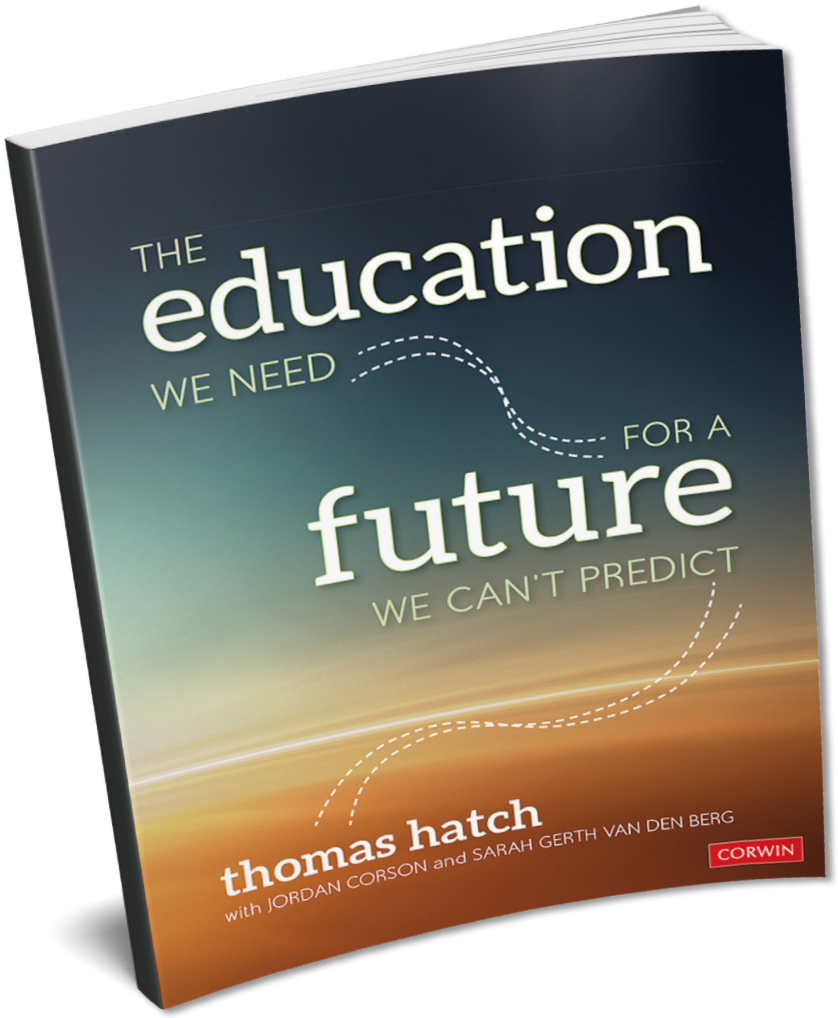

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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *The Education We Need for a Future We Can't Predict* by Thomas Hatch.

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CORWIN

From Improvements to Movements 13

The coronavirus pandemic exposed, again, the extent of inequality that many Black students, indigenous students, students of color, and other historically underserved students face, but it also made visible the fact that many communities already have the capacity to address at least some of these inequities. In New York City, in the first month of the school closure, the Department of Education worked with businesses like Apple and Microsoft to provide almost 500,000 computers and iPads to students who needed them. Although initially some cable/broadband suppliers in New York City cut off some subscribers who couldn't pay their bills, these companies eventually offered free connections (for a limited time) to new subscribers and opened up hotspots around the city for public use (Feiner, 2020). Even in other areas, with more limited digital infrastructure, solutions to many access issues are already available: school buses equipped with Wi-Fi (and sometimes solar power) have been deployed to help students, while other districts have raised the funds to buy or rent cell phone towers (Carter, 2020; Lee, 2020). Given these existing possibilities, one commissioner for the US Federal Communications Commission testified that the connectivity gap could be closed "virtually overnight" with swift action from Congress in response to school closures (Modan, 2020). If it could be done, then it should be done. No need to wait any longer.

