Group: Building Back Better in the Education Sector Post COVID-19
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The Challenge:

Across the globe, school systems were understandably overwhelmed and unequipped to respond when COVID-19 began rapidly spreading in the spring of 2020. Within the United States, the US education ecosystem has traditionally been built around an in-class experience. This experience is reflected from the technology investments in school-level broadband internet and devices to curriculum design and how teachers are trained.

Furthermore, the temporary closure of thousands of schools has disrupted more than day-to-day education. Schools served as a safety net for many students; they acted as a gateway to hot meals, special education services, therapy, high-speed internet access and more. When we removed the physicality of school, these safety nets evaporated and we removed access to these vital services.

During the remote shift, students were unprepared to pivot and didn't have access to technologies or the digital tools to be connected to take virtual classes, a deficiency especially widespread in countries with less economic resources. More than anything, the shift to virtual wasn't a solution for students who have disabilities or the various types of learners.

On a global scale, school closures affected over 188 countries with students with less economic resources getting left behind. They struggled with access to education (either because of economic resources or infrastructure) in ways that decrease their chances of continuing their studies. COVID-19 risks regressing back decades of progress that has been made.

In total, our recommendations are calling for a rethink of the global education structure - making it more collaborative, and focused as much on the wellbeing and health of the students as well as the learning process.

Recommendations:

Recommendation #1: Collaboration with Private Companies - Greater investment:
After hundreds of schools cancelled classes in response to the spread of COVID-19, many education technology companies have started offering free teaching resources to educators to help with the transition from in-person to online learning.

Our recommendation is to bring more members of the education community together to tackle this large-scale transition. Some education technology companies have already stepped up to help teachers facilitate online learning for home-bound students, offering services and resources to schools affected by the health crisis for free.

[Coursera](#)

Online learning platform Coursera has made some 3,800 courses free to every university in the world impacted by coronavirus until July 31, 2020.

[GitHub](#)

Software development platform GitHub is offering computer science instructors free access to developer tools for domain name, code visualization and application monitoring through the GitHub Teacher Toolbox, along with free access to auto-grading with GitHub Classroom.

Even with an approved vaccine for Covid-19, online education is here to stay filling gaps that already existed in education curricula. By collaborating with private companies, we can join forces to further reach underserved populations and expand the possibilities in how we can fill the education gaps.

Recommendation #2: Gamifying Learning through Global Partnerships
As we start building towards a more accessible and equitable education, we will need global partnerships that will support communities/students that have been left behind. Students need and deserve education that empowers them to learn, question, be curious and think creatively. Depending on their region and socio-ecnomic status, students have been educated through online classes, TV or radio. None of these mediums have effectively allowed students to thrive.

Our recommendation is to reimagine education by sending hands-on and engaging education kits to students. These kits help students absorb more knowledge and ensure that the knowledge remains for a longer time. Educational kits make learning more effective for students and allow them to realize concepts through activities.

Another method includes digital game-based learning. This method provides an opportunity to engage students to compensate for missing classroom activities, and creatively allow them to learn concepts. This will not only enhance knowledge but also motivate students to continue the lesson / learn the concept when the class session is over. Depending on the implementation of gamified learning, students can play and compete with other students and earn badges. However, creating these complex learning and gamified lessons will require partnerships with tech companies to creatively implement for students in well-resourced and underserved communities.

Recommendation #3: Reinventing the educational system: Transform for a digital first experience and retrain teachers
Preparing students to be successful for the future requires a robust and flexible learning infrastructure capable of supporting new types of engagement. Our recommendation is to make sure that all students and educators will have access to a robust and comprehensive infrastructure when and where they need it for learning. This can be done by making sure that we're fully equipped with essential components of an infrastructure capable of supporting transformational learning experiences include the following:

- Ubiquitous connectivity: Persistent access to high-speed Internet in and out of school
- Powerful learning devices: Access to mobile devices that connect learners and educators to the vast resources of the Internet and facilitate communication and collaboration
- High-quality digital learning content: Digital learning content and tools that can be used to design and deliver engaging and relevant learning experiences
- Responsible Use Policies:Guidelines to safeguard students and ensure that the infrastructure is used to support learning
- Training teachers on how to properly use and implement tech tools: There is no doubt that technology has improved the classroom experience, so running away from tech tools or assuming tech adoption is a fad is not an option.

We need to provide ubiquitous access to the technology tools that allow students to create, design, and explore.

Recommendation #4: Peer Mentorship
Mentorship provides students with the support system to handle the social changes and challenges of school during COVID-19. When looking at mentorship through the lens of education, peer mentorship can be a vital force for students. One of the many effects of the pandemic has been on students' mental and emotional wellbeing. Peer mentorship allows students to deepen relationships with peers, and will provide greatest benefit to underserved communities who have filled the education gaps through TV, Radio and other media outlets. While students can't be in person and gain direct access to their peers, mentorship can help fill the needs. Some of the methods to build these mentorship circles include seeking through in-build support systems, such as, local communities, virtual communities and social media students are able to bridge the gap. Examples of virtual communities can range from whatsapp groups (accessible in most parts of the world and not data-heavy) to platforms such as akimbo.com, twitch, tiktok.com, discord.com and more.

The benefits of peer mentorship is that it can both work virtually as well as analogue in areas where access to the internet is limited.

Recommendation # 5: Prioritize Education
There's no one solution that will fit all. Education systems across the globe vary in not only in the content they teach, but how they assess students. Irrespective of geography, this education gap needs to be greater responsibility and become a highest priority for governments, international/education institutions and communities. Even when school doors reopen in 2021 and beyond, the learning losses and it's impact from COVID-19 will leave its imprint across generations, This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to reshape the conersative education structure to not only fill the gaps that the digital divide created, but build a better and more equitable system that meets the students needs of the 21st century.

Links to Additional Resources:

[How countries are using edtech (including online learning, radio, television, texting) to support access to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

[Policy Brief: Education during COVID-19 and beyond](#)

[Mind the gap: COVID-19 is widening racial disparities in learning, so students need help and a chance to catch up](#)

[How Administrators Can Prepare Teachers for New Tech](#)

Key Sources:

[Forget a mentor - find a sponsor - Sylvia Ann Hewlett](#)

[The sponsor effect - Sylvlia Ann Hewlett](#)

[The COVID-19 pandemic has changed education forever. This is how](#)

[Office of Educational Technology](#)