A Year Like No Other

The U.S. has many accomplishments to be proud of, leading in many areas as global pioneers, with everything from private sector rockets going to space to 5G broadband. But when a worldwide pandemic arrived, we witnessed just how fragile one of our oldest and most fundamental platforms was: our education system. Despite all our advances, we were completely unprepared for the many challenges we faced.

Schools closed down across the country while teachers left their classrooms not knowing what the next day would bring. Parents and caregivers worried about job security and newfound health concerns. What’s more, we were all forced to imagine how life would function if our children weren’t permanently in school every day. In an instant, many of us came to the greater realization of just how crucial a role our educators play in our society.

Basic needs began to cut across socioeconomic lines, as the demands for seemingly simple items such as toilet paper, disinfectants, and sanitizers surged. For the first time the majority of those ‘with’ felt a deeper disparity as they learned what it meant to go ‘without’. For the millions of children living in poverty across the nation, however, this lack was nothing new. While still far from a level playing field, there was common ground in the urgency to have those needs fulfilled.

As uncertainty ensued, we saw a long-existent divide in our country become exacerbated: the Opportunity Gap. Well-funded schools kept their teachers and students equipped with the supplies and technology necessary to continue education from afar, while those who were already under-resourced fell further behind. In turn, many of us heard the term ‘Digital Divide’ for the first time, catapulting an undeniable inequality to the forefront of our minds, as something so basic as internet access became a barrier to education for so many of our students.

School Meant More

For the 29.4 million U.S. students who rely on the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), school is not only a place for learning and social interaction, but where they also receive a full meal with the proper nutrition. At the heart of and furthering the care they receive, is the teacher who works so tirelessly alongside them.

In the onslaught of COVID-19, our teachers had to exchange their classrooms with four walls for a virtual classroom overnight. We expected them to learn brand new [online] platforms and to engage students of all ages via a computer screen for eight hours a day. Trained to teach in their subject matter, they were now asked to play the role of tech support for schools and students who were not prepared for online education. Simultaneously, we demanded that they deliver the same lessons to students who may be in person and to others who were remote. We asked that they put their own health concerns aside and remain steadfast in the midst of surrounding uncertainty. A pandemic truly changed what school meant to us all.

What We’ve Learned

As told by the teachers who are on the frontlines of education with our youth every day, this report is our lens into a world most of us never get the chance to see. Our educators provide valuable insight that is pivotal to our growth as an organization. It is through their words that we are reaffirmed that when provided with the tools they need to succeed, our children will flourish.

So, even in a year like 2020, did a pencil really matter? The answer is, yes. It really did.

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1 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), March 2021
An Unassailable Mission

What we believe:
We believe every child in America should have equal opportunity and access to a quality education.

What we know:
Supplies = success. With the proper tools at their disposal, students will achieve a higher-quality education.

The resources we provide to underserved schools greatly impact students and teachers alike. With them:

**STUDENTS**
- Have the confidence to attend school every day
- Participate more in class
- Engage in school with more focus and enthusiasm
- Feel empowered to recognize they have choices
- Have a better opportunity to achieve their potential

**TEACHERS**
- Experience freedom from the burden of spending their own money
- Are more empowered to do their best, creative work
- Can lead in an effective, equitable learning environment
- Create a supportive space where students feel they belong
- Are bolstered as they support students struggling to break the cycle of poverty

**WHY IT MATTERS**

A quality education is essential for students to achieve their full potential.

Consistent attendance improves student graduation rates and enables them to reach their potential.

Human dignity empowers students and teachers to own and shape their futures.
Starting from Behind

Through no fault of their own, millions of U.S. children start each school year at a great disadvantage; they feel the impact of the Opportunity Gap that is rampant throughout the country. These students are subject to stark disparities based on skin color, ethnicity, and/or zip code, which inhibits equal opportunity and access to a quality education.

BY THE NUMBERS

90% of our teachers say at least 3 out of 4 students arrive to class without all the requested and necessary school supplies

94% of our teachers say at least 3 out of 4 students likely do not have adequate school supplies at home to complete school work

94% of our teachers say by the start of the second semester, at least 3 out of 4 students run out of supplies and their families are not able to provide replacement supplies

“I teach in a very low income area where students do not bring any supplies to school nor do they have any at home. I have to provide any extras as I have no budget for materials during the school year…”

“Students don't like to feel different. If they are expected to bring in a supply on a particular day (that they do not have) they may skip the class or day to avoid embarrassment.”
The Cost of Teaching

As a society, we entrust our teachers to educate and nurture our youth. The expectations are sky-high, despite not having a full understanding of what a teacher invests into a day in the classroom. Our teachers do more than just ‘teach’; they mentor, counsel and inspire. And throughout a year of turmoil, without pause--placed additional burdens on them to become technical experts, grief counselors, and to provide a whole new kind of care. As they worked to quell their own fears with the uncertainty brought on by COVID-19, teachers rose to the occasion and persevered. But at what cost?

OUR TEACHERS

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The majority are paid below the national average

Over 99% use their own money to purchase supplies for their students and classrooms

The majority spend upwards of one or more paychecks a year to purchase supplies for their classrooms.

“It broke my heart to not be able to give my students the needed supplies at the beginning of the year to help with their learning needs. I have spent so much of my own money that no one has helped me with and am struggling to figure out ways of providing daily materials for my students.”

“At the onset of the pandemic, I knew I had to purchase a reliable computer in order to effectively access the internet from home. The school-owned laptop that is assigned to me is over 10 years old and showing its age.”

“I lost track after [spending] $900.00. I try not to think about it. I can't let these kids down. Someday I will be rewarded when they all go on to do GREAT things. Hopefully, I make a difference to each of them and spark a passion within my students.”
A Profound Impact

Teachers know that with the proper supplies, students are able and motivated to achieve their full potential. And when our teachers are able to focus on teaching, rather than resourcing, education wins.

