

CAAASA presents:

# Lifting Our Voices:



Presenter:  
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Chief Education Officer  
MILO



*Field Guide #1:  
Revisiting Equity: Transitioning Back to  
School with a Focus on Relationships*

*School Re-orientation for Post-COVID Learning:  
What to Know, Do, and Expect as  
In-Person Instruction Resumes*

*Sponsored by:*  
California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE)



California Association of African-American  
Superintendents & Administrators

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California Association of African-American  
Superintendents & Administrators

# LIFTING OUR VOICES

Reimagining Schools for Students of Color Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

The California Association of African American Superintendents and Administrators (CAAASA), has devoted more than 25 years to educational equity and advocacy. Our work disrupts the trends at the root of California's stubborn opportunity gap for black and brown students. We engage teachers, para-educators, principals, district leaders, students and families themselves to implement evidence-based equity interventions that reduce barriers faced by children of color in California schools.



**Click to Play**

## The “Why”

We find ourselves at a unique moment in history where we have all undergone a collective trauma from which we are beginning to emerge as a regional community, state, nation and global community. Are we going to return to our old way of educating K-12 students? We could not do so even if we tried, because we are not the same people, the same society, nor will we be operating our educational institutions in the same manner as we did prior to March 2020. Since that time, we have lost over half a million US citizens, neighbors, friends, and family members to COVID-19. We have endured over a year of quarantining, home confinement, physical and emotional isolation, as well as economic stress. Going forward, status quo will take on an entirely new definition.

We could easily revert to our previous thinking and to the institutional practices at the root of an inequitable educational system in California. However, CAAASA has recommended that we stop, listen, and re-imagine the delivery of high-quality education for all children in California, not just a few who traditionally have been successful in our schools. Instead, we advocate listening to the experiences and reflections of our students, their parents, their teachers, the para-educators on campus, principals, district staff, and other members of the educational community.



With each set of experiences from a specific vantage point, we learn a unique perspective that tells a different story of precisely how the events of 2020 and 2021 have completely changed millions of lives. We persevered through the COVID-19 pandemic, the crisis of racial justice, and unemployment levels not seen since the Great Depression. From all of the experiences associated with these events, we struggled to adjust to a “new normal,” from which we grew as a society and as individuals. While there were many lessons learned, some of them extremely harsh on many families, we did survive. Now we hope to thrive having gained knowledge from the experiences or what we call the “lessons learned.”

## The “What”

Students, parents, teachers, and other members of the educational community have quarantined, sheltered-in-place, separated themselves from friends and loved ones in manner not seen in the United States for over 100 years. With school closures, children have created new digital worlds for themselves with technology playing a dominant role in their lives for 6 to 10 hours a day with few opportunities for face-to-face interactions that our species has enjoyed for several millennia. These experiences, if they are dissected, carefully examined, and thoughtfully considered, can serve as guides for how we can better serve our students in the coming months when they return to their classrooms on campus.

To assist teachers, parents, and students as they return to traditional classroom learning, the Lifting our Voices Field Guides are designed to make that readjustment both possible and successful by capitalizing on the lessons learned in 2020 and 2021.

Parents and teachers have worked closer together over these past 12 months than during any other time in the history of American public education. This experience has reminded us that education truly is a partnership between the home and the school and the more closely parents and educators work in tandem, the greater the likelihood that each student will be successful academically. Collectively we must commit ourselves not only to closing the achievement gap, but to also addressing the impact of 12 months of unfinished instruction and untaught content (not necessarily a “learning loss”) that has impacted millions of our students of color. We believe that meaningful professional learning experiences for educators constitutes one of several ways in which we can confront both of these contemporary dilemmas simultaneously.

We know where we were and what we learned from these experiences in 2020 and 2021. History tells us that we can invest in schools and not “move the needle academically.” However, investing additional time and extra funding into professional development for classroom practitioners typically yields the best return on investment. Now is the time for us to re-imagine a more successful educational experience for every student delivered by every teacher in California.



