



## School leadership in times of crisis

Mark Comanducci · April 7, 2020



Unsplash



As I watch educational leaders across the country grapple with the challenges of the school closures, my mind goes back to Louisiana. I lived in Louisiana during hurricanes Katrina and Gustav. Those events were contained to smaller geographic areas and affected fewer people, and yet similarities abound between them and the current situation. Students, families, and educators, now homebound, are wrestling with confusion, helplessness, anger and countless other emotions. It's a time of great uncertainty and stress.

And yet, we know from history, we will recover. New Orleans and Baton Rouge rebounded after the storms. The US, its educational system, and those it serves will heal and be better as they emerge from the closures. However, for that to happen, school leaders need to create a plan to navigate through the present and plan for the future.



## Manage the Present

A deluge of resources -- lesson plans, videos, kits, worksheets -- are flooding parents and teachers' email inboxes and social media feeds. It's overwhelming and much of it is presented in an unaligned and nonactionable way. Here's how you can cut through the noise and support meaningful progress for your constituents during this difficult time.

**Create an actionable teaching and learning plan.** Think strategically about your school communities. Sort through the resources and find a way to make them consumable and impactful for those they serve. Avoid sending websites or work packets to students and families without making sure they are part of a larger teaching and learning strategy. Translate everything that is out there and make it something that can truly support student learning, academically and social-emotionally.

**Provide support to teachers, staff and parents.** School leaders' lens cannot only be student-facing. You must also serve the adults in your school communities. These individuals are the direct channel to students. Crisis management plans should include ways to offer emotional and professional support to your adult constituency.

**Conduct routine check-ins.** Communication will be key to your school community's success during the closure. Check in with stakeholders regularly, individually and in groups, using video conference tools. Emphasize the plan, see what they need and find out what you can do to support.

**Keep an eye on operations.** Make sure your facilities are well maintained during closures. Also, begin planning for fiscal impact. Leverage new and existing grants. Work with an experienced grant writer to address new challenges your school may face when the closures end.

**Reflect and grow.** Use this time to think about the issues that were affecting your school before the closure and begin developing plans to improve your campus community when school resumes. Enlist the support of a leadership coach and thought partner with whom you can brainstorm and talk.



## Prepare for the Reopening

Heading back to campus will be a different experience. Everyone will be in a new norm. Here's how you can help ease that transition.

**Relaunch.** When school resumes treat it like the beginning of a new school year, resetting cultural and academic expectations

**Welcome.** Students displaced because of the crisis will enroll in your school; have a plan to ensure this transition is smooth and as positive as possible for them and their families

**Address the reality.** School closures and the crises they stem from create trauma for students, families, and educators; create plans to address and a way to provide supports when everyone returns to school

**Set priorities and goals.** School restarting will bring feelings of hope and promise; use this time to establish the priorities and goals for your school community

The coronavirus has paralyzed our world, country and educational system with fear and uncertainty. Our role as school leaders is to guide our teams and students through the wreckage back to level ground. We can do this. We are resilient, we are driven and we will be better on the other side of this.

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