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A "Post" Pandemic(s) Village Check-In: Pulse Checks and Recommendations for a Hard Re-Set in Education

Jarvais J. Jackson

Alesia Mickle Moldavan

Anne Valauri

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Jarvais J. Jackson
Georgia Southern University

Alesia Mickle Moldavan
Georgia Southern University

Anne Valauri
Georgia Southern University

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Abstract

Utilizing the lens of the "pandemic as portal" (Roy, 2020; Souto-Manning, 2021) and the need for a "hard re-set" (Ladson-Billings, 2021) of our current education system, this literature synthesis engages with head, health, and home to consider what a new normal could look like as we take a "village check-in" of each area. For head, we consider the systemic barriers to equitable academic achievement that have long been in place for Black and Brown students. When considering health, we look at the impact of the pandemic on teacher well-being and how this may impact their ability to teach effectively and equitably. Lastly, in a pulse check of home, we look back at the unequal past, while orienting forward towards opportunities for re-imagining home-school connections as we negotiate what a new normal can look like "post" pandemic(s).

Keywords

COVID-19, pandemic as a portal, Black and Brown students and families, family engagement, teacher education

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Introduction

For many people, the COVID-19 pandemic drastically changed their lives. For some, COVID-19 exacerbated ongoing racial inequities that were lived experiences. Hostleter (2021) frames the ongoing racial inequities experienced by Black and Brown people as a pandemic of its own. As the COVID-19 pandemic forced us into a world of unknowns, the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor highlighted the ongoing racial inequities and violence that Black and Brown people face worldwide. Now, more than two years later with COVID-19 still impacting our lives in more ways than just health, we are faced with reimagining what life will look like in a "post" pandemic. More importantly, this examination must simultaneously acknowledge the ongoing racial pandemic driving inequitable opportunities for minoritized groups. In this article, we explore what schools and classrooms will look like, referencing several of the 5H's (Head, Heart, Hands, Home, and Health) central to the *National Youth Advocacy and Resilience Journal (NYARJ)* to guide us through a check-in on the village which consists of teachers, students, and family. Specifically, we draw attention to Head (intellectual achievement and talents), Health (physical and mental health), and Home (family and community support).

Guiding our check-in, we draw from the works of Ladson-Billings (2021) and Souto-Manning (2021), as we examine the impacts of COVID-19 and the racial pandemic on education systems as we know them. The works of Ladson-Billings (2021) and Souto-Manning (2021) were guided by Roy's (2020) conception of "*pandemic as a portal*." She explains, "Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next" (p. 3).

Ladson-Billings (2021) presents the crucial moment that educators are faced with now as an opportunity for a "*hard re-set.*" Presented through the analog of having to reset a mobile device, Ladson-Billings asserts a hard re-set as a moment to "reclaim and preserve our culture through our school students" (p. 68). Souto-Manning (2021) understands this moment as a *portal*, critiquing the functioning of schools through both pandemics, and situates this as an opportunity for transformation in education. We address this portal moment as we take a look at historical conditions of schools for teachers, students, and families and provide recommendations to conduct a hard re-set through the framing of Head, Health, and Home. At the conclusion of each section, we provide opportunities for re-set, actionable ways educators can make changes and positively contribute to the new normal.

A Pulse Check on the Head

While the focus of this paper is the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential to acknowledge the simultaneous racial pandemic. As COVID-19 began to close things down, streets were filled with disgruntled Americans exhausted from the consistent racial inequalities. The protests surrounding the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd overflowed to critiques of social and racial inequities across many sectors, including education. Among those critiques, Shores et al. (2020) shift the blame for many of the inequities that produce disproportionate results for Black students in schools. This is not a new critique; similar to Shores et al. (2020) assertions of schools as the principal source of disparities, Johnson et al. (2019) situates schools as a site of violence for Black and Brown students.

With a focus on discrepancies, many of which have been exacerbated by COVID-19 that prevent Black and Brown students from achieving academic success, we review literature that establishes an understanding of the currency for Black and Brown students in school and highlight literature and practitioner work that moves us towards a new normal, a better normal. To be clear, COVID-19 has impacted all people around the world. The scope of this section is to focus on the effects of the pre-pandemic policies and procedures used during the pandemic that continues to marginalize students of color and how the pandemic(s) have positioned us to move forward in a manner that provides all students with the chance to flourish.

What is Normal?

Nothing could be worse than a return to normality.

(Roy, 2020, p. 10)

Defining normal is not an easy task. *Normal* in educational spaces have historically uplifted whiteness and byproduct white students while failing to meet the needs of many Black and Brown students (Jones, 2020; Woodson, 1933). For this fact and many others, we will focus on the ideal of *normal* as experienced by Black and Brown students. As we attempt to move forward, it is important to understand what the norm has been and how it has impacted our students. Scholarship for decades have shown that *normal* for Black and Brown students have experienced a vast number of discrepancies in the areas of academic success, discipline, and overall achievement in schools as compared to their white counterparts (see Baines, 2018; Bonner, 2000; Bradley & Bradley, 1977; Ford, 1998). *Normal* is Black and Brown students being underrepresented in gifted programs yet overrepresented in special education programs (Bonner, 2000; Ford, 1998). *Normal* is Black and Brown students being disproportionately kicked out of classrooms receiving suspensions and expulsions that remove them from academic time and opportunities to learn (Gregory & Moseley, 2004; Milner et al., 2018). *Normal* is Black and Brown students not seeing themselves reflected in curricula (Bishop, 1990; Boutte, 2016).