## **The “How”**

Now is a perfect time for all of us to take time for introspection where we identify, name, and document our experiences of the past 12 months, and harness the power of those lessons learned. Our students, teachers, parents, and families of color will share their distinctly different viewpoints, diverse strengths, and unique attributes all captured through video in the Lifting our Voices Field Guides. We will examine their experiences and the “lessons learned through video and correlated professional learning experiences for educators.

These professional learning materials are designed around clips of leading educational professionals and videotaped interviews with students, teachers, and parents. Questions accompany each video segment. If your synchronous professional learning experience will be facilitated by a PD leader, you may wish to develop a series of questions that are strategically aligned with the priorities set by your school. Whether the learning is synchronous or asynchronous, there are a series of questions designed to support professional learning with every video segment.

## ***Field Guide #1: Transitioning back to school with a focus on relationships.***

### **Field Guide Overview**

#### ***Description and purpose:***

Very few world events have the extraordinary power to affect nearly every person on the planet in one way or another. For the past 16 months, our lives have been filled with more chaos and uncertainties than any other time in the past 100 years. The rapidly spreading COVID-19 virus and the resultant pandemic of 2020 was one of these few, rare occurrences that has led to varying degrees of collective trauma.

While numerous studies, scholarly articles, news reports, and webinars described how parents, teachers, and students struggled to adjust to this novel pandemic, some individuals were able to cope better than others. Commonly woven into most reports detailing who fared better than whom, was one key factor – relationships. People who maintained regular visits and consistent communications with family members and close friends coped far better than those who leaned towards isolation.

In the 1970s, we frequently engaged in conversations about taking advantage of a “teachable moment” to advance student growth in learning. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the global response to it, we find ourselves immersed in numerous “teachable moment” opportunities worthy of our urgent undivided attention. This Field Guide offers answers to the following questions:

- What have we learned?
- How have we grown?
- What helped us make progress?
- What obstacles did we encounter?
- How do we get all students on a positive learning trajectory?



The Field Guide Transitioning Back to School with a Focus on Relationships examines the ways in which the remote learning policy, (which was our most rational means of addressing both the need to deliver on-going education during a pandemic and simultaneously adhere to the quarantine protocols suddenly erected to reduce the spread of the deadly coronavirus) came at a cost. Remote education also meant disconnected human relationships.

Every classroom practitioner is expected to continue delivering high quality learning experiences to their students even under the current extremely challenging circumstances. Consequently, the critical need for more Professional Development has increased, while the time available to do so remains in short supply. This Field Guide has been designed around the “less-is-more” philosophy with these two concerns in mind. Professional Learning with this module can take place synchronously or asynchronously without diminishing the value of this Important PL experience.

Most importantly, the professional learning experiences oftentimes center around the viewpoints of highly respected researchers and “experts” in educational theory and practices. This project respects the value of decades of evidence-based research from these reliable professional sources, but equally advantageous is learning from the experiences of those who we directly impact in education -- students, parents, and teachers. Each Field Guide offers data and research from noted educational authorities, but they also provide a unique window into the first-hand experiences of students, parents, teachers, principals and other stakeholders who were on the front lines of a vast educational experiment with remote learning substituting for the traditional face-to-face learning experience.

What have we learned and how have we grown should guide our plans for the next 24 months. While few disagree with the call for a clearer path forward, the exact nature of that path has yet to be decided by the educational community.



### **Learning objectives:**

1. Develop an understanding and appreciation of the importance of human relationships in your local educational ecosystem.
2. Recommit ourselves to the value of “community” in our schools.
3. Identify those practices and behaviors that enhance or diminish relationships in a school building and/or a school community.
4. Describe and dissect the attitudes, practices, and strategies that contribute to improved student-to-student, teacher-student, parent-and-teacher, as well as school-and-community relationships.
5. Devise plans to implement more culturally-responsive relationship-building practices at your school site.

