

# **CORONAVIRUS**

**CORONAVIRUS WEB SITE**





**Coronavirus Information**

- Coronavirus Information
- Council Information
- Federal Agency Information
- District Websites
- News Articles



**Coronavirus Information**

**Council Information**

- Press Release: Council Files Amicus Brief Against Department of Education Diverting Money from Public to Private Schools During COVID-19 Pandemic - July 27, 2020
- Press Release: National Education Groups Lay Out Blueprint for Instructional Priorities and Strategies for Upcoming School Year - June 24, 2020
- Letter to Congress - to approve new funding for local school systems in the next coronavirus supplemental appropriations bill, April 28, 2020
- Press Release: Urban Schools Coalition Calls for Congress to Provide More Funding for Public School Systems in Next Coronavirus Relief Bill - April 28, 2020
- Survey Results on How Districts are Using Transportation System to Combat COVID-19 - March 30, 2020
- Summary of Food Service Operations in Council-member Districts - March 27, 2020
- Press Release on Urban School Districts Sharing Information and Best Practices - March 25, 2020
- Readout of Vice President Pence and Secretary DeVos' Conference Call with Education Stakeholders - March 25, 2020
- Letter to the Senate - Urging immediate federal financial assistance to the nation's public schools to help them fight the coronavirus
- Letter to the House of Representatives - Urging immediate federal financial assistance to the nation's public schools to help them fight the coronavirus
- List of School Closures - in Council's 76-member school districts (updated March 31)
- Press Release on School Closings - March 16, 2020
- Press Release on Nation's Big-City Public Schools Working Aggressively to Contain the Coronavirus - March 13, 2020

**Spotlight Series**

- Increasing Ventilation and Improving Air Quality in Schools - September 2020

**Returning to School Series**

- Communications Toolkit for Reopening Schools after COVID-19 - September 2020
- Supporting English Language Learners in the COVID-19 Crisis - August 2020
- Guidelines for Supporting Technology-based Learning Environments - August 2020
- Financial Issues in the Reopening of Schools During the COVID-19 Crisis - June 2020
- Addressing Unfinished Learning After COVID-19 School Closures - June 2020
- Ensuring a Data-Driven Approach to Reopening Schools After COVID-19, Recommendations for Research and Assessment - June 2020
- IDEA Best Practices During the COVID-19 Crisis - June 2020
- Operational Issues in the Reopening of Schools during the COVID-19 Crisis - Facilities, Transportation, and Security, June 2020
- Addressing Mental Health and Social-Emotional Wellness in the Covid-19 Crisis - A Resource Guide for School Districts, Spring 2020
- Assessing Language Proficiency During Extended School Closures - May 2020

**School Districts Reopening Plans**

- Albuquerque Public Schools
- Anchorage School District
- Arlington Independent School District
- Atlanta Public Schools
- Aurora Public Schools - Partnership to Make Free Testing Available to All Teachers Every Two Weeks
- Austin Independent School District
- Baltimore City Public Schools
- Birmingham City School District
- Bridgesport Public Schools
- Charleston County School District
- Cincinnati Public Schools
- Clark County School District
- Cleveland Metropolitan School District
- Columbus City Schools
- Dallas Independent School District
- Dayton Public Schools
- Denver Public Schools
- Des Moines Public Schools
- Detroit Public Schools Community District
- Duval County Public Schools
- El Paso Independent School District
- Fresno Unified School District
- Guilford County Schools
- Hawaii State Department of Education
- Hillsborough County Public Schools
- Houston Independent School District
- Indianapolis Public Schools
- Jefferson County Public Schools
- Kansas City Public Schools
- Long Beach Unified School District
- Metro Nashville Public Schools
- Miami-Dade County Public Schools
- Milwaukee Public Schools
- Minneapolis Public Schools
- NOLA Public Schools - Roadmap to Reopening
- New York City Department of Education
- Newark Public Schools
- Norfolk Public Schools
- Oakland Unified School District
- Oklahoma City Public Schools
- Omaha Public Schools
- Orange County Public Schools
- Pinellas County Public Schools
- Pittsburgh Public Schools - Board Votes to Postpone In-Class Instruction for Nine Weeks
- Portland Public Schools
- Providence Public School District
- Rochester City School District
- Sacramento City Unified School District
- San Antonio Independent School District
- San Diego Unified School District
- San Francisco Unified School District
- Seattle Public Schools
- Shelby County Schools
- St. Louis Public Schools
- St. Paul Public Schools
- Stockton Unified School District
- The School District of Palm Beach County
- The School District of Philadelphia
- Toledo Public Schools
- Toronto District School Board
- Tulsa Public Schools
- Washoe County School District
- Wichita Public Schools

**Federal Agency Information**

- Preparing K-12 School Administrators for a Safe Return to School in Fall 2020 (July 23)
- Cloth Face Coverings in School (July 23)
- Screening K-12 Students for Symptoms of COVID-19 (July 23)
- School Decision-Making Tool for Parents, Caregivers and Guardians (July 23)
- Back to School Planning: Checklists to Guide Parents, Guardians and Caregivers (July 23)
- Considerations for K-12 Schools: Readiness and Planning Tool - June 30
- Inclusive School Physical Education and Physical Activity Research Brief, Centers for Disease Control - June 23
- Center for Disease Control COVID-19 Guidance for Child Care Programs, Schools and Day Camps (May 20)
- Center for Disease Control Guidance for Schools During the COVID-19 Pandemic - (May 15)
- New Resource From UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools, Addressing Barriers to Learning - (April 14)
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention Updated Guidance for School and Child Care Programs - (April 1)
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention Coronavirus Disease-2019 (COVID-19) Interim guidance for school settings
- U.S. Department of Education information on serving children with disabilities, assessments and accountability, etc (https://www.ed.gov/coronavirus)
- USDA information on State waivers serving school meals

**District Websites on Coronavirus**

- Albuquerque Public Schools- APS Broadcast Student Lessons - APS Sponsors Internet Access - APS Board of Education Uses Zoom for Public Comments
- Anchorage School District- Mobile Food Distribution Video
- Arlington Independent School District- At-Home Learning Hub
- Atlanta Public Schools- Memo from Superintendent
- Aurora Public Schools- Fact Sheet
- Austin Independent School District- Board Resolution - Austin Board Temporarily Updates Grading, Graduation Policies
- Baltimore City Public Schools- PreK-12 Learning Packets
- Birmingham City Schools
- Boston Public Schools
- Bridgesport Public Schools
- Broward County Public Schools- Letter from Superintendent on response to the coronavirus - Broward Schools to close school campuses on April 6
- Broward Partners with Museum of Discovery and Science to Deliver Innovative - BCPS Partners with Rethink Ed to Provide News Resources for Social, Emotional Learning
- BCPS to Host Virtual Graduation Ceremonies for Class of 2020
- Buffalo Public Schools
- Charleston County School District-Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools- Remote Supplemental Learning - Video of Teacher Finalists Announced
- Chicago Public Schools - Educational Resource Packets
- Cincinnati Public Schools- Cincinnati area Staples Store Providing Free Homework Printing
- Clark County School District - Student Learning Expansion Opportunities
- Cleveland Metropolitan School District - Spring Break Learning Resources
- Columbus City Schools- K-12 Printable Resources - ESL Printable Resources - Board of Education Virtual Meeting to Include Public Participation - Columbus City Schools to Offer Online Summer Experience
- Dallas Independent School District- Procedures for Staff During Closing
- Dayton Public Schools
- Denver Public Schools
- Des Moines Public Schools- DMPS to Complete Academic Year through Distance Learning
- Detroit Public Schools Community District- At-Home Activity Packets, Students to Receive Wireless Tablets and Internet Access Through \$23 Million Investment
- District of Columbia Public Schools -DCPSatHome - Digital Learning, Summer Learning for All
- Duval County Public Schools
- Duval County Public Schools- Duval! Home room
- El Paso Independent School District
- Fort Worth Independent School District- Learning at Home - Board Approves Pay For Employees - Fort Worth Mobilizes to Distribute Internet Hotspots to students
- Fresno Unified School District
- Guilford County Schools- Distance Learning During School Closures- COVID-19
- Hawaii State Department of Education
- Hillsborough County Public Schools- e-learning contingency plan
- Houston Independent School District- Coronavirus Toolkit for Schools - HISD to broadcast virtual town hall meeting for students pursuing college - Message from Interim Superintendent of Schools
- Indianapolis Public Schools- Guidance for Staff Working Remotely - IPS Foundation Launches the IPS Education Equity Fund - IPS to Broadcast K-8 Lessons
- Jackson Public Schools
- Jefferson County Public Schools- Non-Traditional Instruction (Days Begin on April 7) JCPS to Launch CARE Hotline
- Kansas City Public Schools- KCPS Extending School Closures
- Long Beach Unified School District
- Los Angeles Unified School District- Los Angeles Unified Partnership with PBS SoCal and KCET Plans to Provide Educational Content to Students
- LAUSD & San Diego - Request for Emergency Appropriation
- Manchester School District - Elementary Remote Learning
- Metro Nashville School District
- Miami-Dade County Public Schools
- Milwaukee Public Schools - Milwaukee Journal Sentinel story on teachers staying connected with students
- Minneapolis Public Schools - MPS Announces Move to Virtual Graduation Ceremonies
- NOLA Public Schools
- New York City Department of Education
- Newark Public Schools
- Norfolk Public Schools - Learning in Place Plans - Food Prep Operations
- Oakland Unified School District
- Oklahoma City Public Schools
- Omaha Public Schools
- Orange County Public Schools
- Pinellas County Public Schools
- Pittsburgh Public Schools- Grade-Level Activity Packets - Districts Prepares Families of Students with Disabilities for Remote Learning
- Portland to Begin Transition to PPS Remote Learning
- Portland Public Schools
- Providence Public School District
- Puerto Rico Department of Education
- Richmond Public Schools
- Rochester City School District
- Sacramento City Unified School District - Sac City Reaches Agreement with Principals on Distance Learning Plan - Sac City Unified Provides Over a Million Meals Since Start of COVID-19 School Closures - Sac City Unified to Hold Final Computer Distribution Event
- San Antonio Independent School District
- San Diego Unified School District - San Diego Transitions to Distance Learning
- San Diego Unified Board of Education Holds First Remote Meeting
- San Francisco Unified School District
- Santa Ana Unified School District
- Seattle Public Schools
- Shelby County Schools- Shelby Partners with WMC Action News 5 to Broadcast Home - SCS Announces 2020 Senior Celebration Series
- St. Louis Public Schools - SLPS Launches Meal Program - Buildings to Close through end of the Year - Pandemic Meal Plan flyer
- St. Paul Public Schools - Meals for Students - Board Condemns Racist Attacks Elevated by COVID-19 - SPPS Grateful for \$800,000 Grant from 3M
- Stockton Unified School District
- The School District of Palm Beach County
- The School District of Philadelphia- District Expands Hotline to Multile Languages - Learning Guides, Bridging the Digital Divide - Schools Closed for the Remainder of the Academic Year - School District Launches Website to Support Comprehensive Digital Learning Plan - Board of Education Approves Resolution Calling for State and Federal Funding of Public Education
- Toledo Public Schools
- Toronto District School Board
- Tulsa Public Schools - Tulsa Public Schools to provide educational television programming
- Washoe County School District
- Wichita Public Schools - Letter to Parents regarding Governor closing schools

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- Federal judge halts Betsy DeVos's controversial rule sending coronavirus aid to private schools - Washington Post, August 23
- Atlanta school board gives preliminary OK to push back first-day start date, Atlanta Journal Constitution, July 14
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- Standardized Testing and COVID-19: 4 Questions Answered, Education Week, July 9
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- Let's face it, Coronavirus will make the new school year tougher than the last, The Washington Post, June 29
- School districts see soaring costs for face masks and extra cleaning supplies as new year, Nevada Independent, June 29
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- Kids need to talk about George Floyd, protests and racism. With coronavirus school closures, it's hard to do, USA Today, June 4
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- What schools will look like when they reopen: Scheduled days home, more online learning, lots of hand-washing, USA Today, May 28
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- How to Assess English-Learners' Needs From a Distance? Here's Some Help, Education Week, May 28
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- K-12 school leaders warn of 'disaster' from huge coronavirus-related budget cuts as layoffs and furloughs begin, Washington Post, May 8
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- 4 states receive 'emergency education relief funds', Education Dive, April 29
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- Urban school leaders predict teacher layoffs in 'educational catastrophe' without federal intervention, PoliticoPro, April 28
- Nearly 300,000 Teacher Jobs at Risk if Feds Don't Step Up, Big Districts Warn, Click here to download, Education Week, April 28
- Schools Lean on Staff Who Speak Students' Language to Keep English-Learners Connected, Click here to download, Education Week, April 27
- Under pressure to reopen this fall, school leaders plot unprecedented changes, Click here to download, Washington Post, April 27
- Austin school district deployed over 100 school buses equipped with WiFi for students without Internet access, CNN, April 16
- With schools closed, the learning 'losses are glacial' for Guilford students, leaders say, Click here to download, News and Record, April 15
- Millions of public school students will suffer from school closures, education leaders have concluded, Click here to download the article, The Washington Post, April 13
- RI Education Commissioner: Distance Learning is a 'Whole State Effort', NBC 10News, April 8
- As School Moves Online, Many Students Stay Logged Out, Click here to download the article, NY Times, April 6
- Straight Up on COVID-19: Iconic Great City Schools Chief Mike Casserly on the Urban Response, Education Week, March 31
- Unprecedented Push to Educate Remotely Means Big Ask of School Technology in Texas and Beyond, Texas Public Radio, March 31
- SAISD Expands Food Service for Students to Apartment Complexes, News4SA, March 30
- With videos, phone calls and food deliveries, Milwaukee Public Schools teachers stay connected with families during shutdown, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, March 27
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- Coronavirus: How will school closures affect learning, families in Ohio and Kentucky?- Cincinnati Enquirer, March 13



## **COVID-19 REPORTS AND GUIDANCE**

**ELL SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE**

# Assessing Language Proficiency during Extended School Closures



## Sample Questionnaires

## ABOUT THE COUNCIL

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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Council of the Great City Schools

# Assessing Language Proficiency during Extended School Closures: Sample Questionnaires

Prepared by:

The Council of the Great City Schools

Washington, DC



May 2020

# Table of Contents

- Introduction ..... 1
  - Purpose and Audience ..... 1
  - Background ..... 1
  - Contributors ..... 2
- Section A. Descriptors of Broad Levels of English Proficiency Used in Provisional Screener and Suggested Supports ..... 3
- Section B. Questionnaire for Grades K-2 and Grades 3-5 ..... 5
- Section C. Questionnaire for Grades 6-12 ..... 11
- Section D. Writing Assessment (Optional) ..... 17
- Section E. Description of Questions by Typology and Skills Examined ..... 18
- Section F. Notes ..... 20



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# Introduction

## Purpose and Audience

This document provides sample questionnaires across grade bands that are designed to **provisionally** identify students as English learners (ELs) during the COVID-19-related school closures, which impede the administration of face-to-face screening protocols. **Provisional** screening protocols and interview questions do not replace the formal identification process, which districts are required to administer as soon as possible once school resumes normal operations for any student who has been given a provisional status. These sample questionnaires must be considered in light of guidance provided by the U.S. Department of Education fact sheets and funding information related to COVID-19.<sup>1</sup>

**The sample questionnaires are designed to assess particular skills to help schools understand how much support students will need in a remote learning environment in which they are not in their usual classroom routines, and thus, are not able to fully interact and learn from peers who may be more proficient in English.**

## Background

Despite the COVID-19-related school closures, school districts are handling enrollment of newly arriving students or students who will be starting Kindergarten in SY 2020-21. The school closure and health-related requirements of social distancing impede staff from conducting in-person screening for English proficiency as required by state educational agencies and the protocols of specific assessment instruments. Notwithstanding the impediments of face-to-face assessments, it is necessary for school districts to have a general sense of the level of a student's proficiency in English for the following groups:

- **Current students.** Enrollment of current year students who may be English learners cannot be delayed because of the restrictions around face-to-face English proficiency screening. Estimating a provisional level of English proficiency for potential ELs allows districts to immediately provide instructional resources and supports in line with health and welfare directives from the relevant governmental entities.
- **Incoming Kindergarteners.** For students who are enrolling in Kindergarten for SY 2020-21, and who may be English learners, districts need to know the level of English proficiency to inform placement and allocate necessary resources, including staff to provide the required English acquisition instructional program in SY 2020-21.

Boston Public Schools, a Council-member district, requested that the Council of the Great City Schools provide feedback on the draft guidance for provisional EL screening issued by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) for use during school closures. The Council provided a suggested revised guidance document and independently developed a set of sample questionnaires to be used as a provisional screener for English proficiency. This document contains the sample questionnaires developed by a working group, under the direction of the Council of the Great City Schools. The questionnaires are publicly available for use under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](#).

<sup>1</sup> A school district's ELL Director and legal counsel should ensure that any provisional screening protocols are in compliance with any settlement agreements or consent decrees relating to serving English learners, if applicable.



## Contributors

The Council of the Great City Schools assembled a working group of English learner program administrators from member districts and consultants with experience designing and administering English proficiency screeners to examine and provide feedback on the Massachusetts guidance for provisional screening of ELs, as requested by Boston Public Schools. The group's work resulted in a revised guidance document and an entirely new set of sample questionnaires.

We thank the practitioners and experts who collaborated on developing the set of questions and associated rubric for the provisional screener for ELs. The work was informed by English proficiency screeners and rubrics currently in use in several other states as well as the existing implementation realities.

### Council-member Districts

**Boston** **Eileen De Los Reyes**, Assistant Superintendent, Office of English Learners

**Faye Karp**, Executive Director, Office of English Learners

**Vera Johnson**, Director, Newcomers Assessment and Counseling Center

**Kansas City** **Stephanie Easley**, ESOL Assessment Specialist

**Palm Beach** **Francisco (Harvey) Oaxaca**, Director, Multicultural & Migrant Education

**San Antonio** **Olivia Hernandez**, Assistant Superintendent, Bilingual, ESL & Migrant

### Council Staff

**Gabriela Uro**, Director of ELL Policy and Research

**David Lai**, ELL Projects Manager

### External Experts

**Dr. Jennifer Chard**, a specialist in multilingual assessment and the Project Director of the Multilingual Literacy SIFE Screener in New York State, hosted at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Jennifer's work emphasizes the importance of incorporating students' home language skills and abilities into assessments and producing culturally and linguistically appropriate materials.

**Dr. Tamara Alsace**, former Director of Multilingual Education for Buffalo Public Schools (NY)

**Terry Walter**, former San Diego County Office of Education (CA)

## Section A

# Descriptors of Broad Levels of English Proficiency Used in Provisional Screener and Suggested Supports

The sample questionnaires developed by the Council of the Great City Schools allow staff to assess a student's receptive and productive language ability in English for **provisional** placement. Corresponding rubrics were developed for the sample questionnaires. Should a district choose to use a different set of questions or add supplemental questions, care must be taken to use age-appropriate questions and questions that are free from cultural bias and do not presume a student is familiar with U.S. cultural norms or experiences. In addition, the district will need to revise the corresponding rubric.

**Beginner-level students** range from being completely new to English to being able to understand and/or produce common words and short, simple sentences on familiar topics related to school, self, and home. They may be able to express some basic personal information and answer “yes” or “no” to simple direct questions, showing that they have understood the question and are able to respond appropriately. Beginner-level students may be able to understand and respond appropriately to simple WH-questions (e.g., who, what, where, etc.) and questions with “or.” The answers may be one-word answers, phrases, or simple sentences. Beginner-level students may not understand questions with multiple clauses. They cannot answer in sentences with multiple clauses and may have limited understanding or production of English.

**Suggested supports.** These students will need the most support and will likely have difficulty in understanding instructions for remote learning tasks in English without a lot of help. Instructions should include visual cues (modeling, video, etc.), incorporate scaffolding, and be provided in the home language where possible to get students to the point of even being able to engage with learning English.

**Intermediate-level students** will answer questions using phrases or complete sentences, or single words where appropriate. Simple sentences may be grammatically accurate, with correct word order. Students can name objects in their environment and describe them with appropriate adjectives. Students can compare and contrast using appropriate connecting words and can express and support an opinion. Students can understand the prompts for these types of questions and can mostly make their answers understood, though there may be grammatical inaccuracies, pronunciation errors, and/or they may struggle with vocabulary in some areas. Students may struggle with understanding and producing complex sentences such as relative clauses, reported speech, and conditionals.

**Suggested supports.** These students will likely understand simple instructions given by a teacher in English but will need guidance to perform new routines and participate in remote learning, including modeling and visual support. Home language instructions for entirely new routines will help students understand expectations so they can focus on learning English.

**Advanced-level students** will understand much of what is being said to them, including complex sentences and multi-step instructions. They will respond with mostly accurate simple sentences and will likely be able to produce complex sentences when prompted, sometimes needing support and scaffolding to do so. These students will connect sentences with appropriate transitions and use some low-frequency, specialized words. These students can have conversational exchanges, seek clarification or explanation when they need it, and find a way to make themselves understood, even if through language forms not typically used by an English-native speaker.

**Suggested supports.** Advanced-level students will be able to understand most instructions about novel remote learning circumstances in English. They will have the English proficiency to ask questions when they do not understand instructions, though in some cases they may hesitate to reach out for help. Modeling and visual support for new routines will help these students. Words and concepts related to distance learning may require explanation, since many of these words are not typically used in the classroom.

- **Non-response or incomplete screening interview.** Students who are unable to respond to any of the questions and/or prompts, or whose responses are unintelligible, will be provisionally identified at the **beginner** level.
- **Native-like English proficiency.** Students who respond to the advanced-level questions with native-like fluency and complexity may require only minimal supports (or none at all). Instructional supports and services will be provided, nonetheless, to address any potential lack of familiarity with the school system, technology, distance learning, cultural norms, and/or English academic language.

## Section B

# Questionnaire for Grades K-2 and Grades 3-5

### Overall guidance for the interviewer:

- After introductory Questions 1 through 3, consider whether to continue in order or to jump to Question 6, if the student is providing responses that are intermediate or advanced.
- If possible, record the conversation (and inform the parent/guardian it will be recorded), so you can listen to the responses and score after the interview concludes.
- Please remember to prompt/encourage students to provide more detail in their responses, especially as the remote interview process poses greater challenges to interpersonal communication, without visual cues and facial expression.



For each question, note whether the student’s answer matches the **Beginner Responses** column or the **Intermediate and Advanced Responses** column.

INTERVIEW RATER INSTRUCTIONS: The screener provides a holistic sense of English proficiency rather than a numeric score. Classify the response to each question according to the level that best represents the response. After Question 3, you will be prompted to pause and quickly assess whether to skip to a more advanced question for higher levels of proficiency.			
BEGINNER-LEVEL QUESTIONS			
	Interview Question	Beginner Response	Intermediate or Advanced Response
1.	What is your name?  <i>If the student struggles:</i> Is it [insert name]?	<input type="radio"/> No response, or response is unintelligible <input type="radio"/> “I don’t know,” or student may not give appropriate response <input type="radio"/> Frequent and long pauses in attempt to communicate <input type="radio"/> Grammatical errors and limited or erroneous word choice impede meaning	<input type="radio"/> Responds appropriately with one word or a basic phrase
2.	<b>Grades K-2</b> Are you in [CITY/TOWN]? Tell me about it.  <b>Grades 3-5</b> Is there a park close to where you live? Tell me about it.	<input type="radio"/> No response, or response is unintelligible <input type="radio"/> “I don’t know,” or student may not give appropriate response <input type="radio"/> Frequent and long pauses in attempt to communicate <input type="radio"/> Grammatical errors and limited or erroneous word choice impede meaning	<input type="radio"/> Responds appropriately with one word, a basic phrase, or a more detailed response <input type="radio"/> Pronunciation, word choice, and grammatical errors do not impede meaning

**BEGINNER-LEVEL QUESTIONS, continued**

	<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Beginner Response</b>	<b>Intermediate or Advanced Response</b>
3.	<p>When did you last watch TV, a movie, or video?</p> <p>What is your favorite show? What is your favorite movie/video? When did you last watch it?</p> <p><i>If the student struggles:</i> Do you have a favorite song? Tell me more.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> No response, or response is unintelligible</li> <li><input type="radio"/> "I don't know," or student may not give appropriate response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Frequent and long pauses in attempt to communicate</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Grammatical errors and limited or erroneous word choice impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Responds appropriately with one word, a basic phrase, or a more detailed response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Pronunciation, word choice, and grammatical errors do not impede meaning</li> </ul>
<b>INTERVIEW RATER INSTRUCTIONS: If the student answers Questions 1-3 with intermediate/advanced responses, JUMP TO QUESTION 6.</b>			
4.	<p>What is your favorite color?</p> <p>Tell me three things that have this color.</p> <p><i>If the student struggles:</i> What is your favorite sound? What makes that sound?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> No response, or response is unintelligible</li> <li><input type="radio"/> "I don't know," or student may not give appropriate response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Frequent and long pauses (halting, choppy) in attempt to communicate</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Grammatical errors and limited or erroneous word choice impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Responds appropriately with one word, a basic phrase, or a more detailed response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Pronunciation, word choice, and grammatical errors do not impede meaning</li> </ul>
5.	<p>What do you see around you right now?</p> <p>(What else, tell me more, what's that, what color is it)?</p> <p><i>If the student struggles:</i> Do you see a table? What is on the table? Do you see a bag? What is in the bag?</p> <p><i>Interviewer should prompt students to give 3 objects with at least 1 trait each.</i></p> <p><b>Note: if a video platform or device is being used, images could be sent via text message or the digital platform.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> No response, or response is unintelligible</li> <li><input type="radio"/> "I don't know," or student may not give appropriate response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> May give a one-word answer and be unable to describe any object</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Frequent and long pauses (halting, choppy) in attempt to communicate</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Grammatical errors and limited or erroneous word choice impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Responds appropriately with one word, a basic phrase, or a more detailed response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Pronunciation, word choice, and grammatical errors do not impede meaning</li> </ul>

**BEGINNER-LEVEL QUESTIONS, continued**

	<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Beginner Response</b>	<b>Intermediate or Advanced Response</b>
6.	<p>What do you do for fun? Can you tell me more? (Ask a follow-up question for the student to describe the activity.)</p> <p><i>Interviewer should prompt students to name an activity and give some details about that activity.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> No response, or response is unintelligible</li> <li><input type="radio"/> "I don't know," or student may not give appropriate response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> May give a one-word answer, does not include details</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Frequent and long pauses (halting, choppy) in attempt to communicate</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Grammatical errors and limited or erroneous word choice impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Responds appropriately with one word, a basic phrase, or a more detailed response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Pronunciation, word choice, and grammatical errors do not impede meaning</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Majority of marks under each of the three proficiency levels:</b></p> <p><b><i>Under which column (classification) do most responses fall?</i></b></p>	 <p><b>STOP</b> the interview. Student is a provisional beginner.</p>	 <p>Proceed to asking Intermediate/ Advanced-level questions.</p>

**INTERVIEW RATER INSTRUCTIONS:** The screener provides a holistic sense of English proficiency rather than a numeric score. Classify the response to each question according to the level that best represents the response.

- If a student has great difficulty in giving an answer on three or more questions, **STOP**. Classify this student as having **Beginning** proficiency in English.
- Otherwise, proceed to the next section.

**INTERMEDIATE/ADVANCED-LEVEL QUESTIONS**

**General Description of Expected Responses**

**Intermediate-level students** will engage with all questions but may misunderstand some prompts, or responses may not be understood on all questions. Responses will not be grammatically accurate for all questions, or answers may be limited to simple language structures.

**Advanced-level students** will be able to answer all questions and provide more detail when prompted. They can make their point understood on all or all but one question. They may make grammatical errors, but errors do not impede communication.

	<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Beginner Response</b>	<b>Intermediate Response</b>	<b>Advanced Response</b>
7.	<p><b>Grades K-2</b></p> <p>Can you describe a favorite food you like to eat?</p> <p><i>If the student struggles:</i> What is your favorite toy? Can you describe it?</p> <p><i>Student can use the name for the <b>food</b> or <b>toy</b> in their language, and describe if hot or cold, hard or soft, etc.</i></p> <p><b>Grades 3-5</b></p> <p>Someone asks you how to get to the nearest place to buy food. What would you say?</p> <p><b>Note: Student may need prompting for more detail.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ "I don't know," or student may not give appropriate response</li> <li>○ Provides single-word response</li> <li>○ Frequent and long pauses (halting, choppy) in attempt to communicate</li> <li>○ Pronunciation errors impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Answer can generally be understood</li> <li>○ Includes high-frequency vocabulary and common phrases</li> <li>○ Uses simple sentences with few transitions, attempts to use complex sentences may interfere with understanding</li> <li>○ Includes brief pauses when searching for words or attempting to restate or clarify, word choice may obscure meaning</li> <li>○ Pronunciation and grammatical errors mostly do not impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provides details with well-connected sentences, using some specialized, low-frequency words</li> <li>○ Includes few brief pauses, speech is fairly sustained with minor choppiness</li> <li>○ Few pronunciation errors and grammatical errors but none impede meaning</li> </ul>
8.	<p>What is the difference between wet and dry weather? Or hot and cold weather?</p> <p>(What activities do you do? What clothing/shoes do you wear?)</p> <p><b>Note: Student may need prompting for more detail.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ "I don't know," or student may not give appropriate response</li> <li>○ Provides single-word response</li> <li>○ Frequent and long pauses (halting, choppy) in attempt to communicate</li> <li>○ Pronunciation errors impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Answer can generally be understood</li> <li>○ Includes high-frequency vocabulary and common phrases</li> <li>○ Uses simple sentences with few transitions, attempts to use complex sentences may interfere with understanding</li> <li>○ Includes brief pauses when searching for words or attempting to restate or clarify, word choice may obscure meaning</li> <li>○ Pronunciation and grammatical errors mostly do not impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Compares and contrasts</li> <li>○ Provides details with well-connected sentences, using some specialized, low-frequency words</li> <li>○ Includes few brief pauses, speech is fairly sustained with minor choppiness</li> <li>○ Few pronunciation errors and grammatical errors but none impede meaning</li> </ul>

**INTERMEDIATE/ADVANCED-LEVEL QUESTIONS, continued**

	<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Beginner Response</b>	<b>Intermediate Response</b>	<b>Advanced Response</b>
9.	<p><b>Select one:</b></p> <p>Tell me about a place you really like. Why do you like it?</p> <p><i>If the student struggles:</i> Describe that place. Who also goes to that place?</p> <p><b>OR</b></p> <p>What do you think is the most dangerous/exciting sport? Tell me why.</p> <p><b>Note: Student may need prompting for more detail.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> "I don't know," or student may not give appropriate response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Provides single-word response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Frequent and long pauses (halting, choppy) in attempt to communicate</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Pronunciation errors impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Student is able to answer and provide a reason</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Answer can generally be understood</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Includes high-frequency vocabulary and common phrases</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Uses simple sentences with few transitions, attempts to use complex sentences may interfere with understanding</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Includes brief pauses when searching for words or attempting to restate or clarify, word choice may obscure meaning</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Pronunciation and grammatical errors mostly do not impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Articulates and supports an opinion fluently</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Provides details with well-connected sentences, using some specialized, low-frequency words</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Includes few brief pauses, speech is fairly sustained with minor choppiness</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Few pronunciation errors and grammatical errors but none impede meaning</li> </ul>
10.	<p>If you could meet one famous person, who would it be, and why?</p> <p><i>If the student struggles:</i> If you could choose to have one new talent, what would it be, and why?</p> <p><b>Note: Student may need prompting for more detail.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> "I don't know," or student may not give appropriate response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Provides single-word response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Frequent and long pauses (halting, choppy) in attempt to communicate</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Pronunciation errors impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Responds using "I will" or just states the answer</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Answer can generally be understood</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Includes high-frequency vocabulary and common phrases</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Uses simple sentences with few transitions, attempts to use complex sentences may interfere with understanding</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Includes brief pauses when searching for words or attempting to restate or clarify</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Pronunciation and grammatical errors mostly do not impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Responds to the prompt using "I would..."</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Provides details with well-connected sentences, using some specialized, low-frequency words</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Includes few brief pauses, speech is fairly sustained with minor choppiness</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Few pronunciation errors and grammatical errors but none impede meaning</li> </ul>



INTERMEDIATE/ADVANCED-LEVEL QUESTIONS, continued				
	Interview Question	Beginner Response	Intermediate Response	Advanced Response
11.	<p><b>Select one:</b></p> <p>Describe the rules of a game you played as a child.</p> <p><b>OR</b></p> <p>Describe what a school day was like for you in the past.</p> <p><b>Note: Student may need prompting for more detail.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> "I don't know," or student may not give appropriate response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Provides single-word response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Frequent and long pauses (halting, choppy) in attempt to communicate</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Pronunciation errors impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Responds to prompt with common words and phrases</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Sentences demonstrate some sequencing with simple connective words (game question)</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Response describes their experience using high-frequency words and common phrases (school day question)</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Answer can generally be understood</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Uses simple sentences with few transitions, attempts to use complex sentences may interfere with understanding</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Includes brief pauses when searching for words or attempting to restate or clarify</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Pronunciation and grammatical errors mostly do not impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Student can fluently sequence sentences to describe rules and routines using appropriate connective words</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Uses some specialized, low-frequency words</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Includes few brief pauses, speech is fairly sustained with minor choppiness</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Few pronunciation errors and grammatical errors but none impede meaning</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Majority of marks under each of the three proficiency levels:</b></p> <p><b>Under which column (classification) do most responses fall?</b></p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p><b>INTERVIEW RATER INSTRUCTIONS:</b> The screener provides a holistic sense of English proficiency rather than a numeric score. Classify the response to each question according to the level that best represents the response.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● If the student <b>cannot answer three or more questions</b> appropriately, the student is a <b>Beginner</b>.</li> <li>● If the student is able to answer all questions, assess whether there are <b>more responses</b> in the <b>intermediate</b> column or <b>advanced</b> column for a final placement.</li> </ul>				

## Section C

# Questionnaire for Grades 6-12

### Overall guidance for the interviewer:



- After introductory Questions 1 through 3, consider whether to continue in order or to jump to Question 6, if the student is providing responses that are intermediate or advanced.
- If possible, record the conversation (and inform the parent/guardian it will be recorded), so you can listen to the responses and score after the interview concludes.
- Please remember to prompt/encourage students to provide more detail in their responses, especially as the remote interview process poses greater challenges to interpersonal communication, without visual cues and facial expression.

