# Communications Toolkit for Reopening Schools after COVID-19

## Recommendations for Communication Departments September 2020

Council of the Great City Schools®

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The Council of the Great City Schools is the only national organization exclusively representing the needs of urban public schools. Composed of 76 large-city school districts, its mission is to promote the cause of urban education and to advocate for inner-city students through legislation, research, and media relations. The organization also provides a network for school districts sharing common problems to exchange information and to collectively address new challenges as they emerge in order to deliver the best possible education for urban youth.


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# Communications Toolkit for Reopening Schools after COVID-19

## Recommendations for Communication Departments

September 2020

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# Introduction and Purpose of the Document

The COVID-19 pandemic forced the nation's urban school districts to close their doors in mid-March and educators were faced with the huge challenge of meeting the educational, nutritional and social-emotional needs of their students, all in a relatively short amount of time. But they rose to the challenge, providing millions of meals, distributing computer devices, and launching online instruction for tens of thousands of students.

Now those same school systems are facing other unprecedented challenges—the reopening of schools in the fall amid concerns about the continuous spread of COVID-19 in states and cities across the nation and ever-changing federal and state guidance and shifting public sentiment. As a result, most big-city school districts are beginning the 2020-21 school year with distance-only learning with plans to eventually transition to a hybrid approach combining online instruction and classroom learning.

Whatever return-to-school plans districts eventually implement, effective communication is ***key*** to the success of those efforts.

Communication staff in major urban school districts across the country are experts in their specific contexts and have put massive amounts of work, thought, and planning into their communications strategies over the past five months.

The purpose of this document is to complement their expertise with a checklist of considerations, sample communication materials drawn from urban school districts across the country, and recommendations for effective messaging during the COVID-19 crisis, from initial reopening through the challenges that will arise during the 2020-21 school year. These recommendations are meant to help districts cut through the noise of this constantly evolving crisis and provide big-picture goals to keep in mind as district leaders and communications staff craft and deliver communications day-to-day.

These recommendations come from a working group comprised of senior administrators who oversee communication departments in six of the nation's major city public school districts. The document also contains recommendations and strategies from the Benenson Strategy Group, drawn from their past research on education, experience in crisis communications in the corporate and political worlds, and their analysis of public polling around school closures and reopening this year.

Communication Departments must be able to quickly adapt to the changing circumstances in which they find themselves. It is also vitally important that any communications from the district identify and be sensitive to the devastating impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on students, employees, and families.

Communicating school reopening policies and how they map back to the district's vision for successful learning in safe conditions will be critical in establishing a climate of trust as well as buy-in among students, staff, families, and other stakeholders. It is our hope that this document will equip district leaders and communications staff in the nation's urban school districts with the knowledge, guidance, and tools they need to perform effective outreach amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

# Checklist of Strategic Principles in Communicating the Reopening of Schools

The Communication Department will play a vital role in ensuring that district students, employees, families, community members, and stakeholders are informed by and engaged in the district's plan to support a safe and successful school year for students and staff.

**Here is a checklist of strategic principles that districts and departments should consider when reopening schools.**

- ☐ Be proactive.
- ☐ Provide clear, specific, concise, and timely communications about schools reopening to both internal (staff) and external (students, families, stakeholders) audiences.
- ☐ Identify your "surprising and irrefutable advocates."
- ☐ Look for new channels and creative ways to communicate.
- ☐ Do not neglect internal communications.
- ☐ Show that you "get it" but do not overpromise.
- ☐ Understand the appeal of those who disagree with your approach.

We also include several tips to ensure that your messages have maximum visibility and impact. These include—

- Create visual communications (signage, videos, etc.) to assure external and internal stakeholders that in-person school reopening, whenever it happens, will be safe.
- Develop communications in the event a child, staff member or visitor to the school contracts coronavirus and, separately, in anticipation of districtwide or individual school closures.
- Engage the families of English Language Learners.
- Create a logo/branding that will be used on all reopening materials.
- Create a legislative agenda and communications around finance issues.
- Continue to promote district enrollment options and connect with and celebrate students and staff.
- Provide leadership staff with crisis communications training.
- Develop a communications timeline.

Below, we outline each of these critical areas and more. The organizational structure and capacity of your Communication Department may influence the extent to which these recommendations can be implemented.

## Be Proactive. There is plenty to react to every day, but a proactive, values-based approach is your best shot to have your message break through.

Responding to the news of the day is a necessary component of any communications strategy, but districts need to be careful not to let politicians and the media set the terms of the conversation (as much as possible), leaving districts to play defense and counter misinformation.

- Always communicate your "why" and the reasons behind what you are doing. Once you know your "why" use it to craft messages that are rooted in your values as a district—you will have an easier time connecting with audiences and staying on message if you can articulate what the ultimate vision and goals are for your entire pandemic response.
- When you regularly incorporate your core principles into your messaging, it provides a clearer roadmap for your audience as they navigate the detailed information you are communicating. Look for proactive and frequent opportunities to speak passionately about your district's values and how they have guided your decisions and helped you navigate difficult tradeoffs.

## Provide clear, specific, concise, frequent, and timely communications about schools reopening to both internal (staff) and external (students, families, stakeholders) audiences.

Information voids are your biggest enemy and if you are not telling your story, someone else is. It is ok not to have all the answers today if you are taking action to move things in the right direction. As the situation with the virus evolves, districts will likely find themselves forced to change course, leaving the unpleasant challenge of communicating about those changes in plans. Districts may hear from audiences that they are confused about the path forward, and it may be tempting to hold off on saying anything until there are clear answers. As frustrating as this can be, the alternative—an information void—is worse.

- Public polling and district polling suggest that there is little consensus on any single safety strategy or any single metric that measures school safety.
- Nevertheless, there is a hunger for real information rather than abstract reassurance from authorities that in-person school reopening, whenever it happens, will be completely safe. Parents and teachers are not willing to take anyone's word for it, so being proactive in giving out regular and specific information will help fill information voids and show that you are not hiding anything.
- Committing to regularly releasing updates on a few key datapoints will help keep audiences on your side rather than fighting you for information or turning to less reliable sources.
- Being consistent is important to the extent possible, but the real key is transparency—both about the outcome and the process. Being transparent about the plan that your district has developed is crucial. Districts should clearly describe how the plan will work and what role students, parents, and staff will play every step of the way. But they should also be transparent about the process, including how changes in the situation on the ground have led to districts altering their approach, which helps audiences appreciate the challenges you face.
- Messaging about the range of problems you're working so hard to solve—and acknowledging the reality of what you do and don't know today—will allow districts to prevent a harmful information void and bring your stakeholders along with you on the way to a necessarily imperfect approach.

- Make sure that there is a clear place parents of district students can go in order to get information from the district. Also ensure that there are ways for both parents and teachers to provide feedback to the district on what is working and not working besides public comment sessions at regular school board meetings.
- Committing to regular communications will be helpful in filling information voids and all vital information should be shared at one time to reduce confusion, misunderstanding and anxiety. You do not want to drown your audiences in pointless communications but letting them know when they can expect to hear from you will help keep them from getting impatient and looking elsewhere.

