credit...Gillian Jones/The Berkshire Eagle, via Associated Press

I took out my first student loans more than 20 years ago. I had dropped out of college just before the start of my junior year. I took a couple of years off, and when I went back I had to pay for my final two years myself. I understood the responsibility I was assuming, but I was working minimum wage jobs at the time — retail, telemarketing, bartending. Repayment seemed like a vague, distant concept in large part because I could not fathom being able to repay such staggering amounts of money. I went to graduate school and got two more

degrees, and though those programs were funded, I took out student loans because it was impossible to live on the meager stipends we were given.

One of those jobs I had as an undergrad the second time around was at a student loan company, processing loan consolidations. I saw applications from people who owed \$15,000 and people who owed \$400,000 and everything in between. I learned how expensive chiropractic and dental schools are. I spoke with a young woman who attended Brown and was working at Walmart and had \$300,000 in loans and was desperate for help. Her monthly payment was more than she earned from her full-time job. But mostly, I learned the intricacies of the student loan system, the ways to repay and defer or forbear them, what it takes to pay them off, and how the system is designed to extract as much money as possible from people simply trying to get an education, trying to get the necessary credentials to prosper.

Every month, I pay \$1,000 to the federal government. My balance has hovered around \$140,000 for the past 10 years because most of each payment goes toward the interest. This is a common story, but this is not a sad story because I can afford to pay my loans. In another 15 years, whatever remains on the balance will be discharged, though I will have to pay income tax on the discharged amount. And still, my loans are always looming on the periphery of my life, influencing every fiscal decision I make.

Student loans are the kind of debt from which there is often no escape. They generally cannot be discharged by claiming bankruptcy. Deferment and forbearance periods are finite. If you default, the stain of it will follow you for quite a long time. The consequences can be devastating — wage garnishments, no tax refunds, whatever the government needs to do to get its money back — and your credit score can be destroyed.

Many progressive politicians feature student loan forgiveness as one of their key policy ideas because they understand how big a problem the student debt crisis is and what it will become without intervention. With Joe Biden as president, there is a distinct possibility that some form of student loan forgiveness might become a reality.

But the debate about the issue is contentious. It's either a great idea or a terrible one. It's a way of evening the playing field or it's unfair to people who have paid off their student loans or who never borrowed or attended college. A great many Americans are concerned with fairness only when they think someone else might get something they won't get. And they are seething with resentment as they imagine a country in which we help one another. It's appalling, that this is where we are ... that this is who we are.

No one benefits from everything our government does. I don't have children, but some of the money I pay in taxes goes toward education. This serves the greater good and indirectly benefits me. We're all paying for infrastructure we don't personally need or use. It's part of the social contract, but that contract holds up only when we are all willing to abide by its terms.

Much of the political division about student loan forgiveness can be explained by the fact that people want to benefit from the social contract without adhering to its terms. Or they care about the social contract only as it applies to the right kinds of people. And, of course, there is the bootstrap mentality — *If I have achieved success, surely you can too* — which is delusional at best. Then there are those who worship at the altar of personal responsibility: *If you assume a debt, you must repay it*. And worst of all, there's the sufferance doctrine: *If I have experienced hardship, you must experience hardship, too*.

Damon Linker, a columnist for The Week, [tweeted](#): “I think Dems are wildly underestimating the intensity of anger college loan cancellation is going to provoke. Those with college debt will be thrilled, of course. But lots and lots of people who didn't go to college or who worked to pay off their debts? Gonna be bad.” This is what passes for political thinking these days — empty statements rising out of the notion that we have to govern from a place of fear about what might anger “lots and lots of people.”

