A PIVOT AHEAD

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About our author Joel Backon

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Joel Backon
Vice President
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I. Introduction

In March, OESIS published Sanje Ratnavale’s insightful and prescient report, *COVID Survey Report 2020: The Pivot Ahead for Independent Schools*. It is the result of surveying 150 schools about their short-and long-term plans and developing a prescription for school leaders based on an uncertain future. In the Ten Point OESIS Plan, Sanje makes it clear that future events should not turn schools upside down, and specific institutional and programmatic changes will allow our schools to navigate the unexpected without severe disruption. Part II of this initiative report provides a more detailed explanation and analysis of the key pedagogies and programs that Sanje recommends. The target audiences for this entire report are academic leaders and department chairs, and the key analyses will speak to those in a position to make programmatic decisions. There are additional materials directed to department chairs and classroom teachers. Those sections will be boxed in light blue so they can be easily identified.

During the past several months, OESIS has interviewed teachers and administrators at independent schools to find out how they handled school closings and their strategies for moving forward with online learning this fall. The responses have been as varied as one might expect in our “independent” community, and they suggest some important questions about how we approach student learning and what we value. In some ways, it seems unfair to ask schools to step back and reimagine learning when most of their constituents are feeling anxious about losing some form of continuity or normalcy. Addressing the short-term issues of keeping the school “open” are of the highest priority. Still, the COVID-19 crisis provides an opportunity to reassess why we exist and what’s really important. We’re seeing that the online world turns the face-to-face world upside down by making time a variable and learning a constant (from Michael Horn’s post on the Christensen Institute blog). What if we did the same with face-to-face instruction? Might we suggest that true project-based learning is substantially asynchronous in nature, and that is why it fits so well in an online setting? It is a perfect example of time as a variable and learning as a constant. This report speaks to the reasons why we should design our programs and utilize pedagogies that make the transition between classroom and online virtually seamless.
We now know these past few months represent the largest launch of online programs in history. What have we seen to date that might support a longer-term seamless transition between face-to-face and online learning?

- Increased use of the LMS: While some LMS platforms have added videoconferencing tools, their emphasis is on asynchronous learning, a delivery better suited for the online environment and reflective of more student-directed learning.

- New policies on synchronous and asynchronous delivery of online learning: A few schools have directed that academic work will be asynchronous and other in-class or out-of-class meetings with students will be synchronous. The goal is to maintain real-time video contact with students while freeing them to do their academic work on their own schedule (time as a variable).

- Example: One Pre-K Montessori class has a daily routine that opens with a 30-minute Zoom meeting of students and teachers. For 15 minutes, the students are encouraged to catch up with each other, laugh, and enjoy themselves. During the final 15 minutes, the teachers explain what the kids will be learning that day and how they might accomplish their goals. Parents are encouraged to join the second segment. Again, the time as a constant piece was for group socialization and planning. The time as a variable or learning piece occurs when it works best for the kids and their families.

Going forward, the need to plan for additional openings and closings will be a good chance to identify those programs and pedagogies such as PBL, SEL, and CBE that will make the transitions more seamless. **Note that OESIS is not arguing that the above programs should be implemented because of the current crisis. We have always advocated for these programs in independent schools.** The crisis provides still another reason for moving forward. Our overall recommendation is in the interest of being responsive to the needs of learners and the opportunity to distinguish innovative schools in a very competitive education environment.
The structure of this report is to walk you through the case for adopting programs and pedagogies that render the delivery mechanisms to your students a seamless transition and a co-dependent options (both delivery mechanisms operating simultaneously: blended learning). Section II is an Executive Overview, summarizing the key points in this report. Section III looks at common misunderstandings about new forms of learning in an effort to address some traditional objections to rethinking school. Section IV addresses why PBL, SEL, and CBE are not impacted by delivery modes, making them essential practices and programs for schools of the future and cornerstones of the school community. While the current strain of COVID-19 will end at some point in the foreseeable future, these three practices and programs guarantee that the student learning experience will progressively improve. Section V briefly imagines what an independent school might look like in 10 years.
II. Executive Overview

Will Richardson often talks about his conversations with teachers regarding how kids learn and what they should be learning. He then asks if what they are doing in the classroom aligns with their responses regarding student learning. Most of the time, they do not. Then Will asks about the discrepancy, and he hears responses that are disempowering for teachers and students. Teachers feel they have to teach in a way that supports the factory model of education, designed to move all students at the same pace and toward the same goals of learning collections of content, even though information is not a scarce resource anymore. Virtually all the current research supports student-directed learning resulting from autonomy, mastery, and purpose, and that approach works very smoothly in an online asynchronous delivery setting. We are not arguing that online delivery for K-12 students is the optimal environment; it can be very effective, but cannot match the F2F adult support mechanisms provided by independent schools. Instead, we argue that the need for online delivery creates an instructive and opportune time for schools to augment the migration to PBL and SEL pedagogies under the umbrella of a CBE program of study. There are a number of reasons for doing so:

Kotter’s 8-Stage Change Model
1. A learning model that is not place- or time-dependent is more consistent with the needs of students in the 21st century, develops higher order thinking skills, and creates a pathway for lifelong learning. It provides schools with flexibility to focus on skills that are more dependent on F2F contact while still providing a challenging academic experience.

![OESIS-XP PBL content by subject](image)

- **Milestone 1: What is PBL?**
- **Milestone 2: Why PBL?**
- **Milestone 3: Goals of the PBL**
- **Milestone 4: Performance Tasks**
- **Milestone 5: The Role of a Driving Question**
- **Milestone 6: Planning the PBL & Formative Assessment**

2. PBL, in its purest form, will be a “time as a variable” pedagogy designed to immerse students in deeper learning by appealing to relevant and large questions that inspire student engagement. The desire to answer those questions by determining what one currently knows and what must be learned empowers students to create a learning plan that concludes with the public presentation of the answers to the questions followed by feedback and reflection. It is an ideal learning experience that will uncover the mysteries of any academic subject.

3. SEL will be a universal soft curriculum that enhances any interaction between people, and therefore augments the learning experience for all students (and adults) since much learning is a social activity. It has always been unencumbered by time or place and provides a set of strategies that are used to be supportive of others in the learning process by increasing self-knowledge and shifting mindset. It is similarly a good fit for the PBL pedagogy because PBL is highly dependent on collaboration, communication, and empathy.
4. CBE will become the school’s programmatic pivot to a “time as a variable,” personalized, and student-directed approach to learning with the goal of mastering a set of competencies defined by your school. Mastery will be assessed in the form of demonstrations that are publicly certified, result in the awarding of badges, and are shared in a student-driven portfolio. That portfolio will be the source of information used by schools, colleges, and employers to evaluate what students can do and what skills they have mastered (through the Comprehensive Learner Record).

5. Much of the hesitation to move forward with the above initiatives is a result of misunderstandings regarding a) effectiveness of the current learning programs; b) the roles of project-based learning, social-emotional learning, and competency-based education; and c) the synergies between online and face-to-face learning. In particular, PBL is almost universally misunderstood, and the impressions of online learning are frequently confused with the current state of online courses.

