All right. We'll go ahead and get started.

Hello and welcome everyone to the K-12:

Back In School Session webinar.

It's our distinct pleasure to

have you here with us today.

Before we turn our attention to

introducing speakers for today's session,

I want to remind you to please submit your

questions live through the Q&A feature here in Zoom,

and we will address them at the end of the session.

Do note that we are featuring

Verbit's live integration with Zoom today.

This enables you to have

a view of a live transcript throughout the session.

To enable the transcript,

simply click on the arrow next

to the Closed Caption button at

the bottom menu bar and then

click "View Full Transcript".

My name is Misty Cobb, and

I have the distinct pleasure

of moderating today's session.

I'm joined today by Eric Gordon,

Steven Anderson, and Rachel Klein.

I will allow each of the speakers

an opportunity to introduce themselves.

Eric, will you start us off?

Thank you. Hello, everyone.

My name is Eric Gordon, and I'm

the superintendent or CEO of

the Cleveland Metropolitan School District

here in Cleveland, Ohio.

I look forward to our dialogue today.

Steven.

Hi. I'm Steven Anderson.

I'm the founder and CEO of Web20Classroom.

I have extensive experience in education with

almost 25 years, and I'm

also the creator of the #Edchat.

Awesome. Thank you, Steven. Rachel.

Hi, everyone. I'm Rachel Klein.

I'm a Senior Associate with District Management Group,

which is an organization that

partners with K-12 school districts

and state agencies across

the country to support them in whatever their needs are.

I started off as a teacher

in the classroom and then worked for

the New York State Department of Education.

Excited to be here.

Thank you, Rachel. I am Misty Cobb.

I'm a Senior Customer Success Manager here at Verbit.

I have some 20 years or so

experience in both K-12 and higher education.

I taught the grades nine through twelve in

two public school systems here in the state of Alabama,

and I'm also very

delighted to be here with you-all today.

So I wanted to kick us off by just providing a survey,

if you will, of what I

have been seeing in today's headlines.

So as I was scrolling and studying,

I observed that you could more or

less place everything that

we're seeing in three buckets.

We'll start with the first, which is students.

As I scan the headlines and then as I

talk to family and friends and

students who are part of the groups that I'm in,

what I'm finding that they're saying,

and this is confirmed in the headlines,

is being remote is hard.

Forming connections remotely is really difficult.

Staying engaged, maintaining motivation,

is challenging.

I'm hearing a lot of,

it's just hard to navigate

assignments and understand instructions

and platforms that a lot of students haven't used before.

So they were thrust into

new technologies and having to learn the newness and

then having the additional pressure, perceived or

real, of having to get

through those things is pretty difficult for them.

Parents share a lot of those same concerns.

I'm hearing from parents that they don't

know how to support

their students through these kinds of challenges.

Parents are very focused on and

challenged by employer support.

There was a very interesting survey

that was done by Monster.

What I read there was that a lot of

employees don't feel like

their employer supports them,

even though the employer may say that they

are supportive of the challenges

that we're all facing with having kids at

home for virtual days or having to

work out alternative arrangements for their students

with regards to whatever their school schedule might be.

I mean interestingly, though not surprising at all,

is that 75 percent of

parents who participated in the survey stated

that just some flexibility in

their work schedule would

be a meaningful support for them.

Then last but certainly not least,

the concerns that teachers and staff have a balance.

They have the same kinds of

work challenges and concerns that a lot of parents have.

There was an interesting poll done by USA Today,

where 20 percent of teachers were unsure,

of course this was earlier this summer,

they were unsure if they would return to the classroom.

I know that I have an aunt.

She has taught for some 25 years.

She's not quite ready to retire,

but she's now rethinking

her plans because of the challenges that

she's experiencing in the current environment.

There was another survey where 10 percent

of teachers said they were more

likely to leave the profession.

I guess

indirectly related to the pandemic

because of all the new expectations.

Feeling like you have to be

the master of your craft in the classroom

but also having to manage

a lot of instruction in a way

that they've never had to do before.

There's also growing concerns over

early retirement. I know in when the area where I live,

there have been some concerns about incentives,

encouraging teachers to stay on longer,

encouraging young people to

enter into the profession of education.

So we have an aging workforce over the age of 65,

people who are eligible to retire,

and then others who are

unsure if education is

an area where they want to make

an investment for their future.

Then some things, somewhat new, is that staff

are asking for the same

accommodations that teachers have.

So in my area and other areas across the United States,

teachers have been given the opportunity to

choose how they would like to teach.

Do they want to be in

the classroom, or would they prefer to teach remotely?

Many staff are asking for

those same kinds of accommodations,

which is causing us to have to

rethink the way that we are staffing and

the choices that we provide to our employees.

Sounds like a lot of challenges,

but I would encourage you.

These are real issues,

but one thing that has struck me as I'm

reflecting on all that I see going on around me,

is that there's so much opportunity.

I have found that the pandemic in

more than one way has provided me with a challenge,

but also has served as

a catalyst for me to rethink my approach to things.

I'm seeing that in some of

the local school systems where I live.

But I want to turn our attention at

this point to our fabulous speakers.

I really want to hear from them in

terms of what they're seeing across the nation.

Rachel, I'd like to start with you.

Well, before we dive in, Rachel,

let's do a survey.

We want to make sure that we

understand our audience today.

So those of you who are with us,

we were all keenly interested to

what extent you are utilizing virtual instruction today.

So if you'll go ahead and place your vote,

and we'll wait just a couple of

moments while you do that.

