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WEBINAR 6 SUMMARY: "NORMAL IS NO LONGER NORMAL:" NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR FOCUS ON STUDENTS' HEALTH

*Dr. John Deasy,
Superintendent,
Stockton Unified
School District, CA*

*Dr. Lamar Goree,
Superintendent,
Caddo Parish
Public Schools, LA*

*Dr. Steve Webb,
Superintendent,
Vancouver Public
Schools, WA*

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 featured three superintendents who shared how their systems addressed issues of inequity, specifically generational poverty, as schools closed. Dr. Deasy of Stockton Unified School District spoke about how every student in the community received technology, and a hotspot, if they did not have connectivity. Despite this, many students were still struggling with their specific situations. Dr. Deasy told the story of a high school student who was in a "terrible state" because he did not think he would be able to take his Advanced Placement exams; he

lived in a storeroom without a proper address, so he did not have internet connectivity. Dr. Deasy said that this was a time for the nation to realign priorities for public education in California and across the nation.

Dr. Goree of Caddo Parish Public Schools emphasized this point but added that, although the U.S. education system has been in place for 400 years, the achievement gap still exists. He eloquently explained the issues:

I see this pandemic as an opportunity for us to own that normal is no longer normal. Let's own the opportunity to

be innovative. Let's own the opportunity to truly create systems that do close the achievement gap. I think every inequity in our school systems has never been more clear. But, what are those conversations, what are those ways that we're going to engage all governmental bodies? What are those ways that we're going to engage our resources? What are those ways that we're going to engage policy so we truly see ways to close those achievement gaps? We're looking forward to bragging that normal is not normal. We're not just talking about social distancing in a classroom; we're talking about how we create a system that will really work for all students. The 400-year old system does not work for our disadvantaged students.

During the webinar, panelists also discussed the idea of community school models. Dr. Webb of Vancouver Public Schools spoke about creating a "social service network of community schools to remove those environmental barriers which prevent families and children from doing the very best that they can in supporting student success in our schools." He added that addressing inequities within our systems means addressing the root causes. Too often, we treat symptoms, but without addressing the root cause, the underlying problem will continue.

Another idea mentioned by the panelists was how to use strategic plans. Dr. Deasy said that he is currently thinking about how to use guiding principles rather than strategic plans. According to him, guiding principles direct how something is going to behave, regardless of the circumstances. Guiding principles surrounding equity, diversity, and inclusion should be part of every district's overall plan. Similarly, Dr. Webb discussed how Vancouver had completed its second strategic plan. This plan, however, was developed with input from the community. Community members are invited to participate in community-based symposia and asked to "dream big, harness creativity, and think about making the impossible possible." Six strategic priorities resulted: (1) instructional quality, (2) early learning, (3) family engagement, (4) family community resource centers, (5) flexible learning environments (digital

transformation vision), and (6) programs of choice.

When asked about budget implications, Dr. Deasy spoke about how California was not facing "budget reductions" but "a catastrophe of a removal of resources." One of his concerns is how to address trauma-informed care and trauma-informed instruction for students. Because these types of programs have historically been the first to be cut, Dr. Deasy said that courageous leaders are going to have to fight to keep these programs.

Panelists discussed how they might reimagine professional development. In Caddo Parish Public Schools, professional development prepares teachers for both virtual and traditional education delivery methods. Tier I curricula was redesigned to focus on addressing the "summer slide" and the "coronaslide." The new curriculum will allow teachers to expedite instruction's timeframe and highlight needs of students. Dr. Deasy added that professional development needed to evolve: It can no longer be created by adults only; students need to have a voice to explain what they, as the customers, need.

Dr. Goree, too, echoed the need for including student voices. Last fall, a group of high school students asked to conduct a survey regarding mental health. The results came back as schools closed, and Dr. Goree is looking forward to working with these students to shape policy. He said, "This is a group of brilliant kids whose total focus is how we use policy to improve mental health and how we support that in schools. They are doing amazing things, so I'm looking forward to policy changes to help support students in these settings."

Pertinent Quotes

- "The current crisis highlighted these inequities, but it did not create them."
- "The pandemic, which has killed more than 100,000 human beings in this country alone, has laid bare any veneer or veil that we have an equitable education system."

- “This is an opportunity to say enough is enough. It’s not just money. It is about the courage to say that every single, solitary youth gets the right to be us. Walk to that young person’s apartment or tent, and do something about it instead of just having a conversation about it.”
- “If we were serious about this as a country, in my opinion, we would attend to the economic inequities, the structural inequities, as a nation. We have a tendency to treat symptoms without a root cause. Here is what I believe the new normal looks like: We’ve got to design and develop grassroots symptoms that attend to the whole child, whole school, whole community partnerships to ensure that every child crosses the finish line prepared for post-secondary success.”
- “We change laws, but at the end of the day, we have to change the hearts of people if we are going to see change. As educators, we have embraced our social emotional learning (SEL) responsibilities. We need to create spaces for students to continue to develop their SEL.”
- How are state superintendents considering how we assess “access” for students and parents?
- How can we include parents in this future educational scenario?
- Would love to hear more about redesigning job descriptions for the “new normal.”
- I appreciate the guiding principles concept. How will we behave with empathy, integrity, and inclusion guiding our professional steps? How will we think about liberation versus oppression? How do we use a “values mindset” versus a “deficit mindset” as we serve our students?

Resources for Consideration

- Novogratz, J. (2020). *A Manifesto for a Moral Revolution: Practices to Build a Better World*. Henry Holt and Co.
- Tatter, G., & Chakrabarti, M. (Hosts) (2020, May 28). *So What’s School Going to Look Like in the Fall* [Audio podcast]? In On Point. WBUR. <https://www.wbur.org/onpoint/2020/05/28/school-fall-coronavirus-learning>

Additional Questions/Commentary

- How do we take mass customization to scale?
- How can we offer parents a choice about how students return to school return, especially parents who need school to care for their children while they are at work?