For each question, note whether the student’s answer matches the **Beginner Responses** column or the **Intermediate and Advanced Responses** column.

<b>INTERVIEW RATER INSTRUCTIONS:</b> The screener provides a holistic sense of English proficiency rather than a numeric score. Classify the response to each question according to the level that best represents the response. You will be prompted to pause after Question 3 to assess whether to skip to a question for higher levels of proficiency.			
<b>BEGINNER-LEVEL QUESTIONS</b>			
	<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Beginner Response</b>	<b>Intermediate or Advanced Response</b>
1.	What is your name?  <i>If the student struggles:</i> Is it [NAME]?	<input type="radio"/> No response, or response is unintelligible <input type="radio"/> “I don’t know,” or student may not give appropriate response <input type="radio"/> Frequent and long pauses (halting, choppy) in attempt to communicate	<input type="radio"/> Responds appropriately with one word or a basic phrase
2.	Are you in [CITY/TOWN]?	<input type="radio"/> No response, or response is unintelligible <input type="radio"/> “I don’t know,” or student may not give appropriate response <input type="radio"/> Frequent and long pauses (halting, choppy) in attempt to communicate <input type="radio"/> Grammatical errors and limited or erroneous word choice impede meaning	<input type="radio"/> Responds appropriately with one word, a basic phrase, or a more detailed response <input type="radio"/> Pronunciation, word choice, and grammatical errors do not impede meaning

BEGINNER-LEVEL QUESTIONS, continued			
	Interview Question	Beginner Response	Intermediate or Advanced Response
3.	<p>When did you last watch TV, a movie, video?</p> <p>What is your favorite show? What is your favorite movie/video? When did you last watch it?</p> <p><i>If the student struggles:</i> Do you have a favorite song? Tell me more.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> No response, or response is unintelligible</li> <li><input type="radio"/> "I don't know," or student may not give appropriate response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Frequent and long pauses (halting, choppy) in attempt to communicate</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Grammatical errors and limited or erroneous word choice impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Responds appropriately with one word, a basic phrase, or a more detailed response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Pronunciation, word choice, and grammatical errors do not impede meaning</li> </ul>
<b>INTERVIEW RATER INSTRUCTIONS: If the students answer Questions 1-3 with intermediate/advanced responses, JUMP TO QUESTION 6.</b>			
4.	<p>What is your favorite color?</p> <p>Tell me three things that have this color.</p> <p><i>If the student struggles:</i> What is your favorite sound? What makes that sound?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> No response, or response is unintelligible</li> <li><input type="radio"/> "I don't know," or student may not give appropriate response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Frequent and long pauses (halting, choppy) in attempt to communicate</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Grammatical errors and limited or erroneous word choice impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Responds appropriately with one word, a basic phrase, or a more detailed response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Pronunciation, word choice, and grammatical errors do not impede meaning</li> </ul>
5.	<p>What do you see around you right now?</p> <p>(What else, tell me more, what's that, what color is it)?</p> <p><i>If the student struggles:</i> Do you see a table? What is on the table? Do you see a bag? What is in the bag?</p> <p><i>Interviewer should prompt students to give 3 objects with at least 1 trait each.</i></p> <p><b>Note: if a video platform or device is being used, images could be sent via text message or the digital platform.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> No response, or response is unintelligible</li> <li><input type="radio"/> "I don't know," or student may not give appropriate response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Frequent and long pauses (halting, choppy) in attempt to communicate</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Grammatical errors and limited or erroneous word choice impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Responds appropriately with one word, a basic phrase, or a more detailed response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Pronunciation, word choice, and grammatical errors do not impede meaning</li> </ul>

**BEGINNER-LEVEL QUESTIONS, continued**

	<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Beginner Response</b>	<b>Intermediate or Advanced Response</b>
6.	<p>What do you do for fun? Can you tell me more? (Ask a follow-up question for student to describe the activity.)</p> <p><i>Interviewer should prompt students to name an activity and give some details about that activity.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> No response, or response is unintelligible</li> <li><input type="radio"/> "I don't know," or student may not give appropriate response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Frequent and long pauses (halting, choppy) in attempt to communicate</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Grammatical errors and limited or erroneous word choice impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Responds appropriately with one word, a basic phrase, or a more detailed response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Pronunciation, word choice, and grammatical errors do not impede meaning</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Majority of marks under each of the three proficiency levels:</b></p> <p><b><i>Under which column (classification) do most responses fall?</i></b></p>	<p align="center"></p> <p align="center"><b>STOP</b> the interview. Student is a provisional beginner.</p>	<p align="center"></p> <p align="center">Proceed to asking Intermediate/ Advanced-level questions.</p>
<p><b>INTERVIEW RATER INSTRUCTIONS:</b> The screener provides a holistic sense of English proficiency rather than a numeric score. Classify the response to each question according to the level that best represents the response.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● If a student has great difficulty in giving an answer on three or more questions, <b>STOP</b>. Classify this student as having <b>Beginning</b> proficiency in English.</li> <li>● Otherwise, proceed to the next section.</li> </ul>			

**INTERMEDIATE/ADVANCED-LEVEL QUESTIONS**

**General Description of Expected Responses**

**Intermediate-level students** will engage with all questions but may misunderstand some prompts, or responses may not be understood on all questions. Responses will not be grammatically accurate for all questions, or answers may be limited to simple language structures.

**Advanced-level students** will be able to answer all questions and provide more detail when prompted. They can make their point understood on all or all but one question. They may make grammatical errors, but errors do not impede communication.

	<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Beginner Response</b>	<b>Intermediate Response</b>	<b>Advanced Response</b>
7.	<p>Someone asks you how to get to the nearest place to buy food. What would you say?</p> <p><b>Note: Student may need prompting for more detail.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> "I don't know," or student may not give appropriate response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Provides single-word response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Frequent and long pauses (halting, choppy) in attempt to communicate</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Pronunciation errors impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Gives an answer using high-frequency vocabulary and common phrases</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Uses simple sentences with a few transitions</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Pronunciation and grammatical errors mostly do not impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Provides details with well-connected sentences, using some specialized, low-frequency words</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Includes few brief pauses, speech is fairly sustained with minor choppiness</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Few pronunciation errors and grammatical errors but none impede meaning</li> </ul>
8.	<p>What is the difference between wet and dry weather? Or hot and cold weather?</p> <p>(What activities do you do? What clothing/shoes do you wear?)</p> <p><b>Note: Student may need prompting for more detail.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> "I don't know," or student may not give appropriate response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Provides single-word response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Frequent and long pauses (halting, choppy) in attempt to communicate</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Pronunciation errors impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Answer can generally be understood</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Includes high-frequency vocabulary and common phrases</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Uses simple sentences with few transitions, attempts to use complex sentences may interfere with understanding</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Includes brief pauses when searching for words or attempting to restate or clarify, word choice may obscure meaning</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Pronunciation and grammatical errors mostly do not impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Compares and contrasts fluently</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Provides details with well-connected sentences, using some specialized, low-frequency words</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Includes few brief pauses, speech is fairly sustained with minor choppiness</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Few pronunciation errors and grammatical errors but none impede meaning</li> </ul>

**INTERMEDIATE/ADVANCED-LEVEL QUESTIONS, continued**

	<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Beginner Response</b>	<b>Intermediate Response</b>	<b>Advanced Response</b>
9.	<p><b>Select one:</b></p> <p>Tell me about a place you really like. Why do you like it?</p> <p><i>If the student struggles:</i> Describe that place. Who also goes to that place?</p> <p><b>OR</b></p> <p>What do you think is the most dangerous/exciting sport? Tell me why.</p> <p><b>Note: Student may need prompting for more detail.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ "I don't know," or student may not give appropriate response</li> <li>○ Provides single-word response</li> <li>○ Frequent and long pauses (halting, choppy) in attempt to communicate</li> <li>○ Pronunciation errors impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Student is able to answer and provide a reason</li> <li>○ Answer can generally be understood</li> <li>○ Includes high-frequency vocabulary and common phrases</li> <li>○ Uses simple sentences with few transitions, attempts to use complex sentences may interfere with understanding</li> <li>○ Includes brief pauses when searching for words or attempting to restate or clarify, word choice may obscure meaning</li> <li>○ Pronunciation and grammatical errors mostly do not impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Articulates and supports an opinion fluently</li> <li>○ Provides details with well-connected sentences, using some specialized, low-frequency words</li> <li>○ Includes few brief pauses, speech is fairly sustained with minor choppiness</li> <li>○ Few pronunciation errors and grammatical errors but none impede meaning</li> </ul>
10.	<p>If you could meet one famous person, who would it be, and why?</p> <p><i>If the student struggles:</i> If you could choose to have one new talent, what would it be, and why?</p> <p><b>Note: Student may need prompting for more detail.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ "I don't know," or student may not give appropriate response</li> <li>○ Provides single-word response</li> <li>○ Frequent and long pauses (halting, choppy) in attempt to communicate</li> <li>○ Pronunciation errors impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Responds to the prompt using "I will" or just states the answer</li> <li>○ Answer can generally be understood</li> <li>○ Student attempts to use complex sentences, but these may interfere with understanding</li> <li>○ Pronunciation and grammatical errors mostly do not impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Responds to the prompt using "I would..."</li> <li>○ Provides details with well-connected sentences, using some specialized, including hypothetical, low-frequency words</li> <li>○ Includes few brief pauses, speech is fairly sustained with minor choppiness</li> <li>○ Few pronunciation errors and grammatical errors but none impede meaning</li> </ul>

**INTERMEDIATE/ADVANCED-LEVEL QUESTIONS, continued**

	<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Beginner Response</b>	<b>Intermediate Response</b>	<b>Advanced Response</b>
11.	<p><b>Select one:</b></p> <p>Describe the rules of a game you played as a child.</p> <p><b>OR</b></p> <p>Describe what a school day was like for you in the past.</p> <p><b>Note: Student may need prompting for more detail.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> "I don't know," or student may not give appropriate response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Provides single-word response</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Frequent and long pauses (halting, choppy) in attempt to communicate</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Pronunciation errors impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Uses simple signal words for sequencing (game question)</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Response describes their experience using high-frequency words and common phrases (school day question)</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Answer can generally be understood</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Uses simple sentences with few transitions, attempts to use complex sentences may interfere with understanding</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Includes brief pauses when searching for words or attempting to restate or clarify</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Pronunciation and grammatical errors mostly do not impede meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Student can fluently sequence sentences to describe rules and routines using appropriate connective words</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Uses some specialized, low-frequency words</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Includes few brief pauses, speech is fairly sustained with minor choppiness</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Few pronunciation errors and grammatical errors but none impede meaning</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Majority of marks under each of the three proficiency levels:</b></p> <p><b>Under which column (classification) do most responses fall?</b></p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**INTERVIEW RATER INSTRUCTIONS:** The screener provides a holistic sense of English proficiency rather than a numeric score. Classify the response to each question according to the level that best represents the response.

- If the student **cannot answer three or more questions** appropriately, the student is a **Beginner**.
- If the student is able to answer all questions, assess whether there are **more responses** in the **intermediate** column or **advanced** column for a final placement.

## Section D

# Writing Assessment (Optional)

<b>Writing (Optional)</b>			
<p>Use a writing prompt to determine if the student has writing skills in English. The interviewer can verbally provide the prompt or if using a virtual platform, the prompt can also be displayed on the screen for the student to reference. The interviewer should select from the sample prompts below based on what may be more likely to elicit a response from the student.</p>			
12.	<p><b>Prompt (presented verbally or in writing):</b> Using complete sentences, tell me about A, B, or C. Try to include at least three details.</p> <p>A. A family member or friend            B. A favorite story you know            C. A sport you enjoy playing/watching OR a favorite athlete/player</p>		
	Beginner Response	Intermediate Response	Advanced Response
Sentence Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Is (not) minimally comprehensible</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Includes minimal, irrelevant, or no supporting details</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Uses short phrases and fragments (not complete sentences) or short, simple sentences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Is mostly comprehensible</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Includes some relevant supporting details</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Uses complete sentences and attempts complex and compound structures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Is fully comprehensible</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Includes many relevant supporting details</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Uses complete sentences with purposeful use of varying structure and uses complex structures</li> </ul>
Vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Contains common simple, high frequency vocabulary</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Vocabulary errors and usage obscure meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Contains some repetition and range of vocabulary</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Occasional vocabulary errors obscure meaning</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Includes simple signal words, like conjunctions (e.g., before, when, or, because)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Uses high level, precise vocabulary showing a sense of word choice</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Variation and range of vocabulary is sufficient to express ideas, and includes signal words—like conjunctions—to show time, cause/effect and compare/contrast (e.g., until, leads to, also, however)</li> </ul>
Grammar and Syntax	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Contains very simple syntax in English, repetitive phrases and grammatical structures, or is mostly a word-for-word restatement of the prompt</li> <li><input type="radio"/> May use invented spelling, may include primary language phonics, may include frequent grammatical errors (punctuation, spelling, capitalization) that interfere with meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Contains mostly correct but simple English syntax (e.g., simple pattern using present/past tense, subject-verb agreement) or may use syntax of the home language (e.g., noun-adjective order)</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Use of grammatical conventions (e.g., capitalization, punctuation, and spelling) partially correct and may distract from meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Uses correct grammar and English syntax</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Uses correct verb tenses</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Uses capitalization, punctuation, and spelling with few errors that interfere with meaning</li> </ul>



## Section E

# Description of Questions by Typology and Skills Examined

BEGINNER-LEVEL QUESTIONS		
	Interview Question	Skill Tested
1.	<p>What is your name?</p> <p><i>If the student struggles:</i> Is it [insert name]?</p>	<p><b>Listening</b> – English basic phrase</p> <p><b>Speaking</b></p>
2.	<p><b>Grades K-12</b></p> <p>Are you in [CITY/TOWN]? Tell me about it.</p> <p><b>Grades 3-5</b></p> <p>Is there a park close to where you live? Tell me about it.</p>	<p><b>Listening</b> – <b>yes/no</b> question</p> <p><b>Speaking</b></p>
3.	<p><b>When</b> did you last watch TV, a movie, video?</p> <p><b>What</b> is your favorite show? <b>What</b> is your favorite movie/video? <b>When</b> did you last watch it?</p> <p><i>If the student struggles:</i> Do you have a favorite song? Tell me more.</p>	<p><b>Listening</b> – <b>wh</b> question</p> <p><b>Speaking</b></p>
4.	<p><b>What</b> is your favorite color? Tell me three things that have this color.</p> <p><i>If the student struggles:</i> <b>What</b> is your favorite sound? What makes that sound?</p>	<p><b>Listening</b> – (“or”) <b>understanding</b> you need to choose one</p> <p><b>Speaking</b> – <b>describe</b> preference</p>
5.	<p><b>What</b> do you see around you right now?</p> <p>(What else, tell me more, what’s that, what color is it)?</p> <p><i>If the student struggles:</i> Do you see a table? What is on the table? Do you see a bag? What is in the bag?</p>	<p><b>Listening</b> – <b>understanding</b> the prompt</p> <p><b>Speaking</b> – <b>name</b> objects and <b>describe</b> them with adjectives</p>
6.	<p><b>What</b> do you do for fun? Can you tell me more? (Ask a follow-up question for the student to describe the activity.)</p>	<p><b>Listening</b> – <b>understanding</b> the prompt</p> <p><b>Speaking</b> – using words and phrases about self and others, and if applicable, sequence of steps</p>

INTERMEDIATE/ADVANCED LEVEL QUESTIONS		
	Interview Question	Skill Tested
7.	<p><b>Grades K-2</b></p> <p>Can you describe a favorite food you like to eat?</p> <p><i>If the student struggles:</i> What is your favorite toy? Can you describe it?</p> <p><b>Grades 3-12</b></p> <p>Someone asks you how to get to the nearest place to buy food. What would you say?</p>	<p><b>Grades K-2</b></p> <p><b>Listening</b> – understanding the prompt</p> <p><b>Speaking</b> – express preference for an object and describe it with adjectives</p> <p><b>Grades 3-12</b></p> <p><b>Listening</b> – understanding the prompt</p> <p><b>Speaking</b> – using words to indicate direction</p>
8.	<p>What is the difference between wet and dry weather? Or hot and cold weather?</p> <p>(What activities do you do? What clothing/shoes do you wear?)</p>	<p><b>Listening</b> – understanding the prompt</p> <p><b>Speaking</b> – compare and contrast</p>
9.	<p><b>Select one:</b></p> <p>Tell me about a place you really like. Why do you like it?</p> <p><i>If the student struggles:</i> Describe that place. Who also goes to that place?</p> <p><b>OR</b></p> <p>What do you think is the most dangerous/exciting sport? Tell me why.</p>	<p><b>Speaking</b> – articulate and support an opinion</p>
10.	<p>If you could meet one famous person, who would it be, and why?</p> <p><i>If the student struggles:</i> If you could choose to have one new talent, what would it be, and why?</p>	<p><b>Speaking</b> – conditional constructions</p>
11.	<p><b>Select one:</b></p> <p>Describe the rules of a game you played as a child.</p> <p><b>OR</b></p> <p>Describe what a school day was like for you in the past.</p>	<p>Can <b>sequence sentences</b> using appropriate <b>connective words</b> using vocabulary outside of immediate experience</p>



# Section F

## Notes

## Council Member Districts

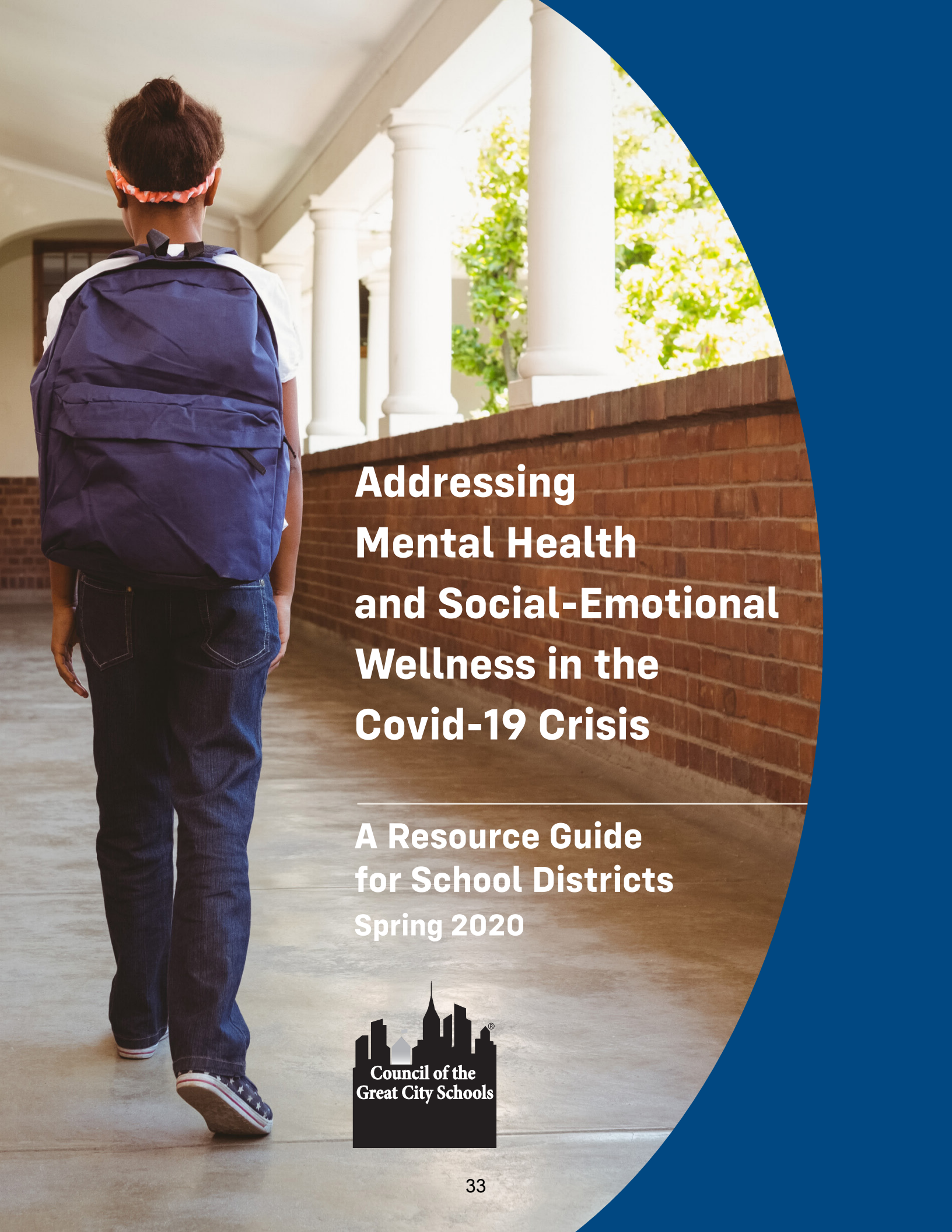
Albuquerque, Anchorage, Arlington (Texas), Atlanta, Aurora (Colorado), Austin, Baltimore, Birmingham, Boston, Bridgeport, Broward County (Ft. Lauderdale), Buffalo, Charleston County, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Chicago, Cincinnati, Clark County (Las Vegas), Cleveland, Columbus, Dallas, Dayton, Denver, Des Moines, Detroit, Duval County (Jacksonville), El Paso, Fort Worth, Fresno, Guilford County (Greensboro, N.C.), Hawaii, Hillsborough County (Tampa), Houston, Indianapolis, Jackson, Jefferson County (Louisville), Kansas City, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Manchester, Miami-Dade County, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Nashville, New Orleans, New York City, Newark, Norfolk, Oakland, Oklahoma City, Omaha, Orange County (Orlando), Palm Beach County, Philadelphia, Pinellas County, Pittsburgh, Portland, Providence, Puerto Rico, Richmond, Rochester, Sacramento, San Antonio, San Diego, San Francisco, Santa Ana, Seattle, Shelby County, St. Louis, St. Paul, Stockton, Toledo, Toronto, Tulsa, Washington, D.C., Washoe, and Wichita



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**MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL  
WELLNESS RESOURCES**





# Addressing Mental Health and Social-Emotional Wellness in the Covid-19 Crisis

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A Resource Guide  
for School Districts  
Spring 2020



## ABOUT THE COUNCIL

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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Council of the Great City Schools



# Addressing Mental Health and Social-Emotional Wellness in the Covid-19 Crisis

## A Resource Guide for School Districts



Spring 2020

# Table of Contents

- Defining Mental Health and Social-Emotional Wellness Challenges in the COVID-19 Crisis..... 2
- Principles and Strategies for Providing Mental Health and Social-Emotional Wellness Supports ..... 3
  - Transparency and Communication..... 3
  - Shared Ownership of the Social-Emotional Wellbeing of Students ..... 5
  - Proactive Support and Intervention ..... 6
  - Inclusion and Outreach..... 7
- District Programming, Partnerships, and Resources ..... 9
  - Broward County Public Schools..... 9
  - Cleveland Metropolitan School District..... 11
  - Los Angeles Unified School District ..... 13
  - Tulsa Public Schools..... 15
- Appendix A: Technical Assistance and Information on Universal Screening..... 18
- Appendix B: Links to Articles and Resources..... 19
- Appendix C: District Experts and Researchers ..... 20



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# Contributors

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Council of the Great City Schools, May 2020

# Defining Mental Health and Social-Emotional Wellness Challenges in the COVID-19 Crisis

Urban school districts will face a number of new and unprecedented challenges in the 2020-21 school year. In addition to safely reopening schools, planning for the likelihood of future rolling school closures, redesigning instructional delivery models, and effectively addressing unfinished learning and learning losses among students, schools will need to address the significant social and emotional toll that the crisis has taken on children and adults alike. After the disruption in schooling and months of isolation, fear, and uncertainty, the start of the new school year—whether it means a return to school buildings or some hybrid model of virtual and in-person learning—is likely to be met with significant anxiety and apprehension. Districts will need to create learning environments that make students and their teachers feel safe and socially and emotionally supported as they return to school.

To meet these needs, significant restructuring and reallocation of resources will be necessary, as social-emotional learning and mental health<sup>1</sup> have traditionally been blindspots for many school systems. In general, addressing the mental health needs of students is not universally understood or embraced as the central work of schools or districts. Efforts in this area have been relegated to siloed mental health, social-emotional learning (SEL), and student services departments, working without sufficient resources, coordination, or access. But as anyone who works with students can attest, attending to the mental health and social-emotional wellbeing of students is not an external consideration—it is a necessary condition for learning. In the context of COVID-19, it is going to become an even more pressing consideration in how we educate and support students, as districts will need to prioritize the emotional wellbeing of students as they re-engage them in academic content.

In this guide, we present a set of overarching principles and strategies to address the social-emotional and mental health needs of both students and adults at this critical juncture and beyond. We then highlight some of the key efforts being undertaken and resources being offered in a set of districts that we have identified as leaders in the field: Broward County Public Schools, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, the Los Angeles Unified School District, and Tulsa Public Schools. Finally, we provide a list of academic and district experts in the field of social-emotional learning and behavior and mental health. Our urban communities need our support now more than ever, and we hope this guide helps to advance the planning and implementation of safe and supportive learning environments.

---

1 While social-emotional wellness and mental health are two distinct realms, we are working with them in an integrated manner as districts will need to marshal resources to address both the psychological impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on students and families. We define mental health and social-emotional wellbeing as reducing psychological symptoms AND improving prosocial and coping skills.

# Principles and Strategies for Providing Mental Health and Social-Emotional Wellness Supports

The current crisis has presented districts with new and unprecedented challenges. It has also highlighted many of the inequities and limitations that have existed for years in the way that we, as educators, support the social and emotional health and development of our students. Dealing with the current crisis will require us to address these limitations.

In particular, building instructional environments that promote positive social and emotional skills and behavior will require districts to increase **transparency and communication** around current and ongoing mental health issues and resources, to build a sense of **shared ownership** of both the physical and emotional wellbeing of children, to provide **proactive support and interventions**, and to advance **inclusion and outreach** for our most vulnerable children and families.

Here is a deeper look at what these principles mean in practice and some strategies for districts to consider in planning for the upcoming school year—

## Transparency and Communication

1

The most immediate step districts will need to take to start to address widespread anxiety and fear is to provide consistent communication that school is a physically and psychologically safe place. Students have experienced sudden and unprecedented disruption to their routines and schedules, home life, and community engagement. Many children may no longer feel physically safe in their immediate (home) or broader (community) environment. Moreover, there is a lack of consistent peer social interaction, teacher instruction, and the natural social-emotional reinforcement that is present in our schools. We can't begin to address the trauma of the past several months and resume effective teaching and learning until students feel physically *and* psychologically safe in their immediate environment. **Sharing school and district plans and processes concerning health and safety** is therefore an important first step to address this anxiety. The plans should be communicated in age-appropriate ways, such as using pictures to illustrate concepts (washing hands), and in multiple languages.

Districts can also boost this sense of security by **providing consistency in daily school routines**. While school closures or changes in schedules may be inevitable, consistent routines and procedures in the meantime help reduce stress and facilitate learning for all students. Schools can further accentuate the familiarity of the school environment by highlighting the routines and special activities that make each school a community.

2

At the same time, schools shouldn't rush to re-establish "business as usual." Schools will need to **provide both communal and private forums for students to share their thoughts and process their emotions**. For example, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning ([CASEL](#)) recommends—

- Using existing SEL programs to help provide opportunities for students to share their experiences, and to promote empathy for one another and those most impacted by the virus.



- Supporting teachers in engaging students in developmentally appropriate conversations and lessons to discuss the news around COVID-19. This can include assessing facts from misinformation, as well as opportunities for students to develop and suggest strategies for their school or community to prevent the spread of disease.
- Using developmentally appropriate conversations and lessons to discuss the impact, history, and context around biased or stigmatizing comments and behaviors related to the disease. (This guidance includes examples of how to have conversations about racism, stereotyping, and bias related to the virus.)

Many students in early elementary grades may not be familiar with or have the skills to effectively communicate their thoughts and emotions. Schools can facilitate this process by having teachers model sharing their own emotions regarding school closures. This can make it “ok” to share feelings, and at the same time demonstrates to students different ways to express emotion. For other students, **teachers must be vigilant in recognizing signs of emotional distress** and have plans in place to access individualized supports for students. Teachers are the primary facilitator of services in the classroom and must be aware of the signs that a student may need additional help. Districts can prepare their staff through professional development (e.g., Youth-Mental Health First Aid) and regularly scheduled supports. For example, districts should consider establishing regular counseling hours within the school to allow for drop-in discussions with a school mental health professional.

### 3

Provide teachers and families with **consistent communication** and **access to resources**, as well as **guidance and support in talking with children about the coronavirus**. In the following section, we will highlight the steps some districts are taking and provide links to the resources and materials they are making available to their parents and communities. Each of these districts provide a wealth of resources from leading medical experts in how to communicate with children about the coronavirus, and video resources schools can share with their parents. Links to these resources can be found in the individual district sections as well as in the additional resources section of this document. For students from historically marginalized communities, it will be particularly important for districts to proactively reach out to families and provide information in their native language.

It is also important for staff to provide **timely and consistent responses to student questions**. Many educators may be uncomfortable at first in communicating medical information or may have experienced substantial stress themselves. Districts should consider providing lists of commonly asked student questions about the coronavirus, as well as sample responses from staff. This will ensure consistent messaging, reduce the likelihood of confusion, and promote a sense of safety and confidence amongst students.

### 4

**Address adult mental health needs as well as student mental health needs.** In order to provide a safety net of caring adults for children, districts need to acknowledge and address the mental health and social-emotional needs of school and district staff. During a given year, upwards of 30% of teachers express clinically significant levels of stress. This stress negatively impacts instructional effectiveness and may increase rates of student distress. The current pandemic and shift in roles and responsibilities will undoubtedly lead to much greater numbers of educators with substantial stress and anxiety. Planned commitment to employee wellbeing is paramount. That is, districts must **take a proactive approach to educator wellbeing** that goes beyond the provision of *passive* resources (e.g., an online mindfulness webinar). Single professional development seminars are not effective; rather sustained employee wellbeing is achieved through skill development, ongoing coaching, and establishing regular check-ins to discuss emotional health. Districts are increasingly recognizing the need to actively promote teacher wellbeing through sustained engagement and supports. For example, Hillsborough County Public Schools (FL), has a department of employee wellbeing and targeted approaches to matching new teachers with mentors and providing targeted and ongoing supports for [promoting wellbeing](#).

During school closures, it is also vital to **address the mental health needs and wellbeing of parents**. As we highlight in the next section, districts such as Tulsa and Los Angeles have developed and shared resources for parents and caregivers on not only how to address the emotional needs of their children, but how to safeguard their own mental health and wellbeing.

## Shared Ownership of the Social-Emotional Wellbeing of Students

5

One of the limiting factors in building integrated mental health programming is the idea that social-emotional needs/mental health needs are somehow outside of our responsibility as educators or not central to the work of a school or school district. To address this, districts need to **build a culture of shared ownership** over these issues. Children will not benefit from high-quality instruction if their immediate physical and psychological needs are not met. While we understand the intrinsic importance of providing school meals to students who are hungry, mental health and social and emotional needs are often treated as if they are “one more thing” or someone else’s responsibility. The message to educators, administrators, and staff throughout the district therefore needs to be: **supporting the whole child—including the social-emotional wellbeing of children—is everyone’s job**. Because building a supportive school climate and a culture of integrated social-emotional supports requires the engagement of adults at all levels—not just school counselors, social workers, school psychologists, and nurses, but district staff and leaders, administrators, principals, and the teachers that interact with students every day.

