Schools During the COVID-19 Pandemic:
Sites and Sources of Community Resilience

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Abstract

Along with the economy and health care system, schools are an essential third pillar in promoting community resilience and rebuilding communities' physical, economic, emotional, social, and cultural health in the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Schools serve as sites and sources of community resilience in five distinct ways: they distribute social welfare services, promote human development, care for children, provide stable employment, and strengthen democratic solidarity. Yet long-term physical school closures—along with impending budget cuts driven by cratering state and local economies and tax revenues—make it extremely difficult for schools to perform any of these roles. We recommend three steps for restoring schools' capacities to support community resilience. First, state and district leaders should set metrics for achieving access and equity in each of the five roles that schools play, not just in academic achievement. Second, to establish these metrics, policymakers should develop or strengthen mechanisms to engage diverse community voices, as local community members often best understand the specific ways in which their own schools support or impede community resilience. Finally, Congress should allocate significant increases in federal funding to support public schools and districts for at least the next two years; these allocations should include strong supports for high-needs districts in particular.

To read more about educational ethics in a pandemic, see white paper 17, "Educational Ethics During a Pandemic," by Meira Levinson, https://ethics.harvard.edu/educational-ethics-pandemic.

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01 Introduction

Public schools[6] are important institutions in virtually every community in the United States, from our most sparsely populated rural counties to our largest cities. They are places where children collectively grow up. They are key partners to families, providing predictable, reliable child care at an economy of scale and supporting children's development. They provide food and health services to children with limited access to each. They are sources of stable, middle-class employment for many adults. They are also sites of disaster relief, citizenship education, voting, town meetings, and celebratory moments of pomp and circumstance.

As we move forward to construct our "new normal" in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, we must therefore recognize that along with the economy and health care system, schools are an essential third pillar in promoting community resilience and rebuilding communities' physical, economic, emotional, social, and cultural health. Supporting schools amid the pandemic is thus about much more than re-configuring learning opportunities, as crucial as that is. In fact, focusing solely on schools' capacities to provide high-quality remote learning opportunities to students at scale may perversely weaken commu-nities by failing to recognize schools' diverse and far-reaching roles in promoting community resilience through non-teaching roles such as child care, social welfare services, and stable adult employment. Pandemic-resilient schools can (and are essential to) contribute to a pandemic-resilient society (Allen et al., 2020) when they are capable of fulfilling each of the five essential roles they have historically played in promoting pre-pandemic community resilience: social welfare services, human development, child care, employment, and democratic solidarity.

Yet the long-term closures that the pandemic requires have made it difficult, if not impossible, for

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[6] By public schools, we mean traditional public schools, public charter schools, Department of Defense schools, and tribal schools.

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schools to perform any of these roles. The shift to remote education has laid bare deep educational in-equities, as many students are not able even to access online schools or much-needed resources. With brick-and-mortar schools closed, parents across the country struggle to balance child care, educational instruction, and their jobs. And schools' role as employers—in many communities the single-largest lo-cal employer capable of providing middle-class or living wages—is facing the threat of severe budget cuts that may force them to lay off or furlough substantial portions of their workforces (Litvinov, 2020; Strauss, 2020). Even when schools have been able to sustain one of these crucial roles—namely, their ability to continue food distribution to students and families—cracks have become evident. Many eligible families have been unable to pick up food because of essential work schedules or lack of trans-portation (DeParle, 2020), and increasing numbers of Americans who are food insecure for the first time because of the pandemic-induced shutdown are reaching out to schools for support (Bauer, 2020). It is unclear whether schools have the resources to meet this growing need.

As the pandemic continues to shake the foundations of the country's economy and social fabric, schools need support along each of the five dimensions of community resilience so that they, in turn, can sup-port the families and communities who rely on them in so many different and vital ways. In what follows, we detail each of these sources of resilience and the impact of the pandemic on schools' ability to real-ize them. We then offer a series of recommendations for policymakers that would enable schools to sustain communities during this moment of global crisis.