6. We can imagine schools in which the above programs and pedagogies will exist in settings that provide maximum flexibility for student learning, faculty support of students, administrative guidelines, and student enrollments. Those programs provide a window into long-term sustainability that will require the kind of “disruption” that has traditionally been applied to corporations.
III. Common Misunderstandings

Many educators long for the day that we return to campus and life proceeds with a kind of “new normalcy” that the current online learning arrangement does not seem to satisfy. One wonders whether that return to campus will be accompanied by an enlightened understanding of student learning or whether the perceived limitations of online will be used as a “straw man” to argue for a return to prior programs and pedagogies. Are the intuitions of most educators based on the realities of learning research or are they influenced by an inertial mythology of the differences between F2F and online learning? Does the existence of that mythology inhibit teachers from extracting “lessons learned” from the online experience? We surveyed teachers to see where their beliefs about online and other progressive pedagogies fall compared with colleagues. Let’s look carefully at some of the misunderstandings highlighted by the reported variations in results.

1. The research shows that online learning is not as effective as F2F — MISUNDERSTANDING — Hundreds of research studies have looked at online and F2F comparisons with varying results. The biggest drawback is the establishment of control groups since we rarely ask students to complete the same course twice
with differing delivery mechanisms. Most of the more recent studies conclude that there was no statistical difference between the assessment results from students that participated in both online and F2F courses. Furthermore, a third mixed delivery option, blended learning, yielded better results than either F2F or online.

2. **Blended Learning is not a good fit for introductory level courses, particularly in language and math courses** — **MISUNDERSTANDING** — First, blended learning is a mix of F2F and online delivery designed to take advantage of the strengths of both. Many teachers have argued that blended learning may work well for older students in more advanced courses, but not for younger students and/or introductory courses, where they argue face time is critical. Prior to the explosion of online multimedia voice and video, that argument may have contained some truth, but today there is little evidence that students always have to be under the supervision of the teacher in order to learn introductory curriculum. In addition, the station rotation model, in which students work independently for periods of time, is widely used in Pre-K through elementary grade levels. Thus, a blended model would certainly work in middle and high school. A number of independent schools have seen great success with the blended approach, and it has addressed a number of bottlenecks in school schedules and course enrollment fluctuations. Fewer class meetings means a more flexible schedule, better suited for the CBE, PBL, and SEL environment. Also, blended learning, like online learning, supports personalized learning plans very well. One school, experiencing significant declines in Latin enrollments, combined all Latin students in a blended environment so each student in the “class” could progress from their current level of expertise at their own pace.

3. **Online Learning was not designed for young children** — Potentially a MISUNDERSTANDING — When online was reading-intensive, young children’s interactions with the online world were primarily through simple games and
dialog. Today, young kids have the benefit of a full set of media tools for simulation, cartoon explanations, video, and live conversations with teachers. Still, short attention spans and visual fatigue are important considerations when designing an online program for young children, and parents will almost certainly have to play a role in their children’s learning. One suggestion from an experienced educator was seven-minute segments of activity followed by seven-minute breaks, with longer breaks every 30 minutes. Another educator pointed out that failing to follow such a structure resulted in young students completing the work for the day in two hours or less, and parents asking the school for more work. Schools have responded by recommending the breaks and explaining to families that heavier workloads are a form of babysitting. In short, there are a variety of ways to engage young children in online learning as long as it is chunked in small morsels, parents oversee the work of their children, and expectations are appropriate for the age level. See Khan Academy Kids as an example.

4 abcMouse.com

4. Online delivery is a secondary or backup strategy to be used when our schools are forced to close or operate during a pandemic — MISUNDERSTANDING — While the current scenario certainly influences the spread of this misunderstanding, stepping back for a moment will reveal evidence to the contrary. First, many independent schools are currently offering online courses to their students, primarily through consortia. For most of these schools, there is an implicit understanding that these credit-bearing courses are academically equivalent to any other course in the school catalog. Second, schools that are practicing blended learning are de facto endorsing the notion of online delivery of learning. What was different about the Spring 2020 scenario was its
universality. All of school occurred online. What if there are other scenarios besides a pandemic that force your campus to close or evacuate, and what if you enroll students in other parts of the country or world who must use the online delivery platform to become part of the school, either through separate online courses or hybrid courses with a mix of F2F and online students? Furthermore, in the blended model, there is a significant online component. Would we argue that for some students or at certain times learning is less effective because of the delivery format?

5. **Many online initiatives have failed** — likely a MISUNDERSTANDING — Unfortunately, the media would have us believe this since they cover big failures more than big successes. Many early initiatives failed because the infrastructure wasn’t as robust, and the audience was different; online was primarily targeted at continuing education. It wasn’t a delivery alternative, but a necessity. During the past 10 years, the infrastructure has improved significantly, and the scope of online audiences has expanded. Some observers have written that MOOCs failed, and that is because repackaged, recorded lectures are not going to capture the hearts and minds of busy post-college adults. Course quality should be designed for the audience and take advantage of the strengths of online learning. A forklift move of a course from the F2F classroom to an online platform is an expedient decision, and not a good long-term strategy. Consequently, as teachers and students better understand the strengths of online delivery, the quality of online learning will improve.
6. **Online learning is generally lower quality learning than F2F** — MISTUNDERSTANDING and inconsistent with learning theory — The quality of any learning is measured by student assessment, both formative and summative. Delivery platforms do not define the success or failure of learning. Formative assessments work as well, if not better, in the online world because they can compile results for teachers instantaneously (an exit ticket, for example). Summative assessment in the online world will vary based on design. The traditional factual test/exam is always at risk in the online world because there are many sources for answers, despite the desire to “lock down” the desktop. If we were to design assessments that were aligned with the online delivery platform, they would work equally well in the F2F setting, but would be different than traditional classroom assessments. Certainly, the PBL and CBE assessment models, where students demonstrate their mastery of topics and competencies, will work well in any delivery setting. When we have more alignment of assessments that are delivery-neutral, we will be able to research potential variability in outcomes.

7. **F2F learning is inherently more equitable than online learning** — IMPLICITLY BIASED by experience; lacking data to draw reasonable conclusions — It’s important to distinguish between equity of infrastructure and home environment, and equity in learning. The latter is most closely tied to personalized learning and is delivery neutral. The goal of student equity is to meet students where they are, as a starting point, and allow them to proceed at their own pace with support through teacher intervention. The argument made by most supporters of this likely myth is that some students do not have access to online tools and therefore are at an inherent disadvantage. In public schools, that has turned out to be a big setback in the current environment to the point where a local TV news channel in Washington, DC, has carved out time in their broadcast day for schools to deliver assignments and content to their students. In the independent school world, we have at minimum, a responsibility to make sure that equity at the basic needs level is practiced. People who are paying for their education must be provided with the tools and access to make them successful. Once those tools are provided, a shift to PBL, SEL, and CBE options will create an equitable learning experience.
8. **Online learning causes screen-time fatigue, something we don’t experience in the F2F world** — INACCURATE and misdirected —

