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Learning remotely in the age of COVID-19: Lessons from evidence and concerns for equity

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Agenda

- Welcome and introductions
- Context of school closures in the mid-Atlantic region and beyond
- Promising practices to support remote learning
- Exploring strategies to promote educational equity during remote learning
- Closing

Who is joining us today?

A few terms

- **Remote learning** is used to describe all education that happenings outside the traditional classroom, which could be:
  - **Synchronous:** A teacher and student(s) interacting at the same time (via video, phone, chat, or other medium)
  - **Asynchronous:** Students work on their own, and interaction with teacher is not simultaneous (for example, via email, text message, or completing instructional packets)

- **Virtual learning** is used to describe education that relies on an electronic connection to facilitate learning for students.

Context of school closures in the mid-Atlantic region and beyond

Schools are closed and support for learning varies

District	Resources for remote learning	Addressing equity concerns	Support physical and socio-emotional wellness
DC Public Schools	• Provides instructional materials accessed online or with phone • Offers virtual office hours	• Provides instructions for students with individualized education plans (IEPs) about the instructional materials. Some resources are available in multiple languages.	• Provides resources to families about students' mental and physical wellness
Newark Public Schools (NJ)	• Varies by school, from packets to online platforms and e-textbooks	• Provides general guidance for students with special needs	• Provides physical education and health lessons and a resource packet on social-emotional support
Baltimore County Public Schools (MD)	• Provides instructional packets but expanding to provide materials online • Students without Internet will receive work packets in the mail • Requires virtual office hours	• Uses instructional packets that provide additional guidance for students with disabilities. Some resources are available in multiple languages.	• Instructional packets contain lessons for health and physical education. Provides resources on social-emotional support
School District of Philadelphia (PA)	• Provides computers to students to facilitate virtual learning	• Provides general resources to support students with IEPs and English learner students. Some resources are available in multiple languages. • Special education teachers will support remote learning for students with IEPs	• Provides resources to families on fitness

Sources: CRPE, 2020, district websites

Different models for instruction are emerging

Bothell, Washington

Instructional model:

- Moved to a virtual classroom model to keep students' schedules intact
- Includes schedule for instruction
- Teachers have office hours
- Teachers' professional development embedded into schedule

New York City, New York

Instructional model:

- Elementary students have 2.5 hours of instruction and twice daily calls with teacher
- Middle/high school students receive virtual instruction from a master teacher
- Other teachers ensure students' attendance, check work, and provide feedback virtually daily

Chicago, Illinois

Instructional model:

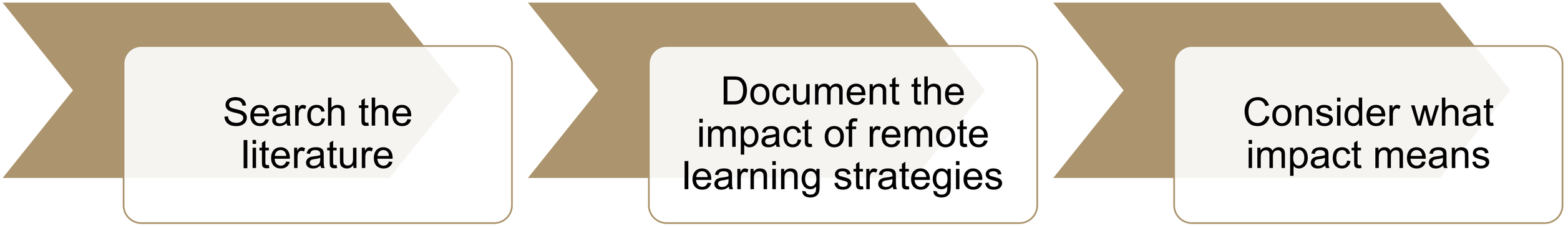
- Initially provided only enrichment instructional materials
- Moving to a remote learning, merging digital and non-digital learning options
- Chicago Public Schools has set expectations that students should complete assignments with teachers helping as needed

Sources: NSD, 2020, Pondiscio, 2020, Kurtz, 2020; district websites

Promising practices to support remote learning

When schools are closed, research comparing remote learning with classroom instruction must be re-interpreted

At this moment, our question is not whether a remote learning strategy is better than classroom instruction



Remote learning is the only option

How do we make it work for students?