### **Components:**

Transitioning Back to School with a Focus on Relationships is built around the following:

- A. Five to six “Voices” - interviews with students, parents, teachers, and other members of the educational community. The focus will be on how their personal experiences intersected with remote learning, living under a pandemic, and how they were able to adapt to the “new normal.”



- B. Lessons learned – analyzing our educational experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic requirements for schools with a focus on what worked, what was unsuccessful, and how we can take those lessons and apply them to add more productive future in our schools.
- C. Each of the above experiences will be accompanied by
  - Questions and written activities, to be completed by individuals or in small groups with opportunities to share responses with colleagues)
  - “Reflections and Applications”
- D. Videotaped excerpts from an “Advancing Equity in an Era of Crisis” webinar conducted by a distinguished California educational leader.
- E. Additional printed and video resources
- F. An evaluation tool.

Completing the Field Guide ***Transitioning Back to School with a Focus on Relationship***, can be one important step that members of your school community can take in unison to get your school back onto a path that leads to equity and educational excellence for every child. This concerted effort is fueled by CAAASA’s faith in our collective power to improve education for all students in general and students of color in particular.





**Click to Play**

*The Voices: Interviews with students, teachers, and parents*

### ***Lifting our Voices***

Video interviews (the “voices”) of California students, parents, and teachers focused around

- (1) The “*lessons learned*” from the remote learning experiences of 2020 and 2021.
- (2) The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the customary interpersonal relationships between students and their peers, students and teachers, and teachers and parents.



**Nicole Brown, Parent**

of a high school junior (Tatum) and a 2020 HS graduate

## The interviewees



**Kalilah Hudson**  
Parent of a second-grade student



**Tatum Brown, Student**  
(daughter of Nicole Brown)



**Shunna Bradford, Teacher**



**LaToya Flowers**  
Teacher



**Leslie Settle**  
Parent and son, Justin

- Responses about relationships. [Click to Play](#)
- The impact of relationships on your students/children. [Click to Play](#)
- Issues related to plans about improving relationships when school resumes. [Click to Play](#)
- Technology and remote learning. [Click to Play](#)

## Professional Learning: Participant Responses

### Relationships and learning

- a. What were your two or three key “take-aways” concerning how relationships impact student learning from the three perspectives?
  1. students
  2. teachers
  3. parents
- b. How were relationships described differently by students, teachers, and parents?
- c. In what ways did these three groups describe the importance of relationships in ways that were (1) the same/similar, and/or (2) different?
- d. For effective learning to take place, sometimes we need to reorder our educational priorities. A teacher’s goal is not exclusively to “cover” content but “discover” who your students are first. What changes will you make now to focus more on “who” you will teach,

before you become preoccupied with “what” academic subject(s) or specific lesson you will teach?

- e. Upon school re-entry this spring or fall for in-class instruction, what will you do differently to address the importance of social emotional learning (SEL) and interpersonal relationships?
- f. How will you apply the interview information concerning relationships to your work with your students when we welcome them back to face-to-face learning?

## **Helping the parents with SEL**

- a. A student’s emotional state can have a demonstrably positive or negative impact on a particular child psychologically as well as academically. Over the past 12 months, what observations did you make concerning the role that students’ emotions played while they learned remotely?
- b. What were some of the unintended negative influences that parents might have had on the emotional state of their children and what were some of their supportive contributions? What are some ways in which teachers can encourage parents to engage in more of the latter throughout the entire school year for all students?