First, online learning doesn’t cause screen-time fatigue; spending too much time in front of a screen does. Effective online learning design (primarily asynchronous) does not keep students in front of the screen all the time, particularly younger students. Second, fatigue can certainly be a factor in a F2F classroom as well. Last year, I observed a high school classroom of 12 students, in which four dozed throughout more than half of the class, and another four spent a good deal of time looking at websites that were unrelated to the subject-matter (shopping for shoes, ESPN, various actors). Learning fatigue is a result of lack of engagement and variety (or no sleep) and can be addressed with effective online learning design. Too much time on anything or boredom will lead to fatigue. See [Brene Brown’s recent blog post](https://www.brenabrown.com/blog/screen-time-fatigue) regarding screen time fatigue and the call for everything in moderation:

And, for those of you asking students to get dressed and sit in front of the computer for 8-10 hours, as if they’re in class . . . I hate to have to tell you — that is NEVER going to happen. Neurologically — it’s screen time. Have you ever been in the same room with someone who has played Minecraft for four or five or six hours? Non-human.
9. **PBL, despite its delivery platform neutrality, is an old pedagogy that never gained much traction** — MISUNDERSTOOD and INACCURATE — PBL might be old by contemporary standards, but that doesn’t mean outdated (the factory model is much older). Good ideas often take time to catch on. Regarding traction, PBL is growing more quickly worldwide more than any other pedagogy (not surprisingly, the U.S. is behind). The number of schools that use PBL exclusively is much smaller. As we have argued earlier, PBL is aligned with almost all of what we currently understand about effective learning, and while it may challenge the requirements of a traditional content-intensive curriculum, it does not undervalue the importance of content. Students who successfully complete PBL projects master the content to which they have been exposed and develop many more skills than students learning in a traditional scope and sequence curriculum.

The coverage model of teaching courses is really designed for the school and the teacher, not the student. By moving through course material at a pace defined by the length of the term, only a small segment of students in the class will be able to master that material. The rest of the students will have gaps that our Carnegie-unit system has determined will be reflected by lower grades and movement to the next level with only partial understanding. We are asking students to construct a house frame with a hammer but no nails. It is an unfortunate view of our traditional courses, in contrast with the learning and equity benefits of PBL, a pedagogy whose time has come.

*Projects presented in a member school’s Maker Space*
10. **Teaching students SEL is the job of school counselors, psychologists, and the medical staff** — OUTDATED AND UNREALISTIC — Before we understood the impact of social-emotional learning on student academic success, it was prudent to make this claim. Now that we understand the direct and consequential connection between the social-emotional state of students and the effectiveness of their learning, it is the job of every teacher to integrate SEL into their curriculum. PBL provides the easiest pathway for such integration because the set of SEL skills required are well-defined (collaboration, communication, empathy). If we are creating social-emotional obstacles for students as a result of course-related challenges or if we are failing to recognize student anxiety as an inhibitor to learning on any given day, we are not acting in the best interests of our students.

11. **CBE is beyond the capability of most schools to implement and requires a challenging reorientation of school constituencies** — MISUNDERSTANDING OF THE EDUCATIONAL CANON; anything worth doing is worth doing well — If your school is planning to embed CBE into the fabric of who you are, then it will be challenging to implement, meaning strong leadership required, lots of people involved, and much time invested. There are strategies and plans available that make the process more transparent and accessible, and some schools are well on their way to full implementation. Alternatively, if you view CBE as a marketing promotion (define portrait of a graduate for your website and identify competencies that are disconnected to coursework as your end point), then it will not be difficult to implement. Reorienting your faculty, students, parents, alumni, and Board is not as challenging if one approaches the pivot from a self-reflective framework. Ask yourself some key questions (many schools are) such as whether the current system of grading is equitable and fair to all students in all courses for starters. As you explore the honest answers to that question, you will construct the argument for CBE in a way that will be difficult to challenge except on the grounds that it is a risky change, threatening a system that worked successfully for many years (reflecting Robert Evans’ sense of loss as part of school change). Of course, remaining status quo is also risky because some of the schools with which you compete may not remain status quo and you could be viewed as the outlier or be unprepared for sudden enrollment shifts as a result of existential factors. While not every school can implement CBE today, every school can be planning to move forward with CBE. The weight of the answers to the big questions you pose will determine how vigorously your school pursues the prize of personalized and effective student learning in a vibrant community, what you sell.
# 2020 Network Participation Options

Complete our online school profile form to express interest in joining.

## Subscription: No Platform Access

### Benefits

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<th>PLATINUM</th>
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<td>Silver subscriptions do not include platform access.</td>
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<td>• $2,500 annually for schools with &lt;100 faculty</td>
<td>• $15 per student enrolled in school K-12</td>
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<td>Gold OESIS Network membership includes faculty access to all our platforms</td>
<td>A $1,000 Network Partner subscription includes full access to:</td>
<td>• $3,500 annually for schools with 100-200 faculty</td>
<td>• Minimum of $5,750</td>
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<td>Platinum OESIS Network membership also includes student access to Portfolium Mastery Assessment and ePortfolios</td>
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### XP Innovation Content Repository Faculty PD

- Not Included
- Academic Faculty PD
- Academic Faculty PD

### OESIS Cohort Pathways managed by Network Leaders in PBL, SEL, CBE and more

- Not Included
- $100-150 per OESIS Cohort Pathway per teacher
- $100-150 per OESIS Cohort Pathway per teacher

Introductory Level, Level 1 (Planning Unit Developer), Level 2 (Practitioner) and Level 3 (Master Credential) Faculty Professional Development Cohort Pathways start every two months in January, March, June, September and November. Faculty who successfully complete each level with feedback from an OESIS Network Leader will earn a digital badge.

### OESIS Conferences

| | 25% Discount | 35% Discount | 35% Discount |
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| Research Surveys & Reports | Included | Included | Included |
| Portfolium Mastery Assessment Platform & linked Portfolio for Faculty to set up their own Pathways, Rubrics, Learning Outcomes | Not Included | Included\* | Included |
| OESIS Career Confidential Teacher Recruitment Platform | Not Included | Included | Included |
| Portfolium Mastery Assessment Platform/ E-Portfolio for Students | Not Included | Not Included | Included for all enrolled students up to maximum of 1,250 |

\* Set up and training options will be discussed at time of joining for all platforms.
Our Innovation Pathways Solution

OESIS Network Gold membership has been expanded to include asynchronous faculty foundational pathways in CBE, PBL, SEL and Flex-Blended Design. We offer innovation strategy pathways in critical thinking, cultural competency, grading and STEAM. Member schools access pathway curriculum through a customized OESIS-XP portal. Combining the foundational pathways with our additional pathways for innovation strategies enhances student agency and outcomes. “Our pathways can be completed independently by teachers or with a designated OESIS Network Leader to help them. Each pathway takes eight to 10 hours of work and includes readings, videos, and assignments with lots of options,” explains OESIS President Sanje Ratnavale.

OESIS members who want to receive feedback from our national faculty on the units they are developing may register for a cohort pathway ($100 intro; $150 Levels 1,2 or 3; or a Department PBL Cohort). Customized in-service sessions based on pathways may also be arranged.

Ask about Portfolium Student Pilots

OESIS Platinum members also have an assessment module where teachers can build customizable skill pathways based on performance requirements and milestones. Recognition of mastery, growth or excellence is based on school-defined rubrics, competencies, skills or standards and rewarded with badges or (mastery) credits towards pre-requisites.

