

AYPF + NNERPP (National Network of Education Research-Practice Partnerships)  
RPP Learning Webinar Series, Part 1:  
How Research-Practice Partnerships are Pivoting in COVID-19  
June 23, 2020

This webinar, the first in a series, examined the role of Research-Practice Partnerships (RPPs) in the transition to online learning amidst the COVID-19 recovery process. Panelists examined the re-energized focus on equity that must be the center of the conversation in school districts as administrators make decisions about the fall. Researchers working with their practice partners know they must acknowledge these realities and manage the process of how best to continue their work.

**Don Peurach**, Professor of Education Policy, Leadership, and Innovation at the [University of Michigan's School of Education](#), began the conversation by addressing the necessity for educators to first recognize the challenges school districts are facing and locate them in a broader context. While COVID-19 produced a dramatic shock to the system, Peurach noted that it has merely, “press[ed] for the rapid acceleration of ongoing sustained transformation that has been playing out in districts since the early 1990s with a keen focus on these same core issues: access, excellence and equity, and organizing and managing instruction.” While the quest for universal access in education allowed districts to take a hands-off approach to learning, the pursuit of equity, particularly in online learning, requires an intense hands-on approach to develop new infrastructure and respond to the effects of the COVID-19 crisis.

President of [Partner to Improve](#), **Erin Henrick**, emphasized the role that RPPs serve in the recovery efforts from the COVID-19 pandemic. Henrick noted that RPPs exist to, “bring together a diverse group of professionals with a variety of skill sets, expertise, and strengths” to address complex education issues. Like Peurach, Henrick believes that equity must be the focus of the recovery conversation, and RPPs should support the development of equitable partnerships, the pursuit of equitable outcomes for marginalized groups, and the construction of equitable political and organizational systems.

Henrick emphasized the importance of a sound “infrastructure for solution-oriented research agendas,” for RPPs to effectively pivot their priorities during the COVID-19 crisis. Because of its longstanding focus on relationship building, the [Houston Educational Research Consortium](#) (HERC) was able to adapt and address the needs of the Houston community as students and teachers transitioned to online learning in mid-March. **Dan Potter**, Associate Director of HERC, recognized the necessity of responding to the crisis in a timely manner, so they reached out to other community organizations and Rice University to determine what work was already being done to figure out how best they could get involved. In response to Hurricane Harvey back in 2017, the [Harris County Long-Term Recovery Committee](#) created Harvey Home Connect to disseminate resources and information to families in need, and the organization was re-activated in response to COVID-19. However, these individuals are not researchers. HERC was able to support the organization by issuing a [Gulf Coast COVID-19 Community Impact Survey](#) to acquire data to identify needs and connect resources from local governments and non-profits

to households in need. HERC studied the impact of COVID-19 on jobs, education, health and medical care, family, and well-being, and then compiled these resources into a [Data Dashboard](#), for individuals to easily access. Currently, they have released data on the digital divide and parental concerns about the fall semester, financial insecurity, and the ability of families to care for children. When addressing what allowed for the pivot to take place at HERC, Potter noted, “Our work is not project-based, it’s partnership-based and relationship-based.” Their partners understood the demands of the moment, which gave them the flexibility to adapt and reshape their work.

Finally, **Paula Arce-Trigatti**, Director of the [National Network of Education Research-Practice Partnerships \(NNERPP\)](#), outlined key takeaways for RPPs to successfully redirect their focus during times of crisis. She stressed the importance of having the right expertise to meet new needs of the partners. Like Potter, Arce-Trigatti believes that RPPs must have general funding that is not project-specific. She noted, “if partnership funding is constrained to a particular project, it becomes impossible to pivot in a successful way.” As the world continues to change, organizations must establish a solid foundation to enable their focus and priorities to adapt to new demands.

Research-Practice Partnerships have been vital in providing school districts with data to improve equity outcomes, and their work must be central to COVID-19 recovery efforts. The successful transition of the Houston Educational Research Consortium to address the needs of the community because of their focus on relationship building and partnership-based projects serves as an excellent model for other RPPs as they examine their future in the recovery process.

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