

2023 RESTART Network National Forum: Advancing Pandemic Recovery by Bringing Research and Practice Together

Forum: May 31–June 1, 2023

Session 2 held on May 31, 2023

Session 2: Needs of the Field Small-Group Discussion

The purpose of this session was to bring together participants in role-alike groups to discuss the strengths, successes, current areas of need/challenge, and areas where additional supports are needed for pandemic recovery.

Discussion Questions and Key Take Aways

Participants self-selected into role-alike groups to discuss questions developed by the RESTART Network (which are listed below). There were four role-based groups: local education agency (LEA) leaders and policy makers (school district leaders and school-based leaders), state education agency (SEA) leaders and policy makers, national policy makers (federal agency leaders and advocacy organization leaders), and education researchers. The ideas that emerged during the discussions are summarized below, by role-alike group.

What are some successful strategies, for learning acceleration and other needs, that have been implemented and what has made them effective?

- Local Education Agency (LEA) Leaders and Policy Makers
 - Teachers are more willing to take risks and use autonomy developed during remote learning
 - Increasing cultural awareness and openness
 - A focus on building relationships with students and their caregivers
 - Dedicated time in the schedule for social and emotional learning (SEL) shows a structural commitment to SEL
 - A focus on continuous improvement
 - Willingness to take risks and reflect on beliefs underlying work
- State Education Agency (SEA) Leaders and Policy Makers
 - After school programs
 - Summer learning programs

- Tutoring programs: Students are motivated to show up to see the tutor they've formed a relationship with
- High-impact tutoring
- College students providing support and tutoring help in the classroom
- Community schools
- Community partnerships
- Use of high-quality instructional materials
- Targeted, intensive instruction for students during breaks (spring, fall, etc.)
- Expansion of existing programs has seen the best outcomes so far
- Recruiting—and paying well—highly effective teachers
- National Policy Makers (Federal Agency Leaders and Advocacy Organization Leaders)
 - Evidence-based SEL programs
 - Professional Learning Communities that share solutions
 - Communities of Practice
 - Funding programs aligned with district vision
 - Convening to discuss use of ESSER funds
- Education Researchers
 - Did not discuss this question

How have partners and/or stakeholders played a role in supporting implementation and success?

- LEA Leaders
 - Mental health organization partnerships to supplement existing resources in schools
 - After school programs provide infrastructure and support for students outside the school day
- SEA Leaders
 - Mental health organization partnerships to supplement existing resources in schools
- National Policy Makers and Advocacy Organizations
 - Mental health organization partnerships to supplement existing resources in schools
- Education Researchers
 - Co-design of research studies with stakeholders

What are the primary challenges and opportunities?

- LEA Leaders
 - Recognize a need to bring more voices to the table, which enriches the discussion but slows down the timeline
 - Recruitment and retention of educators
 - Mission and vision are difficult to implement with staffing shortages and constant turnover
 - Research may be limited in scope because some topics are contentious in the current political environment
 - Determining which partnerships to pursue and which are no longer benefitting the district or school
 - Need for consistent attendance information to assess effectiveness of tutoring interventions
- SEA Leaders
 - Implementing interventions at scale with fidelity
 - Budget timelines do not necessarily align with the research timelines. Decisions about budgets may need to be made before there is complete data about which programs are effective
 - Steep learning curve for federal funding requirements
 - Districts with less money having to address infrastructure issues, not enough funding for instructional materials
 - Tracking the effectiveness of so many different initiatives
- National Policy Makers and Advocacy Organizations
 - Districts understanding what funding *can* be spent on. Sometimes there are misconceptions about what funding can be used for
 - Determining what to do when the current funding runs out
 - Funding instability for mental health partnerships: by the time relationships are built, funding may be gone
 - Integrating acceleration strategies with existing priorities
 - Many principals and teachers didn't feel adequately engaged by districts and policymakers on learning acceleration strategies
 - Lack of capacity throughout all levels of the education system
 - Providing resources (internet access, etc.) to rural students
- Education Researchers
 - Districts not feeling comfortable sharing results when there are no results or undesired results
 - Staffing challenges

In what areas do you believe additional research is needed?

- LEA Leaders
 - Policy and best practices
 - Creating an education system that is equitable
- SEA Leaders
 - Did not discuss this question
- National Policy Makers and Advocacy Organizations
 - High school redesign: Can project-based learning be implemented more widely? Is high school fundamentally unengaging?
 - Research oriented towards prevention (immediate intervention in the event of a learning disruption)
 - Indicators to look for in school visits that signal a trajectory for improvement
- Education Researchers
 - Process and implementation studies

How can researchers better collaborate to ensure research on learning acceleration strategies is relevant and actionable?

- LEA Leaders
 - Constant communication with stakeholders participating in the research
 - Ease the burden on teachers by making research more accessible
 - Work with teachers to build data literacy
 - Understand the specific needs of a district before suggesting possible solutions
- SEA Leaders
 - Did not discuss this question
- National Policy Makers and Advocacy Organizations
 - Provide grant proposal training for small rural districts
 - Streamline information in accessible language
 - Provide infographics and short videos
 - Researchers can ask to join existing national organizational meetings to interact with educators and hear their perspectives
- Education Researchers
 - Honesty upfront and built into the research process
 - Explain what the data being collected will be used for
 - Participatory research