



COVID Keepers: FLIP the Script

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COVID Keepers:

INTRODUCTION

As the threat from the COVID-19 pandemic continues to ebb and flow, educators are actively searching for new and innovative ways to provide students with quality opportunities to learn amidst the uncertainty. In many Michigan schools, students have been able to return to the classroom. But how will students, teachers and administrators settle back into school? Will the traditional and well-known structures that have defined K-12 education for decades remain the educational norm, or will new and innovative approaches to instruction emerge? Will historical cornerstones that have defined K-12 education be challenged? The pandemic has forced, in a good way, educators to re-think how students can reach achievement goals and progress through classroom content at a pace that matches their needs. This is the moment in time when we are asked how education can change into a student-centered approach. An opportunity to develop student-centered frameworks that transform the learning environment into a place where students are the educational focus, and the instructional practices of educators match the needs of students.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented a significant and widespread challenge to the existing structure of schooling. The question is, what happens now and how do we navigate these new conceptions of schooling? Surely, some of the traditions of schooling will reassert themselves over time. At the same time, however, we are in a unique moment in educational history. A moment that we should not squander in our rush to return to “normal.” Normal, after all, worked for some but was also detrimental to other students. In this brief white paper, we explore how educators adjusted instructional activities in ways that may have benefits in the future. We call these adjustments “COVID Keepers,” activities that we suggest should persist as in-school, face-to-face schooling resumes.

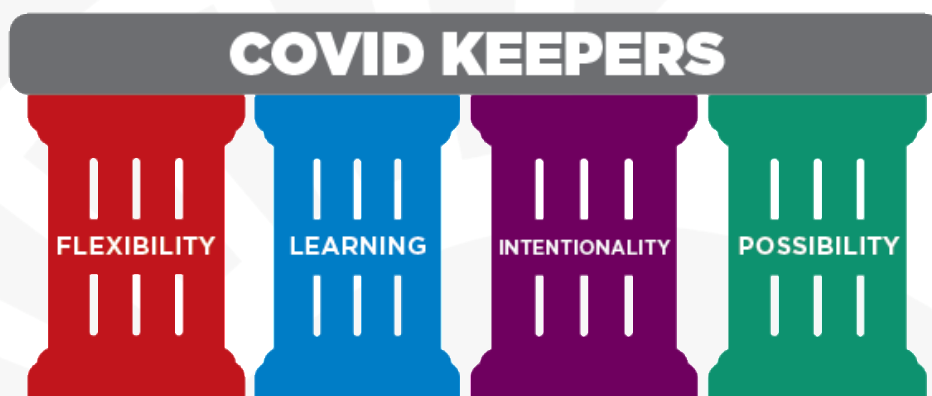
Figure One: FLIP framework



FLIP the Script

We organize this rethinking into four categories—Flexibility, Learning, Intentionality, and Possibility. Through these approaches, we suggest that educators can “FLIP” instructional approaches and enhance students’ achievement and their in-school experiences.

Figure 2: Pillars of FLIP



The FLIP themes are a set of practices identified by educators, administrators, and educational support staff as they reflected on how COVID-19 impacted the classroom. The instructional approaches generated during the last year represent a shift in how content is delivered. We hope that educators will continue to question and challenge the familiar script of schooling. In doing so, educators will be the leaders in the transformation of the school experience into a more welcoming, enriching, and edifying student-driven approach to learning.

Within each of the FLIP categories, we have embedded a specific set of lessons that emerged from the distance learning necessitated by the pandemic. We refer to these lessons and experiences as “**COVID Keepers.**” While we hope the COVID Keepers will provide educators with a heuristic they can apply broadly, we also understand that these themes are launch points for transcending what education used to look like and how schooling can be re-envisioned in the post-pandemic world. We provide a few brief examples of how each category can be enacted in schools. We also see these examples as an overview to get the thinking jumpstarted and help educators and students advance into this new educational space. In the future, we will be exploring each of the FLIP categories in more depth with additional white papers that speak to each of the four FLIP categories. We hope that educators will build upon these examples in ways that ensure opportunities to learn for all students.