## **Reflections and applications**

- a. As students transition back to in-person instruction, in what ways have we grown wiser and what can we say that we have learned concerning the essential role that relationships play in human learning and in education? With this knowledge how do we continue to grow in the future?
- b. Stanford University educator, Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond often says that students learn as much for a teacher as they do from a teacher. In what ways will you establish closer and deeper interpersonal connections with your students? In what ways are you planning to work with your students to make that initial connection?
- c. How might the content you have observed in these videos address the importance of setting aside time for the Social-Emotional Learning needs of each student before we ask students to concentrate on learning the academic curriculum?
- d. Based on the “lessons learned” referenced in the videos, in what ways should teachers work more closely with parents to assure that the “non-academic” needs of students are receiving as much attention as content whether a child is engaged in remote learning or in-person instruction?
- e. When schools resume in-person operations, most students will be ecstatic and excited to be with old friends and meet new classmates. How will you and your school encourage relationship-building, while simultaneously adhering to the rules of social distancing, without dampening their enthusiasm for being back in “real school”?
- f. Some teachers have gone to extraordinary lengths to help students who struggled during

the pandemic, not only with school, but in their personal lives also (emotionally or psychologically). What special efforts have you and other teachers at your school site made to connect students with one another for:

- i. learning
  - ii. collegiality and support
  - iii. better family relations? What would be required to replicate such an endeavor in your classroom?
- g. The pandemic-induced interpersonal constraints added to the isolation, depression and stress experienced by K-12 students and their families. To reduce these effects and to assist students with a healthy adjustment to the “new normal,” what can be done by
  - i. your school district
  - ii. your school site
  - iii. you?
- h. During the past twelve months of remote learning, students worked independently in the comfort of their own home (their “cocoon”). What can/should be done in each classroom to reacquaint students with the procedures, routines, behavioral expectations, and benefits (rather than merely the “rules”) of
  - i. cooperative learning
  - ii. working in collaboration
  - iii. taking turns
  - iv. working in pairs and small groups
  - v. communicating with peers respectfully and productively?
- i. As we concern ourselves with developing a “whole child,” how can we enlist the support of parents in supporting relationship-building at school in ways that will help their child make the adjustment to in-person instruction?
- j. Future coronavirus outbreaks may force schools too close again in the future. Reflecting on your 2020 and 2021 remote education experience, how would you restructure at-home learning in way that it would better meet the relationship needs of students in your school and/or classroom?



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(The second portion of this Field Guide is centered around excerpts from the “Advancing Equity in an Era of Crisis” webinar #2 delivered by California educational leaders, Lybroan James and Anne Watkins).

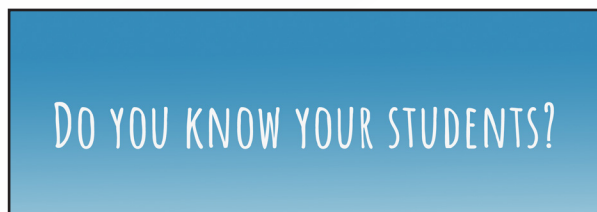
#### **Introduction:**

Psychologists tell us that extraordinary events can lead to lifelong changes. The 2020-2021 remote learning experience caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has changed all of us, and many of us permanently. As we carefully examine the changes in our perceptions concerning life, education, and our relationships with one another, we should acknowledge that the eye-opening events of the last 12 to 16 months have altered each of us and how we see the world.

We cannot go back to where we were and simply “pick up where we left off.” Where we were is a different place now. Who we were as parents, educators, students, and individuals in March 2020 has changed completely. As we entertain just these two factors (understanding that many others are also worthy of consideration), we cannot simply “pick up where we left off” from a place that no longer exists and return to institutions that will no longer look the same nor operate in the same manner. We have experienced a year-long series of life-changing events.

#### **Transitioning back to school with a focus on relationships: Hearing the voices of a California educational leader.**

**Title: “You can’t teach students who you don’t know.”**



The research on effective schools tells us that “You can’t teach students who you don’t know.”

**Synchronous Professional Learning:** Discuss the following questions in your small group and report out to the larger body when you reconvene.

**Asynchronous Professional Learning:** Write your individual answers to each of the following questions.

- How well do you know your students?
- What strategies do you use to get to know your students better?
- How and why does student learning improve when teachers know their students on a personal level?

**Title: School and classroom climate**



Not only can relationships strongly influence the “climate” of a school and/or a classroom, but they can also support the goal of equity in the classroom.