Getting students connected to the internet is no panacea for educational challenges—particularly in many parts of the developing world, where almost half of all students don't have a computer at home and over 40 percent lack access to the internet. We also know that even with internet access and online opportunities, significant improvements in students' learning depend on developing more powerful instructional practices and providing better support for educators. Nonetheless, the responses to the coronavirus show that we have the capacity to address some inequitable learning opportunities, and we can take these steps without ever having to challenge the conventional structures and practices of schooling that have blunted so many ambitious educational-reform efforts.

Pursue a Series of High-Leverage Problems

The power of high-leverage problems comes in part from the fact that there are specific steps that can be taken in different contexts to create more effective and equitable schools right now. Building on what we already know, we can identify high-leverage problems in different contexts, and we can put together sequences of powerful initiatives that address key developmental needs, particularly for historically underserved students.

Books, Glasses, Attendance, and Reading

In the case of learning to read in primary schools, unpacking a series of predictable challenges yields a cluster of related strategies that can launch improvement efforts:

1. Make books by authors from a variety of backgrounds freely accessible.
2. Identify children with vision problems, and provide them with glasses.
3. Identify why children are chronically absent, and support regular attendance.
4. Identify children who are struggling to learn to read, and provide targeted interventions.

The logic is simple: when children have access to books, when they can see, when they're in school, and when they receive targeted support if they're struggling, they're much more likely to learn to read. Despite

this, many children around the world lack access to the basic resources and support they need to be successful.

Even in the United States, children in high-poverty areas have a much harder time getting books than their peers in middle-income areas do. One study showed that, in a middle-income neighborhood, plentiful bookstores meant there were thirteen books available for every child, but in a community of concentrated poverty, only one age-appropriate book was available for every 300 children (Neuman & Moland, 2016). At the same time, we know that making books and other print materials freely available matters: one recent review of studies identified three different book-giveaway programs (including one sponsored by the country singer Dolly Parton) that promoted more interest in reading and the development of literacy-related skills. That study also showed that the number of books didn't even matter much: a program that gave away just a few books was just as effective as one that gave sixty books to each child over a five-year period (Barshay, 2020).

Producing and distributing books equitably can be challenging, but it can be done. Organizations like Wordworks (see Chapter 6) make printable materials freely available online, along with explicit instructions on how parents and children can create books using whatever materials they have. On top of all that, organizations like EmbraceRace and the Jane Addams Peace Association post lists of books by authors from different racial and cultural backgrounds so that there's no excuse not to provide all children with access to materials that reflect their heritage.

Of course, making books and print materials available in a variety of languages, by authors from a range of backgrounds, is just one step. Children still need to be able to read those books once they get those books into their hands. Nonetheless, 25 percent of school-aged children in the United States have undiagnosed eye problems that inhibit their ability to read, and one in three children haven't had their vision tested in the past two years (if at all) (Sparks & Harwin, 2018); but relatively low-cost programs to test students' vision and get glasses to those who need them do exist (Slavin et al., 2018). In the developing world, it may be complicated to create a supply chain that makes print materials readily available and ensures that every child who needs glasses gets a pair, but it can be done.

In turn, the discussions in Chapter 7 demonstrate that there are available strategies for addressing many issues that make it difficult for young students to attend school on a regular basis. Further, programs

like Wordworks, Teaching Matters (Chapter 7), Second Chance (Chapter 9), and numerous others demonstrate different ways to address the specific needs of at least some of the students who experience difficulties. These first steps may not reach every student right away, and any initial success has to be followed by developing educational activities that foster more advanced skills—an even more challenging proposition. Yet all these changes—developing the capacity to provide glasses, to address chronic absences, and to provide targeted support in reading—can be accomplished with relatively little disruption to teachers' and students' everyday work and the conventional practices and structures of schooling. Taking this high-leverage approach to addressing predictable problems builds the capacity and momentum that can lead to more successful and sustained improvement efforts in the future.