COVID-19 exacerbated many issues that were already the daily struggles of many Black and Brown students in classrooms across the country. Due to inequities that were already present, Black and Brown students continued to suffer receiving a less than adequate education during the pandemic. If nothing else, COVID-19 responses in schools showed that schools were designed to uplift white supremacy (Hillard, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Forced to move to remote learning in haste, most educational systems were not ready; many students did not have access to computers, teachers had limited training on the use of technology for remote learning, and parents wanted to help their students but were often unable to do so while juggling the consequences of the pandemic(s) themselves. Living in a world of uncertainty, many students went without academic instruction for weeks at a time. Douglas-Horsford et al. (2021) share responses of families surveyed noting an increased concern in the areas of academic progress as well as the mental health and wellness of students. Furthermore, a general consensus of respondents shared a concern that "the quality of education provided to Black children was inadequate and inequitable overall, as were the educational options available to Black families and children living in predominantly Black neighborhoods and communities" (Douglass Horsford et al., 2021, p. 14). These exacerbated inequities include the digital divide that widened during COVID-19. According to a 2018 study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, approximately 27% American Indian/ Alaska Natives, 19% Black, and 17% Hispanic students live without access to high-speed internet. From

disparities as such, we find Black and Brown students falling further behind. The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education (2021) reported:

> For the Class of 2021, the average score on the ACT dropped to 20.3 on a scale of 1 to 36. This was the lowest average score in more than a decade. For the fourth year in a row, the average score for African American students dropped. This year, the average score was 16.3, down from 16.7 in 2020 and 17.1 in 2017. In 2021, 28 percent of Black test takers were rated ready for college-level courses in English, compared to 67 percent of Whites…The most striking statistic is that only 6 percent of all Black test takers were rated ready for college-level courses in all four areas of English, mathematics, science, and reading. Whites were more than five times as likely as Blacks to be prepared for college-level work in all four areas. (paras. 4–6)

Such results are evidence of how Black and Brown students suffered academically in addition to other factors during COVID-19 and the racial pandemics.

With these issues now at the forefront of our minds and thoughts, there is a chance to attempt to return to the status quo or focus on making   positive change for our students. Many educators have found themselves seeking to go back to normal, when in fact, is that what Black and Brown students need? Normal is not an option for our Black and Brown students. They need and deserve an education that is reflective of their needs and themselves.

While the issues that Black and Brown students face are complex and intersectional, we bring attention to how we can use this portal as a time to seek academic success for these students. Scholarship opposing operating in the norm has been prevalent for decades as this, again, is no new occurrence. Literature has emphasized the importance of incorporating culturally relevant and sustaining practices in our classrooms (Baines, 2018; Boutte, 2016, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2014; Paris, 2012). Approaching this moment of the portal and the hard re-set, as Ladson-Billings (2020) describes, provides us with an opportunity to reflect on what has worked and what has not worked and rely on scholarship that pushes the academic achievement of students. The call for change in classrooms is both in the areas of content and pedagogical practices. W.E.B. DuBois (1935) prolifically proclaimed, "the proper education of any people includes sympathetic touch between teacher and pupil; knowledge on the part of the teacher, not simply of the individual taught, but of his surroundings and background, and the history of his class and group" (p. 328). In this, educators must start with themselves reflecting and working through implicit biases that they may hold for any group of students. As humans, biases naturally come from our environment and experiences, so they are often invisible to ourselves, yet it is essential that we identify those biases and work against them (Baines et al., 2018). Additionally, since teacher preparation programs fail to provide a comprehensive education in the area of non-eurocentric content, particularly areas of Black and Brown histories and knowledges (Baines et al., 2018; Boutte, 2016, 2022; Jackson, Collins, Baines, Boutte, et al., 2021; Jackson, Collins, Baines & Gibson, 2021; Wynter-Hoyte & Smith, 2020), teachers have to take the step to build their content knowledge on Black and Brown students in order to incorporate it in their classrooms. As DuBois (1935) mentioned, both the individuals and their surroundings, histories, and backgrounds must be considered and incorporated into the classroom environment and curricula. In Table 1, we provide a list of literature that can serve as a starting point for educators seeking to self-reflect on their teaching of Black and Brown students along with building cultural knowledge. This list is not an exhaustive list but instead designed to start the journey.