In addition to communicating this message of shared accountability, school districts should address common misconceptions about what it means to support the whole child or what constitutes “mental health” (topics that defined and discussed in greater detail in principle #10 below). With everyone having a common understanding of the “what,” schools can move towards addressing the “how.”

6

Given the critical role of teachers and administrators in addressing the social-emotional needs of students, we need to equip them with the **professional development and resources** to do the work. Research has indicated that while nearly all teachers have reported students with mental health concerns in their classrooms, most teachers indicated not having the skills to address these needs and a lack of training as the primary barrier to addressing the social-emotional needs of students.<sup>2</sup> The top three areas for needed training included (1) strategies to support externalizing behavior problems, (2) identifying and understanding mental health problems, and (3) training in classroom management. As mentioned before, traditional single session professional development has limited long term effectiveness. To meet the needs of educators, school districts, such as Wichita Public Schools, has developed “train the trainers” models to promote the use of universal screening throughout the districts and to quickly build internal staff capacity to train teachers. The School District of Philadelphia has engaged a number of partners to provide ongoing technical assistance and coaching with demonstrated success in both building and sustaining internal capacity to address student mental health concerns.

School districts may also consider building in **common planning time** for cross-functional teams of academic and mental health personnel to address social-emotional concerns *in the same way as behavior and academics*. Critically, districts should not create silos where the various types of student needs are discussed separately. Similar to the standing meetings to identify students at risk of falling behind academically, we should be just as collaborative and proactive when it comes to identifying students at risk of social and emotional challenges.

<sup>2</sup> Reinke, W. M., Stormont, M., Herman, K. C., Puri, R., & Goel, N. (2011). Supporting children’s mental health in schools: Teacher perceptions of needs, roles, and barriers. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 26(1), 1-13.

Another way to operationalize a culture of shared ownership is through the **breakdown of organizational silos**. Districts are structured very differently in terms of how they allocate the work and responsibility of providing social-emotional and mental health supports, but all too often, ownership over this domain and provision of services are relegated to student services or mental health divisions. For example, social workers and school psychologists often work in different departments such as Student Support Services or Exceptional Education and are not integrated within the larger academic functions of a school system. Even SEL and mental health units have traditionally worked in isolation from one another and are often led by individuals with differing professional training and/or philosophies. To promote efficiency and effectiveness in supporting the whole child, academic support, social-emotional learning, and mental health interventions need to be part of an integrated, comprehensive approach to support.

The use of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) in many school systems, for example, has led to the effective integration of prevention efforts for academics (Response to Intervention) and behavior (Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports). Having an MTSS district leadership team composed of personnel from each department/domain is a necessary and efficient way to create a common language and common understanding of the integrated work across academics, behavior, social-emotional, and mental health. Being able to triangulate data on attendance, grades, and behavior provides a more complete picture than when looking at each separately. The open communication and sharing of data from across each of these areas is therefore critical to ensure students' needs are accurately identified and support provided.

To effectively break down the siloed work of social-emotional learning and mental health, districts should start by clearly **communicating a unified vision—and underlying methodologies—for supporting the whole child**. We also find that building a culture of collaboration in large urban districts requires **structured cross-functional teaming and meetings**. For example, teams of academic, SEL, and mental health staff visiting school sites together, debriefing on both the unique and shared needs across schools, and developing an integrated response would help to build a more cohesive leadership and decision-making structure similar to the efforts of aligning behavior and academics through MTSS.

## Proactive Support and Intervention

As educators, and a society, we focus too much on reacting to students' social-emotional needs—oftentimes exhibited by overt or extreme behaviors—and we largely respond in a punitive manner. Schools need to focus instead on how these issues are *prevented* by becoming more proactive in the provision of social-emotional and mental health supports. To do this, districts need to create *systems* that reliably and consistently facilitate early intervention. Research has demonstrated that school mental health interventions are only effective and sustainable when delivered within a broader continuum of care (i.e., MTSS), with tools to efficiently facilitate entry into and exit from the system. In other words, preventative systems need preventative assessment tools rather than reactive methods such as discipline referrals or suspensions.

**Universal screening** is one such tool, whereby teachers or students complete a brief (20 items or less) survey to assess *both* social-emotional and behavioral needs, *and* areas of strength for all students. Screening should include multiple contributors (for example, input from multiple teachers, as well as the student) and take less than one minute per student to complete. Screening is not intended to be diagnostic or problem-specific (anxiety, suicide), but rather is designed to identify general pre-symptomology that can drive early intervention efforts. This data-driven approach is already used by many districts in the academic domain. However, many teachers lack the ability to consistently recognize the signs of social-emotional risk, making the use of a universal screening tool essential to an effective prevention system.



Universal screening promotes a culture shift towards (1) treating problems before they become worse and (2) identifying the skills that lead to growth and resilience. For example, in a typical middle or high school students have multiple teachers and classrooms and are often only on the school's "radar" after a disciplinary referral. Universal screening allows a school to collect and share data on that student from their homeroom teacher, subject area teacher, and from the student directly, allowing school staff to proactively identify risk before problems become severe, and to provide services and individualized support as needed. Further resources for understanding and implementing universal screening can be found in [Appendix A](#) of this report.

9

In addition, districts can also promote a more proactive approach by **building a culture of "checking in."** The simple, consistent act of checking in with students on a regular basis is an effective way of identifying early indicators of social and emotional distress, and most importantly, creating a sense of community and instilling a sense that the adults in a school building care about students. For example, in the wake of school closures Tulsa had every school establish a wellness team of 3 or more staff members, who call and check on students on a daily basis. Teachers contact students for instruction and support staff, and elective teachers reach out to students as well to check on student and family wellness.

The process of checking in also helps educators **develop a more informed/nuanced view of who is in need of support.** Because it is not always the student acting out, but the student with their head down on their desk at the back of the classroom that is in need of support and intervention. To this end, schools/teachers should be provided with the resources and training they need to identify students who need help.

10

School leaders should seize this opportunity to cultivate a more balanced view of mental health and social-emotional wellbeing. For many decades, schools have considered students to be at risk for mental health problems if they demonstrate overt symptoms of psychopathology (e.g., aggression). This is an outdated and inaccurate reflection of mental health. Rather, science has informed a modern understanding of a **dual-factor model of mental health.** That is, students may be at-risk if they display psychopathology AND if they *do not* display prosocial skills (e.g., emotional coping). For example, while one highly anxious student may display overt symptoms such as fidgeting and acting out, another highly anxious student may be withdrawn with a flat affect and unwillingness to engage peers.

As educators we therefore need to develop resources and systems for **both symptom reduction and skill building.** This is a radical change in how we understand mental health and *wellbeing*—one that requires us to move beyond greasing just the squeaky wheel to looking at the whole child. Many districts have adopted "social-emotional and behavioral" terminology to combine elements from Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS). For example, districts utilizing this approach provide behavioral supports to reduce aggression and non-compliance, combined with social-emotional skill building such as responsible decision-making and emotion recognition. Critically, districts must take an integrated and tiered approach supported through a robust data-driven decision-making process; individual and disconnected initiatives such as a Mindfulness training or social skills group will not be effective or sustainable if they are not integrated within a broader system.

## Inclusion and Outreach

11 To serve our most vulnerable children and families, districts should promote a culture of inclusion. To achieve this, districts will need to **identify common needs and challenges among all students and families, as well as the specific or heightened needs of the most at-risk students.** In addition to the shared experience of isolation, fear, and anxiety, communities will likely be dealing with students who have lost a family member or are dealing with unemployment, as well as an increase in child abuse, sexual abuse, suicide, domestic violence, homelessness and more.

Addressing this increased demand for mental health support services will require considerable allocation of resources and professional development. In the Austin Independent School District, for example, a cross-functional team of professional development, mental health, counseling, and academic support staff is working together with the Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development, out of Texas Christian University, to provide trauma-informed support training for 85 additional practitioners. The online Phase I of this training will wrap up in June, with an in-person Phase II to follow, and trained practitioners will be equipped to provide learning opportunities and coaching for staff and caregivers.

Districts can also promote support and inclusion by **connecting with community social service agencies in building wrap-around services and identifying gaps in the social service safety net.** Given the expected growth in unemployment, poverty, and illness, as well as trauma and mental health crises, coordinating with multiple providers will become even more essential to triage and direct services to the students in most need.

12 As noted above, an inclusive environment relies on coordinated outreach efforts. Districts should develop a mechanism for **reaching out to families in need and connecting them with the appropriate resources.** This includes identifying and addressing the needs of students and families who are homeless or in transitional living situations, may not have easy access to computers or internet, receive free or reduced-price meals through school, or rely on support services at their schools. For example, the next section spotlights local guides the Los Angeles Unified School District has developed in English and Spanish to connect families to neighborhood mental health clinics and family services organizations, as well as Tulsa's family assistance request process and the wellness tracking system they use to follow up on these requests.

In the case of students with disabilities, in particular, the disruption in school services could lead to acute mental health challenges. For example, students on the Autism Spectrum benefit from routine and expectations. The significant disruption to schedules and loss of specialized and individualized supports can lead to severe anxiety and disruptive behavior. Re-establishing these critical supports may take time, and districts can promote an inclusive environment by **reaching out before the start of the school year and planning for gradual re-entry into services.**

# District Programming, Partnerships, and Resources

Here is a closer look at some of the strategies, resources, and programming being implemented in four Great City Schools districts to address the mental health and social-emotional needs of students, staff, and families during the COVID-19 crisis.

## Broward County Public Schools

To meet mental health (and other) needs of students, families, and staff during the current crisis, Broward County Public Schools is providing the following support and resources:

- Currently, school social workers are supporting the mental health, emotional and social service needs of students via phone and email, as well as providing counseling services via telephone or virtual platforms. They are receiving referrals from teachers and other school personnel and remain in contact with pertinent staff at assigned schools to address participation (attendance) concerns with students on the District's distance learning platform. They are providing crisis intervention, case management and support services to students and families and making referrals for counseling to the District's Family Counseling Program and behavioral partners. Additional support is being provided in assisting families with technology issues, either in obtaining a device or internet connectivity. School social workers are collaborating with school support staff and school psychologists' in completing pending psychosocial reports, participating virtually in MTSS meetings and other school related meetings and conferences.
- In collaboration with the Family Counseling Program, school social workers are also contacting students who took part in the Distance Learning and Wellness Survey, requesting to speak with a mental health professional. Support counseling, linkage to school staff, and referrals for counseling are being provided based on individual needs.
- During Distance Learning, school psychologists are also continuing to participate in collaborative problem-solving teams to discuss concerns regarding students. They are also providing crisis response to schools, conducting mental health check-ins, and conducting consultations with parents, as needed.
- This April 24 [interview](#) with Dr. Laurel Thompson, Director of Student Services, shared on WIOD's Brian Mudd Show, provides a good overview of how the mental health team is continuing its work virtually. Specifically, data on student engagement—such as whether students are logging into Canvas for online instruction—is used to identify students who are disengaged or disconnected during this time. District personnel then follow up with students and families to identify the reasons for the lack of participation, whether it is a mental health issue or a device issue. In this interview, Dr. Thompson reports that over 1500 clinical hours of one-on-one student and family therapy have been provided, that school social workers have received over 4,000 referrals of students in need of services, and that they have conducted over 9,000 interventions since they have gone remote. Dr. Thompson also reported that they are focusing special attention on students who qualify for homeless services, providing meals, devices, as well as mental health supports.

- The district has launched a [mindfulness initiative](#), ensuring that students, families, and staff have access to high quality online mindfulness-based education, support, and resources on The Mindfulness in BCPS portal. Here is a link to the Superintendent introducing the district’s mindfulness initiative:

<https://becon.eduvision.tv/directplayer.aspx?q=3SfVi13wT7Tn6jR0iDs6YHfJBhsJkHGrgMCnhjMlylQ%253d>

- On the mental health services homepage, the district provides links and numbers for the following hotlines:
  - First Call for Help: 2-1-1
  - Broward County Public Schools Mental Health Hotline: 754-321-HELP (4357)
  - National Crisis Text Line: 741741
  - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- The district also offers the following COVID-19-specific resources on its [Student Services/Mental Health Services page](#):
  - [COVID-19 and Your Mental Health](#) (Mayo Clinic)
  - [Taking Care of Your Behavioral Health](#) (SAMHSA, 2020): Tips for Social Distancing, Quarantine, and Isolation during an Infectious Disease Outbreak
  - [Caring for Children: Tips to keep children healthy while school’s out](#) (CDC)
  - [Mental Wellness During COVID-19](#) (United Way)
  - [Helping Children Cope With COVID-19 Stress](#) (WHO)
  - [BCPS Employee Assistance Program for COVID-19](#)
  - [SAMHSA’s Disaster Distress Helpline](#)
  - [COVID 19 Resource and Information Guide](#) (National Alliance on Mental Illness)

In addition to these COVID-19 specific steps and resources, the district has substantial infrastructure in place for addressing the mental health needs of students, given its history in addressing student trauma in the wake of the 2018 Stoneman Douglas school shooting. As part of the district’s commitment to delivering evidence-based, mental health assessment, intervention, treatment and recovery through a multi-tiered system of supports, the district has developed structures and processes including the following—

- BCPS has a comprehensive electronic database known as Behavioral and Academic Support Information System (BASIS) that provides data needed to drive decision- making and instruction in schools. The data includes student assessment results, attendance data, discipline information, and demographic information. The data is analyzed to create at-risk indicators that guide school-based teams to prioritize student needs.
- Each school has a Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) Team that meets frequently to discuss students with academic, behavioral, or social/emotional concerns. Further data is collected through a review of records, observations, interviews, etc. This information is then used to develop intervention plans tailored to the individual student’s needs. The intervention plan may include individual or group counseling provided by school-based mental health professionals.
- The District’s Family Counseling Program provides free individual and family counseling services. The goal of the program is to promote student academic performance, responsible behavior in school, and regular attendance. School-based teams and district mental health professionals also refer students and families to community providers for additional services.

- According to the district’s [Mental Health Plan for 2019/20](#), students who are exhibiting post-traumatic stress symptoms are able to receive appropriate therapeutic intervention—85% of the district’s Family Therapists are trained in Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT).
- School psychologists deliver a continuum of services that support academic, social, and interpersonal student development. They conduct psychological and academic assessments that help to identify and meet the needs of students with disabilities and those who are gifted. This includes expedited evaluations through SEDNET for students who have been hospitalized through the Baker Act process. They are also important members of the school-based collaborative problem-solving teams, as they help to collect and interpret student and classroom data. School psychologists promote positive behavior and mental health by serving on crisis intervention teams, working to improve schoolwide practices and policies, as well as providing ongoing small group and individual counseling at their schools. They also provide direct and indirect services to support at-risk or traumatized youth. They conduct trainings related to violence prevention, suicide prevention, crisis response, and mental health. Additionally, school psychologists collaborate with parents, school professionals, and community providers to coordinate needed services, which may include mental health awareness trainings.
- School Social Workers are advocates who help students achieve academic and social-emotional success by linking the home, school, and community. Social work support services include intervention, crisis support and mental health counseling, addressing issues of non-attendance and truancy, completing behavioral assessments, and psychosocial evaluations.

## Cleveland Metropolitan School District

To support and connect to families during school closures, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District is providing the following support and resources:

- The district’s Rapid Response Desk/Team has moved their crisis response operations online. The Rapid Response team is a 24/7, 365-day service that gathers resources in response to a range of crises including, but not limited to: suicide ideation/attempts, grief adjustment, and gun violence. During school closures, this team of crisis coordinators is still fielding calls from school administrators concerning students in need of immediate assistance, reaching out to families virtually and connecting them to local resources and support personnel.
- The district’s COVID-19 social-emotional wellness site also provides links to resources families can access for immediate emotional support or assistance, including a crisis text line, which connects individuals to live, trained crisis counselors, and Frontline Mobile Crisis, Cuyahoga County, which provides 24/7 mental health crisis and suicide prevention assistance, as well as referrals for other supportive services.
- CMSD is working with Dr. Laura Purnell, a wellness coach and former CMSD educator/superintendent, to develop and conduct wellness sessions to help parents/caregivers cope with their emotions so they can create a supportive home for children. Four pre-recorded sessions are currently provided on the district’s website. Week 1 featured a wellness workshop for families, Week 2 covered resilience strategies, Week 3 addressed fear, and Week 4 was devoted to a discussion of family values and “stepping into the new normal.” In addition, members of the Humanware Department (see below for description) record their own SEL videos for parents and scholars. These videos offer “Brain Breaks” and guidance for families on how to use SEL activities.
- The social-emotional wellness site provides links to resources specifically designed to address the social-emotional wellness needs of families and children, including:
  - [Building Positive Conditions for Learning at Home: Strategies and Resources for Families and Caregivers](#) (American Institutes for Research)



- CMSD is working with [The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#) to respond to and raise the awareness of the range of emotions students and educators are feeling as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19). CASEL CARES connects the SEL community with experts to address how SEL can be most helpful in response to today’s circumstances. <https://casel.org/covid-resources/>
- A [bank of social-emotional wellness videos](#) for students at home. For each video, the site provides a description, intended grade levels, and run time. Examples include videos that describe breathing techniques and strategies for helping students destress and calm down, videos that deal with gratitude and relationship building, and videos that provide guidance for parents in how to have courageous conversations about coronavirus and school safety.
- [First Aid for Feelings: A Workbook to Help Kids Cope During the Coronavirus Pandemic](#). (Available in English, Spanish, and French). Denise Daniels, a leading child development expert, has teamed up with Scholastic and the Yale Child Study Center to help children, families, and educators cope during this pandemic.
- Regular [updates](#) from the CEO keep the school community informed of developments and resources. A recent update laid out the protocols/process for the district’s upcoming (in-person) graduation procession and virtual graduation ceremony.
- The district’s COVID-19 site provides academic enrichment resources, including weekly materials and assignments for all grade levels. CMSD has also partnered with CW43 WUAB and the Cleveland Teachers Union to present televised lessons for students whose schools have been closed due to the Coronavirus. A sample week of episodes can be found [here](#).
- CMSD is fielding remote learning surveys for parents/students to provide information that will be used to make decisions about how best to support scholars and their families when school resumes this year.
- Families can access information on grab-and-go meal locations and an interactive map, links to health and government resources, and information on [technology assistance and support](#), including information on how to apply for discounts or complimentary Wi-Fi service.

In addition, the district has the following infrastructure in place for addressing the social-emotional and mental health needs of students:

- **School-based Mental Health Services:** Every CMSD school is paired with one of five community agencies. These agencies provide a menu of resources including individual therapy, small group sessions, crisis intervention, general consultation, and conventional grief adjustment. All services provided are free of charge to the scholars, the families, and the school district as they deliver the required services at the school building avoiding difficult after school appointments.
- Another key component of the CMSD school-based mental health services is to make sure that all students know where to reach out to for help. The schools and students take an active role in communicating available supports through each school.
- **Humanware** is an initiative of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District supporting the commitment to providing safe and supportive schools where their scholars can succeed and thrive.
  - Humanware advocates for evidence-based social-emotional learning (SEL) practices. Humanware Partners serve as thought-partners, planners, professional learning providers, and coaches to CMSD educators to facilitate the integration of SEL core competencies into schools to engage students, family, educators, and community to create safe, supportive, and successful learning environments.
  - Humanware advocates for best practices that ensure that all human resources in a student’s school, family, and community function together so that students are learning in safe, supportive, and successful schools.

- **Districtwide Student Support Teams (SST):** The SST is a group of adults from each school districtwide that supports the most intensive needs (Tier 3) of CMSD youth at that particular building. The team meets weekly at each site to discuss referrals made from staff and parents. The SST is made up of a core team of adults, who attend all building level SST meetings, including the parent or guardian (when available), the building administrator, a teacher representative and an individual from support services (either the building psychologist, school counselor or school nurse). The plan is for the core team to determine who else needs to attend the meeting and invite them, set the meeting schedule and gather all the available information that will assist the team in determining what each situation requires. The goal of each SST is to determine appropriate intervention strategies for the referred students in order to keep them successfully functioning in their regular classroom setting.
- **Winning Against Violent Environments (WAVE):** WAVE is CMSD’s peer mediation program. Each school has a WAVE team made up of an adult coordinator and grade specific scholars who perform the mediations. All schoolwide WAVE teams are trained by the district’s WAVE Specialists who also consult with the teams and monitor the mediations. Often, scholar concerns are addressed by the WAVE mediators, which minimizes further adult involvement and discipline.

## Los Angeles Unified School District

LAUSD has developed the following COVID-19 Mental Health and social-emotional wellness strategies and resources:

- LAUSD has a set of extended hour (6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.) hotlines for families and employees, and the Student Health and Human Services (SHHS) Division has added a layer of support to the main district hotline. When families call the district hotline, an operator can immediately connect the caller with the SHHS team—who can provide mental health support and consultation for students, families, and educators—as well as provide support with accessing basic resources such as food, clothing, and shelter, referrals to Los Angeles county community partners, and support for families with school enrollment during closures.
- Families may also contact SHHS personnel directly via their own hotline number, and SHHS Wellness Programs established a direct extension on the hotline to assist families with enrolling in health coverage. Given that many district families have lost their job-based health coverage or they’re experiencing a reduction in income because their hours have been cut, they can no longer pay premiums. So LAUSD staff also assists families in need of financial assistance to maintain coverage.
- Online resource [guides](#) have been developed for each local district (with the district covering over 700 square miles, it is subdivided into 6 local districts). These guides are available in English and Spanish, and connect families to neighborhood mental health clinics, family services organizations, wellness centers, and other organizations to contact for assistance with food, housing, or unemployment insurance. These guides have also been made into flyers and are being distributed to families who come to the Grab and Go (meal) centers.
- The district is also in the process of developing an online tool which families will be able to use to search for community organizations in their neighborhood that provide essential services. The organizations will be the same that Student Health and Human Services’ School Mental Health and Healthy Start staff use to refer families, so everyone will have access to the same information.
- In response to school closures, all professional development for teachers and administrators offered by the district’s Social-Emotional Learning unit has been adapted to be presented virtually. The SEL unit also has a web page with comprehensive list of virtual SEL resources for parents and teachers. This list is organized by grade span: <https://achieve.lausd.net/Page/16609>.

- The Division of Instruction has developed and provided 10 hours of professional development to assist teachers and administrators with the transition to online instruction. Social-Emotional Learning was highlighted as a part of this learning. Continuity of Learning sessions developed by the SEL unit included: Mindfulness, integrating the Middle School Second Step Digital Resources into online learning, and incorporating Self-Management and Social Awareness into virtual classroom practice.
- LAUSD has also developed a 30-hour course—Future Ready—to build and refine the skills of teachers and administrators to provide rigorous and robust online instruction. A part of this course will focus on Social-Emotional Learning.
- SHHS has a [website](#) that provides [resources for families during school closure](#), including a list of Wellness Centers and school-based clinics that remain open, news updates, links to free educational resources from PBS SoCal | KCET and KLCS-TV, instructional continuity guides in both English and Spanish for both [parents](#) and [students](#), as well as an instructional continuity guide specifically targeted to [students with disabilities](#), online technology support, an interactive map for locating the closest Grab and Go meal sites, and links to a host of other online resources such as:
  - [Ten Free Library Resources for Families & Kids to Access from Home](#): Tutor.com, Storytime Online, Tumblebooks and more (Los Angeles Public Library)
  - [La biblioteca digital te acompaña en casa](#) (Los Angeles Public Library)
  - [Coronavirus Resources: Teaching, Learning and Thinking Critically](#) (*New York Times*)
  - [Free, easy science for remote learning](#) (Mystery Science)
  - [12 World-Class Museums You Can Visit Online](#) (Mental Floss)
  - [Amazing Educational Resources](#)
  - [Khan Academy Schedule for School Closures](#)
  - [Free Zoom Videoconferencing Tool for K-12 Schools](#)
- On this site there is also a link to an excellent [document](#) outlining five resilience factors: Sense of Safety, Ability to Calm, Self-Efficacy and Community Efficacy, Connectedness, and Hope. Other districts should consider utilizing or adapting this document in their parent and community outreach efforts. In clear, straightforward language, and in both English and Spanish, this guide provides parents with concrete steps they can take to support their children during this crisis.
- A [website](#) and email address [enrollduringclosures@lausd.net](mailto:enrollduringclosures@lausd.net) have been established by SHHS to support newly enrolling families with school enrollment this academic year to ensure that students who live within the district’s boundaries are enrolled and able to access the district’s distance learning programs and other academic and social services, as appropriate.
- An email has also been established, [ask-shhs@lausd.net](mailto:ask-shhs@lausd.net), through which families can ask questions about the coronavirus and supports offered during this time.
- SHHS has developed tools and resources to support the implementation of [Positive Behavior Supports and Interventions and restorative practices](#) in virtual learning environments including structure and routes, establishing and reinforcing behavior expectations, building community, and practicing self-care. An on-line professional community has been established to share tools and resources to support district educators with establishing safe, healthy, welcoming and affirming virtual classrooms via the district’s learning management system.
- [Virtual town halls](#) are being held in communities across the district, to keep families informed and address concerns.



- The State of California has also established a website to help Californians working in essential sectors during the coronavirus response to find safe, reliable, and accessible child-care options. A link is provided on the family resources page.
- Superintendent Austin Beutner provides [regular updates](#) to the school community available in English and Spanish closed caption and American Sign Language (ASL). This form of communication is a positive manner to connect with entire communities while social distancing.

In addition, the district has the following infrastructure and partnerships in place for addressing the social-emotional and mental health needs of students:

- The Division of Instruction has a unit dedicated to Social-Emotional Learning. This team promotes SEL by developing and providing professional developments for teachers and administrators as well as workshops for parents.
- In partnership with CORE (a consortium of nine school districts in California), LA Unified uses the Mindsets, Essential Skills, and Habits (MESH) framework to define and measure SEL. The District’s School Experience Survey, which is administered annually, contains a section that measures Growth Mindset, Self-Efficacy, Self-Management, and Social Awareness. The data from this survey are used to inform decisions around SEL programming and instruction.
- The Social-Emotional Learning Unit has developed several partnerships with organizations that provide SEL curricula. The Committee for Children is a long-term partner. Their TK-5 Second Step program is used by most elementary schools in the District. The Second Step digital platform for middle school for grades 6-8 was provided to every Title I middle school in LAUSD. Sanford Harmony is another partner that has provided free SEL curricular kits to every teacher who attends professional development to learn about their program. More recently, they have moved their materials online to reach an even wider audience.
- The Social-Emotional Learning team has also established a relationship with Inner Explorer, a program that provides developmentally appropriate mindfulness practices for classroom use. Due to the COVID -19 crisis, Inner Explorer is providing free access to their program to the entire district for three months.
- Additionally, the Social-Emotional Learning team partners with the Sandy Hook Promise Foundation and Let it Ripple. These organizations provide free resources for schools and teachers to further self – efficacy and social awareness.

## Tulsa Public Schools

Tulsa Public Schools has developed the following COVID-19 social-emotional wellness and mental health strategies and resources:

- The district has established a Wellness Care Line, staffed by TPS team members, for students and families to call if they need to talk and/or ask questions regarding referrals for mental health services, community resources for basic needs and social services (food, shelter, clothing), questions about distance learning, and supports for students with special needs.
- Parents can also fill out a [Family Assistance Request Form](#) to request support online anytime for referrals for mental health services, community resources for basic needs and social services (food, shelter, clothing), and pre-qualification for free- or low-cost internet access.
- The district has implemented a wellness tracker in PowerSchool to track data on a range of areas—mental health, technology, food resources, etc.— to help them focus on supporting the whole child during this time. This tool gives teachers and school staff, as well as the district team, a place to track individual calls to students/families and flag updates or unmet needs.

- Every school must establish a wellness team of three or more staff members who call and check on students on a daily basis. Teachers contact students for instruction, and support staff and elective teachers reach out as well to check on student and family wellness.
- All students receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 services receive calls by licensed social workers to assess their needs and ensure that TPS is helping them navigate supports.
- Leadership has also asked all TPS supervisors/principals to actively check on the wellness of their staff.
- Another resource for staff is Tulsa’s “[Employee Assistance Program](#)” (EAP) benefit. The benefit connects Team Tulsa employees to behavioral health providers at no cost to the employee. There is no charge for sessions (approximately four sessions) and no information regarding employee information is disclosed to the district.
- Community partners are working alongside TPS to drop off ‘SEL packages’—including ‘at home’ social-emotional activities and curriculum as well as things like jump ropes and water bottles— together with food and other supplies at the meal sites for students and families. TPS also provides food and personal items to TPS staff who may be struggling during this time.
- TPS also partners with [The Opportunity Project](#) to provide expanded learning opportunities—including social-emotional learning—during out of school time. This organization offers a wealth of [COVID-19 resources](#) for students, families, and educators.
- The [TPS Social-Emotional Newsletter](#) provides updates on the social-emotional resources that are being made available to schools and their community during the distance learning opportunity. The district also distributes a “Wellness Wednesday” Newsletter to school leaders and teachers every week.
- TPS is providing explicit SEL lessons in their distance learning guidebook to provide supports to teachers as they use them in their lessons with students. The Tulsa website also provides a digital bank of [SEL resources](#) for elementary schoolers, middle schoolers, high schoolers, and adults.
- Finally, on its website, Tulsa recommends that parents limit their child’s exposure to COVID-19 media coverage and provide a calming influence, reminding them that children look to adults to understand how to respond to the situations around them. They also offer numerous links to resources to help children address their fears, including the following:
  - **Centers for Disease Control:**  
[CDC Coping During COVID-19](#)
  - **Child Mind Institute:**  
[Talking to Kids About the Coronavirus](#)
  - **National Association of School Psychologists:**  
[Talking to Children About COVID-19: A Parent Resource](#)
  - **SAMHSA:**  
[Coping with Stress During an Infectious Disease Outbreak](#)
  - **Share My Lesson:**  
[Coronavirus Student Guide: Explanations and News Updates](#)
  - **University of Pennsylvania:**  
[How Emotional Contagion Takes A Toll](#)

In addition, the district has the following infrastructure and partnerships in place for addressing the social-emotional and mental health needs of students:

- TPS partners with Panorama Education to distribute districtwide SEL surveys twice a year. In addition, five pilot sites use SELWeb to collect SEL data.
- District leadership conduct biweekly phone calls with school leaders and biweekly meetings with senior leadership. These meetings provide climate data updates and 'pulse checks' with teams to understand their current emotional state.
- The Student and Family Support Services department currently has seven licensed therapists on staff, and three student success coordinators who support engagement in secondary schools.
- The district also partners with 38 mental health organizations which provide mental health supports for TPS students, families, and staff.
- Tulsa Public Schools is part of the Collaborative District Initiative with the [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#), and has partnered with the Yale Center for Social-Emotional Learning to implement foundational social and emotional learning practices with students, educators, and district leadership.

## Appendix A

# Technical Assistance and Information on Universal Screening

- The mission of the **School Mental Health Collaborative (SMHC; [www.smhcollaborative.org](http://www.smhcollaborative.org))** is to facilitate and promote access to high-quality, evidence-based, school mental and behavioral health assessments and interventions. The SMHC focuses on (1) reviewing and disseminating evidence-based school mental health interventions and assessment, (2) developing consumable evidence briefs and blueprints that will serve as effective catalysts to guide advocacy and inform school mental health policy and practice, and (3) creating school-university research partnerships that include expert technical assistance to facilitate essential implementation processes and provide program evaluation expertise.
- A primary example of SMHC technical assistance partnership involves supporting district efforts in universal screening training, use, and integration into MTSS processes. The team developed a free [Best Practice Guide for Universal Screening for Social-Emotional and Behavioral Outcomes](#) as well as a publicly available [online repository of resources to support screening initiatives](#).
- The SMHC provides a range of technical assistance and professional development situated within a Multi-Tiered System of Support and across four phases including *Readiness, Installation, Expansion, and Program Improvement*.
  - *Readiness*: A school team determines the capacity to begin installing social-emotional, behavioral, and mental health supports across Tiers I and II. Readiness typically involves building internal capacity to complete assessments in Tiers I and II along with the requisite intervention supports. Training in specific interventions at this phase will involve primarily didactic introductions to the concepts and components of the intervention, to promote **basic knowledge** of the intervention. Subsequent training will involve a much closer look at the intervention through active learning methods to permit practice of the content in a controlled setting, such as through role plays with feedback, to promote **intermediate and procedural knowledge** and **competency** of the intervention and culminate with readiness to apply it with supports.
  - *Installation*: A school team has foundational supports in place and is ready to begin data collection, data review, intervention selection, and progress monitoring. Installation phase involves more in-depth training, practice, and review of readiness interventions/assessments, as well as problem-solving common barriers to success (e.g., intervention fidelity). Training in specific interventions at this phase will involve supervision of the intervention as delivered in the actual settings, through coaching methods to ensure fidelity to intended procedures, to promote **expert knowledge and proficiency** of the intervention, and culminate with the ability to deliver it independently.
  - *Expansion*: Once the team has installed the necessary components to begin integrated Tiers I/II, expansion includes weekly coaching to improve delivery of classroom interventions, meeting with problem-solving teams to review progress towards school initiatives/goals, and expanding into areas beyond initial installation (e.g., moving from PBIS or behavioral foundation into integrated SEL or mental health supports).
  - *Program Improvement*: Schools with fully installed and expanded Tiers I/II now build a culture of continuous improvement through data reviews, ongoing coaching, and onboarding of new staff. A specific focus includes training on data literacy and using data across a variety of sources to monitor the overall effectiveness of the MTSS as well as specific components across Tiers I and II.