All right. Probably not surprising, is that

instruction is happening fully online or remotely

is the majority, by instruction that's

happening "fully in-person."

One person who respond "other."

If you responded with "other,"

we would love to know more. If you'd

like to just enter into Chat

some context for that.

Now, Rachel, I do want to turn to you.

I know that you've been very busy

partnering with institutions across the US,

and I wondered if you would share with us some of

the challenges that you've discovered

as well as opportunities

as you've been supporting

individuals in the reopening process.

Yeah, absolutely. My organization,

District Management Group, has supported over 80 districts

and a few state agencies across the country

over the summer in planning and implementation.

Misty, if you want to just move to the next slide.

It's clearly a really challenging time.

I mean, there is limited information

in addition to the fact that

the summer, and I

think, Superintendent Gordon, you'll attest to this,

is usually where educators get a little bit of a break,

and this summer was not that.

It was an intense

spring that moved into

an intense summer that is moving into an intense fall.

During the planning and implementation processes,

there were a couple of strategies, however,

that some districts employed and we supported

districts to employ, that

we found to be really effective.

One of those was using

guiding principles to drive decision-making.

In the absence of the research and the data and

the past precedent that

usually drives these decision-making,

these guiding principles, which may be the same values

that districts are using to guide their decisions

or it could be unique guiding principles for this moment,

but those are really driving

the decision-making and providing

the rationale behind some of

those decisions in the absence of data.

A second strategy we saw

was developing working groups that were topic specific

that really focused on the resources of

a district in areas of expertise.

So there might be a teaching and

learning group, an SCL group,

facilities, a budget group, and

everybody is working in their area of expertise.

What we found to be the most effective in this model was

having a frequent, perhaps weekly steering committee,

where representatives from each

of those working groups would

come together and share what was happening;

the updates, the pieces,

the components of the plan

to ensure that there was equity and there was coherence

among those pieces once

the plan was put together and released.

Then the last strategy that we saw to

be really effective in the planning part of

this was getting actionable feedback

from individuals in the community,

staff, students, and families.

We saw some districts reach

out with open-ended questions,

what improvements would you make

to the spring remote learning?

What do you need?

Those can be really tedious to go through,

really time-consuming to read through,

and also really hard to implement.

It's really almost impossible to have every parent and

every student and every staff member feel

heard if you're getting different opinions from everyone.

So instead, the most effective survey that we saw,

identified two or three options and then asks for

feedback about which of

those options would be most effective.

In that way it was easy to collect the data.

It was a low lift on the community members

themselves, and then it was easy to share

back that data and justify the solutions

that districts knew

would best support the community members.

Until then turning to implementation,

which was perhaps even more

challenging than the planning piece,

there were an additional couple of

strategies that were really supportive of districts.

The first was strategic communication.

What I mean by strategic is that it was proactive.

It was planned with

an intentional messaging of the sequence

of who's being communicated with and how.

It was clear. It was using simple language.

It was skimmable so that there were subheadings and

bullets so that it was easily

read by community members.

It was accessible, meaning that there were

multiple modes that they did this

in, videos, social media, texts,

e-mails in multiple languages where necessary,

and that the info is chunked into

small pieces so that it could be processed easily.

A great example of this,

there was a superintendent in

Illinois who would make these five-minute videos of

components of the plan in order that

built on each other and released them every week.

This was really helpful for the community because not

only did they know when to expect the next communication,

that's the planned piece of it, but

they were also able to see it by video,

which is often easier for some community members,

It was small pieces of information, and so

they could really deeply understand and process it,

as opposed to these 50-80-page plans

that were typical of school districts.

The last piece of the strategic communication

is thinking about how to make it widespread,

who in the community is the best to spread this message?

There's obviously the typical influencers,

the leaders of the districts,

the leaders of schools,

and staff members. But there's also

these unofficial influencers who have

a great deal of clout in the community.

Those might include elected officials,

religious leaders, or just vocal families.

So bringing them into

the early parts of communication and ensuring that they

are bought in and understand the plan as a way

of spreading that information to

the community was very effective.

The second is balancing

the message around flexibility and confidence.

Of course, you want to step out and you want

to reassure the community and show

that they're doing everything

possible to support students and families and

make sure that everyone is safe and

learning, but that's really

hard to do when you have to message.

The reality that we live in

is that you'll need flexibility.

There will be changes coming.

The way that we saw that happen,

is by confidently messaging

what is known, what is unknown,

what may change, and

importantly, why it may change. So setting

those criteria and those benchmarks

of when decisions would need to change,

either based on positive cases

or things like that so that

the community can anticipate what

those changes might be and why.

In addition, there is

this aspect of gratitude that we saw

to be really effective in

building rapport alongside empathy,

recognizing the frustrations and

how unnerving it can be not to know the information,

but then also really thanking

community members, families,

students, and staff for understanding the need for

agility and flexibility and

working with the district to make this work.

What we would call a gratitude sandwich.

You would start a communication by thanking

everyone, and you would end up by thanking everyone,

which just sets a tone and

builds the rapport in the community.

Lastly, this piece of

feedback. Again, setting up those systems and structures,

proactively, to really be able to get

ongoing feedback from staff, students, and families.

Some examples of these that we saw,

e-mail addresses that were specific around COVID concerns

or COVID-plan questions; frequent,

really brief two-question surveys to keep a pulse on it;

and then the importance of of that of knowing

what that information is going to lead to,

what decisions those will drive,

so there's a purpose to it,

and staff and students and families can see how

their feedback and input is being put into place.

