April 2021: School’s In

An offering to New Mexicans from the faculty and students of the Department of Individual, Family and Community Education at the University of New Mexico.
School’s In
Schooling as we knew it has changed forever. What have teachers and kids lost? What have they gained? How do kids, parents, teachers, schools go forward from here, attending not just to learning but to all aspects of the benefits of schooling?
Solidarity with Asian, Asian American, and Pacific Islander Communities

From hate crimes to physical violence to “Chinese Virus”, Asian, Asian American, and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities have continued to be victims of xenophobia, violence, racism, prejudice, exploitation, and discrimination. WASH NM wholeheartedly endorses the statement made by the UNM College of Education and Human Sciences, and we offer these resources to you.

• What can or should you do if you see acts of racism?
  • Bystander training is available online for free.
  • UNM has resources
  • The Santa Fe-based non-profit Resolve offers trainings.

• Other ways to help and support
  • Race-and culture-based tensions have unfortunately always been a part of New Mexican life. Here are some ways to learn about the history of AAPI experiences and the present in New Mexico:
    • A recent NMPBS segment on a rise in AAPI violence in New Mexico.
    • A brief description of the Asian community in Albuquerque.
    • New Mexico had four Japanese American Internment Camps during World War II. More about them here.
    • Racist history still visible in New Mexico’s housing markets.
    • Approximately 2% of New Mexico residents are AAPI.
    • Intersections: Critical Issues in Education is offered by our colleagues in UNM’s Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies.
    • The New Mexico Holocaust and Intolerance Museum.

• Asian, Asian American, and Pacific Islander organizations in New Mexico:
  • The New Mexico Japanese American Citizens League
  • The Asian American Association of New Mexico
  • The New Mexico Asian Family Center
  • The Korean American Association of New Mexico

• Having and using your voice are actually important to your wellbeing. Here are some resources for learning more and for making your voice heard:
  • Pledge to deconstruct racism in New Mexico.
  • United Against Racism -- New Mexico lists many organizations in the state doing racial justice work.
Simple Pleasures

These are our latest finds for relatively quick, easy, often healthy, things you can do during COVID-19 restrictions.

Oh, to be in Paris now that spring is here. The Louvre has made nearly half a million digitized items from its collection available for free online.

Here’s a Kewa Pueblo teacher’s pandemic experiences presented in a comics format.
You’re vaccinated but your kids aren’t:

• Now what?
• Can you travel for summer vacation?
• Can your kids visit with extended family?
• Can kids have playdates?

When might vaccines be available for kids?

• Teens 16 and over -- are eligible for the Pfizer vaccine NOW in New Mexico.
• Ages 12-15 -- some study trial evidence is available now. Perhaps by the end of summer?
• Ages 6 months-11 years -- Studies are underway. Perhaps by 2022?
• Why are kids’ vaccines slow in coming?

Masks, six feet between people, other social distancing, hand sanitizer, and hand washing remain as important as they have been -- for you (yet) and your kids.
This past year affirmed the importance of the relationships between children, ...Their families and the need for strong collaborative partnerships between families and early childhood educators. It has reminded us all that content knowledge may be easier to recover than repairing the harm from social emotional stress. The pandemic has highlighted our resiliency, creativity, the importance of relationships and has tested partnerships whether experiencing essential face to face schooling and care or remote learning.

As in-home and center-based educators provided non-stop services to children of “essential” workers, we quickly learned new ways of being. Centers look and feel different with new health protocols and boundaries. Families are not allowed physically in the learning environments. Following health questions and temperature checks, they are required to drop children off outside with a person wearing a mask, a face-shield, PPE gown and gloves. All adults and children over 3 years old are required to wear a mask all day, except when eating. Children are placed in small groups and not allowed to have contact with people out of their group. Meals, outdoor playtime and use of hallways are staggered to avoid contact between groups. Educational toys and learning materials, which cannot be disinfected within a 24-hour period were removed from the classroom. While getting used to environmental changes took time, learning to express ourselves and socially emotionally nurture and support each other proved to be a bigger charge. We developed the skills to express ourselves while covering half our faces with masks and taught children to read facial and body cues. We learned new ways to greet and celebrate by calling attention to gestures. We rediscovered smiling with our eyes, using “jazz hands” and dance moves to express joy and reinforce behaviors. As we could not physically enter each other’s spaces, communication and trust between adults became increasingly important and we learned the use of different communication mediums and platforms.

