

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/in-brief/pivoting-to-face-disruption/>

Abl founder and executive chairman Adam Pisoni explains the importance of the “master scheduling” process, and describes how deeply COVID-19 disrupted that essential school district planning framework. Amid those disruptions and a pause in standardized testing, he sees a huge opportunity to rewrite school districts in the direction of equity. However, he observes, these disruptions have also required Abl to pivot, putting more emphasis on consulting services for districts and less emphasis on software solutions.



Transcript

- A fundamental level what Abl does is you know operational approach to equity.. But a big part of that is helping schools develop what are called master schedules that are more equitable and drive more excellence in their students.. The master schedule is what that process determines what courses are offered, who teaches what, how students are grouped, all these, all of the decisions pretty much that are made outside the classroom that impact the potential the opportunity and success of the student.. It's a critical function and under the COVID world that has so insane, because normally, schools begin in January, maybe March developing master schedules for the next year.. But in March of this year, they were like, whoa, everything's out.. And so suddenly, they're in a world of not only having to do in a very short amount of time that they normally do in six to nine months.. But they have to do multiple ones because we don't know our kids are coming back to school, are they gonna be hybrid, we're probably gonna switch.. And so we need to be able to have an eye on what that is.. And we have new constraints.. Not just the old ones but how many students is each student in contact with you know how do we decide how to group these students together, especially if it's hybrid, and some are coming in and some are not..

And so our work is sort of in two pieces.. One is the re-imagining school piece, of which there's a lot of interest today because they're recognizing this as an opportunity.. And the other is the sort of equity and operational piece, which is whether you're re-imagining or not, you have to come back in a way that is gonna not just maximize the you know the excellence but also the equity piece of that.. And you know and dealing with, but I think this is a real opportunity, because I said earlier about how parents often drive, parents are rationally making decisions to benefit their kids.. And yet that can often have negative benefits negative consequences.. COVID provides the best excuse for a district leader to say, you know what, I know that we've offered French five for whatever but like those six kids that had that we need that teacher to teach English right now and to remediate because we have students who are falling behind.. I also think one of the most dramatic changes we're gonna see this year is many, if not most districts are not gonna do standardized testing this year.. The traditional types of standardized testing.. And there's so many good and bad directions that can go, you know a lot of the people who push for standardized testing, were the people who really cared about equity because they wanted to measure the inequity.. That's a very noble reason..

But we also know that standardized testing creates perverse incentives.. There's all these ways in which school has an opportunity to rewrite and what we're trying to do is if one way our work has really changed is we've become a bit more consultative heavy, because there's no there was no way to productize that quickly the challenges that they're facing.. And so we're relying on the fact that we can work more closely with our customers to learn through these challenges and productize them as we go.. And we're holding less precious the like, it has to all be SAS revenue and we should never you know, that kind of thing, which is really hard to do as a startup.. And in many ways I think that speaks to one of those tensions between social enterprise and enterprise...