Assigning staff to track social media or to

respond to frustrated community members

at board meetings. Again,

proactively reaching out and reassuring others.

Then providing the rationale with every decision,

which is where those guiding principles come into play.

Those can continue to be used to provide the rationale

to provide the validation for the decisions,

the very difficult decisions that are being made.

I'll just give one example of how this communication and

these strategies around communication

have really played out differently.

We worked with two districts in Ohio.

One of them really focused on perfecting the plan,

and one of them focused on getting

a solid plan and implementing it. Don't worry,

neither of these districts

are Superintendent Gordon's districts.

The first district is now dealing

with putting out fires every day, and all

of their staff are dealing where there are

so many people reaching out with questions,

with concerns, with frustrations, that most of

the district staff is

spending their days putting those fires out.

Whereas the district who really put in

proactive measures for the communication,

they still have a team

that's responding to those questions.

There are going to be questions.

There are going to be frustrations

But the rest of those team members,

the ones that are focusing on

academics and facilities and

all the other components that are important

for keeping students and staff safe,

they can still focus on their work and

refine those plans to make them work better

because there is a full team that is

already devoted to this

and there are already structures in place,

and there's already been

messaging and rapport building with the community.

I'll open it up now. I know, Steven and Eric,

you also have experience

with some of this, particularly you, Eric.

I'm just curious about

any additional thoughts or responses to that?

I would say that,

and I said this, Rachel, as we prepared,

I think CMSD lifted right from your playbook, and I think

we'll be able to show how we

thought about this work in a few moments.

But one thing that I really wanted to point out is that

planning and implementation are

two very different skill sets

and both are really critical.

I've actually encouraged my team to think about who are

the architects that create the blueprint or plan, and

then who are the construction team that build the school,

in this case, the remote school.

Thinking about both how

those jobs are unique and different,

but also how they intersect.

Once the blueprints are there,

the construction team's fulfilling, and

you actually come back and do some change orders,

change the blueprint a little bit.

So just really wanted to lift up

the importance of understanding,

not only that planning and

implementation are both critical elements,

but that they're very different sets

of skills and helping

people identify where they bring that expertise

and then where they step out of the way and

let others, turned out to be

really an important sense

of clarity for us in our district.

Along that same lines,

it's one thing for someone to plan

a beautiful building on paper and a whole other thing

for someone to implement that.

This is a pretty unprecedented situation

that all of us are living through, and so managing

all of those expectations of all stakeholders is really

super key. I think Eric

and others would attest to that.

There are no right ways.

There are no wrong ways.

There are good ways, and there are

not good ways. So not

every decision that we're going to make is

going to make everyone happy every time.

That's just the nature of the business that we do.

But certainly, safety has to be top of mind.

The concerns of the community have to

be taken into consideration.

If I have a location where it's very difficult for

the majority of my parents to be

able to stay home with their children,

there are other things that we need to consider.

I know, Eric, you're going to touch

on that in a few minutes.

Lastly, always leading with reassurance.

Always letting everybody know all the time.

We know, we know, we know this is not ideal.

We're doing everything we can.

I have two daughters. One in middle school

and one in elementary school. Our district here

sends home a weekly message.

They're just reassuring us all the

time that these are the decisions that we're making.

These are the things that we're still thinking about.

So as Rachel mentioned, there aren't

those gaps in communication.

There's always that sense

that we know what's happening and we're always

being reassured that the best interests of the students

and staff and the community are at top of mind.

Yeah. You'll hear this reassurance theme throughout,

and we'll come back to that.

I wanted to stress,

just as Steven did,

managing expectations of all stakeholders.

We have to remember that this is

not how teachers were taught to teach,

how leaders were taught to lead,

so all stake holders means

all the way up to the executive team who

are actually challenged with

creating and implementing these plans,

which is a very different lift and a very different set of

expectations than what we've typically done.

So making sure not to forget the social, emotional

health and wellness of the people

that are working in service of kids

and families is every bit as

important as the kids and families themselves.

That's an excellent point, and it's a nice setup

for something that I would like to

ask you-all to respond to.

Similarly, I've seen parents say,

I didn't sign up to home school my kids,

and I don't know how to help my student.

Would any of you have a tip to offer?

Eric, what is your school doing?

Steven, what would be meaningful to you as a parent

of a middle school or in an elementary school student?

Rachel, what advice have you-all

given as you've supported districts across the nation?

What can schools do to help

parents as they support their students at home?

From our perspective, and it

goes back to what we've already heard,

we have continued to reassure

parents of essentially three things.

One is we are not asking you to

be an outstanding sixth grade math teacher.

We want you to be the very best parent you can be.

That matters now more than ever. Be a good mom.

Be a good dad. Have the grace and

humility to know that you're

not a math teacher, and that's okay.

Number 2 is to take advantage of

all of the natural learning opportunities.

So the cooking together, reading together,

talking about what you just watched on TV,

getting outside and exercising together.

But helping families talk out loud

about what they're doing so that the learning

becomes explicit and visible.

Then the third is reminding

our families that none of us have been

through a pandemic, and so there

is no shame in asking for help.

We have published a series

of help lines, including a COVID hotline,

a mental health hotline,

technology hotline, and just I

want to talk to somebody. We mailed it to

every resident in Cleveland

with the notion that every one of us should help

kids and families and keep

reassuring that that's really what we want you to do.

We're in this together,

and we're going to make our way through it.