Access to College-Level Content, Assessments, and Counseling

For older students, even challenges as difficult as increasing access to college can provide opportunities for high-leverage problems. In particular, low-income and other historically underserved students often "undermatch" by not applying for entrance in programs for which they qualify. One study in North Carolina found that over half of students from low-income families undermatched by attending a less selective college than one to which they could gain access, but only about a quarter of students from high-income families undermatched. Although undermatching has also been associated with decreased odds of graduating from college, successful interventions can have a meaningful effect on these students' long-term life outcomes (Bowen et al., 2009; Chingos, 2014; Hoxby & Avery, 2012).

Illustrating the possibilities, Susan Dynarski and colleagues designed a low-cost intervention at the University of Michigan that focused specifically on increasing the enrollment rates of low-income students who undermatched. This "informational" intervention sent these students a letter that offered a promise of four years of free admission and encouraged them to apply. The researchers found that the students who received this information were more than twice as likely to apply and enroll. Notably, the intervention "closed by half the income gaps in college choice among high-achieving students." Further, it didn't create added costs for the university; it allowed for more efficient and productive uses of funds already dedicated for scholarships (Dynarski et al., 2018).

The issues faced by "threshold" students, such as those who undermatch, make particularly good candidates for high-leverage problems because they address systemic inefficiencies as well as implicit and systemic biases that can prevent students from making progress. Developing any comprehensive approach depends on finding the fit between the needs, concerns, and capacities in different communities, but the work of districts like Passaic and Freehold and the other members of the New Jersey Network of Superintendents demonstrates that educators already have it within their power to pursue a coordinated series of interventions that can help increase access to college (Hatch et al., 2019):

- *Offer assessment preparation for all*. Enable all students to take required college entrance tests early in their high-school careers; waive registration fees; and provide free online preparation opportunities for those who need them.
- *Remove barriers for entrance into college-level courses*. Opt all students into college-level courses; establish clear, consistent criteria rather than subjective criteria for students who choose to opt out.
- *Provide targeted, intensive support*. Monitor access and outcomes in college-level courses with disaggregated data to identify students who need additional support; provide targeted interventions to enable those students to get back on and stay on track, rather than demoting them to lower levels.
- *Strengthen supports for navigating the college and career process*. Provide underserved students with access to counselors, mentors, and peers who can help guide them through finding colleges and careers; eliminate fees and complicated forms and procedures for applying for colleges, jobs, and scholarships.

These steps are just the beginning, but they provide a foundation for the long-term work of developing more intensive and effective academic support and addressing directly the low expectations and systemic barriers that Black and Latinx students and students from families with lower incomes face in schools.

Develop New Approaches to Critical Challenges

Micro-innovations serve as the building blocks for addressing high-leverage problems and building the infrastructure for more

powerful learning opportunities. Linking innovations can strengthen that infrastructure in almost any context. Imagine teachers supported by access to more powerful materials; a network that connects their students to capable tutors, mentors, and other caring peers and adults; and assessments and information systems that assist them in meeting the needs of all their students.

Drawing on materials like eduLab's *wRite Formula* and the math cards of Jo Boaler's Youcubed approach, teachers can support students' learning in key areas where their students regularly experience difficulty. Putting these materials into the hands of tutors, as well, can amplify teachers' efforts. Tutoring provides one of the most effective means of improving academic achievement, but it comes at a high cost, made more complicated by needs for training and difficulties in finding capable tutors (Hill & Loeb, 2020; Nickow et al., 2020). Nonetheless, approaches like those of the Learning Community Project (Chapter 8), IkamvaYouth (Chapter 7), and the Kliptown Youth Program (Chapter 7) demonstrate productive ways to find, support, and organize tutors and "learning facilitators" even in circumstances where qualified and effective teachers aren't available. In countries like the United States, the examples of Citizen Schools (Chapter 9) and City Year and other AmeriCorps programs demonstrate ways to create a steady supply of tutors and mentors who can support learning both inside and outside schools (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2020). To unlock the power of social networks more broadly, Julia Freeland Fisher, in *Who You Know* (2018), and Marc Freedman, in *How to Live Forever* (2018), describe how to connect students in schools with the many people (including seniors) who can also provide support.

