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# WEBINAR 1 SUMMARY: ANSWERING THE CALL TO INNOVATE

*Dr. Mark Bedell,  
Superintendent,  
Kansas City Public  
Schools, MO*

*Dr. L. Oliver  
Robinson,  
Superintendent,  
Shenendehowa  
Central School  
District, NY*

Discovery Education *Equity Talks* is a live webinar series featuring our nation's top educational leaders with a focus on cultivating equity and excellence. Moderated by Dr. Luvelle Brown – superintendent of Ithaca City School District – these 45-minute segments are designed to provide guidance and support to educators across the country and internationally who are struggling with issues of equity that, while always a topic of concern, have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, nationwide civil unrest, and the need to rely on remote and hybrid learning.

## Summary

This webinar focused on resource inequities and how to best address them through creativity, innovation, boldness, and a willingness to push for change. COVID-19 removed the false assumption that most kids are "OK"; in reality, most kids are not "OK," and we have a crisis.

The discussion emphasized the need to be tactical with resources in the short term and strategic with our plans for moving forward. Right now, some districts are considering compressed curricula and how to connect with students in different ways. They are prioritizing ways to help the most vulnerable students and resist voices that want to highlight more privileged issues like GPA. There is a resounding

need to reframe our questions to avoid the same old answers that do not appropriately address inequities. Online schooling has the potential to create equity – it can be a game changer – and it is our responsibility to secure equitable outcomes for all students.

One of the panelists outlined his district's lack of resources for some groups of students. In Kansas City, Missouri's WiFi deserts, 60% of families do not have the ability to access online curriculum and had to rely on paper packets. In response, the Kansas City school district dispatched buses equipped with WiFi to serve those neighborhoods. In this same school district, a district with one of the highest poverty rates in Missouri, 100% of students have free or reduced lunch. Thousands of students are

homeless, and mobility is a major issue for this community. Many families have lost their homes due to lost jobs and wages. A lack of access to healthcare and economic development exacerbates the problem, and the children who are experiencing the most intense trauma are the ones who were already experiencing adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Thus, Kansas City diverted resources towards practical solutions, such as purchasing mobile phones for homeless students and providing meals to food insecure families.

Too many children experience inequity and trauma. Students are falling behind, bringing about psychological trauma as well. The children who are still in touch with their districts are the lucky ones; those suffering in isolation are the ones educators need to reach, and institutions need to go beyond traditional norms and methods. One panelist thinks that the worst thing we can do is to “play it safe” just to “get by and survive.” He acknowledges that there is a “tremendous amount” of grace during these times, and another panelist added that necessity will breed our innovation. We have a chance to involve communities and to make sure that students are learning in relevant and meaningful ways. We have an opportunity to make large systemic changes and create mind-shifts. We have a chance to make face-to-face learning better and online learning better. We have an opportunity to answer the call and ask ourselves, “How can each hour I spend with students create greater impact?” The model of offering—but not effectively serving—can no longer persist.

### Pertinent Quotes

- “Shame on us if we allow a good crisis to go to waste.”
- “We have an opportunity to be bold and to ensure that we are not just doing things to get by and survive.”
- “Send me. I’ll go.”

### Additional Questions/Commentary

- How do we support parents in our search for equity?
- How can we push policy makers and legislation to establish, fund, and distribute new essential resources? How might we encourage them to consider internet a utility or laptops as essential learning tools?
- How do urban equity issues overlap with rural equity issues?
- How are English-language learners, special education students, and students with special health needs disproportionately affected? How can approaches for special populations be beneficial for all students?
- What are the best practices for compressing the regular curriculum to accommodate SEL or trauma informed curriculum?
- What are the best practices for SEL and/or trauma informed schooling?
- How can we increase adaptability for future unpredictable crises?

### Resources for Consideration

- Bozarth, N. (Host). (2018, April 7). Dividing lines: A history of segregation in Kansas City [Audio tour]. In *Johnson County Library*. VoiceMap. <https://voicemap.me/tour/kansas-city/dividing-lines-a-history-of-segregation-in-kansas-city>
- Schirmer, S. L. (2002). *A city divided: The racial landscape of Kansas City, 1900–1960*. University of Missouri Press.
- Fox, G. K. (2014). *Race, real estate, and uneven development: The Kansas City experience, 1900–2010* (2nd ed.). State University of New York Press.
- Freeman, J. (2017). *Tales of two Americas: Stories of inequality in a divided nation*. Penguin Books 2017.