From the parent perspective, I mean, unfortunately,

my daughter has two parents who are both math teachers.

I don't know if they're lucky or unlucky in that then.

Certainly, for both of my daughters,

just in what they've experienced with their teachers,

the best thing that

their teachers have done for them isn't

to expect that the parents teach.

It's to call. They're not using technology.

That's one of the things we have stress.

One of the questions on the slide is,

how do we address inequity?

Telephones still do exist.

It is shockingly amazing to me

how reluctant people are to pick up a phone and call.

So one of the best things,

especially for my second grader who loves school;

she is just in love with school.

That has been the best thing over the last six months is

her teachers call her once a week and talk to her,

or she does her last class meeting

and stays on the call with Chesney just to

talk about her dog and

what's going on and what does she see outside.

Just to keep maintaining those relationships.

It's same thing with parents.

Just like Eric said, there is

no expectation that everybody

just suddenly becomes an educator.

It's just not going to happen in the home,

but certainly forming those relationships

and focusing on SEL,

on social emotional, is definitely critical.

Then one thing that Eric said. It's really,

really super important here that not all this learning,

even if it's remote, has

to take place through technology.

I'll touch on that a little later.

But we've gotten so wrapped

up in this notion that we have to put

everything in the LMS, and we have to do

all the Zoom meetings. No, we don't.

There is a tremendous amount of

learning that kids have been doing for centuries,

that didn't involve technology.

Now we cry and complain that education needs to change.

Now is the perfect opportunity to change it,

so let's utilize some of

those non-technology ways in order to engage students,

which we'll talk about later on.

That's awesome. Thank you.

Then a couple of more questions before we

dive in to learning more about Cleveland

Metro schools. Do you three have any tips

for how schools can help students who

lack maturity or discipline to self-monitor

and progress at home on remote learning days?

Yeah, I'll jump in here. Some of what

I've seen across the country.

For the younger students,

creating things like visual schedules where they can self

monitor their own progress

through the day can be helpful.

Again, making sure there are certain movement breaks.

I have a four-year-old nephew doing

remote learning, and about every 30 minutes or so,

not even, maybe 15,

they're touching their toes and running in place and

freeze dancing and all that kind of stuff,

and so that's important as well.

Then a big one I think is making it about the

goal-oriented purpose of

the day rather than task-oriented.

Yes, there is a schedule. At some point

you're going to have to do math, and you're going to have

to do ELA, and you're going to have to

attend music class or whatever it is.

But making sure it's very clear what

the goals are for each of those moments.

Like at the end of today,

I want you to know X,

or I want you to have a question about

X, can be a really effective way of keeping

students motivated and to

reaching that goal rather than just moving

through motions. One last thing I'm going to add,

I was thinking about this, as Steven and

Eric you were speaking,

about building those relationships,

but I think there's also opportunities here

for building structures that

bring the students together so that there's some of

this peer accountability, and it's not

just coming from the top down, so to say,

of the expectations. So things like having students

review using breakout rooms or

even using the phone, Steven to your point,

to review their work or to check their work or

even if they're sending each other

their work and putting feedback on there.

These are building important skills,

and they're developing

these relationships and holding some

internal and external

sort of accountability for their work.

I would build on what Rachel shared.

We did many of the same things.

We have videos showing parents how to set up a workspace,

how to motivate kids, those sorts of things.

We created a family checklist that has lots of

embedded links to help families help their children.

I think the thing I would say though,

is here as a place where we can actually rely on

our expertise, and it doesn't always seem very visible,

but we have always had the challenge of

having some reluctant learners in our schools.

We've always been tasked as educators to

figure out how to motivate that reluctant learner.

I think what we'll find here is that

the learner who has become

reluctant may not be the same child.

So we may actually see some kids thrive in

this environment who were bored to death in

their 25-student class that ran

55 minutes a day and

others who are going to struggle deeply.

But we actually do know, in our profession, about

our, both, moral responsibility and

strategies to motivate that reluctant learner.

Then I think also, this is

another place where Steven's emphasis that it

is not all about sitting in front of

a screen becomes really critical.

A small move that we made that

people were really surprised by is

when we distributed our technology,

we also gave out school supplies, art supplies,

and music supplies because we actually want kids building

things and constructing things

that are not happening on a screen,

but that they love to do.

We can connect them back in and have them

visually show to their classmates. So thinking about

authentic ways to engage

young people in actually building,

constructing and doing and not just thinking of this

as chalkboard on a screen,

is going to be really important as well.

I love that point because I think it speaks a bit to

the second question on the screen,

and if I were to rephrase it a bit,

that perhaps there could be an emergence of

new curriculum or modifications?

I think maybe a change in perspective on

what remote learning should really be.

Would any of the three of you add to or

expound upon the second question around,

how do we continue to prepare for

a virtual learning environment that

will for all likely purposes,

at least in the immediate short term, will

continue as we go through this pandemic?

I honestly think Eric nailed it right there,

is that focusing on those types

of things that kids enjoy to do

that don't involve technology, which

as someone who has been

an expert in the education technology space

for a number of years, it

sounds counterintuitive. But

certainly there are ways to

utilize the technology effectively,

but kids still need to have

those tactile opportunities to learn

outside of this environment of sitting in front

of a screen for seven or eight hours a day.

We don't do that in the classroom.

If we do, we're doing it wrong.

I tell teachers all the

time, if you're working harder than the students,

you're doing it wrong. Your kids need to be the hardest

working people in the room, not you.

