

Deeper Learning in the Time of COVID-19: Virginia (Part 2 of 3)

Tuesday, June 16, 2020

In part 2 of 3 in AYPF's Deeper Learning in the Time of COVID-19 webinar series, panelists from Virginia discussed how high-quality professional development and training is supported through the alignment between the Commonwealth Learning Partnership, a network of education nonprofit organizations across Virginia that share a collective goal to modernize the K-12 education system, and the [Virginia Department of Education](#). Their partnership offers a model for investing in the education workforce and prioritizing equity.

Virginia State Superintendent **James Lane** began the conversation by commending the work of educators, students, and administrators in their rapid transition to online learning at the end of March. On June 9, 2020, the VA Department of Education published "[Recover, Redesign, Restart 2020](#)" to address the logistics of returning to school in the fall. First and foremost, students must receive support to recover from the trauma they have experienced. After this, a redesigning period begins. Lane continues to be inspired by the creative ways that schools adapted to online learning, the new skills teachers have gained throughout the transition, the renewed engagement among certain students, and the reinforcement of deeper learning strategies and practices. Finally, Lane finds hope in the opportunity to use this crisis as a reset opportunity to "eradicate racist inputs and racist outputs" with a culturally relevant curriculum imbedded with deeper learning practices to maximize the potential of every student.

Equity has been the focus of the [Virginia Department of Education](#) for many years, and it has served as the backdrop for the recovery efforts. Educational equity in Virginia refers to the inability to predict student outcomes based on race, gender, zip code, ability, socioeconomic status, or language spoken at home. **Leah Walker**, Director of [Equity and Community Engagement](#), explained that the English Pass Rates on Virginia Standards of Learning tests demonstrate large disparities between racial and ethnic groups, which, in some ways, have been exacerbated by COVID-19. In the recovery process, educators must foster "public education that allows young people to participate in the transformation of their world," specifically through the advancement of racial equity. Walker emphasized that leaders must make inequities visible, encourage discourse, and find new ways to engage. Walker outlined 10 equity strategies, including an [Equity Audit](#) for school administrators to complete before returning in the fall.

Gena Keller, Director of the [Commonwealth Learning Partnership](#) noted that their work closely aligns with the [VDOE](#) to improve equity outcomes. Keller explained that the Partnership strives to "align, amplify, advance, and create opportunities for people to come the Partnership to engage in a way that results in a call to action." Throughout the past couple of months, the Commonwealth Learning Partnership has implemented two programs: Voices from the Field, which invites over 200 educators to share their experiences and recommendations for online learning, and Educator Heroes, which highlights and uplifts the stories of educators who go above and beyond professional expectations. Most recently, the Partnership hosted a "Beyond the Book: A Call to Action" session featuring Ted Dintersmith. The virtual opportunity engaged

over 150 educators across the nation - inviting them to reimagine schools and to participate in subsequent sessions to ensure equitable practices in public education that will modernize Virginia.

Finally, **Stephanie Krauss**, Senior Director at [Jobs for the Future \(JFF\)](#), discussed the necessity of upscaling and supporting [the Partnership](#) to ensure its centrality in recovery measures. JFF strives to achieve economic advancement through human development. To this end, Krauss stressed the importance of investing in educators as a workforce, as they enable the existing workforce to function. The power of a state-national relationship is evidenced through JFF's continued work with the Commonwealth Learning Partnership and VDOE as they work together to improve education to achieve economic advancement.

The partnership between the [Commonwealth Learning Partnership](#), [VDOE](#), and [JFF](#) with an emphasis on deeper learning practices enabled a smooth transition to remote learning for educators and students. Furthermore, their long-standing focus on equity serves as the centerpiece of recovery conversations—setting an excellent example for other states and school districts as they consider plans for the fall.

This event summary was written by Nicole Chandonnet, AYPF Intern (Summer 2020).