



# WHAT A COVID-19 STRATEGIC RESPONSE PLAN CAN LOOK LIKE

An offering

## ABSTRACT

I have been asked by friends and colleagues to share some thoughts about ways to think strategically amidst the urgency of now. I offer the following framework at this difficult time in the hope that it will help school leaders integrate crisis and strategic responses as we all prepare to be forever changed. It is an offering laced with love for our schools, our teachers, our families, and most importantly, our students. Please feel free to use it in whole or in part to think about, frame, act on, and communicate your school's strategic response to the demands of the extended crisis we're all in together. Stay safe, healthy, and supported.

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## *Introduction*

Our mission, vision, and core values have never been more important. In this time of unprecedented global crisis they continue to guide the “why,” “what” and “how” of our school relationships, programs, services, and resources, as well as all strategic priorities. In addition, our school has identified three key priorities that will shape the next three years of strategic planning as we adapt to the discontinuous change brought on by the Coronavirus Pandemic. These newest priorities are not intended to stop or replace the core work of our strategic plan. They simply define areas of focus for our school’s resources and opportunities for new pathways to advance our mission and vision in the face of an extended period of uncertainty.

### *Pandemic-related strategic priorities*

1. We will be a driving force in an integrated approach to every member in the community’s health and well-being.
2. We will evolve structures and processes to cultivate timely, relevant, and accessible learning opportunities.
3. We will answer the question: Given the changing landscape as a result of the Coronavirus Pandemic, how do we reimagine ourselves in a new reality?

### *Strategic steps we are taking now*

1. We are protecting employees and students.
2. We are being flexible.
3. We are engaging in basic scenario planning.
4. We are communicating regularly with all constituencies.
5. We are dedicating all necessary resources.
6. We have paused new strategic plan initiatives.
7. We are staying on top of the situation, planning strategically, and supporting key actions.
8. We are tightening finances.
9. We are thinking about the next horizons of COVID-19 and creating a nerve center to plan for the next phase.
10. We are questioning every assumption.

### *Catalytic questions we are asking now*

1. What should be our starting point for next time?
2. How should this experience change us?
3. As an outcome of this experience, what assumptions do we need to hold on to, what assumptions should we let go of, and what are our new assumptions?
4. Going forward, what do our students and families need from us?
5. How do we reimagine ourselves in a new reality?
6. Once we are on the other side of this pandemic, what if...?

This is a new and integrated planning approach for us. It is intended to combine the urgent mandate of crisis management and the long-term view of strategic planning to focus attention on contemplating the unknowns of the present moment and of the future. By looking at both together we can identify major risks, assumptions, and uncertainties, and lay out a path for overcoming these barriers, leaving room for course correction as the future becomes clear. Importantly, our strategic thinking around the long-term impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic also helps school leadership decide what capabilities need to be built or developed to meet emerging trends and new patterns. Once built, our Strategic Response Plan for the Coronavirus Pandemic will have clear next steps and metrics that will lead directly to implementation.

Our School's Strategic Response Plan for the Coronavirus Pandemic  
2020-2023



## Coronavirus Pandemic Strategic Thinking Rubric

Major Unknowns	Assumptions	Uncertainties
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How will this pandemic last?</li> <li>When will it come back?</li> <li>What will be its long-term impact on the health and wellness of teachers and administrators?</li> <li>What will be its long-term impact on the health and wellness of students and on student life and learning?</li> <li>What sense are colleges and universities making of all this and how does this impact our students and relationships?</li> <li>What is the path to the next normal? In other words, what does a discontinuous shift look like and what are the implications for how we should reinvent?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The pandemic can transform the way we think and how we view the world.</li> <li>We have faulty assumptions this pandemic is tearing down.</li> <li>Building a strong foundation in safety should come before higher-level work that requires performance.</li> <li>In a crisis, we must lead with our strengths. The time to remediate weaknesses is not during a crisis.</li> <li>Schools serve as emotional and social anchors and when children are not at school this stability is lost.</li> <li>What we know now that we didn't know at the beginning can change our strategic response for the future.</li> <li>The position we began the year in will not be the same one we end in.</li> <li>Everyone is doing the best they can.</li> <li>We must support and protect employees in this brave new world (increase communication, change working norms, balance needs of the school with the needs of the individual)</li> <li>Crisis is a great teacher.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How will the competitive landscape shift? Will our competitors survive and thrive during and after the pandemic?</li> <li>Will our school culture be negatively impacted by the destabilization of our campus support systems?</li> <li>Are we resilient enough?</li> <li>Will our donors continue to support us?</li> <li>Will our parents expect financial considerations that we cannot afford to give?</li> <li>What does success look like?</li> <li>Can we be successful in helping our students and faculty establish balance, productivity, and wellness under sustained disaster conditions?</li> <li>What do we want to model right now?</li> <li>What do we really think our students need and want right now?</li> <li>What do we as educators need and want right now?</li> </ol>
Scenarios <sup>1</sup>	New Threats	Emerging Opportunities
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on data about coronavirus, what do we think are plausible scenarios of the future?</li> <li>What do we think is the likelihood of the occurrence of each scenario?</li> <li>What do we think would be the effects of each of the scenarios on teaching, operations, community, and financials?</li> <li>What do we think we can plan for today to mitigate negative effects and optimize positive effects?</li> </ol> <p>McKinsey &amp; Company suggest three Coronavirus pandemic-related scenarios<sup>2</sup>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quick recovery (least likely)</li> <li>Global slowdown (most likely)</li> <li>Global pandemic and recession (worst)</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enrollment issues with current and prospective families</li> <li>Increased need for financial aid that we cannot support</li> <li>Interruption of student learning requiring steep learning curves to get on track</li> <li>Faculty discomfort with online platforms</li> <li>Moving too quickly to productivity without first building a foundation</li> <li>Key leadership getting sick</li> <li>Large numbers of faculty getting sick</li> <li>Burnout</li> <li>Firm timelines cannot be set</li> <li>What we know now that we didn't know at the beginning</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chance to reimagine ourselves in a new reality</li> <li>Retrenchment, liquidation, merger/acquisition</li> <li>Market expansion or diversification</li> <li>Program and service expansion, enhancement, extension and/or exit</li> <li>Personal transformation: what am I doing to let this crisis change me as a human?</li> <li>Leaving a lasting imprint on students and each other during a crisis</li> <li>Strengthened school family partnerships</li> <li>New organizational resiliency</li> <li>Strengthened donor relationships</li> <li>Public value of private education</li> </ol>

<sup>1</sup> Paul Friga, Scenario Planning for Coronavirus, *Inside Higher Ed*, March 13, 2020

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2020/03/13/using-strategic-thinking-and-scenario-planning-deal-coronavirus-opinion>