# STAKEHOLDERS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN ONLINE EDUCATION

## A look at the vital roles and strategies of parents, teachers, community partners and students in the success of online learning

Online teaching and learning have been an invaluable component of education in the past decade, and even more so in the past year. Nearly 93% of people in households with school-age children reported some type of "distance learning" during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the US Census Bureau.

The demand for quality fully online or hybrid learning has been steadily increasing, even pre-pandemic. A report in December 2019 from Research and Markets forecast the online education market to reach $350 billion by 2025, with the report citing rising demand from school districts, parents and students. Post-pandemic, these figures are expected to rise even

higher. Online learning platforms, therefore, must rise to meet the needs of students, their parents, teachers and the community at large.

## INVESTING IN THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

The outcome of the educational experience for a child affects whole schools, districts and communities. Educational stakeholders share a belief in the importance of learning and those stakeholders all work together to build and implement learning environments that support students. This is especially important where online learning is concerned because home and community life are vital to its success.

"When we look at students as monoliths, we are setting ourselves and them up for failure. Relationships matter, across the board," said Rehan Mirza, executive director of Sanad Trust Foundation, a nonprofit that offers K-12 learning coach services in person and online with Stride Learning Solutions.

It is important to meet stakeholder needs and forge stronger connections between them through online learning as it continues to evolve. In stakeholders lie the resources, information, opportunities and wisdom needed to support the goals of the education system — creating the conditions for students to thrive now and in the future.

To thrive, and to help students do so, online learning programs must take stakeholder input and experience into account, from the planning stage all the way through celebrating successes.

## STUDENTS AS STAKEHOLDERS

Students are important stakeholders in their own education, so they should have a voice in what they want and need to learn. An effective virtual learning experience will consider that students are more engaged when they are part of the dialogue surrounding their learning, according to published educators Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey. Along with conversations, students are most engaged when they're learning new things, participating in active learning, and when they can take purposeful initiative while gaining a sense of self.

Creating personalized, engaging online learning experiences not only helps students work independently, but it puts them at the center of their course, style and manner of learning — making them stakeholders in the knowledge at hand and putting them at the helm of their future learning.

Intervention strategies also play a role in the student stakeholder experience — particularly when it comes to them feeling that they can work at their own pace and complete their own tasks on a timeline they help design. Online learning platforms such as Stride Learning Solutions provide the tools students need to engage in personalized methods of remediation, strengthening the areas where they need more help without stigma or blanketed prescriptions for improvement.

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> EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF SANAD TRUST FOUNDATION

# Strengthening stakeholders in education

Stride Learning Solutions recognizes the extreme value of stakeholders in the online learning environment and incorporates valuable tools into its platform to facilitate the process.

A summer 2020 survey of parents found that parents and students at Stride K12-powered, full-time online schools felt more connected to their learning roles. Parents and students received more frequent and quality communication from instructors, and students felt more organized and productive, with a willingness to participate in more active-learning activities.

Stride Learning Solutions features consultative support, professional learning and training for administrators, teachers and parents. Stride Learning Solutions offers all-inclusive, full-time online or blended options for students of every age to learn outside of the brick-and-mortar classroom. Decades of experience, combined with a holistic student approach, make Stride Learning Solutions a great fit for a variety of learners.

## TEACHERS AS STAKEHOLDERS

Teachers who feel empowered in the instructional process tend to bring more passion, creativity and openness to student input to the classroom, whether in person or online.

"It's intangible in some ways, but I believe that teachers most want to feel secure from failure," Mirza said. "Providing opportunities and the space for teams to explore, fail and contribute in more than one way empowers and strengthens a learning environment."

This sense of empowerment and "having a say" can be cultivated through professional development that encourages curriculum feedback, personalization of content and development of expertise in areas where teachers are enthusiastic.

This thorough inclusion of teachers as stakeholders must take place as early as the onboarding process and should include outreach for their feedback and suggestions as their careers continue.

A culture of open communication — one that invites new ideas and is flexible to change based on educator feedback — is also vital to teachers as stakeholders. This dialogue should never be as simple as an "open door" policy for school and district leaders; rather, leaders should seek consistent opportunities — such as roundtable discussions or even teacher surveys — to ensure educators feel truly welcome in bringing their ideas, feedback and constructive criticisms to the table.

## PARENTS AS STAKEHOLDERS

A recent survey from the nonprofit Learning Heroes found that two-thirds of surveyed parents say they're more involved with their child's education today than ever before. This is beneficial and helps parents intervene and reinforce learning at home, leading to even greater student success. The National PTA shares that "family involvement improves student success, regardless of race/ethnicity, class or parents' level of education."

Not all parents are involved, however, and some may not feel comfortable or even welcome into the stakeholder circle for various reasons.

"For these parents, I think providing education and inspiration is paramount," Mirza said.

Among ways to engage parents are workshops, guest speakers, online forums, short explainer videos and how-tos, and even book clubs.

Part of this involvement includes strong parent-teacher partnerships. It is not enough to speak once a quarter at a parent-teacher conference; parents and teachers should be working consistently, hand-in-hand, in the online setting.

Districts can assist all types of parents with their role as facilitators in their students' learning environment and success. It is important to remember that virtual learning can be a big adjustment and comes with some challenges, but the transition is made possible with the tools and support that virtual learning experts such as Stride Learning Solutions provides.

## BUSINESSES AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AS STAKEHOLDERS

The heart of every community begins with its educational cornerstone: the students who are learning there. This used to be true of geographic regions, with the educational accomplishments of students having a direct impact on the local economies. Today, the opportunity and ability for businesses and organizations to affect positive change in students is much wider. This is especially helpful for online learning platforms, which can tap the expertise of leaders from all over the country and world to create and deliver lessons for students. Viewing as valuable the input of business and industry leaders is part of a holistic approach to curricula that gives students real-world examples both on the local and global level.

## BRINGING STAKEHOLDERS IN

Stakeholders in education work together for a common purpose and their input is invaluable to making the schools conducive to teaching and learning. Behind every online learning platform, lesson and live classroom session are stakeholders supporting students and encouraging academic success. Realizing that students learn best when supported from many angles is important to a holistic student approach that benefits everyone long term. ■

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## ABOUT STRIDE LEARNING SOLUTIONS

Since 2000, Stride Learning Solutions has been a leader in strategic solutions to solve district challenges. Stride's flexible and highly engaging online and blended learning options are designed specifically for virtual learning and supported by professional learning for educators — led by experienced Stride virtual instructors. With an innovative platform, comprehensive digital courseware, adaptable technology, and extensive support, Stride will help your school or district empower a brighter future for learners.

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