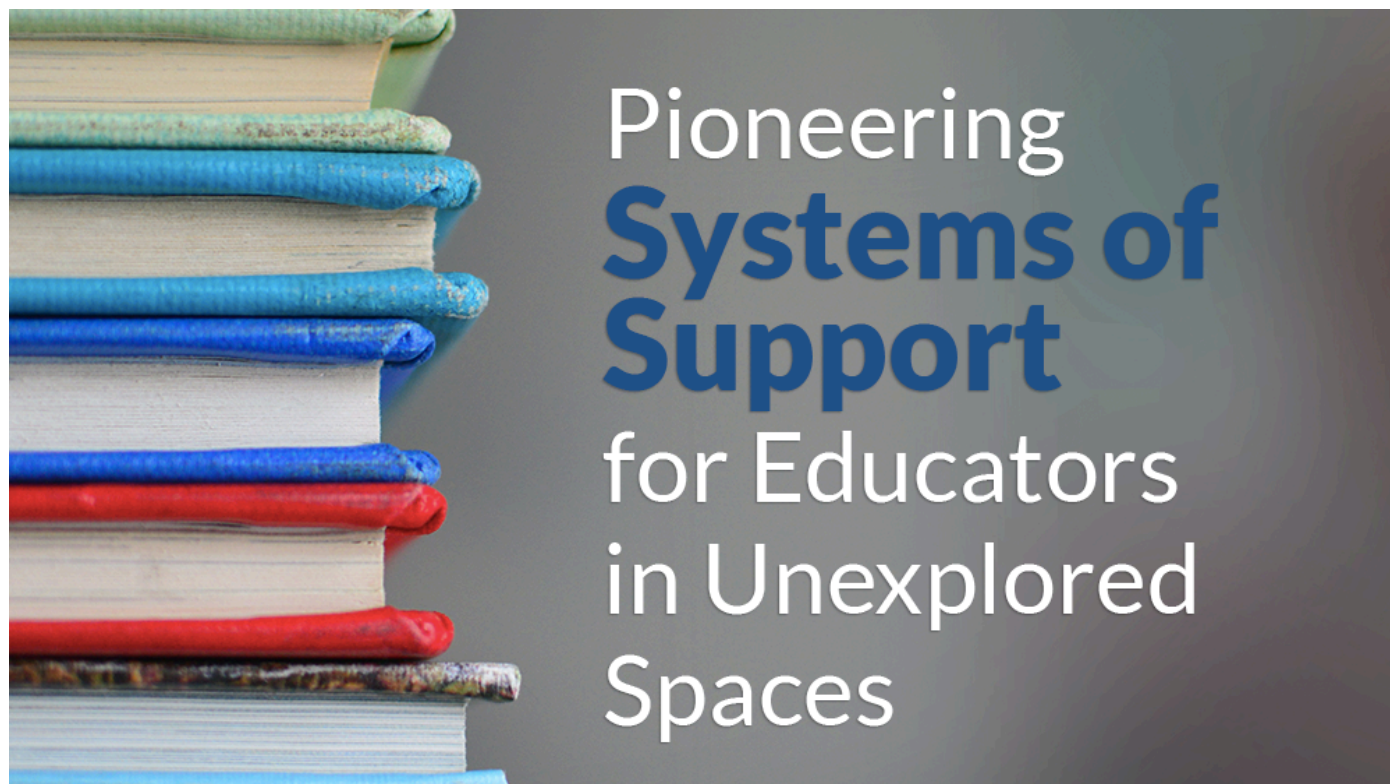


Pioneering Systems of Support for Educators in Unexplored Spaces

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To be an educator right now—be it a teacher, counselor, principal, or instructional aide—is to be a pioneer. This means we are, collectively, the first in very new, very unexplored spaces. These spaces are without markers or guideposts, and, as fast as we can find our footing, they evolve beneath us. This fluidity presents a barrier for educators to see their way forward, to be future-focused, and even process the space they occupy in the present. Monica Jordan, who teaches art at Lindsay High School in Central California, reflects that, “My nine prior years in the classroom may technically classify me as a veteran teacher, but, right now, in many ways, I truly feel like a novice again.”