Communication may be carried out in a variety of ways to reach internal and external audiences:

1. Post all information around school reopening on a dedicated COVID-19 district website with clear links and continuously update information.

   *Example:*

   - Miami-Dade County Schools' reopening website

2. Host monthly virtual information Town Halls, live Q&A sessions, and Zoom panel discussions to help give students, families, and staff a stronger sense of what the return to school will look and feel like. Stream the events on different communications channels such as Facebook Live or the district's cable channel with interpretation provided in different languages.
3. Create weekly/biweekly videos from the district Superintendent and distribute them through social media channels.
4. Maintain a dynamic FAQ.

   *Examples:*

   - Des Moines Public Schools FAQ
   - School District of Palm Beach County FAQ
   - Dallas Independent School District's Reentry Information for Parents

5. Share information and updates regularly with students, families, and community members via robocalls, texts, emails, district website, mobile apps, and social media posts.
6. Create one-pagers that can be distributed to families and community stakeholders. Also create one-pagers for specific job groups.

   *Examples:*

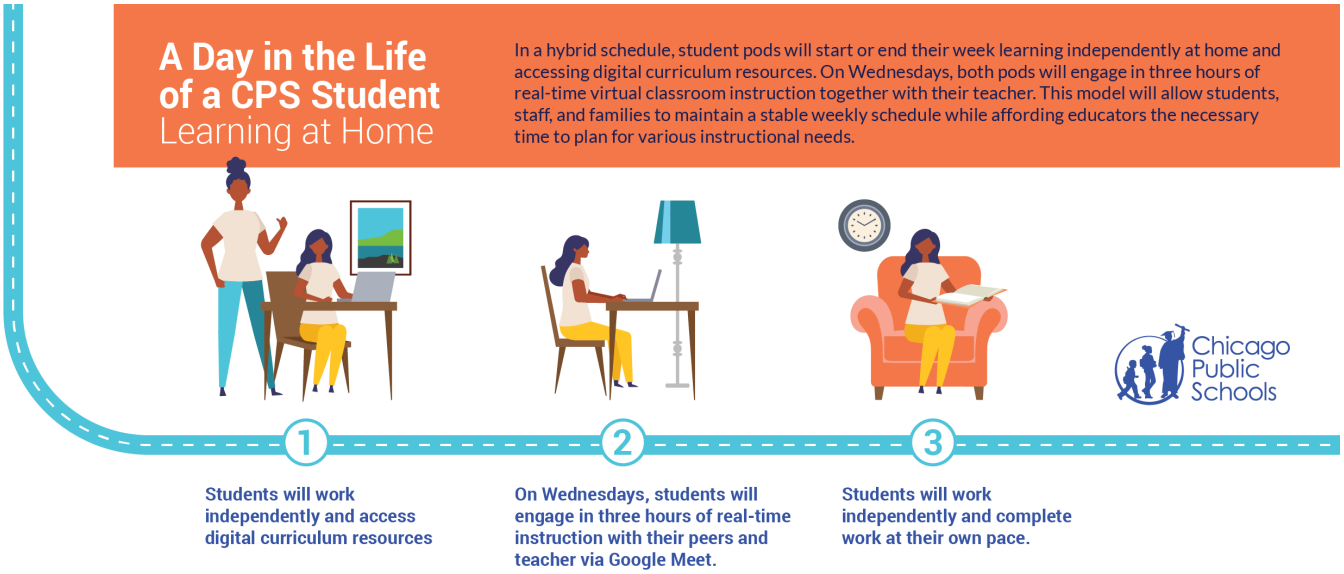
   - NOLA one-pager
   - Indianapolis Public Schools Back to School Guidelines
   - School District of Philadelphia one-pager
   - Cleveland Metropolitan School District developed a postcard mailer that went to all Cleveland households with a message of empathy for families and a list of supports available to them.

7. Create Back-to-School Checklists for parents with students participating in hybrid or remote environments.

   *Examples:*

   - Cleveland Metropolitan School District created a "Parent Checklist" page that includes links to everything the district created to prepare families for the remote learning experience.
   - The district also includes documents on Internet Safety:
     - Internet Safety Tips for Parents
     - Internet Safety Tips for Educators
   - Chicago Public Schools created graphics depicting:
     - A Day in the Life of a CPS Student—Learning at Home
     - A Day in the Life of a CPS Student—Learning at School

*Chicago Public Schools graphics:*



# A Day in the Life of a CPS Student
## Learning at School

Given the health and safety challenges associated with reopening school during a global pandemic, students, staff, and families must be prepared for school to look and feel different next year. Although these changes may feel difficult at first, we believe they are both prudent and necessary to support the safety of our students and staff. While these changes will impact the majority of our students, we also recognize the diverse medical needs of our students, and schools will work with our Office of Diverse Learner Supports and Services department to ensure all students are properly supported.

When students attend school for in-person instruction, this is what they can expect their day to look and feel like:

1

### Getting ready for school

Students will complete their required sick screen protocol at home. Students will bring their clean cloth face covering with them.

2

### Traveling on the school bus

Students wear cloth face coverings while on the school bus. School bus aides will wear appropriate PPE and offer students hand sanitizer prior to boarding the bus. Students will sit by themselves or only with their sibling and be spaced to ensure proper social distancing.

3

### Arrival at school

Drop-off times may be staggered, and students will enter the school building through assigned entrances alongside their pods in order to ensure proper social distancing. Upon entering the school building, students will wash their hands or use hand sanitizer.

4

### Entering the classroom

Students will go straight to their classrooms. Students sit in assigned spaces, eat meals in their room, and stay with their pod for the full school day.

5

### Following classroom procedures

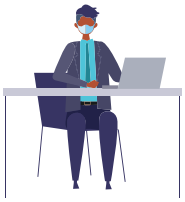
Students and teachers will wear masks at all times, and student-teacher close contact will be limited. Only a limited set of supplies may be shared, and hand sanitizer will be used as needed.

6

### Taking restroom/lunch breaks

Pods will have designated bathrooms which will be cleaned frequently throughout the day. Students will need to wash their hands thoroughly and use hand sanitizer anytime they return to their classroom space.

Students will eat lunch in their classrooms, or if space allows, eat lunch in the cafeteria on a staggered schedule. Lunchrooms will need to be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected between use.



7

### Receiving student services

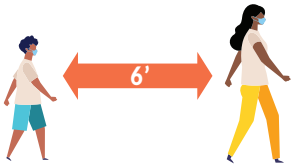
Related service providers, English learner teachers, diverse learner teachers, and social emotional learning specialists, among others, will continue to provide student services.

These staff members will rotate across assigned pods to provide services. If they need to see students in a pod not assigned to them, those services will be provided remotely, or with social distancing. Staff will have appropriate PPE depending on their job duties.

8

### Accessing content

Students remain in their pod throughout the day, but additional teachers may rotate across a few pods to provide instruction across multiple subjects and breaks for classroom teachers.




