Education Trends

**3 Keys to a Better 2020–21**

In response to the upheaval of the pandemic, researchers and the leaders of over 100 schools focused on three fundamental areas of education, whether it’s in person or virtual.

By [Jonathan Eckert](https://www.edutopia.org/profile/jonathan-eckert)

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The pandemic precipitated a historic education disruption. In response, my colleagues at Baylor University and I gathered educators from around the world in virtual learning communities to determine how best to respond. Leaders from 112 schools met in virtual communities in May, June, and July to identify what is most important in education, regardless of delivery method.

In general, we decided that the three most fundamental emphases should be on well-being, engagement, and feedback. We imagined a pyramid in which well-being is the largest section, at the pyramid’s base; engagement is the middle layer; and feedback is at the pyramid’s peak.

**Well-Being**

Well-being is the base of the pyramid because Maslow’s hierarchy takes priority over Bloom’s taxonomy. Maslow’s hierarchy categorizes basic human needs, and Bloom’s taxonomy identifies different levels of learning. If students’ and teachers’ physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being are not intact, then nothing else really matters.

Before they began addressing academics, the most successful schools ensured that they cared for teachers and students’ well-being. To that end, administrators set up multiple connection points each week to check in with teachers at their convenience. They asked teachers two simple questions: “How are you doing?” and “What do you need?”

Teachers and administrators also made weekly well-being phone calls to every student’s home. Some homes received three calls a week, particularly if there were concerns about family well-being. Several schools used mentor groups of students and faculty to generate ideas for service learning projects for their families and communities. These projects helped students think beyond themselves and reduced isolation. At one school, for instance, a team of five students created a tech support hotline for students or families struggling with technology issues that arose through distance learning.

**Engagement**

The second level in the pyramid is engagement. Students don’t learn if they’re not engaged. Whether learning occurs virtually or in person, we came up with what we called the 4 Cs of Engagement: content, competition, collaboration, and creation.

**Content:** Through the spring, teachers discovered innovative ways to deliver content. Schools already using robust learning management systems like [Schoology](https://www.schoology.com/) and [Canvas](https://www.canvas.net/) made the transition to online content delivery relatively smoothly. For teachers of pre-K through second grade, [Seesaw](https://web.seesaw.me/) proved an invaluable tool because of its ease of use and the ability it provides to give and receive feedback. Tools like [Edpuzzle](https://edpuzzle.com/) and [Pear Deck](https://www.peardeck.com/googleslides) allow teachers to incorporate questions and interaction into videos and Google Slide presentations.

**Competition:**Friendly competition, particularly for reviewing surface-level knowledge, has always been an excellent way to engage students. [Quizlet](https://quizlet.com/) has long been an excellent review tool for almost any subject area because of its large number of quizzes that have already been created by teachers and students. Also, its format enables students to receive immediate feedback on what they do and don’t know. [Kahoot!](https://kahoot.com/) has been a favorite for a number of years now and allows students to interact with each other in a game format, whether in person or over distance. [Gimkit](https://www.gimkit.com/), developed by a high school student who liked Kahoot! but thought he could improve on it, is a great tool for review: It’s fast-paced but allows students to repeatedly review questions and also records how many questions each student answers correctly.

**Collaboration:** With the move to distance learning, teachers shifted the tools they were using to facilitate virtual student collaboration. Three tools I was not aware of at the beginning of the school year that have proved to be invaluable are [Parlay](https://parlayideas.com/), [Mentimeter](https://www.mentimeter.com/), and [Mural](https://www.mural.co/). Parlay allows teachers to track discussions virtually as students discuss meaningful texts. Mentimeter allows students and teachers to collect real-time data on students’ questions in the form of word clouds, rankings, and multiple-choice quizzes. Mural is a digital workspace for virtual collaboration that allows teachers and students to post, group, and reorganize ideas in real time.

**Creation:** Student content creation allows for autonomy and significantly boosts engagement. Tools like [Canva](https://www.googleadservices.com/pagead/aclk?sa=L&ai=DChcSEwi-6r_asI7qAhVQ1sAKHUcEDlIYABAAGgJpbQ&ohost=www.google.com&cid=CAESQOD2Ms7_gnYXDaU-7s_B9poVxOewB8_FVns2G1-Sq2wPWubQG9vui0ulrvsD0hgyvQjOhEKF9u8exGZNkjjzp7Y&sig=AOD64_3o8A70GumsESNg_cgw1ctUVTB4oA&q=&ved=2ahUKEwjmmLbasI7qAhVElKwKHRJgCOIQ0Qx6BAgoEAE&adurl=), [Piktochart](https://piktochart.com/), and [Padlet](https://padlet.com/) allow students to create digital images and content. [Screencastify](https://www.screencastify.com/), [GoFormative](https://goformative.com/), and [Loom](https://www.loom.com/) allow students to annotate and explain complex problems. [Flipgrid](https://info.flipgrid.com/) enables students to submit pictures and videos for feedback from teachers and students. [Apple Clips](https://apps.apple.com/us/app/clips/id1212699939) and [iMovie](https://www.apple.com/imovie/) give students the opportunity to tell their own stories.

**Feedback**

We get better through forms of deliberate practice that also provide opportunities to receive feedback. All of the tools we used for engagement offer opportunities for both deep and immediate feedback.

Whatever tool they use, great teachers know that they need to establish the criteria for success with students. Effective success criteria include answers to the following questions: (1) What does a good example look like?, and (2) What’s in it for the student? Students need examples and a reason to improve. With clear success criteria, students can self- and peer-review work. Instead of thinking in terms of the content they will cover next year, great teachers think about the skills and knowledge that students will be able to demonstrate and how they can provide feedback to help them get there.

With the uncertainty ahead for 2020–21, clarity in these three areas is more important than ever. The good news is that well-being, engagement, and feedback are not new—they have always been the key to a good education. We just need to leverage resources to implement them well in 2020–21.