Percent of teachers who reported that having access to free supplies was very or critically important to impacting:

- My ability to create a more equal learning environment: 92%
- My personal budget: 90%
- My ability to focus on other areas of need: 88%
- My daily classroom activities: 84%
- My ability to increase the variety and scope of projects I can offer my students: 84%
- My ability to deepen the scope of learning in a particular area: 79%

“Our school is almost 100% low income. Many of our students do not even have meals except the ones they receive from the school. The supplies we are able to give them are invaluable to them, allowing them to be successful in their quest for education. For some of them, the socks we received and distributed are the only ones they have. The same is true for the pencils, notebooks, etc. Most of us (teachers) are already spending hundreds of dollars a year, or more, trying to help our students. If we could do more, most of us would...[it] is invaluable to us as teachers to be able to help our students succeed.”
Measuring Success

Percent of teachers who reported access to free supplies from their local Resource Center impacted a lot or was critically important for:

- Class Preparedness: 80%
- Class Participation: 66%
- Self Esteem: 65%
- Interest in Learning: 63%
- Social Engagement: 62%
- Student’s Learning to Respect and Take Responsibility for Their Items: 59%
- Student Behavior: 52%

“The free supplies enables all students to have an equal opportunity to complete and participate in assignments. Students are more likely to come to school prepared.”

“Attendance percentages reach the 95%+ when students have what they need. I have witnessed declines to 75-86% when they lack supplies.”
Beyond the need for any product, teachers are what our kids need most. For our students, the data is clear: distance learning does not even come close to the value of being in a classroom, starting with the social interaction between a student and their teacher. However, both our students and teachers need proper tools in order to be successful in their educational journey.

While the prevalence and reliance on technology soared, the basic school supplies far outranked technology. Why? Because tangible learning items keep children engaged and more focused on the task at hand. When they use their hands to write, build, and create--they are inspired.

When asked which items they needed most for their classrooms, teachers were clear: core supplies are what is most essential to a successful learning environment.

**Top 10 classroom supplies**

By percent

- **PENCILS**: 69%
- **PAPER**: 56%
- **NOTEBOOKS**: 48%
- **CRAYONS**: 30%
- **MARKERS**: 25%
- **GLUE**: 24%
- **DRY ERASE MARKERS**: 22%
- **FOLDERS**: 20%
- **COLORED PENCILS**: 15%
- **PENS**: 13%

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**IN THEIR WORDS**

**The power of a pencil:**

“My students are able to always know that we have a pencil for them. Just something that small helps the educational mindset.”

“I have noticed it brings [my students] relief when I am able to supply them with a pencil rather than expecting them to show up at school with one or receive the consequence of not being able to participate fully.”
With the implementation of distance and hybrid learning restrictions active throughout 2020, home was either partially or completely where students' learning took place. Even still, teachers continued to rank core products, like pencils and paper, above devices and the internet.

Teachers told a similar story when it came to their needs in order to successfully teach their students in a distance and hybrid learning environment.

**IN THEIR WORDS**

*Why core?*

"The free supplies [have] helped create an equal classroom environment for my students because when a student comes in without the needed supplies, we are able to provide them with the pen, paper/notebook, etc. to be successful."
What’s Next: Evolving Classroom Needs

While pencils and paper will always be at the core of what we provide, our teachers will need additional resources to support students in today’s environment and for a future yet imagined. As we move forward, we will continue to bring partners together to help fund, secure, and provide both the supplies and the tools needed for students to connect to each other and the world around them.

As we consider the ever-evolving needs that our advancing society demands, we must especially acknowledge how it impacts our educational system. We all endured extraordinary hardships throughout 2020. While most struggled to maintain some semblance of normalcy in their daily lives, our teachers were simultaneously subject to much higher expectations.

Teachers are meant to educate, not to be experts in technical systems or the issues that are often associated with their usage. However, these duties became an integral part of their jobs last year. Therefore, we asked our teachers what their biggest challenges were as they implemented remote learning. The responses showed that student participation and technical issues were their two primary challenges.

In line with the fact that technical integration was an enormous feat for our teachers in 2020, when asked to rank categories they needed additional support in, it was no surprise that technology was #1. From training, to having proper devices, and most importantly—ensuring their students have the tools they need to participate, teachers need more. Additionally, Literacy and S.T.E.M. Education emerged as top contenders in areas where support is crucial.
It’s more than just a backpack.

Amidst all the challenges our teachers battled throughout 2020, 80% of teachers reported that their local teacher resource center was very or critically important to them.

The difference we make for our students and teachers assures us of two things: the work we do is making an impact and must continue, and we need to scale our work to even greater levels to meet the needs of all of the teachers and students who need our support.

This is doable. With your partnership, a collective vision of equity in education can be realized. Together we can empower great teachers to continue impacting the communities that need them most. And we can break down the tangible barriers, closing the Opportunity Gap and giving under-resourced students the tools they need to reach their full potential.

In 2020 we served:

- 205k teachers
- 5 million students

In the next 5 years our goal is to double our impact to serve:

- 500k teachers
- 10 million students

Let’s aspire to do more. In the years to come, we will continue to expand our reach of whom we serve. We recognize that the need is great, but our mission is greater. We are the only national nonprofit exclusively dedicated to getting basic school supplies into the hands of the educators and students who need them most. Please continue to be the champion for our teachers, so they can focus on what they do best: teach.
The Teacher Impact Report is an annual publication produced by the Kids In Need Foundation (KINF), a nonprofit organization that believes every child in America deserves equal opportunity and access to a quality education. Copyright 2021. All rights reserved. For more information, visit KINF.org