02 Social Welfare

Despite U.S. education reformers' single-minded focus over the past thirty years on assessing schools' academic outcomes above all else, schools have always provided vital physical, mental, and emotional social welfare services to children and families. These important services enable the academic achievement by which schools are most often evaluated. They also frequently underpin the physical and economic health of communities made vulnerable by inadequate insurance, family instability, environmental toxicity, and jobs that fail to pay a living wage.

In 2016/17 (the most recent year for which complete data is available), for instance, public schools provided free or reduced-price meals to over 26 million students, or 52% of all school children (NCES, 2019a). Estimates for 2019 show that U.S. public schools served 3.6 billion free and reduced-price lunches; they also served over 140 million meals in the summer (USDA, 2020). Furthermore, many community partners, districts, schools, and individual educators supplement these federally funded programs to improve children's nutrition. After-school partners provide snacks and often dinner to hungry students; many schools send home backpacks on Friday afternoons with food to tide families over for the weekend; and countless teachers keep granola bars, apples, and other grab-and-go snacks in stock for students who need them.

K-12 schools also provide physical and mental health services to millions of students per year, including vaccinations; management for chronic diseases such as diabetes, asthma, or ADHD; sexual and reproductive health education and services; vision, dental, and mental health screenings and services; nutrition health education; and hypertension screening (Baltag et al., 2015). School nurses and counselors are particularly powerful providers of care (Maughan, 2018); recent studies have found that about three-quarters of students who receive any mental health services get them in their schools, for instance, and that students are "21 times more likely to visit school-based health centers for mental

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health services get them in their schools, for instance, and that students are "21 times more likely to visit school-based health centers for mental health than community mental health centers" ([Whitaker et al., [2019]](#)). Although the nationwide shortage of nurses has made it hard for schools, like community health centers and hospitals, to maintain adequate staffing levels (Washburn, 2019), U.S. schools still employ approximately 95,800 FTE nurses to serve a population of about 55 million students (Willgerodt, 2018). Vital health services are also provided by 111,000 school counselors, 32,000 social workers, and 41,000 school psychologists (as of 2012; see [NCES, 2012](#)). Often these providers are the first point of care, especially in under-resourced areas ([Whitaker et al., [2019]](#)); about a quarter of students served by a dental outreach program in Michigan, for example, had never seen a dentist before ([Albanese, 2014](#)), and over 6,500 students in Baltimore Public Schools have received glasses since 2016 thanks to school-based screenings ([Hub Staff, 2019](#)). Unfortunately, availability does not fully match need. The most vulnerable students often attend schools in districts with the worst ratio of counselors and nurses to students (Willgerodt et al., 2018; [Gagnon & Mattingly, 2016](#); [CLASP, 2015](#)). This is one of the reasons teachers went on strike in Los Angeles Unified and Oakland, California, in 2018 and 2019; the unions made increased nursing capacity a key demand ([Washburn, 2019](#)) and won concessions in both cases.

Schools also act as hubs for a wide range of therapeutic and social services. In 2015, for instance, nearly 60,000 students received occupational therapy in the New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles public schools alone ([Harris, 2015](#)); schools also provide regular speech and physical therapy to children. Every day, educators identify and advocate for students who need evaluation or support by social services agencies. Students who are homeless, in foster care, or are experiencing significant life changes are often supported by school programs that support their well-being and stability ([Belsha, 2020](#)). Many schools also provide before- and after-school wrap-around services, including everything from music lessons to behavioral therapy, to offer flexibility for parents and enrichment for the students who attend.

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The estimated 5,000 community schools in the United States go even further, providing health care, English as a Second Language classes, parenting classes, and housing and job supports to children's families and others throughout the community (Dryfoos et al., 2005; NCCS, 2020; Trujillo et al., 2014).