It should be the same sort of thing

in remote learning. We had a real

grand opportunity here to really think about,

what are those traditional skills that we've been

teaching and how effective have we've been doing it.

Then to Rachel 's point about some of

those soft skills that we have

the opportunity of reflection and collaboration.

Those are the kind of things that are

really difficult to teach.

But now again, we have

a really great opportunity in order

to work on some of those softer skills that are

essential for the workforce today.

I would hope that we will study

the synchronous and asynchronous experiences

that our kids and

our educators test in this environment and really think

about what a true

effective differentiation could look like.

At least in a very poor urban system

where lots of kids are behind where they need to be,

differentiation often gets coated as

individualization. Because teachers can't individualize,

they go right back to one-size-fits-all out of a sense of

hopelessness. I hope that we're able to say, boy,

there are some things that really leveraged

this asynchronous stuff that I can pull back

into the lived environment when we're back into it

that really lets me differentiate

for kids where they are and makes

them more personalized and

mastery-based learning experience

because of what we learned from this experience.

I think that's an opportunity, Eric,

for us to shift our focus to

what you're doing specifically

at Cleveland Metro Schools.

Will you share with us more about how

this pandemic has changed your focus for

serving the diverse 37,000 students that you have?

Sure. Thank you. We can go right into the first slide.

I just wanted to share a little about who we are.

Cleveland Metropolitan School District

is 86 percent children of color.

That's 68 percent African-American; 16 percent Hispanic,

mostly Puerto Rican; and

then a wide diversity of children from African,

Asian, and other countries.

We also have the highest childhood poverty

of any major city in the country.

Detroit is number 2.

We rally back and forth every time the census comes out,

and we are a

100 percent economically disadvantaged district,

which means that for my entire 14 years in the district,

we have been universal service.

We provide breakfast, lunch,

and often snack and dinner for every child at no cost.

We have nearly 24 percent of

our students identified with a disability.

There are lots of reasons for that.

Some of the primaries are

overidentification that we know

happens in urban environments.

Also, the Ohio Charter context,

which allowed lots of

typical students to have other options

but students with higher needs to have limited options.

Then a huge lead effect and lead

poisoning problem that results in

higher identification of students with

cognitive disabilities and

emotional disabilities at young ages.

We're about eight percent Limited English Proficient;

those are the families that have not

yet acquired English proficiency.

We have a larger English learner population,

and about five percent of

our students are homeless at any given time.

Then very clearly evident in the pandemic,

we're also the fourth worst

Internet-connected city in the US,

and that manifests itself both

in those families who have never had the Internet;

40 percent of my families do not

have Internet or did not have Internet,

but also in all of the families that have

unreliable or insufficient Internet

when we start applying all of these additional devices.

I share this not as a pity party;

we're very proud of who we are as a community,

but to say that often people say, well,

I can't do it because,

and then they fill in these blanks.

But I would argue that we are doing some, what I believe,

is really good work for our kids and families

because we have a moral responsibility.

If we can do it in Cleveland,

we can do it elsewhere.

We also have really challenged

ourselves to say, why it matters.

So our plan focuses on opportunity, equity, and success.

Those are our guiding principles, to

Rachel's earlier point, that we really call.

We are very deliberate in creating the capital and

the social-capital that

middle-class families already enjoy.

What do I mean by that?

Well, capital is the things, permanent access

to high-speed, reliable Internet;

the sufficient resources that

a family needs; many other examples.

The social-capital are access to

academic learning pods that are popping

up in communities that can afford them,

and we've actually created 1,000 slots with

48 partners here in Cleveland to

make that available for my families as well.

Then we're also really taking a look at this

from an opportunity to really

revisit our thinking about

racial justice. As a community at

86 percent of color and 68 percent African-American,

we have a really unique opportunity

to address the structural biases in

the system because for all of

my working career and for

all of our civil rights movement,

we've been trying to change existing systems that

were built to serve white people and mostly white males

and then women and then ultimately

forced to serve people of color.

This moment, we can't go back to the systems exist.

So we have a new opportunity to build

better systems that are more fair, just, and good.

So we're really trying to hold ourselves this mirror of

why does this matter so much?

Then finally, I would say, so how do you do it?

I didn't show you our plan.

If you want to see our plan,

you can go to our website, and it's there.

It's clevelandmetroschools.org/reopeningCMSD,

and you'll see our video blogs and many of

the things that Rachel talked about.

But I did want to, before I even saw our group slides,

let you know just how tightly aligned these things are.

So we were very,

very clear on our guiding principles, and we had

very rigorous conversations as a team that

now is not the time to abandon our values and priorities.

It's actually a time to double down on them.

We've watched systems make

the choice of whether they can

"continue their learning agenda or

whether they need to shelve it to respond."

I would argue that the ones that shelve it to

respond are making a big, big mistake.

In fact, it's how do you accelerate

what you want in

this new learning and teaching environment?

The second big one, again, is that communication.

That reassurance that you heard,

we call it "bounded optimism" and "deliberate calm."

It's going to be okay,

and here's what we're going to do

We continue to communicate

it's going to be okay,

and here's what we're going to do.

Just like we heard from Rachel, literally every Monday,

you know you're going to see my video blog,

my audio blog, my e-mail to your home,

my social media posts,

the multiple ways that you're going to

hear one message about

this week's bite of this bigger challenge saying,

we're going to be okay, and here's what we're doing.

Really, really important that we take advantage of

the opportunity to stress

the importance of relationships.