This professional self-consciousness demands a reconsideration and humanization of systems of support for educators. Since the start of remote instruction, we’ve focused in Lindsay Unified School District on ensuring that [while facilities may be closed, learning remains open\(Open Link in new tab\)](#). It’s an evolution of our longstanding belief about anywhere, anytime learning embedded in our [district’s mission and vision\(Open Link in new tab\)](#). This means, by extension, learning and support are open for our educators as well.



What we have seen since early March is a rapid-fire expansion of the mindsets and motivations of our learning facilitators as they design and deliver instruction to our K-12 learners. For that expansion, there is a matching need for more support and consideration for their evolving teaching experiences. It's not as simple as saying, "let's just offer some professional development." Instead, as a district, we asked ourselves different questions that put the educators at the center of the conversation about support.

- *What kinds of spaces of learning and support would our learning facilitators benefit from?*
- *What kinds of skills and behaviors does remote instruction demand?*
- *How can we build confidence and clarity around those new skills?*
- *How can we build community amongst learning facilitators in times when they need each other more than ever?*

In answer to those questions, we built systems of support that could begin to alleviate some of the pressures that had begun to exist in the instructional space.



Vulnerable Spaces – More than ever, educators need safe spaces where they can be vulnerable and lay their evolving questions and frustrations bare. Jordan, both a learning facilitator at the high school and a parent of learners in our system, admitted, “I wondered if I was doing enough for my learners without adding to their already full plates. If I am feeling these pangs of stress, how are my learners feeling? How do I balance that with continuing to provide a high-quality education?” She is not alone in this thinking. About a week after closure, we offered such spaces for our learning facilitators. We constructed weekly Zoom “labs” to support learning facilitators across a range of topics, including teaching, curriculum, connection to learners, and best uses of online tools. The labs quickly became a space where our learning facilitators could be seen, known, and heard and connected to a community of peers to share their challenges, hear strategies that work, and offer new thinking on curriculum resources and teaching structures.

Developing Skills and Mindsets – Beyond spaces of vulnerability, educators also need spaces that help build the technical and instructional skills necessary for remote instruction, including teaching through Zoom, connecting with learners asynchronously, and creating community and engagement in spaces that feel disconnected and distant. Diana Delgado Salinas, who teaches 5th grade at Washington Learning Community, admitted, “I’m used to having some control and influence over my learners’ progress. Now there are distractions and things happening in the learners’ lives that are beyond my control.” As a district, we moved quickly to provide [virtual professional learning experiences](#) for our educators to address these instructional skills and mindset shifts. Through district partners, we offered short, targeted doses of professional learning

that allowed every learning facilitator to enter into the skillset, whether it was using Zoom, delivering Balanced Literacy, creating virtual choice boards, or broader instructional thinking, such as creating cadence and ensuring equity in synchronous instruction.



Constructing Clarity and Meaning – Most important in these systems of support is the need for educators to have the ability to derive clarity and construct meaning. No amount of professional learning can make up for a lack of meaning and relevance. The weekly labs, the ongoing virtual professional learning, the other coaching structures we leverage—all should foster personal and professional relevance, provide positive reinforcement, and push an educator’s thinking. These support systems should offer them clarity through the foggy demands of remote instruction and construct meaning in encouraging and unexpected ways. Salinas reflects that, “Everytime I leave these virtual professional learning sessions, I feel like a new educator who is growing and developing for the well-being of my learners.”

Our learning facilitators in Lindsay Unified, like so many others, continue to pioneer as the school year draws to a close. Being a pioneer in new spaces means you are always confronting the unknown. It is our role to stand behind these pioneers, offering the tools and skills to help them forge ahead.

Educators, how are you adjusting to this new reality?

Feel free to share how you are adjusting and helping to support students and teachers from afar in our comments section.