4. **Attend to the inherent limitations of distance learning.** Distance learning can be a challenging medium for meeting human needs, but it's the present reality for millions of students. Schools, districts, and states need to be explicit in effectively using technology to know, understand, and affirm their students, leveraging each student's assets and meeting their needs. Education technology cannot be used as a replacement for human interaction, but as a tool to help students and adults communicate, monitor progress, and represent information in different ways.

When those of us who work with and for young people understand their intersectional identities and integrate social, emotional, cognitive, and academic development, we can help address the challenges that young people face, like trauma created by the COVID-19 crisis. This trauma disproportionately impacts young people who carry intersectional identities that are typically marginalized in school settings. It's only when we've addressed these challenges that we can help learners come out of this crisis stronger and more prepared for success.

Question for Reflection:

Do you know how individual students with disabilities, students of color, English language learners, and other systemically marginalized students in your district have been impacted by the COVID-19 crisis?

As a school district leader, you can prioritize the unique experiences of our most marginalized students and then intentionally work to help them to learn and thrive by having clear answers to the following questions and taking the following actions:

Key Questions for School District Leaders

1. How has your district understood and centered the intersectional identities and lived experiences of students in the past? How does that need to change in light of COVID-19?

2. How are you making decisions about hiring, capacity-building, and resource allocation to ensure that educators and school staff are able to meet students' integrated social, emotional, cognitive, and academic needs?

3. How are you setting expectations for schools and supporting educators in your district as they address students' belonging, emotional wellness, and learning and development?

4. Have you considered how social-emotional learning and whole-child approaches can advance equity and help your district meet its obligations under special education law for students with disabilities?

Key Actions School District Leaders Can Take to Support Students With Disabilities

1. **Create and communicate a clear, transparent, and intentional plan to address students' intersectional needs.** Based on a comprehensive needs assessment, this plan should ensure district- and school-level accountability for cultivating belonging and emotional wellness, supporting student learning and development, and providing support to educators (including time, resources, professional development, and acknowledgment) so they can effectively serve students and affirm their intersectional identities. Your plan should include:

   • Professional Development Investments: Provide district-wide professional development on the importance of knowing students' intersectional identities, their assets, and their needs, so educators can build the relationships and supportive contexts for learning that students with disabilities need and are entitled to. These investments should build on existing, effective MTSS, PBIS, and/or RTI systems or seek to create new programs and systems that provide equitable, universal, and targeted supports for students' social, emotional, and academic learning and development.

   • Community Connections: Develop or strengthen partnerships with organizations that complement district and school resources for students and families during the COVID-19 era. Focus on partnerships that can help the district identify and meet students' and families' basic needs, including food, shelter, and health care, as well as those that can meet their social, emotional, cognitive, and academic needs by providing, for instance, internet access, or by providing affirming, developmental relationships and experiences.

2. **Make accessible, timely, and asset-based family and community engagement a priority.**

   • Family Engagement Strategy: Use existing effective district-wide systems — or design new ones — to prioritize and enable proactive, culturally responsive and sensitive, and asset-based family engagement for students with disabilities. Continue to build and act upon knowledge about how to address the many compounding and exacerbating challenges that families are experiencing.

   • Inclusive Communication: Ensure that all communications with students and their families from the district and schools are timely, accessible, proactive rather than reactive, and provided at the same time in their home language (not days after they are provided in English). Communications should encourage input from families and should offer pathways for students and families to ask for and receive help from well-trained support personnel.

3. **Address barriers to effective distance learning.**

   • Access to the Internet and Devices: Address both the technical (access to devices and connectivity) and cultural dimensions of learning that will enable distance learning to be successful for students with disabilities, including access to and engagement with social, emotional, and academic learning. In addition to academic classes, educators could provide digital literacy support for families and create virtual advisory groups for students, intentionally building relationships and belonging. Knowing students and families well can help educators better understand how to lower barriers to effective teaching and learning.