



THESE SCHOOLS ARE ATTENDING TO EQUITY DURING COVID. HERE'S HOW.



COVID has created overwhelming concerns about basic health and safety. But other concerns need not fall by the wayside. In districts and schools where social justice and equity are baked into the culture, the pandemic has been an occasion to embrace these values rather than shelving them during the crisis.

At Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School, a 2015 recipient of NEPC's Schools of Opportunity designation that recognizes equity and excellence, teachers created an engaging new freshman and sophomore unit this school year that focused on studying the Bronx, the New York City borough where the school is located and one of the nation's poorest areas. The students learned in nearby outdoor settings, for instance, by taking samples of the Bronx River for lessons on environmental racism.



Students at Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School in the Bronx study the health of the Bronx River.

Two time zones away, in rural New Mexico, the Cuba Independent School District, where most of the students are Navajo Dine Native Americans, a different version of outdoor classrooms are now becoming a permanent fixture. Architects worked with the community to design spaces built into the natural landscape. Concurrently, the district has gone into overdrive to ensure that all students have access to the Internet, including those who live without electricity. For these students, the district purchased Wi-Fi “jetpacks” for each family. For students who live in reservation areas or remote areas without accessible Internet or electric service, the district sometimes is subsidizing a monthly fee for access and has also purchased needed tools like generators, gas cards, and solar panels. School buses also shuttle back and forth among these remote areas, carrying food, supplies, and zip drives containing schoolwork.



Staff at New Mexico’s Cuba Independent School District work to serve their community.

Other schools have found creative ways to create in-person opportunities for learning and personal connection. Utah’s [Salt Lake Center for Science Education](#), a 2019 School of Opportunity, responded to the pandemic shutdown by combining remote learning with a small program of on-campus programming for students with academic concerns. Later, the school expanded that programming to include other students in need. All students had access to group and individual therapy through the school’s well-being program. Students were also able to participate in outdoor club (e.g., biking and archery), agriculture club (e.g., preparing and planting the school community garden), open art studio, and service learning.

At [New Vista High School](#), a 2016 Schools of Opportunity honoree located in Boulder, Colorado, the school has encouraged students struggling with attendance, academics, access to technology, or other issues to attend additional in-person school days where counseling is offered to cohorts of students in the gymnasium. Likewise, at [Casco Bay High School](#), a 2019 School of Opportunity in Portland, Maine, limited in-person contact opportunities are used to forge and nurture personal relationships as well as to foster social justice.

Each in-person time focuses on a mix of meaningful academic work that is best done in-person—from labs to long-term interdisciplinary projects—as well as thorough crew check-ins and ‘courageous conversations’ on the issues of the

day, from race and the police to gender identity,
said principal Derek Price.

NEPC Resources on Schools of Opportunity

This newsletter is made possible in part by support provided by the Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice: <http://www.greatlakescenter.org>

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