**Synchronous Professional Learning:** Discuss the following questions in your small group and report out to the larger body when you reconvene.

**Asynchronous Professional Learning:** Write your individual answers to each of the following questions:

- Why would you say that the above statement is correct?
- How would you describe the climate of your school?



- How would you describe the climate inside your classroom?
- What kind of climate would you say best described your remote learning (Zoom) classroom for students?
- How did the answers to your above questions impact the relationships that your students were able to establish?

*Title: **Meeting your students where they go and where they are***



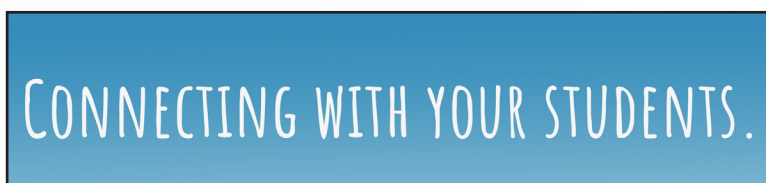
It is considerably more helpful to meet your students where they are, instead of insisting that the “starting point” for all student-teacher interactions begins where the teacher decides it to be.

**Synchronous Professional Learning:** Discuss the following questions in your small group and report out to the larger body when you reconvene.

**Asynchronous Professional Learning:** Write your individual answers to each of the following questions.

- Do you agree with the above statement? If so, why? If not, why not?
- How would you discover “where students are” in their means of communication so you can regularly meet your students there?
- How does reaching out to students via their preferred means of digital communications promote respectful teacher-to-student relationships with them?
- What are the places that you found to be best for connecting with students over the past 12 months?

*Title: **Connecting with your students***



Connecting with your students by regularly engaging them in a personal “check-in” and giving them a safe space online to connect with the teacher and peers are all three critically important factors in the academic success of students.

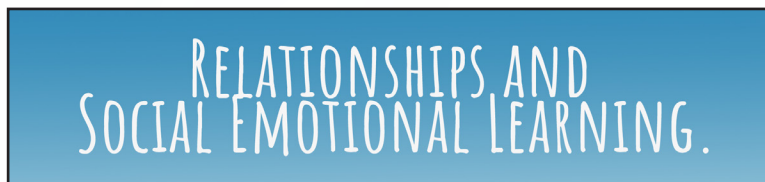


**Synchronous Professional Learning:** Discuss the following questions in your small group and report out to the larger body when you reconvene.

**Asynchronous Professional Learning:** Write your individual answers to each of the following questions.

- Explain why you agree or disagree with the above premise.
- Have you established a consistent and reliable strategy for a regular “check-in” with your students? If not, why not? If so, how is does it work? How well does it work?
- If a student seldom checks-in with you on-line, what message does that communicate to you? What should a teacher do? How have you responded to this situation in the past?

**Title: *Getting the school day or class off to a positive start***



Daily or frequently beginning class with an SEL (Social-Emotional Learning) activity can set the stage for (1) improved academic performance, and (2) positive student-to-student and teacher-to-student relationships, which contribute to a productive day of teaching and learning.

**Synchronous Professional Learning:** Discuss the following questions in your small group and report out to the larger body when you reconvene.

**Asynchronous Professional Learning:** Write your individual answers to each of the following questions.

- Why would the above statement be true for students of all ages? Have you ever encountered any exceptions?
- How can/do SEL activities improve relationships?
- What SEL exercises or activities have you used with your students during the last 12 months? Will you continue them when in person instruction resumes? Why?
- Where do you go to find age-appropriate SEL activities, strategies, and techniques?
- When schools reopen, how much time should be set aside to developing student-to-student and teacher-to-student relationships?

