

Visioning for the Future of Education: Listening to Youth

By Dr. Christine Mason, Paul Liabenow and Dr. Melissa D. Patschke,



About the Authors: Christine Mason, Ph.D., is Executive Director of the Center for Educational Improvement and Assistant Clinical Professor, Department of Psychiatry, Yale School of Medicine, Program for Recovery and Community Health.

Paul Liabenow is President of the Center for Educational Improvement and Executive Director of the Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association.

Melissa D. Patschke, Ed.D., is Principal of the Upper Providence Elementary School in the Spring-Ford Area School District, and Director of the Coalition for the Future of Education. She currently serves on the PA Principals Association Board of Directors and has also served on the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) Board of Directors.

What are your plans for next fall? Do you have a vision for classrooms and schools for next year and beyond? Many of us cannot imagine returning to classes as they were pre-COVID. Yet, we also know that some sense of order and routine will be good for everyone.

To help plan for the future, the Center for Educational Improvement (CEI) used our visioning process [see *Visioning Onward: A Guide for ALL Schools* (Mason, Liabenow & Patschke, 2020)] with a group of over 25 educators and youth to develop a vision for how we might learn from our experiences during COVID to create a better, more meaningful future for our students. This visioning process, conducted by CEI's recently formed *Coalition for the Future of Education*,

began with a series of three online sessions and morphed into monthly online discussions. From that process we developed a vision for the world, for education, and for our organization. Our visions for the world and education follow:

Vision for the World

CEI envisions a world that leans in with heart and compassion for self, others and our environment, where people and institutions are dedicated to expanding conscious acts of caring, building resiliency and advancing equity and justice.

Vision for Education

CEI envisions education that serves as the foundation for our humanity; it is flexible and empowering, where there is room for adventure, students drive their own learning, learning is celebrated and communities support their individual and collective self-care, resiliency, and well-being.

As our team visioned and planned together over a series of months, it became more and more apparent that:

- Restoring a sense of community and helping youth feel connected and empowered is critical.
- We would be wise to consider a culture of joy and respect for each other (Mason, Liabenow & Patschke, 2020).
- When we lead from our hearts, we gain important insights into how we and others are feeling.
- To help students navigate their way out of trauma next year, we can acknowledge each person, act with gratitude, give everyone permission to be human and celebrate successes and joy (Patschke, 2021).
- Moving forward will take mindfulness, compassion and courage.

Our Youth Listening Tour

To help with our visioning, our Coalition conducted a Youth Listening Tour (Becker & Chen, 2021), which included a series of online discussions with several groups of diverse 12-20 middle school, high school- and college-aged youth. Some of the key takeaways from these sessions were:

- Youth valued being asked their opinions and would like to be more involved in planning for and designing their futures, including their course of studies, requirements and instructional preferences.
- While many students struggled with online learning, some students thrived. These students appreciated the flexible schedule afforded to them as they worked from home; some students also learned a lot about self-motivation. With practice they gained new skills that will serve them a lifetime.
- Many students experienced a profound trauma last year, missed their social interactions with peers and teachers, and also found it hard to stay focused with virtual learning.
- When considering education in the future, youth want greater use of hands-on learning and more mindfulness to help alleviate their stress and anxiety and create a greater sense of peace, calm and well-being.
- Students realized the value of the current focus on equity and diversity and are looking forward to a future where more educators “look at them” and can related to them.

Anxiety, Youth Engagement and Courage

As part of our focus on youth, Melissa Patschke, Director of the Coalition for the Future of Education, wrote about the importance of youth engagement, vulnerability (Brown, 2018) and courage, saying, “Our youth are courageously creating their own journeys each day” (Patschke, 2021a).

As part of her leadership with the Coalition for the Future of Education, Dr. Patschke (2021b) interviewed four student members of the Coalition. Here are some of the highlights from her interviews:

Courage. From Mehir Badlani, a High School Junior from Pennsylvania:

We had a discussion in class one time about why some of my peers are hesitant about turning on their camera, and they expressed it feels like being stared at by everyone else in the classroom all the time and that makes them uncomfortable. Some students are more comfortable than others. With students both in the building and online, students in both settings have to advocate for

themselves; that takes courage. As students, we utilize courage in almost everything we do. Every time someone asks a question, they have to overcome their fear of embarrassment and judgment.

Advice on Anxiety. From Kaya Payton, a High School Junior from New York:

Anxiety is one of the most common mental health challenges today. In this day and age, dealing with COVID, anxiety in schools is more prevalent than ever before. . . . easier. With COVID, there is even more pressure put on students due to the way we are learning. Not going to school makes it more difficult to learn and there are just so many assignments that have certain due dates. The pile up of all assignments can be very stressful for students to handle.