## Appendix B

# Links to Articles and Resources

- [COVID resources from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#)
- [COVID-19 and Your Mental Health \(Mayo Clinic\)](#)
- [Five Resilience Factors \(LAUSD Student Health and Human Services\)](#)
- [Building Positive Conditions for Learning at Home: Strategies and Resources for Families and Caregivers \(American Institutes for Research\)](#)
- [Evidence Based Interventions for Trauma \(Treatment and Services Adaptation Center\)](#)
- [Taking Care of Your Behavioral Health \(SAMHSA\)](#)
- [Coping with Stress During Infectious Disease Outbreaks \(SAMHSA\)](#)
- [SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline](#)
- [Interim Guidance for Administrators of US K-12 Schools and Child Care Programs \(CDC\)](#)
- [Caring for Children: Tips to keep children healthy while school's out \(CDC\)](#)
- [Coping during COVID-19 \(CDC\)](#)
- [Talking to Kids about the Coronavirus \(Child Mind Institute\)](#)
- [Mental Wellness During COVID-19 \(United Way\)](#)
- [Helping Children Cope With COVID-19 Stress \(WHO\)](#)
- [Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak \(WHO\)](#)
- [COVID 19 Resource and Information Guide \(National Alliance on Mental Illness\)](#)
- [Talking to Children About COVID-19: A Parent Resource \(NASP\)](#)
- [COVID-19 Information and Resources for Schools and School Personnel \(Ed.gov\)](#)
- [Coronavirus: How emotional contagion takes a toll \(University of Pennsylvania\)](#)
- [Coronavirus: ELL and Multilingual Resources for Schools \(Colorín Colorado\)](#)
- [School Responses to COVID-19: ELL/Immigrant Considerations \(Colorín Colorado\)](#)
- [Distance Learning for ELLs: Privacy Considerations \(Colorín Colorado\)](#)
- [COVID-19 School Closures: Supporting English Learners During the COVID-19 Pandemic \(AFT\)](#)
- [Preparing for Widespread Illness in Your School Community: A Legal Guide for School Leaders \(NSBA\)](#)
- [Addressing mental health & crisis among students during COVID \(State of Reform\)](#)
- [Coronavirus Student Guide: Explanations and News Updates \(Share My Lesson\)](#)
- [Helping Students and Staff Cope with Crisis and Loss During a Pandemic \(Children's Hospital of Los Angeles and the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement\)](#)
- [Planning for Virtual/Distance School Counseling During an Emergency Shutdown \(ASCA\)](#)



## Appendix C

# District Experts and Researchers

The following district staff and researchers contributed to this report and may be contacted with questions or requests for further information.

### Report Contributors:

#### **Nathaniel von der Embse, University of South Florida**

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*Fellow, Educational Policy Information Center*  
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Dr. von der Embse is an associate professor of school psychology at the University of South Florida, and chair of the Government and Professional Relations committee for the National Association of School Psychologists. Dr. von der Embse serves as an associate editor for the *Journal of School Psychology*, and his research interests include universal screening for behavioral and mental health, teacher wellbeing and student test anxiety, and training educators in population-based mental health services. His research has resulted in over 75 peer-reviewed publications, professional articles, and book chapters. Dr. von der Embse's research has been featured in the New York Times, Bay News 10, WUSF, TIME magazine, cited in government policy briefs, and presented nationally and internationally (China, France, England). Dr. von der Embse has a currently funded research program of nearly \$8,500,000 from the Institute for Education Sciences, National Science Foundation, Spencer Foundation, National Institute for Justice, and the Scattergood Foundation. He received the 2018 Lightner Witmer Award for early career scholarship from Division 16 of the American Psychological Association.

Dr. von der Embse received his Ph.D. from Michigan State University in School Psychology. He is currently working with **Philadelphia Public Schools** and **Hillsborough County Public Schools**.

#### **Judy Elliott, National Education Consultant**

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Judy Elliott is the former **Chief Academic Officer of the Los Angeles Unified School District** where she was responsible for curriculum and instruction from early childhood through adult, professional development, innovation, accountability, assessment, afterschool programs, state and federal programs, health and human services, magnet programs language acquisition for both English and Standard English learners, parent outreach, and intervention programs for all students. Before that she was the Chief of Teaching and Learning in the **Portland Oregon Public Schools** and prior to that an Assistant Superintendent of Student Support Services in the **Long Beach Unified School District** in CA. Judy also worked as a Senior Researcher at the National Center on Educational Outcomes at the University of Minnesota. She started her career as a special education classroom teacher and then a school psychologist. During this time, she was an adjunct professor

at the State University College at Buffalo New York, where she received her Ph. D. and taught graduate courses in curriculum and instruction and applied behavior analysis in the Department of Exceptional Education.

In 2012, she was appointed by Commissioner John King as the first ever New York State “Distinguished Educator” to help support and oversee the **Buffalo City School District** Priority Schools. Judy continues to assist districts, cooperatives, schools, national organizations, state and federal departments of education in their efforts to update and realign systems and infrastructures around curriculum, instruction, assessment, data use, leadership, and accountability that includes all students and renders a return on investment.

Her research interests focus on systems change and leadership, equitable and accessible effective instruction for all students, data-based decision making, and accelerated student achievement. She has trained thousands of staff, teachers, and administrators in the U.S. and abroad in areas of integrated service delivery systems, multi-tiered system of supports, effective use of data, linking assessment to district and classroom instruction and intervention, strategies and tactics for effective instruction, curriculum adaptation, collaborative teaching and behavior management. She has published over 51 articles, book chapters, technical/research reports and books. She sits on editorial boards for professional journals and is active in many professional organizations.

Judy is nationally known for her work in Multi-Tiered System of Supports/Response to Instruction and Intervention. She has led many successful projects in this area and actively continues to support school districts and national organizations in this work.

## District Contacts:

### **Stephanie Andrews, Tulsa Public Schools**

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Stephanie Andrews has been an educator for 20 years with Tulsa Public Schools serving as a classroom teacher, Counselor, and currently the Director of Student Engagement. Stephanie will be assuming the role of Interim Executive Director of Student and Family Support Services. Stephanie holds an Ed.S. in Educational Leadership, an M.S. in Community Counseling and a B.S. in Elementary Education. Stephanie was an NBCT educator. She currently serves as the district lead for social-emotional learning in Tulsa Public Schools where she is part of the leadership team for the Wallace Foundation grant around social-emotional learning and expanded learning.

### **Pia Escudero, Los Angeles Unified School District**

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Pia V. Escudero serves as Executive Director of the Student Health and Human Services (SHHS) Division in the **Los Angeles Unified School District**, the second largest school district in the nation. She is responsible for implementing policies and direct services that promote the health and wellbeing of students, families, and staff. She oversees more than 2,500 administrators, service providers, and support staff in the following departments: Human Relations, Diversity, and Equity; Nursing Services; Pupil Services (Attendance); Positive Behavior Intervention & Supports & Restorative Justice; School Mental Health; Special Student Populations; Student Medical Services and MediCal Programs; and Wellness Programs.

Throughout her career, Ms. Escudero has been recognized as a leader in the field of school mental health, wellness, and trauma. Her expertise includes the development, implementation, and evaluation of high-quality interventions that promote resiliency, healing, and lifelong health. Ms. Escudero is a locally and nationally recognized licensed clinical social worker. She holds a bachelor's degree in Sociology and Spanish Literature from the University of Southern California and a Master's Degree in Social Work from the University of Southern California.

**Antoine Hickman, Broward County Public Schools**

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Dr. Antoine Hickman has committed his career to the field of education as a “voice for the voiceless.” He is currently the Chief of Student Support Initiatives and Recovery for Broward County Public Schools, the sixth largest school district in the country.

In his current role as Chief of Student Support Initiatives and Recovery, his responsibilities include providing leadership in the delivery of student support services in the areas of positive behavior and climate planning, prevention and intervention support for physical and social-emotional health, equity and diversity, and personal development for all students. His various leadership roles have afforded him the opportunity to work with multiple public and private entities to provide reasoned approaches to address the behavioral and mental health needs of students. In addition to providing oversight of school and district programs in rural and urban districts, his overall success as a leader and administrator has been attributed to his positive, cooperative, committed, and consistent attitude as a servant leader.

**Saemone Hollingsworth, Broward County Public Schools**

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Saemone Hollingsworth is the Executive Director of the Exceptional Student Learning Support Division of the School Board of Broward County. Prior to her appointment to this position in September 2019, she was a Cadre Director in the Office of School Performance & Accountability for three (3) years where she supervised fifteen (15) elementary Principals.

The majority of Ms. Hollingsworth's career has been spent in the Broward County School system. After starting her career as a self-contained Special Education Teacher with the Alachua County School Board, she continued as a Special Education teacher at both Palm Cove Elementary School and Silver Ridge Elementary School. Ms. Hollingsworth also served as the ESE Specialist at Silver Ridge Elementary School for eight (8) years. She then served as an Assistant Principal at Silver Ridge Elementary School for seven (7) years and later became the Principal at the same school. After completing the Wallace Intern Director Program, Ms. Hollingsworth became a Cadre Director in 2016.

Ms. Hollingsworth earned her undergraduate degree in Special Education from the University of Florida. She earned a Master's degree in Educational Leadership from Florida Atlantic University.

**Ebony Johnson, Tulsa Public Schools**

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Dr. Ebony Johnson is a Tulsa native who takes pride in having grown up in North Tulsa and graduating from McLain High School in 1994. She began her journey in education in 1999. Dr. Johnson has been a



Language Arts middle school teacher where she was named Teacher of the Year for Monroe Middle School after teaching for only two years, an Elementary School Principal at Academy Central and a High School Principal of McLain Magnet High School for Science and Technology where she raised test scores, fostered college acceptance for many seniors and changed the culture towards high expectations for all students. Dr. Johnson served as Principal of Central Magnet Junior and Senior High School for Fine and Performing Arts, the Executive Director of Student and Family Support Services within Tulsa Public Schools and most recently named the interim Chief Learning Officer. In addition, she is the co-lead for the Wallace Foundation PSELI (Partnership for social and emotional learning initiative) multi-year grant. Ebony is also lead for Tulsa Public Schools on a partnership with the Aspen Institute on Climate work and she partners with community agencies and philanthropic supporters on mental health and ways to address student trauma.

She has served her community by sitting on a number of boards, committees and speaking to various groups and constituents about the power of education for all children.

Dr. Johnson has received many awards and accolades for her work with high-poverty, urban students as well as her commitment to collaborating with the community as a whole including the Tulsa Metropolitan Urban League Educational Excellence award in 2010 and the Williams/Shocks Women of Inspiration award. In addition, while an undergraduate college student she was inducted into the NSU Hall of Fame and was named Miss Black Oklahoma 1997 and served as the founding president of the Rho Sigma Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. In order to keep our community informed of educational information, Ebony sends the "What's Happening in Education" to radio station 105.3 –Kesha the Daytime Diva. In 2014, Ebony received the 100 Black Men of Tulsa Hall of Honor Community Service Award.

Most recently, she received the honor of a top 10 Tulsan to Watch in 2015 by the Tulsa World. She was also named Educator of the Year by the Perry Broadcasting and Company in 2015 and Principal of the Year by the Tulsa Metro Chamber of Commerce Partners in Education 2016. She also received the Status of Women Award by Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority in 2016.

She has conducted numerous trainings on Classroom Management for the Urban Child, Culturally Responsive Teaching and Progress Monitoring. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Education from NSU in 1999, her Master's in Education from NSU in 2001 and her Doctorate in Education from the University of Oklahoma in 2011. She is a board member of the YMCA of Greater Tulsa and Women of the United Way of Tulsa.

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Bill Stencil has over 44 years of experience in education as a Teacher, Coach, School Psychologist, Crisis Coordinator and District Administrator. He is presently the Executive Director for the Humanware/Social-Emotional Learning Department with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and the former Director for the Cleveland Office of Psychological Services. Beginning in 2007, he worked closely with Cleveland CEO, Eric Gordon, and the Cleveland Teachers' Union in the creation of Humanware and has been a major influence in the development of all the initiatives found in the present department. Bill continues to stay involved with crisis response as he created the existing, Cleveland Rapid Response Team and still oversees its functioning. He also spent several years as the lead for the State Crisis Response Team representing the Ohio School Psychologists Association. In addition, Bill spent 10 years in private practice focusing on adolescents and their families. To share resources with colleagues and families, Bill takes every opportunity to present various aspects of Humanware/SEL information throughout the country in conferences, webinars, radio, and television spots.

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Marco is a Director in the Division of Special Education for the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). He brings with him over 20 years of experience in education with a focus on data-driven instructional decisions, creating a student-centered environment through inclusion and building collaborative school cultures to support the needs of students. Previously, he was a Special Education Administrative Coordinator leading a team supporting over 120 schools in Local District Central within LAUSD, which serves over 10,000 students with disabilities. He has also served as a teacher, coach, coordinator, and high school administrator throughout his career.

**Allison Yoshimoto-Towery, Los Angeles Unified School District**

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Allison Yoshimoto-Towery is Chief Academic Officer of Los Angeles Unified, leading instructional strategies for almost 500,000 students in one of the nation’s largest and most diverse school districts. She oversees preschool to adult education, including specialized programs for English learners, Standard English learners, Gifted learners, Academic counseling, guiding post-secondary success, advanced placement programs, linked learning and career technical education are a few of the programs within the Division of Instruction. Most important to Alison is leading from an equity lens and rethinking how “business as usual” is done to meet the needs of those students and communities traditionally underserved by public education.

Allison has served Los Angeles Unified for more than 25 years as a teacher, principal, director and top administrator. She is a fierce advocate of high expectations for all students and believes it is up to educators to find a way to reach every child. As principal, her school won a California Distinguished School Award and the highly competitive Target Heart of America Library Grant in collaboration with local government. She currently is overseeing the effort to provide all students with access to high-quality instruction and a robust online curriculum as Los Angeles Unified shifts to a system of remote learning.

The great-granddaughter of Japanese-American migrant farmworkers, Alison learned the values of hard work and perseverance during her childhood in Boyle Heights and Monterey Park. Through her family’s experience, she understands the importance of ensuring all students feel proud of their heritage, and is dedicated to providing them with opportunities that celebrate biculturalism and bilingualism.

Allison has a bachelor’s degree from the University of California, Irvine; a master’s degree in education and reading specialist credential from Cal State Los Angeles; and a master’s degree in education and an administrative credential from UCLA. In 2020, Alison was awarded the Curriculum and Instruction Administrator of the Year for the Association of California Administrators, Region 16.

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**IDEA BEST PRACTICES**



# **IDEA Best Practices During the COVID-19 Crisis**

**Spring 2020**





## ABOUT THE COUNCIL

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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Council of the Great City Schools

# IDEA Best Practices During the COVID-19 Crisis



Spring 2020

# Table of Contents

Purpose of this Guide.....	1
Framing the Challenge: Individualized Recovery Planning for Students with Disabilities Receiving Special Education, Compensatory Services, and COVID-19 Disputes.....	2
Guidance and Resources on Selected Topics.....	6
IEP Meetings.....	6
IEP/504 Meeting Requirements and Annual Reviews.....	6
Distance Eligibility Meetings.....	7
How to Prepare for Virtual Meetings with Parents?.....	7
Scheduling the Meeting.....	7
Documentation for the Meeting.....	7
Parent Evaluation Requests During Distance Learning?.....	8
Current Open Evaluation and Re-Evaluations.....	8
Requests for Independent Educational Evaluations (IEE).....	8
MTSS and PBIP Meetings.....	8
Prior Written Notice.....	8
Services.....	10
Distance Learning Plans.....	10
Considerations for Child Find.....	11
Progress Reporting/Progress Monitoring.....	11
IEP Goal Progress Reporting During COVID-19.....	11
Progress Reporting During COVID-19 School Building Closures.....	12
Example of Comment Statements on a Progress Report.....	12
Links to Sample Materials and Resources.....	14
Bios of Contributors/ IDEAS Small Working Groups.....	15



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# Purpose of this Guide<sup>1</sup>

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, school districts across the country were required to close school buildings in order to protect the health and safety of students and staff. During this time, district staff and leaders have taken extraordinary steps to provide continuity of learning for all students, developing and implementing creative approaches to the remote delivery of education and related services.

Nonetheless, this disruption has been difficult for all students and, in particular, for students with disabilities and their families. Distance learning as a form of instruction significantly alters the teaching and learning process and the student-teacher relationship.

The intention of this document is to offer guidance for districts to be mindful of as they continue to provide instruction and services to students with disabilities during and after the COVID-19 health crisis. This includes guidance on outreach and communication with parents; conducting virtual IEP, MTSS, PBIP, and remote eligibility meetings; handling parent evaluation requests and progress reporting; prior written notice procedures; the development of distance learning plans; and a range of other related topics. In addition to identifying key considerations in these areas, this guide provides [links](#) to a host of sample materials and policies from large urban school districts across the country. The goal is to support districts at this critical time, and to equip them with the knowledge and tools they will need to navigate the physical, educational, financial, and legal challenges of educating students with special needs in the aftermath of a global pandemic.

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<sup>1</sup> The information provided in this entire document and in the attachments does not, and is not intended to, constitute legal advice; instead, all information, content, and materials are intended to provide general information and guidance only. Please consult and follow your state statutory guidelines, regulations and school district attorneys as required.

# Framing the Challenge: Individualized Recovery Planning for Students with Disabilities Receiving Special Education, Compensatory Services, and COVID-19 Disputes

## Context

In determining “Best Practices” for supporting students with disabilities in the time of emergency school closures, it is important to remember that the original intent of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was to address the inadequate educational services offered to children with disabilities and combat the exclusion of such children being educated with their peers. 20 USC §1400(c)(2)(A)-(B). In other words, students with disabilities should have the same opportunity to receive an education as non-disabled peers. Students with disabilities receiving special education under the IDEA thus have a procedural and substantive right to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and that right is enforceable through the courts.

The IDEA is clear that, in order to deliver a FAPE, special education and related services must be delivered “in conformity with the [IEP].” (20 U.S.C. § 1401 (9)). Many circuit courts (including the 9th, 5th, and 8th Circuits) have found that material failures to deliver the services called for in an individualized education program (IEP), in the manner and frequency required by the IEP, is a violation of the IDEA and a denial of a FAPE.<sup>2</sup> Other circuits such as the 3rd Circuit further consider whether a school district has taken steps that are reasonably calculated to enable a student to make appropriate academic progress in light of his or her circumstances.<sup>3</sup>

## The Challenge of School Building Closures

The mandatory conversion due to the COVID-19 pandemic from traditional learning at school facilities to distance education at home has created a major disruption in the delivery of all education, including special education supports and services. COVID-19 disruptions have also highlighted divides in access to technological resources that are available to families and districts as we all respond to this situation.

In other words, no students (students with and without disabilities) are receiving the same level of educational experience as before COVID-closures. Moreover, it is likely that all students (with and without disabilities) will require some additional supports upon their return to school facilities following the COVID-19 closures.

Yet, while the circumstances within which all children, in the general and special education populations, are educated changed virtually overnight, there has been no corresponding legislative or regulatory change in what it means to comply with an IEP or provide FAPE.<sup>4</sup> While the range of circumstances and individualized needs is vast, the delivery of remote learning opportunities and student and staff interaction are limited by factors such as teacher and parent availability, health and safety concerns, willingness to participate in their child’s education, and capabilities, as much as by technology access and other at-home circumstances.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Van Duyn v. Baker School District* (9th Circuit 2007) 481 F.3d 770.

<sup>3</sup> *S.C. v. Oxford Area School District* No. 17-2990 (3rd Circuit 2018).

<sup>4</sup> The USDOE declined to seek waiver recommendations to FAPE, LRE Requirements, Timelines, etc. a requested by Congress for their consideration.

<sup>5</sup> One example of a challenge most schools will face is how to simultaneously accommodate individualized instructional needs and honor LRE placements.



Thus, LEAs have been placed into an untenable situation: because they were forced, through no fault of their own, to change the manner of IEP service delivery and face the predicament that notwithstanding their equitable, good faith actions to deliver services to students with disabilities, they may be unable to provide the services as described in students' IEPs and expose themselves to expensive, burdensome, and resource-consuming litigation, and attendant fee shifting, once the dust settles.

As the U.S. Department of Education wrote, "the IDEA, Section 504, and Title II of the ADA do not specifically address a situation in which elementary and secondary schools are closed for an extended period of time (generally more than 10 consecutive days) because of exceptional circumstances, such as an outbreak of a particular disease." In guidance dated March 12, 2020 and March 21, 2020, the USDOE did acknowledge that FAPE may need to be provided in a different manner and that services may not be delivered as they typically would in a school building. The guidance states: "an IEP Team and, as appropriate to an individual student with a disability, the personnel responsible for ensuring FAPE to a student for the purposes of Section 504, would be required to make an individualized determination as to whether and to what extent compensatory services are needed under applicable standards and requirements."

The critical concern is that some would seek to impose a presumption that school districts are expected to provide "compensatory services" due to a global pandemic resulting in the closure of school buildings. Compensatory services have traditionally been required only when a school district has failed to offer an appropriate education to a student with disabilities. Under the extraordinary and unprecedented circumstances of COVID-19, the ability to educate all students and for educating students with disabilities in particular changed dramatically and suddenly. The unique circumstances of an unsafe school environment must be considered when evaluating a school district's offer of education generally, and good faith effort to implement a student's IEP or Section 504 plan. Reasonably, compensatory services should be applicable only when services were not offered when school personnel could have reasonably done so through distance learning under stay-at-home orders.

Recognizing the disruptive effect of this abrupt and imposed change in education delivery, the USDOE declaration in a guidance document that IEP teams would subsequently need to engage in an "individualized determination as to whether compensatory services are needed"<sup>6</sup> requires proper interpretation. This statement should be interpreted in light of the underlying reason why children may need other services, attributable to a global pandemic, to avoid confusion with the compensatory education liability standard set forth in jurisprudence analyzing the IDEA requirements, which was never intended to apply to this type of unprecedented circumstances. The IDEA itself neither mentions nor defines the term "compensatory services."<sup>7</sup> Nor has USDOE sought to clarify whether "compensatory services" are the equivalent of "compensatory education." Thus, LEAs are rightfully concerned that the guidance to consider "compensatory services" will be interpreted as an invitation to litigate disagreements arising from adjusted services caused by mandatory COVID-19 school facility closures regardless of what distance education services are offered or what steps schools take to assist students to catch up when normal school operations resume.

This concern is not unfounded. Indeed, parent demands for compensatory education and resulting litigation has already begun, and threats of individual and class action litigation are widespread.<sup>8</sup> LEAs should not be required to make up for each service not provided during school closures due to a global pandemic wherein districts were mandated to close school buildings and provide distance education services instead of the traditional programming the school teams planned for and provided for its students. This is not a situation where an LEA has intentionally or negligently denied FAPE to a student; it is a forced response to a national crisis not within the control of the LEA. That

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6 Questions and Answers On Providing Services To Children With Disabilities During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak, dated March 12, 2020; Supplemental Fact Sheet Addressing the Risk of COVID-19 in Preschool, Elementary and Secondary Schools While Serving Children with Disabilities, March 20, 2020.

7 Interpreting regulations (at 300.151 and 300.432) mention compensatory services as part of remedies to a state complaint alleging IDEA violations.

8 On April 13, 2020, a special education attorney sought to certify a class action against the Hawaii Department of Education involving compensatory education remedies and claims resulting from the failure to implement IEPs during the coronavirus school closings. (*W.G. v. Hawaii Department of Education*.)



is not to say that districts would not be required to address the recovery planning of individual students in some way, but it should not be a requirement that each individual minute of service not provided during school closures be provided once schools reopen.

## Moving Forward

Districts are committed to working for the success and progress of all students and engaging in a common approach that is viable for students and school districts. School districts will continue to keep their FAPE obligation at the forefront of their decision-making, taking into account the specific needs and circumstances of each student with disabilities in these challenging times. As school districts implement some form of distance learning for all students, they need to make sure students with disabilities are also receiving instruction through these methods. Supporting students with disabilities will also require districts to conduct an individualized review of the educational impact of these unique circumstances and determine appropriate next steps, taking into consideration whether or not a student has experienced a loss of skills and/or lack of progress as compared to their non-disabled peers, in light of the child's circumstances. An analysis in light of the child's circumstances is consistent with the ruling of the Supreme Court in *Endrew F.*<sup>9</sup>

It is critical, however, to distinguish this commitment to individualized recovery planning, on the one hand, from any presumption that all districts must make up for each and every minute of service students did not receive due to the school closures resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, on the other. It is currently a nationwide challenge to employ enough special education providers to adequately cover existing services, let alone adding tremendous numbers of compensatory hours to those already required by student's IEPs. Most school districts would not have the capacity to provide additional services alleged to have been missed by students during COVID-19 school facility closures while also providing ongoing IEP services. For students with disabilities, FAPE during pandemic-related school closures should be measured by taking into consideration the remote learning opportunities being offered to nondisabled students. If a nondisabled student is not receiving the same degree of instruction and service during distance learning as they would receive in a school building, it is reasonable to expect that students with disabilities would similarly not be offered the same amount of instruction that they would receive while in a school building. This approach is aligned to the equalizing purpose for the creation of the IDEA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. This distinction will facilitate districts' ability to focus on meeting the needs of individual students, while avoiding unnecessary pressure on the system to elevate form over substance.

LEAs additionally should not be required to bear the financial and resource burdens arising from IDEA compliance disputes and lawsuits when they neither created the violation, nor were given adequate time to prepare and plan for the scenario that underpins them. The costs of litigation, both to the limited financial resources provided to carry out LEA obligations and to the already overburdened teachers and service providers attempting to meet those obligations, have always been difficult to manage, even in normal times. School districts bear all the costs of such special education disputes, including due process hearings, which can easily range for an individual dispute between \$10,000 and \$200,000 at the district level. The number of cases varies across districts, but could annually be in the millions nationwide. This does not include appeals. Therefore, without legislation and/or appropriate additional funding, claims for—and disputes regarding—compensatory services due to school disruption caused by the COVID-19 response have the potential to overwhelm LEAs and leave them unable to effectively fulfill their missions to provide quality education to all students, including those with disabilities.

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<sup>9</sup> *Endrew F. v. Douglas County Sch. Dist. RE-1*, 580 U.S., 137 S.Ct. 988 at 999 (2017).

There is also a tremendous impact to the school district in terms of personnel time. Teachers, therapists and other related service providers will be removed from their duties serving students on a regular basis in order to participate in defense of these cases. When a school district loses, the potential remedies they will have to bear will cause serious financial ramifications to districts that are already experiencing financial constraints and potential significant budget and corresponding personnel cuts brought on by COVID-19. This will lead to fewer teachers and administrative supports, which would in turn have devastating effects on the ability of school districts to serve all students. Potential class action lawsuits could have catastrophic impact on services to all students, including those that the IDEA intends to serve, and instead fund attorneys' fees and costs (parents' attorneys as well as LEA's outside counsel to defend claims).

In summary, LEAs face a Herculean task—they must try to use the resources, personnel, and finances they have to educate students safely, thoroughly, and in a way that is consistent with their legal obligations. As districts pursue the work of planning for physical reopening, they are considering various ways of addressing ongoing health and safety issues through potential staggered schedules as well as addressing childcare needs of working parents (including their own staff). Decisions about individual students will need to be made in the context of the realities of what reopening looks like for each district. Without shirking any obligation to use good faith efforts to look at each child individually, LEAs need reasonable expectations on how they can recover from this catastrophic and historic situation and the opportunity to move forward without having to defend themselves from the issuance of orders requiring compensatory services.

Upon return to operations, districts will also need sufficient time to determine the best way to address the needs of all their students and time to collect data to determine the best way to provide an education without the disruption and costs of disputes and litigation. Districts will need the patience and support of families, advocates, and the legal community in consultation with parents to take the time to make an appropriate determination, taking into account the needs of students and capacity of staff. That time can be used to allow districts to identify the range of and plan for additional supports and services that may be needed to allow all of their students to regain skills and make progress in their education.

# Guidance and Resources on Selected Topics

## IEP Meetings

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### Should we conduct IEP meetings during distance learning?

- If the team has appropriate current data to hold an IEP meeting (virtual or teleconference), the meeting should be held.
- In the event that a parent is uncomfortable having an IEP meeting or if an IEP meeting cannot be held the meeting should be scheduled upon a return to school and stress that there will not be a lapse in service until that time.
- Part of the consideration of whether to request an extension from parent should consider the following:
  - Will the changes being made to the IEP have a direct impact on the distance learning format being utilized? If the answer is no, an extension of the meeting may be appropriate.
  - Are there changes to FAPE that could be difficult to implement in a distance learning format? (i.e., changes to PBIP)
  - Is this a meeting that involves advocates, lawyers or concerns that may result in substantive changes to FAPE?

In these situations, an extension, if agreed to by the parent, may be best. If team does not have appropriate current data or the conditions listed above are present, an extension should be requested from the parent. If a parent does not consent to an extension in writing via email, the meeting should be held.

## IEP/504 Meeting Requirements and Annual Reviews

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- If a student's IEP or 504 Plan is due for an annual review, schedule a virtual or teleconference meeting. Proceed as usual to update the IEP or 504 plan, taking into consideration the current learning environment as well as the learning environment when the student returns to school.
- Please type in participants' names in the plan and indicate that they participated virtually.
- For IEP Meetings make sure there is a Prior Written Notice that goes into the detail of the "why" behind every determination and rejection.
- Make sure the conference notes capture any parent concerns and a statement like:
  - Due to the National Emergency in response to the COVID-19 epidemic and guidelines set forth by the CDC for social distancing, this meeting was held virtually. The parent participated by (phone/virtually). The implementation date is (district to insert date) so that the parent has an opportunity to review the Prior Written Notice and Procedural Safeguards. The parent was provided a draft via (mail/email) and will receive the Procedural Safeguards, IEP and Prior Written Notice via (mail/email).

- Please make sure your implementation date takes into account the amount of time it will take for the parent to receive the Prior Written Notice.

## Distance Eligibility Meetings (conducted virtually or by teleconference)

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- If evaluations have been completed and there is sufficient data for the team to determine eligibility, meeting should be held.
- Flexibility regarding number of observations/time period of data collection is encouraged if professionals performing the evaluation determine that sufficient data (Existing data, Tier I and Tier II data that supports the Tier III data being reviewed) has been collected in order for the team to make an appropriate determination. The meeting to draft an IEP or 504 Plan must occur within the statutory timeframe for making the eligibility determination and may or may not take place on the same day as the eligibility determination. Another meeting can be scheduled at a later date, as long as the meeting is scheduled within the statutory timeframe.
- The Eligibility Determination document for special education services should be filled out completely with the “why” of every determination and rejection by the team as well as every evaluation measure used to make the determination as this will serve as the Prior Written Notice.
- This statement should be put in the appropriate section of the document (i.e., “Additional Considerations by Team section”):
  - Due to the National Emergency in response to the COVID-19 epidemic and guidelines set forth by the CDC for social distancing, this meeting was held virtually. The parent participated by (phone/virtually). The Consent to special education services will be sent to the parent via (mail/email) and the parent has the option of providing consent via email. The Eligibility paperwork, Procedural Safeguards will be (mailed/ emailed) to the parent by (date) and an IEP Meeting will be scheduled to write a plan within the required statutory number of days following receipt of the parent/guardian written consent.

## How to Prepare for Virtual Meetings with Parents?

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### Scheduling the Meeting

- Contact the parent via email or phone to schedule a virtual meeting using one of the available virtual meeting platforms.
- Create a Meeting Notice that you will send via email or mail. Please document at least two notices. Include Procedural Safeguards in the mail or email.
- If the parent has internet access and can participate virtually send an invitation via these platforms.
- If the parent does not have technology to participate virtually use phones/virtual platform to call parent so they can fully participate.

### Documentation for the Meeting

- Send a draft of the IEP to the parent 5 days before the scheduled meeting. In addition, send any evaluation reports if applicable to the meeting.
- Make sure the parent is emailed or mailed an agenda for the meeting.

## Parent Evaluation Requests During Distance Learning?

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- Contact the parent within the required statutory number of days of the parent request for evaluation using a virtual platform or the phone.
- Review the data and consider suspected areas of disability as usual.
- Include a statement in the notes from the meeting such as:
  - “This consent was obtained during the school building closures related to COVID-19. The parent was in attendance and has provided verbal agreement with the proposed evaluation plan. A copy of this consent will be provided to the parent with a copy of the Procedural Safeguards via mail or email. Due to school operations closures, some elements of the evaluation which require direct, face-to-face assessment or observation may not be completed until school buildings reopen which may impact typical case timelines.”
- After the meeting is concluded, mail or email the parent a pdf copy of consent and Procedural Safeguards. Request that the parent respond to the mailing or email confirming their receipt of and consent to the proposed evaluation plan.

