Seven Rs for

# Building Back the Three Rs During Covid



By Donna McGuire

In the nineteenth century, education underwent reform; support started to become available for students with disabilities and an education was available to African Americans and women. It was during this time that the phrase "the three Rs" was coined. At the same time, those in the field of medicine and science only had a basic understanding of diseases, causes, and possible cures. This period was a learning curve for medicine, knowledge on epidemiology, and vaccines. History can repeat itself, or at least certain aspects do, and once again our society is facing a deadly pandemic while reflecting, revisiting, and reversing the impact of social inequities. Education is being forced to keep up with the times!

In order to build back better during Covid times, and support our students, staff, and school communities, let's apply the seven Rs for rebuilding education during Covid-19.

### REIMAGE — SHIFTS IN LEARNING MODELS (SYNCHRONOUS/ASYNCHRONOUS)

March 2020 marked the beginning of a year that changed the lives of all of us forever. The world had to readjust to a new norm, forcing many of us, regardless of race or religion, to revise our daily routines. In education, we learned firsthand about synchronous and asynchronous learning. Some teachers even figured out how to work with students who are remote, while working at the same time with students in the classroom. Remarkable! During the course of a year, the learning models kept readjusting, as schools would close, open, and then close again for a Covid-19 outbreak. This required flexibility and ingenuity for all educators involved. The shift in learning models has also allowed for even more tailored, differentiated instruction for students. The digital platforms that teachers have infused into instruction are exciting; many have assessments and data analysis features for real-time results. The quick data collection is beneficial in providing student feedback and designing lesson plans.

### RENEW — TEACHING METHODS

As this historic academic year began, we replaced some of our more antiquated teaching methods with new methodologies for online, virtual instruction. Teachers and administrators were responsible for strategies that they could apply to individual students, small groups, intervention, and enrichment. To this end, by creating opportunities for teams of teachers to research and share their best practices and make recommendations, the learning curve for everyone involved grew! Many digital software programs are robust and can enhance daily instruction. Many of our teachers had to find such programs, and had just days to figure out ways to make sense of them in their daily practice. Change happens when we are forced outside our com-

fort zone. The result is that the teachers have adapted, have many new tools in their instructional toolkit, and are proud of their newly acquired knowledge and teaching practices. The classes are more dynamic and technology is embedded more than ever. Bravo!

### RESTORE — SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

It is the role of the school administration team to keep the momentum and energy high, for students, staff, and families! The pandemic has undeniably made an impact on all of us. As educators, we realize that we need to be mindful of what everyone is going through, and provide encouragement to help others recover and feel rejuvenated, and restore some normalcy to the process as we return. We need to remember the high expectations set by administration, teachers, and collectively as a school. Be proud, and continue the push; this is how your school will see results. Even in remote instruction, students will continue to rise to your expectations, so remember to keep raising the bar. Administration and staff must keep focused on maintaining the tone, building upon best practices, and of course tailoring instruction to meet the needs of all students, whether in person or remote!

### RESOLVE — TECHNOLOGY

As mandates ordered schools to close their doors, it left many unanswered questions. How can we support and communicate with the students and their families? How can we help provide the necessary technology and tools, so that families would not incur additional expense? Some families had the necessary technology at home. In districts where students lacked devices, grants and state funding were applied to ensure that connectivity, instruction, and learning continued, even during the most difficult times. The pandemic actually catapulted the way all schools look at teaching and learning, incorporating technology in everything from how they partner with and communicate to families, to providing individual learning supports, tailored instruction, and assessments. We have all learned

so much about how technology can be applied to assist us in our daily lives, especially in school, that it is now difficult to imagine a world without it.

### REFRESH — SOCIAL EMOTIONAL SUPPORTS

In order to continue, we need to reach everyone in our learning community. Even though we can use technology as a way to communicate, we still need to remember that in times of global hardship, when families are suffering and impacted by illness, unemployment, depression, and food insecurities, to name a few, a toll will be taken on the lives of children. We need to be mindful of what our educational community is experiencing, help provide resources in the area if needed, and ensure that we are there to support. Our schools need to support families, reduce the learning gap, and work toward helping our students achieve academic success and happiness. Schools must continue to work together, communicate internally if they are having difficulty reaching a student and/or family, and persevere until they are able to rekindle the spark toward success.

### REIMAGINE OR RETHINK — THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

The onset of Covid-19 marked a historic time in history when many parents and their children had to learn for the first time how to work from home and connect with the outside world. For some families, the time spent together in the home prior to the pandemic was less than the time spent in pandemic, especially during lockdown, when everyone was under one roof. The families needed to figure out their own systems and routines, learn how to share devices, provide each child an area conducive to learning, and connect to the class and teachers. This was a time for all school personnel to be sensitive to what families were going through, but also a time to revise how we are doing things and think outside the box to rethink our processes. Now, we have created online clubs, spirit days, special activities, and events. It is also a way to have the students invite a family member to sit with them, experience a read aloud,

a publishing party, or an online Zumba class. This remote time gives us a way to reconnect not only with the students, but the families too, in a way you could not have previously imagined!

## RESHAPE — CREATE INNOVATIVE APPROACHES AND PRACTICES

The pandemic has forced all of us to use our talent and our ingenuity, and our actions have been a testament to our resilience. As school leaders we need to restore our schools to a place of stability, and refine our processes and protocols to suit remote, hybrid, and in-person settings. We not only need to work toward reversing the learning loss, but act as a pillar of strength for everyone in the educational community who has suffered loss, because these struggles can and will affect our students' overall success. Continue to have regular conversations with the staff, create opportunities for families to connect, and celebrate the little things. Realize how hard everyone is working toward a common goal, and reward them by highlighting or complimenting the achievements. Encourage the staff to share as a way of rebuilding the capacity within the school. Reintroduce the structures, systems, and routines that

are working, review what needs to be reshaped, and collaborate on creating innovating approaches and practices that all work toward reversing the learning loss. Once everyone is back in the building, review and reissue new safety protocols to suit new Covid-19 guidelines, and consider revising your school handbook to reflect the changes.

Try having virtual visits and learning walks, giving folks some specific lens along the way. Provide key dates, invite everyone to attend, send reminders, and include links to make it easy (we are receiving a lot of email). While on a virtual learning walk, see how teachers are embedding digital platforms into practice, student engagement, and the use of digital data. Another focus may be to see how students use real-world examples, and apply research, or text-based evidence, so the lesson becomes even more relevant and meaningful. This will also help develop their abstract thinking, an important skill set needed in college and careers. We will be most successful when we take care of children's physiological, social, and emotional needs, so they focus on learning. Our lives have been placed on reset. We need to return from the

pandemic, and in a better way! Please follow the seven Rs to help your school build back better!

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DONNA MCGUIRE is the assistant principal at PS/IS -18 Park Terrace School.