

How high-quality curriculum and PD can transform the post-pandemic crisis into an opportunity for innovation



Q&A with **Britt Magneson**, Vice President, National Inventors Hall of Fame

What do you envision being some of the most significant challenges for K-12 educators post-pandemic?

Our nation's teachers have had to bear an unbelievable burden

during the pandemic, which has resulted in both anxiety and burnout. They had to move to online instruction so suddenly, with very little preparation or additional resources. Our organization works with many teachers around the country, and they tell us they feel exhausted and burned out.

But on top of that, there is tremendous anxiety because of testing and assessments, and the learning loss students are experiencing. Teachers are wondering how they can address those learning gaps.

Motivation is also a challenge; many teachers are leaving the profession entirely and changing careers. And our students have been changed by this experience. When they return to classrooms, they will be very different kids.

How can administrators address some of these challenges?

This is a pivotal moment in education. It is a very challenging and complex time, but this is also an opportunity for real change. We have had unprecedented disruption, but we also have new resources to address these challenges in the form of federal funding from the American Rescue Plan Act and the ESSER Fund. This is a chance to reexamine the purpose of school.

Addressing these challenges requires two main components. First, we need to provide all students with content-rich curriculum and materials built on engagement and hands-on learning. And second, we need to complement that with curriculum-based, high-quality professional development for our teachers.

Providing teachers with a rich array of high-quality materials and curriculum will help restore joy in teaching and go a long way towards reducing burnout while increasing student engagement. The right professional development is vital, but it can't add to the burden already on teachers.



What does that type of PD look like?

When our organization works with a district, we first focus on getting teachers interested in problem-based, hands-on learning, and rediscovering their joy of learning. We will have a full day PD experience using imagination and play, asking big questions and encouraging curiosity. Secondly, we follow that up by providing high-quality teaching materials for them to use in the classroom. And third, we provide job-embedded PD later on that is focused on developing an innovation mindset in students, by working directly in the classroom.

What is an innovation mindset, and why is it important for learning?

Developed from the lessons and stories of National Inventors Hall of Fame inductees, the innovation mindset is a set of eight essential skills and traits: Confidence, Design Thinking, Persistence, Innovation, Creative Problem Solving, STEM, Entrepreneurship and Intellectual Property, which is understanding that ideas have value. Having this mindset can benefit administrators, coaches, teachers and students alike.

We believe that developing these characteristics and habits of mind in students is the foundation of quality instruction. Developing an innovation mindset will invite, sustain and expand the understanding that a student is owner of their learning, and will empower them throughout their lives.



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