9

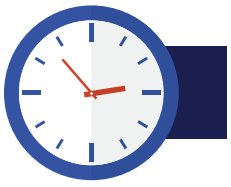
### Exiting the building

Students move through hallways within their pods and are socially distanced from all other pods.

Students leave the building through the door assigned to their pod.

### Addressing symptoms

If a student arrives exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms, or begins to exhibit symptoms during the day, they will be moved to the school's designated Care Room to wait until they are picked up.



10

### Attending out-of-school time

Students can attend out-of-school time (OST) programming. Schools must either maintain classroom pods for OST programs, or form additional, fixed pods specifically for OST programs. Students participating in OST programs must maintain social distance to the extent feasible within their pods, and must either maintain six feet of distance from other OST pods at all times or remain in separate spaces from other pods. OST providers are encouraged to create virtual adaptations of programming wherever possible in order to minimize the need for additional pods.

Chicago Public Schools

8. Involve your principals and support strong principal Back-to-School communications. If you can get principals or other trusted voices involved in delivering your message to every teacher rather than relying only on all-staff emails, you are less likely to get tuned out.
9. Create a principal toolkit to help principals communicate with families about the reopening of their individual schools. The toolkit might include:

- Talking points
- Answers to anticipated questions (for use with staff and families)
- Letter/robocall/text templates for use with families, highlighting the general reopening plan and anticipated next steps at the school level in preparation for school start
- Access to all quick guides and Did You Know? video resources, etc.

  *Example:*

  – The New York City Department of Education School Building Re-opening Preliminary Plan.

10. Create a "reentry to workplace" plan for staff. Questions that need to be answered include:

- What do returning employees need to know to feel safe and protected?
- Who returns, who doesn't and why? Look into creating specific professional development modules that all campus-based staff must complete prior to the first day of school and practice appropriate routines, such as arrival and dismissal, hand-washing procedures, covering your cough, etc.

  *Examples:*

  – Charleston County School District created custodian job cards to help the daytime custodians conduct their daily cleaning routine during COVID-19.

  – Orange County Public Schools' created a COVID-19 Health and Safety Procedures Manual for district staff.

11. Enable and promote student voices by engaging and connecting with student councils and other student-led organizations.
12. Display up-to-date communications on school marquees, through email groups, PTAs/booster clubs and other parent groups.

## Identify your "surprising and irrefutable advocates."

From political campaigns to organizations in crisis—your ability to get your audience on your side depends on not just what you say, but who is saying it. Your most effective messengers are what we call surprising and irrefutable advocates—those who bring unquestioned authority on the subject at hand, and that audiences would not automatically assume are on your side.

- With so much noise around this issue, breaking through is easier with unexpected messengers who can capture stakeholders' attention and whose viewpoints will be difficult to dismiss.
- Depending on the specific context your district faces and the aspect of your strategy you need to communicate, these advocates could include local health officials, doctors, principals, teachers, or trusted community figures outside of the education system altogether.

- Relying on actual people as messengers is more effective validation than just asserting their support or appealing to authority. For example, partnering with a respected local medical institution to talk about risks of transmission and your safety precautions will be more effective than saying you followed guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or a state health authority. Similarly, finding opportunities for parents and educators to directly speak in support of your approach will carry more weight than saying you consulted them.
- It may also be powerful to find advocates who can validate your approach to meeting the needs of vulnerable populations, particularly given the data showing there is widespread recognition of disproportionate impacts from the pandemic and remote learning. For example, advocates for students with special needs or English language learners may be powerful validators by speaking out about your efforts to ensure every student's needs are met, even during remote learning.
- Work with neighboring districts on messaging and planning. For instance, the San Diego Unified School District and the Los Angeles Unified School District released a joint press statement on their back-to-school plans.

## Look for new channels and creative ways to communicate. There is a lot of noise out there, so you need to keep your message from getting lost.

Consider how you can break out of traditional communications channels and approaches (that you have honed for handling typical situations) to mobilize your entire organization as communicators. Effective communicators can exist at any level, from superintendents to teachers, parents to community leaders, local public health officials to doctors.

- For example, if you can identify individual educators, parents, or students who can speak authentically about what the district is trying to do—such as members of district advisory boards—look for any opportunity to lift their voices or put them in front of the media. Similarly, look for ways to capture fun, innovative ways that your teachers are putting their creativity to work to make hybrid or remote learning engaging and effective, and pitch those stories to outlets that might otherwise be looking for stories about glitches and problems.
- For internal communications, look for ways to reach teachers through channels they will engage with. One way to do that is by creating opportunities for deeper, more interactive engagement for stakeholders who care and who want that, such as regular townhalls, live Q+A sessions, etc. that teachers or other stakeholders can join. But you should try to deliver your message to all stakeholders in personal, engaging ways as well, because many of your teachers and other stakeholders are exhausted, overwhelmed, and not seeking out new channels to hear from you. If you can get principals or other trusted voices involved in delivering your message to every teacher rather than relying only on all-staff emails, you are less likely to get tuned out.

## Do not neglect internal communications. You need to be communicating with everyone, but do not let a focus on the public debate distract you from internal communications needs.

- In a crisis, it is natural to focus your communications efforts on media and public narratives, which can often feel like they hold the greatest consequences and importance. Internal audiences—in this case, teachers and school-based staff—are on the front lines of any crisis communications challenge, and they can be your best asset or your worst enemy.
- Retaining (or regaining) the trust and support of educators is critically important for its own sake (the success of in-person, hybrid, or remote learning) but will also work to back up the messages you are driving publicly. The interactions educators have with students and families are often more powerful than any public-facing message you could craft—they can be either your best validators or a voice that undermines the confidence you're trying to instill in your approach.
- Districts should prioritize setting up consistent lines of communication directly to teachers and staff such as creating a weekly internal newsletter. Allowing internal audiences to hear first from anyone other than the district itself (media, unions, parents, etc.) about decisions that impact them personally is a recipe for disaster and a surefire way to erode trust and buy-in.
- Try to make sure that messages from the district directly to teachers—particularly blanket messages such as all-staff emails—are clearly conveying useful information rather than only sending a message. If you incorporate your high-level message while delivering information about online learning procedures, progress on safety measures, new resources they can use, etc., it will help keep teachers on board with your plan. If you send messages that are all rhetoric with no substance that matters to them, you risk being ignored or irritating your internal audience.
- In addition, as discussed above, messages to teachers will be much better received if you can engage principals and other trusted voices to help deliver them. At a minimum, districts need to do everything possible to ensure that principals are not sending messages that conflict with the district's message, which sows confusion and can quickly destroy confidence in your plan.
- You should also try to gather information on what your teachers are hearing from others (on Facebook, in union newsletters, from coworkers/parents, etc.) to better understand the full picture of what teachers may be feeling and thinking. Use these insights to craft messages that speak to their top-of-mind concerns and address any confusion or misinformation they may be hearing.

## Show that you "get it" but do not overpromise.

A calm tone is key, but sterile messages are likely less effective than ones that tap into the emotion and fear people are experiencing.