## Current Open Evaluation and Re-Evaluations

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- Identify cases that are currently open.
- Determine if all remaining evaluation components can be completed remotely.
- If so:
  - Complete evaluation components, then
  - Continue to Eligibility Meeting/IEP, as appropriate.
- If some parts of the evaluation require direct assessment (e.g. direct testing/observation):
  - Compile a list of such cases and draft a proactive communication to the parent.
  - Example communication would be:

“Your child has a current open evaluation to consider due to the COVID-19 school building closures, certain elements of direct assessment cannot be completed until school buildings reopen and your student returns to school. This may impact typical evaluation timelines. We appreciate your understanding during this difficult time, and if you would like to discuss this further you can contact <INSERT APPROPRIATE CONTACT HERE>.”

## Requests for Independent Educational Evaluations (IEE)

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- Continue to follow your state’s specific statutory time period for responding to requests for IEEs if there is one in place. For states with no specific statutory time period for response to a request for an IEE, districts must respond without unnecessary delay. This has been viewed to be a very short time period so responses should be provided as quickly as possible.
- If a parent requests an IEE, the district must make a decision as to whether to provide the IEE or file a due process action to defend the district evaluation.
- If the district is going to move forward with the IEE, the district should provide the documents that are normally provided to parents who request an IEE.



- If the evaluation is one that requires face-to-face interaction, the district should do whatever can be done to prepare for the evaluation to proceed when possible and inform the parent of the status of the evaluation.

## MTSS and PBIP Meetings<sup>10</sup>

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- Plan Facilitators should reach out to the parent/guardian to let them know that staff are still working and interested in connecting with them to discuss their child’s progress and current performance with distance learning. If the parent requests to reschedule the meeting for a later date, then document that request. If the parent requests to proceed, then the MTSS/PBIP meetings can be conducted as a virtual meeting or phone conference.
- A statement can be included in the review document (MTSS/PBIP) such as:
  - “This review meeting was held during school building closures due to COVID-19. Data available for review included <INSERT DATA REVIEWED>; however, other sources of progress monitoring data cannot be collected until school buildings reopen.”
- During these review meetings teams should emphasize care and concern for the student and family, ask if they are appropriately accessing the distance learning, problem solve barriers to access and provide strategies to increase instructional/intervention time, etc.
- Any communication with the parent/guardian should always include general questions related to their child’s distance learning experience, whether there are any barriers to access, letting them know about the continued support of staff from the school who are still working, and bringing back any parent/guardian concerns to the designated personnel to help problem solve solutions for students and families.
- In general, these meetings may look different from their typical content and context; however, the default position should be to continue to offer to meet regularly with the parent/guardian, update on any relevant indicators of progress and performance, and document continued parent/school collaboration in an ongoing problem-solving process during distance learning.

## Prior Written Notice

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Should a Prior Written Notice be issued for the change to distance learning?

- Each district must come to its own conclusion regarding whether to provide a Prior Written Notice (PWN) to each parent of a student with a disability regarding the change to distance learning. The factors that have been used by districts in the decision of whether to issue a PWN are:
  - Districts that have chosen not to issue a PWN are generally relying on the argument that the change to distance learning is not a district-initiated change in placement, therefore a PWN is not necessary and should not be issued as it provides a mechanism for parents to challenge the change to distance learning.
  - Districts that have chosen to issue a PWN have determined that the change to distance learning is a change in placement because the school day has been shortened and other material changes have been made to the delivery of instruction. For those that choose to issue PWNs, a few [examples](#) are provided.

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<sup>10</sup> Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and Positive Behavior Intervention Plan (PBIP).



## Services

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What services should be provided to students with disabilities during periods of school closure?

- To the extent services are provided for students receiving general education, resources should be provided for students with disabilities (SWD) receiving special education as well. Students with disabilities should be provided the services in their IEPs to the extent available, taking into consideration the services that are being provided to students in the general education program. Multiple methods for providing services (virtual instruction, paper packets, etc.) should be encouraged for all students to the extent possible in the distance learning environment in order to accommodate the needs of students with different skills. Collaboration with parents as to the best method to serve the student and amount of work to be provided should be encouraged. Accommodations (such as extended time) in the distance learning environment should be provided.

## Distance Learning Plans

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Should the district create a separate distance learning plan for each SWD or amend each student's IEP?

- Each district must come to its own conclusion regarding whether to create a [distance learning plan](#), a [brief document](#) for each student, a more defined learning plan, or to actually amend each student's IEP. Districts should consult any guidance provided by the department of education within their state to determine what the expectations of their DOE are. The factors that have been used by districts in making this determination are:
  - Districts that are creating a distance learning plan for each student are creating a separate plan to document services and accommodations that can and are being provided during distance learning without amending the student's IEP. The plan is being created and discussed with the student's parent. It allows for a formal plan to guide distance learning without requiring an IEP meeting and formal amendment to the student's IEP. The student's IEP will resume upon return to school.
  - Some districts feel it is appropriate to amend the student's IEP to reflect changes during distance learning.

Should teachers who provide special education services and related service providers continue tracking the delivery of services to SWD?

- Yes. Districts should document all services being provided to students with disabilities using whatever documentation each district finds appropriate. This is of critical importance during this time. Some sample documents for tracking services and how those services relate to the student's goals are [provided](#). In addition, all communications with parents should be documented. If a parent cannot be reached, that should be documented and additional attempts to reach them should be made and documented as well.

Should districts send out progress reports on goals?

- Yes. Progress reports should be sent consistent with the way your district normally provides progress reports to parents. More information regarding Progress Reporting/Progress Monitoring is provided below.

If a parent makes a request for records, should those records be provided?

- You should consult your individual state's statutes with regard to provision of student records. Unless your state has issued some guidance that extends deadlines for provision of student records, those records should be provided to the extent possible in compliance with your state's and district's rules for accessing school buildings.

## Considerations for Child Find

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Should districts continue following its child find processes?

- Absent waivers from the USDOE or individual state departments of education, districts are still obligated to disseminate child find notices and communicate with teachers and parents to make referrals. The obligation also applies to other entities, such as private schools and health care providers. District procedures should be revised as necessary to implement processes for accepting and processing referrals, conducting evaluations, and utilizing screening measures in alignment with remote limitations. For example, it is still possible to review existing data and have parents complete questionnaires.
- Teachers should be reminded to look for and document the following occurrences: (1) a student does not log in or complete assignments; (2) a parent expresses concerns or requests accessibility accommodations for provided materials in hard copy or electronic formats; (3) a student begins to fall behind or exhibits slow progress; or (4) a student is having trouble understanding assignments.

## Progress Reporting/Progress Monitoring

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### IEP Goal Progress Reporting During COVID-19

- It is recommended that LEAs continue to report on the student's progress towards his/her goals during the provision of distance learning during COVID-19 school building closures. Advocacy groups and the Parents' Bar are advising parents to maintain their tracking of their child's progress on IEP goals "while schools are closed." This advisement is being provided for a dual purpose which is to (1) increase familiarity with their child's education to determine if their child is learning more or forgetting what was learned in order to have meaningful discussions with their child's teacher and/or related services providers; and (2) compile documentation for possible requests for "compensatory education." As students are receiving instruction at home through distance learning frameworks, parents are more involved with their child's education and have a greater opportunity to observe first-hand the daily instructional process. Therefore, parents will have a great deal more input as members of the IEP team in upcoming IEP meetings. It is important that teachers and related services providers document their efforts and ensure that documentation is focused and as detailed and consistent as possible in order to demonstrate the efforts the District made to continually provide services during this time.
- LEAs should follow the distance learning protocols and grading practices it has determined are applicable during COVID-19 (i.e., held harmless on grades). Note: Grading determinations made during this time do not override or overrule the LEAs obligation and legal mandate to report progress on a student's IEP goals. In accordance with 34 CFR 300.320 (a)(3)(i) and (ii), the IEP must include a "description of how the child's progress toward meeting the annual goals described in paragraph (2) of this section will be measured; and when periodic reports on the progress the child is making toward meeting the annual goals (such as through the use of quarterly or other periodic reports, concurrent with the issuance of report cards) will be provided."

## Progress Reporting During COVID-19 School Building Closures

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- It is the responsibility of special education teachers/related service providers to prepare and send the report of progress home to parents. Special Education Case Managers and Related Service providers must continue to document the student's current level of performance. The level of performance for each goal/objective is based on various forms of data collection.
  - **Information:** Each student still requires a SUMMARY of the progress towards his/her goal (objective). During the COVID-19 school building closures and provision of distance learning, it is recommended to also include the following statement in the COMMENTS Section of the Progress Report. Note: Continue to make additional comments, as needed, to report adequate information to the Parent/Educational Rights holder.
  - **Guidance:** School Closure COMMENTS STATEMENT on Progress Report. Due to COVID-19 and State-mandated school building closures on March \_\_, 2020, data and progress summary information has been collected by the following as available: report card information, informal assessment data, formal assessment data, district or site-based assessments, teacher-made assessments, as well as distance learning activities.
- As part of progress monitoring and progress reporting under distance learning frameworks, it is important to consider all of the following:
  - Explore all assessment possibilities recognizing that conducting assessments may be limited during school building closures;
  - Maintain documentation of what services were offered;
  - Maintain documentation of what services were delivered;
  - Maintain documentation of student "attendance" to the extent possible (if digital learning is being offered, how often did the student log in, what work was produced during that time, etc.);
  - Determine what aligns to IEP goals and how to gather solid data on IEP progress to support this determination in the best way possible;
  - Manage the data gathered; and
  - Analyze the data against student progress at the point school building closures took place to ensure COVID-19 impact is made clear (this is a necessary determination for students without disabilities as well).

## Example of Comment Statements on a Progress Report

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*GUIDE: Below are summary starters to assist in the reporting of a student's progress. The starters are examples of ways to summarize a student progress.*

### Increased Progress or Met Goal

- [Student Name] has successfully completed this goal in all the learning opportunities during this year.
- [Student Name] has worked hard throughout the year and has contributed successfully towards his/her goal.
- [Student Name] is a positive member in class and has successfully met this goal.
- [Student Name] routinely and independently works well in a group setting.

- [Student Name] displays a positive attitude toward learning, demonstrating motivation and seeking new learning opportunities and has met his/her goal.
- [Student Name] continues to make a positive increase towards this goal.
- [Student Name] continues to make a positive increase towards this goal and now is at \_\_\_% mastery towards this goal.
- [Student Name] consistently completes and submits all assignments on time. He/She works well independently, shows good motivation, especially when working on tasks that require problem solving and creativity. [Student Name] has met this goal.
- This term [Student Name] has made gains and progress toward his/her goal. He/She continues to maintain a high level of commitment and (eagerness/willingness/readiness/synonym) toward learning.
- [Student Name] is developing suitable skills necessary in the preparation for achieving his/her goal.

### Minimal or Limited Progress

- [Student Name] enjoys sharing his/her ideas and concerns in small group discussions. [Student Name] is encouraged to continue to concentrate on achieving his/her (personal transition) goal.
- [Student Name] continues to show improvement towards this goal.
- [Student Name] is a motivated student; however, has made limited progress towards his/her goal and will need to continue to work effectively to attain it.
- [Student Name] has made minimal progress towards this goal. It is recommended [Student Name] continue to participate in this goal.
- [Student Name] has established some challenges towards this goal, especially in the area of\_\_\_\_\_.
- Since the time of school closure (COVID-19), [Student Name] has made limited access in meeting his case manager and data reflects minimal progress towards her goals.
- [Student Name] has made a decrease in progress on his/her goal since school closure (COVID-19) while participating in a distance learning environment.

### Unable to Contact Student During School Building Closure

- Case Manager was unable to obtain data to determine overall progress, at this time, due to limited contact with [Student Name] during this reporting period while in school closure.
- Since the time of school closure (COVID-19), data collection has been insignificant and progress on goal is unknown as student contact has not been established.
- Since the time of school closure (COVID-19), case manager was unable to establish progress measures due to the inability to make contact with [Student Name]/parent.

# Links to Sample Materials and Resources

- [Temporary Distance Learning Plan](#)
- [Continuity of Learning Individualized Plan](#)
- [FAQs for Parents](#)
- [Continuity of Learning Plan Parent Receipt](#)
- [Parent Letter](#)
- [Preferred Mode of Communication Letter to Parents](#)
- [Parent Opt-Out of Services Form](#)
- [IEP Meeting Continuity Guide](#)
- [COVID-19 Progress Reports Guide](#)
- [IEP Data Tracker](#)
- [Notice Regarding Evaluation Timeline](#)
- [Update to Parents Letter](#)
- [Prior Written Notice of Extended School Year](#)
- [Prior Written Notice of IEP Meeting Abeyance](#)
- [Prior Written Notice of Extended School Year and Related Services](#)
- [Prior Written Notice Letter Regarding COVID-19 Emergency Response Distance Learning Program](#)
- [Practice Pointers for Special Education Staff in Drafting Prior Written Notice](#)



# Bios of Contributors/ IDEAS Small Working Groups

## Co-Chairs

### **DENEEN EVANS COX, ESQ.**

Deneen Evans Cox is the Chief Compliance and Performance Monitoring Counsel of the Los Angeles Unified School District in the Office of the General Counsel. In this capacity, Ms. Cox oversees internal monitoring processes to ensure that LAUSD programs and services operate in a manner that promotes equity, access and compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Title II program accessibility requirements and protects student civil rights. As the LAUSD's lead counsel in the *Chanda Smith v. Los Angeles Unified School District* special education consent decree litigation, Ms. Cox's representation of the LAUSD recently led to the conclusion and termination of the 26-year consent decree litigation resulting from the LAUSD's commitment to special education compliance and remediation efforts. Ms. Cox strongly believes that an effective system of compliance requires that while focusing on improved student outcomes, special education supports and services to the general education program be driven by, centered on and responsive to the needs of students with disabilities.

### **HEATHER WALLACE, ESQ.**

Heather J. Wallace has served as the Assistant School Board Attorney for the Pinellas County School Board since 2013, representing the district in matters involving special education, purchasing, contracts, facilities, construction, real estate and charter schools. Prior to that, she served as the Assistant School Board Attorney in Lee County. Ms. Wallace is Board Certified in Education Law and currently serves as the Chair of the Education Law Certification Committee for the Florida Bar.

### **YOLANDA ASAMOAH-WADE, ESQ.**

Yolanda Asamoah-Wade is a veteran educator and attorney with 28 years of experience in serving children and families in Monroe County. She holds a Juris Doctorate from the State University of New York at Buffalo specializing in international law, environmental Law and finance transactions, a Masters in Teaching from the University of Rochester and, a Masters in Educational Leadership with building and district leadership certification and a Bachelor of Arts. Yolanda is a New York state certified teacher in multiple disciplines, having taught all grade levels, K-12 students in several Monroe County school districts. Her legal practice has included serving subject children as a Law Guardian and representing parent/guardian respondents in Family Court. As a private practitioner, Yolanda supported multinational corporate joint ventures, mergers and acquisitions, and public infrastructure projects. From 2016 to 2018, Yolanda was the Rochester City School District's first Chief Ombudsman and Compliance Officer responsible for promoting procedural and substantive fairness for families. She currently serves as the Rochester City School District's Chief Counsel for Special Education, providing counsel to staff, managing special education legal matters, developing procedures and protocols, and supporting organizational design initiatives. A native of Ghana, Yolanda is trilingual and has lived and studied in Ghana, the UK, and France. She is admitted to practice in New York State and the Western District of New York and was a recipient of the Daily Record's Attorney of the Year Award in 2014.

### **SUSANNE STARECKI KIM, ESQ.**

Susanne Starecki Kim is a Senior Deputy General Counsel at San Francisco Unified School District. She earned her Bachelor of Arts from the University of California at Berkeley and Juris Doctor from the University of California, Hastings College of the Law. As a daughter of refugees, who fled Poland in 1969 due to anti-Semitism, and as an immigrant herself, she was raised to value education. After graduating college, she worked as an AmeriCorps member in a low-income high minority school, and pursued a career in law with the goal of improving public schools. For about ten years, she worked at Semple, Farrington and Everall, PC, an education law firm in Denver, Colorado, and handled cases ranging from employment discrimination to free speech. In 2016, she joined the Legal Department at SFUSD, and provides advice and counsel on all special education matters impacting students from pre-school to high school at SFUSD. She is committed to collaborating with special education directors, school psychologists and teachers to serve the needs of all students.

### **MARY C. LAWSON, ESQ.**

Mary Lawson has been an Assistant Attorney representing the School Board of Miami-Dade County since January 2007. Prior to becoming in-house counsel for Miami-Dade School Board, she worked as an Assistant Attorney at the Office of the General Counsel for the Broward County School Board. Mary's educational law practice includes Special Education, Student Discipline, Mental Health, Title IX, FERPA and various other issues. Ms. Lawson holds a Florida Bar designation of Board Certified Specialist in Education Law. Prior to working in-house for public school districts, Ms. Lawson worked in a variety of practice areas at Hogan & Hartson, L.L.P., an international law firm headquartered in Washington D.C. Before becoming a lawyer, Ms. Lawson was a middle and high school Social Studies teacher in Florida, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. She obtained her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Master of Arts in Teaching from the University of Pittsburgh and her J.D. from Howard University Law School.

### **ELEISSA LAVELLE, ESQ.**

Ms. Lavelle is General Counsel for the Clark County School District, Las Vegas Nevada which serves approximately 320,000 students and more than 40,000 employees. In addition to advising and providing other legal services to the District, Ms. Lavelle oversees and manages the CCSD Office of General Counsel which delivers legal assistance to all departments within the District, including, but not limited to, special education, employment matters and human resources, CCSD sponsored charter schools, contract review and preparation, school related matters, state and federal legislation affecting students, teachers, administrators, trustees, facilities (including real property construction), and representation in litigated matters. In addition, Ms. Lavelle oversees complex litigation handled by outside counsel. Ms. Lavelle is working to develop a dispute resolution program within CCSD to resolve conflict between parents and schools.

Ms. Lavelle is a mediator and arbitrator with JAMS and is an Adjunct Professor of Law at the Boyd School of Law, University of Nevada Las Vegas, where she teaches Negotiation and Real Estate Finance. She serves on the Nevada Supreme Court Settlement panel. Before joining CCSD, Ms. Lavelle was a partner in national, regional and Nevada based law firms, where she was both a litigator and transactional attorney focusing in the areas of real property, construction and other commercial matters. Ms. Lavelle holds an LL.M. in Dispute Resolution from Straus Institute, Pepperdine University Law School, and a J.D. and B.A. from the University of Utah. She established the State Bar of Nevada's Office Bar Counsel and served as its first Bar Counsel and was a founding member of the Southern Nevada Association of Women Attorneys.

### **SARA MARKEN, ESQ.**

Sara Marken has been an Assistant Attorney representing the School Board of Miami-Dade County for the past eight years. Prior to joining the School Board Attorney's Office, she worked as an Assistant Public Defender for the Law Offices of the Public Defender for the 11th Judicial Circuit of Florida. Sara's educational law practice includes Special Education, FERPA, Mental Health, Personnel, and Transactional. She obtained her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Philosophy from Florida State University and her J.D. from Florida International University.

### **SARA MONTALVO, ESQ.**

Mrs. Montalvo is the General Counsel for the Washoe County School District where she advises and represents the District on all legal matters including litigation, special education claims, District contract/policy review and revisions, and preventative law for all District departments and employees through program reviews and in-service training. Prior to joining the Washoe County School District, Mrs. Montalvo was a litigation attorney for two private law firms with a focus on business, commercial, and employment litigation.

Mrs. Montalvo is active in her community. She has been hired under letters of appointment with the University of Nevada, Reno to teach Special Education Law to graduate students in the Education Leadership Program. She was also hired by the University of Nevada, Reno to edit and co-draft the Nevada Education Law Manual for teachers. Since 2015, Mrs. Montalvo has served on the City of Reno Access Advisory Committee, charged with improving access to public facilities, businesses, and residences for use by individuals with physical or other disabilities. Since 2015, Mrs. Montalvo has been appointed to serve on the Northern Nevada Disciplinary Board by the Nevada State Bar Board of Governors. She served on the Board of the Northern Nevada Women Lawyers Association from 2012-2014, serving as its president during 2014. For three years, she served on the Founding Board and the Board of Directors of a local K-8 charter school. She has twice been named to the Nevada Business Magazine Legal Elite list wherein recipients are voted in by their peers and represent the top 3.7 percent of practicing lawyers.

Mrs. Montalvo received her undergraduate degree in Journalism from the University of Nevada, Reno, earning the Senior Scholar Award as the top graduating student of the Reynolds School of Journalism. She received her Juris Doctorate from the William S. Boyd School of Law at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, achieving CALI Awards in Gaming Law and Pretrial Litigation, and was a member of the Society of Advocates Moot Court Competition Team. While in law school, she externed for the Eighth Judicial District Court and the Nevada System of Higher Education.

### **BARBARA J. MYRICK, ESQ.**

Barbara J. Myrick is the General Counsel for The School Board of Broward County, Florida

She joined the GCO in August of 2007, after six years as an administrator in the Department of Exceptional Student Education and Student Support Services of the School District. Prior to her service as General Counsel, her practice concentrated on issues related to students with disabilities, which was a natural fit, in that Barbara spent over 25 years working in the Broward County community implementing a broad spectrum of community-based programs for children and adolescents with disabilities. In January 2016, Barbara was named Interim General Counsel for the School Board and in June was named to position on a permanent basis. Barbara leads an office of nine attorneys and seven support staff. She is a member of the Florida School Board Attorneys Association (FSBAA) and the Florida Bar's Education Law Committee.

### **LAURA PINCUS, ESQ.**

Laura Pincus currently serves as an Assistant General Counsel in the Office of General Counsel for the School District of Palm Beach County, Florida, where her practice concentrates on the laws surrounding students with disabilities. Previously, Ms. Pincus served as the Director of Exceptional Student Education for the School District of Palm Beach County, where her responsibilities included oversight of programs for special needs, 504, gifted, and ESE pre-k programs.

Ms. Pincus is proud to be one of few attorneys in the State of Florida to be certified by the Florida Bar in Education Law. She serves on the Education Law Certification Committee of the Florida Bar and is an active member in the Florida School Board Attorneys Association. She is an adjunct professor for Nova Southeastern University's Shepard Broad Law Center, teaching Discipline Law and an Independent Research class to students earning a Master's in Education Law. She is also an adjunct professor for Florida Atlantic University where she teaches Legal Foundations of Special Education to doctoral candidates.

Ms. Pincus received her J.D. from Nova Southeastern University. She also earned a Master's degree in Education and a Bachelor's Degree in Communication from The American University in Washington, DC.

**LYNN ROSNER RAUCH, ESQ.**

Lynn Rosner Rauch joined the School District as General Counsel in 2017. In this role, she advises the Superintendent and other District leaders, the Board of Education, and program offices throughout the District. Lynn manages the Office of General Counsel, overseeing the provision of legal services. Her experience with the District dates back to the mid-1990's, having since represented the District in desegregation, constitutional and civil rights, equitable and adequate funding, and environmental proceedings.

Before joining the District, Lynn was a partner at both Dilworth Paxson LLP, and Manko, Gold, Katcher & Fox, LLP. In addition to the School District, she represented clients such as the Barnes Foundation, SEPTA, Independence Blue Cross, and prospective investors in Major League Baseball in high stakes litigation in federal and state courts, administrative forums, and mediation.

After graduating from Duke University, Lynn earned her law degree from the University of Pennsylvania Law School. She remains active with her alma maters, chairing the Philadelphia region of the Duke University Alumni Association, founding the Philadelphia Chapter of the Duke Women's Forum, and co-chairing Duke and Penn Law reunions.

**JILL R. WILSON, ESQ.**

Jill R. Wilson is general counsel for the Guilford County Board of Education in Greensboro, North Carolina. As a partner at the law firm of Brooks Pierce, LLC, she leads the education practice, and currently represents public and private schools, colleges and universities on a broad range of education issues, including special education, employment, student matters, school funding and discrimination. She has been involved in significant education litigation in State and federal courts. She graduated from Wake Forest University School of Law, where she served on the Law Review, in 1982.

**ARSEN ZARTARIAN, ESQ.**

Arsen Zartarian serves as Deputy General Counsel of the Newark Public Schools, the largest school district in New Jersey, with approximately 40,000 students. In addition to litigation responsibilities, he provides daily legal advice, preventative counseling and training regarding all aspects of state and federal education and labor/employment law to school administrators who supervise a work force in excess of 7,000 employees. He regularly appears in administrative court on employee discipline and special education matters, as well as the New Jersey Appellate Division and United States District Court. Mr. Zartarian is Past President and currently an officer of the New Jersey Association of School Attorneys, President of the New Jersey State Bar Association's School Law Committee, and a member of the State Bar Association Labor and Employment Law and Administrative Law Sections. He frequently presents at statewide school and employment law seminars and moderates the annual CLE programs "Administrative Law Forum" and "Representing School Employees and Boards of Education in Employment Law Cases." Mr. Zartarian received his undergraduate degree from Rutgers College, where he was Sports Editor of The Daily Targum, and his law degree from Villanova University School of Law, where he was Case & Comments Editor of the Villanova Law Review and a national moot court competitor.



### **JULIE WRIGHT HALBERT, ESQ.**

Julie Wright Halbert has been legislative counsel for the Council of the Great City Schools for over 25 years. In that capacity, she has served as a national education legal and policy specialist, with emphasis on special education. She worked extensively on the reauthorizations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997 and 2004. Ms. Halbert is responsible for drafting numerous technical provisions to the IDEA and providing technical assistance to Congress and the U. S. Department of Education. In 1997 and again in 2005, she testified before the U.S. Department of Education on its proposed regulations on IDEA 2004. Ms. Halbert has directed each of the Council's special education strategic review teams, including in the school districts of Anchorage, Austin, Boston, Chicago, Charleston, Cincinnati, Clark County (Las Vegas), Cleveland, Des Moines, Detroit, District of Columbia, Guilford County (NC), Memphis, New York City, Richmond, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Providence and St. Louis. Working with national experts Sue Gamm and Judy Elliott, she has published a Council national white paper on the implementation and development of MTSS, Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports for our nation's urban school districts. Ms. Halbert took the lead working with our cities in the development of the Council's amicus brief to the Supreme Court of the United States in *Endrews v. Douglas County School District*, on determining the educational benefit standard due by our districts to students with disabilities when implementing their IEPs. She was also the counsel of record for the Council of the Great City Schools' amicus briefs in the Supreme Court of the United States in (a) *Board of Education of the City School District of the City of New York v. Tom F., On Behalf of Gilbert F., A Minor Child* (2007); (b) *Jacob Winkelman, a Minor By and Through His Parents and Legal Guardians, Jeff and Sander Winkelman, et al., v. Parma City School District* (2007); (c) *Brian Schaffer v. Jerry Weast, Superintendent of Montgomery County Public Schools, et al.*, (2005); (d) *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District, and Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education* (2007) and *Forest Grove School District v. T.A.*, (2009). Additionally, for the past three years, together with Husch Blackwell partner John Borkowski, Ms. Halbert is assisting to develop and implement national legal webinars on emerging legal issues for Council districts.





## Council Member Districts

Albuquerque, Anchorage, Arlington (Texas), Atlanta, Aurora (Colorado), Austin, Baltimore, Birmingham, Boston, Bridgeport, Broward County (Ft. Lauderdale), Buffalo, Charleston County, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Chicago, Cincinnati, Clark County (Las Vegas), Cleveland, Columbus, Dallas, Dayton, Denver, Des Moines, Detroit, Duval County (Jacksonville), El Paso, Fort Worth, Fresno, Guilford County (Greensboro, N.C.), Hawaii, Hillsborough County (Tampa), Houston, Indianapolis, Jackson, Jefferson County (Louisville), Kansas City, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Manchester, Miami-Dade County, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Nashville, New Orleans, New York City, Newark, Norfolk, Oakland, Oklahoma City, Omaha, Orange County (Orlando), Palm Beach County, Philadelphia, Pinellas County, Pittsburgh, Portland, Providence, Puerto Rico, Richmond, Rochester, Sacramento, San Antonio, San Diego, San Francisco, Santa Ana, Seattle, Shelby County, St. Louis, St. Paul, Stockton, Toledo, Toronto, Tulsa, Washington, D.C., Washoe, and Wichita



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# **OPERATIONS REPORT**



# Operational Issues in the Reopening of Schools during the COVID-19 Crisis

Facilities, Transportation,  
and Security  
June 2020







## ABOUT THE COUNCIL

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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Council of the Great City Schools



# Operational Issues in the Reopening of Schools during the COVID-19 Crisis

## Facilities, Transportation, and Security



June 2020

# Table of Contents

- Purpose of this Document ..... 1
- Working Together to Open the Great City Schools ..... 2
  - Leadership and Collaboration..... 2
  - Policies and Practices..... 2
  - Communications, Messaging, and Change Management..... 3
  - Pandemic Recovery Plans..... 4
- Opening Facilities, Offices, and Classrooms ..... 5
  - Worker Safety..... 5
  - Workplan ..... 5
  - Systems Checks..... 6
  - Cleaning, Disinfecting, and Environmental Management..... 6
- Restarting Transportation Services ..... 8
  - Essentials for Restarting..... 8
  - Logistics for Social Distancing..... 8
  - Cleaning and Disinfecting Buses ..... 9
  - Employee Safety and Contract Issues..... 10
- Securing District Properties ..... 11
  - Entrances..... 11
  - Front Offices and Reception Areas..... 11
  - Buildings, Offices, Classrooms, and Social Distancing..... 12
  - Lobbies and Common Areas ..... 12
  - Elevators and Stairways..... 12
  - Shipping and Receiving Areas ..... 13
- Appendix A: Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for Facilities..... 14
- Appendix B: Safety & Security Operational Recommendations..... 17
- Appendix C. Working Groups..... 20



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# Purpose of this Document

Over the past several months, the Council of the Great City Schools has been working with its member school districts to develop strategies and plans to help prepare for the reopening of school districts in the nation's major cities. The reopening will undoubtedly look different in every district, but one thing is clear: sound operational management of the reopening process will be critical to building public confidence and ensuring success.

The Council has prepared this preliminary "How-to Guide" to share industry best practices<sup>1</sup> and some of the best thinking and recommendations from school districts across the country. These recommendations come from a series of working groups comprised of senior administrators who oversee facilities and plant services, transportation, and safety and security in the nation's major city public school districts. A subsequent edition will be provided later this summer that will contain additional detail and sample district protocols.

The intention of this initial guide is to establish a foundation of ideas, issues to think about, and recommendations to help member districts plan for the reopening of schools. The Council is also certain that the coming weeks and months will teach us many new things, and we expect to update and expand this document as the situation gets clearer. In the meantime, the Council will continue to connect with its members to learn more about how we can help.

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<sup>1</sup> The Council appreciates the guidance provided by Jacobs, Sodexo, and especially the information provided by Cushman and Wakefield, a global commercial real estate firm headquartered in Chicago, which was helpful in preparing this document.

# Working Together to Open the Great City Schools

Leadership, collaboration, and communications within and across major operational departments have never been more important. And cooperation up-and-down and side-to-side within each organizational function will be critically important to ensure a smooth reopening process and to safeguard the welfare of our students in both the short and long term. This imperative is the bedrock of effective and successful operations this fall when schools are likely to look much different from what they do now.

## Leadership and Collaboration

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The following are suggestions and guidance on how departments and divisions can work together to achieve the best results during the reopening of schools this fall.

- District leadership should establish clear expectations for collaboration and communications within and across departments in the planning for reopening this fall. Priority should be established for the security and well-being of all students, teachers, staff, parents, and visitors. Leadership should be clear that staff will be held accountable for collaboration and establish measures, procedures, and actions that will govern performance in facilities, transportation, and safety and security.
- District leadership should designate a lead individual, e.g., the Chief Operating Officer, as the person who would have overall authority to direct and coordinate multiple operating departments in the reopening of schools. This collaboration should extend to the instructional side of the house.
- District departments and divisions have individualized and specialized roles and responsibilities, but they should recognize that the health and safety of district employees, students, parents and visitors is a collective responsibility.
- District plans, policies, and procedures should align with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and relevant state and local health recommendations to ensure the health and safety of all employees, students, parents, contractors, and visitors when schools reopen.

## Policies and Practices

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It will be important for districts to have policies and procedures in place that set clear expectations for employees, students, parents, and visitors. District leadership should revisit and update relevant policies that are needed for a successful reopening. Communicating these policies will be critically important for establishing a climate of awareness and compliance with any new requirements. Policies for consideration might include—

- Protocols for a phased re-introduction of employees based on essential roles for the re-opening of the district.
- Clear procedures for if and how to screen employees and students in a way that will comply with CDC guidelines. Procedures should be repeatedly and clearly communicated so everyone understands them, and the public is confident in them before students and staff return to school either in a face-to-face or remote mode.

- Restrictions on access by the general public and other visitors, such as vendors and contractors, to school buildings, students, and staff.
- Hiring and training temporary employees in the event some full-time employees become unavailable.
- Guidelines for the prevention of virus transfer, including clearly defined communications and escalation protocols outlining the management and decision-making processes and including the participation of local, regional, and state health organizations, as well as other emergency services in the case of a potential COVID-19 emergency or further outbreak.