FLEXIBILITY

COVID-19 encouraged educators and school districts to be flexible in how they arranged the structure of school for students. The methods and learning opportunities were, in some locations, adjusted to meet the students where “they were,” provide what was needed to survive during the pandemic, and ensure that schools connected with students and their families. COVID-19 has forced the educational system to rethink how schools and educators connected with families, how “classroom” time was viewed, and how curriculum was delivered.

One of many significant lessons that has been realized in the pandemic-induced remote learning environment is that content can be delivered in significantly different methods.

Understanding that curriculum implementation is constantly adjusting to meet the needs of students is critically important. In addition, it is important to remember that what was always done, because it was easy or used over many generations of educators, does not need to



continue. The traditional approach, according to anecdotal evidence from educators, with the teacher in the front of the room writing down formulas or calculations, is outdated and very well could be detrimental for some students and their individual growth. Educators and school systems have been able to identify new and innovative approaches to content delivery and assessment. From the development of videos that can be watched over and over (mirroring flipped classroom approaches) to bringing in material/digital media that supports the main content delivered in the classroom, several new methods to reach students have been implemented.

FLEXIBILITY

The objective to meet the curricular expectations of the state and the school district produced unique learning opportunities for students that enabled students to advance their knowledge through familiar mediums and in a timeframe that met the students where they are. Educators can be empowered to be flexible in how they nurture student knowledge and support student growth. There is a need to give educators the opportunity and agency to craft lessons in ways that meet expectations but also empower educators to approach the classroom as a true space of learning.



We also know that the historical approach to the length of seat-time and the number of minutes that students are required to be in the classroom may be an outdated system of accountability. Students learn at considerably different speeds. Educators have long identified that classroom differentiation

“The main advantage of asynchronous online learning is that it allows students to participate in high quality learning situations when distance and schedule make on-ground learning difficult-to-impossible.”
Strengths and Weaknesses of Online Learning, University of Illinois – Springfield

was key to achievement. A common discussion has been that it might be possible that seat-time may not lead directly to achievement.

FLEXIBILITY

Students can work individually, access digital media to learn content, and work with educators to target areas where more support is needed online. This does not mean that all seat-time approaches need to be scrapped. Students do need to be present for instruction that introduces key concepts (e.g., mathematical computations, social studies classrooms, or scientific experiments) that advance student knowledge, but there has also been considerable time in classrooms when students could have been working independently.



Flexibility in how students are engaged is critical in this re-thinking of how education is delivered. Educators can be thinking about the many ways that the pandemic *encouraged* greater flexibility in solving other challenges as well. Additionally, how can these flexible practices complement prior approaches even if they do not replace them entirely? The pandemic has shown that learning can occur across many platforms. Individual subject areas have found innovative practices that enhance the learning for students. The outcome is that educator and student flexibility has produced important growth opportunities not previously explored. These are areas that should be investigated as students and educators return to the classroom. At-home and school-based learning have operated in mostly separate spheres, at least until the spring of 2020.

LEARNING

As anyone reading this will know, school-based learning was cast suddenly and completely online, leaving educators scrambling about how to best provide students educational opportunities at home. In other words, the familiar patterns and arrangements surrounding school-based learning were utterly disrupted in ways that few, if any, were prepared for. As a result, the separate spheres of learning were blended into one. This blending of spheres transformed the historical concept of “learning” and permanently altered the learning paradigm as it was known. Parents were forced to be more participatory in the learning process.



The pandemic nudged the learning process into a cooperative, collaborative experience where the home and school are fused into one experience. This collaborative learning process will need to be maintained and built upon moving forward to ensure that what was gained during the pandemic is not lost as students return to the traditional classroom. To provide quality educational experiences for students, teachers had to act quickly and do a lot of digital learning themselves. Only a minority of teachers had experience or comfort with teaching online. In discussions with educators, a common perception was that the very thought of re-imagining teaching so suddenly was anxiety-provoking, and many, no doubt, had difficulty with the immediate transition.