- In this crisis, fear and anger are running deep. Polling has shown time and again that concerns about reopening schools in-person have grown rapidly as virus cases spread across the country, and anger has been growing on all sides of the issue, particularly as it has been politicized.
- Districts should also remember that while most parents have concerns about the safety of sending their kids to school in person, surveys demonstrate clear differences along racial lines. Likely stemming from the disproportionate number of COVID infections and deaths hitting communities of color, Black and Latino parents have more intense concerns about in-person instruction than their white counterparts.

- In this environment, it is important to be calm and reassuring—but a message that ignores the anger, frustration, and betrayal that parents and teachers feel risks coming across as tone-deaf or out of touch. Without making excuses, it is still important to control the context by reminding your audiences of the difficulty of the situation we are all facing. This can buy you goodwill and put you on parents' and teachers' side by letting them know you are as frustrated as they are.
- Although it may be tempting to "stick to the facts," it is important to at least acknowledge how hard this has been, and will continue to be, for parents and teachers. A message that leans into the difficulty ("This is one of the most difficult decisions we've ever had to make, but after consulting with public health authorities, we will…") is likely to be much better received than one that focuses only on the facts without speaking to audiences' feelings.
- Also, do not overpromise. Organizations that are navigating crises can easily lose their audiences' confidence and goodwill by promising immediate and complete fixes and then failing to deliver.
- Parents and teachers know that the situation is bad, that there are no good answers, and that this school year will be tremendously demanding and challenging. They are not expecting a painless, seamless solution, and overpromising will just make districts seem out of touch and earn resentment down the road.
- Audiences want you to acknowledge that even though you do not have a perfect solution, you are doing everything you can to safely keep kids learning.

  *Examples:*

  The Donovan Group created templates school districts may use for various COVID-19 situations.

  - Move from in-person learning to a hybrid model
  - Move to All-Remote Learning
  - Suspension of Athletics/Extracurricular Activities
  - Face Coverings Required in School
  - Addressing False Rumors
  - Reminder of Safety Protocols

## Understand the appeal of those who disagree with your approach.

- You cannot avoid people criticizing your approach. You may face criticism from multiple sources, some more organized than others, and you may even face conflicting criticism—i.e., some groups pushing for a more cautious approach while others demand more in-person instruction, etc. But what you can do is dig beneath the surface to understand why those criticisms are resonating and with whom they are most effective.
- With the conversation around the virus and its impact on schools changing so rapidly, many districts seem to be focusing much of their efforts on countering misinformation and concerns being raised, to set the record straight and clear up confusion about the path forward. But taking the time to dig into why and how your critics' messages are appealing will help you craft stronger positive messaging and inoculate against future criticism by undercutting the other side's appeal.
- Ask yourself: What values and concerns does the criticism tap into, and how can district communications take ownership of these values? Through what channels is the criticism being delivered? Do the ways that the criticism is breaking through indicate any gaps in your approach?

The following are tips to ensure that your messages have maximum visibility and impact.

**Create visual communications (signage, videos, etc.) to assure external and internal stakeholders that in-person school reopening, whenever it happens, will be safe.**

Districts need to offer visual examples and illustrations of what social distancing will look like in the classroom and throughout the school building. Schools will need to prepare for pre-designated entry and exit pathways and doors for entering and exiting school buildings, focused on safety measures for students and employees as individuals enter and go through the buildings. The Communications Department could assist with developing this signage.

*Examples:*

- Orange County Public Schools' graphics/signage in preparation for reopening.
- Fort Worth Independent School District signage:
  - Fort Worth COVID-19 Precautions
  - Fort Worth Entry Sign
  - Fort Worth Floor Decal
  - Fort Worth Tabletop Sign
- Miami-Dade County Public Schools' Reopening of Schools Signage
- Print Resources for supporting COVID-19 hygiene and precautions from the CDC.

Create social distancing videos. Work with your local department of public health to create a video that will explain what in-person learning may look like in a classroom and throughout school buildings.

*Examples:*

- With guidance from the Denver Department of Public Health and Environment, Denver Public Schools created a video using illustrations and graphics available in English and Spanish.
- Austin Independent School District created a video to demonstrate the safety places they have implemented to prepare to phase-in face-to-face instruction. The video walks families through many of these procedures that will be on campuses from day one.
- Florida's School District of Palm Beach County created several short videos to help staff prepare for the arrival of students on September 21.
  - Desk Spacing and Safety
  - Hallway Traffic and Signage
  - Isolation Areas
  - Overflow Spaces
  - Visitor Protocols
- Video featuring Pittsburgh Public Schools explaining how schools will reopen safely.
- Video of Sacramento Unified School District students explaining the importance of wearing masks.

**Develop communications in the event a child, staff member or visitor contracts coronavirus and, separately, in anticipation of districtwide or individual school closures.**

As part of their planning to reopen, schools should expect that there will be staff or students who contract COVID-19. Being proactive in regularly giving out specific information will help fill information voids. Committing to regularly releasing updates on a few key datapoints (e.g. daily updates on the number of reported cases and the number of students and staff in quarantine, weekly updates on progress toward a goal of updated ventilation systems in every school and PPE in every classroom) will help keep audiences on your side rather than fighting you for information or turning to less reliable sources.

*Examples:*

- San Diego Unified School District issues a COVID-19 Weekly Surveillance Report.
- To remain transparent with families and the media, Florida's Pinellas County Schools shares the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in schools and district-wide on the district's Coronavirus Information webpage under "Confirmed Case Information". The report includes:
  - Number of positive employees,
  - Number of positive students,
  - Location of cases (schools or facilities),
  - Classrooms and buses impacted.

| **Pinellas County Schools' weekly COVID-19 report, encompassing data from Saturday 9/5 through Tuesday 9/8.** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Locations affected** | **Number of positive employees** | **Number of positive students** | **Bus/Classroom Impact** |
| Ozona Elementary School | 1 | 0 | 1 classroom |
| Tarpon Springs Elementary School | 1 | 0 | No impact to bus or classroom |
| East Lake High School | 0 | 1 | 7 classrooms |
| Blanton Elementary School | 0 | 1 | 1 classroom |
| Curtis Fundamental Elementary School | 0 | 1 | 1 classroom |

- Pinellas County Schools' employee COVID-19 positive case protocols:
  - COVID Case Employee Protocols
  - COVID Employee Case Protocol
  - COVID Student Case Protocol

Here is the link to communication templates from the Donovan Group that may be used in the event of a confirmed case of COVID-19 in a school or district.

- Communicate to parents and staff about what to do when you are sick, akin to this presentation from the CDC.
- Here is an example of an assurance letter schools can use to ensure parents are aware of their obligation to immediately pick up a sick student from school.

The district/school will also need to communicate general closure information with all staff and impacted families, in alignment with all federal and state confidentiality rules, using robocalls, letters, text and email.

- Post on the district website homepage
- Post on all district social media
- Alert the media, making sure information reaches all local media outlets
- Include local Department of Health contact information, when relevant

  *Example:*

  – Florida's Orange County Public Schools' Olympia High School had to temporarily close and pivot to remote learning due to COVID-19 quarantines. Here is the press release the district issued.