## Communications, Messaging, and Change Management

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Districts should have a thoughtful communication plan that anticipates questions, anxieties, and concerns and uses a wide range of channels and materials to prepare employees, students, parents, and visitors for the reopening of schools. The plan should stress that the district will not be the same and that the changes made follow CDC and other government guidelines and are intended to keep employees, students, parents, and visitors safe and healthy. Recommended communications might include the following components—

- Communicating frequently on how the district is following CDC and state coronavirus guidelines and how the measures taken are designed to keep everyone safe and healthy.
- Encouraging employees, students, and parents to participate in and comply with new procedures and practices.
- Providing training and materials so employees are introduced to any new roles and responsibilities.
- Identifying various target audiences, e.g., employees, students, parents, and visitors, and the key or tailored messages that are needed.
- Using a wide range of communication channels and materials, e.g., email, text messages, video, posters, digital displays, door-to-door, and others to ensure that staff, parents, and the public understand changes and the reasons behind them.
- Providing instructions on how to prepare for new building entrance protocols and what to expect when returning employees, students, parents and visitors arrive.
- Changes to classroom and work environments, including offices, classrooms, common areas, buses, and work area reconfigurations, etc.

An important part of successfully communicating will involve addressing the concerns of employees, students, and parents about their personal health and the health of those they care about. To help mitigate these concerns, district leadership should understand how the pandemic has affected the personal experiences that employees, students, and parents have had with the virus. It is important that employees, students, and parents know that their district cares about them, and will sustain its commitment to their wellbeing after students and staff return to schools.



Finally, employees, students, and parents will need to understand what the district will be like upon their return. Some may expect nothing to have changed, while others will assume everything will be different. Preparing and reminding them that the changes will help keep them safe will ease anxieties.

Job descriptions and roles may also need to be revisited, as schools will be generally short-handed to address the challenges they will face. Flexibility, teamwork, and goodwill will be required to handle the many unforeseen issues that are likely to arise.

Recommended practices include—

- Informing employees, students, and parents as plans are developed and implemented.
- Building the public and school-based staff into the planning process as much as possible.
- Repeating messages through a variety of media channels to reinforce the changes that have been adopted, why they have been adopted, and providing signage that communicates key messages in high traffic areas such as main entrances, restroom facilities, cafeterias, and common areas once school buildings reopen.

## Pandemic Recovery Plans

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Districts should utilize the expertise of their emergency management personnel, local health officials, and other key staff to create a Pandemic Response and Recovery Plan that includes—

- Escalation protocols, based on the National Incident Management and Incident Command System<sup>2</sup> guidelines and best practices, including management and decision-making processes for responding to and recovering from the COVID-19 emergency.
- What/if scenarios around the resurgence of the pandemic with possible responses and the staffing, funding, and resources required to address the variables involved in each of them.
- Use of a wide range of media channels to disseminate information to employees, students, parents, and the general public in the event of a COVID-19 reoccurrence and the procedures to mitigate a potential resurgence of the disease in the district.

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<sup>2</sup> The National Incident Management (NIMS) and Incident Command Systems are standardized approaches to the command, control, and coordination of emergency responses, providing a common hierarchy within which responders from multiple agencies can be effective.

# Opening Facilities, Offices, and Classrooms<sup>3</sup>

## Worker Safety

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Anyone preparing district buildings and offices should follow all existing policies, procedures, risk assessments, and applicable safety practices, including—

- Wearing and training in wearing appropriate single or multiple use PPE, e.g., uniforms, masks, gloves, and eye protection.
- Training in the disinfection, removal, and disposal of single use equipment.
- Requirements for social distancing, the wearing of masks, and hand washing.<sup>4</sup>

## Workplan

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Districts should develop a detailed COVID-19 workplan with strategies, tactics, checks, tasks, and assignments to combat and minimize the risks associated with the introduction and spread of COVID-19. Areas or issues to consider include—

- Placing of hand sanitizers or other checks at building and classroom entrances.
- Modifying work shifts of custodial services personnel to provide rapid-response disinfecting and ensure sinks and bathrooms are fully stocked with soap and paper towels during the daytime.
- Maintaining standards for routine and advanced cleaning and disinfecting of buildings, including all offices, classrooms, cafeterias, and other common areas.
- Routine disinfecting and cleaning of high-touch spaces and surfaces.
- Placing signage in common areas of office buildings, such as hand-washing signs in restrooms that promote safety through basic infection-prevention measures.
- Providing adequate stocks of towels and disposable tissues to clean desk and work surfaces, no-touch trash cans, hand soap, alcohol-based hand sanitizers, and surface disinfectant wipes in restrooms, cafeterias, and other common areas.
- Scheduling and coordinating any ongoing or planned capital programs, and on-going maintenance projects.
- Planning for the possible reconfiguration of secondary schools into facilities that could accommodate younger children.
- Developing or adopting indicators of facility cleanliness or safety by which the public can be assured that buildings are free of the virus to the extent possible. Consider establishing a local task force with health officials to certify building safety prior to reopening.

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3 Subsequent version of this document may take up issues around the redesign of school buildings and instructional space to accommodate newly reformed school systems and their missions.

4 A district of about 215,000 students estimates that it would cost about \$8.8 million every 30 days to provide masks to all students and staff.

## Systems Checks

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The Great City Schools, which have been financially squeezed for a long time, have had to make decisions that ultimately reduced their ability to sustain comprehensive, preventive maintenance programs. Consequently, as funds continue to be in short supply, districts have been forced to make fewer repairs, which has accelerated the deterioration and premature failure of some buildings and component systems.

Regardless of the current state of buildings and their component systems, building engineers and inspectors should certify that all existing equipment, mechanical systems, water systems, and life and safety support services have been inspected and critical components of those systems have been repaired or replaced to mitigate the possible spread of the virus. Factors that should be considered in certifying systems-readiness include--

- Replacement of air filters following manufacturers' recommendations and proper PPE and safety procedures for the handling and disposal of filters through which the virus might travel.
- Activation and testing of plumbing, drain flow, toilet flushing, etc.
- Review of building water management plans and, working with water treatment services providers, ensuring that chemical levels are within defined ranges.
- Verification that all mechanical systems are operating properly.

District facilities should be declared ready for occupancy only after the Chief Operating Officer and other relevant health officials have confirmed that all required remediations and repairs to equipment and systems, offices, classrooms, and common areas have been completed and inspected to ensure their health and safety.

## Cleaning, Disinfecting, and Environmental Management

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Districts will need to define what they consider to be a successful program to clean and disinfect their facilities and make this public, since there is no single all-inclusive method for cleaning and disinfecting. There are, however, basic guidelines districts should follow in preparing for the disinfecting and cleaning of buildings, offices, classrooms, cafeterias, and other common areas. These include—

- Reviewing inventories of cleaning chemicals, materials, and consumables to ensure inventory levels are aligned with forecasted building needs and CDC recommendations.
- Providing a checklist for the safe use of all chemicals to verify that instructions for their use are being followed.
- Ensuring cleaning equipment and tools are in working condition.
- Providing training—in person, through videos, and online—on general cleaning, proper disinfecting guidelines, and site-specific protocols for custodial employees.
- Identifying common areas that require thorough cleaning due to heavy usage, such as gyms/locker rooms, cafeterias, restrooms, etc.
- Providing time, if this has not already been done, for students to come into school to clean out their lockers, and have custodial staff do their normal end-of-year locker cleanout, cleaning, and disinfecting prior to school reopening. Following reopening, the custodial and housekeeping staff should clean and disinfect lockers as they would all other high-touch points. Staff would not otherwise have access to student lockers for interior cleaning and disinfecting since they would be locked, but they might need to be opened, cleaned, and disinfected if there have been confirmed cases of COVID-19 among students or employees.
- Ensuring employees are following health and safety requirements, including hand hygiene and washing hands thoroughly.

- Treating all surfaces using disinfectants from government approved or authorized lists, e.g. EPA's List-N and ensuring all chemical dwell times are adhered to.

In terms of Environment Management, there are three cleaning and disinfecting procedures to augment current practices for cleaning and disinfecting school facilities. (Detailed Standard Operational Procedures, based on CDC guidelines, are presented in [Appendix A.](#))

- **Daytime Specialized or Enhanced Cleaning** similar to what is normally done overnight with enhanced cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces that are soiled, and disinfecting other surfaces that are high touch points such as tables, desks, chairs, countertops, windowsills, cabinet handles and doorknobs, light switches, and telephones. The district should work in partnership with school staff and aides to develop regular procedures for the cleaning and disinfecting of classroom electronics, such as tablets, touch screens, keyboards, controls, books, and equipment. The cleaning and disinfecting of drinking fountains, handrails, cafeterias, and bathrooms should be done daily to ensure restrooms are stocked with soap and paper towels, and that sanitizer stations are replenished.
- **Deep Cleaning**, which is recommended by CDC for use in buildings, offices, classrooms, cafeterias, and other common areas that have been unoccupied for more than seven days. The cleaning procedures include--
  - Use of recommended PPE and district-approved electrostatic sprayers, foggers, sponges, applicators, mop heads and buckets, measured spray bottles, and trash liners, etc.
  - Use of the EPA's registered list of approved disinfectants or diluted household bleach or 70 percent or more alcohol solutions for what is considered normal routine cleaning.
  - Disinfecting uncluttered flat surfaces; soft or porous materials or items such as carpeted floors, rugs, drapes, and seating; objects normally touched in buildings, offices, and classrooms such as desks, tables, phones, keyboards, touchscreens, toilets; high traffic areas such as front offices, gyms, locker rooms, lunchrooms, and multi-purpose rooms; and outdoor areas such as playgrounds.
  - Sweeping, vacuuming, or mopping all floors; emptying all trash receptacles; and disposing of any trash, used items, or equipment.
- **Confidence cleaning** procedures, developed in conjunction with the CDC's "Reopening Guidance" for cleaning and disinfecting of school buildings and rooms after a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 has been detected and removed under the direction of the health department and supervision of the district's health services, which include—
  - Opening windows to increase outside air flow for at least one and up to 24 hours; using equipment such as PPE face covering (masks), gowns, gloves, etc.; using spray bottles or electronic sprayers; using HEPA vacuums, if available; and using cleaning cloths.
  - Disinfecting hard, horizontal, and frequently touched surfaces such as tables, desks, chairs, handrails, equipment, and door handles in buildings and rooms with a CDC-approved product rated for SARS-CoV-2, Rhinovirus or Human Coronavirus.
  - Appropriate removal of PPEs and disposal of waste.

# Restarting Transportation Services

## Essentials for Restarting

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Member districts in the Council of the Great City Schools transport millions of children to and from school every day. Each member district will need to focus on several essentials for the reopening of schools. Under “normal” circumstances, the logistical details for school bus transportation involves Herculean efforts. Pandemic and post-pandemic transportation will be even *more* challenging. As such, it is recommended that member districts focus on the following essential areas in the reopening of schools—

- Logistics for social distancing on school buses.
- Cleaning and disinfecting buses.
- Employee safety and contract issues.

## Logistics for Social Distancing

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In preparing for the reopening of schools, district superintendents should include transportation directors in discussions with senior leadership so there is a full understanding of the costs and viability of delivering services. Considerations should include—

- The financial costs and logistical issues that could result if a six-foot social distance is required for bus ridership. Costs and logistical issues might include—
  - Staggered scheduling (e.g., alternating days, alternating times of days, extended hours, longer school day and/or week, year-round schooling, cohort scheduling, and the like) of students for face-to-face instruction in a way that maintains social distancing.<sup>5</sup>
  - Acquisition and servicing of additional buses.<sup>6</sup>
  - Labor and PPE equipment costs for additional drivers and mechanics, as well as the possible use of additional monitors and aides on buses who would be responsible for conducting wellness checks, supervising the loading of students at the bus stops, and tracking students if a positive test is discovered on a bus.
  - Additional fuel costs associated with higher numbers of bus runs, and the additional costs of maintaining and repairing buses because of added wear and tear.

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5 Subsequent versions of this report will include additional details and models for estimating transportation costs and logistics.

6 Social distancing of 6 feet, when applied to a school bus, results in a 77-seat capacity bus effectively reduced to a 13-passenger bus—an 83 percent reduction. Identifying siblings who could rise together might increase the number of riders per bus.



- The cost of the additional lead time necessary for the transportation department to configure or reconfigure bus runs and routes to transport the estimated numbers of students to where they need to be—and when—for the various instructional delivery models under consideration, e.g., traditional, double sessions, staggered schedules, hybrid schedules, alternate instructional days (with or without Saturday), etc. <sup>7</sup>
- The logistical challenge of ensuring social distancing while meeting programmatic requirements to transport special needs students to facilities to receive appropriate educational services identified in their IEP in the shortest distance and lowest riding time. Also, the challenge of attending to modifications to students' IEPs.
- The increased route times and costs that may result if unemployment causes an increase in the use of contracted services to meet general education and specialized services, such as the McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance Act and foster care transportation.
- The potential use of a tag system to track who is on a bus for any given run.

## Cleaning and Disinfecting Buses

In addition to students who may be carrying COVID-19 when they board a bus, high-touch areas such as seat backs, handrails, stability poles and bars, windows, and window ledges can also contribute to the spread of the virus. Cleaning and disinfecting these areas are vitally important to mitigating the spread of the disease. The general guidelines that should be followed in preparing for the cleaning and disinfecting of the bus fleet include—

- Maintaining an inventory of personal protective equipment (PPE), government approved cleaning and disinfecting chemicals with instructions on their safe use, and materials such as microfiber towels and consumables to ensure supply levels will be adequate to meet anticipated needs.
- Acquiring, within budgetary limits, measuring systems (such as microbial solutions), cleaning equipment (backpack or canister vacuums, “spray-and-vac,” and “dispense-and-vac” cleaning systems), and, in the event there would be a new outbreak of the coronavirus, an “activated” cleaning system. These systems will require regular inspections and maintenance to ensure they are in working order when “activated.”
- Providing training—in person, through videos, and online—to personnel who will be responsible for the preparation and application of disinfectants, conducting high-touch audits, the correct and safe use of cleaning systems (including activated cleaning, if required), the two-step process of cleaning and disinfecting floors and vehicles, and properly disinfecting areas that are high-touch and become contaminated throughout the day.
- Designing a detailed work plan with modified work shifts that cover the frequency and service levels needed to ensure appropriate cleaning and disinfecting of buses. A checklist of specific cleaning tasks and timelines to be performed for pre-trips, between-trips, post-trips, and for regular, interval, and post-positive testing to ensure the safety of students and staff will be needed.
- Ensuring all staff practice hand hygiene and follow health and safety requirements for the use and disposal of PPE.
- Attending to the bus cleaning standards of CDC, OSHA, and EPA and any differences among them.

<sup>7</sup> Each instructional delivery model will affect numbers of drivers, routes, cleaning costs, fuel costs, and bell schedules.

## Employee Safety and Contract Issues

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Anyone entering onto bus compounds and facilities or who are involved in any aspect of student transportation should follow all applicable safety requirements and practices, including—

- The wearing of appropriate single or multiple use PPE (e.g., uniforms, masks, gloves, and eye protection) and the disinfecting, removal, or disposal of single use equipment.
- Hand washing and social distancing in the bus yards, maintenance garages, employee break areas, and at timeclocks and any other locations where employees congregate.
- An employee wellness screening procedure to test and identify employees who may have been exposed to or show symptoms of the coronavirus, and a return-to-work or duty process (including labor contract modifications if required) for those who need to be quarantined.
- Procedures that protect road supervisors, maintenance and repair staff, drivers, monitors, and students when maintenance is required to bring a bus back into service following a breakdown.
- Revamped in-house, behind-the-wheel training and retraining programs and online learning systems to ensure compliance with the district's applicable employee safety requirements and practices.
- Required language in current and future contracts with private, outside service providers to ensure they comply with all requirements for social distancing, the cleaning and disinfecting of buses and all other vehicles transporting students, and the safety of their own employees, including a schedule of liquidated damages for any non-compliance with these requirements.

Planning for the reopening should also include a plan developed in conjunction with the human resources department on the aggressive recruitment and training of school bus drivers.

# Securing District Properties

District security leadership should be included on all major teams working on programming, health, food service, transportation, and social distancing, but security staff should not be used to enforce social distancing or the wearing of masks, etc. In general, the pandemic should be viewed as a health issue, not a security or policing issue.

## Entrances

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Districts should utilize the expertise of their safety, security, and emergency management personnel and district and local health officials to develop a work plan that addresses the unique and variable conditions caused by COVID-19 that might impact the health and safety of all those who are on school properties.

The work plan should specify guidelines and recommendations that—

- Reduce the number of entrances used in each building and identify who is responsible for directing the ingress and egress of staff, students, parents, and visitors at those entrances, while maintaining code compliance.
- Establish a verification process in cooperation with local health offices and aligned with CDC guidelines that includes the equipment and resources to be used and who is responsible for each step in the process of testing all those entering district buildings during regular hours and off-hours.
- Define the role district safety and security personnel have in the physical assessment and monitoring of individuals entering school properties, including auditoriums, gymnasiums, stadiums, athletic fields, and parking lots that attract large numbers of people.<sup>8</sup>

## Front Offices and Reception Areas

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- Training front office employees on safe interactions with visitors.
- Installing glass, acrylic, or plastic screens between office staff and visitors, and removing, restricting, or reserving the use of furniture in front offices for people waiting for appointments or assistance to ensure appropriate social distancing.
- Disabling or removing kiosks and touchscreens.
- Using disposable sticker security tags for visitor recognition and identification.

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<sup>8</sup> The Council's recommendations for managing the unique and variable effects of COVID-19 on districts' safety, security and emergency management are outlined in [Appendix B](#).

## Buildings, Offices, Classrooms, and Social Distancing

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It is important that state and local safety codes, building codes, and applicable security requirements are not compromised to achieve social distancing. Solutions may differ based on the number of buildings, offices, and classrooms that will be needed when the districts reopen. There are, however, a range of social distancing measures that include—

- Calculating maximum capacity and monitoring space density use for each floor, office, and classroom.
- Increasing space between desks or adding desks to spaces normally used for group activities.
- Designating, marking, and signposting acceptable space capacities for each floor, office, and classroom.
- Posting signage for social distancing on floors and the direction, and possibly one-way foot-traffic, in main corridors, stairs, and entries.
- Restricting or reducing the number of large group activities to ensure appropriate social distancing.

## Lobbies and Common Areas

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Districts should consider guidelines and recommendations that promote safety and guide employees, students, and visitors through common areas in buildings beyond offices and classrooms. These steps might include—

- Hand sanitizers in all building common areas.
- Developing new rules for common areas.
- Signage or floor markings to direct foot traffic (particularly if designating the direction of foot traffic) and ensure safe social distancing.
- Clearly posting signage with rules for cafeteria services.
- Consider acrylic dividers between cafeteria service providers and users.
- Offering pre-packaged foods only—temporarily.
- Reducing self-service access to foods.
- Rearranging cafeteria furniture to promote social distancing.
- Reviewing, adjusting, and enhancing cleaning guidelines for paths of travel and high touch areas.
- Consider not issuing lockers since they tend to be gathering points for students that will challenge social distancing requirements, particularly when lockers are stacked on top of one another.

## Elevators and Stairways

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Elevators and stairways are challenging areas to establish social distancing. Methods for managing the use of elevators and stairways might include the following—

- Temporarily closing elevators.
- Deploying monitors to manage flow and discourage over-crowding of stairways.
- Posting signs displaying healthy use of stairways, including how to use and maintain safe distances for those on the stairways.
- Reviewing and updating cleaning processes to ensure on-going cleaning of high touch surfaces like stairway dividers and railings.

## Shipping and Receiving Areas

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Districts should review and revise current processes for inbound and outbound deliveries (parcels, mail, food deliveries, etc.) that align to COVID-19 safety precautions. These processes might include—

- Routing instructions to avoid deliveries through employee or main entrances to minimize interaction with employees and students.
- Separating shipping and receiving offices, classrooms, and common areas.
- Training personnel handling mail, parcels, and other deliveries in the use and proper disposal of PPE, masks, and gloves.
- Sanitizing the exterior of packing and, if appropriate, removing items from and appropriately discarding boxes.
- Continuing use of security personnel at food distribution sites.



## Appendix A

# Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for Facilities

### STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES (SOP) FOR FACILITIES

This SOP is based on guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and describes how to disinfect the environment to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>

Ensure every relevant staff member is trained, informed, and instructed on the outcomes of your risk assessment and how to undertake the work activity safely (i.e., through the implementation of this standard operating procedure).

Where any Health and Safety concerns are highlighted, they must be reported to the central facilities office.

In the event a Health and Safety concern is identified, the task at hand must not commence, or must be halted if already in progress. Facilities management must ensure the task can be carried out safely before it commences (or re-starts).

Ensure three checks for safety have been performed before the task commences:

- Do I know how to do the job?
- Do I have the right equipment?
- Is my environment safe?

What are the basic procedures and steps for cleaning the facility?

- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and dry them thoroughly using a disposable paper towel if available.
- Put on personal protective equipment.
- Where possible, ventilate the area.
- Check that all equipment and materials are safe to use before starting the task.
- Visually inspect the work area and using the “step back” process, check to ensure that the area is safe.
- If there is a hazard and you are not able to find a solution, you **must** inform your immediate supervisor before proceeding.
- Set up hazard warning signs so they can be clearly seen by all.

**Use the following—**

**Personal protective equipment (PPE)**

- Non-latex moisture impervious gloves (preferably disposable)

**Disinfectant (as specified in COVID 19 Chemical, Equipment, and PPE List for your region)**

- Solution diluted according to manufacturer's instructions (preferably in a bucket, but if not available use a spray bottle)

**Cloths or wipes**

- Color-coded cloths to avoid cross contamination (preferably disposable)
- Pre-moistened disinfectant wipes (if available)

**Bucket**

- Color coded to avoid cross contamination

**Standard procedures for disinfecting—**

1. Clean carefully and conscientiously—by understanding and thinking about the importance of cleaning correctly, we will do the best job we can.
2. Read the manufacturer's instructions, so you know the contact time and dilution required for the disinfectant to be effective and whether there are any materials you must not use it on.
3. Take a cloth and fold it into four.
4. Dip cloth into disinfectant solution and wring out thoroughly. (If you must use a spray bottle, avoid creating splashes).
5. Wipe surface using smooth, overlapping strokes, allowing disinfectant solution correct contact time.
6. Re-fold cloth regularly.
7. As necessary, rinse cloth and re-charge with disinfectant solution and wring out.
8. Clean systematically and methodically:
  - Top to bottom
  - Clean to dirty
  - Space to space
9. To damp wipe flat surfaces, clean corners and edges first, using even strokes to cover the entire area. Clean all horizontal and vertical surfaces to hand height, especially frequently touched points including:

- Light switches / pulls	- Telephones
- Door handles	- Keyboards (as appropriate)
- Door plates	- TV remotes
- Lift (elevator) controls	- Dispensers
- Tables	- Taps
- Desks	- Shower fixtures
- Cabinets	- Shower curtains / screen
- Chairs	- Toilet flush handles
- Wall mouldings	- Toilet seats
- Window sills	- Bathroom handrails

10. Renew your disinfectant every 20 minutes or when the solution becomes dirty (if sooner).
11. When your cloth becomes heavily soiled, change it.
12. When task is complete, dispose of remaining disinfectant. Clean and disinfect bucket or spray bottle.
13. Remove and clean hazard warning signs.
14. If using disposable cloths, dispose of as waste. (If using microfibre cloths, remove to be laundered).
15. Remove disposable gloves and deposit as waste (if using re-usable gloves, wash thoroughly with soap and water, spray with disinfectant and allow to dry).
16. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and dry thoroughly using a disposable paper towel if available.

## Appendix B

# Safety & Security Operational Recommendations

The purpose is to develop a generic set of recommended “best practices,” focusing on operational requirements related to the safety and security of the facility and personnel. All procedures should be vetted through CDC and/or local public health entities prior to implementation.

### Operations (Physical Environment)

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Physical Environment includes but is not limited to the following:

- Academic facilities (schools) - including shared campuses
- Administration Buildings
- Operational Support Buildings - facilities, food services, safety and security
- Athletic fields and practice facilities

### Access Control Guidelines

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Security staff should work with district leadership to develop plans, guidelines, and mandates that specify how students and staff will enter and exit the building each day. Areas of importance include:

- Staff points of entry with verification processes in place where employees are cleared for work
- Student single points of entry that support temperature checks, thermal scanners, or safety checks, etc. (Most districts will use health staff rather than security staff to conduct any required temperature checks.)
- Development of procedures to specify who is responsible for each service
- Definition of the role security have in social distancing enforcement at schools
- Review of electronic thermal detection resources for both short-term and long-term use
- Defining visitor management procedures and limiting access to school buildings
- Developing a quarantine location within each school/building for individuals that become ill or are detected to have a fever
- Developing access guidelines for those coming to pick up individuals that may be ill

- Identify areas where plexiglass might be used to create a barrier between individuals:
  - Main office
  - Health clinics
  - Registrar’s office
  - Counseling offices
  - Student desks

Safety and security should develop plans on how to monitor social distancing requirements outside of a facility, prioritizing the following:

- Hourly checks of playgrounds, parking lots, fields, athletic areas, etc.
- Conduct a physical security assessment of each facility prior to opening and mitigate/close any areas that may attract large groups of people.
- Do not allow lingering or lengthy socializing after school/between periods. Keep students moving.
- Manage ingress and egress with specific traffic control patterns and high visibility.

## Processing Considerations

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District safety and security authorities that have a responsibility for detaining, transporting, or processing individuals should consider the following guidelines in developing modified procedures:

- Ability to cite and release individuals for low level offenses
- PPE for security individuals engaged in the detaining/processing of individuals (mask, gloves, sanitizer, disposable coveralls, etc.)
- Partner with local jurisdictions to conduct processing in one central location to minimize frequency of transport.
- Procedures for disinfecting patrol cars after each transport
- Procedures for disinfecting spaces that are utilized for processing

## Safety and Security Daily Operations

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Safety and security departments should consider the following in developing operational plans that address physical environment concerns:

- Minimize law enforcement staff from gathering in one location for on/off shift requirements.
- Conduct virtual briefings and minimize department staff from gathering in one location during or in between shifts.
- Individual assigned computers with PPE available for cleaning
- Individual assigned patrol cars (if possible), or disinfectant plan after each use
- Six-foot clearances in dispatch centers with disinfectant procedures established after each shift or personnel rotation
- Inventories of supplies needed to disinfect vehicles and spaces after use



## Emergency Management

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Safety and security should consult with the Office of Emergency Management for their district and consider the following when developing modified procedures:

- Identify with a cross-functional district leadership team the state and district requirements and procedures for emergency drills (e.g., fire, storm, earthquake, or active shooter situations) and determine if there will be any changes due to COVID 19 social distancing requirements. Ensure that accommodations are specified for students with disabilities.
- Develop lockdown/shelter in place procedures that support social distancing requirements of six feet or more.
- Develop evacuation procedures that support social distancing requirements of at least feet.
- Test your plan and identify any gaps/barriers in new procedures.
- Communicate changes to the emergency procedures and continue to monitor federal and state guidelines related to emergency drills in schools.

## Appendix C

# Working Groups

### Facilities Working Group

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#### Co-Chairs:

**Alex Belanger**, Assistant Superintendent of Facilities Management and Planning for the Fresno Unified School District. He is responsible for overseeing 3,862 Classrooms located at 99 schools with 12 non-instructional sites totaling, 8.26 M square feet on 1,277.66 acres. Mr. Belanger has over 26 years of experience in general contracting and recovery of major construction projects, public and commercial maintenance and operations services, construction management and public and private design/sustainability program management.

**Clint Herbic**, Associate Superintendent of Operational Services for the Pinellas County Schools. Mr. Herbic oversees the operation of the district's Safety & Security (Area Maintenance Supervisors), Building Operations, Schools Police, Food Services, Transportation, Warehousing, Office of the School Board Architect, Utility Management, Maintenance, and Environmental & Quality Improvement Services, Pest Control, and Turf Maintenance in the eighth largest district in the state and the 28th largest district in the nation ).

#### Members:

- John Dufay, Executive Director, Maintenance & Operations, Albuquerque Public Schools
- Darin Hargraves, Senior Director of Maintenance and Operations, Anchorage School District
- Tim Bacon, Director, Maintenance and Operations, Aurora Public Schools
- Sam Bays, Director of Physical Plant Operations, Broward County Schools
- Clarence Carson, Chief of Facilities, Chicago Public Schools
- Trena Marshal, Executive Director, Facility Management, Denver Public Schools
- Jason Duke, Executive Director of Operations, Fresno Unified School District
- Jane Banks, Fresno Unified School District
- John Shea, Chief Executive Officer, Division of School Facilities, New York City Department of Education
- John Hensley, Director of Physical Plant Operations, San Diego Unified School District

## Transportation Working Group

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### Chair:

**James Beekman**, General Management of Transportation, Hillsborough County Public Schools. He is responsible transporting over 90,000 students daily on 837 routes that cover an annual total of 17 million miles. In addition to yellow bus, Mr. Beekman is also responsible for maintaining over 600 vehicles in the district's white fleet, which is used by a variety of departments in the District. He is President of the Florida Association of Public Transportation and has been recognized by School Bus Fleet Magazine as the national 2014 Administrator of the Year.

### Members:

- Royce Bins, Executive Director of Transportation, Albuquerque Public Schools
- Kris Hafezizadeh, Executive Director of Transportation and Vehicles Services, Austin Independent School District
- Steven McElroy, Executive Director of Business and Operations, Columbus City Schools
- Reginald Reuben, Director of Transportation, Fresno Unified School District
- Nicole Portee, Executive Director of Operations Systems Support Services, Guilford County Schools
- David Palmer, Deputy Director of Transportation (Retired), Los Angeles Unified School District
- Orlando Alonso, Transportation Director, Miami-Dade County Public Schools
- William Wen, Senior Director of Transportation, Orange County Public Schools
- Megan Patton, Director of Pupil Transportation, Pittsburgh Public Schools
- Shane Searchwell, Director of Transportation Services, School District of Palm Beach County
- Nathan Graf, San Antonio Independent School District

## Safety, Security, and Emergency Management Working Group

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### Co-Chairs:

**Jason Matlock**, Director of Emergency Management, Safety and Security, Minneapolis Public Schools. He is responsible for supervising 600 staff and over 70 sites in all aspects of prevention, mitigation, response and recovery while maintaining a focus on equity and support of a safe and welcoming school climate. Mr. Matlock has over twenty years of experience in law enforcement and school safety with multiple certifications in emergency management, change management, non-violent crisis intervention, threat assessment, and thousands of hours assessing and training staff in various aspects of school safety.


**Michael Eaton**, Chief of School Security for the Denver Public Schools. He is responsible for overseeing approximately 145 staff that provide 24/7 safety and security services to the district, which includes the Department of Safety leadership, armed patrol staff, campus-based safety officers, 24/7 communications dispatch center, fingerprinting and badging, emergency preparedness, crossing guards, and investigations. Mr. Eaton is also responsible for the planning, coordination and implementation of all access control, video surveillance and other security related infrastructure throughout the district. He is the President of the Colorado Association of School Safety and Law Enforcement Officials.

### Members:

- Brian Katz, Chief of Safety, Security and Emergency Preparedness, Broward County Public Schools
- Lester Fultz, Chief of Safety and Security (Retired), Cleveland Metropolitan School District
- Tina Ingram, Executive Director of Safety and Security, Durham County Public Schools
- Jenine Stevenson, Emergency Management Specialist, Durham County Public Schools
- Armand Chavez, Emergency Planning Crisis Response Manager, Fresno Unified School District
- Kevin Bethel, Special Advisor on School Safety, School District of Philadelphia
- Laura Olson, Director of Security and Emergency Management, St. Paul Public Schools

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Albuquerque, Anchorage, Arlington (Texas), Atlanta, Aurora (Colorado), Austin, Baltimore, Birmingham, Boston, Bridgeport, Broward County (Ft. Lauderdale), Buffalo, Charleston County, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Chicago, Cincinnati, Clark County (Las Vegas), Cleveland, Columbus, Dallas, Dayton, Denver, Des Moines, Detroit, Duval County (Jacksonville), El Paso, Fort Worth, Fresno, Guilford County (Greensboro, N.C.), Hawaii, Hillsborough County (Tampa), Houston, Indianapolis, Jackson, Jefferson County (Louisville), Kansas City, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Manchester, Miami-Dade County, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Nashville, New Orleans, New York City, Newark, Norfolk, Oakland, Oklahoma City, Omaha, Orange County (Orlando), Palm Beach County, Philadelphia, Pinellas County, Pittsburgh, Portland, Providence, Puerto Rico, Richmond, Rochester, Sacramento, San Antonio, San Diego, San Francisco, Santa Ana, Seattle, Shelby County, St. Louis, St. Paul, Stockton, Toledo, Toronto, Tulsa, Washington, D.C., Washoe, and Wichita





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**RESEARCH AND ASSESSMENT REPORT**



# Ensuring a Data-Driven Approach to Reopening Schools After COVID-19

Recommendations for Research and Assessment  
June 2020



## ABOUT THE COUNCIL

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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Council of the Great City Schools

# Ensuring a Data-Driven Approach To Reopening Schools After COVID-19

Recommendations for  
Research and Assessment



June 2020



# Table of Contents

- Introduction ..... 2
- Informing Decisions on Programming, Policy, and Budget..... 3
- Data Collection and Evaluation..... 4
  - Key Considerations for Research Departments ..... 4
  - Evaluating Strengths and Weaknesses of Distance Learning Implementation ..... 5
- Identifying Student, Staff, and Community Needs ..... 6
- Addressing Equity Disparities for Students and Families..... 7
- Assessing Impacts on Student Learning Outcomes ..... 8
- Rethinking Policies and Protocols for Calculating Student Enrollment ..... 9
- Rethinking Transportation and GIS Algorithms ..... 10
- Temporarily Suspending External Research in Schools..... 11



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# Ensuring a Data-Driven Approach to Reopening Schools after COVID-19: Recommendations for Research and Assessment

## Introduction

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The pandemic brought on by COVID-19 has brought cities to a standstill and disrupted the functions and operations of school districts across the country. Urban districts with dense populations have been hit the hardest by the virus, and families in large urban cities have been significantly impacted. As school districts begin to plan for the reopening of schools in the summer and fall, research, assessment, and evaluation departments in the Council of the Great City Schools have an important role to play in school district decision making.