We can create

a whole new student-family-teacher relationship

here that is far more

deliberate than we've ever had before,

but we have to be deliberate in

building it and we have to mean it.

We have to challenge those out there that are giving it

the right lip service that we're supposed

to say relationship, and so we say it.

We have to actually deliberately change

our behaviors to say

that families who have their kid at home,

they have a whole new line of sight about what we were

doing well and what we were doing really poorly.

Now, how do we learn

together and say we're all in this together?

We have to focus on learning what students, caregivers,

and educators actually need,

not what we wish they need.

So I spend a lot of time with my team saying,

we have a lot of employees

at all levels of the organization,

from a cleaner in a building to

senior staff, who have children in our schools,

so go collect intel.

We're getting ready for open houses right now.

Literally I said, so go ask these families,

what do you want to experience at

open house? Then build that.

Because if we can give them what they need,

then we can ask them to take on what we need for them.

Communicate, plan,

and progress frequently in multiple formats.

You heard Rachel say that already.

Also, be prepared to acknowledge problems,

challenges, mistakes, and how you will address them.

We rolled out last week,

our one-to-one strategy after being the worst

connected or the fourth worst

connected city in the country.

We way underestimated the level

of support that families were going to need.

So our IT, helped us, was getting calls saying,

step one says, connect

your device to the Internet. How do I do that?

Well, we failed to give clarity on that,

and so on day two,

the message that I sent to the entire community is,

you're frustrated, and I'm sorry for that frustration,

and here's what we're going to do about it.

But remember we're all in this

together, and it's going to be okay,

and here's what we're going to do.

Going right back to "bounded

optimism" and "deliberate calm."

So I would say keep these things in mind

as principles as you build your own plan.

Again, I felt it more important to say,

what are the things we thought

through in coming up with the plan than

prescribing an actual plan that

anybody would unpack and go.

So thank you for giving us

a chance to be your case study for today.

Thank you, Eric. That was encouraging and motivating.

Let's continue to dive a bit more deeply

and shift our focus to

digital instruction and student engagement.

We have another poll for our audience.

So which of these do you feel is

the most challenging part of pandemic learning?

You see the options there on the screen.

If my colleague from Verbit will launch the poll.

As we wait, I'll just review the options.

It's, "Lack of professional development for distance or

hybrid learning," "Technology challenges,"

"Student engagement," or "Safety concerns."

We'll wait just about 30 seconds

to give you-all an opportunity to respond.

All right. We are tied

at "Technology challenges" and "Student engagement,"

so some of what you just touched on.

Then a right behind

is "professional development for

distance and hybrid learning."

Thank you, audience, for participating.

I want to turn it over to Steven.

Steven, I can't wait

to hear what you have to share with us.

Yeah, I'm sometimes quoted as being the disruptor of the

group, but I'm really passionate about

the relationship between technology and engagement.

I've been doing a lot of research

in the area of technology and engagement.

Oftentimes, what many educators fail to realize,

is they use technology as a motivator

rather than a true learning tool.

That's pretty typical of what we've

seen during this pandemic-style learning.

Back in March, just from my own experience,

my own daughters, their last day of in-person learning was

March the 12th.

That was the last time they stepped foot in a

school building. From the middle

of March until the beginning of June,

we were doing emergency learning, and that's really

what everybody was doing was emergency learning.

When we had this opportunity over

that summer. Folks like Eric and

other districts that

Rachel has worked with, have done

a pretty good job of trying to navigate this space.

What the actuality is is beyond those examples,

there are very few that took a lot of time to

really consider what would

the learning environment need to look like.

A lot of the conversations around

technology and remote learning and how do

we use technology for engagement have

been happening for 20-plus years.

Now, all the sudden it's,

oh my gosh, now we really have to figure it out.

What I've been trying to stress

with the organizations and

district and leaders that I've been working with is

really these three things. One is relationships,

and we've heard all

about relationships through this entire conversation.

The importance of the teacher-student relationship,

the importance of the school-and-

the-district-to-parent-and-community relationship,

and the relationship between parents and teachers.

But there's been

a lot of rumbling around from some educators saying,

it's important for me to get to know my students and I

have a strategy that I use in the classroom,

but I don't know how to do that in

an online space. It can be challenging,

but if we think about what do kids

of this era typically like to do,

they have created and bonded

relationships with other kids

that they may not even know. They

do that through a process that

research calls affinity spaces.

An affinity space is just a digital

space where students gather.

We typically see that in gaming, where students or kids

are in a gaming situation,

things like Fortnite or World of

Warcraft or some of

these other games that are multi-player,

multi-dimensional. While

there is an end goal that I must win,

they will sometimes pair up into teams that they

may not have any relationship

with the other persons on the team

other than that common goal.

Kids are very adept at

creating and building these relationships.

It's us, as the educator, to

rely on us to provide them that opportunity.

Differentiation, as Eric talked about.

Differentiation doesn't mean individuality.

It's great if we can do

differentiation with individual students.

But it's important that

we take the opportunity of differentiation,

and we can apply it at at a distance.

It is totally possible. Formative assessments,

one of the easiest ways to

provide the levels of differentiation,

and formative assessment is completely

possible in a distance learning situation.

Then understanding the student's learning journey,

and this again goes back to formative assessment.

We know that students are going to be in

different spaces in their learning

because not every student,

even in the classroom, learns the same.

It's going to be hugely

amplified in a virtual learning space.

I think about my own daughter,

who's a sixth grader. She

is begging to go back to school.

