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# GETTING READY

LEADERSHIP FOR WHAT'S NEXT

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# LEADING IN TRYING TIMES

Leading change is challenging for any organization. But in education, it is different from other professional fields where one's ability to adapt is the key to survival. Effective educational leadership hasn't always been about innovating and prototyping ideas to transform existing systems and structures. It certainly is now.

COVID-19, similar to the impact of 9/11, has changed us as a society. It has exposed a flawed design and thrown us into a reactive state. As the dust is starting to clear, we have opportunities to design (and re-design) learning and leadership for all.

We have a chance to keep equity and learner voice at the center and to embrace newfound agility in responsive learning structures.

And initially, when these structures change, it mostly impacts adults in the process, which requires dynamic and responsive leadership. Principals and superintendents know they cannot lead this work alone.

# WHAT'S COMING?

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## MORE REMOTE WORK

After adapting to remote work, many companies will continue to support more work from home. A growing number of companies will reduce their leased space or go completely virtual. Prices of expensive urban commercial real estate will quickly soften and developers will hit the brakes on new construction.

## MORE PERSONALIZED CBE LEARNING

States have begun to issue guidance to high schools and it basically says, 'figure it out'—find learning options for kids, make judgments about competency, and waive what you can. Post-pandemic, a lot more high schools will have more flexible, 'show what you know' options.

## MORE COMMUNITY CONNECTED PBL

With state testing cancelled and a lot more flexible time, many learners are engaging in interest-based learning and impromptu projects. School closures have been a reminder that learning can happen anywhere. When kids return to school, some schools will respond with more project-based learning connected to local problems and opportunities.

## CONTINUITY OF LEARNING

By the 2020-21 school year, the learning institutions will have a continuity of learning plan with a blended curriculum, learning platform, personal or take-home devices, and support for ubiquitous wi-fi. No more snow days! Post-pandemic, more people will think of education as a public service more than a place.

## MORE HOME-BASED AND HYBRID LEARNING

After parents figure out learning at home, half a million students won't go back to school. And a bunch of school districts will get more aggressive about supporting homeschoolers with hybrid learning centers like [Workspace Education](#) in Bethel, Connecticut, and [Da Vinci Connect](#) near Los Angeles International Airport.

## NEW MUTUALITY

Perhaps the most foundational change will be a recognition of our [new mutuality](#)—we're all in this together. We think that will translate into difference-making: more schools focusing on helping young people find and begin making their unique [contribution](#).

# HOW CAN WE GET READY? DISTRIBUTIVE LEADERSHIP

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Successful systems practice distributed leadership. Sometimes this level of change for an organization can best be accomplished by a relatively ‘flat’ team in terms of roles, which allows for adaptability and increased responsiveness, as well as time for forward planning. One of the ways this can be structured is through distributed leadership.

Distributed leadership is a counter-narrative to traditional, isolated, expertise-focused leadership models. It resolves in community and requires collaboration and multiple stakeholders. As we navigate through COVID-19, many traditional leaders are struggling with highly nuanced and complex expectations and needs. Many times they resort to controlling details and final decision making to “make progress” with the intention of easing difficult situations.

However, it is precisely in times like this that we need to shift to distributive leadership approaches.

## Leading Fluid Space

Distributed leadership is not just creative with roles and teaming. It is also inclusive of leading over time in a more fluid way, thinking about how to hold time; in the present, for the future, and learning from the past. This style of educational leadership is not contained to superintendents but is also used by site leaders, department leaders, and teacher leadership. It does not mean that all leaders are doing the same thing, or in the same way, the work itself is distributed.

One integral strategy for effective change leadership is being intentional in creating time and space for distributive work that is time-sensitive, assigning people to think and do with an eye towards the future as well as utilizing the best people and resources to persist in the present. For example, a superintendent might not have the headspace or physical time to engage in future planning work right now, but there are people on the superintendent's team that can, and should, so that when the superintendent is able to focus on the future, they can enter into a well-framed plan that they can finalize and lead.

## Inviting In All Stakeholders

When considering stakeholders that are part of collective leadership actions, it is important that leaders consider all the possible stakeholders. Parents, community leaders, students, and business partners are all integral participants in the work of education, and they should be represented in decision-making processes. When distributed leaders welcome these stakeholder voices, many times they have a different perspective or approach, and ask important questions that inform a more comprehensive view of policy and initiative impact. Leaders must listen to this key insight and respect ways that stakeholders can take the lead in not only thought partnership but also in setting action steps.