Research departments uniquely connect to many other divisions in the central office – curriculum, information technology, student support services, career and technical education, assessment, and facilities – and the data they collect often serve as the glue that holds district operations together. As each of these divisions develops plans for reopening or reengineering school, research departments should be involved at the beginning to inform decisions and assess the impact of changes on student and staff outcomes. Superintendents should also meet regularly with research directors to make sure that the research perspective is included in district plans, and representatives from research departments should participate in cross-functional teams to ensure data and research findings are incorporated into decision-making.

Specifically, research departments can contribute to the reopening of schools in 2020 by:

- Informing Decisions on Programming, Policy, and Budget
- Evaluating District Initiatives
- Identifying Student, Staff, and Community Needs
- Addressing Equity Disparities for Students and Families
- Assessing Impacts on Student Learning Outcomes
- Evaluating Strengths and Weaknesses of Distance Learning Implementation
- Rethinking Policies and Protocols for Calculating Student Enrollment
- Rethinking Transportation and GIS Algorithms
- Temporarily Suspending External Research in Schools

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

## Informing Decisions on Programming, Policy, and Budget

---

Superintendents should include research departments in a wide array of policy and planning discussions to ensure that the decisions are driven by data and research. Specifically, research departments should:

- 1 Participate on committees and task forces to reopen schools. Research departments offer the unique ability to gather and provide data on the multiple needs of the school district as well as the broader community. These should include strategic collaboration with—
  - Offices, staff, and community leaders who represent English language learner communities and culture
  - Offices and staff who represent families of students with disabilities
  - Family engagement coordinators
- 2 Support the superintendent and district departments by researching various state, school board, and district policies to identify revisions needed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3 Provide literature briefs on best practices in areas requiring planning and decision making. Several research departments in member districts have developed research scans or briefs on key research questions identified by district administrators. Topics for these literature scans include blended learning, the impact of class size and student teacher ratios on student achievement, summer learning loss, and extended year programs, among others.
- 4 Participate in and inform discussions on human capital initiatives. District leadership should convene Human Resources Officers, Chief Financial Officers, Chief Academic Officers, and leaders of research to develop a short- and long-term strategy for human capital acquisition and deployment. Many districts are currently rethinking staff roles and deployment to align with state social distancing guidelines. For example, districts that are moving to blended learning will have to consider simultaneous staff requirements for in-person instruction and online support for students learning from home.

Moreover, due to a projected loss in state and local revenues in the coming months, many school districts will need to deploy school staff efficiently and, in some cases, adapt to potential hiring freezes or reductions in staff. Involving research departments in human capital initiatives is critical for effectively evaluating these initiatives in the coming months. For example, careful consideration should be given to the return on investment or student achievement outcomes for district initiatives such as instructional coaches, after-school or extended-day programs, and the like.

- 5 Collaborate with academic departments to develop and model multiple options for school schedules. When schools reopen, many will have to adhere to social distancing requirements to ensure the safety of students and staff. It may not be feasible to have all students in the building at once, if at all. Therefore, districts will need to model school schedules for multiple scenarios that account for different modes of instruction, varying costs, and staff requirements. Some considerations for modeling new school schedules might include:
  - Student-to-teacher ratios during in-person or distance learning instructional time. This might include the possibility that teachers will have separate A and B day class rosters even in elementary grades. Moreover, teachers may be permanently assigned to distance learning classrooms with higher per-pupil class sizes.
  - Staff assignments and requirements for:
    - online instruction
    - in-person instruction
    - blended learning

- Social and emotion supports for students
  - Costs related to:
    - Technology infrastructure for distance learning (e.g., adding data collection programs or algorithms for student enrollment and engagement)
    - Printing take-home paper packets with districtwide assessments
  - Including recess, the arts, and extracurricular activities into school schedules
- 6 Partner with community organizations that provide critical services to students and families. Research departments will need to develop data-sharing agreements to ensure community organizations and school district initiatives support one another. New school operations and norms will require updates to agreements with district partners.

## Data Collection and Evaluation

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Data collection and evaluation are critical considerations in the planning and implementation of district initiatives and programming during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Involving research departments as early as possible in the decision-making process is the key to ensuring that initiatives can be properly evaluated throughout the duration of COVID-19-related activities and beyond. Earlier inclusion gives research departments the time needed to produce more meaningful metrics for evaluating programs. The following sections outline strategic considerations for research departments and how they evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of distance learning.

### Key Considerations for Research Departments

Research departments should consider:

- 1 Developing a measurement/research plan—including the articulation of logic modeling, necessary data collection, and intentional comparisons—for the evaluation of new initiatives related to the COVID-19 pandemic
- 2 Conducting needs assessments by interviewing or surveying staff, students, families, and other stakeholders. For example, the New York City Department of Education interviewed educators about their participation in a blended learning program. The interviews provided information to inform decision-makers about online and blended learning for summer and beyond.
- 3 Ensuring surveys and other data collection activities in the district are centralized to maintain alignment of efforts and avoid overwhelming parents, staff, and students with multiple survey administrations.
- 4 Developing dashboards to provide real-time disaggregated and actionable data in areas such as access to technology, student engagement, and COVID-19 infections. Dashboards make COVID-19 information easily digestible for district leaders who need to make evidence-based decisions on transportation routes and school reopening procedures.
- 5 Evaluating intersession programs (e.g., after school, summer, extended year) occurring in the district and examine programming, participant eligibility, participation rates, and program effectiveness.



## Evaluating Strengths and Weaknesses of Distance Learning Implementation

The academic literature on distance learning and blended modes of instruction comes predominantly from higher education and adult education settings. Research departments will be tasked with evaluating the effectiveness and implementation of these instructional methods in a large-scale K-12 setting. The implementation of distance learning will likely vary in quality and fidelity for elementary, middle, and high school grades. As research teams begin to plan evaluation studies, they should take into consideration the following—

- 1 Obtaining data on students and households that were not able to access computers and internet at home. It is important to assess gaps in technology access to determine the reach of district initiatives during school closures and what their effects might be on student outcomes.
- 2 Assess the distance learning/blended learning professional development that teachers have received to measure its effectiveness. Determining the quality of professional development will help districts adjust their offerings to help teachers acclimate to a digital learning environment.
- 3 Evaluate the implementation of distance learning during school closures at each grade level. Assess the effects of variations in distance learning on student achievement gains or losses. Districts should use the findings to guide policy for the reopening of schools, implementing blended learning, or continuing distance learning in the fall and beyond. School districts should plan for the possibility of future closures. Evaluating distance learning implementation should include the following benchmarks:
  - Established distance learning procedures to ensure high engagement and strong participation rates were achieved
  - All students, particularly low income or historically marginalized students, can access district distance learning opportunities at the same rate as their peers
  - Efficient and effective teaching practices as teachers adapt to distance learning
  - Consistent grading procedures to ensure student assignment and workloads during distance learning are comparable across the district
  - Survey parents, students, teachers, principals, and central office staff on how supported they felt in their daily responsibility during the school closure and what the district can do to improve
  - Focus groups with principals and teachers to get feedback on all aspects of the district's response during the school closure
- 4 Evaluations should include comprehensive quantitative analysis of student outcomes including:
  - Benchmark assessments when reliability and validity have been established
  - Diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments for teachers to understand individual student instructional needs
  - Engagement/attendance data (logins, participation, assignment completion, etc.)
- 5 Qualitative analysis should inform how distance learning was implemented and what policies and decisions may have influenced student outcomes. Key considerations include:
  - Staff training for implementing distance learning and the effectiveness of professional development
  - Understanding the gaps in access to technology over time for students and staff
  - Staff practices for addressing social emotional needs of students during distance learning
  - Teachers' ability to adapt instructional delivery for distance learning

## Identifying Student, Staff, and Community Needs

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The COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to take a significant toll on mental health and well-being. The lack of social interaction is difficult for all, and many students, staff, and families must also process the loss of friends and colleagues. Moreover, some students or staff may currently be living in abusive or traumatic environments (i.e., increases in domestic violence, cases of child abuse, LGBTQIA students living with families not supportive of their identities, etc.). Research departments can be instrumental in gauging the current and future needs of students, staff, and the community during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research departments should:

- 1 Survey students, staff, parents, and community members about their social, emotional, and mental health needs during the COVID-19 pandemic to better plan for the reopening of schools. Examples of district surveys are available in the COVID-19 Research Resources section of the Council’s document sharing platform ([www.edwires.org](http://www.edwires.org)). Many districts have employed mail, phone, and web surveys to improve response rates from typically hard to reach community members. The surveys should focus on topics such as understanding—
  - Instructional Needs
    - The needs of English learners and students with disabilities during and after the pandemic
    - The needs of students with individualized education plans (IEPs) when schools reopen
    - Opportunities for integrating distance learning into normal school district operations (e.g., replacing out-of-school suspension with distance learning opportunities, employing distance learning opportunities after school or on evenings to mitigate learning loss)
    - Challenges students and parents face implementing home-based instruction
    - Obstacles teachers experienced when providing online-only instruction for students
    - Supports and professional development teachers need to provide high quality online instruction
    - Lessons that teachers have learned while providing online instruction that they wish to share with colleagues
    - Quality of online interactions (time interacting each day, opportunities for collaboration, student learning outcomes, etc.)
    - Quality of learning content (accessibility, rigor)
    - Cultural relevancy and responsiveness of academic instruction and content during distance learning
  - Social/Emotional Needs<sup>1</sup>
    - Levels of stress for students and staff
    - Coping strategies for stress and creative outlets for students and staff
    - Social interaction with peers during distance learning for students and staff
    - Evaluation of district-provided social and emotional support to ensure it is culturally relevant and responsive

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1 For more information on addressing the social-emotional and mental health needs of students, staff, and families, see the Council’s report [Addressing Mental Health and Social-Emotional Wellness in the COVID-19 Crisis](#).

- Basic Needs and Accessibility
  - Food, housing, and health needs during school closures
  - Patterns and concentrations of resource scarcity (food, internet, and other deserts in the community), ideally using Geographic Information Systems (GIS)
  - The impact of job losses in the school community
  - Instructional needs of families (internet access, school supplies, access to a computer or tablet, etc.)
  - Characteristics of educational spaces at home during distance learning
  - Challenges and obstacles to connecting with instructors during distance learning
  - Guardian preferences concerning modes of instruction moving into the fall (distance learning, hybrid, AB schedule, etc.)
  - A household’s work arrangements and childcare needs in the fall for parents and staff
  - Members of a household (e.g., elderly parents, chronically ill family members) who may be at a greater risk from exposure to the coronavirus
- School Facilities/Safety Needs
  - Staff preferences for returning to work if there is not a vaccine for the coronavirus (returning to work full-time, telework, etc.)
  - Conditions that should be in place for parents and staff to feel safe returning to school and work
  - Tracking and addressing student behavioral issues on school-related digital platforms
  - Staff suggestions for managing visitors in schools, including tutors, outside program providers, contractors, parents, etc.

## Addressing Equity Disparities for Students and Families

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Council member districts have embraced efforts to ensure that schools provide an equitable education to all students and are working to address historic inequity, bias, and oppression existing in our schools. These inequities are often interrelated, including discrimination based on race, nationality, and cultural/language heritage; gender; sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression; religion; family structure; housing situation; interaction with the justice system; interaction with the healthcare system; physical, intellectual, or emotional disability; and learning differences. COVID-19 school closures have the potential to exacerbate inequities that already exist and contribute to greater learning loss for vulnerable populations.

To assist in these efforts to combat racism and oppression, research departments should:

- 1 Collect disaggregated demographic data in their evaluations, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, to identify how school closures are differentially impacting student groups (such as English language learners, students with disabilities, students of color, economically disadvantaged students, as well as differential effects according to characteristics such as age or gender). These data can inform the planning of resource allocations (i.e., distribution of technology, mental health support staff, student success teams, etc.).
- 2 Conduct an analysis of students and families the district was unable to reach during distance learning in the spring of SY 2019-20 to inform a more comprehensive approach for the reopening of schools for SY 2020-21. Students who were hard to reach or rarely engaged during school closures will need additional support in the fall to address learning loss and bridge technological gaps at home.

- 3 Conduct an analysis of who are the most vulnerable students, how they are performing, and to what extent the district has provided additional supports for their instruction.
- 4 Examine models of schooling that remove barriers and help create more educational opportunities for the most vulnerable students in the district.
- 5 Conduct a needs assessment of technology and internet access among the district's low income and vulnerable students to plan for the possibility of rolling school closures or providing distance learning or blended learning in the future.
- 6 Evaluate the distance learning professional development provided to teachers to assess how issues of equity have been included in the training. Reviews should include how culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, anti-oppression pedagogy, and asset-based approaches to education have been included in distance learning guidance.
- 7 Assess the impact of food and housing insecurity on schools and curriculum needs.
- 8 Determine whether fluctuations in family income or employment status owing to the COVID-19 pandemic are reflected in school lunch classifications for students.

## Assessing Impacts on Student Learning Outcomes

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The first instinct of many districts will be to immediately test students upon their return to school in order to gauge their academic level and needs. This would be a mistake for many reasons. To begin with, districts should focus on creating learning environments that feel both physically and psychologically safe for students (and adults). Educators need to work to reengage students in school, emphasizing the importance of the school community and the joy of learning. Administering tests too soon undermines both objectives.

Districts also need to ensure that assessment data are not misinterpreted or misused by teachers or administrators. Teachers far too often end up confusing scale scores with a student's capacity to learn. Based on standardized assessment data, teachers place kids into high or low ability groups or provide low levels of instructional rigor to lower performing students. This is not an effective strategy for addressing unfinished learning, and not an appropriate use of assessment data.

Another caution for districts will be the temptation to administer standardized assessments should online only instruction be extended. Administering computer adaptive or benchmark assessments while students are learning from home is very likely to result in data that are invalid and an inaccurate measure of student achievement. It is, however, entirely appropriate to employ computer adaptive or standardized assessments as a broad temperature check a few weeks into the school year—which is when they are typically administered—should districts return to face-to-face or blended learning. But it is more important than ever to ensure that students have had an initial period of a few weeks to reacclimate to the school setting, and that teachers are given careful guidance on what the data mean—and what it doesn't—and how the results should drive instruction.

Once standardized or benchmark data are collected, research and assessment departments will be instrumental in gauging and understanding the impact of the COVID-19 school closures on student learning outcomes. These activities should include:

- 1 Creating testing calendars that conform to district social distancing practices. Districts that plan on implementing block scheduling or blended learning models should consider extending the testing window, allowing schools the time to rotate students into school buildings and administer assessments.
- 2 Developing a student assessment plan for the possibility of continued distance learning into SY 2020-21. Research departments should begin discussions with assessment providers regarding the reliability and validity of online test administration for all district assessments, including benchmark assessments, assessments for students with disabilities and English learners, and state assessments.

- 3 Ensuring a real-time data system to monitor student progress and support educators. Research departments can create this system through comprehensive balanced assessments with the following objectives:
  - Gauging learning loss from extended COVID-19 school closures. Ideally, this assessment should happen in early fall of SY 2020-21
  - Monitoring progress during the school year toward learning goals to address:
    - Historical learning gaps between student groups, and
    - Learning gaps for all students because of COVID-19 school closures.
  - Evaluating learning progress at the conclusion of specific instructional periods
  - Providing professional development to leadership and instructional staff to increase the data literacy of school district employees
  - Reviewing what worked and did not work in providing instruction during the remote learning period
  - Using the Great City Schools on-line academic key performance indicators to monitor how your district compares to others
- 4 Collaborating with academic teams to review curriculum maps and curricular modifications to determine content not covered during school closures. Research departments can use this information to revise district benchmark assessments that schools will use to gauge student progress.<sup>2</sup>
- 5 Providing timing, space, material, and technology assessment accommodations for ELLs and students with disabilities for any assessments or benchmarks administered virtually. Particular attention should be placed on groups that would normally need extra supports (such as students with disabilities and ELLs).

## Rethinking Policies and Protocols for Calculating Student Enrollment

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Student enrollment is a basic metric for school districts that grounds every facet of district planning and operations. As school districts begin to plan for the reopening of schools in the summer and fall, consideration should be given to how student enrollment is measured, given the array of challenges presented by social distancing. To help address these challenges, research departments should:

- 1 Obtain an accurate count of enrolled students before, during, and after COVID-19 closures. Districts should work with their state to broaden the period for counting students and create reliable metrics for counting students engaged in distance or blended learning. Some current methods of collecting enrollment will not apply to the new circumstances. Districts will need to account for the various ways students can “attend” school (face-to-face, virtually, face-to-face for two days and virtually for three days, etc.). Attendance could feasibly be measured in unique ways, such as every day (face-to-face), once per week (virtually), and two to three days per week (blended learning). Other ways a student can demonstrate attendance may include:
  - Number of logins onto an online system
  - Completion of daily or weekly assignments
  - Daily or weekly phone calls or emails to students and families
  - Number of students picking up instructional take-home packets

<sup>2</sup> See forthcoming reports from the Council of the Great City Schools and Student Achievement Partners on addressing unfinished learning and priority instructional content.



- 2 Pay attention to getting an accurate count of students who have been hard to locate, such as students in low-income households, homeless students, students whose parents are essential workers, and English language learners. Should schools need to close again, explicit plans to engage and count these students must be developed.
- 3 Create a flexible attendance policy. Many families are undergoing substantial challenges that can affect a student's ability to regularly check into an online class or report to school buildings. Moreover, several districts have conducted parent surveys to gauge the percentage of students who may not return to school without a vaccine for the coronavirus. To account for these varying circumstances, districts should create attendance policies that allow students who are disproportionately affected by the pandemic to receive additional excused absences and make up classwork later.

Research and academic departments can take this opportunity to collaborate on aligning attendance and grading policies to ensure that students continue to be held to high expectations while being offered flexibility in meeting those expectations.

- 4 Account for student mobility. The economic impact of the pandemic can potentially lead to higher than usual movement within, into, and out of the school district. Research departments should therefore factor the possibility of higher than average student mobility into their enrollment projections, implementing robust systems for assessing student enrollment in each school prior to or immediately after school reopens to adjust teacher assignments as needed.
- 5 Ensure an accurate count of low-income students. The pandemic is causing massive economic strife that is affecting large numbers of families in urban areas. As a result, the number of low-income students is likely to rise. Getting an accurate count of these students will have major implications for school funding, evaluation of district initiatives, and analysis of student achievement during this time.

District leaders should work closely with research departments to broaden measures of poverty to ensure the district is able to account for all low-income students (since districts are providing meals to all students that need them). Possible approaches might include:

- Moving toward using direct certification if your district does not do so already
- Matching names of students with households that receive unemployment benefits
- Continuing or restarting household surveys for low-income families

## Rethinking Transportation and GIS Algorithms

Given the economic impact of COVID-19, student mobility is likely to increase in response to changes in housing circumstances. Below are recommendations for research departments that manage Geographic Information Systems (GIS):

- 1 Ensuring the GIS system already includes a complete database of addresses with coordinates (latitude & longitude). This information will expedite locating students spatially as their home addresses change.
- 2 Many school systems are actively working to maintain contact with students through online learning activities that may extend through the summer. Consider updating address records and phone numbers as part of the ongoing connection with students.
- 3 Districts should consider developing new approaches to transportation that include social distancing for bus routes and considerations for siblings/students from the same address sharing seats. Consider utilizing bike lanes (if they exist) and encourage students to bike to school if it is safe to do so.
- 4 Districts should consider implementing applications or systems to support contact tracing and the identification of COVID-19 virus clusters based on geographic proximity.

## Temporarily Suspending External Research in Schools

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Due to the unpredictable impact of COVID-19 on the new structure and reopening of schools, districts need to create learning environments that feel physically and psychologically safe. To ease the transition back to school buildings, there should also be an emphasis placed on re-establishing everyday routines and providing students with a safe space to share and process their emotions and experiences. Having outside researchers in school buildings may undermine this sense of security and openness. To this end, we suggest suspending all external research in schools for the time being. We propose this language as an example for school district websites:

Due to the COVID-19 emergency, active data collection associated with external research is currently suspended as campuses are closed for an indefinite period. Capacity to participate in research activities will also be limited when students and staff return to campus locations at a future date. Concerns include safety as well as atypical contexts affecting data collection and research validity. This temporary suspension will allow schools to maintain a safe educational environment for students and time to return to normal working conditions.

Research departments should craft very detailed external research agendas that help address district priorities once restrictions for the COVID-19 emergency are relaxed.

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Albuquerque, Anchorage, Arlington (Texas), Atlanta, Aurora (Colorado), Austin, Baltimore, Birmingham, Boston, Bridgeport, Broward County (Ft. Lauderdale), Buffalo, Charleston County, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Chicago, Cincinnati, Clark County (Las Vegas), Cleveland, Columbus, Dallas, Dayton, Denver, Des Moines, Detroit, Duval County (Jacksonville), El Paso, Fort Worth, Fresno, Guilford County (Greensboro, N.C.), Hawaii, Hillsborough County (Tampa), Houston, Indianapolis, Jackson, Jefferson County (Louisville), Kansas City, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Manchester, Miami-Dade County, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Nashville, New Orleans, New York City, Newark, Norfolk, Oakland, Oklahoma City, Omaha, Orange County (Orlando), Palm Beach County, Philadelphia, Pinellas County, Pittsburgh, Portland, Providence, Puerto Rico, Richmond, Rochester, Sacramento, San Antonio, San Diego, San Francisco, Santa Ana, Seattle, Shelby County, St. Louis, St. Paul, Stockton, Toledo, Toronto, Tulsa, Washington, D.C., Washoe, and Wichita



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**UNFINISHED LEARNING REPORT**



# STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT PARTNERS



June 24, 2020

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## **National Education Groups Lay Out Blueprint for Instructional Priorities and Strategies for Upcoming School Year**

Guidance Emphasizes Importance of Addressing Unfinished Learning in the Context of Grade-level Work

Student Achievement Partners and the Council of the Great City Schools today released the following companion documents laying out a blueprint for schools across the country to get the nation's schoolchildren back on track academically after a disrupted school year.

- *2020–21 Priority Instructional Content in English Language Arts/literacy and Mathematics* ([www.achievethecore.org/2020-21\\_PriorityInstructionalContent](http://www.achievethecore.org/2020-21_PriorityInstructionalContent))
- *Addressing Unfinished Learning After COVID-19 School Closures* (<https://tinyurl.com/ya4g73f9>)

The complementary resources identify grade-level instructional priorities in math and literacy for the 2020-21 school year and describe how schools can recognize and address unfinished learning among their students while ensuring equitable access to grade-level standards and mental health supports.

The two national organizations stress that, while students will have incomplete learning from this school year, resorting to extensive testing, reteaching, and remediation at the expense of grade-level work will further jeopardize the academic success of students, particularly those with specialized learning needs.

The documents, which were developed in tandem with teams of national experts in math and literacy, articulate the rationale for sustaining a focus on grade-level work; outline a set of streamlined, high-leverage standards and topics; and address ways to support the social and emotional development of students. The blueprints also describe specifically how unfinished learning can manifest itself and what teachers can do in math and literacy to address gaps without losing instructional momentum.

The materials were developed by the two partner organizations to help school districts across the county address the incomplete education that many students received over the course of the last school year and keep students on track with their studies in the years to come.

*Student Achievement Partners is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving achievement for all K-12 students nationally.*

*The Council of the Great City Schools is a coalition of 76 of the nation's largest city public school districts.*



# Addressing Unfinished Learning After COVID-19 School Closures

June 2020



## ABOUT THE COUNCIL

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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Council of the Great City Schools

# Addressing Unfinished Learning After COVID-19 School Closures



June 2020

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# Table of Contents

- Purpose and Audience ..... 2
- Principles and Strategies for Addressing Unfinished Learning ..... 3
  - #1. Stick to grade-level content and instructional rigor ..... 3
  - #2. Focus on the depth of instruction, not on the pace..... 4
  - #3. Prioritize content and learning ..... 4
  - #4. Ensure inclusion of each and every learner..... 5
  - #5. Identify and address gaps in learning through instruction, avoiding the misuse of standardized testing ..... 7
  - #6. Capitalize on commonalities, not differences ..... 8
- Supporting Grade Transitions through Strategic Instruction ..... 9
  - How to identify essential learning..... 9
  - Instructional Priorities in Mathematics for Key Grade-Level Transitions ..... 10
    - Transition to Grade Three ..... 11
    - Transition to Grade Six ..... 13
    - Transition to Algebra I ..... 15
    - Transition from Algebra I to Geometry ..... 17
  - Instructional Priorities in English Language Arts for Key Grade-Level Transitions..... 20
    - Transition to Grade Three ..... 21
    - Transition to Grade Six ..... 27
    - Transition to Grade Nine ..... 33
- Appendix A: Additional Resources ..... 39
- Appendix B. Information on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) ..... 41
- Appendix C. Advisory Committee..... 42



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# Purpose and Audience

The current health crisis has caused an unprecedented disruption in the education of children throughout the world. In the first chaotic days of the crisis, schools across the United States organized to assemble and distribute instructional materials and to make a rapid transformation from school-based to home-based learning. Lesson plans were written and sent home with meals, thousands of electronic devices were purchased and distributed, hot spots were set up, and teachers were trained in how to teach from a distance. The energy, dedication, and sense of urgency that have gone into these efforts have been nothing short of extraordinary.

Nonetheless, the impact of this crisis on all students is significant. As districts resume instruction in the upcoming school year, they will not only need to address the significant social and emotional toll that the crisis has taken on children, but also widespread unfinished learning and learning losses sustained in the wake of school closures. In a companion document—[Addressing Mental Health and Social-Emotional Wellness in the COVID-19 Crisis](#)—we provide a collection of resources and guidance for creating learning environments that are physically and psychologically safe for students and staff. In particular, that document promotes a proactive and inclusive approach to communication, outreach, and intervention, as well as shared ownership of the mental health and social and emotional wellbeing of all students.

In this guide, we focus more directly on the instructional challenges posed by school closures. In particular, we present district curriculum leaders and staff with an instructional framework for addressing unfinished learning and learning losses, as well as a review of essential skills and content in English language arts and mathematics to support access to grade-level content in key grade transitions for all students. We also provide additional resources for districts to consult as they design and implement their curricular materials for the coming school year, including further information on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to ensure that grade-level content is accessible for all students. While this guide touches on some of the specialized instructional needs of English language learners, a forthcoming Council guide will provide more detailed guidance and materials in this area.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, this guide is intended to complement resources being released by various other organizations, including Student Achievement Partners (SAP) and the Council of Chief State School Officers, that also address the challenges of [prioritizing instruction](#),<sup>2</sup> addressing unfinished learning, and meeting the social-emotional and mental health needs of students. The common messages found across these materials illustrate a consensus in the field around the importance of safeguarding equity and access in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. We hope that the following guide contributes to that national conversation, and to the capacity of urban school districts to effectively support students and families.

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1 All of the Council's COVID-19 resources can be found at [cgcs.org](https://cgcs.org), or by clicking [here](#). This page is being updated with new information and materials regularly.

2 See Student Achievement Partners' Resource, [2020-21 Priority Instructional Content in English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics](#).

# Principles and Strategies for Addressing Unfinished Learning

In many ways, the instructional challenges that school districts will be faced with in the 2020-21 school year will be unprecedented. Students will be returning to school with significant anxiety and likely trauma, as well as considerable unfinished learning from the past school year. However, while the scale of the challenge (owing to the shared nature of the educational disruption) may be novel, unfinished learning is nothing new. Addressing skill gaps, incomplete learning, and misconceptions is a necessary and natural part of the teaching (and learning) process, although it is one with which educators have traditionally struggled. All too often, unfinished learning leads to remediation or pull-out interventions that serve to further isolate students and impede their access to rigorous, engaging grade-level content—this is how something as natural as unfinished learning leads to intractable achievement and opportunity gaps. Addressing unfinished learning in a constructive manner is therefore essential not only to a district's short-term response to the current pandemic, but long-term commitment to educational equity and excellence.

In this section, we introduce six overarching principles for supporting students with unfinished learning. In planning instruction for the coming school years, districts should (1) **stick to grade-level content and instructional rigor**, and (2) **focus on the depth of instruction, rather than the pace**. To provide this grade-level instruction, districts will need to help teachers (3) **prioritize content and learning**. In order to continue to reflect a districts' instructional vision and commitment to equity, educators will also need to (4) **maintain the inclusion of each and every learner** and (5) **identify and address gaps in learning through instruction, avoiding the misuse of standardized testing** to place kids into high or low ability groups or provide low levels of instructional rigor to lower performing students. Finally, districts should consider (6) **focusing on the commonalities that students share in this time of crisis, not just on their differences**.

These principles reflect high-quality instruction in general, but they will be particularly crucial as schools reopen amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, schooling may look very different than it has in previous years, and a district's academic response will need to be closely integrated with its social emotional and mental health response. But regardless of what instructional delivery model a school district implements or what combination of in-person and virtual learning it employs in the coming months and years, adhering to these overarching principles will help ensure that all students have equal access to high-quality instruction and educational opportunity.

Here is a closer look at what these principles look like in practice.

## #1. Stick to grade-level content and instructional rigor.

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Given the amount of time and learning loss since schools were shuttered, districts will face a strong temptation to test students immediately upon re-entry to school, identify their academic "deficits," and reteach or remediate. According to research, both are largely ineffective practices, resulting in student disengagement with school and greater inequities in access to grade-level instruction and educational opportunity.

Instead, school and district curriculum leaders should **keep the focus on grade-level content and rigor, addressing learning gaps as needed within the context of grade-level work**. In reading, for example, when students stumble over unfamiliar words or have difficulty understanding a text, don't retreat to less demanding or simplified texts, or assume that students who are having difficulty require remedial practice on basic reading skills. This is particularly important

for English Learners, whose struggle with reading may be a reflection of the process of second language development rather than a lack of literacy skills.

Instead, teachers should take the time to discuss the text, provide scaffolded support on how to discern the meaning of words in context, and allow opportunities for students to express their thinking and ideas with their peers. This will ensure that students continue to work with rigorous, engaging grade-level text and content. **This daily re-engagement of prior knowledge in the context of grade-level assignments will add up over time, resulting in more functional learning than if we resort to watered down instruction or try to reteach topics out of context.**

## #2. Focus on the depth of instruction, not on the pace.

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Districts should also avoid the temptation to rush to cover all of the ‘gaps’ in learning from the last school year. The pace required to cover all of this content will mean rushing ahead of many students, leaving them abandoned and discouraged. It will also feed students a steady diet of curricular junk food: shallow engagement with the content, low standards for understanding, and low cognitive demand—all bad learning habits to acquire. Moreover, at a time when social emotional wellbeing, agency, and engagement are more important than ever, instructional haste may eclipse the patient work of building academic character and motivation.

As educators we need to remain focused on the learning that could and should be happening today, and not allow ourselves to be distracted by how we will catch students up. These distractions shift our attention from *just in time learning* to *just in case teaching*. “Just in case” teaching wastes time teaching content and skills from earlier grades just in case students need it for grade-level work. “Just in time” concentrates time expenditure on needs that actually come up during grade-level work. In other words, **taking the time to provide patient, in-depth instruction allows for issues related to unfinished learning to arise naturally when dealing with new content, allowing for just in time instruction and reengagement of students in the context of grade-level work.**



### Just in Time versus Just in Case Learning: An Example in Math

In math, don't reteach fractions to eighth grade students *just in case* they need it when learning slope. For slope, they only need the specific use of fractions to represent ratios. Use the slope ratio of rise to run as a context to teach what is needed about ratio.