For those children, families, and educators who were plunged into remote learning, a whole new world was constructed. Education departments put forth plans for synchronous and asynchronous learning for 3 and 4-year-old children. Schools and families scrabbled to get devices and internet into homes for instruction, sometimes with success and many times without. Families rearranged their furniture in an attempted carve out and create learning places for the children, and those working from home juggled work hours and scheduling support for their young during school. Educators had to quickly learn online education platforms, recreate and convert the curriculum into virtual lesson plans, while maintaining the attention of young students. Everyone dealt with slow modems, routers and crashing internet during sessions and meetings. Families witnessed and experienced firsthand the teacher’s knowledge and skills and their children’s abilities and engagement. Teachers glimpsed into the children’s homes, families, supports and resources. Acknowledging young children could only be online for a short period of time in the best of circumstances, teachers and families improved their partnerships and communication for off-screen/asynchronous learning.

As the state reopens and schools were encouraged to go face to face has schooling changed and have we learned from the experience? The optimist in me believes we have. Families were reminded of the challenges of teaching and student engagement. Everyone learned that schools do more than “just teach content areas”. They meet many community needs including medical/dental/mental health care, food and meal support, and sport, music and artistic development. Educators visited the child’s home on a regular basis and were introduced into their home environments, hopefully creating a greater understanding. Families were reminded they were their children’s first teachers and learned they have what it takes to facilitate learning. Government and system leaders learned of resource inequities from food, learning devices and internet and have begun taking the steps through legislature to better fund the education system. So shout-out to continue improved communication and partnerships between families and educators, giving grace during challenging times and change, to appropriate sanitizing and jazz hands and fun dances.
I compare the start of the COVID-19 pandemic to the 1980s AIDS epidemic.

The fear of contracting the virus, the scapegoating of cultural groups. And 9/11. Where were you on September 11, 2001? I remember that day clearly: Lunchtime at Hernandez Elementary. March 2021, the USA marked the one-year closure anniversary, the experience personal to each of us. My own quarantine began while I was in New Orleans, at a national teacher program accreditation conference. The morning I flew home, the first cases of coronavirus were reported in New Mexico, and New Orleans was listed as a hot spot for infection. “Maybe you should cancel your classes for the rest of the week?” asked a colleague. March 11, 2020, my quarantine began. I have barely left my house the 14 months since.

Schools in the time of COVID. Schools shut first, remember? My three children’s district closed while they were on spring break, the first week of March. Three weeks, they said. UNM closed a day or so before our spring break. Adapt all courses to online before the students return, they said. My Wisconsin acquaintance went back in January. When I return to a physical classroom, it will be 530 days. So jealous! Besides health professionals, I would venture to say the pandemic impacted educators the second most. Below I outline a few ways we experienced these, and ways I saw teachers rise to the challenge of formal schooling in unprecedented times in humankind. Losses and gains, if you will.

Challenges to teacher preparation and teaching and schooling:
• Delayed student teacher (ST) placements into cooperating teachers’ (CT’s; mentors during student teaching) classrooms.
• Closure of physical schools, testing sites, (STs need to pass three licensure exams to enter student teaching.), UNM and other higher education campuses, communities, such as Keres pueblos, resource centers, such as toy lending libraries, more.
• Access to CT’s online classrooms, school personnel, such as human resources, to complete background checks, university faculty and personnel, healthcare, internet.
• Cancelled placements (e.g., Gallup/McKinley Schools).
• Coordinating with CTs regarding observations, schedules and solo teaching days, or when STs guide instruction. (April 2021: Online, face to face and/or hybrid?!) 
• Adapting from in-person instruction to teaching through a screen.
• Teachers, families and students learning how to use remote learning platforms, such as Google Classroom.
• Actively engaging with CTs and with CT’s students.
• Child care for STs, CTs and USs.
• Mental and physical health of STs, CTs and USs.
• Families doing students’ work.
• Maintaining student engagement in the online classroom.