OESIS also offers its Platinum members student ePortfolios that document credentials earned in the mastery assessment platform. The ePortfolio is a student-controlled private life-long collaborative repository of their learning journey (and for parents with children under age 13). Both the ePortfolio and the assessment/recognition solutions sync with many school’s student information and learning management systems.
IV. Delivery-Neutral Programs & Pedagogies

As this report is written, independent schools are in the midst of a transition from a classroom and community learning experience to one that will include mixed delivery methods. The conventional wisdom is that, at some point, life will return to normalcy. Everybody has worked very hard and displayed amazing cooperation and sharing to get to this point, but the uncertainty of the future means that these transitions might become somewhat routine in one scenario and more the rule than the exception in another. If we think back to those wonderful days prior to the pandemic threat, what kinds of programmatic and pedagogical discussions were occurring? Likely:

- Rethinking grading (standards-based, more equitable)
- Increasing student autonomy
- Pivoting to more formative assessment
- Revisiting project-based learning
- Integrating more social emotional learning into the curriculum
- Defining the portrait of a graduate
- Considering mastery- or competency-based programs
- Reimagining transcripts
- Incorporating student portfolios

Some schools moved ahead in several of these areas, programmatic changes, but not moving forward either because design and implementation resources were scarce, or the topic represented a perceived threat to the school community from one or more constituencies. The situation has changed. What is occurring right now during this transition to online learning reveals to all of us the importance of delivering a quality program that will serve all of our students equally well regardless of where and when they are learning. While the power of our campus communities has allowed us some latitude and bought us time to defer some initiatives, we now understand that longer-term shifts will be necessary to sustain the financial and educational health of the school. Disruption to our overall lives does not have to negatively disrupt student learning. In fact, with some creativity, disruption can represent an optimal learning experience.

We propose that schools seriously consider the following model that is not as place- or time-dependent, equally effective regardless of setting, more consistent with the needs of students in the 21st century, develops higher order thinking skills, and creates a pathway for lifelong learning. The model does not suggest that what we are doing well today is outmoded or irrelevant. We still want our students to learn the content of academic disciplines and develop the skills of effective leaders. In short, we can incorporate the best of what we are doing
With a new program, parts of which can be transitioned incrementally to avoid disrupting learning, we recommend that schools do the following:

- Transition most courses to a project- or problem-based approach (PBL). This may mean something different in each academic subject, but the goal is to ask students to answer big and challenging questions as a means of learning the subject matter and skills required to successfully answer those questions. PBL does not mean replacing the traditional summative assessment at the end of each learning unit with a project. In PBL, the project is the curriculum, guided by formative assessment. The process and accompanying content are the focus, effectively reducing student anxiety (through SEL techniques) when the project deliverable is presented and evaluated. The summative presentation is defined by equitable grading practices and a feedback narrative.

- Integrate social-emotional learning (SEL) into each and every course and school program. The goal is to reduce the overall level of student stress and anxiety, thereby increasing the quality of student learning. The short-term benefits will be to meet student needs during your programmatic and pedagogical transition. The longer-term benefits provide a softer and more integrated curriculum that helps students thrive in highly demanding learning settings.

- Pivot all school programs to an integrated set of experiences that provide opportunities to demonstrate their competency or mastery (CBE) for those outcomes that your school deems important based on your portrait of a graduate. Make the necessary additions in transcripts to reflect the pivot and embrace the notion of a true student-directed portfolio that provides a narrative of student learning and a social setting for sharing learning experiences. If necessary, roll out this program incrementally, beginning with either co-curricular activities or special/capstone programs. Then expand the program to student electives and the core curriculum.
As you navigate through this transition, your programs will shed the limits of time- and place-based learning, develop great 21st century students, and plant the seeds for lifelong learning. Let’s examine the three steps in more detail.

a. PBL and its impact on the school community

If you would like to design and teach in a project-based paradigm, OESIS offers PBL Faculty Pathways and a one-day in-service program for just that purpose. Like design thinking, PBL is a process that students master (making it transferable) and then can manage themselves with appropriate support from peers and teachers. The complexity of the process will increase based on grade-level and the details of the process will be nuanced by the requirements of specific academic subjects. The general process, however, will become routine over time. According to Bob Lenz, Executive Director of the Buck Institute for Education, there are six criteria of high quality projects:

- **Intellectual Challenge and Achievement:** Students learn deeply, think critically, and strive for excellence.

- **Authenticity and Empathy:** Students work on projects that are meaningful and relevant to their culture, their lives, and their future.

- **Public Product:** Students’ work is publicly displayed, discussed, and critiqued.

- **Collaboration & Communication:** Students collaborate with other students in person or online and/or receive guidance from adult mentors and experts.

- **Project Management:** Students use a project-management process that enables them to proceed effectively from project initiation to completion.

- **Reflection:** Students reflect on their work and their learning throughout the project.

OESIS research reports are accessible to members only.

*See other membership benefits on page 17.*

Annual OESIS Network Gold Memberships cost:

- **$2,500** for up to 100 faculty
- **$3,500** for up to 200 faculty.

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The most common question raised by teachers is how to adapt all the existing course content and skills work into a PBL format. The short answer is that not everything will be transferable given the nature of project work, a very unsatisfactory response for teachers who are committed to their scope and sequence or teaching an AP course. The reality of quality PBL is that there are stages of the process in which much of your current curriculum might be incorporated but will require flexibility regarding scope and sequence. There are several opportunities for injecting the course curriculum, and some of those opportunities may not be planned, depending on how well students manage the project. Here are some of those opportunities (based on Boud & Feletti, The Challenge of Problem-Based Learning, 1997).

Our experience indicates that the quality and scope of the big or challenging project question will define how much of your existing curriculum will be included. PBL work is often completed in teams, where a combination of individual and collective resources can be brought to bear. The first thing students will do is organize their ideas regarding a response to the big question based on previous knowledge. The goal of the subsequent discussions is to define what aspects of the question they do not understand so they can create a matrix of their thinking that includes what they know and what they don't.
know. If you, as an experienced teacher, anticipated what they don’t know, it is an opportunity to introduce the curriculum of your subject matter. If you feel students will not be able to master a necessary concept without understanding two previous concepts, then you have a choice: Point the students in the right direction and see what they come up with, filling in the appropriate gaps or create mini-workshops in advance, and students learn the requisite concepts or facts in order to move forward.

As students collect and compile the information and coaching, they must now rank them as useful tools for breaking the question into fundamental parts that can be pursued by subsets of the team or individuals. This is an opportunity for you, the teacher, to introduce project-management techniques and tools that capture the resources needed and where they can be located, who is responsible for what, and realistic timeframes for completion based on the overall project schedule. You might also introduce the notion of a contingency plan; what happens if something goes wrong with a component of this project? Finally, there is an ongoing process of students reviewing what they have learned to date, what still needs to be learned, and how that learning will be applied to the question at hand. There is no guarantee that students will be exposed to every step of the current course curriculum. However, if the goal is learning, not coverage or exposure, then you will be more confident that students have learned those curricular components they needed to complete the project. What happens to the gaps from your old curriculum? They wait for the next project or you lower their priority in your traditional scope and sequence.