# Lean Into the Ambiguity

Distributed leadership is necessary to lead schools and systems through the transformation required post-COVID-19. Leaders will need to utilize the expertise and insight of various stakeholders to present whole picture needs and inform the best steps to support systemic change and sustenance. Instead of siloed departments disconnected from their mutual accountability, distributed systems will lean into the ambiguity together. Continuous collaboration, improved communication, and more robust identities for roles and contributions will lead us to a new way of understanding leadership and possibility.

## Strategies

- Bring diverse voices to the table to build and/or update the vision. Flatten access by inviting new voices into conversations.
- Build trust through transparency in communication and action. Use virtual circles or 'rounding' for checking in and building understanding.
- Distribute decision making authority and responsibility to teams closest to focused stakeholder impact, like students. Spot and utilize leaders throughout the organization to lead short term projects. Host or sponsor conversations, facilitate agreements for improvement, and innovation projects.
- Give space for leaders in charge of future thinking AND leaders in charge of the current strategy. Lean into critical conversations and embrace the vulnerability in times of ambiguity.

## Follow Leaders Making This Shift

- Pat Deklotz (@PDeklotz), Superintendent of Kettle Moraine (KM) School District (@kmdistrict)
- Randy Ziegenfuss (@Ziegeran), Superintendent of Salisbury School (@SalisburySchool)
- Tom Rooney (@TomTrooney), Superintendent of Lindsay Unified School District
- Christopher Stone (@Dr\_Chris\_Stone), Superintendent of Montour School District (@MontourSD)

## Resources

- [The Multiplier Effect](#) for strategies on building your team or learn about the [Accidental Diminisher Profile](#) work for leading teams
- [Cognitive Coaching or Adaptive Schools Trainings](#) and support
- Agile strategies, such as [Scrum Leadership](#) and [Holocracy](#).
- [Dare to Lead](#) book study, workbook groups

# HOW CAN WE GET READY? EMERGENT LEADERSHIP

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Traditional building management routines have little significance right now. Leadership that is moving systems forward is an emergent influence, with incredible communication capacity, trust holding, and creative thinking. Districts and schools with leaders that are able to stay focused on the human-centered priorities are able to know and communicate what needs to be done, are settling into uncertainty knowing they can trust each other and are finding creative ways to embrace and navigate challenges.

Emergent leadership is an agile practice that lets go of a sense of expertise and calls upon wisdom and collaboration to navigate new approaches efficiently. The typical compliance structures will be less relevant when students return to school. When students enter back into the structures that housed them before, they will be changed, the whole world will be changed. Emerging in this same space is a new culture of staff, students, and family engagement that have differentiated needs and abilities unlike ever before.

## Creating Culture

Designing a learning environment that is ready, agile, and responsive to a future level of expectations in learning will be crucial. The act of co-design will have new meaning, as stakeholders will have a strong voice about what it means to be a learner, a teacher, and a leader. There will be a desire to mix the best of the old with the best of the new.

## Staying Focused

Leadership amidst the COVID-19 pandemic needs to stay focused. Leadership at this time must lead only towards what matters (whole child, future-ready skills). Outcomes and directions will be different — the approach possibly unrecognizable, but what we want and need for our kids should not have wavered during this time. It is essential that leaders keep their teams and students focused as well. Leaders need to communicate now, tomorrow, and the day after that supporting students is what matters, letting students know they are seen, heard, loved, and empowered. Leaders must clearly and consistently communicate: these are the ways we are working towards what matters. Here's how you matter. No new information or circumstances will change what matters, but it can impact our work, and we will stay steady and keep focused.

To stay resilient in that focus, leaders must know how to cancel unnecessary information, find trustworthy information resources, and keep a close-knit community to help them make sense of information and find direction towards goals. They must also seek out new types of resources that can improve their goal journey and be open to listening to their close-knit community when they have a different perspective or idea. This nuance is pivotal to lead their schools through unprecedented times. You must not waiver and you must be open. That permeable threshold and clear boundary will sustain trust, vision, and most importantly, actions that are desperately needed.

## Resilience in Community

By now, it's clear that we cannot do it alone. Two months ago, many principals and superintendents experienced loneliness and isolation in their roles. In this crisis, communities of school leaders have arisen, connecting with each other and with community partners in meaningful ways. This has opened a new ecosystem of collaboration that will present a stronger community to welcome back students and continue to empower them through inevitable obstacles in collaborative relationships unlike ever before.

