

## IV. We must adjust course

*“This moment of disruption should be a moment of reinvention. It should be a moment when leaders rise up and say: Let’s get beyond stale debates over charters, vouchers, gender neutral bathrooms and the like. We’re going to rethink the nuts and bolts of how we teach in America.” –[“America Should Be in the Middle of a Schools Revolution,”](#) David Brooks, New York Times columnist*

We need immediate action to address the current and long-term learning and emotional needs of older students impacted by the pandemic. Specifically, states and the federal government can:

**Provide transparency about how successfully schools are ensuring that every child is on track to master core skills.** A high school degree needs to mean something again, but most governors and state chiefs are [avoiding the subject](#) of pandemic learning loss, mental health data, and other indicators of crisis. If pandemic recovery matters, states and districts must measure and report on it. Government officials must come clean with families. We call on advocates to push for such reporting. Every child should have a meaningful report saying whether they are on track for college and career success. Virginia’s leadership in this area is encouraging (see [Aimee Guidera’s essay](#) in this volume). Indiana’s [data hub](#) provides transparency about high school, college, and workforce outcomes. Connecticut, Louisiana, Mississippi, and North Carolina also are bright spots.

**Invest in a national youth intervention strategy** that develops, tests, and promotes new interventions (such as strengthening adult-student relationships) and innovative methods (such as AI technology) for struggling adolescents and young adults. The teaching and learning crisis in this country warrants large-scale action and investment. [Aaliyah Samuel](#) offers useful insights about how to close the “relationship gaps” that contribute so significantly to learning loss. [Kevin Huffman](#) urges us to strengthen the role of high-impact tutoring, including the use of AI.

**Invest in high school and college mastery programs** to ensure disruptions wrought by the pandemic and the youth mental health crisis do not derail any young person’s aspirations. Taking a break from college to support family or address mental health issues should not permanently jeopardize a student’s chance of earning a credential. Students who need extra time to fill holes in academic skills, get help with applying to college, or explore alternative career pathways could, as [Tom Kane and Sean Reardon](#) have proposed, split their time among high schools, community colleges, and employers in a transition or gap year after high school.

Community colleges that have lost enrollment in recent years might offer tuition-free (state and federally subsidized) gap-year programs that allow students to finish their high school degree and begin earning college credits or industry credentials.

States, cities, and school districts could invest in outreach programs such as those by CUNY (Reconnect Initiative), as well as provide funding and flexibility to support working students while they complete their degrees. An essay by [Joanne Vogel](#) explains how Arizona State University is adjusting student supports and expanding inclusive learning practices to respond to the new challenges students are bringing to campus since the pandemic, while New York University’s [Kristie Patten](#) spotlights how her institution is helping students capitalize on their neurodiversity.



**Support research to track the Covid generation's progress.** In this report, [Jake Anders](#) describes a long-term study in the United Kingdom tracking student outcomes. CRPE has commissioned several such studies on how older students have been affected by the pandemic, and a new Gallup poll is tracking student views on education, but more data is needed.

Business leaders, university presidents, foundations, and concerned citizens can:

**Rethink high school-to-career pathways.** We need to go beyond pilots for more career-relevant high schools that blur the lines among high school, college, and career. An essay by [Colorado Governor Jared Polis](#) shows how such a “blurring strategy” is central to his state’s education and workforce approach. [David Adams](#) profiles how New York City’s Urban Assembly is offering students multiple pathways to postsecondary success. [Marie Mackintosh](#) spotlights a modern apprenticeship program and other efforts to engage Indianapolis youth. An essay by our colleague [Chelsea Waite](#) draws from our work in New England to show how school systems are offering additional choices that go beyond the limited “college-or-bust” paradigm.

We will simply tinker around the edges of what students need and want if we fail to reimagine American high schools as more engaging, joyful, equitable, and relevant to college and career. Students want to see better attention to mental health supports, career relevancy, and a more dynamic, individualized, and relationship-rich learning environment. This is a big and long overdue endeavor. Now is the time. CRPE director [Robin Lake](#) describes what this might look like in her essay on the New American High School.

