

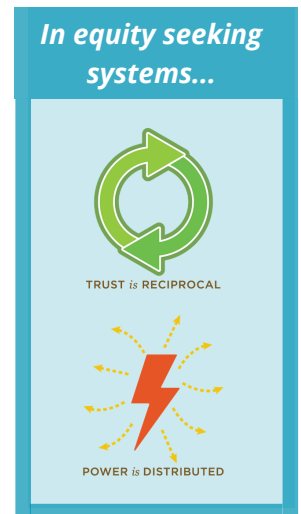
In our recent [letter to education system leaders](#) we shared insights gleaned from our longstanding collaboration with some of the nation's leading equity seeking and innovative education leaders. In that letter, we encouraged our colleagues to be realistic about the limits of traditional expertise in addressing an unprecedented situation of this magnitude and to examine with great honesty and humility what the crisis is illuminating about the nature and performance of our existing systems.

We are writing to governors, lawmakers and education chiefs because we recognize that there are roles that only you can play in helping local education systems respond to the immediate COVID crisis *WHILE* planning for the longer-term. Each of you has the opportunity to determine how to make CARES dollars available, and to determine which state programs should expand, contract or work differently in the coming years. This presents you with an important set of levers that you may pull as you lead your state toward a more equitable and innovative future.

We believe that one of the greatest long-term risks of the COVID era is that a desire to return to "normal" as quickly as possible may also tempt us to return to policies and practices that can contribute to system stability but also continue to reinforce inequity. Given all that COVID has surfaced about both the flaws and incredible strengths of our systems, it is incumbent upon us all to examine and learn about all the ways our systems impacts students, families and communities so that we may do better at engaging and serving them.

We offer 3 strategies common to our nation's most effective equity seeking and innovative education leaders to consider as you make policy & funding decisions.

1. **Equity seeking leaders work to make trust reciprocal.** They signal trust in local capacity and are able to act as both a trustworthy supporter and critical partner. They surface and share stories of local success and are willing to ask and be asked hard questions.
2. **Equity seeking leaders rely on deep partnerships to distribute the power that it is safe and appropriate to distribute.** In this time, some decisions about public safety need to come from a governor or mayor. But other powers, like deciding whose voices and experiences should drive the design of school this fall, are probably better distributed to locals and supported by the state.
3. **Equity seeking leaders ensure that public investments result in public impact and understand that different forms of impact are measured differently.** Sometimes impact is measured well by counting the number of meals or computers distributed. However, when local innovations are generating solutions, impact is better measured by evaluating the volume and quality of new knowledge generated and shared with others all across the state.



We believe that policies that foster knowledge generation are different from policies that seek to expand distinct capacity or use of specific tools. For those who wish to go deeper, the CIE [System Transformation Policy Framework](#) describes our learning to date regarding the design of innovation policies or RFPs. Continuing below, we offer **4 specific ideas** illustrating what it may look like to enact these strategies while making funding and policy decisions related to COVID.



**Clearly, it is essential to understand and respond to the financial realities of local districts and their pronounced and immediate needs,** such as increased food service production or new technologies and internet access. But, we take the position that responding only to those immediate needs does not do enough to encourage the local innovation and shared learning that is essential to schools becoming more, rather than less, equitable after COVID.

2

**Identify the learning agenda that matters most for your state.** If you haven't already, do some efficient but wide reaching needs assessment with *both* families and LEAs from across your state to surface those problems that are commonly experienced and for which there are no apparent or feasible solutions.

- For many of us, our learning agenda will relate to seeking new and much better ways to take on the inequity that exists in terms of who has access to powerful learning. See the CIE [Organizational Declaration](#) for our full stance on systemic inequity and how systems become equity seeking.
- For many of us, our learning agenda will relate to how to make school finance more equitable in a time of reduced resources. See the [CIE writing on the topic of school finance for possible inspiration](#).
- Another possible learning agenda may focus on new ways of honoring and working with the new found agency of both learners and families. See one of our projects called [The Assessment for Learning Project](#), which has been building a field and tools and resources regarding the role assessment can play in fostering learner self-efficacy and agency.
- Another possible learning agenda may relate to school and district accountability. Given that most state testing plans were interrupted by COVID, you may wish to invite conversations about other ways to think about accountability. See the [CIE paper on assessment and accountability](#) for ideas.

3

**Offer unrestricted funds to local systems that wish to learn something that contributes to your statewide learning agenda.** See the CIE [System Transformation Policy Framework](#) for ideas about how to structure such policies. Here are a few examples of the parameters that may support a learning agenda while giving locals true innovation permission as they devise COVID response plans:

- If part of your learning agenda relates to how severely underrepresented some family voices have been in your state, you may wish to require formal partnership from a newly formed or expanded family centered group that represents the least well served families in each local context.
- If part of your learning agenda relates to readiness of high school graduates for the workforce needs you anticipate in the next 24 months you may wish to require that LEAs apply with a coalition of local employers and give those employers a clear continued leadership role in the effort proposed. You may also wish to require coordination with the regional plans for Perkins dollars.
- If part of your learning agenda is how to drive meaningful collaboration among public systems, you may wish to require that at the local level 3 or more agencies apply in collaboration.

4

**Align education dollars with other priorities to amplify impact**

- If you are concerned that small businesses in your state were left behind when the first wave of PPP dollars ran out, perhaps place contracting guidelines on RFPs or policies such that companies fully managed within your state, or with fewer than a certain number of employees, or who already demonstrate partnership with local education systems be given preference in contracting for whatever supports teams identify in their projects.
- If you are concerned about disproportionate harm that has befallen your aging population, consider incentives for projects that reconnect young people with elders once it is safe to do so.

We believe carefully constructed Innovation policies can help states achieve both necessary, immediate relief and more lasting impact from their COVID recovery investments if shared inquiry with communities is an integral part of helping schools and districts thrive. Essentially, we believe such partnerships are fundamental to interrupting long standing inequities and establishing a culture of innovation that is constantly pursuing a healthy and prosperous future for all.

We also believe we still have a lot to learn, and we want to hear your feedback about ideas presented here. And more generally, If you have insights or questions you wish to share, please email us to follow up at [gretchen@leadingwithlearning.org](mailto:gretchen@leadingwithlearning.org).

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