During the COVID 19 pandemic, schools' role as social welfare providers has been challenged by physical school closures. Students no longer have in-person access to the early intervention services, social workers, counselors, nurses, and numerous other resources that schools provide. Although special educators and occupational and speech therapists are trying to connect virtually with students (Mitchell, 2020), many students are losing valuable ground without in-person services and supports, and others awaiting services may not receive the diagnosis they need until schools reopen (Mader, 2020; Preston, 2020). Calls to child abuse hotlines have dwindled during COVID-19; experts believe that this drop in reporting is due to school closures rather than actual reductions, since school workers are distanced from their students and are less well-situated to detect abuse (Schmidt & Natanson, 2020; Stewart, 2020). Schools and districts have made herculean efforts to organize food distribution to children—and often to hungry adults as well, no questions asked (Levinson, 2020; Malkus & Christensen, 2020c). Los Angeles Unified School District, for example, has provided almost 5 million meals to adults and students while also providing nutritional assistance to thirteen temporary homeless shelters (Nittle, 2020). But meal access is still radically below normal levels, at a time when food insecurity is massively increasing due to cascading job losses. Only 15% of eligible children (4.4 million out of 30 million total) have received Pandemic-EBT electronic grocery cards set up by Congress's Families First Act—in many cases because states have to coordinate with individual school districts to get eligible students' names and addresses (DeParle, 2020), as they are the onl only governmental agencies that keep track of school children suffering hunger. The Census Bureau (Callen, 2020) and Brookings (Bauer, 2020) have similarly found that since pandemic-related shutdowns, nearly one-fifth to one-third of all families with children report food insecurity, and researchers Elizabeth Ananat and Anna Gassman-Pines have

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found that only 11 to 36% of low-income students in Philadelphia are even able to pick up grab-and-go meals provided by the school district (DeParle, 2020). Closing school's physical locations, while crucial for public health reasons, has substantially weakened community resilience by preventing students and families from accessing vital social welfare supports.

03 Human Development

Modern societies rely on two central institutions to work in tandem to support children's educational development—the school system and the family. This partnership supports community resilience in two different ways. First, schools are vital partners in the shared work of child development. While children's home environments have significant impact on their school-based learning (Coleman, 1966; Osher et al., 2020; Reardon, 2011), schools are primary sites of formal academic, social-emotional, civic, and vocational learning for the vast majority of children in the U.S. As many parents have been dismayed to discover while trying to homeschool during the pandemic, teaching algebra, reading, coding, or music requires specialized knowledge and skills, which professional teachers have and parents generally lack. By bringing numerous children and adults together into one shared space, schools also provide young people opportunities to develop friendships and other meaningful relationships, to develop emotional regulation and executive function skills beyond the family setting, to develop civic knowledge and habits of civic engagement, and to gain valuable workplace skills including group work skills and vocation-specific skills such as nursing or car repair. Schools can also harness economies of scale unavailable to families because a single teacher can educate multiple children at a similar stage of development at a time. Furthermore, schools can improve the prospects of students whom our society systematically disadvantages in other ways. U.S. schools are characterized by deep disparities in achievement and opportunity, by race and class in particular, but there is also good reason to believe that without schools, these disparities would be even larger (Reardon, 2011; Center on Education Policy, 2007).

Second, schools support long-term community resilience by providing individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary for sustaining collective community life. In addition to the effects of education for individuals, we all collectively benefit from higher levels of educational goods in the population. High levels of education enable greater economic productivity, quicker and better solutions to social and economic problems, and greater and more complex cultural production, not to mention healthier and

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longer lives (Sen, 2009; Mcgregor, 1994; Moretti, 2004a, 2004b). Never is this clearer than in a major public health crisis in which we rely not just on the dedication and commitment of health professionals, but also on their knowledge and skills.

