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A Reckoning: Changing How We Think About Education and Work in the United States

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Schroeder, Mubina and Kelly, Inas R., "A Reckoning: Changing How We Think About Education and Work in the United States" (2020). *Economics Faculty Works*. 56.

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A RECKONING

Changing How We Think About Education and Work in the United States



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Barring the advent of a miraculous drug, procedure or vaccine anytime soon, schools in the United States, particularly those in urban areas, will not return to any recognizable form in the foreseeable future. This is a sad and uncomfortable fact but the sooner we register this, the better we can address how to ameliorate a difficult situation for everyone involved: working parents, students, teachers, and communities--and especially the economy.

From an economic perspective, we have good reason to focus on channeling resources into education. Education has consistently been shown to affect [economic growth](#), and the [quality](#) of education matters in this relationship. Both employed and unemployed parents currently face constraints. Only [37 percent](#) of U.S. jobs can currently plausibly be performed at home, and while parents with these jobs may be fortunate,

they are not performing them efficiently with the issues surrounding the lack of childcare. Unemployed and low-income parents face financial and digital constraints to remote learning, the so-called [digital divide](#). Education is a key determinant for GDP and employment, but also for [health outcomes](#), which in turn affects economic growth. Intimately linking school schedules to the ability for parents to work has always been an incredibly flawed model; one only has to witness the [difficulties](#) many working parents face during summer months when schools are not in session.

The first order of business may be for schools to aggressively adopt sound remote teaching strategies. This crisis has highlighted just how fragile the support network is for teachers to receive adequate underpinning and resources. Teachers must be trained and given tools to succeed in the virtual environments that will very likely function as their *pro term* classrooms. Districts must work in concert with teacher training institution to augment scaffolding for classrooms. Curriculum, learning progressions, and grading practices will have to be profoundly revised. Our nation's [emphasis](#) on high-stakes testing may have to be finally eliminated. And, alongside, students and families will need to be given the knowledge capital to effectively use technology and support to participate.

With sound remote learning policies and procedures in place, it is important to not overlook adaptive ways to incorporate in-person learning into the repertoire of strategies. Some [countries](#) have been playing around with the idea of using a staggered school schedule where a certain percentage of each school meets on certain days so that social distancing can be utilized. Other, more bold initiatives are to trial the concept of smaller, community-based schooling, where small student groups are assigned to dedicated community pods. These community pods can work together to provide schooling and other resources to their members and can use the concept of more individualized, [play-based](#) curriculum that focuses less on standardization and pricey resources. Smaller, localized classrooms which are quotidian around in the globe, may become the norm in the United States and other industrialized countries.

During this unusual time in history, it is salient to invest in resources for the present and near future. We will have to discard our traditional notions

of schooling, work life balance, and community structures, and start from scratch in some ways. The silver lining is that our institutions of education, of work schedules, and support for parents have long been in need of innovation; this is may be the critical juncture for us initiate a grand rethinking and to see the possibilities in the disruption.

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