

COMMENTARY

Implementing a Restorative Restart by Planning for the Four Ts

Time, Talent, Training, and Technology/Materials



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This fall, schools and districts will likely return to full in-person instruction amid a lingering pandemic while being faced with the challenge of addressing heightened student academic and wellness needs associated with lost learning opportunities, extended periods of isolation and physical distancing, and other challenges students encountered during the pandemic. Though the demands on schools will be high, the resources available to schools will also be considerable, with [state](#) and [federal](#) dollars filling many district coffers to a level previously unmatched. After [years of underfunding](#), many districts are finding themselves in the unfamiliar circumstance of having sizable financial resources to support recovery from a crisis of unprecedented magnitude. These resources, if deployed strategically, have the potential not only to reverse the effects of pandemic-induced lost learning opportunities but also to lay the groundwork for systemic transformation to advance learning and engagement for all students.

After navigating their school communities through the [volatility, uncertainty, chaos, and ambiguity](#) of the past year, however, many district leaders are depleted and understandably weary, lacking the bandwidth to formulate clear plans for the upcoming year while they are contending with winding down the current one. To help scaffold a vision for the 2021–22 school year, PACE published a report on May 26th, [Restorative Restart: The Path Towards Reimagining and Rebuilding Schools](#), which presented the research evidence and concrete practices for schools and districts to address whole child needs of students—not only their academic needs but also their needs for relationships, wellness, and engagement in learning that is meaningful to them. The report, which builds upon and deepens the [consensus vision](#) established through collaboration with California-based family and student engagement organizations, educators and system leaders, research institutes, and civil rights and equity organizations, provides 14 action areas that can help schools to advance equity by: centering relationships between and among families, students, and educators; understanding whole child needs; strengthening staffing and partnerships to provide needed supports for learning and mental health; prioritizing racial equity, relevance, and rigor in curriculum and instruction; and empowering diverse teams to monitor improvement and build towards long-term change.

Knowing the pressures facing educators and the level of burnout that many are experiencing, our report also includes a framework to support planning and budgeting for a restorative restart. We recommend that administrators and community stakeholders consider the Four Ts of school resourcing to ensure that the restorative actions are comprehensively and

adequately funded to meet local needs:

Time

Districts will need to account for the additional or reprioritized time required of school staff during the restorative restart. They can do this by paying for additional time or by reducing current staff responsibilities (i.e., “taking things off their plates”) to increase staff capacity to engage in these restorative actions. Examples of investing in time include extending instructional hours, adding contract days for professional development, increasing time for teacher planning and collaboration, and increasing time for staff meetings.

School calendars and schedules may need to look different this year to accommodate planning for and implementation of activities that support a restorative restart, such as family outreach, relationship building, and attending to students’ academic and wellness needs. Additional requests of staff time will require additional compensation. While many schools will need to add time to the school year or day, in some schools and districts this may also entail subtracting tasks or deprioritizing prior initiatives or programs to increase time to focus on the restorative restart.

Talent

For decades, schools in California have not been adequately staffed to meet student needs; now, greater student needs resulting from the pandemic have made increasing the number of adults in schools to support whole child needs and address barriers to learning even more urgent. The recent infusion of federal and state funds has opened the window to this possibility. Although the one-time nature of the funds shortens the time for implementation and the impact of additional support, new staff and partners can still be deployed to address short-term needs in a burst of support, which might include forging connections and building trust with families, identifying and addressing disparities in unfinished learning, and meeting mental health needs.

New positions and/or new hires might include data analysts, family engagement coordinators, social workers, counselors, tutors, aides, and arts and music teachers. In many cases, the need for talent to support the restorative approach will necessitate the launch of new contracts or new partnerships with community organizations. Some of these hires or partnerships may need to be short-term contracts or commitments because of the one-time nature of much of the federal and state funding. Partnering with community-based organizations is efficient and sustainable because it leverages available local resources and these partnerships can persist after the stimulus funds expire.

Training

Districts must invest in staff capacity to teach and support students in new ways during the restorative restart. This will call for professional learning opportunities for all school staff (including those in new roles) in social-emotional support, restorative practice, cultural responsiveness, and universal design. This investment will primarily take the form of opportunities for teachers to work, reflect, and plan together as well as providing workshops and training. Funds may also be required to pay for substitute teachers to offer coverage during training and observation opportunities.

Teachers, staff, and school leaders will be challenged to adjust their practice during the restorative restart to center relationships with students and families, address whole child needs, and promote engaging and rigorous teaching and learning. Robust professional learning opportunities and support for teachers will be critical to ensure that students experience a coherent and consistent restorative restart. Protecting ongoing time for teacher and staff teams to collaborate, learn, plan, review student data, and examine their practice must be a cornerstone of professional

learning during the restorative restart and beyond. Staff and community partners will also need to be trained to ensure alignment in strategy and coherence across the student experience.

Technology/Materials

The efforts made to close the digital divide should continue until all students have reliable access to computing devices and connectivity. Furthermore, the restorative restart may necessitate purchasing software licenses for wellness screeners, student information systems, formative assessment systems, learning management systems, and/or curricular materials.

Technology and other learning materials can continue to be used asynchronously, which will help ensure that in-person instructional time is well tailored to be relationship centered, rigorous, and engaging.

The contents of the Four Ts cannot be prescribed for districts or schools because local implementation will vary by local assets, needs, and priorities; however, the framework can support discussion and planning among local leadership and stakeholders. Read more about the Four Ts as they align with the restorative restart action areas in the [full report](#), or click below to go directly to the 4T analyses in each of the following areas for restorative action:

- [centering relationships between and among families, students, and educators](#);
- [understanding whole child needs](#);
- [strengthening staffing and partnerships to provide needed supports for learning and mental health](#)
- [prioritizing racial equity, relevance, and rigor in curriculum and instruction](#) and
- [empowering diverse teams to monitor improvement and build towards long-term change](#)

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