**Engage the families of English Language Learners.**

Schools should translate all mailings and emails to parents whose first language is not English to provide access to the information in a language they understand in addition to outreach to foreign-language media, faith-based and community-based organizations. Working with parents and offering them the opportunity to be involved in their children's education are always key to the students' success, especially during distance learning and the transition to reopening.

However, effective communications with EL families requires more than translating documents and providing interpretation; it also requires a cultural understanding of EL families and their developing familiarity with the U.S. school system to ensure messages are conveyed in a manner that is relevant, and therefore, well understood.

One district's enrollment center hired bilingual customer-care associates, and its campus police hired bilingual officers to build relationships.

Another EL office trained staff in other departments on the various tools used to communicate with EL families, including web-based and text-based applications and the use of telephonic three-way interpretations.

In addition to providing materials that are translated into various languages, districts and schools should provide curated information to EL families that are focused and relevant. To assist in effective outreach—

- Salient information should be communicated in a succinct manner and might include well-designed graphics, videos in various languages, and straightforward instructions. Providing lengthy, densely written memos or letters, even if translated, are less effective in conveying important messages, especially when they include directions that families are expected to follow.
- Messaging from multiple offices should be consistent and, if possible, closely coordinated to avoid inundating EL families with multiple instructions.

Engaging EL families, therefore, requires that the district and schools develop communication systems that allow for two-way interaction to gain a better understanding of priorities, needs, and interests unique to EL families. Districts and schools create and sustain the trust of EL communities by responding to their needs in a dignified manner that is well-tailored and timely. Some of the culturally responsive ways in which Council-member districts have sustained EL community engagement include—

***Channels of communication (outbound).*** Identify effective channels of communications that are culturally responsive and respectful in reaching EL families. For example, EL families, which may not have email addresses, are less likely to read an email or go to links embedded in an email. EL families who access the internet are more likely to use their mobile phones, so district websites need to be formatted accordingly for easy viewing. Also, EL families may be more comfortable with social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, or text-based applications like WhatsApp. Announcements on local radio and TV, postings in stores where EL families shop, laundromats, as well as ads in neighborhood newspapers in various languages are additional ways to reach EL families. Engaged EL parent leaders who are trusted by their communities can be important partners. Districts can also harness the power of 'word of mouth' by cultivating EL parent leaders and providing them with timely and accurate information to be shared with their respective communities.

***Tools for communication (inbound).*** Identify the tools and modalities that EL families are most comfortable with before surveying or communicating with them. For example, EL parents may be more likely to respond to surveys provided through mobile phones, a district or school's Facebook page, or a telephonic hotline where they can reach a live person who speaks their language. Districts that have initiated Facebook pages in specified languages have found it to be a useful way to support two-way, ongoing, and timely communications with parents.

***Community Partnerships.*** Establish ongoing partnerships with community based- or faith-based organizations that serve EL community groups to share important information, serve as cultural interpreters, and listen to community concerns. Nurture these partnerships to sustain a reliable network that can withstand staff turnover and support effective communications with families in different groups.

**Create a logo/branding that will be used on all reopening materials.**

Develop a logo for the Reopening Plan that will be displayed on all materials.

*Example:*

- Cleveland Metropolitan School District's ReSTART Branding Package:
  - Primary logo
  - Secondary logo
  - Branded Flier Template (for use in creating meeting agendas, one- and multi-page branded documents)
  - Branded PowerPoint Template

**Continue to promote district enrollment options and connect with and celebrate students and staff.**

Continue marketing the district's schools to students and families, especially those with students in Pre-K and kindergarten. Also, continue to connect with and celebrate students and staff through awards, special recognitions, opportunities for community service and volunteering, and meaningful partnerships with the district's various stakeholders. School volunteers, mentors and community partners will be encouraged to follow CDC guidelines, if their roles require visiting campuses.

**Provide leadership staff with crisis communications training.**

During the summer Indianapolis Public Schools provided mandatory crisis communications training to its leadership team, i.e., school supervisors and principals, partnering with a marketing firm to conduct 1½ hour sessions. Here is a recording of one training session.

**Create a legislative agenda and communications around finance issues.**

A virtual or printed brochure providing talking points to board members and others as they address public education concerns at the statehouse and federal level. The brochure may include the following:

- the size of any announced budget cuts, revenue shortfalls, or staff reductions;
- expenditures incurred by the school district during school closures at the end of 2019-20; and
- state/local health directives and the projected additional costs for re-opening schools.

  *Example:*

  – Fort Worth Independent School District's Legislative Priorities Brochure

**Develop a communications timeline.**

Communications Departments should create a timeline to follow for the 2020-2021 school year.

*Examples:*

– School District of Philadelphia's Communications Timeline

| **Milwaukee Public Schools' Communications Timeline** | |
|---|---|
| **July 2020** | **Prepare to Deploy Communications Strategy** |
| **Goal:** Reiterate the school reopening decision that was selected, what new procedures and processes are going to happen, what next steps look like. | |
| ■ Develop and distribute a press release about the school reopening decision. | ■ Engage press for media coverage/interview about school reopening decision. |
| ■ Continue to create videos, FAQs, signage, talking points related to specific model of reopening i.e., protocols and procedures for wearing masks, social distancing, health, and safety measures, extracurriculars, busing etc. | ■ Plan student, family, and staff online engagement opportunities.<br>■ Continue to promote enrollment options. |
| ■ Create a webpage dedicated to the school district's reopening plan. | ■ Refine Crisis Communications Plan. |

| August 2020 | Implement Communications Strategy |
|---|---|
| **Goal:** Deployment of fall school reopening materials and resources to education and answer questions all stakeholders have for the school in the fall. | |
| ■ Communicate the district's reopening plan focusing on academic measures and school schedule, schoolwide supports, health and safety procedures, professional development and learning for families and district staff and communication commitments. | ■ Ensure communication materials are translated into families' language preference. |
| ■ Encourage parents to always update their contact information for timely communication delivery. | ■ Distribute informational materials, videos, flyers etc. to students, families, and staff. |
| ■ Use advertisements (TV, radio, bus, billboards) to help carry school reopening messages to the public. | ■ Engage press for media coverage/interviews related to school reopening.<br>■ Host student, family, and staff online engagement opportunities. |
| **September 2020** | **Continue to Implement Communications Strategy** |
| **Goal:** Deployment of all school reopening materials and resources to education and answer questions all stakeholders have for the school in the fall. | |
| ■ Continue to give students, families and staff up-to-date information about the pandemic and school reopening plan. | ■ Ensure that students, families, and staff can access key information to begin school. |
| ■ Continue to work with schools to ensure websites and other forms of communications are up to date to keep students and families informed. | ■ Continue to gain feedback from students, families, and staff to update or create communications or materials needed for school reopening. |

# Conclusion

Everything you do in a crisis is part of your message, even if the topic seems unrelated.