Large and Small Leaps of Courage. From Audrey Choi, a High School Freshman in Pennsylvania:

Courage can be found all around you. It keeps you going. Courage helps you to step out of your comfort zone, it helps you to push for what is right, or to watch that scary movie you have been wanting to watch. It is never the same for everyone, but it helps us all to simply keep moving forward to pursue our goals in life no matter what those may be.

Courage Building Strategy. From Julia Murphy, College Senior, Rhode Island:

A strategy that I have found effective when I feel like I'm behind the curve or not where I want to be is maintaining a focus on the things that I am doing right and well, no matter how big or small they may be. Celebrating life's daily achievements, such as sending the email that's been on your to-do list, prioritizing time for self-care, or even just making it through a busy day, really helps you feel accomplished and helps you remember that you're doing your best on any given day. When we celebrate the little things, the big things start to feel much more attainable.

A Vision for Our Future

Many of us feel the weight of decisions that are being made right now. Many of us are uneasy about what lies ahead, even as we are so very eager to be back in schools with our students. We are concerned about students' learning, and also their health and safety, including their mental health and well-being. Our vision is that the planning for the future will be an empowering pro-

“Many of us are uneasy about what lies ahead, even as we are so very eager to be back in schools with our students.”

Continued from previous page

cess, that youth will feel included, and that their sense of safety and well-being will be enhanced by the opportunities they have to voice their preferences and concerns. Our vision is that we all will listen to youth, learn from them and welcome them to the table as equal partners as we move forward.

You can sign onto a letter to the U.S. Department of Education about the future of education and learn more about our Coalition by visiting: <https://www.edimprovement.org/coalition-future-education>

or by scanning the **QR code on the right**.

For additional information, contact the authors at: chrismason@edimprovement.org or **@Edimprove on Twitter**; pliabenow@gmail.com or **@PaulLiabenow on Twitter**; or MPats@spring-ford.net or **@MelissaPatschke on Twitter**.



References

- Becker, W. & Chen, C. (2021, July). CEI's Youth Listening Tour: What we learned and the pathway forward. *CEI's HeartMind eNews*, 1,7.
- Brown, B. (2018). *Dare to Lead*. Penguin Random House LLC.
- Mason, C., Asby, D., Wenzel, M., Volk, K., & Staeheli, M. (2021). *Compassionate School Practices: Fostering Children's Mental Health and Well-Being*. Corwin Press.
- Mason, C., Liabenow, P. & Patschke, M. (2020). *Visioning Onward: A Guide for All Schools*. Corwin Press.
- Patschke, M. (2021a, May). A Heart Centered Community: "You are valued, and you belong!" *CEI's HeartMind eNews*, 1,6.
- Patschke, M. (2021b, April). Culture of courage: Youth speak, we listen. *CEI's HeartMind eNews*, 1, 5.

Developing Protocols for Students with Disabilities During Active School Shooter Drills: What Principals Need to Know

Continued from page ?

is neither prudent nor legal. The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) clearly states that excluding or denying people with disabilities from emergency sheltering and crisis response because of a specific disability is not legal according to Chapter 7 Addendum 2 of the act. Administrators should remember to communicate with families, use the IEP process to develop specific procedures in safety plans, allow students with disabilities opportunities to practice

those safety plans, include psychologists and mental health experts in the district crisis planning team and make sure preparedness drills are developmentally appropriate. Doing these things can help to make schools a safer and more supportive environment for all children...including children with disabilities.

For further information, you may contact Dr. Isherwood at robert.isherwood@sru.edu

References

- Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq. (1990). Available at <https://www.ada.gov/>
- Erbacher, T. & Poland, S. (2019). *School psychologists must be included in active shooter drills*. *Communique*. 48(1).
- National Association of School Psychologists. (2020). *School safety drills and exercises for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD): Tips and resource for educators*.
- Rich, S. & Cox, J. W. (2018, December 26). School lockdowns: How many American children have hidden from gun violence. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/local/school-lockdowns-in-america/>
- Cowan, K. C., Vaillancourt, K., Rossen, E. & Pollitt, K. (2013). *A framework for safe and successful schools [Brief]*. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

SAVE THESE DATES

PA Educational Leadership Summit

August 7-9, 2022 - Lancaster Co. Convention Ctr.

LEAD22 Conference

October 16-18, 2022 - Kalahari Resorts Poconos