We can identify promising strategies from *positive*, *equal*, and *negative* impacts

- *Positive impacts*: Strategy works better than face-to-face instruction
- *Equal impacts*: Strategy works just as well as face-to-face instruction
- *Negative impacts*: Strategy works worse than face-to-face instruction

Studies finding *negative* impacts relative to classroom instruction suggest potential importance of synchronous learning

- Students attending brick and mortar schools typically, but not always, have better outcomes than those attending online schools or completing online coursework.

- What can we learn from these studies with negative impacts? **Synchronicity seems to matter.**

Studies finding *positive* or *equal* impacts of remote learning relative to classroom instruction suggest strategies that might show promise

- What was happening with these strategies?

Some involved feedback, tutoring, and support strategies

Some involved project-based learning

Some involved games and virtual simulations

They planned for more than just content delivery

Making the most of insights drawn from promising practices to inform remote learning

Remote strategy	What might we take away from this?
Online learning and courses	*Synchronous time seems to be important.*
Feedback, tutoring, and support	*Students need ongoing feedback, support, and relationships with their instructors and their peers.*
Project-based learning	*Develop learning activities that cause students to solve meaningful, real-world problems that foster creative thinking.*
Gaming or virtual simulations	*Employ activities that engage students and use techniques to anticipate when students might lose interest or disengage.*
Plan beyond content delivery	*Provide resources and materials to help supplement students' learning.*

Consideration for remote learning when students might not have access to the Internet and web-enabled devices

Insight	Questions to consider
Synchronicity	How can teachers, administrators, and other school staff connect with students in real time? Phone calls or office hours?
Feedback	How can students receive feedback and connect with peers about their learning? Phone calls? Sharing pictures of work? Sharing written feedback via mail or where students pick up meals?
Problem-centered	What problems are your students grappling with and how can the content being taught help them explore those problems and come up with their own solutions?
Engagement and motivation	Where will students lose interest or become distracted? And how can that be avoided? Competitions? Other content-embedded games?
Supplement instruction	What additional resources can students (and families) obtain to help support learning? Clear directions for what to do and how to do it?

Educators have a role in generating evidence

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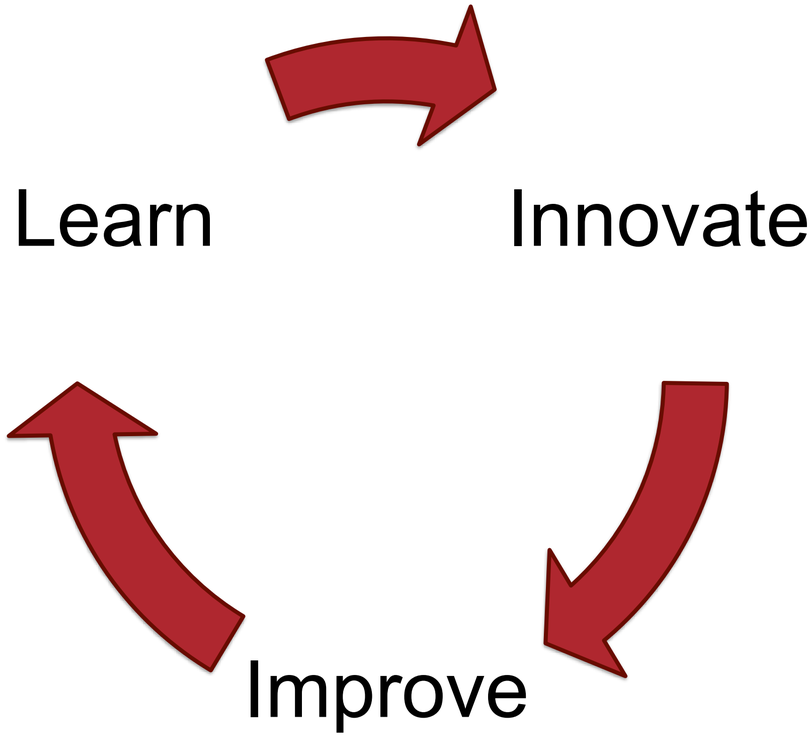

