

# Crises and Capital: The Top Edtech Business Stories of 2020

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“Never let a good crisis go to waste,” so the saying goes. The education industry didn’t. In fact, many capitalized on it in 2020.

School closures have forced people to not only rely more on digital tools in the short term, but also reimagine what education can be once it’s safe to return. If anything, the disruption to daily lives only accelerated interest from entrepreneurs and investors in shaping what that future will look like. Many are betting—literally—that it won’t be business as usual.

Here is a recap of the biggest and most popular edtech business stories of 2020.

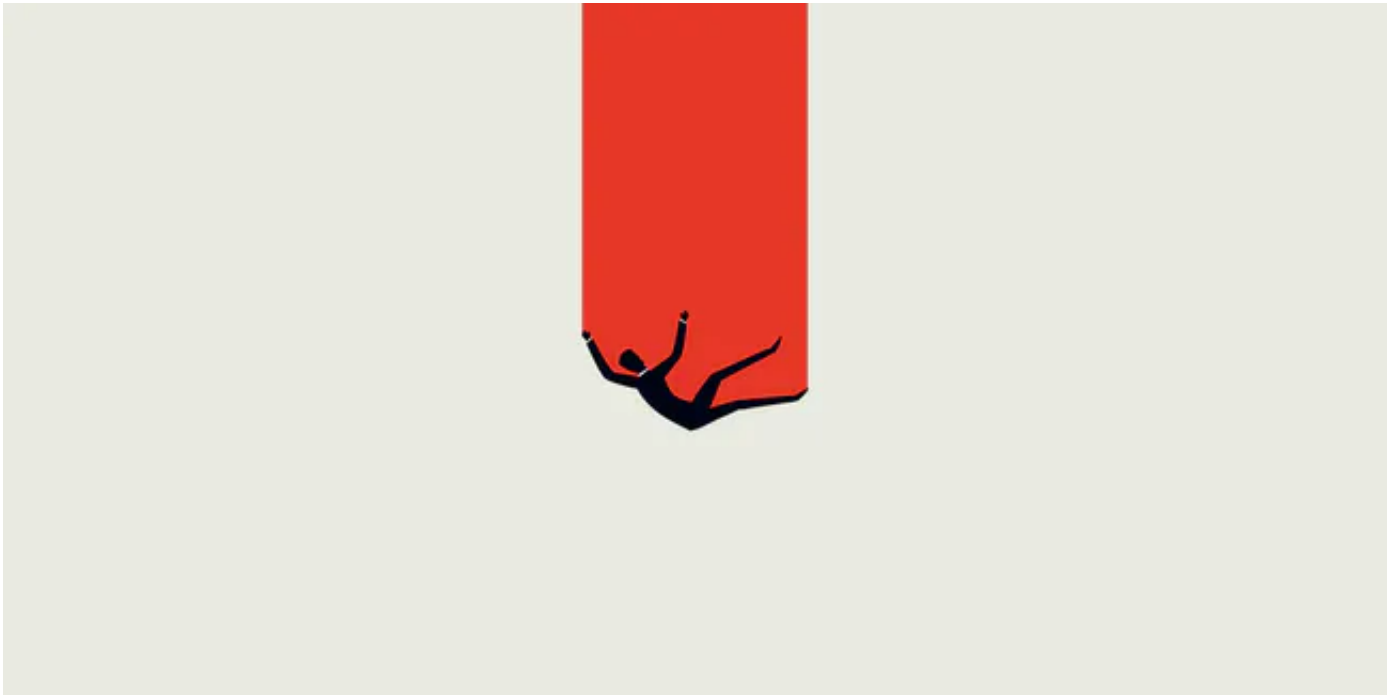


## Instructure's Future

Before there was a pandemic, there was the twisted tale of Instructure's sale. The maker of the Canvas learning management system, which went public in 2015, announced a \$2-billion offer from private equity firm Thoma Bravo last December. That set off a chain of lawsuits, layoffs and revolt from investors unhappy with the terms, which carried into 2020. Ultimately, the sale went through in March.

It may not be the only publicly traded edtech company to be taken private. This month, Pluralsight agreed to a \$3.5-billion acquisition offer from Vista Equity Partners.

- [Instructure Lays Off About 100 As It Urges Shareholders to Support Sale](#)
- [4 Items on Instructure's To-Do List After the Sale of the Canvas LMS Provider](#)
- [Pluralsight, Vista Equity Partners Agree to \\$3.5 Billion Acquisition Deal](#)



## COVID's Immediate Aftermath

As the pandemic shuttered schools, many educators found themselves turning to tools to support remote instruction. That led to record-setting traffic for many providers—along with a flurry of pitches from companies trying to capitalize on the moment (annoying more than a few school leaders in the process).

The pandemic also disrupted the normal sales cycles for education companies, and many turned to government support to stay afloat.

- [Traffic Is Booming for Online Education Providers. But So Are Costs.](#)
- [Want to Help Schools Closed by COVID-19? Don't Pitch Them Right Now.](#)
- [Dozens of Venture-Backed Startups Among Edtech Recipients of PPP Loans](#)



## Race, Culture and Curriculum

The murder of George Floyd on Memorial Day rallied many people across the country angered and frustrated by the long history of racial injustice in the United States. The national outrage dovetailed with a reexamination on the cultural perspectives and biases represented in education curriculum.

- [Racism, Consumerism, and a Conversation With My Son About the Future of Diversity](#)
- [A Tale of Two American Education Systems: An Edtech Investor's Perspective](#)
- [Schools Drop Acellus Learning Platform Over 'Glaring' Offensive Content](#)
- [From DC Chancellor to Edtech Founder: Kaya Henderson on Her New Venture in Culturally-Relevant Education](#)





## Funding, Wheeling and Dealing

As many schools closed, investors' checkbooks opened, many attracted by the surge in the usage of edtech products and services. Fundraising and acquisition deals continued uninterrupted. Established companies raised money in greater amounts; longtime edtech entrepreneurs re-entered the market with new startups.

- [US Edtech Raises \\$803M in First Half of 2020 As COVID-19 Forces Learning Online](#)
- [Entangled No More: Guild Education Buys Edtech Venture Studio](#)
- [Former Blackboard CEO Raises \\$16M to Bring LMS Features to Zoom Classrooms](#)
- [Coursera Couple Returns to Higher Ed With \\$14.5M to Recreate In-Person Learning, Online](#)
- [Discovery Education Acquires Mystery Science in \\$140 Million Deal](#)

[Revisit our coverage of other major deals here.](#)



## March of the Unicorns

Established private edtech companies continued to attract capital at larger valuations, leading some to join the “unicorn” club and existing unicorns to grow even bigger horns.

- [Coursera Raises \\$130 Million as Colleges Turn to Online Courses for the Fall](#)
- [With \\$1.1B Valuation, Course Hero Joins the Edtech Unicorn Stable](#)
- [Duolingo Just Raised \\$35M. Udemy Got \\$50M. Both Are Valued Billions More.](#)