
What does it look like for state and local education systems to ensure excellence and equity in the middle of a global pandemic? This brief, a companion to our piece on "Assessment, Accountability, and the Adaptive Challenge of COVID-19," offers some of our recent wonderings related to one of the three areas of the new vision of assessment and accountability originally described in Accountability for College and Career Readiness: Developing a New Paradigm – investing in professional capacity-building.

“Systemically we haven’t invested in the teacher capacity to authentically assess meaningful learning in a variety of ways, and now you need to build capacity in an environment where it’s really hard to teach anybody anything anyway. You have to narrow down into your purposes for teaching. Decide in the direction you want to go, and invest in that.”

- Paul Tritter, Director of Professional Learning, Boston Teachers Union

Given the likelihood that some forms of distance learning will persist next year, it is clear that significant investments are needed to uplift and re-skill an entire educator workforce beyond the ad hoc efforts of this past semester. While considering the obvious need for new skills such as effective use of technology, education leaders and their communities might also consider what last semester has shown us about the educator mindsets, interpersonal skills, and pedagogical skills that will be critical for success both next year and beyond; and how teachers are engaged and activated as agents contributing to the discovery of new solutions. Questions might include:

- How do we unleash the power of teachers to come together in learning communities, to share successful research and practice and to design new pathways to support equity in outcomes for learners?
- What skills or mindsets should educators possess in order to better promote learning (distance or otherwise), such as formative assessment skills, developing and supporting student agency, teaching for deeper learning, developing students’ metacognitive skills and other essential skills and dispositions in the context of academic learning, and building trusting relationships with students and their families?
- What skills or mindsets should be developed to better prepare educators to address issues of systemic racism and poverty that have been more glaringly apparent during the pandemic? For example, what learning around excavating personal bias and understanding systemic (not just individual) racism can provide important context for approaching equity? What strategies for addressing inequity – such as personalizing approaches based on student need or competency-based approaches that develop mastery by meeting students where they are – might be important subjects of a collective learning agenda?
- Given the potential for accountability systems that are more reliant on local measures of learning in the post-COVID-19 era, what investments might we make to strengthen educators’ abilities to make professional judgments about student progress?
- What strategies, such as looping, can support the development of teacher-student and teacher-family relationships that have been shown to be essential to teaching and learning?
- How might we hold states and districts accountable for building educator capacity and providing ongoing supports in these areas?

We believe questions like these are best explored by education leaders and their local communities in collaborative, inclusive conversations about how assessment and accountability policies can best place students and their needs at the center. Change is both imperative and already happening; we need only to ask the right questions, listen, and answer the call to action.