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You may be thinking to yourself that PBL seems great in concept, but what about the realities of managing a classroom of kids who are doing PBL for the first time. I have done this in my own classroom, so I know it works. I also know that the process of student adjustment was made more difficult because many of my colleagues in other disciplines were not adopting PBL. The students were only learning it in my World History class. I wanted the students to understand each step of the project as a progression and development in their thinking (verified by formative assessment) rather than a series of discrete submissions; they figured it out. Most importantly, doing PBL forced me to rethink some of the issues we identified at the start of this section. I had to rethink the frequency of formative assessment (more is better), rethink grades (more standards-based), and constantly remind each student that this project was theirs, not mine. I helped formulate the original big question and be a resource and coach to each student and team when they needed me. Was it more work? Initially, yes. Anything you try for the first time is more work because you don’t know what to expect. Before long, however, the workload was about the same as teaching the previous course, although the types of work I did were allocated quite differently. I spent almost all of my time interacting with students in the context of the curriculum. Isn’t that why we’re teachers?
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Source: Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy

The most important lesson of PBL is that it does not care about setting or delivery. Students need the ability to interact, they need access to tools for planning, research and submission of the final project. They need to do research, but in the K-12 world, they are not researching at the Masters or Doctoral level. While a steady diet of Internet sources is not ideal, it can work (bricks and mortar libraries are only closed during severe pandemics such as this one). At times, I found myself taking photos of passages from my own library and sending them to students to circumvent the wild goose chase students would experience finding more shrouded information. This technique would certainly work in the current environment. The idea was not to do the research for the student, but to provide research support (“You find a good source, I'll find a good source”). Next, I had more flexibility as well. During a typical term, I spent several days away from school attending workshops or visiting colleagues at other schools. On none of those occasions did I ask a local colleague to cover my class. Students knew what they had to do, and they knew their deadlines, so they worked, either in the classroom, student meeting rooms, or the library (or online in the current scenario) without supervision. Because all project work was recorded in shared documents, I was able to informally check in and monitor progress. Finally, as Jeff Robin, a founding faculty member at High Tech High, explains in Sanje’s report, well-designed projects...
allow teachers to coach larger numbers of students since the demands for their time are more uneven (because students work at a different pace, their need for the teacher varies across the schedule).

Traditionally, our schools would encourage the “innovative teachers” to learn about and subsequently transition to PBL while the rest of the faculty continued with business as usual. Doing so may be a good first step, but without wider adoption, the kids will never completely buy into the concept and change their thinking about learning because too many of their courses will not be asking them to do so. A critical mass of coursework needs to shift to the PBL pedagogies every day. When the tried and true one-to-two-day creative interludes to two-day creative interludes becomes the rule rather than the exception, there is a strong justification for reexamining many of the traditional practices. And, of course, PBL fits perfectly with the “time as a variable, learning as a constant” model of effective education.

b. SEL and its impact on the school

If you would like to develop and integrate an SEL curriculum, OESIS offers SEL Faculty Pathways, jointly designed with Six Seconds.

Let’s begin with a definition of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL):

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (from the Intro SEL Pathway).

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Schools with successful SEL programs are safe, engaging, and well-supported environments where children can focus on learning. Teaching SEL reduces anxiety and conflict while creating an atmosphere of trust, engagement, and curiosity (from the OESIS Introductory SEL Pathway). In biological terms, we now know that during difficult times the amygdala will produce several chemicals that interfere with the effective operation of the cerebral cortex where learning originates. Behaviorally, if we are calm or have low levels of anxiety, we can learn very effectively. When those anxiety levels rise above a certain level, we experience diminishing returns with respect to learning. When you walk into a classroom and observe that your students are highly stressed, it would be a worthwhile exercise to spend 10 minutes calming them with music and mindfulness exercises in order to have a productive remainder of the class. Consequently, there are two important points to be made here. First, we all need to learn more about SEL so we can address the symptoms of the problems our kids are facing today. Second, we can control the causes that emanate from school policies and programs such as grading, homework, exams, etc.

We seek to avoid the diatribe that inevitably follows our last assertion. This report is not written to caution schools for creating policies and programs directly responsible for raising student levels of anxiety and drain the resources of the counseling staff because most teachers have not been trained in SEL strategies. Other educators (Denise Pope et al.) have already made that point loud and clear. Instead, this report argues that SEL, like PBL, is one of the key transferable programs that is not limited by place or delivery mechanism. It also works hand-in-hand with PBL as a primary driver of student success and higher self-esteem. It is from that perspective that we explore the benefits of SEL.

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One thing we know intuitively about our social-emotional well-being is that, in general, the higher the positive vibes, the lower the probability that our anxieties will diminish us to a point at which we are not effective learners, friends, teammates, and classmates. Consequently, if we are mildly enthusiastic or even unenthusiastic about a course we are taking, minor anxieties in our lives will more proportionally impact our work in that course. Alternatively, if we are passionate about a course because it provides us with a strong dose of the Daniel Pink success formula: autonomy, mastery, and purpose, then minor setbacks may have less impact. Last year, I had a student who contracted “mono” and experienced a concussion early in the PBL course I described previously. When he returned to school, I met with him to discuss how he would find the time to complete the project when he was behind in all of his coursework. His response was a perfect pitch for the integration of PBL and SEL: “I'm not worried about finishing work in my other courses; I'm worried about losing three weeks but wanted to complete that project more than he wanted to catch up in his other courses.

Many of us underestimate the challenges of SEL because there are two fundamental steps that we must understand: our own emotions; how they release both the best and worst in us at times, and under what conditions. Second, we have to apply that self-knowledge in our interactions with those who know us well: family, friends, and colleagues. Only then can we apply those understandings to our students, particularly in the classroom when they are “in public” almost all the time. It is difficult to forget the story of botched SEL (empathy) from one of my advisees attending English class the morning after the last presidential election (2016). The teacher walked into the classroom five minutes late and announced: “I am so distraught by the outcome of yesterday’s election that I can’t teach today so class is cancelled.” Imagine how a student that supported the winner of the election must have felt. In a traditional classroom, small transgressions appear to be forgotten by the next class when you are potentially a much happier camper, but in reality, they are not always forgotten.

In a traditional classroom, small transgressions appear to be forgotten by the next class when you are potentially a much happier camper, but in reality, they are never forgotten. We always ask why they were unable to connect with a few of their students. In some cases, SEL principles were in play and students simply wrote off their teacher as someone they had to satisfy but would never form any kind of relationship. PBL starts kids in a more equitable place and helps students move forward at their pace with a well-defined singular goal that bolsters confidence. The integration of PBL and SEL does help the social-emotional well-being of students.