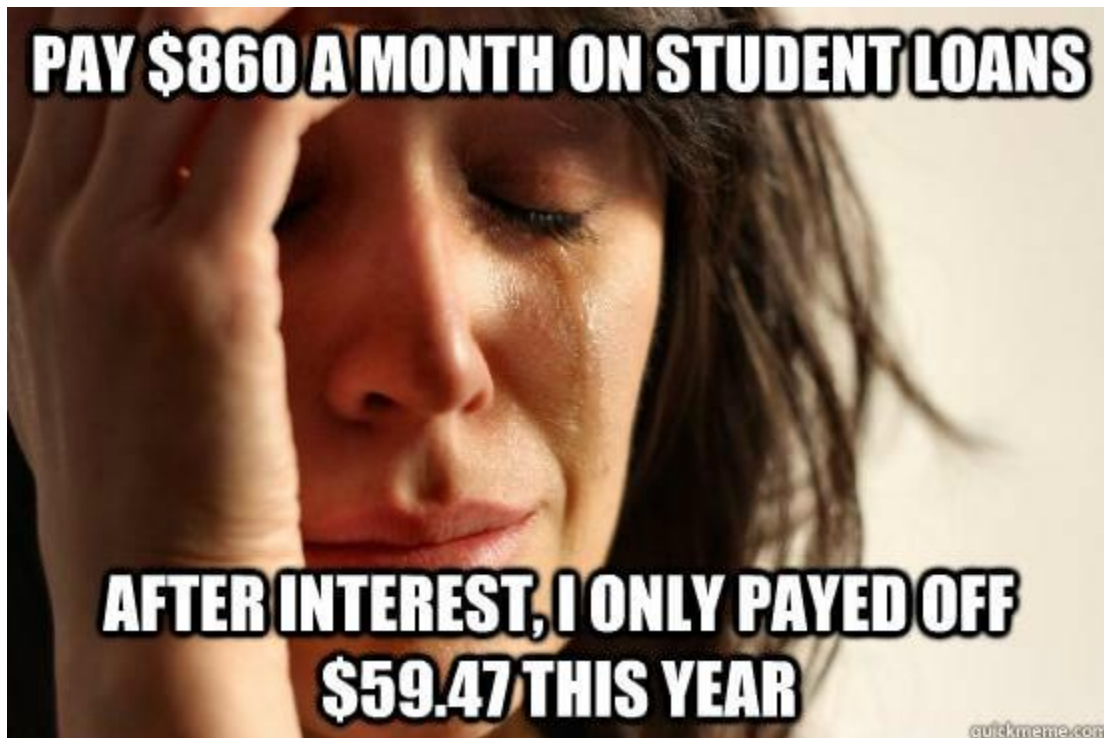
Conventional wisdom seems to be that we must not trigger people by discussing radical ideas like universal health care, civil rights for the L.G.B.T.Q. community, reckoning with police violence and the carceral system, protecting women's bodily autonomy, and, of course, student debt forgiveness. Somehow, compromise has come to mean not doing anything to upset anyone who is completely fine with ignoring the most urgent problems of our day.

Here's the thing about anger. We seem to prioritize only one kind — anger in reaction to progress. And we never seem to acknowledge the anger rising out of oppression, marginalization, and under representation. The end of slavery and desegregation angered lots and lots of people, and so did taxation, suffrage, marriage equality. Progress angers people, but change is not the problem. The rage and resentment are.

People are struggling. The \$1,200 stimulus checks have been spent. The additional \$600 a week of unemployment funding has run its course. The Paycheck Protection Program has shut its doors. The economy continues to falter because we lack coherent federal leadership, and conditions will only worsen. We are on a precipice, as we have been before and will be again. A lot of political thinkers believe that now is the time for moderation, that we are in a boat that must not be rocked.

But now is not the time for half-measures. Now is the time for grand gestures and innovative thinking. Now is the time for remembering the social contract and recommitting to the idea of a unified country where we understand how intimately we are all connected. Now is the time for understanding that empathy is infinite if we allow it to be.

This country has to rise out of the bitter ashes of Donald Trump's presidency. Student loan forgiveness won't solve all the problems we are facing, but it will ease a significant burden for tens of millions of people. It will stimulate the lagging economy. And though not everyone will directly benefit, the country as a whole will improve. As a public, we owe a debt to one another — the debt of belonging to a community. It's time that debt was paid.



Engaging Students in a Virtual Classroom

Educators have discovered some tried-and-true strategies for remote learning that could benefit in-person instruction as well.



By: Cindy Long
Published: 11/16/2020

Distance learning forced educators to file away some of their most time-tested classroom management tricks. You can't exactly flick the lights on and off to get attention in Google Meet. There's no withholding recess as a consequence or promises of a classroom pizza party as a reward when you're online. But educators have discovered some tried-and-true strategies for remote learning that could benefit in-person instruction as well.

BUILD HUMAN CONNECTION

One of the most effective approaches is to build a sense of community. With a new semester upon us, this is the perfect time to look for fresh ways to bring your students together—even if they are physically apart.

Create small groups

Scheduling small virtual “gatherings” is an excellent way to get to know your students. You can create small groups for reading or math, but they don't necessarily need to be based on academics. Try meeting with a handful of students to talk about the best and worst parts of their week. Let them vent their frustrations about school and share their hopes for the rest of the year. By allowing them to express their thoughts and feelings, you build trust and respect. Students who feel respected and heard are much more likely to be engaged.

Set goals together

Students always need encouragement, but during the pandemic we all need extra motivation. Helping students set goals, with a little guidance from you, will go a long way toward staying on track. If they record their learning goals, track how they're doing and reflect on progress. This will help keep them excited to learn.