Students will return to community school learning hubs, buildings once previously isolated in compliant academic metrics are now expanded as gathering places for students, community partners, and organizations. Now that schools are more explicitly recognized for services beyond teaching and learning, school and system leaders shift priority from compliance with arbitrary test prep and could now be more interested in developing their students as community members working towards significant possibilities. Learning will be prioritized around empowering student well being. Families, school teachers, and administrators could reconnect in physical locations after building a relationship over time through various methods of communication that will allow a more authentic connection through a vulnerability in uncertainty while grounded in care for each other.



# HOW CAN WE GET READY? CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP

According to [The Center for Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning](#) (CCRTL), an institution that provides professional, community, and school development with the goal of “making cultural responsiveness a meaningful aspect of everyday life,” culturally responsive educators validate, affirm, build, and bridge (VABB). When educators explicitly care about individual student’s cultures and experiences, they validate who students are. When they appreciate students for who they are, they affirm students’ identities. When they integrate and amplify diverse contexts and approaches in the learning environment, they help students build and bridge toward academic achievement.

CCLRT focuses on culture, not race (culture and race are not synonymous). It is student-centered and emphasizes the importance of not only talking and relating to students differently but also teaching them differently.

## Starting the Cultural Responsiveness Journey

Creating a culturally responsive classroom can seem daunting. Luckily, several teaching organizations and experts have insights and resources that can help educators navigate their journeys.

## Resources

The CCRTL website contains [resources](#) for educators at numerous stages of their culturally responsive journeys. These free assets include comprehensive guides that take educators from building cultural awareness to [classroom management](#) as well as videos, handouts, and articles.

Thought leaders like Zaretta Hammond, the author of [Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain](#), share insightful information and tips from her book (including “[Five Key Culturally Responsive Teaching Moves](#)”) through [her blog](#).

Finally, organizations like [Teaching Tolerance](#) and [The National Equity Project](#) offer resources such as a [Learning Plan Builder](#) and tips for [developing community agreements](#) that can be used as common frameworks for transformative action.

# Conduct an Equity Audit

Traditional education measurement structures are developed within dominant culture frameworks. Therefore, to collect and analyze data in support of measuring and improving culturally linguistic and relevant pedagogy, the measurement structures and examples must look different.

[Equity Audits](#) measure discrepancies in academic achievement. In our [Student-Centered Data Analysis](#) blog, we showcase the work of Edna Garcia, Director for State and Federal Programs at Plainview Independent School District in Texas, who is leading this Equity Audit process by using data to really see what is going on – teasing out information on student performance and needs by demographics. This informs teams what instructional impacts need to happen. “I have seen this process useful when it comes to implicit biases that educators (and we all) have this focus on data helps uncover inequities in a “safer” less emotional way,” said Garcia. Equity Audits clearly reveal students’ needs by showing which grade levels are most impacted and revealing underrepresented students that can be “hidden” in more traditional data.

## Shadow a Student

Pairing with (or “shadowing”) a student for a day is an excellent way for educators to understand and empathize with their students. [The Shadow a Student Challenge](#), an initiative of [School Retool](#), offers a workbook and other resources for educators who are interested in “seeing school through your student’s eyes, identifying meaningful opportunities to improve the school experience for your students, and then taking action to create change at your school site.” Student feedback on assignments and procedures can also inform what is aligning and what areas of cultural relevance need to be improved.

## Looking Forward

More research continues into effective classroom practices and impact on student success and well-being. Equipping educators with a better understanding of what Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness is and best entry points for instructional practice is a key step to meeting and serving the needs of all students in the new decade ahead.

## Resources

Like the assets mentioned above, the following resources offer educators who are on responsive cultural journeys advice and information.

- [Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain](#)
- [Responsive Reads](#)
- [Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy](#)

# SO NOW WHAT? LEAD.

It seemed like we were experiencing a lot of change with the climate crisis, the innovation economy, and trade wars—then comes a pandemic. As the emergency brake was pulled on the economy, almost everything shut down. Many were laid off, others are trying to figure out how to work from home. The disruption is establishing new baselines in work, learning, healthcare, and governance. In fact, it's a hard reset on everything, and we need strong leaders more than ever.

Leadership will arise from this pandemic anew. It will not be as it was before. The tactics and identity of leadership have been reshaped in this journey through COVID-19. There is a call for a new formation of community learning spaces framed in the sense of school, family, and community. Leaders embracing that community along with creativity and resilience will communicate with, and build relationships for, a new generation of learning systems.

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