

Pandemic-Era Guidance for Educators

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EdResearch for Recovery, a project co-led by Brown's Annenberg Institute, provides evidence-based advice to support U.S. educators through COVID-19.

Like educators around the country, Craig Levis, superintendent of public schools in Coventry, R.I., worries about the toll COVID-19 disruptions have taken on students. But during fall 2020 workshops hosted by EdResearch for Recovery — a project of Brown's Annenberg Institute for School Reform — Levis explored proven strategies for countering the kind of learning loss that has occurred, especially among already-struggling students. Levis and his team then crafted plans to provide intensive tutoring this summer.

"The research shows that if you put students in weeklong 'academies' with teachers in subjects like math, reading and writing, they can gain three months of learning — and it helps them feel more connected to the school," Levis says.

The Annenberg Institute established EdResearch for Recovery, in partnership with the nonprofit Results for America, to help K-12

education leaders make informed, student-centered decisions. This is essential as they navigate a public health crisis that has upended in-person classroom teaching, strained school budgets, stressed families and exposed alarming disparities in education.

"With so much uncertainty in their work right now, educators are looking for strong, research-based guidance to point them in the right direction," says project founder Nate Schwartz, an associate professor of the practice at Brown.

In response, project staff developed a library of research briefs, with timely advice from national education experts on topics such as improving distance learning, engaging families, and supporting children's emotional well-being in light of both COVID-19 and racial justice unrest (see related box). The project also brings educators together virtually to discuss their concerns and recommended strategies.

Pressing Questions

Launched in summer 2020, EdResearch for Recovery extends the Annenberg Institute's goal of producing knowledge to address key education questions and facilitating its use in practice, notes institute director Susanna Loeb, a professor of education and of international and public affairs. "The substantial learning loss and traumatic experiences faced by students called for just this type of work," she says. "We need, more than ever, to make the right decisions to help our students."

The project grew out of conversations last spring between Brown faculty and Providence educators, who faced challenges such as finding laptops and meals for students when the pandemic hit and asked the Annenberg Institute to consider broader issues around teaching, learning and equity. Project staff culled the most pressing questions from local and national policymakers and practitioners. Then they enlisted top education scholars from U.S. colleges and universities to create research briefs to address them — with plans to release about 20 by spring 2021 — and peer reviewers to make sure the advice will be useful on the ground.

Several briefs describe ways to motivate students who aren't fully participating in school from home. One approach is to make remote classroom time more interactive through class discussions, small-group projects and direct feedback from teachers to students. "We are thinking about ways to support district leaders in creating adult-student connections," Schwartz says.

On-the-Ground Impact

To expand its reach, the project hosts monthly webinars with the national news outlet *Education Week* and regular virtual workshops with education decision makers in Rhode Island and Washington, D.C., where Brown and Results for America are based, respectively. The project is also poised to help school districts start implementing changes they would like to make.

EdResearch for Recovery, which receives support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, has made a difference in Coventry, where Superintendent Levis values the chance to brainstorm solutions outlined in the research briefs with other Rhode Island educators attending the workshops. "It's been very

powerful," he says. "I can walk away after an hour-and-a-half session thinking, 'OK, there's something we can do.'"

Dahlia Aguilar, chief schools officer for Mundo Verde, a public charter school in D.C., says the project has informed her school's efforts to create a more inclusive environment for students with different abilities. "Translating relevant research into practice has never been more important," Aguilar says. "With the pandemic ground constantly shifting beneath our feet, our leadership team has found the research briefs to be invaluable anchors. The work with Brown has helped us keep our balance."

The EdResearch for Recovery team knows that learning gaps, student disengagement and other problems will, unfortunately, persist beyond the coronavirus pandemic. It hopes to continue assisting school leaders, Schwartz says, "so we can all get smarter at this work — that is, the work of educational improvement informed by strong evidence."

Strategies to Help Schools Recover



Brown's EdResearch for Recovery Project has produced a library of easy-to-digest, downloadable research briefs for K-12 leaders and policymakers that present key issues for each education topic, strategies to consider and avoid, and links to studies, articles and other online resources. Topics include:

- How to improve distance and hybrid learning
- Academic interventions to counter COVID-19 learning loss
- How to keep dropout numbers from spiking
- Strategies for fostering a safe and positive school climate
- How to narrow the gaps between students with disabilities and their peers
- Practices to support student immigrants and English language learners
- How to responsibly make tough budget decisions
- Ways to enhance communication with parents and families

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