Teachers meeting students’ and communities’ needs:
• Jack Hartman.
• Hard copy packets created up to a month in advance, with materials for students.
• Supply/Material Drop-offs and Pick-ups
• Dialoguing with stakeholders to address student needs, such as rationale for student learning outcomes, i.e., pincer grasp.
• New methods for classroom management.
• New methods for behavior management (i.e., setting weekly online goals to have spirit days).
• Individual student reward charts (distributed to students at monthly distribution). Students count to ten, reward at ten.
• Individual student conferences in private Google room after class time.
• Health breaks, such as students going outside their own homes.
• Incorporating lessons on internet safety and safe decision-making.
• Nutrition checks, such as inquiring with students about meals.
• Asynchronous activities (i.e., bike-riding, hiking, playing).
• Social-emotional wellness checks, such as check-ins with individual students in class meetings.
• Fitness checks, such as asking about physical activities children have completed.
• Non-structured time for child and family support.
• Families seen in classes, like dancing with grandma or singing along with class.
• Families as co-teachers, like siblings helping young learners find pages.
• Student and family input into curriculum, such as picking songs (“We Will Rock You”).
• Online information boards and class pages, such as Class Tag.
• Community/Family Donations of Supplies (Sanitized)
• Adapted schedules.
• Backgrounds in virtual classrooms.
• Culturally relevant pedagogy.
• Songs to teach across subjects.
• Stuffed animals and other sensory items for story time and whole group instruction, and throughout the virtual day.
• Modified dressed codes and seating.
• Movement allowed.
• Visuals, like pictures and posters of class norms in STs’ and teachers’ backgrounds.
• Visuals in children’s backgrounds.
• Lessons for many learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic).
• Utilizing student’s home environments and easily accessible materials for learning, such as science projects and math manipulatives.
• Finger songs and hand movement.
• Teacher allowing students to join online room early to informally engage with peers.
• Physical cues. Example: Teacher activates camera, has mute button on. After some minutes, teacher holds up mute sign. Students gradually give teacher their attention.
• Adapted environmental checklists.
• Adapted class norms.
• Observation assessment, like checklist usage during informal online time.
• Increased portfolio assessment.
• Emojis, for increased participation and feedback.
• Verbal feedback.
• Performance assessment, i.e. author’s chair.
Tips for the Zoomer:
• Switch up your background (I am currently channeling MadMen, lol).
• Laugh. Once, one ST’s background was tropical, and she was wearing colorful glasses. She was laughing, which caught me off guard, and I commented, “I want to be where J is!” We all had a good laugh.
• Get dressed. I suspect many people in Googleland are in their pajamas. For my morale, I get dressed at least a few days a week. It feels more committed to students, and if I am dressed, I am more prone to leave my yard.
• The Ten Zoom Commandments for Elementary School
• Strategies for Teaching Students Online & Face to Face at the Same Time
• How This District Leader Transformed Teacher PD
• National Standards for Quality Online Teaching.

Final Thoughts
Lost learning is a new and old term, now more often associated with pandemic and online-related academic “underachievement,” based on state and national standards and global competition. The holistic, multicultural and early childhood education educators in ME say we need to reevaluate this. Families and children are under a lot of stress, ME for instance, working full time from my house while I supervise three teenagers, online learning and otherwise. They are eating me out of house and home (lol)! A fundamental principle of formal schooling is preparing children to be productive members of their society. Teaching children resilience is part of surviving the pandemic physically, academically and emotionally more or less intact. Let us reevaluate learning loss, and then how to address this, meeting our NM students’ needs while attending to their overall well-being. We’re on the homestretch, teachers. Hang in there, colleagues, families and students.