Exploring strategies to promote educational equity during remote learning

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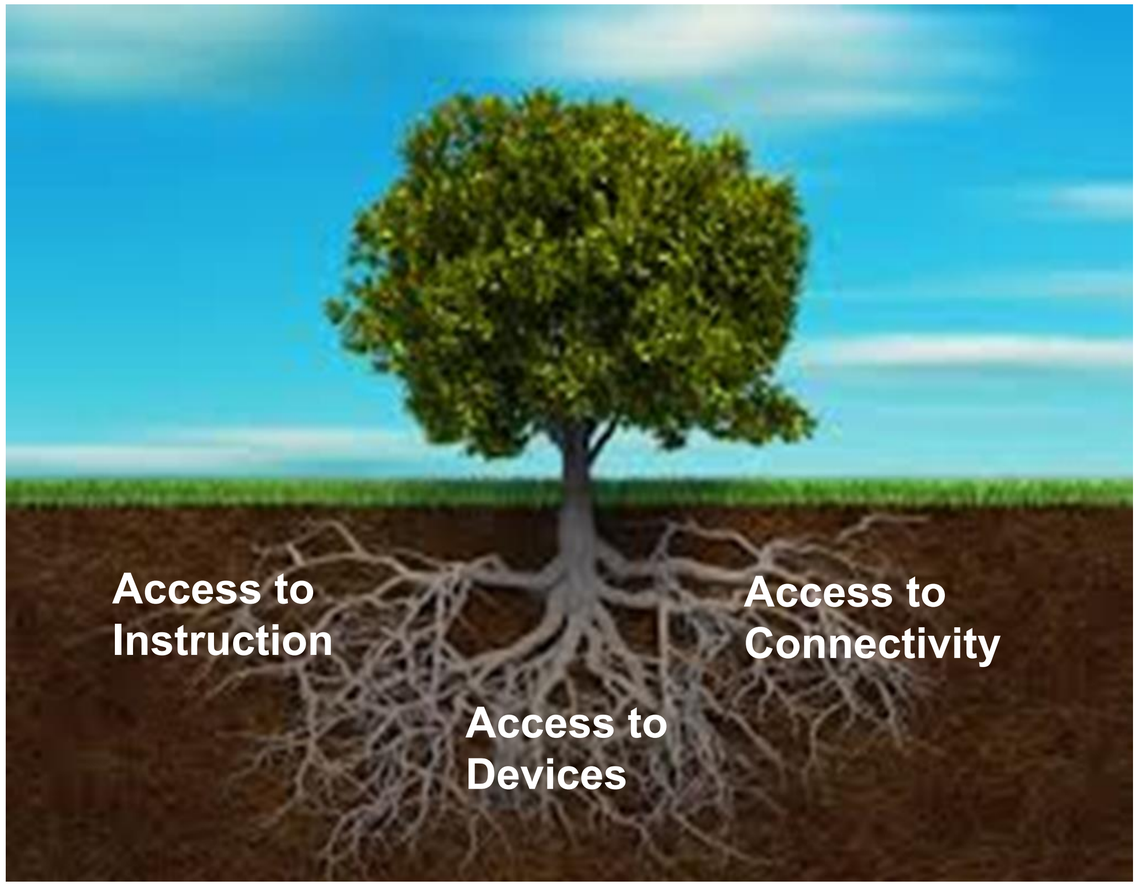
Deep rooted inequity: Digital learning



- Digital equity: “equal access to digital tools, resources, and services to increase digital knowledge and skills” (The National Digital Inclusion Alliance)

- Digital resources are not equally distributed. High-poverty schools; rural schools; and students from families with low income, English learner students, and students with disabilities and their families are disproportionately affected by the lack of access to digital tools and resources (Pew Research Center, 2018).