Yet, the pandemic has disrupted the traditional division of labor between families and schools, affecting both the short- and long-term ways that human development supports community resilience. Schools typically promote human development through embodied, synchronous interaction: teachers and students are in the same room at the same time, and whatever work they do outside that room, alone or with others, is organized around that embodied interaction. That is exactly what schools cannot do during a pandemic: public health precautions require teachers and students to be physically isolated from one another.

Schools have thus shifted to using alternative modes of delivery. In fact, in just eleven days during the pandemic, the percentage of schools providing remote learning increased from 43 to 71% (Malkus & Christensen, 2020b), and by late April virtually all schools and districts had remote learning plans in place (Malkus & Christensen, 2020c). Despite classroom closures, teachers in 60% of schools have been encouraged to connect with their students through synchronized video lessons, independent-learning platforms, or email (Malkus & Christensen, 2020a). But without training, practice, preparation, or a proven infrastructure, these efforts have proven to be substantially less effective at driving learning than traditional in-person modes of instruction (Goldstein, 2020; Reich et al, 2020). Furthermore, the evidence suggests that the "online penalty" (Dynarski, 2018) has proven even harsher for already-vulnerable students, in particular low-income students, students with disabilities, and students in historically marginalized schools and communities (Goldstein, 2020).

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Most parents are ill-equipped to step fully into teachers' educational roles even under propitious circumstances. Teaching is already a complex task that requires professional judgment and expertise that most parents lack (Alterator et al., 2018; Parker & Hess, 2001; Shulman, 1986). On top of that, most parents are either trying to balance an increased role in educating their children with the other job they were already doing, or are trying to educate their children while they endure the stresses associated with the loss of the job they were previously doing (Long, 2020; Harris, 2020). The vast majority of parents cannot simply step into the role of teacher and do so effectively.

Public health concerns justify the closure of schools in most places right now, despite the costs to individual and collective human development. But there is every reason to suspect that those costs will be substantial (Dorn et al., 2020). This will be especially true for students whose families are particularly stressed by the virus, whether because they are in populations that are disadvantaged due to U.S. socioeconomic and racial structures, or because their parents work in positions that are vulnerable to infection, or because they are sick, or because they have special educational needs (Kelly & King, 2020; Kufeld & Tarasawa, 2020).

04 Child Care

The impact of the sudden, sustained disruption of the family-school division of labor extends beyond human development concerns. Perhaps the single most (formerly) underappreciated way in which schools support community resilience is in their role as sources of stable, safe child care. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2019 roughly 40% of all U.S. families had children under the age of eighteen (US BLS, 2020). Although children spend only one-third of their waking hours, or about 1,000 to 1,200 hours a year, in school (Craw, 2020; Wherry, 2004), the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed two distinct ways in which the time schools do care for children is absolutely vital. First, school closures have caused real stress and hardship to both unemployed and working parents. Second, while schools remain closed and parents lack dependable child care, there is no clear path toward full economic recovery.

Parents struggle as a result of school closure in different ways given the varying impact of the pandemic on their ability to work. Far too many parents have lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic. In addition to providing care for their children, they may be searching for work, navigating overwhelmed unemployment offices, or fighting with landlords about rent (McCarthy et al., 2020). Most parents of school-age children who have not lost jobs continue to work. Yet now they must do so while they balance childrearing full-time—a challenge that has led to reported declines in family well-being within a week following a stay-at-home requirement (Ananat & Gassman-Pines, 2020). Through social media and widely shared opinion columns, parents offer glimpses into their reality. Two-parent families struggle to adapt to various coping strategies, including alternating work hours or working early or late in the day if their job allows (Manjoo, 2020), while single-parent families face even steeper obstacles (Bobrow, 2020). Some schools have attempted to ameliorate parents' child care obligations through providing synchronous classes or assigning projects and other school work designed to occupy students for long stretches of time. While this has proved a boon for some families, it has imposed additional burdens on others whose children need extra support to access the technology or complete the work. Particularly for families

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with young children, children with special needs, or multiple siblings, managing school work adds to the child care burden rather than relieving it (Cavanagh & Fox, 2020; Parcak, 2020).