Gains and Losses
All of these changes!
Some are true losses big and small.
Some, though, are gains.
Every 50 years or so, something critical, something wonderful, or something tragic shakes up education in our nation.

For us right now, we have a horrible and remarkable pandemic. As we get past the horror, evidence from history suggests that we need to be anticipating and working toward the remarkable.

Here is something wonderful. In 1838 Horace Mann began to establish the first normal schools. These were places where teachers learned how to teach based on the best practice of the day. These teachers made possible the vast expansion of public schools. It also began a century long effort of professionalizing teaching.

On a negative and tragic turn, in 1899, a year after the Supreme Court ruled in Plessy v. Ferguson that the U.S. could be an apartheid nation, the Court ruled in Cummings v. Richmond Ga. Board of Education that the formal establishing of separate schools for African Americans was legal. School boards across the South defunded or lessened school funding for African Americans.

During the same period, other groups took their turns at marginalization: Latinx, women, Italian Americans, Irish Americans, Jewish Americans, LGBTQ individuals, and those with ability uniqueness—a long incomplete list that is always completed with the decimation of Native Americans. This period in our history was so dark, it inspired Nazis in Germany.

However, millions more African Americans in the old South showed amazing resilience. Hundreds of private secondary schools opened and even flourished between 1900 and the 1950s. Additionally, to counter Jim Crow education, over 5000 Rosenwald schools emerged in the South, funded in part by the Sears, Roebuck Co. owner, Julius Rosenwald, who matched nearly $50 million dollars raised by African Americans to build these schools from Virginia to Texas. That is $100 million in turn-of-the-century dollars, billions in modern terms. Many of the teachers in these schools were educated in top Northern universities, so many Black students in the rural South received excellent instructors. The graduates of these schools fed a range of state and private Traditionally Black Colleges and Universities, who in turn produced college graduates who drove the Civil Rights Movement.

One fiery spark for the Civil Rights Movement was the Brown v. Board of Education in Topeka KS, Supreme Court ruling that desegregated schools. Several education movements followed, including 50 or so years later, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. Known for a vast (and to some contemptable) expansion of standardized testing, it is easy to forget that NCLB forced attention on poor, minority, English language learners, and special education students, like no other education legislation before it.

Still, the current pandemic may provide a bookend for our NCLB experience, with some lessons from our nation’s 50-year cycles of educational history.

- Teachers are resilient, courageous professionals. Teachers of those Rosenwald schools had to be incredibly creative because they often had little in resources, and their students were deep in a rural Southern depression that started before the great crash of ’29. My mother’s teacher of one such school took over an abandoned cannery. He used it to help locals can their summer harvests. My mother said they canned everything. With a stable food source established for his students’ families, he helped them stay in school during winter months. He made a generational impact on his community. During the pandemic, in state after state, today’s educators followed a similar standard. They created drive throughs to deliver food to students. When students could not come to them, they found ways to get the food to the students. They also got Internet hot spots to homes...
and converted parking lots and buses to free Internet zones—all while following CDC guidelines on keeping everyone and themselves safe. Years from now, we will write about their generational impact, too.

• More than teachers are needed. Pandemics measure inequality better than standardized tests do. Tests measure inequality better than they measure learning. What happens before and after school as students interact with family and their communities are critical facets of the learning experience. The Jim Crow experience in the South was not all degradation with only schools emerging as heroic. Those schools emerged in environments of Black entrepreneurialism and an emerging professional class that belied the fact they these were the children and grandchildren of former slaves. If the COVID-19 pandemic is a stand in for Jim Crow, we need a similar response—schools and families joined with businesses, professionals, religious institutions and the instruments of the state as part of the response to loss learning. Yes, the “It Takes a Village” people are right. Inequality is a village affair. So is its solution.

• Students will be more resilient than loss learning gaps indicate. This will be especially true if schools and teachers break away from industrialized, assembly-line schooling. For example, future teaching will be less rote and less aligned to multiple-choice tests and more aligned to learning from one’s environment.