Access to devices

- The problem:
  - Economically disadvantaged students have limited access to devices. Even if students have access to a device at home, the device might not be conducive to completing school assignments.

- Issues:
  - Providing devices to every student
  - Providing students with a device safely
  - Learning how to use the device

Access to devices: Ways to mitigate the inequity

- Provide devices to students with the most need through mail or at specified distribution sites. (Take into consideration the safety of staff and families when distributing devices).
- Consider alternate types of devices or additional software that students with disabilities require when providing school-owned devices.
- Test the learning platform on the device and survey learners to assess compatibility and usability.
- Partner with technology companies to provide devices.
- Seek out grant funding.
- Provide a how-to resource on the website. (Consider using the automated call system to provide a phone number for tech assistance for those without Internet).

Access to connectivity

- **The problem:**
  - There is a digital gap by class, race, and geographic location in Internet access. Without access to connectivity, students cannot access the same resources and participate in the same opportunities as those students in schools and households with adequate connectivity (Verizon, 2018; National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

- **Issues:**
  - Cost of Internet services to households.
  - Lack of Internet infrastructure for cost-effective, high-speed connectivity in remote locations.

Access to connectivity: Ways to mitigate the inequity

- Partner with Internet providers for free wi-fi for the most economically disadvantaged families and to lift caps on data usage.
- Provide hot spots for families and staff.
- Provide a map of community hot spots and wi-fi locations (libraries, community centers, churches, parking lots).
  - National free wi-fi map: https://www.wifimap.io/.
  - It is important to survey and assess transportation barriers for students to access these hotspots.
- Use public television stations or radio to promote instruction.
- Modify online instruction for students through paper packets.

Access to instruction

- **The problem:**
  - Educators' facility with technology has also shaped the digital divide. Effective use of technology can change the traditional model of teaching from instruction to facilitation.
- **Issues:**
  - Access to training: Providing teachers, parents, and caregivers training to use the device and digital platforms.
  - Choice of instruction: Providing instruction that meets the needs of diverse learners.

Access to training

- Has the district implemented training for staff, parents, and caregivers regarding:
  - The importance of digital learning?
  - The use of digital devices, digital learning platform, and the video conferencing application?
  - The integration of social emotional learning and culturally responsive practices into the curriculum?
- What supports exist for teachers, staff, parents, and caregivers for digital learning?
- What biases and fears do teachers, staff, parents, and caregivers have toward digital learning?

Choice of instruction

- Is the instruction tailored to meet the needs of vulnerable populations such as:
  - Economically disadvantaged students
  - Student in special education
  - English learner students
  - Homeless students
- Is the instruction tailored to social-emotional learning and focused on mental health concerns of students and staff?
- Is the instruction culturally responsive?
- How will you promote the rigor of academic content?

Access to instruction: Ways to mitigate inequity

- Providing training for teachers, parents, and caregivers (that is, webinars, videos, guides)

- Focus students in instruction:
  - Choose content that reflects the experiences and the identities of students and families.
  - Allow students to choose topics and engage students' voices in decision making.
  - Incorporate group activities (that is, monitor breakout rooms on learning platforms)
  - Engage in project-based learning.
  - Check in with students consistently about their needs, fears, interests, and concerns.
  - Build relationships.

- Recognize your biases toward online learning as well as biases toward students and families.

- Engage in active digital instruction as much as possible.