Table 1

Texts on Pedagogical Practices for Black and Brown Students

- *"We've Been Doing It Your Way": Choosing the Culturally Relevant Classroom* (2018) by Janice Baines, Carmen Tisdale, & Susi Long
- *Educating African American Students: And How Are the Children* (2nd Edition) (2022) by Gloria Swindler Boutte
- *Intersectionality of Race, Ethnicity, Class, and Gender in Teaching and Teacher Education: Movement Toward Equity in Education* (2018) Edited by Norvella P. Carter and Michael Vavrus
- *Walking The Road: Race, Diversity, and Social Justice in Teacher Education* (2004) by Marilyn Cochran-Smith
- *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* (2006) by Lisa Delpit
- *Teaching When the World is On Fire* (2019) Edited by Lisa Delpit
- *Black Children: Their Roots, Culture, and Learning Styles* (1986) by Janice Hale
- *Learning While Black: Creating Educational Excellence for African American Children* (2001) by Janice Hale
- *The Dreamkeepers (2nd Edition)* (2009) by Gloria Ladson-Billings
- *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom* (2019) by Betina Love
- *Start Where You Are, But Don't Stay There: Understanding Diversity, Opportunity Gaps, and Teaching in Today's Classrooms* (2010) by H Richard Milner, IV
- *Growing Critically Conscious Teachers: A Social Justice Curriculum for Educators of Latino/A Youth* (2016) Edited by Angela Valenzuela
- *The Healing Power of Education: Afrocentric Pedagogy as a Tool for Restoration and Liberation* (2021) by Marcia J. Watson-Vandiver & Greg Wiggan

Rejecting a return to normal, we highlight Souto-Manning's (2021) assertion that we consider: "*What if we were to reject a return to an oppressive past marked by harmful practices, pathologizing portrayals, and damaging pedagogies for Black, Indigenous, and other communities of Color?*" (p. 3). In the next section, we explore the means by which we can *reset* for a new normal for our students.

Where to From Here?: Opportunities for Hard Re-Set

Thinking about how to meet the needs of students, COVID-19 has shown the power of technology. Students are increasingly technologically savvy, and teachers must adapt to this in classrooms to remain relevant (Kaloeti & Manalu, 2021). Not reinventing the wheel, teachers can rely on proven strategies such as flipped classrooms to strengthen instruction and engagement (Ash, 2012; Schmidt & Ralph, 2016). Inadvertently, many teachers used flipped classrooms during COVID-19 allowing students to review materials at their own pace with support, such as videos. Teachers can continue to use technology like this and in other manners. Not all technology is appropriate for every grade level; rather, the teacher should choose cultural and developmentally appropriate technology for their students. Allowing students to show their learning using technology, particularly social media, can also improve engagement. For example, many young people have turned to social media outlets such as TikTok and YouTube to express themselves and participate in conversations around pop culture, politics, and activism

(Nam, 2020). Utilizing the skills associated with content creation, students can engage with each other, open dialogue, and be assessed using these platforms to share their content knowledge. Integrating technology requires intentionality and education about the safe use of technology but taps into the skills and interests of students. This is not to say to use these methods exclusively, but rather as an option for students.

Continuing to determine the possibilities for transformation in classrooms, we offer examples of how teachers have already created safe spaces for Black and Brown students. These spaces start young and continue throughout K-12 classrooms. These spaces are reflective of the students and provide students with the tools to be academically successful. There is not a prescriptive way to approach culturally relevant and sustaining classrooms, but these examples provide tools that you can use to adapt your classroom as you see fit.

In a first-grade classroom, a teacher guides students through inquiry standards using familiar and unfamiliar Black and Brown figures. Guided by standards, this teacher embeds Black histories creating a space where students can see themselves. Figure 1 captures an inquiry unit where students researched the life and experiences of Ruby Bridges. Strategically selected, Ruby Bridges was in first grade when she integrated her local public school. The voices of the students are captured on the board as the teacher facilitates the inquiries presented. As a final project, the students authored a page in a class book with what they learned.

Figure 1
Bulletin Board Exhibiting Inquiry Unit on Ruby Bridges
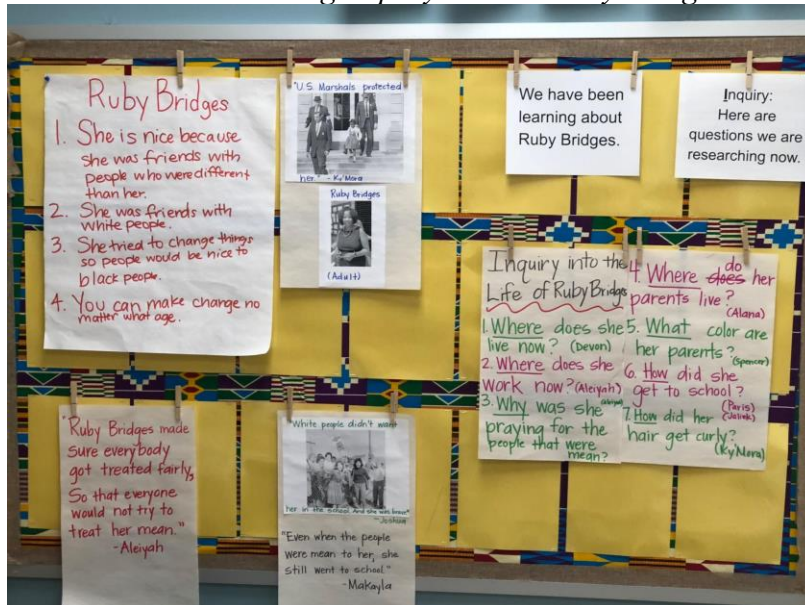
In a 5th-grade classroom consisting of the majority being students of Color, this teacher, pre and post-pandemic(s), structured his classroom to be a safe haven for Black and Brown students to feel safe and achieve academic excellence. Evidence of this starts from the door where there is an affirmation affixed that was co-created with his students stating, *I am… beautiful, grateful, confident, every good thing, wisdom, unstoppable, and worthy.* He refers to his classroom as a family and works hard to build an environment where everyone is heard and respected. Once trust is built, students are open to engaging and sharing their opinions and thoughts. This teacher uses many opportunities in English Language Arts (ELA) and Social