• A post-pandemic teacher will be product-, problem-, and project-focused like never before. Besides helping to meet the social, emotional needs, and health needs of students, a post-pandemic teacher will need improved skills. They will need to guide more student-directed learning. These lessons will be technology enhanced. With a focus on products, problems, and projects, a post-pandemic teacher will make better use of the integrated nature of knowledge. Those Rosenwald School teachers used what they could from their students’ lives—local fields and forests were classrooms too. Authentic ways of assessing this type of learning must finally overtake standardized tests. Finally, this teacher will need to teach discernment and data evaluation—skills that lead to wisdom, skills needed for a democracy that works. In this year of the pandemic, learning the habits and having the experiences that lead to wisdom may be one of our most critical lessons.
While there are sound reasons to be concerned about learning losses due to the pandemic, we should consider potential gains as well. Children are resilient, adaptable beings who are ready to learn from the start! What might some have gained through a year of expanded opportunities for self-directed play, observation, and extended social interactions with household members of all ages, while everyone was learning how to do new things? Children have had unprecedented opportunities to spend time with parents, adult caregivers, and siblings. Extended, close proximity cast a bright light on family members' unique personalities, strengths and vulnerabilities. Some children might have spent more time than usual playing outdoors, and some might have had the good fortune to go for walks and bicycle rides with other members of the household. The pandemic brought new opportunities for children and adolescents to develop and employ self-regulatory and self-management skills. Children are, indeed, cognitive sponges soaking up knowledge and know-how through direct experience and observation. What they might not have learned in the traditional academic sphere, or through face-to-face social interactions with peers, they will most likely be able to learn later.

Adults, too, are resilient and adaptable, though they must work harder to build new neural connections (foster neurogenesis) as they age. (See the January “Elders” Issue of WASH NM on “Successful Aging, Neuroplasticity and Self-Talk.”) The pandemic might have created conditions that produced gains for some adults. For those able to work from home, less commuting and less corridor talk increased the amount of time available to invest in other activities: reading, hiking, nature journaling, gardening, cooking, hobbies, crafts, viewing the night sky, meditation, mindfulness and other spiritual practices, volunteering, learning to use technologies to connect with co-workers, clients, students, and loved ones. If you have engaged in any of the many activities we have highlighted in past issues of WASH NM, then you have also fostered neurogenesis, cognitive-control functions (e.g., selective attention, goal-directed planning, impulse control) and wellbeing. And the more challenging the learning curve, the greater the gains.

Drawing on Grafton’s (2020) work in movement science, Daniel Levitin (2020) observed that “at the most fundamental level, the brain is a giant problem-solving device. Furthermore, most of its problem-solving capabilities evolved to allow us to adapt to a wide range of environments...Our success [as a species] is due in large part to our problem-solving, adaptive, and exploratory brains” (p. 281). He noted that exercise and goal-directed, challenging physical activities support cognitive health in different ways.

Our brains were built to move our bodies toward food and mates, and away from predators. Exercise is important for two reasons. The obvious one is that it oxygenates the blood. The brain runs on oxygenated glucose, carried by hemoglobin in the blood, and a fresh supply of oxygen is good. The nonobvious reason is that our brains, because they were built to navigate unfamiliar surroundings, don’t do well when they’re not challenged by having to problem solve. Every step you take on a treadmill or elliptical is helping you with the first of these two imperatives—getting your blood and memory systems honed. Every minute you walk on an unpaved trail, whether in a park or in the wilderness, requires you to make hundreds of microadjustments to foot pressure, angle, and pace. These adjustments stimulate the neural circuitry of your brain in the precise way that it evolved to be used. The area most stimulated is your hippocampus, that seahorse-shaped structure that is critical to memory formation and retrieval. This is why so many studies show that memory is enhanced by physical activity.