Other parents—many in what are considered to be essential services—have to leave the home for work and thus require child care. Unless they have some other support—a non-working spouse, a grandparent, an older child—such workers are torn between their job and taking care of their children. Finding child care elsewhere is no easy task—child care is expensive and in short supply (Lukas, 2020). Making matters worse, some companies that remained open or have recently reopened have told employees who are unready or unable to return to work that they will lose their jobs—and possibly their unemployment benefits as well (Carlisle, 2020; Alabama Department of Labor, 2020).

While parents may feel these challenges individually, the loss of schools as a source of child care has an additional collective impact that may even magnify parents' individual struggles: the pace at which the economy is able to recover (Newkirk & Baker, 2020). As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. GDP contracted by nearly 5% in the first quarter of 2020. This economic crunch has been painful for the vast majority of American families (Council of Economic Advisers, 2020). However, while reopening the economy occupies nearly everyone's attention, the intermediate step of providing child care for parents so that they are even able to work, either in the home or outside it, is all too quickly glossed over.

Schools' role in providing stable, dependable child care is thus a vital source of community resilience: without it families suffer and economic productivity falters. As a Massachusetts state senator put it, policymakers should understand child care as "part of our infrastructure… as important as roads and bridges and public transportation" (Ebbert & Moore, 2020). This sentiment quite rightly prioritizes the labor that enables large-scale economic productivity, but it also should remind us that child care is already part of every state's infrastructure through their public schools.

05 Employment

In addition to enabling adults to work by providing child care, public schools further strengthen the economic life of a community because they themselves are sources of employment. There are roughly 8.6 million people employed in U.S. public and private schools (US BLS, 2019), including 3.2 million public school teachers and almost 500,000 private school teachers (NCES, 2019b). Millions more are custodians, bus drivers, cafeteria staff, and teacher aides. For rural communities, schools are often the single largest employer. In North Carolina, for example, schools are the largest employer in 59 of the state's 100 counties (Public Schools First, 2020). For communities of color such as New Orleans, teachers have often made up the bulk of the Black middle class (Buras, 2011). Yet there is surprisingly little empirical research that examines how schools' role as sources of employment contributes to stronger communities.

One reason for the dearth of research is that questions about schools as employers may be, under non-pandemic conditions, relatively uninteresting. Teaching has a long reputation as a solid, middle-class profession. But that reputation was under scrutiny before the pandemic. A series of recent high-profile strikes in states like West Virginia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, North Carolina, Arizona, Colorado, and California called attention to the growing impossibility of raising a family on a teacher's salary (Van Dam, 2019). Indeed, a Pew Center report indicates that as many as one in six U.S. teachers hold a second job during the school year (Schaeffer, 2019). Such economic realities have left some wondering if teaching will remain a stable source of middle-class employment (Kim, 2018). Districts also have a long history of preferential hiring for White teachers and administrators and disproportionate firing of educators of color, particularly during economic contractions or other systemic shocks (Carver-Thomas, 2017).

The COVID-19 pandemic may hasten such concerns.[7] With state tax revenues cratering as a result of

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[7] Note that we are not arguing that jobs should be kept artificially high in the face of future technological or other potential efficiencies. Rather, districts should not shed jobs during this time of crisis since pandemic-driven job losses could be economically devastating to communities around the country, and the workers perform essential functions.