Studies to have an open dialogue where students are provided a space to critique social inequities. While using state-mandated standards, students build literacy of African and African American histories. Having done the work to interact with students and their families inside and outside of the classroom, he is able to make content relevant to students resulting in academic achievement.

Finally, Systslinger et al. (2019) share examples of how high school teachers enrich their English courses through social justice. Particularly, these   teachers challenge norms in their selection of texts,   such as *A Long Way Gone, The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, and Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide.* These texts and others guide students through building critical consciousness. These teachers believe, "when we teach students to read, we are teaching much more than that. We are teaching them how to better understand the world, their place within it, and their capacity to transform both" (Styslinger et al., 2019, p. 11). These teachers   use reading and responding as ways to have students critique social injustices and reflect on their own biases of gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, and sexual orientation, among other identities.

All three examples are examples where teachers engage students in culturally relevant and sustaining ways while still meeting the state-mandated standards and required skills. Heeding DuBois's (1935) notion, these teachers capture their students holistically and design their classrooms accordingly. These are classrooms where Black and Brown students succeed academically, culturally, and socially. These are examples of what classrooms can look like as the result of this hard re-set as the pandemic has provided us with this portal. As we use this to make necessary adjustments to our teaching, in the next section we check in on health, explicitly for teachers.

A Pulse Check on Health

The pandemic forced us to pause and reflect on our daily practices, including our mental health and well-being. While the pandemic did not make life any easier with added stressors infringing on one's wellness, it did illuminate that such states of wellness may not have been as balanced and stable as one may have thought. Furthermore, the heavy toll of the pandemic disproportionately harming Black and Brown communities (Armitage & Nellums, 2020; Horsford et al., 2021; Souto-Manning & Melvin, 2022; Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020) exacerbated the mounting challenges and traumas faced by Black and Brown teachers and students in schools. Acknowledging that racialized experiences and race-informed ideologies (e.g., white supremacy, anti-blackness) have too often been entrenched by racism in the United States' education system (Dumas, 2016) illuminates the need to examine the multidimensional aspects of well-being alongside the added burdens of COVID-19.

As pandemic-related disruptions impacted in-person instruction, the demands, roles, and responsibilities of teachers shifted, leading to personal and professional sacrifice, often in areas pertaining to wellness. Although existent research on teachers experiencing feelings of burnout, high-levels of stress and anxiety, as well as lack of autonomy and control in one's practice (Graham & Truscott, 2019; Harmsen et al., 2018; Hinze & Morton, 2017; Jerrim & Sims, 2021) occurred pre-pandemic, the rippled effects of COVID-19 coupled with the ongoing racial inequities pushed and pulled teachers in new directions, unfortunately many to their breaking point (Davis et al., 2021). In the following, we highlight some of the challenges facing "post" pandemic(s) teacher well-being and the need for a hard re-set (Ladson-Billings, 2021) to support

and preserve healthy teachers and students in our classrooms, especially those of Black and Brown communities.

A Self-Care Analogy

Teaching is a complex and demanding profession, as there is a need to have multifaceted skills, patience to nurture, and a high degree of flexibility. The additional demands of building relationships with students can also make it challenging to separate and balance one's personal and professional lives. As past pre-K-12 teachers and current teacher educators, we can attest to teaching being neither easy nor trivial. However, we do it because we know that we have an opportunity to make a genuine difference in the lives of those we teach. We also acknowledge that our roles can be used to challenge the deficit discourses evoking harm and discomfort to students who have been (and continue to be) marginalized and promote action toward racial justice in productive ways. To ensure we have the strength to invest our souls into our practice, we know we must keep a check on reality with this self-care analogy in mind.

When you travel on a plane, flight attendants remind you to put your own oxygen mask on before you help others put their masks on. While it may not be instinctual to help yourself while others (e.g., children, elders) may not be able to help themselves, there is a good reason to limit the possibility of both parties passing out from lack of oxygen. If you put your mask on first, you will then be able to help others. The same must be true for well-being to ensure self-care while teaching as well as the potential to advocate for others in the classroom. If a teacher has the energy, time, and resources to tend to their own well-being, then they can use their reserves to help students tend their own well-being, thereby serving as a model for productive self-care. Thus, it is necessary for teachers to prioritize their well-being and learn ways to use their resources wisely to ensure they are equipped with the strength to fulfill their responsibilities caring for others and engaging in justice-oriented advocacy.