This way of looking at things is known as embodied cognition, the idea that physical
properties of the human body, particularly the perceptual and motor systems, play an important role in cognition (thinking, problem solving, action planning, and memory). In this way of thinking, the sensation of movement is inextricably bound with knowledge. Embodied cognition...sees humans as embodied, ecologically and genetically embedded social agents who shape and are shaped by their environment. The body influences the mind just as the mind influences the body. Embodied cognition puts intelligence and control out in the body. (pp. 281-282)

Hommel and Kibele (2016) argued that the conventional, cognitive view of healthy aging underestimates the complexity of the interactions between control processes and their application by failing to take the embodiment of cognitive control into consideration. The idea that human cognition is embodied relies on the assumption that cognitive processes and functions should not just be taken as a given, as the common information-processing approach to cognition suggests, but as abilities that emerge from active exchange with one’s physical and social environment (Wilson, 2002; Hommel, 2015, 2016).

Cognitive declines associated with aging are often treated as an inevitable byproduct of declining biological resources (or cognitive reserve). This assumption is founded on a kind of mind/body dualism that overlooks the interactive relationship between cognitive, physical and environmental factors.

The embodied cognition perspective illustrates how easily a downward psychological spiral could begin with a physical injury resulting in immobility, social isolation, and loss of one’s perceived sense of agency. “Abandoning particular actions would lead to perceiving oneself as ‘someone not performing these kinds of actions’—as a (partial) non-agent that is. If we assume that the motivation to make active use of one’s control resources relies on one’s self-representation as an active agent, this implies that age-related inactivity can lead to the underuse of available control resources” (Hommel & Kibele, 2016, p. 2). For a variety of reasons, older adults may choose to avoid novel situations that could produce uncertainty and surprise, which may provide the best opportunities to use (and thus maintain) cognitive control functions through active engagement with the physical and social world. One of the reasons that social isolation and perceived loneliness are problematic is that social interactions are associated with a particularly high degree of uncertainty, which renders them ideal for practicing the very cognitive-control functions that are most endangered in the aging individual. The natural loss of social networks with increasing age has thus particularly dramatic consequences for the elderly; while maintaining their cognitive-control functions would actually call for more interaction, they get less—an underuse of the cognitive training effect that social interactions provide. (p. 2)

My takeaway from the embodied cognition perspective and other work on successful aging is that people benefit from experiences that entail physical challenges encountered as we move through “new” spaces or in new ways. Americans are immersed in media messages aimed at persuading us to spend money in the pursuit of greater ease, comfort and convenience. One of the paradoxes of aging is that some of the cultural roles and “rewards” of seniority may work against our longevity. The embodied cognition perspective has helped me better appreciate the benefits of movement, the importance of novelty, and the hazards of choosing ease and predictability over challenge.
Three summers ago, as I wandered the aisles of Target I happened upon an oversized plastic softball bat. I smiled, remembering how much I had once enjoyed playing softball games with siblings and classmates. I wondered if I could still hit a ball with a bat. And then I thought, “It would feel good to be able to hit something once in a while!” I have discovered that, for me, tossing balls in the air and whacking them is great fun! I now have two different toy bats and a basket of balls of varying colors, sizes, materials and weights. It is an idiosyncratic form of therapy: working through my colorful collection of balls in random order at the end of the day. Given what I have learned about embodied cognition and successful aging, I suspect that the childlike pleasure I experience through my alternative version of batting practice is part of an ancient cultural and psychological tale. One of the ideas we explore in my human development courses is the notion that how children play (when they are free to choose) reflects their developmental tasks. Perhaps “finding ways to keep moving, differently” is a key developmental task for older adults. My recommendation for adults of all ages is to explore new ways of being physically active and engaged in the world, try to befriend uncertainty, and remember to drink plenty of water.