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both spikes in unemployment and decreased consumer spending, states project deep budget short-falls, which in the absence of additional federal investment will force across-the-board spending cuts (Strauss, 2020). Schools are likely to face steeper spending cuts than during the Great Recession, which saw 120,000 teachers lose their jobs. A 15% reduction in school budgets as a result of the pandemic could result in an estimated loss of upwards of 300,000 teaching jobs (Griffith, 2020). Other projections are even more grim; the Council of Great City Schools estimates that 275,000 teachers could lose their jobs just in big city districts (Ujifusa, 2020), and the National Education Association has projected 1.89 million job losses in the absence of supplemental federal funding (Litvinov, 2020). Making matters worse, schools need to expend even more resources to achieve social distancing: covering increased expenditures like expanding the number of bus routes, installing air quality systems, making sure students have technology for remote education, or simply sanitizing surfaces throughout the day. The combination of reduced budgets and increased expenditures has led some superintendents to wonder if it is even financially feasible to reopen schools (Burnette, 2020b).

The budget shortfalls may be even more calamitous to the many other non-teaching staff that schools employ. School workers who cannot do their jobs remotely—such as bus drivers, custodians, nurses, and librarians—are at heightened risk of being furloughed or losing their job during school closures. Many of these same employees are also at heightened risk of job loss from budget cuts (Mahnken, 2020). Individually, these job losses could be catastrophic for a family; collectively, they may well be ruinous for communities.

Finally, the impact of the pandemic on schools' ability to sustain pre-pandemic employment levels will vary from state to state and district to district. Districts whose budgets rely on locally sourced funding (Texas and California) may not feel the effects as severely as those who rely on state funding (e.g., Vermont and Michigan). Within states, it is likely that the heaviest burdens will fall on high-poverty districts, further disadvantaging communities for whom schools are a source of social mobility (Burnette, 2020a; Litvinov, 2020).

06 Democratic Solidarity

Finally, schools often strengthen community resilience by building democratic solidarity. Many schools foster cohesion not only among students but also among adults—parents, alumni, educators, and local community members—through strengthening social ties at the playground or bus stop and creating communal experiences through holiday concerts, sports teams, school plays, potlucks and clean-up days, proms, and graduations (Avirmed, 2017; Fischel, 2009; McArdle, 2019). This is especially visible in schools with strong foundations in African-American communities (Ewing, 2018; Small, 2010; Morris, 1999) and in rural schools, which educate about one-fifth of all children in the United States. Scholar Mara Tieken explains of rural schools, "Without the school, the community would lose its 'hub,' its recreational and communal center. This school is the space where people gather, an animated and dynamic space filled with people coming together for common purposes, and in this space, as they gather, they build relationships" (2014, p. 54).

Although there has rightly been considerable attention paid to the shameful and ongoing segregation of K-12 education by race, class, language, and citizenship status (Orfield, 2009, 2014; Frankenberg et al., 2019; Frankenberg & DeBray, 2011; Rothstein, 2015), public schools also can and often do bring students together across lines of difference. Across the United States, about 43% of K-12 public school students attend ethnoracially integrated schools (NCES, 2020, fig. 3),[8] and 16% of public school students attend schools with no majority ethnoracial group (NCES, 2020, Indicator 1.10, fig. 2, p. 46). A majority (52%) of public school students also attend schools that are socioeconomically integrated (NCES, 2020, Indicator 1.11, fig. 1, p. 50). Integration at the whole-school level does not automatically translate to integration within classrooms, sports teams, or friendship groups. Even with well-intentioned leadership, schools with diverse student bodies can create internally segregated pathways

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[8] We define "integrated" as having a 25 to 74% non-White or low-income enrollment—i.e., neither hypersegregated wealthy or White or low-income or non-White.

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(Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Noguera, 1995). However, there is compelling evidence that ethnoracially and socioeconomically integrated schools promote democratic solidarity by reducing prejudice and discrimination, increasing students' and adults' comfort in diverse settings, and strengthening both individuals' and whole communities' academic, economic, and social welfare outcomes (Johnson, 2019; Wells et al., 2016; Kahlenberg et al., 2019; Hochschild & Scovronick, 2004).