Teacher well-being can be considered a multidimensional concept taking into account contextual, environmental, and personal factors (Dodge et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2017; McCallum et al., 2017); however, it can be broadly described in terms of five interconnected dimensions: social, physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual. An understanding of each dimension can shed light on the impact the pandemic(s) have had on teachers' well-being. Furthermore, teacher well-being has significant implications for teacher turnover and retention, thereby impacting student support and success both in and out of the classroom (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Placing a critical lens on well-being in a "post" pandemic(s) society can inform the steps needed to guide the hard re-set needed in schools, for the collective sake of all teachers and students, including those from Black and Brown communities.

Social

The COVID-19 pandemic often left teachers and their students feeling lonely and socially isolated, thereby causing feelings of anxiety and depression (Blackmon, 2021). Coupled with COVID-19, Black and Brown families and communities were also left facing increased racial trauma and mental health issues in part from efforts to dismantle systemic racism (Horsford et al., 2021). The toll of navigating racism alongside the unknowns of COVID-19 weighs heavily on one's social well-being. For a hard re-set to "treat" and "heal" social health, there is a need to validate the experienced struggles and present healthy models of social well-being situated in sociopolitical contexts.

A great contributor to social well-being is a sense of connectivity where individuals can share and lean on one another for guidance and support. While teachers and students turned to technology to stay connected, pervasive challenges with limited technology and unreliable internet made connectivity challenging and, in many cases, near impossible during COVID-19 transitions to remote learning. Recognizing research on the digital disparities of the digital divide (e.g., Dolan, 2016; Fulton & Sibley, 2003; Gorski, 2005; Moldavan, Capraro, & Capraro, 2022; Puigjaner, 2016) has not only shown the gap in access to digital resources and the knowledge to use such resources but also the need for advocacy initiatives to prioritize digital equity to reduce such gaps. Teachers and students from Black and Brown communities disproportionately face the societal impacts of the digital divide with limited physical access to materials (e.g., computer hardware, software, internet) and the social access of using such resources to participate in learning (Gorski, 2005). While there are obvious implications of digital disparities on academic success (Dolan, 2016), teachers must navigate the impact of digital privilege on vulnerable and marginalized students as well as problematize solutions to empower their students with the resources necessary to achieve. The mental health of taking on this responsibility can weigh on one's ability to seek (and find) meaningful social networks to help regulate these demands and cultivate collective connections to ensure one does not feel alone or question one's career choice (Acton & Glasgow, 2015; Education Support, 2019).

Additionally, the prevalence of new technology coupled with limited time and training to incorporate such resources into one's already full schedule, reminds the field to question what intentional space must be made to entertain new demands, especially during episodes of social isolation when it is increasingly necessary to seek a community of supporters (Carillo & Flores, 2020; Passey, 2021). Support from family and community involvement may be one solution, especially since remote learning taught us that there needs to be a central role in sharing teaching and learning responsibilities with the cooperation and involvement of families (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Thus, teachers may need to rethink traditional school hours and support personnel, thereby extending learning communities to families during hours of evenings and weekends to encourage family engagement. Furthermore, space for critical dialogue among teachers and families must be made for recognizing experiences of digital disparities to ensure students can best be supported. The same must also be prioritized for recognizing experiences of racism and discrimination to strengthen shared commitments to racial justice. We discuss family engagement and the pandemic(s) even more deeply in the final section of this paper.

Physical

Without a doubt, the pandemic blurred the lines between places of work and non-work. When teachers were asked to move to virtual instruction, they created lessons, filmed tutorials, and organized Zoom meetings from home, the very same place where they tended to out-of-work responsibilities, such as childcare and making dinner. The balance between mind and body when professional and personal commitments clash often results in a distorted sense of purpose, spiraling teachers into a mode of constant survival (Blackmon, 2021). How one tends to one's health, including exercise, nutrition, sleep, and preventative health care, impacts how one physically feels and their ability to engage in activities with a sense of purpose (Holmes, 2019; Wigford & Higgins, 2019). When navigating a "post" pandemic(s) education, teachers need to be granted the space to exercise their rights both mentally and physically to tend to their health. Such spaces must be free of racism and discrimination, thereby providing safe and inclusive

conditions. If COVID-19 taught us anything, we must prioritize our health because without it, we are left tired, unable to jump hurdles and carry new burdens.

Emotional

Unsustainable workloads also play a toll on one's emotions and impact their professional identity, resilience, and self-care (Parker et al., 2012). Having a strong sense of autonomy, self-esteem, trust, positive mindset, and moral outlook contributes to one's emotional well-being (Holmes, 2019). Furthermore, having emotional control over how one feels can help one confront life's challenges and demands, as well as build a sense of understanding and compassion for others' emotions (Dorman, 2015). In a hard re-set, schools must pay more attention to teachers' emotional wellness and the framing of racial climate on emotional health (Kohli et al., 2022). Considerations must be made for offering sessions on meditative mindfulness and how best to support teachers (and their students) when there are fears and emotional distress (Emerson et al., 2017). Discussions must also extend to other societal issues, such as the social traumas and experiences of racial injustice. Forming and advocating for "community circles" where teachers can exhale and share in confidence can build strength and resilience to cope as well as foster individual introspection and job fulfillment (Durksen & Klassen, 2012).