References


The Pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed all our social and cultural ways of being. Many people had to risk their own lives to keep the world going, stocking up shelves of food and other home essentials or providing continual medical services without break. Many people had the option to work from home, which required a reconsideration of home configurations to make room for makeshift offices. With school closings, students similarly had to also create learning spaces. Parents/caregivers often became teachers, taking on another role alongside their day-to-day-work. Everyone in the home, including our pets, had to learn to be together in a whole new way, both in love and strain. A new understanding of stress encroached upon us as we cannot deny the social and emotional impacts from videoconferencing for not only work and school tasks, but in efforts to stay connected as much as possible with loved ones. Adding to this stress, families and communities dealt with many losses. Such losses include loss of individuals due to trying to survive the virus. Many people lost jobs, as many places of employment closed and/or folded completely, and thus making it challenging to make ends meet. Our young community members were not able to maintain their critical school connections with not only teachers, but their peers, as well. Pre-schoolers or kindergarteners made friends, a critical teaching and skill at this developmental level, via online versus in person for the first time in our history.

Racial Tension. In the midst of the pandemic, racial tension rose. Regardless of political stance, we observed and/or participated in demonstrations. This created much tension between friends, families, community members and racial/cultural groups, even beyond political affiliation. Youth were exposed to what most often only discuss as part of a history lesson. Even if one did not observe or actively demonstrate, everyone knew of or opined through social media platforms. These platforms are part of the cultural of today’s youth, and thus participation was inevitable in whatever shape or form. Youth in particular are in the midst of work toward answering the question “Who am I?” and in part, many discussed or protested “Who we are.” When we intersect the impact of COVID-19 with racial/cultural groups, we witnessed the disparities of health and wellness across the nation. For example, over the last year, youth who were already at a disadvantage due to marginalized identities experienced loss of the only source of nutritional, and health needs that school often provide for them. Safety was compromised among families already living in marginal situations wherein illness and social tensions further contributed to domestic violence. Asian communities have been targeted as the “cause” of the COVID-19 pandemic, making young students vulnerable to greater violence and bullying. Needless to say, social tension and adversity was prominent over the last year and definitely impacted the knowledge and understanding of the world among youth. Specifically, one may wonder how larger social, political, and cultural relations will impact the social and emotional interactions in school settings, which are often noted as microcosms of society, upon returning in person.

Impact. In effect, many people have felt that our young lost many educational opportunities over the last year. We cannot deny stress, grief, and trauma from various losses and racial tension we have all experienced over the last year. Everyone experienced anxiety and sadness or depression and if already present, it was exacerbated by these events making it challenging to focus on work and/or school for many students. Even with racial tension, we have questioned ourselves, values, and beliefs about self and others, which can bring us much personal strain or dissonance. Now, time, space, self, and relationships are understood differently. We have lost our sense of what was thought to be “normal.” But was all lost?

School Counseling and Wellness Mindset. Schools and stakeholders might think upon returning to the school setting that “We have lost a whole year of learning. Now we have to ‘catch them up!’” This can reflect a “deficiency mindset.” We have to be careful with that thought as it can set up both teacher and students to feel even more stressed due to “being behind.”
School counseling is a specialization which is often misunderstood. The counseling profession, as opposed to other mental health professions, is well focused on models of wellness. As such, pathology or deficiencies are of concern, however, strength and resiliency are highlighted when working with individuals, viewing people holistically. School counselors are trained in both clinical and school counseling practices. They are able to recognize and address academic, social-emotional, and career challenges young students face in the school as well as consider other aspects of wellness, which includes intellectual, physical, environmental, financial, occupational, social, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. A deficiency-centered philosophy may only focus on clinical anxiety and depression. Interventions may focus on and address how can we decrease or stop the concern.

A wellness mindset recognizes that humans have not only experienced stress and trauma throughout time. In extreme cases, there is a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that is ascribed to an individual. This is a reality, which we may observe in our youth as they return to school. Conversely, humans have survived through historical adversities. A wellness mindset also considers the growth and learning that happens during these “unprecedented times.” The flip, but complementary side, to PTSD is PTG or post-traumatic growth. PTG includes dimensions wherein we find new personal strengths, develop closer relationships, have a greater appreciation for life, recognize that there can be new possibilities, and develop our spiritual selves (see provided PTG youtube link below). While we are not grateful for adversity, we have gained new insights from going through it. We, including our young students, have gained wisdom and new understandings. Young students have learned new ways of being, as we are adaptable humans. As opposed to the deficiency understanding of humans, here we work toward promotion of health and wellbeing, which may go alongside recognizing the stress and trauma, and thus seeing the person as a whole being.