In turn, this growing infrastructure for teaching and learning can be enhanced and surrounded by the development of more effective technologies for adaptive learning and expanding opportunities to link students with online learning resources, tutors, and other allies. New tools and software, like those being developed by New Visions for Public Schools (Chapter 7), can help teachers and administrators keep track of students' progress; surface individual and collective learning problems that need attention; and take care of routine tasks, such as tracking attendance.

Strengthening instruction in critical areas and creating related efficiencies can free the time and mental space that teachers need to connect with individual students, focus on their educational and developmental needs, and differentiate instruction. In this scenario, new learning opportunities are added into the school day over time.

Such an approach shifts the focus from trying to overhaul the entire curriculum in a matter of a year or two to providing the tools and support that enable educators to effect a series of targeted interventions that can transform their practice over time.

Take Small Steps to Make Big Changes

The incremental approach to school improvement relies on a fairly simple series of ideas:

- Enable educators to add more powerful and more efficient learning opportunities into the school day.
- Create time and space in the school year that allows educators to provide more targeted support for academic achievement and for pursuing a broader range of developmental goals.
- Develop "add-ons" and "plug-ins" to the school day that take advantage of the new time and space by fitting into some aspects of the conventional grammar of schooling but extending it as well.
- Establish broader social networks of caring adults who can foster students' learning, both inside and outside school.

Of course, making even incremental changes can be challenging, but changes in society, including crises, can create new demands and opportunities for changes in schools. As devastating as the coronavirus pandemic has been, it has exposed ways to begin to address a critical problem with the design of conventional schools: *schools are designed to house students, not to educate them*.

Conventional schools are a better medium for spreading disease than they are for supporting meaningful learning. Learning depends on healthy, safe conditions for students, educators, and all those who work in schools; but schools cram too many people into too little space, and the typical layout of age-graded classrooms along long hallways limits collaboration, exploration, and engagement with the world. We've made things worse in the United States by leaving buildings in disrepair, particularly in low-income communities, and failing to provide adequate ventilation, air conditioning, or heating. Add on a draconian schedule that leaves very little time for healthy activity—whether it's just to take a break, get some exercise, or get lunch at a reasonable hour with enough time to eat—and then ramp up stress levels with high-stakes tests and exams, for which students have to sit in rows, in silence, for hours, facing a ticking clock.

To address this problem, we can take advantage of some of the same steps that help protect students and staff from a widespread outbreak and create a foundation for much healthier and more powerful educational opportunities in the future.

KEY IDEAS FOR CREATING THE EDUCATION WE NEED

- Address high-leverage problems, and build the capacity and constituency for sustained, long-term work.
- Focus on learning that matters.
- Break down the barriers between—and connect—learning experiences "inside" and "outside" schools.
- Condense schooling and increase learning.

Focus on Learning That Matters

The coronavirus-related school closures, and the inequities in access to online learning they exposed (see Chapter 2), raised concerns about "learning loss" and generated a slew of proposals for counteracting it by adding and intensifying work on academic subjects. That conception of learning loss, however, ignores the mile-wide and inch-deep curriculum and age-graded pacing that make it almost impossible for students to catch up once they're left behind.

To address these issues, we can focus on a small set of key skills and concepts every month and provide educators with the tools to ensure that every child meets those goals. Approaches to such a "less-is-more philosophy" have already been laid out by people like Ted Sizer and the Coalition of Essential Schools. The Teaching for Understanding project (developed by David Perkins and Howard Gardner at Project Zero) and the Understanding by Design approach (from Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe) also provide a wealth of examples and resources to help educators focus in on the most generative topics and goals.

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skills relatively quickly. Even at the high-school level in the United States, the responses to the school closures demonstrated that some substantial reductions in academic demands can be made. Shortly after schools in the United States went online, the Advanced Placement program slashed its curriculum and produced shorter exams, with 75 percent of the usual content. According to one of the directors of the program, "Psychometricians have identified subsets of questions that have correlations to the questions we won't be asking this year, so that the shorter exam will have high predictive validity, as usual with AP exams." He added that AP has shortened its exams under a number of other emergency conditions, and colleges have always accepted those scores (Hess, 2020).