I thought she would take to virtual learning because of

her level of engagement with

technology. She's off the charts.

She loves to use technology,

but she likes to use it in her way.

So I thought she would take to

virtual learning much better than she actually has.

So what's great about her teachers, is

they've actually taken the time to

understand who those students are.

It wasn't that they started school.

They just now, just

this week, started doing actual learning.

What that means is where they're

actually covering content.

They've been in school for four weeks

every day virtual learning,

and so it was important for them to form

those relationships with those students

to understand who the students were

not only as learners,

but who they are at learners in a virtual environment or

a distance environment in order to

best understand what

that student's learning journey is.

What we see too often is because of

this rush to put and to make the learning remotely,

that because there isn't a whole lot

of professional development for

educators in distance learning,

there was this rush to replicate the classroom.

That's why we see things like Bitmoji classrooms,

or things that are cute and

fun that we try to engage students.

Those can be good motivators, and it

can make kids, especially younger kids, excited,

I'm going to go into my Bitmoji classroom,

but ultimately, what does that do for the student?

How does that help the student understand

and learn so that when they do go back to the classroom,

that first day back in school,

it's going to be a new experience

since we haven't been there since March,

but we can pick up right where we left off

on that Friday through virtual learning?

We go to the next one, the next slide,

the important thing to remember is research,

and research around this notion of utilizing technology.

There's a real, real,

real thing called the video

fatigue or Zoom fatigue,

not to pick on one product over another,

that we're expecting to have students

sit for eight hours a day in the classroom

looking at a screen trying to

replicate that learning

that normally would take place in the classroom.

I don't know of a teacher

who teaches straight from eight o'clock 'til

three o'clock with every student who doesn't move,

who doesn't get up, who doesn't have

an opportunity other than lunch to move around.

I don't know of a classroom like that.

So why are we forcing our teachers to

replicate that experience in a remote learning?

If we move to the next one.

If we really think about the research there,

the wide body of research around you utilizing

video through remote means in order to teach students.

What the research says is that less is more,

and really when you use

those video services in

distance learning for

smaller or individualized instruction,

the engagement levels go way up,

the achievement levels go way up.

So my second grader,

as much as good as

what her teachers and her school have done,

the district is requiring her to be

online from from 8:30 in the morning

until 12 o'clock midday straight. Three-and-half hours

for a seven-year-old in front of

the computer, it's ridiculous to be honest.

They're not doing any individualized instruction.

The teachers are doing the best they can,

and we're not here to do teacher bashing,

but it's important to know that

the research is out there to

justify this smaller length of

time that students should be spending in remote learning.

My sixth grader who falls into

that yellow range there,

she's online from 8:30 until 3: 30 straight everyday.

She gets 30-minute break for lunch,

and while her teachers are using it to try and maintain

relationships and trying to do

breakout rooms and things like that,

it's too much to ask of,

especially, the teacher. Who would want to sit?

I don't even want to sit and listen to

myself for eight hours a day,

let alone someone try to

teach at me for eight hours a day.

It becomes just an impossible path,

and we're asking educators to do this.

Reserving that

whole group instruction time

for relationship building and

using those opportunities to break out.

I've been talking about choice boards for

years, and choice boards,

where you give a menu

of learning paths for students to take,

where they get to pick and choose

the different types of methods

they want to use to learn content.

A choice board is a great opportunity

for remote learning because

now students can go off on their

own, and they can watch that video or

they can engage in that subject matter

either digitally or hands on,

but have a smaller group opportunity

to come back with a teacher.

Because if we go back to differentiation,

if I'm trying to provide

that individualized instruction yet I'm

forced to be in class for eight hours a day,

of course it's not going to be possible.

So really considering that less is more and focusing

on high quality research-backed pedagogy,

rather than tricking students

into engagement through technology is important.

If we go to the next one.

There is an opportunity to move away from this.

There's an opportunity.

This is where Eric and Rachel,

I think you wanted to jump in

We have a real opportunity.

Eric, you touched on this as well,

that we have this opportunity to move away from this?

Yeah, I just really want to echo what Steven said,

that replicating what was

is not the goal.

Out of some necessity,

we do look for those structures

of the class schedule and those sorts of things.

But really, when we examine our education system,

even pre-COVID,

it was driven by seat time and Carnegie units and

these structures that made

time the constant and learning the variable.

We really have an opportunity here to make

learning the constant and move kids along at their pace.

On the prior slides,

Steven had raised the issue of how do

you know where a child is on their learning journey?

It's really a decision point about whether we're

going to continue to use a deficit model,

identifying what kids haven't learned,

or whether we're going to identify unfinished learning,

where did Steven's daughters stop on March 12th,

and how do we continue

that learning, and then making sure that the design

of the plan is flexible enough

that you have those shorter class touches.

You have those off-line activities that you do,

either individually or in small groups.

My students have already figured out how to

create their own team conversations that we're

trying to figure out how to facilitate with them

because they want to get in a small group together.

Thinking about this opportunity to shift away from

time-bound instruction and really

get to the mastery of content

at the pace that meets each kid's need,

I think is really going to be

important in this shift that we're in.

This shift that we're in is very important for

students, and it's really impactful for students.

I think there's also the opportunity here though

to think about the way that teachers

interact with one another as well.

Education, and I'll tell you from my time teaching,

it's typically a closed-door type of thing.

You're in your classroom. You're with your students.

Your door is closed. Sometimes the principal pops in.

But really, there's this opportunity to build

collaboration among teachers, especially among schools,

which is not as easily done in person.