Review and renew class norms

If you already created a class contract or even a class constitution, now's a great time to review and update it if necessary. If you haven't, you can establish one to govern the remainder of the year. The classroom contract is a set of rules and norms created collaboratively and agreed upon by everyone in the class. It includes consequences for not following the rules and norms and should be updated to reflect unique situations that arise. The contract can be a good reminder for everyone if there are disruptions.

Answer common Q&As

By week one of remote learning, you probably knew what the most common questions were. They likely came up again and again ... and again. Set aside time for students to think of their most common questions and a few they hear classmates asking frequently. Have the students send you their questions, then answer them all together.

Create a Q&A document they can print, hang, or reference as a bookmark. Ask the students to review the document before asking during class.

GET STUDENTS MOVING!

We asked our NEA Today Facebook fans for tips on getting their students up and out of their chairs to blow off steam. These moves are great for distance learning or in the classroom. Shelly McCormick-Lane, a Latin teacher in Texas, filmed her school's world language department doing 60-second dance party breaks to everything from the "Macarena" to "YMCA."

"I placed them strategically in the middle of PowerPoints. ... At first most stared at me like I was crazy, but soon most of my high school students grades 9–12 were dancing with me!" she writes.

Meagan Penn is a New Jersey high school dance teacher, and even her 18-year-old football players love a round or two of Just Dance. “YouTube has almost every Just Dance video that’s ever been released, and most can be done in a small amount of personal space. A lot of kids will know the dances already from playing on their gaming systems.”

GIVE STUDENTS CHOICES

During the pandemic, choice boards became even more widely used to engage students in asynchronous learning.

Part of the teacher toolkit for years, these graphic organizers are set up as a grid, offering students different activities in each square to learn about a single concept. If they are learning about history, for example, they can watch a short documentary, read a text, create a timeline, or write a poem or play about a time period or event. If they are learning math concepts, they can complete a timed worksheet of problems, answer a series of word problems, write the instructions for solving a complex problem, or create a poster showing three different ways to solve a problem.

Choice boards help students stay motivated because the students select the learning path that appeals to them the most.

This technique also helps educators achieve that most elusive of lesson goals: differentiation. Choice boards allow educators to reach a group of students with many different levels of understanding and learning styles.

Students need that human connection now more than ever. The human element will reduce disruptive behavior and help keep your students motivated through these difficult times.

Preventing Youth Suicide: Tips for Parents and Educators

If you or someone you know is suicidal, get help immediately via 911, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK or the Crisis Text Line (text "HOME" to 741741).

Suicide is preventable. Youth who are contemplating suicide frequently give warning signs. Do not be afraid to ask about suicidal thoughts. Never take warning signs lightly or promise to keep them secret.

Risk Factors



- Hopelessness
- Non-suicidal self injury (e.g., cutting)
- Mental illness, especially severe depression, but also post traumatic stress, ADHD, and substance abuse
- History of suicidal thinking and behavior
- Prior suicide among peers or family members
- Interpersonal conflict, family stress/dysfunction
- Presence of a firearm in the home

Warning Signs



- Suicidal threats in the form of direct (e.g., "I want to die") and indirect (e.g., "I wish I could go to sleep and not wake up") statements
- Suicide notes, plans, online postings
- Making final arrangements
- Preoccupation with death
- Giving away prized possessions
- Talking about death
- Sudden unexplained happiness
- Increased risk taking
- Heavy drug/alcohol use

What to Do



- Remain calm, nonjudgmental and listen.
- Ask directly about suicide (e.g., "Are you thinking about suicide").
- Focus on your concern for their well-being
- Avoid being accusatory (e.g., don't say, "You aren't going to do anything stupid are you?").
- Reassure them that there is help; they will not feel like this forever.
- Provide constant supervision. Do not leave the youth alone.
- Remove means for self-harm, especially firearms.
- **Get help!** Never agree to keep suicidal thoughts a secret. Tell an appropriate caregiving adult. Parents should seek help from school or community mental health resources as soon as possible. School staff should take the student to a school-employed mental health professional.

Reminders for Parents



After a school notifies a parent of their child's risk for suicide and provides referral information, parents must:

- **Continue to take threats seriously.** Follow through is important even after the child calms down or informs the parent "they didn't mean it."
- **Access school supports.** If parents are uncomfortable with following through on referrals, they can give the school psychologist permission to contact the referral agency, provide referral information, and follow up on the visit.
- **Maintain communication with school.** After an intervention, the school will also provide follow-up supports. Your communication will be crucial to ensuring that the school is the safest, most comfortable place possible for your child.