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As we remake the school schedule to help stop the spread of the coronavirus, we can stagger schedules to fit students' sleep patterns and development as they get older. We can make sure that students have regular opportunities to take the breaks and get the exercise that we know benefits learning and productivity. As we limit the numbers of people using school facilities at any given time, we can rotate students in and out of schools and expand support for students' learning far beyond school walls. In addition to online learning, we can take advantage of possibilities for education outside on playgrounds, in the natural world, and in gyms, museums, community organizations, and businesses in the surrounding neighborhoods. In the process, we can shift the focus from getting children into schools and embrace the possibilities for supporting students' learning and development wherever and whenever it occurs.

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To increase the reach and power of teachers who have been limited largely to working with students in classrooms, we can engage the volunteers and other young people and adults who have the time and the capacity to play positive roles in learning inside and outside schools (National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2018). The means to fill the demand for this support could come from creating 1 million service jobs (Khazei & Bridgeland, 2020) or other proposals to expand national service, such as the Cultivating Opportunity and Response to the Pandemic through Service (CORPS) Act developed in the US Senate during the pandemic (Ignatius, 2020).

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Condense Schooling and Increase Learning

All these changes are within our reach right now. They don't require new curricula, massive professional development for teachers, or new technologies. Reimagining education begins with reorienting our priorities, making schools healthy and safe, and focusing first and foremost on students' needs and interests, particularly those of Black, Latinx, and other historically underserved students. If we have to, we can start an incremental "less is more" approach slowly, by dropping the teaching of at least one major topic from every subject every semester and monitoring the results. But as we take these steps and rethink our priorities, a more radical possibility emerges: *condense the school day.*

Instead of extending the school day and requiring students to spend even more time on basic skills, imagine concentrating academic support in a few hours, with educators able to utilize sophisticated materials and coordinate contributions from colleagues with specialized expertise, as well as from volunteer tutors, mentors, and online and offline guides. If we could cut the curriculum in half, in a sense, every day would be a half day, opening up opportunities during the rest of the day for students to

- have lunch;
- get outside;
- participate in a variety of school-based, community-based, and online activities;
- pursue their own educational interests; and
- participate in activities that foster a much wider range of goals for their development and education.

Schools in Norway, Finland, Estonia, and other places already demonstrate that students can thrive and succeed in systems with a shorter school day. And Estonia, with a well-established tradition of publicly supported "hobby schools," provides every school-aged child with funding to participate in at least one after-school activity (e.g., music instruction, astronomy and computer clubs, or sports teams) every week.

More radical approaches to rethinking the school day highlight the limits of every improvement effort that focuses solely on changing what happens in schools (Corson, 2020). These "beyond school" approaches to educational improvement take advantage of the opportunities both inside and outside schools for developing what Jal Mehta

and Sarah Fine (2019) suggest might be an alternative grammar of schooling: learning arrangements and practices that can be found in extracurricular activities such as drama clubs, community service projects, and recreation leagues.

Such an approach to rethinking the school day also rejects the tacit assumption that equates education with schooling. As laid out at the beginning of this book, children learn all the time, and that learning goes on throughout life. We can't create much more equitable learning opportunities without addressing the inequitable access to learning opportunities and support wherever learning takes place: inside and outside the classroom, after school, and over the summer.

Whether incremental or radical, these approaches to improvement begin by looking at the educational potential of all the hours children spend inside and outside of schools and then building the infrastructure that enables them to take advantage of the whole day and the whole year in ways that are most productive and personally meaningful. These changes open up conventional schools to allow more unconventional approaches—like those of the Beam Center, Citizen Schools, and others—to take root on a wider basis. This approach shifts from asking how much time children need to focus on school and academic work to asking how can we support children's constructive engagement throughout the day and what role can school play in that process?