

Governing in Crisis Teaching Guide

Allegheny Intermediate Unit Executive Director Robert Scherrer
COVID, Classrooms and Community-Planning for a New School Year

Interview Summary

This fall more than 56 million students are getting ready to return for the new school year. Normally, this is a time of excitement for schools and families, but this school year will be unlike any we have seen as school districts are presented with unique challenges related to fostering a safe and productive education environment during the pandemic. Robert Scherrer, executive director of the Allegheny Intermediate Unit, discusses the response of the 42 school districts within the boundaries of the intermediate unit as they develop in-person, hybrid, and remote learning opportunities for students and respond to challenges in public health, school funding, and access to technology.

To watch the video interview please visit: https://youtu.be/eAbHtW_0Zq8.

The Governing in Crisis series videos, podcasts, and resource materials are available at:
www.iop.pitt.edu/governing-crisis.

Video Topics

- (0:00) Introduction
- (5:32) AIU and School District Preparations for Reopening Schools
- (13:58) Public Health Informed Decision-Making
- (23:00) Overcoming Programming, Costs, and Equity Issues Arising from the Pandemic
- (32:59) Reopening Schools Safety with Community Support

Potential Uses

- Post a governance series video on Canvas and ask students to respond to a discussion question about the video, as well as comment on 1-2 of their classmates' posts.
- Show a clip of the video during class to enrich learning, emphasize a point, and/or contextualize a topic.
- Create a resource folder on Canvas that includes governance series videos, accompanied by "learn and do more" documents, as well as other links to support student growth related to current events.
- Incorporate a governance series video into pre-class readings for a live discussion using or adapting the questions below.

Suggested Written Reflection Questions

- ❑ Have you been learning in-person, remotely, or a combination of both? How has this experience shaped your learning? What learning challenges and upsides have you experienced?
- ❑ Dr. Scherrer explains how the AIU has convened public health experts to participate in the decision-making process. How do you think public health experts should be included in the decision-making process? Are there other people that should be involved?
- ❑ What did you find interesting in the interview? What is something that you disagreed with?
- ❑ Find the reopening plans for two school districts in Allegheny County (You may wish to use the Pittsburgh Quarterly article cited below as a guide.) How are they similar or different? How might the community they serve influence the type of reopening plans they adopted?

Suggested Classroom Discussion Questions

- ❑ The AIU received 1.5 million dollars to support school districts. What are some of the additional costs that school districts will bear as a result of the crisis? How would you allocate this money? What factors would you consider? (size of school district, access to resources, past academic performance, etc.)
- ❑ Dr. Scherrer underscores the inequities in education across the nation and Pennsylvania. How has this been exacerbated by COVID-19? How would you combat this?
- ❑ How did Dr. Scherrer use his past experience as a superintendent to develop strategies for communicating with school administrators in his new role at the AIU?
- ❑ In Pennsylvania, each of the 500 school districts is controlled locally by an elected school board. What are the benefits and detriments of this model?
- ❑ According to Dr. Scherrer, returning students to in-person schooling is a “a community effort.” What efforts have you seen in your community? Where do you see communities falling short?

Related Reading

- ❑ Read the Pittsburgh Quarterly’s article *Back to School? 42 Districts, 42 Plans*, which Chancellor Emeritus Nordenberg references during the interview.
- ❑ In Allegheny County, both in the city of Pittsburgh and outer districts, there is a large gap in students and families that have internet access and those who don’t. Read more about *How the pandemic is exacerbating the digital divide in Allegheny County*.
- ❑ Read the *Pittsburgh Equity Indicators’ report*, an annual report put out by the city in partnership with CUNY ISLG to assess the city’s progress regarding equitable opportunities.

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