To share a bit about planning,

to share some of the ideas, and to lessen

that lesson-planning load on teachers

and then to build those relationships that they

can continue beyond this moment.

Yeah, and I'll just add to that one.

The expectation for that collaboration

shouldn't be after the work day.

Many schools engage in PLCs and have team meetings.

It's one thing to do that immediately

after the bell rings and students go home so

that you have a little bit more freedom

and flexibility to do that,

but I can't count how many times I've seen teachers say,

well, my school requires me to teach

in-person and hybrid all day and then have

a faculty meeting at seven to nine o'clock at night,

and then I'm supposed to do the same thing the next day.

If you wouldn't expect your teachers to do a PLC or

a faculty meeting at seven or eight or nine o'clock

at night face to face,

don't have that same expectation in

the virtual environment just

because we're teaching from home.

We need to have that same built-in time during

the day because that's our opportunity

for formative assessment for ourselves.

That's how we get better to have those conversations.

Really quickly, because I know we need to wrap up,

if we look at the last of the slides.

Since we're talking about engagement,

these opportunities to engage with students

isn't necessarily about what types of technology you use.

It's more about what you do through them.

It goes back to building the relationships.

You're not Steven Spielberg.

These are not high quality videos.

Frankly, kids want to

see the other kids come in and out of the video.

They want to see your cat.

They want to see your dog. Because

that's all they have right now.

That's all that they have to

make that connection to the teacher,

and the kids need see we're

not using somebody else's video.

We're not using that video from

some other service that somebody else created to do this.

We're using something that we

created because that's how we build those bonds.

We're also doing active learning.

We're engaging with the students.

We're asking them questions.

It's not just yes, no, right,

wrong. It's what do you think about that?

What makes you think that?

The same sorts of techniques

we would use in the classroom,

the ones that research tells us

the pedagogy really improves student understanding,

are the same sort of things we can

do through remote means.

All right. As we come to a close,

I want to make sure that we allow at least a

minute to address any questions that have come in.

But I don't want to skim over

something that's very important, and it's

around addressing and supporting

accessibility needs of students.

We have here something

that we've already really mentioned.

Each of you have really noted the importance of

ongoing communication and collaboration.

Then, Eric, I loved what you shared about

the diversity of your district and

there are, what I would say,

becomes traditional accommodations that needs to be made,

but you're also supporting

homelessness and other kinds of things.

What's a quick point that any of you would offer

for this slot as we move into final questions?

If I would just share that to really

serve any student well, and including these students,

you have to understand what they need.

You have to take the time to learn the student.

It goes back to that relationship.

Then solve for the problems they're facing

and not the problems that we wish they were facing.

I think we often design for what we wished would

be true instead of what is actually the case.

That would be my tip. I do need to apologize, everyone.

I actually have to get onto another webinar right now.

I want to thank everybody for

including me and thank you to my colleagues

who will do a great job

answering your questions. Thanks, everybody.

Thank you, Eric. We're going stay on

just one more minute to take a couple of questions.

While I'm reading through,

one of the first ones that I noted is,

can any of you share, Steven or Rachel,

a tip for supporting

student mental health and concerns

that stem from the pandemic?

Yeah, I think Eric touched on that.

What they're doing in Cleveland is incredible.

That's one of the first districts

I've heard, and I'm sure, Rachel,

you might have other examples too, that

actually is trying to support

not only their school community

but their wider immunity.

Because this is a situation that's not just affecting

schools. While that may be the leading headline

for a lot of us,

especially those of us in education

and the effect that this has had on schools,

this has had cascading effects across all of our lives.

What they're doing in order to provide those services

or to put people in touch with

those services is truly incredible.

I think from a school perspective, again,

picking up the phone and

calling your kid. If

they missed a class, not just sending them an e-mail,

not just sending them a note in the LMS,

picking up the phone and calling them.

We've got to get away from this aversion to call.

There are more active sim cards

in the US than there are people.

While there may be a technology deficit in terms of

internet or a laptop,

there are tons more cell phones than there are people.

It's usually a lifeline for a lot of folks.

So picking up the phone and making just

that quick connection can be tremendous.

You don't want to expose your phone number,

get a Google Voice number. It's completely free.

You can even set up texting on that and set up

hours when people can

text you or they can't call you.

All different types of things are

available out there completely for free,

but it's the point of picking it up and actually using it

that really is where we need to go.

I would just add to that to

take the staff that would typically address some social,

emotional, and mental health needs for

students, psychologists, social workers,

and really be critical

about what they actually need to be spending

their time on in this environment and

see whether some of their time

that may be typically spent

on administrative duties or meetings

can be shifted towards providing

some proactive supports within the classrooms,

within the classroom environment, and

really embedding, either through professional learning

for the teachers or

directly towards the students themselves,

really promoting some of

those strategies and coping and having

this opportunity to really talk about some of

the difficult things that students

as we all are facing.

Thank you both. There are a couple of other questions.

We will be sure that in our follow-up to you all

we respond to those questions.

Because we are out of time,

I want to express my thanks to you, Steven,

Rachel, Eric, who has had to leave.

I really appreciate the opportunity to

collaborate the expertise that

you've shared with us today.

I want to thank our audience for participating.

We will be sending out

the session recording slides. I will be

following up on any unanswered question. Again, we

appreciate. We know that your time is so busy now,

so thank you for choosing to spend this hour with us.

Everyone, be safe and take care. Bye-bye. Thanks.