

INTRODUCTION

You have been stretched. You have been pulled. You have been through the wringer, tested, and tested again. You probably feel like a rubber band, holding it together but under a lot of tension. But the problem with the rubber band analogy is this: They either break or they go back to their former shape. Neither are good options for you, your family, or your students. We need to see and feel the excitement of learning again. We need to engage with our colleagues again. But we also need to heal from the traumatic experiences that have shaped the recent past.

It's time to rebound. We chose this word because it allows us to acknowledge that there will always be an impact from the experiences we've had. There will be a lasting effect from the time we quarantined and were isolated. There will be a lasting impact from seeing some of our students and colleagues suffer. We may have suffered. We have been changed.

But the word *rebound* also acknowledges that there can be increasing value and strength following a decline, setback, or adversity. There is a bounce-back notion contained within the word *rebound*. Rebound asks us to consider what worked well, what did not, what we need to preserve from the pre-quarantine, and what we need to cherish during quarantine teaching. Rebound means we can go back to the pre-COVID world, or we can learn from it and create better. After all, why would we want to go back to inequitable school systems when we can build something different? We use the term *rebound* in the sense of "our health is on the rebound." That is, we can learn from pandemic teaching to come back better.

It's too trite to say that time will heal all wounds. These wounds are part of us now, but they don't have to define our future.

In order to rebound, we need to address the collective experiences we have had, including those that were traumatic, and rebuild our sense of self. We need to help our students do the same. And we need to recover and reassemble our students' learning. We can choose to see this as an opportunity to positively change schooling and learning for more students. To do so, we need to take what we have learned and create a new language of schooling. Let's not simply go back to school but rather return to school stronger and better. Our schools are on the rebound.

Yes, we hope that this book offers some optimism about the future of schooling and the ways in which educators can impact the lives of their students. And we hope that this book helps you recognize the wounds, address them as well as you can, and take what we have collectively learned to improve the overall quality of schooling.



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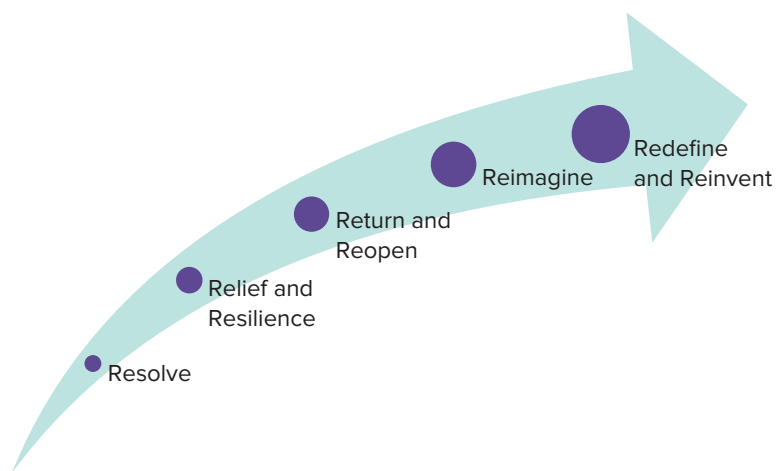
THE “NEXT NORMAL”

Over the past several decades, there have been instances in which members of society have argued that there will be a “new normal.” There is much debate about who first developed the phrase, but it has been used following the 2001 World Trade Center bombings, the 2005 avian influenza, the 2008 financial crisis, and many others. McNamee suggests that “the new normal is a time of substantial possibilities if you are willing to play by the new roles for the long term” (Sartain, 2004, p. 1). But the current twin pandemics of disease and the recognition of systematic racism (Williams & Youmans, 2020), as well as the imminent restricting of the global economic order (Sneader & Singhal, 2020), require that we consider the “next normal,” which is meant to reframe our thinking from getting “back to business” to imagining what the next normal will be like. Those writing about the next normal, mostly in business, describe an arch with several stages (see Figure 1). These stages apply to the work we’re doing here and now and include the following:

- **Resolve.** At this first stage, we recognize what is. This includes acknowledgment of what has been lost and what the world looks like now. We give ourselves permission to mourn the things that are gone, yet we make a decision to move forward. As we will see in the first module, this includes recovering from the traumas we have experienced and accepting the facts, including the need to improve the learning lives of our students.
- **Relief and resilience.** As we move into this second stage, we experience some relief and mobilize our resilience. We begin to recognize that we can face challenges and that we rely on our personal, professional, and collective assets to protect ourselves from the effects of the stressors that continue to exist. As we have noted before, the impact of these world events will leave a mark and, with support and connection with others, we can use what we learned to improve schooling.
- **Return and reopen.** As we begin planning for and implementing the reopening of schools and return more and more students to physical classrooms, we experience a range of emotions—nostalgia, loss, joy, and more. We’re thrilled to see our students repopulate the campus yet recognize that learning environments have changed. Some students did much better with distance learning, academically and socially, and may choose to continue online. Others craved the social interactions of school or needed more support from a teacher. Still others need significant social and emotional support to re-engage with learning. As we reopen, we realize that distance, hybrid, hyflex, remote, blended, and simultaneous learning will continue to be options for some, or many, students. This realization, that school will never be the same as we knew it in the before times, can test our resilience and passion. But, if we embrace the possibilities, we can move forward to reimagining our classrooms.

- **Reimagine.** As we come to terms with the next normal, we start reimagining the ways in which learning can occur. We think about students' ownership of their learning and their ability to self-regulate as they choose strategies for learning, seek feedback, and monitor their progress. We look at what worked for our students in distance learning and what didn't. If we let ourselves, we can get excited about what the future holds and the ways in which these crises can open the doors of possibility for students. We embrace the lessons learned from pandemics and engage students in lessons that build their skills, identity, intellectualism, criticality, and joy (Muhammad, 2020).
- **Redefine and reinvent.** As we embrace the possibilities that we imagine, we begin to redefine school and reinvent ourselves, our classrooms, the learning experiences students have, the ways schools operate, and the very idea of schooling itself. We are emboldened, and we take action. We recognize the harm that has been done and create new opportunities for ourselves and our students. And hopefully, we never go back to the way that schooling was. We no longer miss those old days, as our impact has grown and we are realizing success. We recognize effective practices and new approaches, and we implement them.

Figure 1 The Next Normal for Schooling



WHY THIS BOOK?

This is a playbook, meaning that it is designed for you to interact with. There are tasks, reflection opportunities, and tools that you can use to move forward, personally and professionally, in the ways that we described above.

In the first module, we focus on the ways in which we heal from trauma. From there, we move to agency—the belief that your actions result in good things.

Both educators and their students' agency have been tested. We ask ourselves, is anything that I'm doing making a difference? Does it matter if I put forth the effort, or will I just fail and fail again? Rebuilding agency is an important part of rebounding schools.



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As we rebuild agency, we recognize that we must recover learning for our students and ourselves. As we will note, it remains to be seen how much learning needs to be recovered and by whom. Certainly, some students and educators have suffered greatly. Our current reality is that we need to recover from the lost learning and, in doing so, we need to resist the temptation to focus on gaps, remediation, and lowered expectations. If there ever was a time to believe in the capabilities of our students and ourselves, it is now. We will focus on accelerating learning and creating opportunities for learning leaps.

And finally, in the last module of this playbook, we offer a glimpse of what schools can be. It's time to rethink schooling and use the wisdom collected during this pandemic to make schools even better. We do not subscribe to the idea that schools have been failing all of their students. The majority of students do quite well. But some do not. And, we have to ask, where is the ceiling on learning and have we reached it? We don't believe so. There is much to do, and this should create a sense of excitement.

We cannot unsee what we have seen. The pain, the inequities, the lack of engagement—the list could go on. And this was the case for the old normal and the COVID normal! If we want to survive, and thrive, we need to rebound from these experiences. We need to redefine and reinvent. The time is now. The opportunity is ours.