Schools also often contribute to democratic solidarity by functioning as sites specifically of civic gathering and engagement. Schools serve as polling sites for about one-third of all American voters (Kennedy, 2014). School auditoriums, gymnasiums, and classrooms are often also used to host town halls for local community officials, political debates, evening and weekend meetings for charitable social organizations, and adult literacy and citizenship classes. Furthermore, local schools are often a community's primary or sole source of shelter during a natural disaster or mass displacement (Bloch, 2019), and even after residents return to their homes, area schools often continue to store supplies, facilitate Red Cross operations, and serve hot meals.

Shuttering school buildings curtails their role in generating democratic solidarity. For students, the equalizing space of the classroom has been lost. Although virtual meetings share an online platform, they often showcase disparate home settings and family dynamics that can challenge students' sense of membership, identity, or peer status. In addition, when classes are accessed by simply "logging on" or "logging off," students miss out on the everyday exchanges—from hallway conversations to whispered jokes to borrowing a pencil—that do so much to turn classrooms into communities. While these interactions may seem trivial on the surface, they supplement democratic solidarity through the accumulation of common, quotidian acts that form bonds and connections (Plachta & Hagan, 2020). Furthermore, the pandemic has deprived communities across America of far more momentous rites of passage—proms, sports championships, and graduations—that have the potential to bridge racial,

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sociopolitical, economic, and ideological lines (Nguyen, 2020). While communities should be cheering their graduates across the stage or reveling in collective elementary "last-day-of-school" classroom traditions, they are instead trying their best to keep spirits up in socially distanced single family celebrations at home (Neighmond, 2020; Peetz, 2020).

Many schools have tried to replicate the democratic solidarity-building moments that would have characterized the latter half of the 2020 school year. Some school performances have moved online (Santos, 2020), and schools are streaming virtual graduation ceremonies, sometimes with celebrity speakers (Associated Press, 2020). Schools have distributed yard signs to high school graduates, created congratulatory videos, organized "car parades" by teachers, and generated other creative ways to engage in remote collective celebration (Katz, 2020). These emergency measures may provide some sense of recognition for students who are graduating or experiencing other milestones, but they cannot replicate the solidarity generated by in-person school gatherings.

07 Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed both the best and worst of U.S. education, making it difficult to view simply reopening schools exactly as they were before as an unmitigated success. At the same time, it is equally hard to imagine the pandemic will fundamentally remake U.S. schools or society for the better, as much as some may wish for it. We think it unlikely, for example, that the U.S. will suddenly develop alternative social institutions such as a National Health Service to provide the welfare services that schools have long provided, despite the pandemic's exacerbation of chasms in our current health-care system. But we can—and should—work to create pandemic-resilient schools that are sources of community resilience, and that are better equipped to support the families and communities that rely on schools for vital services. To that end, we offer the following three recommendations.

1. State and district leaders who are planning for 2020/21 and beyond should set metrics for achieving access and equity in each of the five roles that schools play in promoting community resilience, not just in academic learning.

The challenges schools face as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic encompass much more than inter-ruptions to academic teaching and learning. While reestablishing schools' ability to nurture children's cognitive development is crucially important, it is essential that we not stop there; we must also reme-diate the pandemic-induced disruptions to schools as sources of social welfare, social-emotional and civic development, child care, employment, and democratic solidarity. For this reason, state and district leaders who are actively planning for the 2020/21 school year should set metrics for achieving access and equity in each of the five roles that schools play, not just in academic learning. Plans for remote, hybrid, or in-person schooling, for instance, must each account not only for students' equitable access to and engagement with high-quality curricular materials, but also for students' developmental needs around play and social engagement, for vulnerable families' access to nursing, therapeutic, and social

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services, for parents' access to reliable child care, for workers' need for stable employment, and for communities' access to inclusive civic engagement opportunities and moments of communal joy and accomplishment.