Cognitive

On another note, the pandemic demanded opportunities to be creative in our everyday practice, including teaching and learning. Virtual instruction forged a connection beyond a student to their home life. Some teachers capitalized on this opportunity to learn more about students' cultures and backgrounds as well as be innovative and creative in developing culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), making considerations for student learning, cultural competence, and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Such opportunities to rethink curriculum through a lens of CRP and develop associated pedagogical repositories can ensure that all students can be reached. As Bishop (1990) notes, considerations for "mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors" can pave the way for teachers (and students) to step out in each other's worlds to better understand themselves as well as what others bring to the classroom, including their cultural practices. For teachers to have the motivation and cognitive demand to take on new professional tasks, such as redesigning and reorienting curriculum, they must see professional autonomy in their professional practice to embark on such tasks (Parker & Martin, 2009; Parker et al., 2012). A hard re-set that encourages the learning of cultural practices from students who flex to meet dominant culture expectations in schools acknowledges the need for all students to see themselves in the curriculum they study. Additional considerations can be made to extend curriculum focuses to socio-emotional learning, mental health, and why Black and Brown communities were more vulnerable to COVID-19.

Spiritual

For some, spiritual well-being extends from religious faith, but it is not dependent on such belief. Instead, it is the personal desire to seek a sense of connectedness to a bigger purpose and nurture creative freedom (Holmes, 2019). Recognizing one's sense of meaning, inspiration, and professional purpose can be driving factors in not only how one thinks of themselves within the world but also engages in life (McCallum et al., 2017). The pandemic made it challenging for teachers to understand their purpose when personal and professional potential was limited. The

added threat and judgment for one's belief in various arenas, such as masks, vaccines, and desires to seek anti-racism and equity professional development, often infringed on one's ability to believe and ascertain their beliefs. While there will always be those that challenge beliefs, there must also be those that protect and defend the right to believe. Administrators and educational leaders must encourage intentional efforts to foster harmony and worthiness in teachers' practice. Doing so will transcend to the classroom where students will be able to receive education in a safe, welcoming, and affirming learning environment.

A Beat to a New Drum: Opportunities for Hard Re-Set

When considering a hard re-set, teachers must be equipped with the skills and resources needed to manage and respond to well-being while negotiating the profession's demands. To do this, dedicated space must be made available for teachers to learn more about the dimensions of well-being and strategize self-care practices, thereby helping teachers build a conceptualization of what teacher well-being entails (Weiland, 2021). Professional learning communities can provide opportunities for teachers to share their needs, exchange resources, and provide support. Technology can also be used to explore resource repositories and bridge communities. For instance, digital platforms like EduBeing (www.edubeing.com) can be used to learn more about the dimensions of well-being and participate in related activities, including targeted reflection tasks and discussions (Moldavan, Edwards-Leis, & Murray, 2022). Teacher preparation programs and school-related professional development can also be strategic in embedding teacher well-being into curriculum that both prioritizes self-care practices and recognizes the added demands of pervasive racism that shapes the experiences of Black and Brown teachers and students (Kohli et al., 2022).

Without a doubt, the pandemic wreaked havoc on each of these five dimensions of well-being. But, as we begin to return to our "new normal" in a "post" pandemic(s) society, we must remember how we evolved in response to the pandemic(s), including the good, the bad, and the ugly. We must take what we have learned back into the classroom and question the normalized practices that once were and why we should resume such ways, especially those that did not benefit marginalized students in the first place. Furthermore, we must make intentional efforts to build communities of learners and supporters that can leverage each other's strengths, abilities, and cultures to expand and elevate our own understandings, inclusive of well-being. Such communities will ensure that if one falls, they do not fall alone with no one to lend a hand. And as we consider communities of teachers, we must also turn our attention to communities beyond the classroom.

A Pulse Check on Home

Home-school connections are often referred to as parent involvement, family engagement, and several similar terms; they are, most succinctly, the relationships and interactions between children, families, and schools. Although considered a key element of education by many, home-school connections before the pandemic suffered from many issues of systemic inequity endemic to the school system. Many "mainstream" home-school practices have historically been based in white, middle-class, English dominant ways of knowing and doing that often excluded, disregarded, and alienated many economically, culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse families. A common theme in critical literature on family engagement from the last few decades highlights how many teachers believe that parents or caregivers do not care about their children if they do not participate in schools in a desired way (Abdul-Adil &

Farmer, 2006; Cooper, 2009; Dyrness, 2011). These expectations are often based on teachers' own school experiences, which are shaped by race, class, and language, among other factors. While there has been significant critique of mainstream or traditional perspectives and engagement practices before the pandemic (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Gallo, 2017; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006), this mindset has still been very prevalent for teachers in the United States. This damage-based and deficit positioning often leads parents or caregivers, particularly Black and Brown families, to create understandable boundaries between home and schools, or to resist the "bridging" of home and school desired by many educators (Doucet, 2011; Gallo, 2017). In addition to this harmful, deficit positioning, many parents or caregivers may already feel wary of forming relationships with school due to "legacies of schooling" (Greene, 2013), or the ways that racism has been a part of not only the geography of school districts but how students are treated and disciplined in school systems. Unfortunately, these boundaries are often pathologized and used as further evidence that parents or caregivers "don't care," rather than seen as protection or opportunities for teacher reflection.