Access to instruction: Ways to mitigate inequity (2)

- Embed social-emotional learning and culturally responsive practices into the curriculum

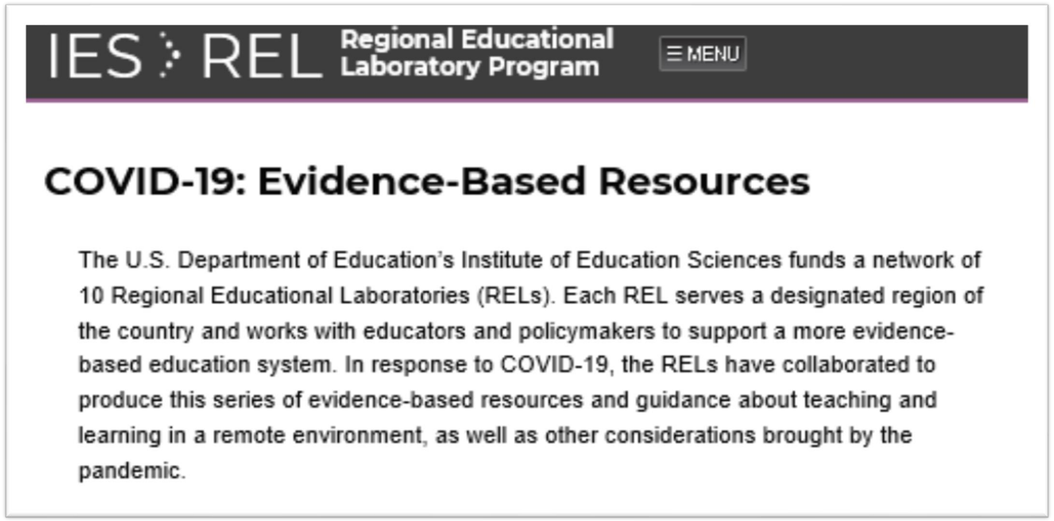
- Consider a team partnership approach (parents, caregivers, family liaisons, teachers, case worker, specialists, community leaders) when:
  - Developing instruction and curriculum for students in special education
  - Supporting and developing instruction for English learner students
  - Supporting homeless students and families

- Think consistency: make instruction and learning process as routine as possible despite the circumstances.

Q&A

Closing

Where can I find more information?



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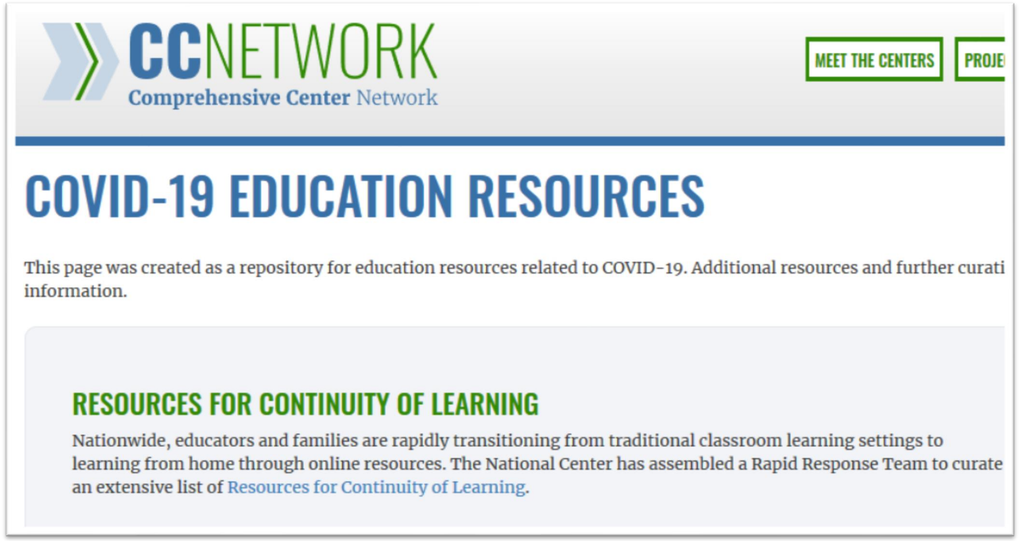

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What are your next steps?

Contact us if you have any questions

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