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PBL impacts SEL in another way as well. Trained counselors and gifted teachers seem to be able to enable SEL strategies and tactics on demand. Short of their expertise, the most common disruptions and transitions in our daily lives are generally addressed by some adults. For kids, this is a much taller order, primarily because the frontal lobes of their brains have not fully evolved. Thus, rushing from one class to another because the test ran over, an evacuation drill occurring during a critical lesson in class, or the student arriving at the wrong classroom because a last-minute change was made, are all big deals for kids and heighten anxiety levels. In a PBL setting, there is more of a flow; not that everything is predictable, but the unpredictable simply creates interruptions rather than inhibiting progress toward the overall goal. That is far different than rushing to complete a traditional lesson as our nemesis, the clock, winds down at the end of a period. That rushing not only creates anxiety for you, the teacher, but it is communicated to your students.

In PBL and life, we try, we fall short, we receive feedback, we try again, and repeat as necessary until we succeed. It is not a deviation from the course; it is part of the program and everybody does it, even the teacher. It leads to the development of what SEL experts (Six Seconds) call “creative substitution.” I’m doing homework. My laptop crashes and I can’t get it running again. Rather than panic, I think about options for completing the work. I have my phone. It’s not ideal, but I can finish my lab report and my English paragraph without my laptop. If I panic, the substitution options will never present themselves to me. Running into obstacles is the stuff of PBL and learning to creatively substitute serves both the success of the project and one’s social-emotional self.
In the fall, we face some enormous SEL challenges, and virtually every teacher will be receiving on-the-job PD as we navigate these waters. We have students displaced from the communities in which they spend most of their time. These students feel disconnected from some of the key adults in their world. They are physically isolated from their friends and greater family. They may be working at home in a setting that is likely not conducive to multiple people balancing other responsibilities (parenting, meals, housecleaning, etc.). They may be learning in ways that are quite different than previously as they become comfortable with online tools delivering a substantially traditional curriculum. Most importantly for them as well as the rest of us, there is uncertainty: When will this end? How will it impact my future? Will I get sick? How much longer will I be able to cope with being outside my comfort zone? SEL is essential for teachers and students, now and in the future. PBL supports the social and emotional well-being of students. Both, in concert, define the health of any learning community.

c. CBE and its impact on the community

If you would like to pivot to a competency-based program that integrates academic and co-curriculum, OESIS offers CBE Faculty Pathways and a one-year faculty in-service program for just that purpose. The Introductory level Pathway includes the all-important rationale for the pivot.
An encapsulated description of CBE comes from my blog post of October 22, 2019:

CBE is ... a profound rethinking of how school and learning work. While it can be accomplished incrementally, the outcome of CBE will shift learning into the growth and development process we now know it to be while keeping the focus on individual progress and student choice rather than the mass instruction of factory models and comparative performance.

Changes in the mindset when CBE is implemented; source: researchnetwork.pearson.com

We all know the famous quote from Plato's Republic: "Necessity is the mother of invention." A more current rendition comes from Angela Watson’s podcast series entitled: “Schools are closed. This is our chance to reimagine them.” Both quotes, in their own way, tell us that the silver lining in the COVID-19 crisis is the bell sounding for change. Some schools and supporting organizations did an outstanding job in their own way, taking a proactive role in preparing students for continued learning. Nobody would expect more than the patchwork we had, and the nature of the questions asked indicates that the spring emphasis was on keeping things under control and maintaining a standard of high-quality learning. This is not because there is something inherently inferior about online or blended learning (as contrasted with online courses). There is not. It was more about our inexperience with online learning on such a large scale. The fact that it worked at all (in light of the equity challenges) is a testament to the creativity of teachers in the interest of our students. Still, we now...
know that a complete shifting of gears on a repeated basis will wear us down. We need programs that smoothly migrate from one environment to another, and better reflect the longer-term needs of our students. CBE is one of those future-proof programs, and it provides an umbrella for PBL and SEL.

Example of a Competency-Based Dashboard — Capella University

There are many reasons for pivoting to an incremental implementation of CBE. Our experience has been that few schools are opposed to moving forward for the long term. Some are taking steps to implement CBE. They have redefined their portrait of a graduate, implemented student-driven portfolios, and defined a set of basic competencies that must be mastered in order to move to the next level or graduate. A few schools have gone even further creating standards-based grading systems and common rubrics. The schools that have not moved at all either have other priorities at the moment or perceive a lack of resources to move ahead. The biggest reasons for adopting a CBE program are straightforward and minimally controversial:

- The value proposition for attending independent schools has been challenged. For many years, the value of an independent school education was not questioned. More recently, continually increasing tuitions combined with shifting societal expectations for college education and careers have caused some families to wonder if they are getting sufficient value. The current crisis has only amplified the questions due to additional uncertainty. CBE is designed to align what our schools do with what colleges want from our students and what
the job market has been screaming loudly for over the past 20 years. The CBE realignment will strengthen the school community and reestablish the value proposition by integrating programs in a way that will prevent their value from being compartmentalized.

• CBE makes learning visible by asking students to demonstrate understanding and mastery, preferably in a public setting where the work can be evaluated, and feedback provided. It also values mastery through transferable demonstration and increased sophistication. Demonstrating a competency in the 3rd grade is a first step to showing more sophisticated skills at subsequent grade levels. Transferability is a key quality of CBE as it protects our students from rote learning. If I learn to change the oil in my Subaru but can’t change the oil in a BMW, then I haven’t mastered the skill of changing engine oil even though you tested me after the Subaru change. In many ways, these principles level the playing field by insulating the program from those students who develop great facility with a single form of summative assessment.

• CBE, combined with PBL and SEL, is pedagogically consistent with optimal student learning. It creates the conditions of Csikszentmihalyi’s “flow,” it reaches well up the pyramid of Bloom’s taxonomy, and it engages students as the owners of their learning. If they own the learning process that is driven by demonstration of mastery, then they own the portfolio in which those demonstrations live and are shared with peers, admissions offices, and ultimately, potential employers. Additionally, let us not forget that CBE Portfolios, and PBL pedagogy integrated with SEL, support the equity mission. Learning begins in a place where each student is comfortable and progresses accordingly. Demonstrations of mastery are assessed with rubrics that are designed to focus only on the learning outcomes that have been identified by the school as critical components for success. Evaluation is insulated from the probability of implicit bias or personal criteria.

• Finally, CBE integrates all elements of the school program into a coherent whole in which value is assigned to academic and co-curricular programs. A student may draw from both areas of school offerings to meet the requirements of school-identified competencies. Such a strategy provides students with opportunities and choices that encourage autonomy and self-directed learning, even when choices are made in concert with parents and academic advisors.

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Each one of these characteristics allows for a uniformity and equity of overall experience while providing the latitude for individual differences in both students and faculty, the underpinnings of a strong and dynamic community. Historically, many independent schools have built community standards on a platform of policies and procedures that are “contractually” accepted by all members of that community. An increasingly litigious culture accompanied by more governmental compliance has provided much of the impetus for the policy-defined community. We spend a great deal of time explaining what a good community member is in the pages of handbooks; and we tax our school leaders with regular updates to those pages until, without noticing, they morph from educators to bureaucrats. This is not a call to burn handbooks. Instead, it is an ask to build these handbooks and cultures on the foundations of learning communities by defining the goals of the school programs and then defining how one succeeds in those programs. CBE provides an ideal framework.