Over the last few decades, critical scholars have highlighted the problematic nature of many mainstream home-school practices and have developed more humanizing and culturally responsive frameworks of family engagement, including pushing the terminology from the more limited, one-directional "parent involvement" toward the more inclusive "family engagement" (Barton et al., 2004). In taking a pulse check on "home", we aim to use this opportunity to imagine a hard re-set (Ladson-Billings, 2021), or to take pause (Patel, 2016). Patel (2016) cites the works of bell hooks and Roy in defining this kind of pause, saying, "Perhaps one of the most explicit decolonial moves we can make, at this moment, is to sit still long enough to see clearly what we need to reach beyond" (p. 88), noting how reflection and stillness are not to be confused with doing nothing, but are necessary tools of material transformation. In considering a re-set of family engagement practices, this means considering where family engagement was before the pandemic as well as literature on family engagement during the pandemic, including moments of connection and moments of disconnect or harm.

Family Engagement During the Pandemic

Wilinski et al. (2022) looked at family engagement and how the pandemic impacted home-school connections, offering possibilities for new kinds of relationships. Their study launched a check of teacher practices and their views of family engagement during the pandemic through interviewing 30 pre-K educators in the state of Michigan. Reflecting on the changes due to the pandemic, teachers found that virtual learning blurred lines between home and school in a new way, offering multimedia approaches that parents or caregivers could engage with on their own schedules. The teachers termed this "responsive remote learning" (Wilinski et al., 2022, p. 15) highlighting how responsiveness, lack of a script, and an improvisational "Yes, and" approach opened doors for deeper relationships, more meaningful engagement, and new roles for parents and caregivers.

We may not yet have a full picture of family engagement during the pandemic, as many empirical studies on critical family engagement published in the past few years are still based on data from before the pandemic. However, this likely signifies that we need to do more work around this topic to take a more comprehensive temperature check of where family engagement is and where it could go. Another possibility that has been demonstrated before the pandemic is engaging parents and caregivers in leading research collaboratively, making sure their voices are heard and that they are represented in the research process (Dyrness, 2011; Ishimaru & Bang,

2022). Considering how deficit and damage-based perspectives of families and communities of color are often perpetuated through research (Smith, 1999; Tuck & Yang, 2014), a hard re-set demands greater input from families and communities on who is researched and how.

New Visions for Family Engagement: Opportunities for Re-Set

> Stories of potentialities matter, and perhaps their importance is more salient during our most uncertain times. Such stories allow us to explore currents and uncertainties. Some allow us to bring closure to a past of oppression and envision futures of possibility.
>
> (Souto-Manning, 2021, p. 6)

Taking a check of where we are also means looking at what has been, what is, and what can be. As Souto-Manning (2021) notes, stories of potentiality matter. While we may not yet have the full story of family engagement during the pandemic, it is imperative that we "explore currents and uncertainties" to look for the potentiality of transformation. Ladson-Billings (2021) suggests that to engage in this transformation, we must "re-set around technology, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and parent/community engagement that will support and promote students' culture" (p. 73). In this section, while centered around parent/community engagement, we also take into account the "currents and uncertainties" that have arisen from research during and before the pandemic, and also consider how elements like technology can help re-set family engagement approaches and practices.

Contextualizing greater national focus on racial justice with the historic harm done to families

Martell (2021) uses the lens of pandemic as portal to ponder how to interrupt the harm of schooling, echoing Ladson-Billings' (2021) refusal to return to normal in saying, "I do not want to return to that normal. That normal is not neutral, but deeply harmful for Black, Indigenous, and communities of Color" (Martell, 2021, p. 82). In looking forward, Martell is also looking back to consider where we have been while orienting towards a more just future. In considering this historic harm, and looking forward towards a different future, we must make sure that families and family engagement are parts of these conversations and visions of the future.

A greater awareness of histories of schooling and harm can help guide teachers in their relationships with families. This awareness can hopefully help interrupt the harm of labeling families as "not caring" for not engaging with schools in prescribed ways, and potentially open doors or push teachers to engage with families more meaningfully and creatively. This also might mean respecting family boundaries, or those who are resistant to the desired "bridging" of home and school (Doucet, 2011; Gallo, 2017). This resistance is often shaped by the "ghosts of the classroom", as Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) explains the complexity of returning to school as an adult: "parents and teachers…their conversations are shaped by their own autobiographical stories and by the broader cultural and historical narratives that inform their identities, their values, and their sense of place in the world" (p. 3). In acknowledging that parents or caregivers' relationships to school can be shaped by both historic harm and personal experience (and how their own relationship to school is shaped by broader cultural and historical narratives), educators can better understand resistance to bridging. Perhaps instead of negatively stereotyping or labeling parents and caregivers in ways that push them further away, educators can develop respect for these boundaries, while keeping an open door to show families they are always welcome into the classroom if they so choose.