LEARNING

Despite these initial difficulties, however, new methods of effective teaching began to emerge. Teachers immersed themselves in the affordances and potential benefits of teaching online. Teachers began to collaborate more than previously experienced and discussed what was working for students and how to implement new tools into the learning space.

These new forms of learning have the potential to make content more accessible for all students, thus meeting students where they are rather than focusing on what the curriculum requires.

Teachers began using the online tools (e.g., Padlets, Mentimeters, Jamboards, Seesaw) to engage students in academic content, provoke discussion, check for student understanding, elicit critical thinking, provide descriptive feedback, and construct opportunities for students to take actionable steps toward mastery. Undoubtedly, teachers were engaged in these practices before, but online tools have helped to re-imagine instruction and new ways to utilize innovative and engaging strategies that lead students on a path of discovery - a path that meets students where they are socially, emotionally, and academically. Upon returning to the classroom, teachers can implement the practices they adopted out of necessity and turn those practices into complementary strategies and approaches.



INTENTIONALITY

Like many disruptive life events, COVID-19 forced us to ask tough questions. Most notably, the pandemic forced educators to ask questions that they may have taken for granted previously. The most pressing questions, “What is a school-based education?” and “How do we ensure quality educational opportunities for all students?” increased the intention with which teachers designed and implemented instructional activities. Educators could not rely solely on traditional ways of doing things, and as a result, this created an intentional innovation of practice. Hopefully, this intentional habit of mind persists as students, teachers, and administrators return to school buildings. As educators re-enter the classroom, they will need to ask themselves a new series of questions that increase the intentionality that serves as the foundation for what they do.



The questions are not meant to overthrow traditional practices but rather to raise awareness of the logic, effectiveness, and potential alternatives to our actions. These questions might include:

- What challenges are we facing?
- What are our options when facing these challenges?
- What have we tried?
- How effective have our prior efforts been?
- What might we do differently now and in the future?
- How will we know if what we are doing is working well?

INTENTIONALITY

Educators have, of course, asked these questions in the past, but the urgency and intentionality of these questions became more acute in 2020. We suggest that this urgency and intentionality continues as educators examine past practices, reflect on the present, and look to the future. In addition to its role in enacting innovations more broadly, intentionality can also be used to improve the student experience through eliciting student voice. Student voice engages youth in school change by asking them for feedback based on their educational experiences.



Student voice includes student expression, participation, partnership, activism, and leadership. Another way to conceptualize student voice is to think of it as a way to strengthen student-teacher relationships through mutual collaboration. Returning to school after the pandemic is an ideal time to elicit student voice in pursuit of enhancing the student experience, and educators are now likely more comfortable with a variety of technological tools that can help them understand the student perspective. Correctly applied, student voice improves school climate and culture, fosters memorable learning experiences, and drives professional development. What can be more intentional than placing student perspective in the center of teaching practices?

POSSIBILITY

Two years ago, who would have thought it possible to transition so suddenly and completely to online learning? Who would have thought it possible to provide devices for all students so they could access instruction online? Who would have thought it possible to mobilize the teaching force and prepare them to deliver online instruction?



As impossible as any of these events might have seemed, incredibly, they all happened. Schools mobilized resources and personnel to ensure that all students had access to an education. The educational community is now presented with an opportunity to question the vast possibility of what “can be” going forward for educational systems when we are forced to make substantive changes that enhance student learning. In these possibilities, we can find opportunities to fundamentally restructure education to the needs of students as opposed to the wants of the system.



POSSIBILITY

For instance, if the mass of teachers that learned to use online platforms to engage students in instruction were able to elicit tangible evidence of their learning, provide essential feedback, and extend social and emotional enrichment opportunities for students, what other possibilities might there be for teaching and learning in the near and distant future? More specifically, how can

other lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., flexibility and intention) enhance social and emotional development opportunities for teachers to learn from and with each other? Traditional barriers of space and time do not seem as formidable now. Teachers were forced to learn and adapt quickly to virtual instruction by taking advantage of learning opportunities essential to their immediate occupational survival. The pandemic highlighted how technology could enhance professional learning in ways that were on the periphery before. Many teachers found that these pandemic-provoked opportunities were more plentiful and accessible than ever before. Teachers also found that they did