- Experience has shown that a corporation or candidate facing a crisis is often eager to see certain aspects of their work as on a "separate track" from the crisis communications response. But audiences do not consume messages in this way—instead, they internalize the messages they're hearing collectively, often coming to negative conclusions if the signals they are getting feel disjointed or incongruous.
- For example, this dynamic is important when communicating about academic expectations for the upcoming year. Districts may be wary of backing off long-term messages around high academic expectations. But we know from parent and teacher polls that there are acute concerns around holding students and teachers to "normal standards" during these deeply abnormal times. Sending even an implicit "business as usual" message about expectations may appear to dismiss these concerns and undermine the sense that you understand parents' and teachers' frustrations.
- Similarly, districts should make sure that contentious debates about labor issues do not cast doubt on the larger story they are telling about how they have responded to the crisis. District or city leaders exchanging jabs with unions can easily undermine their message about the overall response.
- Communications around all issues should be evaluated and crafted in the context of the broader crisis response goals. Districts should aim to tell a single, cohesive story across all of their communications (and avoid coming off as tone-deaf) by modifying language around topics that are not directly related to the district's COVID response to align with districts' key messages.

In conclusion, it is important to remember that this situation is a marathon, not a sprint. Understanding what aspects of your work you can use to tap into reservoirs of goodwill to maintain confidence over the long run is critical.

- Like many crises, COVID-19 is going to be a very long slog. To make it through crises, organizations need to not just address the immediate problem, but identify deeper reservoirs of goodwill and tap into them to keep key audiences on board long-term.
- In this case, public polling tells us that strong majorities believe that in the spring, schools responded to an unpredictable and challenging situation as best they could, even as political leaders failed to handle the crisis and keep us safe. This response earned you goodwill, and parents take pride in having made it work in the spring—but it will not give you the benefit of the doubt indefinitely.
- As the crisis drags on, districts will have to do more and more to retain this trust and goodwill, by highlighting all of the work and effort that has already—and continues to—go into addressing the needs of students, families, and educators during this unprecedented time.
- For example, districts can highlight the ways they have gone above and beyond to provide devices, hotspots, lunches, training, and other new resources to their students and educators. Reminding audiences of these efforts, even when not directly related to a challenge that arises this fall, can help underscore the values that drive a district's work and refresh the goodwill that your hard work is earning.

## Appendix A

# Messaging Do's and Don'ts

## Messaging Do's and Don'ts

| DO's | DON'Ts |
|---|---|
| **DO: Ground your message in empathy and acknowledge the challenges we are all facing.**<br><br>*There is no way that any of us could have been prepared for a global pandemic, but we have been working day and night to develop a plan for the school year that keeps our community safe and our kids learning. Further delaying the in-person opening of our schools was one of the most difficult decisions we've ever had to make as a district, but after consulting our educators, families, and our public health partners X and Y, we've decided this is the right approach.* | **DON'T: Let a desire to "stick to the facts" make your message sterile and out of touch with the emotions people are feeling in this moment.**<br><br>*Due to the state of the virus in our community, we have decided that the best course for our district is to further delay the in-person opening of our schools. We have weighed many factors including X, Y, and Z, and consulted with state and local authorities, and we believe this approach is necessary for the situation at hand.* |
| **DO: Lead with a strong, unequivocal message that the decision-making process starts with safety.**<br><br>*We are only going to return to in-person instruction if it is safe to do so, which is why we are preparing to take XYZ precautions if and when we reopen our schools in person later this year.* | **DON'T: Suggest that any other goal comes before safety. Even if you loudly address safety, you will lose audiences if you give the impression that you are working toward a predetermined goal of finding a way to reopen schools in person.**<br><br>*Our top priority is to safely get students back in school for in-person instruction as soon as possible, which is why we are taking XYZ precautions to enable schools to reopen safely.* |
| **DO: Utilize messengers from local hospitals and health organizations to attach a human face and trusted local expertise to your safety planning.**<br><br>*Our safety plan was developed by and for our community. We have been working hand-in-hand for months with state health officials and local hospital X. Our partner Dr. Y from the hospital is here today to provide more information about the current state of spread in our community and answer questions you may have about how the in-person reopening plan was designed to keep our students, staff, and families safe.* | **DON'T: Assume that citing the CDC or any other set of broad guidelines will be sufficient to ease fears or get audiences on board.**<br><br>*We're confident that the plan we've developed for reopening the school buildings in our district will keep our students, staff, and families safe because it rigorously complies with CDC guidelines and all other federal and state directives for safe school reopening.* |

| DO's | DON'Ts |
|---|---|
| **DO: Continue to root your messaging in your core values and principles as a district, while acknowledging the challenges ahead.**<br><br>*Our commitment to giving each one of our students a great education has not changed, but it will be harder than ever to ensure we live up to this goal.*<br><br>*We do not have all the answers, and we know everything will not be perfect. But we are committed to working as hard as we possibly can to support teachers in keeping our students on grade level and addressing gaps in what our students need to know. We want to do right by our teachers and students.* | **DON'T:Overpromise or give the impression that you are missing the gravity of the situation. You should set clear expectations for what instruction will look like but avoid setting unrealistic expectations for test results during this abnormal time.**<br><br>*We have always set high educational standards as a district, and our expectations for higher test scores have not changed one bit this year. No matter the challenges ahead, our attention will be 100% focused on getting better results from every student in the district.* |
| **DO: Address the wide range of impacts that the pandemic is having on kids.**<br><br>*We are committed to meeting all of the needs of our students during this difficult time—which means giving them the best education possible, but also ensuring that they're safe, healthy, and feel supported by our school community. We will be doing XYZ to support the mental health and emotional wellbeing of our students.* | **DON'T: Focus so narrowly on academic results that the mental health and safety of students and staff are given secondary priority.**<br><br>*The most important thing we can do as a district is keep our students on track academically during this challenging time. The mental health, social-emotional well-being, and safety of our students will take care of themselves. That is the family's job.* |

| DO's | DON'Ts |
|---|---|
| **DO: Highlight specifics from community surveys and how your plan directly reflects their opinions and concerns. (Our research has found this matters with teachers, who are more likely to trust decisions that clearly incorporate not just teacher input, but the input of those closest to them—in their own school, same subject/grade level, those who work with similar student populations, etc.)**<br><br>*We are reaching out to share more details about our remote learning plan for the fall. We are grateful to the A% of teachers and B% of parents across our district who shared their perspectives in our recent surveys, as well as the incredible work of our advisory committee, which represents every corner of our diverse community. [Insert school/grade level details about those who served in advisory roles.]*<br><br>*Our decision heavily weighed the concerns we heard from the survey—especially the critical need to provide students with engaging live lessons while balancing logistical issues and educators' needs. Based on what we heard, a one-size-fits-all approach will not meet the varying needs of students at different grade-levels. Our remote learning plan, which we have developed with our teachers and parents, will include X hours of daily live instruction for elementary students and Y hours for middle and high school students.* | **DON'T #1: Only talk about the outcome, leaving audiences to wonder how, if at all, their input was taken into account. (Soliciting stakeholder input and then appearing to ignore it will be frustrating and alienating.)**<br><br>*We are reaching out with more details about our remote learning plan for the fall. After extensive deliberation, we have developed a remote learning plan that includes X hours of daily live instruction for elementary students and Y hours for middle and high school students.*<br><br>**DON'T #2: Vaguely reference community input, without giving specifics about the sources, extent of input, or how it was actually used.**<br><br>*We are reaching out to inform our community that our remote learning plan will include X hours of daily live instruction for elementary students and Y hours for middle and high school students. We have made this decision after taking into account the responses of many members of our community through our surveys. We hear you.* |
| **DO: Focus on your approach.**<br><br>*We know that our community has serious concerns about health and safety. That is why we are doing XYZ during this time and will only return to in-person instruction when we can do it safely.* | **DON'T: Call out those you perceive as fearmongering or exaggerating the extent of the threat we face.**<br><br>*While some would like you to believe that we're putting teachers and students at risk, the truth is that based on the facts we have, our district's plan is appropriate, thorough, and will keep our students and staff safe once we reopen in person.* |