As Ladson-Billings (2021) and others note, we are not only in a COVID-19 pandemic, for we are in an racial pandemic as well. While 2020 did not begin protests against racism and police brutality, this marked a time in which many white Americans finally acknowledged the salient role that race plays in American society, which could be seen from national conversations to book sales of *Stamped* (Kendi, 2016)*, How to Be an Antiracist* (Kendi, 2019)*,* and other texts. The effect this had on education was also seen in how many of these texts were assigned in schools (or in some cases, the "young reader" versions of these texts) and teacher book groups. While many activists rightly argue that more is needed for transformative change than a book club or an assigned reading, these moves certainly drew reactionary laws in state legislatures and school districts across the South and Midwest, with several states banning or limiting certain books that discuss Critical Race Theory and the history of racism.

Educators are now in a challenging position as they may be hearing messages from legislators discouraging them from engaging in reading, discussion, or reflection that explores the racist history and harm of systems of education. There is no easy or clear answer for what this tension will look like going forward; however, educators will likely need continuous support to help connect this reflection and discussion to their own pedagogy and their approaches to family engagement. Even before the pandemic, critical scholars drew on humanizing (Gallo, 2017), culturally responsive (Grant & Ray, 2018), and sustaining (Flores & Springer, 2022) family engagement frameworks to re-envision ways that families and communities engage with schools. In drawing on these frameworks, educators have learned about family funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) and incorporated these knowledges into their classrooms, curriculum, and pedagogy, opening new spaces for families to enter school and see parts of their lives reflected. More recently in the family engagement literature, there has been greater awareness of Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005), or CCW, the strategies that communities of color have employed to "do more than survive" (Love, 2019) in a world of systemic racism. Recent critical family engagement literature has employed CCW in centering knowledges outside of white, Western, English dominant ways of knowing and doing, pushing back against mainstream or traditional conceptions of home-school connections (Flores & Springer, 2022; Greene, 2013). The above theoretical perspectives and frameworks have helped educators work with families in more humanizing ways that move away from damage-based and deficit narratives   , while also opening new spaces in and outside of the classroom that might not have traditionally been considered part of home-school connections in the past. One other avenue that the pandemic highlighted as both an opportunity and a necessity was the use of technology in both communication and connection between families and schools.

Utilizing technology to help "rewrite the script"

In framing a hard re-set, Ladson-Billings (2021) suggests that technology and internet accessibility are necessary to move towards transformation. This suggestion aligns with the work of Wilinski and colleagues (2022) that virtual learning helped rewrite the script of home-school connection, blurring lines between home and school, while opening up relationships. From the perspective of educators in the study, technology added greater flexibility and outreach, and allowed parents to engage more on their own terms and schedules. This also aligns with work that pushes back against the one-directionality of home-school connections (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Greene, 2013), in which teachers or other school stakeholders get to set expectations that parents must meet. Utilizing technology to connect with their child or children's school can potentially give parents or caregivers more freedom and agency to work with the schools on their

own time. Yet, in utilizing technology, we must approach these opportunities with knowledge of the digital divide, and how this reality may be challenging   us to be more creative in rewriting the script of family engagement.

This section presents suggestions of reworking home-school relationships using the lens of pandemic as portal (Souto-Manning, 2021) and the hard re-set (Ladson-Billings, 2021) with a primary focus on relationships between teachers, families, and communities. There are many tensions in this re-set that still need to be better understood, including whether a historically oppressive space can ever be a space of deep relationships, liberation, and justice. That is a tension we will have to live in and work through as we take this check-in. However, we cannot let changes in legislation prevent us from looking to the unequal past to see where we have been, as it is the only way to redefine where we can go.

Conclusion

As we reimagine life in a "post" pandemic(s) society, we must be thoughtful about how we conceptualize the new normal and what it means for students, teachers, families, and communities. While the uncertainties of COVID-19 and racial inequities still plague the world, deliberate efforts must be made to pause (Patel, 2016), like that forced upon us by lockdowns, to ensure we take the necessary time to check-in with our village and the various stakeholders serving our youth. In this article, we critiqued the Head (intellectual achievements and talents), Health (physical and mental health), and Home (family and community support) aspects that have been impacted by the pandemic(s). Although we did not mention the Heart (social and emotional skills) and Hands (safety and protection), we would be remiss to say that these aspects are not interconnected in keyways that promote the well-being of the whole child.

As we took deliberate "pulse checks" supported by recent literature leading the charge for a hard re-set in education (see Ladson-billings, 2021; Roy, 2020; Souto-Manning, 2021), we made actionable recommendations for purposes of challenging our village to commence. This re-set is not about returning to what once was, an unjust education system that did not meet the needs of all teachers and students, especially those from Black and Brown communities. Instead, the re-set is about creating anew, an equitable education system that recognizes (and critiques) the past and responds (and advocates) for productive steps forward. Educators are presented with a critical moment, a moment of decisions and actions, of beginnings and of endings. We must use these moments as turning points to allow for impactful change and transformation.

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