## **Conclusion:**

Teachers, parents, administrators, students, and educational researchers are cognizant that our public schools do far more for students than merely delivering instruction. Among the many contributions to a child’s development are vast range of opportunities to cultivate social-emotional competencies that can influence an individual for a lifetime. While we are concerned about unfinished instruction over the past 12 months, we have become increasingly concerned about the psychological and emotional effects of “virtual education” and its prolonged periods of working

in isolation, the lack of interpersonal interactions, and few prospects for building and sustaining ordinary relationships as children and young adults customarily do in a typical school setting. Human beings are social animals. Students who develop and nurture numerous positive student-to-student and student-teacher relationships frequently outperform classmates with poorer relationships.

The COVID-19 disease mitigation strategies lead to at-home learning for over 55 million American students. Stark disparities in access to high-speed Internet, reliable Wi-Fi, and access to technology tools and resources at home exacerbated the “digital divide” putting students of color at an incalculable academic disadvantage.

As we make plans to transition back to school, whether in the spring or the fall, all members of the school community must play a role in giving every student access to the same level of technology tools and technology support. Equally important, every child must also have access to social and emotional support that often comes by way of high-quality relationships within and beyond the school building.

## Resources:

- A Guide to Parenting Through Crisis, Boys Town  
<https://www.boystown.org/parenting/guides>  
See: A Guide to Parenting Through Crisis
- COVID-19 School Response Toolkit  
<https://tntp.org/covid-19-school-response-toolkit/view/restart-and-recovery-considerations-for-teaching-and-learning>
- Six Parenting Tips to Adjust to Your New Normal  
<https://hernexxchapter.org/blog/2020/06/15/6-parenting-tips-to-adjust-to-your-new-normal/>
- The California Parent and Youth Helpline  
<https://caparentyouthhelpline.org/>  
855-427-2736
- A Work in Progress: Family Resilience and COVID-19  
<https://nyulangone.org/news/work-progress-family-resilience-covid-19>
- Video: Resilience Is Connection: Strong Relationships Create Strong Kids  
<https://www.connecticutchildrens.org/coronavirus/resilience-is-connection-strong-relationships-create-strong-kids>
- Video: Every Kid Needs A Champion by Rita Pierson TED Talk:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFnMTHhKdkw&t=94s>
- Resources for building teacher student relationships  
<https://educationnorthwest.org/resources/resources-building-teacher-student-relationships>
- Health & Safety Guidebook California Collaborative for Educational Excellence  
<https://k12playbook.ccee-ca.org/guidebook/>

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<https://apnews.com/article/survey-schools-reopen-many-students-still-learn-remotely-e4d47c469e5bbd96868766771064f620>
- I Am Going to Physically Explode: Mom Rage in a Pandemic - The New York Times Parenting section July 6, 2020  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/06/parenting/mom-rage-pandemic.html>
- Three Concepts Shaped This District's Plan for Fall 2021 District Administration  
<https://districtadministration.com/increase-school-family-engagement-technology-fall-2021/>
- Opinion: How to keep our most vulnerable students from losing ground in the pandemic  
<https://hechingerreport.org/opinion-how-to-keep-our-most-vulnerable-students-from-losing-ground-in-the-pandemic/>
- Will schools be back to normal this fall? Kind of, sort of, maybe. The Washington Post April 3, 2021  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/schools-fall-plans/2021/03/30/0fb982a8-8daf-11eb-a730-1b4ed9656258\\_story.html?](https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/schools-fall-plans/2021/03/30/0fb982a8-8daf-11eb-a730-1b4ed9656258_story.html?)
- Almost 75% of San Diego families responded to survey want their kids in schools  
The San Diego Union-Tribune April 2, 2021  
<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/education/story/2021-04-02/less-than-half-of-san-diego-unified-families-say-they-want-to-return-to-in-person-school>

## Evaluation-Survey

**Did you find this Field Guide helpful? Please Share Your Feedback!**  
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CAAASA presents:

# *Lifting Our Voices:*

*Reimagining Schools for Students of Color Amid COVID-19: Planning Guidelines to Support the **Leading Forward Learning Series***