## Messaging Do's and Don'ts: With Teachers Specifically

| DO's | DON'Ts |
|---|---|
| **DO: Everything you can to demonstrate that you understand how hard educators' jobs are even in normal times, and the additional strain that all aspects of this situation are putting on them.**<br><br>*We know we are asking you to do an extremely difficult job, especially today as our district and our entire community faces unprecedented challenges from COVID-19. Implementing [our remote learning/hybrid/in-person plan] will take tremendously hard work by every teacher in our district, and it will be your time, energy, patience, and creativity that will ultimately make it possible for kids to continue learning during these difficult times. We want to give you the support and resources you deserve throughout this process, which is why we are doing XYZ.* | **DON'T: Minimize educators' concerns or the gravity of the situation. (Educators may already be getting these messages from sources you cannot control—media commentators, local elected officials—and you need to do your best to allay rather than reinforce the anger these messages can provoke.)**<br><br>*This is a difficult time, but the reality is that we need to make this work for our students, and we expect teachers to step up and fulfill their professional responsibilities. It is your job to serve the students in our district, and we are grateful to those teachers who have committed to continue putting their students first.* |
| **DO: Be honest about what did not work in the spring, and how your approach for the fall addresses this.**<br><br>*We heard from teachers in the spring that one of the greatest obstacles was X. We know this was a major source of frustration and we did not have the supports in place at the time to address it. We want teachers to feel prepared to tackle this challenge in the fall—that is why our plan focuses on Y and takes Z approach moving forward.* | **DON'T: Assess your response with rose-colored glasses or paper over challenges in ways that risk seeming out-of-touch.**<br><br>*We are proud of our successful response to the initial outbreak during the spring semester, and we look forward to building on the tremendous steps we took to move learning online with further improvements for the upcoming school year.* |
| **DO: Clearly communicate your expectations for what teaching will look like and what teachers will need to do and ground those expectations in students' needs and feedback.**<br><br>*We are making two key commitments for as long as students are learning remotely: that every student should have access to live instruction that has been adapted to remote learning as well as asynchronous learning, and that every student will have a daily check-in with a teacher or staff member. We have heard loud and clear in our surveys and outreach to students and families that these live interactions are their highest priority, and we believe we can work together to live up to these commitments. Your principals will be reaching out with additional details on each individual school's specific plan to support you in delivering on these commitments.* | **DON'T: Send vague messages about high expectations without giving teachers clear guidelines or the specific information they need to do their jobs.**<br><br>*We are committed to ensuring that our move to remote learning does not diminish the learning that any student receives. We have the same high expectations for your student's test scores that we have always had, and we believe that teachers and parents can make that happen. We are always working to develop resources to better support our educators in delivering on those goals, and we hope to provide an update soon about those additional resources.* |

## Messaging Do's and Don'ts: On Remote Learning Specifically

| DO's | DON'Ts |
|---|---|
| **DO: Speak to student excitement, engagement, and experience, not just how much they are learning. (Student engagement is key to both the parent and teacher mindset—teachers see student engagement and excitement as the key to real learning.)**<br><br>*By [taking X approach/providing instruction in Y way] we will be able to support our teachers in providing engaging lessons that keep kids excited about what they are learning, even during this unprecedented time* | **DON'T: Be blinkered in your focus on the student outcomes you are committed to getting, especially when they run counter to teachers' concerns about unrealistic pacing and student outcomes during remote learning.**<br><br>*By [taking X approach/providing instruction in Y way] we will be able to provide high- quality, rigorous lessons that keep kids on track academically during this unprecedented time. We know that teachers have concerns, but we think we have a good game-plan.* |
| **DO: Demonstrate that you are prepared to meet students' needs no matter what happens, even if long-term remote learning is necessary.**<br><br>*None of us can know for sure how the situation with the virus will progress. That is why as a district, we are preparing for any possible situation, including if remote instruction needs to continue beyond [Q1/the first month of the school year/etc.]. We know that this will be challenging, but we'll be working hard to keep improving—based on feedback from our families, students, and educators—so we can deliver the best virtual instruction we can for as long as we need to.* | **DON'T: Give the impression that remote learning is a band-aid until we can get back to "real" learning in person, which risks undermining confidence in your near-term plans for remote learning and overpromising about the future.**<br><br>*We all know that real learning happens when students and teachers are together, in person. We believe our remote learning program will keep students on track for the next month, but as a district, we're closely monitoring the situation with the virus and are committed to returning to real learning as soon as we are allowed and safely able to do so.* |
| **DO: Acknowledge concerns about impacts on the most vulnerable students—even in broader communications—and highlight what steps you are taking to make sure they do not fall through the cracks.**<br><br>*We are committed to supporting the academic, social, and emotional needs of every single student in this district, even as we return to online learning. This pandemic is affecting every student in different ways, and it is hitting our most vulnerable students the hardest, which is why we've followed through on the plan we made this spring to distribute X internet-connected devices to families across the district and partner with Y organization to offer Z supports for students who need them most.* | **DON'T: Assume that every parent expects remote learning to cause serious academic challenges for their own kids, even when they see the challenges overall.**<br><br>*We know that every parent across the district is deeply concerned about how remote learning will affect their children, including the possibility of learning losses. You all saw firsthand with your own children how difficult remote learning can sometimes be for students. That is why we are taking XYZ steps to improve the process.* |

## Appendix B

# Bringing It All Together: Messaging Scenarios

**While every district will face distinct and unique challenges this fall and throughout the course of the school year, the messages in this section are intended to provide examples of how districts might handle some likely scenarios. These messages draw from the recommendations laid out in this document to show how they can come together to form a complete message as part of a cohesive communications strategy.**

## Scenario 1: Reopening for hybrid learning after beginning the year remotely

As a district, there is no way we could have been prepared for a global pandemic, but we've been working day and night over the past six months to implement a plan for the school year that keeps our community safe and our kids learning. We know how challenging this time has been for our teachers, students, and families, and we are so grateful for all the ways that our entire school community has helped to make this plan work so far.