Most CBE programs begin from a student-focused school statement called Portrait of a Graduate. It sends a very different message than traditional statements of expectations, moving from a focus on what defines the school to what defines the successful student. It also parses the college selection process from a profile that explains what students will be able to do when they graduate. There is a profound shift in accountability as the college admission process is not in the control of the school or the student, but the Portrait of a Graduate is. As the higher education landscape becomes more unpredictable, it would be prudent for independent schools to pivot their goals to something they are able to control.
The Portrait of a Graduate is also outcomes-based. Most schools are currently dependent on antiquated grading policies and standardized test scores as the gold standard of student outcomes. Both are time-constrained symbols that provide us with spurious information at best regarding student learning. The Portrait drives a set of school competencies that are sliced and diced into learning outcomes. These outcomes are visible displays of what a student can do, mirroring what an athletic coach would ask from a student: What can you do? An authentic, outcomes-based learning environment moves schools out of the traditional spaces in which accreditation takes stock of input-based criteria and moves the school to demonstrated success based on criteria that the school controls. A shift from: “Appoints a Director who provides regular programming for students and faculty” (an input) to “Director surveys the school community at least twice a year using questions from [Accreditation Agency] and yields a positive overall score from at least 80% of all constituents.” (an output). Outcomes are the fundamental cornerstone of the world outside education. Is it time for educators to shift their thinking?

Why is CBE such a powerful program? It is all about alignment. We want programs that are aligned with mission, community standards, expectations of the next levels of educational institutions, and expectations of potential employers. Consequently, CBE is defined as:

- Students at the center of the learning experience and empowered to make choices about how they demonstrate competency.
- Pedagogy aligned with learning goals.
- Learning goals aligned with societal needs and requirements.
- CBE as personalized learning; it overcomes the traditional time-based, “one size fits all” approach, recognizing there is a difference between personalized or self-paced learning and learning alone.
- CBE as a uniform means of measurement and feedback, even for softer skills, thereby enhancing the current evaluation systems.

These characteristics increase the stakes for learning and provide a framework that is not dependent on any specific style of delivery or pedagogy. PBL and SEL are excellent practical fits for CBE, but there are many other pedagogies and approaches that will also work as long as the above points are honored.

Finally, by student choice, accomplishments and successes are communicated through the Portfolio.
We have discussed the notion that a unified program such as CBE, augmented by PBL and SEL, will provide additional depth and cohesion to already strong communities in the independent school world. The real glue that will make these communities rock solid is the equity component. In a January 2020 report published by Sanje Ratnavale, President of the OESIS Group, entitled "The Future of K12 Transcripts," a new definition of equity is offered:

Equity represents, at the student level, equal opportunity, and for every student that is a very different context: a context that must recognize the many influences, cognitive and non-cognitive, cultural, and socio-economic, inter alia, that represent their starting points. Equity does not mean merit, nor does it mean fairness or justice or inclusivity: it means opportunity, growth alongside proficiency (p. 5).

Within the communities of practice at your schools are the personalized pathways that reintroduce the value of opportunity for every student. We know that the students who thrive at our schools, receive the accolades and prizes, and sit on the spring visit and parents weekend panels are being served well by our schools. We also know that students who have learning needs are also well-supported by our counselors and learning specialists. How does the rest of the student body fare? Their school background requires them to learn in ways that may not match those of the current top students. We also know that equity does not apply only to the identity politics groups such as race, religion, ethnicity, and gender identification, that populate our student bodies. We
have affluent students, some second or third generation legacy children, who struggle academically, and need the same kinds of attention as any student that struggles. Equity is built into the CBE recipe with large doses of PBL and SEL. It is the final frontier for enhancing school communities to the point at which they are much less breakable, both on our campuses and in the online world.

d. Coda: Standards-Based Grading

We’ve made reference to standards-based grading on several occasions. Many of you may understand CBE as a system that does not utilize grades to measure competency, and in theory, that is the case. However, even a skill such as argumentation does not imply that mastery of the Emancipation Proclamation, an important debated component of the U.S. History course. Combining the two components, content and skill, invites a standards-based approach to student evaluation. Guskey and Bailey (Developing Standards-Based Report Cards, 2010) define a standards-based report as identifying:

*The specific learning goals within the curriculum so that the appropriate rigor can be ensured. It also communicates more detailed information about learning progress with regard to those goals to bring about higher levels of success.*

![STANDARDS-BASED LEARNING PROGRESSION](image)

3 Clear Creek Independent School District
Let’s leap forward 10 years and try to imagine what independent schools might look like, and how the recommendations of this report fit that vision. Imagine that the COVID-19 pandemic continued for 18 more months with selective releases of population segments based on a series of risk factors. That means independent schools would have to reimagine student interaction on campus until September 2022 (few schools could afford to be closed for any period of time). They would also implement a hybrid model of mixing both F2F and online students in the same classes since some families would not feel comfortable sending their children to school.

Following the pandemic, a few independent schools closed their doors due to declining enrollments. Most schools were forced to rethink their financial models in ways that would permit alternative tuition structures and expense management. If one looks at Scott Galloway’s analysis of the future of higher education institutions, it is easy to see the sobering outlook with the barbell effect of the most prestigious schools (with large endowments) and community colleges surviving. According to Galloway’s matrix, the rest of the colleges are either at great risk or will not survive without significant structural changes. A similar study could occur for the independent school world. It would tell the story of severe disruption and its impact on a financial model that has much less relevance in our current environment. This report describes one pathway to escape the unfortunate consequences of exposing the cracks in an education model that has run head-first into the realities of our most challenging confrontation: institution of elite learning meets cultural equity.

a. The Delivery-Neutral Blended-Learning Experiment

Multiple models of curriculum delivery began as a stopgap measure to cope with the exit strategies related to COVID-19. With the world economy slowly evolving, enrollments were impacted. While a few school enrollments changed little, most dropped in a range from 5-35% of the student population. International families, in particular but not exclusively, were nervous about sending their children away to school. Approximately 20% of independent schools closed their doors within five years. Many of the surviving 80% aggressively pursued PBL, SEL, and CBE migrations. The need to reach international students that were not living with host families became a priority issue since most of that population consisted of full-pay families. Creating a separate remote program to mirror the existing on-campus program was not an option because it would serve to depress tuitions. In the online marketplace, pricing was

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significantly below face-to-face tuition and fees. If the triumvirate of PBL, SEL, and CBE were certified as delivery-neutral, then was this a model that would support international students?

The answer was no. Enrolling international students at a lower tuition rate would provide discounted costs to families who were most able to pay the traditional tuition. Equally important, the loss of international students on-campus would alter the fabric of the diverse communities that made independent schools attractive. The conclusion was that delivery-neutral strategy such as blended learning would work very effectively for students attending school when they were forced to be off campus, but the two forms of delivery could not cohabitate simultaneously because they had different cost structures and the online component was mistakenly undervalued. Accordingly, the independent school population decreased along with the number of schools. The remaining schools transformed their programs to the PBL, SEL, CBE suite, and continued to provide an outstanding 21st century education to the students who were fortunate enough to attend.