2. To establish these metrics, policymakers should develop or strengthen mechanisms to engage diverse community voices.

To establish these metrics, policymakers must listen carefully to diverse members of the local community, as they often best understand the specific ways in which their own schools support (or impede) community resilience. For decades, in fact, community members have sought greater input in decisions about their schools, in large part because they tend to recognize the multiple sources of value that schools provide beyond sheer academic learning or graduation rates (Ewing, 2018). Policymakers at all levels should seek out this wisdom by developing new mechanisms or strengthening existing ones (such as community outreach officers) to engage parents, educators, students, local employers, and other community members in collective deliberation. As institutions that foster community resilience, it is only logical that schools should empower an inclusive array of community members to influence policy decisions. Furthermore, state and district leaders are far more likely to develop effective and empowering policies if they seek out diverse perspectives and sources of insight. Policy makers must make an overwhelming number and range of decisions over the next 10 weeks: how to modify school schedules; whom to permit, whom to compel, and whom to prohibit from entering school buildings; when and how to transport children to and from school; what criteria should trigger school or district closures; how to accommodate medically vulnerable students, educators, and families; how to modify the curriculum, or students' grade placements, to account for lost learning in the spring; and so on and so forth. Local educators, families, students, and other school and district personnel can provide valuable insight into what is likely to work given their own situations, and may even generate innovative solutions that work

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on the ground, whether or not they generalize elsewhere.

3. Congress must increase federal funding for K-12 public education for at least the next two years.

Communities have greater health, economic, civic, cultural, and social needs than they have had in decades, at the very moment that public schools face drastic reductions in local and state tax revenues. Communities can only recover, however, when schools rebuild as well; schools are the essential third pillar, along with the economy and health care, of a pandemic-resilient society. For schools to serve again in these roles, however, the federal government must provide increased funding to K-12 public schools and districts (Green, 2020). Pandemic-resilient schools will require greater investments in instructional capacity such as the ability to flexibly move from in-person to remote learning when needed. They will require updates to physical infrastructure—from classroom layouts to bus route planning to air flow circulation in schools buildings. They will require robust funding for social services like meal provision—including funding for ensuring that meals reach districts' neediest children and families. They will need additional nurses, guidance counselors, and social workers to address pandemic-related trauma and the wide array of adverse childhood events that continue to harm student well-being (CDC, 2020). These investments are essential. It has become increasingly clear that other economic stimulus spending is not as effective without prioritizing funds to support schools. Policymakers should also recall that educational investment has significant long-term payoffs (Jackson et al., 2018). Funding schools not only stimulates the economy in the present but also supports future community resilience and prosperity.

It is vitally important that this funding comes from the federal government. State budgets across the country will increasingly bear the brunt of the pandemic's collective economic impact, where collapsing revenues are creating massive shortfalls and states' expenditures are constrained by balanced budget requirements. School expenditures are a natural target for spending reduction because they constitute

Recommendations

such a large fraction of state budgets. But state budget cuts will compound the financial crisis that schools will face in the next few years as they have even more limited resources to cover their typical expenses and meet the increased needs of maintaining pandemic-resilient systems. Funding from the federal government is our only hope for averting this impending disaster.

Finally, given the broad range of community support that schools can provide and the fact that public schools serve every community in the country, we recommend that any general federal stimulus funding that designates money for state budget relief require that states refrain from cutting public school budgets, or, at a minimum, prioritize public K-12 funding relative to other categories of spending. Congress should also require "maintenance of equity" by states to prevent them from reducing the share of funds going to high-needs districts, as Former Secretary of Education John King recently testified to the Senate HELP Committee. We are not prepared here to propose specific allocation formulas or regulatory requirements for use federal funds (see Reber & Gordon, 2020 for a thoughtful discussion of these issues); that is an essential next step. These requirements would ensure support for a social institution that both provides vital jobs and contributes to economic recovery in other sectors, that provides needed social services and is a vital partner in children's development, and that has long served as a focal point of community cohesion and pride.

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