As we have said from the beginning, we will only return to in-person instruction if it is safe to do so. We are reaching out today to share that, with great caution and optimism, our district will be moving to hybrid learning, with some students returning to school in-person on X date. We did not come to this decision lightly. But after consulting our educators, families, and public health officials—including our local partners at Hospital X—we have been advised that it's safe to reopen in-person and decided that the time is right to take this step.

The safety plan for hybrid learning was developed by and for our community. We have been working hand-in-hand for months with state health officials and Hospital X. Our partner Dr. Y from the hospital will be joining a live Q+A session next week to provide more information about the current state of the virus in our community and answer questions from community members about how the in-person reopening plan was designed to keep our students, staff, and families safe.

Our decision also heavily weighed the concerns we heard from our recent surveys. We are grateful to the A% of teachers, B% of parents, and C% of students across our district who shared their perspectives in our recent surveys, as well as the incredible work of our advisory committee which represents every corner of our diverse community. [Insert school/grade level details about those who served in advisory roles.] We heard that a large majority of families want to return to hybrid learning, with most preferring that students come to school each week rather than alternating weeks, which is reflected in our plan. And we heard that families' and educators' top priorities for safety precautions include X, Y, and Z—all of which we have put in place as part of this plan.

We will also continue offering all-remote instruction for families who want that option. We will be hosting a series of information sessions to review these safety measures with families across the district before school buildings reopen.

While we are excited to be able to take this step, we understand that moving to hybrid learning will require additional care and effort by every member of our community to adjust to new routines and processes. We remain absolutely committed to giving every one of our students a great education and meeting all of their needs during this difficult time, and we know that means offering our teachers, students, and families the support to make that possible.

Moving forward, we will keep you updated every step of the way. Our dashboard and parent portal [link] will be updated [daily/weekly] so you can quickly and easily access the information you need, and we are here at [contact information] to answer any questions you may have about what to expect.

## Scenario 2: Continuing remote learning for longer than initially announced

As a district, there is no way we could have been prepared for a global pandemic, but we've been working day and night over the past six months to implement a plan for the school year that keeps our community safe and our kids learning. We know how challenging this time has been for our teachers, students, and families, and we are so grateful for all the ways that our entire school community has helped to make this plan work so far.

As we have said from the beginning, we will only return to in-person instruction if it is safe to do so. We're reaching out today to share that our district will be continuing remote learning until at least December, after which we will determine whether to reopen in-person in January based on input from our community and advice from our public health partners on whether it is safe to do so.

Further delaying the in-person opening of our schools was an incredibly difficult decision, but after consulting our educators, families, and public health officials—including our local partners at Hospital X—we've decided this is the right approach to keep our community safe.

We have been working together for months with state health officials and Hospital X, and they have provided critical guidance to our district on how to weigh the many difficult factors at play. Dr. Y from the hospital will be joining a live Q+A session next week to provide more information about the current state of the virus in our community and what steps are being taken to contain its spread, and to answer questions from community members about the public health considerations that informed this decision.

We are committed to supporting the academic, social, and emotional needs of every single student in this district, even as we continue with remote learning. This pandemic is affecting every student in different ways, and it's hitting our most vulnerable students the hardest, which is why we've followed through on the commitments we made this spring to distribute X internet-connected devices to families across the district and partner with Y organization to offer Z supports for students who need them most.

Our commitment to giving each one of our students a great education has not changed, but we recognize that it will be harder than ever to ensure we live up to this goal as we continue remote learning. We do not have all the answers, and we know everything will not be perfect. But we are committed to working as hard as we possibly can to do right by our teachers, students, and parents. That includes continuing to make improvements to our online learning program and supporting every teacher in our district as they put their creativity to work delivering engaging lessons that get our students excited to learn.

Looking ahead, it is impossible to know for sure how our community's efforts to contain the virus will progress. That is why as a district, we are committed to being prepared for any possible situation, including returning to school in person later this year or extending remote instruction further if necessary. We understand how frustrating this decision may be for families eager to return to school in person, but we will be working every day to deliver the best virtual instruction we can for as long as we need to.

**We know that each district will have a unique set of procedures for remote learning, including specific requirements around live and asynchronous learning, student collaboration, feedback, and assessments, etc. We are not providing guidance on which approach will be most effective or easiest to communicate—rather, the language below is meant to provide an example of how districts can navigate communicating with teachers about the expectations for remote learning. In many places, these requirements may be points of discussion with labor organizations, making it all the more important that districts are communicating directly with their educators to tell their story about how they believe remote learning should work and what priorities and values are guiding their decision-making process.**

## Scenario 3: Communicating with teachers about expectations for remote learning

There is no question this is an incredibly difficult time to work in education, and one that none of us could have expected or planned for. We are endlessly grateful to every member of our community—especially our passionate and dedicated teachers—who have worked day and night since schools closed in the spring to meet the needs of every student in our district.

We do not know today exactly how long we will be learning remotely. But we know that some amount of remote learning will likely be required throughout this school year, even after we're able to safely reopen in-person—such as for families who choose this option, or for students and teachers who need to quarantine after a positive test or suspected exposure.

**Given the uncertainty ahead, the most important step we can take as a district is to ensure that we are doing everything we can to prepare and support our teachers to deliver engaging, high-quality remote instruction. No matter what mode of instruction our students are receiving, we are committed to giving all students a great education, including access to grade-level learning for every child, and ensuring that none of our students fall through the cracks.**

- As part of our commitment to put our students' needs first, we strongly believe that every student should receive live instruction **every day**, in addition to asynchronous lessons. We know that live instruction is essential for delivering engaging lessons that get students excited to learn, even during these difficult times. This is also a key priority we heard from our students and parents, who expressed a strong desire for direct, meaningful interactions with their teachers every day.
- Now more than ever, we believe strong relationships are necessary for kids to learn. To ensure we are meeting all our students' needs—including supporting their mental and emotional well-being—we believe students should also have daily check-ins with teachers, guidance counselors, or other school- based staff. Our teachers know that learning can only happen when students feel safe and cared for, which is why these check-ins are essential—especially for the students in our district most vulnerable to the impacts of the pandemic.
- Remote learning does not mean that students should miss out on socialization or collaboration. We are committed to giving students opportunities to work together in small groups and keep building relationships with each other, and we will be using every tool at our disposal to support teachers as they provide these opportunities.

To help our teachers deliver on these commitments, we are launching a **new portal** for educators across the district that includes all the information you need about our new procedures along with a new library of resources. These resources include how-tos and support documentation for our instructional platform, as well as videos created by teacher-leaders in schools around the district with tips on techniques for delivering virtual lessons that keep students excited to learn. The portal will include ways for teachers to provide feedback on instructional materials, devices, and strategies, and pose questions. Later this week, **every teacher in the district will be receiving an update from their principal** about the specific steps that each individual school is taking to support these instructional goals.

Above all, we know we are asking our teachers to do an extremely difficult job, especially today as our district and our entire community faces unprecedented challenges from COVID-19. Implementing and continually improving remote instruction will take tremendously hard work by every teacher in our district, and it will be your time, energy, patience, and creativity that will ultimately make it possible for kids to continue learning during these difficult times.

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