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# ONcall

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## Leading in a crisis — lessons learned

The pandemic is not over, and the upcoming school year will present new challenges. Schools will need to deal with ongoing changes to health and safety guidelines while welcoming students back after a year in remote learning. However, it is important to reflect on what we can learn from the pandemic. What worked and what missed the mark? Take time to write down what went well and what you'd like to do differently. This will become a useful resource for the next crisis.

Here are a few lessons learned from education leaders to get you started:

### Ask for help

You have community members, staff and a school board to help you. Use them. Ask for their input. Solicit different opinions. Difficult decisions are easier when you have support behind you.

Morcease Beasley, Clayton County Public Schools superintendent, located in the metro Atlanta area, was faced with pressure to reopen, anxiety about student and staff safety and escalating HVAC costs. “For big issues that involve the public, including significant expenditures and life-and-death questions about school safety, you don’t have to be the Lone Ranger. Indeed, you shouldn’t be. Find allies on the board and in the community to shoulder some of the heavy load you carry.”

[www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-superintendent-pandemic-lesson-1-don't-go-it-alone/2021/07](http://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-superintendent-pandemic-lesson-1-don't-go-it-alone/2021/07)

### Build relationships

Getting student online, distributing student meals and providing remote instruction takes teamwork. Build relationships with school administrators and your school board, labor unions, the county health department, state officials and the U.S Centers for Disease Control. To harness these relationships, create working groups to tackle pressing issues.

Zandra Jo Galván leads Greenfield Union School District in California where 95% of students are socioeconomically disadvantaged. The district convened a 75-member reopening task force and, within the first two weeks of the 2020-21 school year, the district had provided a hotspot within 300 feet of every home with a student.

“Leaders have to take responsibility for their own performance. But we can’t do it alone. Responding to crises requires engagement from across the district. If it’s done right, the payoff is enormous. Your teams become stronger and more cohesive, banding together to do whatever it takes to serve their community. And, in turn, the community appreciates the

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district's efforts. Most importantly, your students and their families know you love them, will do whatever it takes to support them, and will never lose faith in them because we are stronger together.”

[www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-superintendent-pandemic-lesson-2-get-all-hands-on-deck/2021/07](http://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-superintendent-pandemic-lesson-2-get-all-hands-on-deck/2021/07)

### **Remember your duty to serve and protect**

The health and safety of staff and students is the most important duty of a school leader. During the controversy over reopening timelines and following health and safety guidelines, the community's health and safety needs guided difficult decisions by school leaders. Remember your duty to serve and protect students and staff, even while facing opposing viewpoints by your community.

Mark Lane, Decorah Community Schools superintendent, learned this lesson when the governor of Iowa signed legislation banning mask mandates. The Decorah school board voted to follow U. S. CDC guidance on reopening, which recommended wearing face coverings. While his district could no longer require masks, Lane continued to wear his mask and encouraged others to do so. He had staff who were pregnant, who took care of elderly parents, or who had students who lived with at-risk family members. Lane said, “Our mask mandate was in place to give those staff members the comfort to serve others while still serving those they love most.”

He advises making future decisions based on care and concern in order to create a safe learning and work environment for staff and students.

[www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-superintendent-pandemic-lesson-3-remember-your-duty-of-care-to-others/2021/07](http://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-superintendent-pandemic-lesson-3-remember-your-duty-of-care-to-others/2021/07)

### **Continue practices that worked**

Everett Public Schools in Washington found that many of the changes made in reaction to the pandemic were positive. Practices that will likely continue in the district include:

Clearer communication with parents

- Remote options for school and other activities
- Making the most of after-school hours
- Immediate, more personal feedback
- Thinking about the students' user-experience

[www.edweek.org/leadership/lessons-from-the-pandemic-that-can-improve-leading-and-teaching/2021/03](http://www.edweek.org/leadership/lessons-from-the-pandemic-that-can-improve-leading-and-teaching/2021/03)

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*Contributed by Erin Good, communications consultant*