Growth and learning is a natural part of being human. We are born growing and learning. Teachers facilitate this, but teachers come in many forms beyond that of formal educational environments. Many communities during the past year have turned to community elders and leaders who have taken learning from their hardships and thus have shared natural resources of knowledge, understanding, and methods of coping for not only surviving, but thriving. The challenging experiences we have all been part of over the last year are our teachers, too, in and of themselves. This is something that cannot be replicated in educational environments (Not that we should for the sake of new learning and growth!). Taking a wellness mindset is not only about affirming and validating the challenges and barriers to learning, but recognizing that we can grow from adversity. While resiliency means we can always “bounce back” to normal, too much has changed, and thus, we now more so have opportunity to “bounce forward” with new ways of being, learning and growing.

Growth Mindset Now and Upon Return to School. Here are some “tips” and resources for you, your young student, and learning about school counseling perspectives.

Tips for the Family

Encourage a Growth Mindset (Parents, Teachers, and School Counselors) BEFORE Returning. Make it a point to communicate with intention to make meaning of the past year and the various events. Learn from your young student what they have experienced. Create moments to share each other’s gained growth and wisdom.

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rUJkbWNnNy4
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_X0mgOOSpLU
- On Post Traumatic Growth
- For Teachers
- Resources for the School Counselor and Fellow Educators
Safety First. Upon your student’s return to school, also have conversations about physical, social, and emotional safety. This includes discussions about COVID-19 and relationships with peers, including creating an anti-racism culture in school. Here are parent guides from Youtube for ideas:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjZ9dKESpYg
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uH1oGgNaA3Q
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WSZaBprQUdM
- Interrupting Racism in Schools

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For those in the Helping Professions

**Million Girls Moonshot** from New Mexico Out-of-School Time Network “The effort is designed to engage 1 million school-age girls in the United States in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) learning opportunities over the next five years.”

**Evidence-Based COVID-19 Resources in Education** from the Institute for Educational Sciences

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**National Resources:**

- The Transgender Law and Policy Institute

- Teen ‘mpower for LGBTQ Teens and Allies @ TeenMPower
- GLSEN (Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network)

**Albuquerque Resources:**

- Casa Q: Provides safe living options and services for LGBTQ youth
- Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico

**LGBTQ Resource Center:** https://lgbtqrc.unm.edu/

New York Times: Parents, Stop Talking About the ‘Lost Year’
What’s Next?

Caregivers -- May 12 -- We’re mindful of how difficult the pandemic has been on caregivers. Those taking care of children or parents; those taking care of the ill or elderly. We’re mindful of the toll the pandemic has taken on women and minorities especially. Caregiving comes at considerable cost, although it affords many benefits as well.
The faculty and students of the Department of Individual, Family and Community Education in the College of Education and Human Sciences at the University of New Mexico would like to offer to all New Mexicans thoughts, ideas, and resources from ourselves and our areas of study and work -- counseling, educational psychology, family & child studies, and nutrition -- to enlighten, soften, and aid the COVID-19-related transitions. We intend to make this offering monthly, each with a theme relevant to our times. With informed reflection and action throughout this time, we can all improve our Wellbeing at School and at Home in New Mexico.

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The department houses four diverse, but interconnected, programs that prepare students to address the myriad issues faced by the State of New Mexico. Our faculty members are leaders in their disciplines of Counselor Education, Educational Psychology, Family and Child Studies, and Nutrition; although each of these programs reflect different professional fields and identities, we all have shared values of human development, diversity, and excellence in scholarship and teaching. We offer various Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Doctoral Degrees and a number of programs have achieved national accreditations in their fields, a true marker of success and innovation.

ifce@unm.edu
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