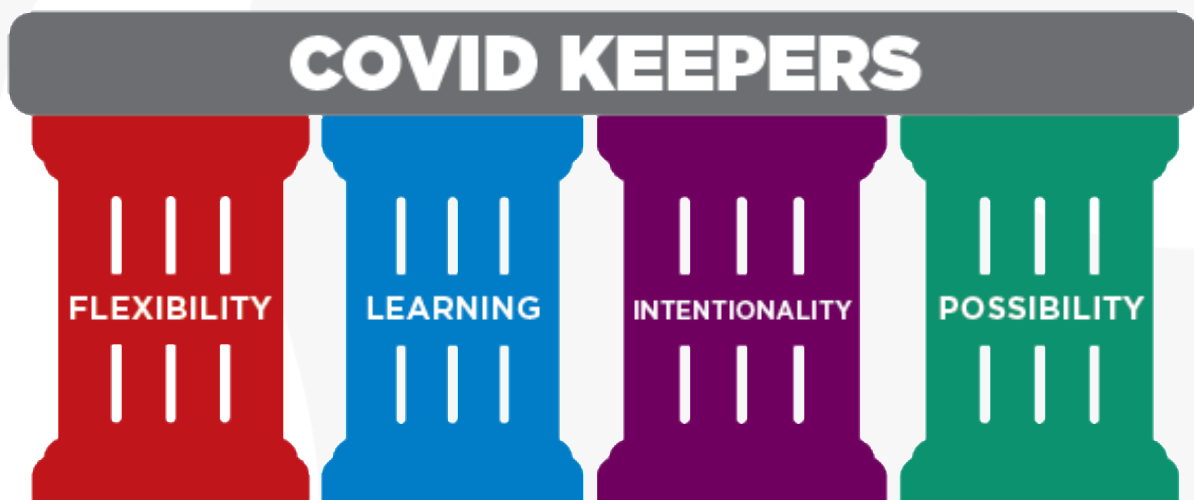


not need to expend the resources (e.g., time and money) that were required before under more traditional professional learning arrangements. Professional learning is simply one of the areas where educators should explore new opportunities and question future possibilities. As noted previously, educators can also question the historical limitations of connecting with parents, understanding student knowledge, engaging students in academic content, providing students feedback on their work, and connecting with one another.

SUMMARY

As students return to in-person learning, familiar structures will be there to greet them. Many of these structures are necessary to make schooling organized and manageable. We are not making the call here for “de-schooling” or otherwise overthrowing the structures that have served to make school universally accessible. What we are advocating for is that educators carry lessons they learned during the COVID-19 pandemic forward to **FLIP** the learning paradigm to a post-pandemic environment that honors students as they navigate the educational environment. As educators, school leaders, district administrators, school boards, and all other educational staff endeavor to translate **Flexibility, Learning, Intentionality, and Possibility** into universal access to excellence for all students, it is imperative to rethink schooling and its purpose. Given what we have learned in the past 18 months, how might we FLIP the script of schooling to increase flexibility, learning, intention, and possibility?

Figure 3: Pillars of FLIP



SUMMARY

In this white paper, the Office of K-12 Outreach started to identify and focus on the COVID-19 pandemic-induced lessons. The Office of K-12 Outreach will continue to expand and share these themes in subsequent white papers, but right now, we are hoping for educators to extend these ideas with their own experiences and successes. When subsequent white papers (and other valuable resources) are published, they will be located within the *resources* section of the Office of K-12 Outreach's [Monthly Newsletter](#) that is published on the Office of K-12 Outreach website (www.education.msu.edu/k12).

While the process may be challenging, there will be great opportunities for rethinking education. The fusion of school and family spheres will bring about new collaborations and efforts to ensure that all students have access to the education that they need. Educators will be given the liberty to incorporate technology and educational platforms that allow for students to advance their knowledge in ways that meet their needs. We see this pandemic-induced opportunity as a moment in education where students, families, and educators can transform the learning environment and take advantage of the opportunity before us today to rethink and reset our collective understanding of schooling.



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