A few innovative independent schools took their cues from the most innovative colleges and universities such as The Minerva Schools at KGI. These schools reimagined student life.
b. Schools that valued time as a variable

During the 10 years from 2020 to 2030, there was a precipitous drop in domestic manufacturing and service industry jobs due to an increase in robotic substitution, improved artificial intelligence, or jobs lost to other countries. Retail storefronts were reduced to very small and specialized customer experiences. The largest corporations with on-the-ground missions were delivery services. For most companies, the idea of commercial real estate was a dated luxury. Large structures that could be rented by the hour/day were the rule rather than the exception, and white-collar employment rolls declined. Large corporations and white-collar employment rolls declined and professionals comfortable with tele-health increased. The notion of bell schedules virtually disappeared, deliveries almost all same-day, and professional services billed by the service rather than elapsed time. Calendars were also altered with a large percentage of the working population at home, reducing the need for seasonal clothing and other seasonal products. As a result, independent schools were forced to rethink their daily schedules and school calendars to meet societal needs and the potential professional goals of their students.

School calendars were altered radically by the cultural shifts described above. There was a need for additional sources of tuition revenue while reducing the physical plant and labor force. As a result, most schools went to a 12-month calendar with longer breaks between the three trimesters, and a requirement that students enroll for a minimum number of terms. Borrowing from the higher education term-abroad model, schools maintained the same on-campus level of enrollments for all terms, but spread that enrollment out over 12 months, increasing the number of tuitions by a significant factor. Curriculum for a trimester was defined by meeting a series of course requirements and learning outcomes that would be aligned with school competencies. Therefore, there was a pathway of routes to satisfy those requirements, but each student created their personalized path for success subject to approvals from their academic advisor. Most courses would adopt the PBL pedagogy with weekly or bi-weekly milestones, but no daily assignments.
Daily schedules were essentially blown-up in the face of shifting demands. Most organizational experts determined that structure could be imposed without frequent time constraints, and people, even children, would adapt to the shift in parameters. Regular meetings disappeared from the landscape of most organizations to be replaced by small, but nimble and empowered project teams that reported informally to the top level of a flatter organization (see General Stanley McChrystal’s book, *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World*). Food service was a continuous process throughout the day since the nutritional and energy needs of students varied depending on their work habits. Class meetings were not formal events but occurred at the discretion of the teacher or the students. When direct instruction was appropriate, it could occur in a live meeting room or as a synchronous video conference or a screencast made by the teacher or another professional source. Attendance was always voluntary as some students might not need that specific instruction. With most courses adopting the PBL pedagogy, students had a series of projects running simultaneously, and might decide to spend an entire day on one rather than splitting daily time equally among each project/course.

*The MODUPOD has been featured in an article titled “How will schools look in 10 years?” on news.com.au*
More time was spent with academic advisers as that role expanded while direct teaching time was reduced. While most teachers were still subject-matter experts, they were also required to be well-versed in PBL and other student-directed pedagogies, as well as competency-based programs. The first-year intern program became a requirement for almost all schools as it ensured that every new teacher was appropriately prepared for the responsibilities they would undertake. Because higher education was slower to adapt to the changes occurring in the culture, the division of academic disciplines continued a bit longer, and independent schools followed suit. There were more transitions to interdisciplinary coursework, but the siloed departmental structure was sustained during the third decade of the 21st century.

c. Learning Constant Schools

We have already discussed many of the structural pieces that aligned with a "learning as a constant" philosophy, including calendars, daily schedules, and program delivery flexibility. The pedagogies and programs were the foundational components of learning as a constant as they took advantage of the benefits of PBL from a variety of perspectives and helped to make your curriculum delivery-neutral, valuing time as a variable, and learning as a constant.

PBL pedagogy with SEL integration is one of the most powerful pathways to an immersive, engaged, and deep learning experience that values learning constant. The intersection of PBL and SEL is defined by the progressive flow of a PBL project and its accompanying singular focus on a big question. That flow creates better SEL conditions for students because regular time intervals become less important (class by class time) and learning, as defined by PBL, is more of a continuum. Students should be able to compare their PBL experience with a more traditional learning experience and recognize the differences in their social and emotional well-being. Another intersection is the relationship of equity to PBL; the reductions in anxiety because students are starting their learning in a personalized manner and progressing at their own pace provides more SEL relief for students. Finally, SEL integration with PBL will exist in the CBE world because some of the competencies and requirements defined by your school will fall in the SEL domain.

CBE slowly becomes more of a fixture in independent and public schools as colleges and employers apply additional pressure to prepare students for the shifting landscape of the global culture. That preparation is defined in the Portrait of the Graduate and translated into a series of competencies and requirements that are incorporated into most schools’ expectations for promotion or diploma. The earning of digital badges for
Successful completion of expectations also grows quickly as it is a quick way of assessing a student's qualifications for any kind of program or job, with the ability to see more details regarding those qualifications if required. Digital badges live in student-created portfolios along with a comprehensive look at student accomplishments accompanied by feedback from both adults and peers. All of the information in a portfolio as well as academic records from a school's LMS or SIS could be securely extracted into a digital wallet as a comprehensive learner record that is portable, secure, and lifelong. It is a perfect scenario for a “learning as a constant” world.

Nobody would have believed that the 2020 decade of independent schools would be a complete reformulation of high-quality education. Those who wagered on these kinds of predictions would have expected our schools to follow the same pattern as in previous decades. They would be a reflection of former practices that had been highly successful. This time, however, enrollments were negatively impacted, and tuition losses forced many schools to rethink how they deliver learning as a constant, culture. It’s hard to fathom how a global pandemic, a virus, would change the face of independent school education. Let’s remember, however, that our practice of independent education is selective, reserved for those to have their children attend and understand the added value of that experience. In a selective and somewhat elite market, we are more sensitive to significant cultural shifts than the public market for education might be. That’s the way it should be because it forces us to play the leadership role expected in the ongoing and progressing delivery of high-quality learning.

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Jennifer Zaccara, Head of School, Vermont Academy (VT)

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Director of Miss Fine’s Center for Interdisciplinary Studies, and 6th Grade Humanities Teacher, Princeton Day School (NJ)

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History

Wellness

World Languages

English

English

Joel Backon joined OESIS July 2019 as Vice President. He partners with progressive independent schools in our network to develop programs and resources to foster school academic and co-curricular achievements, as well as faculty professional development.

Joel comes from Choate Rosemary Hall (CT) where he has held key roles in Information Technology, Academic Technology, as classroom teacher, curriculum designer, and in academic and student life advising for 27 years. He has been an OESIS Network Leader since 2015.

A teacher since 1991, Tara Quigley has been serving as the Director of Miss Fine’s Center for Interdisciplinary Studies since 2014. She is dedicated to educating and empowering teachers to try new pedagogical practices and strategies, including: design thinking, PBL, inquiry research, Visible Thinking, and teaching towards mastery of skills and competencies. She is also a co-chair of the Academic Affairs Committee at Princeton Day School where she has been for 18 years. As an OESIS Network Leader and PBL cohort facilitator, Tara frequently shares her process and experiences with her colleagues at peer schools and at national conferences.

Joel Backon
Vice President
OESIS Network, Inc.

Tara Quigley
Director of Miss Fine’s Center for Interdisciplinary Studies, and 6th Grade Humanities Teacher, Princeton Day School (NJ)