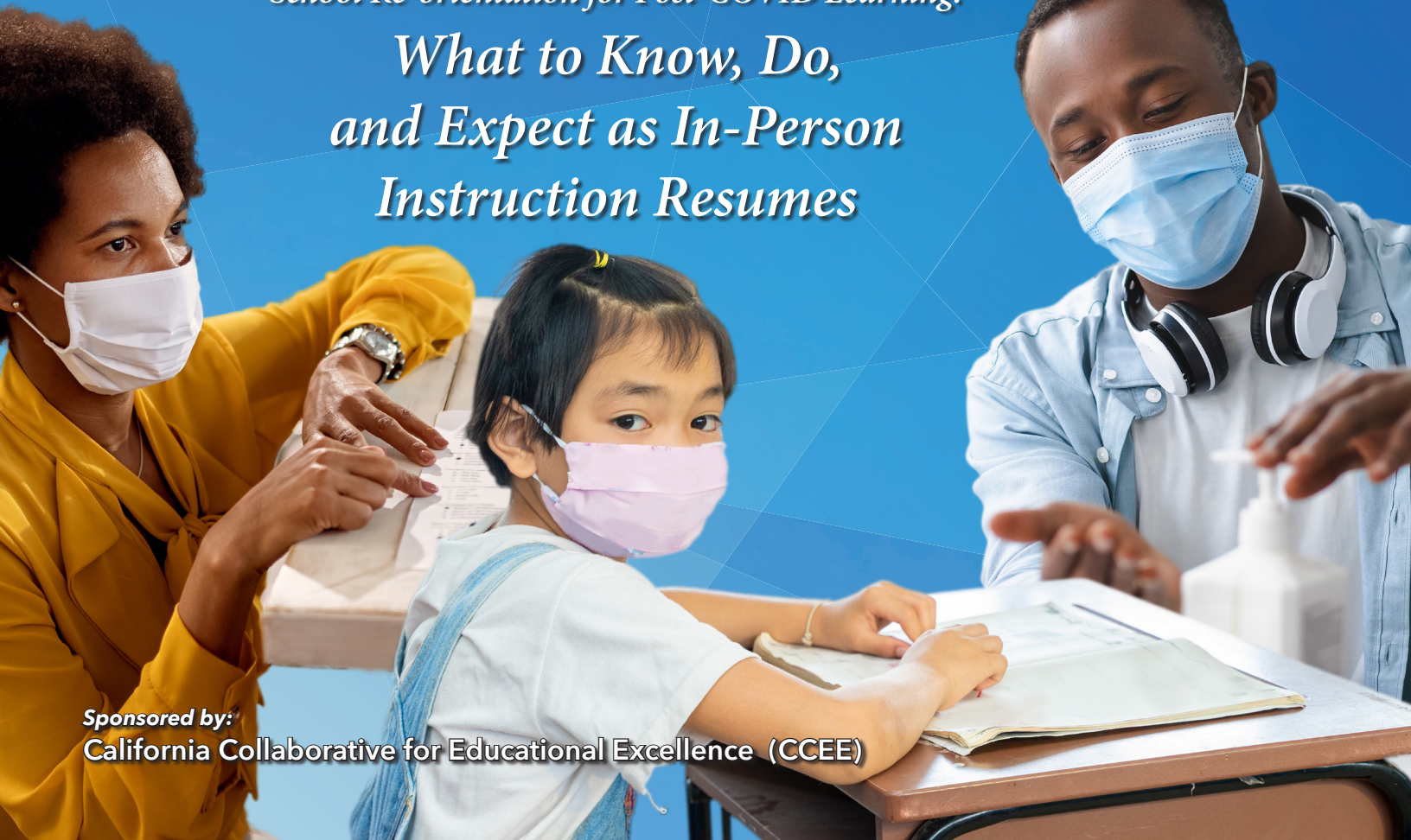


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*School Re-orientation for Post-COVID Learning:*

## *What to Know, Do, and Expect as In-Person Instruction Resumes*



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