## #3. Prioritize content and learning.

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In order to allow sufficient time for the in-depth instruction and just in time learning described above, curriculum leaders will need to articulate the district's instructional priorities for schools and teachers—what is most important to teach within the major curricular domains at each grade level. It is important that teachers know where to invest their time and effort, what areas can be cut, and where they should teach only to awareness level to save time for priorities. What is most important deserves more time, and teachers need to be given the latitude to provide responsive feedback and allow time for constructive struggle—a very different proposition than merely offering a superficial ‘right’ or ‘wrong.’ This additional time has to come from somewhere. Further guidance on identifying essential learning at each grade level will be covered in the next section, and can be found in a complementary document from Student Achievement Partners, *2020-21 Priority Instructional Content in English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics*.



Prioritizing content and learning does not mean that students will be deprived of critical knowledge, or that their educations will be any less diverse or rich. Every topic in a district’s curriculum encompasses a collection of related ideas, skills and applications. Just because a topic is important doesn’t make every underlying or related skill or concept vital to a student’s ultimate understanding of that topic.

For example, what’s important about adding fractions with unlike denominators? This mathematical computation extends students’ developing ideas of addition from whole numbers to unit fractions. The purpose is to help students develop deeper insights into the number line, which will eventually provide a basis for coordinate graphs in algebra. So math teachers should focus their efforts on building this understanding, not on honing students’ ability to add fractions quickly or to handle particularly awkward numbers such as  $\frac{3}{17} + \frac{5}{12}$ .

English language arts textbooks, meanwhile, typically include six units per grade level for grades K-five, with texts and activities selected and organized around generic themes such as “culture and cultural identity,” “plants and the food we eat,” and “the war between the states.” The goal of such units is to provide students practice with working on different types of texts and to practice developing reading and writing skills, rather than to present a coherent treatment of the nominal topic. With this in mind, districts should consider the fact that students may get a lot more from working closely on 10 items in a unit than briefly on 18, and a class might profit more from spending a month and a half each on four units than a month each on six. This prioritization of content and learning not only promotes in-depth, rigorous instruction, but allows for the additional time teachers will need to address unfinished learning needs as they arise.

In reviewing district grade-level standards curriculum leaders need to be asking not “what are the topics that need to be covered in this grade?” but “what is the importance or purpose of this topic?” It is also an opportunity to clearly illustrate examples of the level of rigor the district intends as the target for student grade-level work, and the associated language demands. At the same time, it is necessary to keep in mind that standards describe outcomes, not inputs. It is up to teachers, with support and guidance from the district, to decide which inputs are most important for building student knowledge and skills and warrant the greatest time investments.

#### #4. Ensure inclusion of each and every learner.

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While school closures have impacted all students, some students, such as ELLs, students with disabilities, students with learning or attention issues, economically disadvantaged students, foster children, and homeless youth, will be disproportionately affected by school closures and the unanticipated, rushed switch to distance learning. When schools are back in session, the temptation of education systems will be to pull these at-risk students out of classrooms to provide enhanced support and remedial coursework. But now more than ever, it is essential to ensure that *each and every* student has equitable access to engaging grade-level content and instructional rigor.

For example, the research shows that for students with disabilities, the level of inclusion is a strong predictor of academic growth—the greater the level of inclusion (particularly 80% or more of the day), the greater the rate of academic growth.<sup>3</sup> Removing students from core instruction in an attempt to remediate or catch them up is not only counter-productive, it significantly contributes to the widening of the opportunity gap and often results in students being tracked or grouped into lower grade-level and core content classes.

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Hehir & Associates (2014, August) Review of Special Education in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts: A Synthesis Report, Boston, Massachusetts, retrieved at <https://www.bostonpublicschools.org/cms/lib/MA01906464/Centricity/Domain/249/Hehir%20SynthesisReport.pdf>.



It is also important, when addressing the disproportionate impact of the sudden change of the learning environment for English language learners, to maintain an asset-based view of these students. This view recognizes that English learners bring to the classroom their multi-competence—their capacity to see two or more languages as part of one overall system, and to use language as a thinking tool. Moreover, students from other cultural backgrounds bring new ideas and ways to think about content that will strengthen their learning, as well as the learning of their peers. Teachers should therefore resist the inclination to “water down” instruction and assignments for ELL students—and other students with specialized learning needs. These students require the same challenging work and cognitive demands as their peers in order to develop academic skills and grow as scholars. These students also need a deliberate and sound pedagogical approach to developing their academic language to enable them to engage with grade-level content.

One way to make grade-level content accessible for all students is through the use of the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Universal Design for Learning principles are based on the understanding that students differ in the ways they are motivated to learn, and that students with language and/or cultural difference, sensory disabilities (e.g., blindness or deafness), and learning disabilities all require a different way of approaching content. For example, students may learn more efficiently or mitigate the impact of a disability in classroom environments that make ample use of multiple modes of communication (speaking, listening, reading, writing) and multiple representations (ways of presenting instruction, such as pictures, diagrams, tables, graphs, visual displays), allowing students to make connections within and between concepts and facilitate the transfer of learning. Moreover, providing students with different ways to engage in and process learning (working with a peer or in small groups, conducting interviews, critiquing the reasoning of others), and to express their learning (making presentations, sharing written explanations, making a collage) helps to reduce or eliminate barriers to showing what they know and can do.

All of these classroom practices help to increase active student engagement, which is key to improving the rate of growth for all learners. Teachers should ensure that all students, therefore, have the opportunity to engage in productive struggle with Tier 1 instruction, allowing them sufficient time to make sense of a task or problem before intervening. Some students, of course, will need more time and engagement strategies (through additional opportunities to practice, review, preview, mathematics language development, routines, and just-in time vocabulary development, for example) to show growth (Tier II). And there will be students that may need even more intensified instruction to address skill deficits (Tier III). But these additional layers of support should not come at the cost of core content instruction.<sup>4</sup> Instead, the scaffolds that teachers employ to meet specialized student needs should be specifically targeted to an individual student’s academic difficulties or language development needs and should serve to expand—not limit—their access to rigorous content and their development of higher order conceptual understanding and the corresponding academic language to convey their understanding. For more information on UDL, see [Appendix B](#).

Finally, ensuring inclusion during this time of school closures and distance learning will require districts to fundamentally rethink their approach to family engagement. As families are increasingly expected to assist in ensuring that kids are learning from home, they have moved from being stakeholders to being critical partners in the central work of teaching and learning. Moving forward, districts will therefore need to provide parents with more detailed and timely information on instructional approaches and learning expectations—not only as a matter of good policy and public relations, but in order to ensure that learning continues in whatever circumstances the next few years bring.

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4 For more information on using Multi-tiered Systems of Support, see [Common Core State Standards and Diverse Urban Students: Using Multi-Tiered Systems of Support](#).

## #5. Identify and address gaps in learning through instruction, avoiding the misuse of standardized testing.

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The first instinct of many districts will be to immediately test students upon their return to school in order to gauge their academic level and needs. This would be a mistake for many reasons. To begin with, districts should focus on creating learning environments that feel both physically and psychologically safe for students (and adults). Educators need to work to reengage students in school, emphasizing the importance of the school community and the joy of learning. Administering tests too soon undermines both of these objectives. Moreover, testing appears to put the onus of learning losses on the students themselves—the resulting label of “deficient” or academically behind may very well further alienate and isolate the students who most need our support.

Districts also need to ensure that assessment data are not misinterpreted or misused by teachers or administrators. Computer adaptive and standardized assessments should not be considered broad diagnostic assessments. While assessment companies tend to sell their products as providing “diagnostic” information for every child, this is not how they are structured or designed. What they do provide is a way to measure growth over time, allowing us to monitor trends in the learning gaps between student groups (lower and higher performing students) and cohorts of students (e.g., last year’s fourth graders and this year’s fourth graders).

Teachers and administrators far too often end up confusing scale scores with a student’s capacity to learn. Based on standardized assessment data, teachers place kids into high or low ability groups or provide low levels of instructional rigor to lower performing students. This is not an effective strategy for addressing unfinished learning, and not an appropriate use of assessment data. A large number of assessments also fall short in terms of accurately assessing the learning needs of diverse learners such as ELLs, as unfinished learning for English learners goes beyond content-area expectations to include language acquisition and development. Moreover, the all-too-common exclusion of some diverse learners from benchmark administrations results in a lack of baseline data to measure potential learning loss.

In contrast, each of the principles covered thus far concern maintaining the integrity and rigor of instruction even amidst widespread disruption in schooling. It is only through strong, grade-level instruction—for all students—that districts will be able to effectively and equitably identify and address unfinished learning.

In other words, districts should approach assessments as temperature checks. A thermometer can identify when someone has a fever, but it takes a doctor, armed with this data, to probe further and identify what is causing the fever and how to restore a patient to health. Similarly, teachers should use assessment results to alert them to the fact that students have unfinished learning. But it is ultimately up to the teacher to identify where the gaps in essential learning exist, and what additional scaffolding and support is required. Strong, attentive instruction, with embedded formative assessment, thus enables teachers to respond to student needs in real-time, and in the context of grade-level standards, rather than defaulting to wholesale remediation. Moreover, this type of attention and responsiveness, particularly among teams of different types of teachers (such as special education teachers, bilingual education teachers, etc.) working together, provides a more complete picture of the educational needs of diverse learners. For English learners in particular, educators working to address unfinished learning while delivering grade-level instruction need to discern whether learning challenges are due to gaps in the understanding of content, language acquisition, or both.

It is therefore entirely appropriate to employ assessments as a broad temperature check a few weeks into the school year—which is when they are typically administered in a normal school year. But it is more important than ever to ensure that students have had an initial period of a few weeks to reacclimate to the school setting, and that teachers are given careful guidance on what the data means—and what it doesn’t—and how the results should drive instruction.

## #6. Capitalize on commonalities, not differences.

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It is important to recognize that the prolonged interruption in schooling will have affected some children more than others. For example, the hiatus will likely have a greater adverse impact on students with disabilities (SWDs), English learners, students who are homeless or in transitional living situations, or students from low income backgrounds who receive free or reduced-price meals through school and/or may not have easy access to computers to engage in distance learning. Other students may be dealing with issues of psychological stress, abuse, domestic violence, suicide, or parental job loss. Those issues must be recognized, and schools will need to attend to the emotional wellbeing of students as they re-engage them in academic content.

However, whatever differences exist in the experiences and resulting academic needs of children during this crisis must not be the starting point for instruction in the coming school year. Rather, as educators we should capitalize on the shared experience of living through a pandemic, as well as the more recent social justice protest movement, as a learning opportunity. The virus, school closures, social distancing, and nationwide protests have created new common experiences that can serve as the basis for work across subjects in the first weeks of school. The assignments associated with this real-world learning opportunity should emphasize improving the quality of what students produce using collaborative (and perhaps digital) feedback and revision cycles. Grading, moreover, should be based largely on validating revised student work rather than on “measuring” the student. This will allow schools and teachers to reengage students, directly address student and adult hardship, stress, or trauma, and resume instruction in a way that feels contextualized and responsive, helping students comprehend the world around them. This will also provide educators with a way to focus on grade-level texts and content that are less dependent on prior learning and are engaging and topical enough to reaffirm students’ understanding of themselves as members of a learning community.

The most immediate applications are in the realm of science education. The COVID-19 pandemic offers a unique opportunity for students to learn about how science works and to reaffirm the place of science in an informed society. The present situation has highlighted a major division across the American public in its belief and trust in science and its understanding of what constitutes scientific evidence. Scientific literacy is a critical need in a world in which the future depends on collective action based on science rather than on political ideology or self-interest.

A third-grade unit, for example, might focus on personal and community health: the human body, growth, health practices, roles played by health care professionals in the prevention of disease and the maintenance of good health. A fifth-grade unit might focus on scientists as detectives solving mysteries in medical, geological, and ecological research. An eighth-grade unit might have an epidemiology CSI focus<sup>5</sup>: What are causes and patterns of health and disease events? What questions do scientists ask when there is evidence of unexplained illness in a community? What clues do they look for? What is a hypothesis? How do they arrive at hypotheses to test?

There is also ample opportunity to cover the current crisis in the context of English language arts, mathematics, and social studies. In mathematics, for example, this suggests a unit on Data Science—a study of the graphs and tables featured in the news and analysis of linear versus exponential growth, or an exploration of the mathematics of social distancing. In other classes students may read nonfiction texts or literature about past epidemics and the impact of disease outbreaks on history, or be asked, in writing or classroom discussions or presentations, to grapple with issues related to our health care system, the manner in which different countries and forms of government respond, the definition and importance of eliminating xenophobia and racial discrimination, and ensuring social justice.

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<sup>5</sup> Montclair State University has a program that promotes epidemiology education for middle and high school students with teaching materials for grades 6-12 in English and in Spanish. <http://www.epiedmovement.org/detectives.html>.

# Supporting Grade Transitions through Strategic Instruction

## How to identify essential learning

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As discussed earlier, to effectively address unfinished learning curriculum leaders will need to provide guidance to teachers on what is most important to teach within the major curricular domains at each grade level, and where teachers should invest their time, resources, and effort. Moreover, because it is inadvisable (and impossible) to try to teach every missed concept all at once, it is necessary to prioritize the concepts and skills that are of immediate importance in helping students access grade-level work.

In making these determinations, curriculum leaders should start by asking a series of questions to determine the significance of a given unit or lesson:

1. Does the content extend work from earlier units and grade levels?
2. Does the content extend into future content?
3. Does the unit help students deepen conceptual understanding and subject area expertise, such as expertise with mathematical practices or reading comprehension?
4. Is this content that students need to know right now in order to continue learning grade-level subject matter?

At the same time, in order to prioritize units and lessons, there are a number of features or qualities that mark content as inherently lower in priority. For example, in mathematics there may be units that cover specific answer-getting tricks or methods that do not build expertise in deeper mathematical principles and concepts, or time spent devoted to enhancing a student's speed in producing a calculation. There are also topics that make a cameo appearance for two to three days and then disappear for years, or topics that are only ever introduced once, and don't lead to further or deeper mathematics—academic curios and cul-de-sacs. These are the areas that can and should be cut out in the name of maintaining in-depth instruction that builds true conceptual knowledge, rather than a superficial survey of topics.

In English language arts, instruction is often organized around strategy-based instruction. That is, teachers provide direct instruction on comprehension strategies and have students practice and focus on them in isolation instead of teaching students how to use these strategies in service of gaining meaning, developing vocabulary, and building knowledge from the text. Instead of taking students through a litany of practice activities and thematic units, teachers should focus on topic texts that build knowledge and employ text-dependent questions that engage students deeply with the text and build understanding. Ultimately, the learning goal across all grade levels is to cultivate every student's ability to read with understanding and to gain knowledge and skills through the careful study of grade-level texts not only in English language arts, but across all content areas. Moreover, students should develop the ability to consolidate and evaluate what they have heard or read, and to clearly express this understanding orally and in writing.

In the following sections, we apply this process to identify instructional priorities in mathematics and English language arts for a set of key grade-level transitions.

## Instructional Priorities in Mathematics for Key Grade-Level Transitions

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Grade-level work in mathematics makes extensive use of knowledge and skills taught in prior grades. The priorities below identify knowledge and skills from prior grade spans most needed—and most likely to show up as unfinished learning—as students engage in grade-level work.

We illustrate this relationship through a series of conceptual maps. The map of each grade band identifies the priorities for re-engaging students with the conceptual knowledge that constitutes the understanding of that grade. They show this for crucial transition grades—grade three, grade six, Algebra I, and Geometry. For example, the ‘K-two into grade three’ map illustrates how Kindergarten through grade two knowledge develops into grade three to five knowledge. It is to help third graders re-organize, revise, and solidify this prior knowledge into their current learning. The third-grade teacher’s job is to re-engage what is mapped as it emerges in student responses to grade-level math. This is how the past learning shows up in the present. The same is true for the sixth-grade teacher, as it is for Algebra I and Geometry teachers.

Each cluster of circles represents a coherent system of related ideas, smaller conceptual knowledge areas that together converge in the larger, most general, understanding that students take with them from the earlier grade span into their new grade-level work. This is the what plugs into the new grade level. The learning is normally uneven and unsettled, often insecure and dependent on the contexts in which it was learned. The work of the new grade level is to take this uncertain learning or under-developed learning, incorporate it into new, closely related ideas to deepen and secure the prior learning.

- Orange: Major domain of conceptual understanding strongly interactive with new grade-level concepts
- Green: Important component concepts of the major domain to be further developed in new grade level
- Blue: Critical correspondences across the mathematical representations used in the major domain
- Lines: Proficiencies with mathematical language, representation, techniques and tools to be developed during work in major domains. Development of these proficiencies is distributed across grades, units and lessons... not confined to the study of one topic.

The key to prioritizing learning is to move beyond grade-level check lists and instead think of progressions of important learning that cut across grade levels. Kindergarten teachers can see the priorities for them to focus on the foundations of the grade two span, while first grade teachers build on the unfinished learning from Kindergarten and solidify. Grade two and grade three teachers span critical transition points, so it is important that they look both back at Kindergarten through grade two and forward to grades three through five priorities.

It is also important to keep in mind that as we interact with students while introducing grade-level content, we want to give them a chance to productively struggle and to demonstrate what they know and are able to do. This means not making assumptions about what students can or cannot do. Instead, we need to provide the support they need just in time when we try to teach them grade-level concepts. We must assume and expect variety of ways of thinking and respond accordingly. The four levels of support described below are intended to help teachers respond to students’ attempts to work on grade-level tasks.

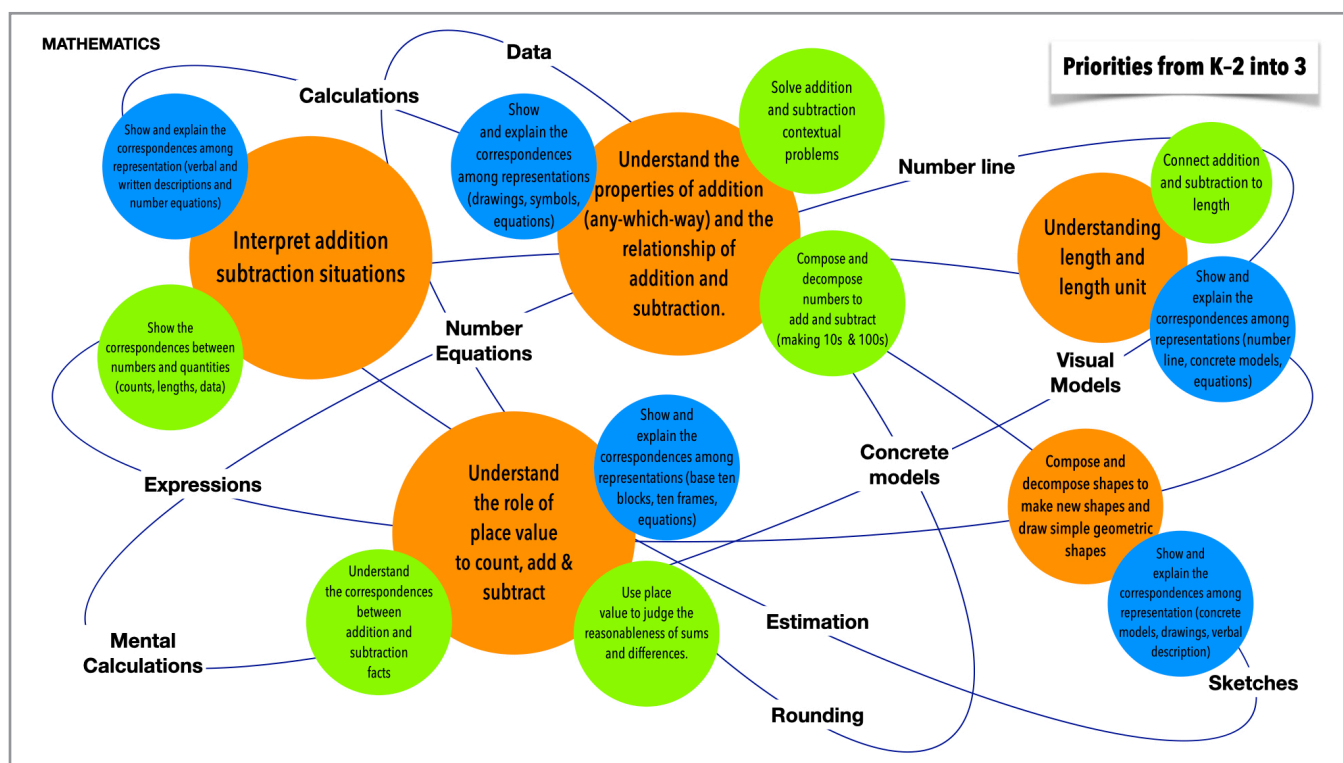
- For students whose struggle with grade-level assignments and language demands becomes unproductive:
  - Provide extra feedback on student work and pose questions that push students to articulate their thinking and to compare solutions and strategies. Teachers should also include explicit summaries in the classroom while working on grade-level tasks. These approaches require that teachers use discussions and questioning to informally determine the need for additional just-in time support.



- For students who need specific prior knowledge and language demands for a grade-level assignment:
  - Provide just-in-time instruction that does not disrupt the flow of each lesson. This requires that teachers understand how mathematical concepts and skills progress over time so that lessons include time for re-engagement without significantly interrupting the flow of classroom instruction.
- For students who need a more significant chunk of specific prior knowledge and language support for a grade-level unit:
  - Provide extra teaching of underlying mathematical concepts and skills connected to the grade-level unit using mini-lessons or centers, and spend extra time with students providing explicit feedback on their thinking and tutoring (including peer-to-peer tutoring) during each lesson. This requires that teachers engage in prior planning to provide additional just-in time instruction.
- For students who need sustained conceptual understanding and language support to stay engaged in grade-level work:
  - Provide supplemental instruction beyond the regular class that will support student’s success with grade-level work. This requires that teachers engage in prior planning to understand how concepts and skills progress over time so that the supplemental instruction explicitly strengthens the foundational concepts and interconnected language functions needed to access grade-level work in mathematics.

## Transition to Grade Three

The following conceptual map illustrates how students develop expertise with the eight **Mathematical Practices** and proficiency with the mathematical language, representations, techniques, and tools in the transition from Kindergarten through grade two into grade three.



In the transition to grade three, students will be expected to:

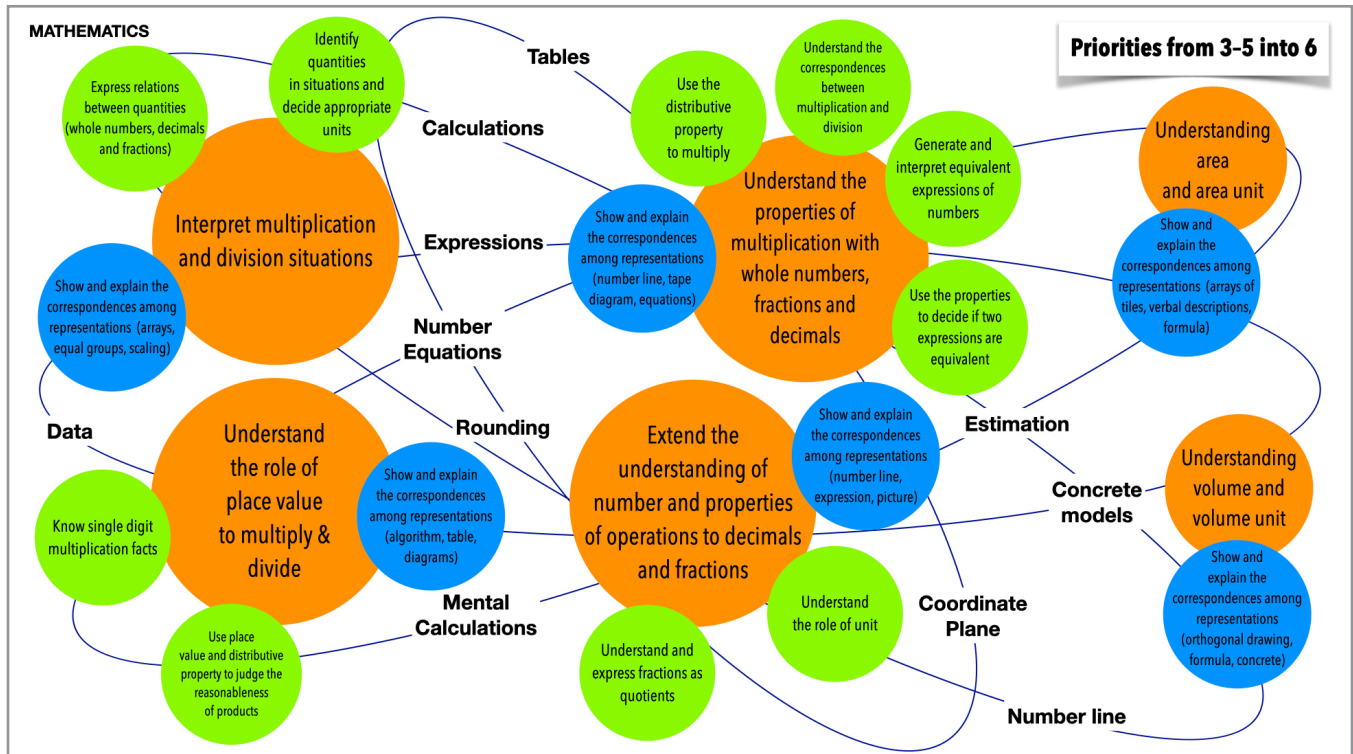
- Understand the properties of addition (any-which-way) and the relationship between addition and subtraction
  - Apply the properties of addition, the relationship to subtraction and interpretation of addition and subtraction situations to solve contextual problems
  - Compose and decompose numbers to add and subtract, making 10s and later, making 100s. Express mental calculations with number equations.
  - Show and explain the correspondences among representations (drawings, symbols, equations)
- Interpret addition subtraction situations (add to, take from, put together and take apart, compare), and express the corresponding additions and subtractions as number equations
  - Show the correspondences between *numbers* (and *sums* and *differences*) to quantities of objects, measurement units and data
  - Show the correspondences among calculations, number equations and expressions, concrete and visual models for addition and subtraction.
  - Show and explain the correspondences among representations (verbal and written descriptions, concrete and visual models, and number equations)
- Understand the role of place value in counting, addition and subtraction;
  - Know single digit addition facts and corresponding subtraction facts.
  - Use place value understanding to estimate, round, calculate and judge the reasonableness sums and differences.
  - Show and explain the correspondences among representations (base ten blocks, ten frames, equations)
- Understanding length and the idea of a length unit
  - Connect addition and subtraction to length, both in context and on a number line
  - Show and explain the correspondences among representations (number line, concrete models, equations)
- Compose and decompose shapes to make new shapes, draw simple geometric shapes.
  - Show and explain the correspondences among representation (concrete models, drawings, verbal description)

### Examples of Instructional Strategies for Supporting Unfinished Learning

- When teaching adding fractions on the number line, it is worth the time to re-engage adding whole numbers on the number line. Re-engage the knowledge that the numbers on the line refer to unit lengths, knowledge that surely will be unfinished or insecure for most third graders. The fractions on the number lines are numbers, so they, too, refer to lengths, and students will wonder what the units are that denominate these lengths. Teachers should help them see how and why adding unit fraction lengths works the same as adding whole numbers on the number line.
- When multiplying whole numbers in grade three, teachers should introduce the area model. The product is the number of equal unit areas in the area defined by the side lengths (the factors). Students will wonder how this area model of multiplication works when the factors, i.e. the side lengths are less than 1, the side length of the unit area, and this will help further their conceptual understanding.

## Transition to Grade Six

The following conceptual map illustrates how students develop expertise with the eight **Mathematical Practices** and proficiency with the mathematical language, representations, techniques, and tools in the transition from grades three through five into grade six.



In the transition to grade six, students will be expected to:

- Extend whole number arithmetic, the properties of operations and number lines to decimal numbers and fractions.
  - Understand the role of units (what is being counted or measured: what the number 1 refers to) on the number line (3 means 3 of the unit length from 0 to 1), in place value units (digits in each place show how many of the place value unit, e.g. 30 means 3 of 10 where 10 is the place value unit,...), and in unit fractions ( $\frac{3}{4}$  means 3 of  $\frac{1}{4}$  where  $\frac{1}{4}$  is the unit)
  - Understand a fraction as a quotient, and express quotients as mixed numbers rather than with remainders
  - Show and explain the correspondences among representations (number line, expressions, picture)
- Understand the properties of multiplication, with whole numbers, fractions and decimals.
  - Understand the relationship between multiplication and division
  - Generate and interpret equivalent expressions of numbers: equivalent fractions, decimal equivalents of fractions
  - Use the properties to decide if two expressions are equivalent, e.g., is  $6 \times 7$  equivalent to  $(6 \times 5) + (6 \times 2)$ ?
  - Use the properties and equivalent expressions to make multiplications and divisions easier to calculate and to compare solution methods

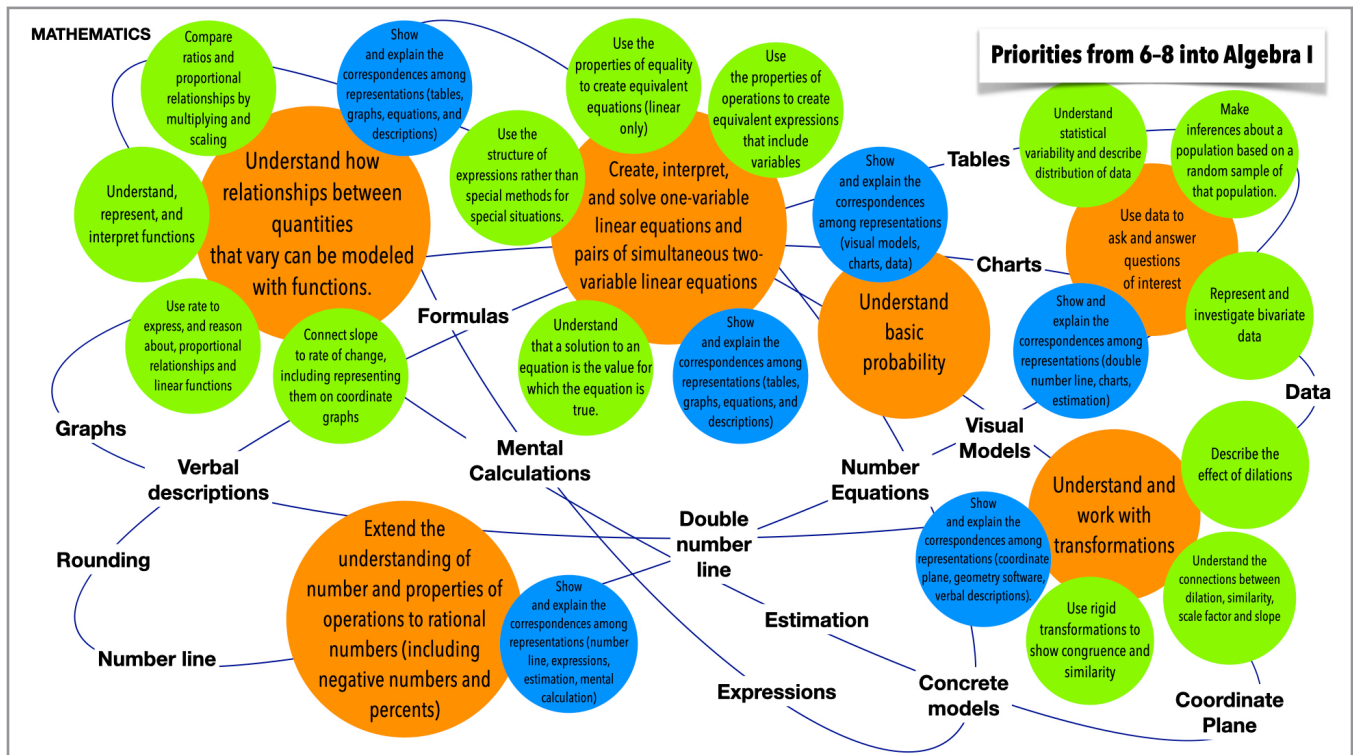
- Compose and decompose numbers used with the distributive property to multiply including mental calculations
- Show and explain the correspondences among representations (number line, tape diagram, equations)
- Understand the role of place value in multiplication and division
  - Know single digit multiplication facts
  - Understand and calculate products of “very round numbers,” like  $50 \cdot 700$ , and apply this knowledge with the distributive property to estimate, judge reasonableness of solutions and calculate multi-digit products
  - Show and explain the correspondences among representations (algorithm, table, diagrams)
- Interpret multiplication and division situations (sharing and equal groups, area and array, compare)
  - Express relations between quantities in situations in number equations. Initially, with whole numbers, then decimals and fractions
  - Identify quantities in situations and decide appropriate units, use number line to represent quantities with appropriate units, use units to scale number lines, manage units in calculations
  - Show the correspondences among visual diagram, table, graph and formula or equation for a given problem. Show how questions can be answered using different representations.
  - Show and explain the correspondences among representations (arrays, equal groups, scaling)
- Understand area and the idea of an area unit; use multiplication to determine areas in contextual problems, and use areas to represent products in reasoning about the distributive property
  - Show and explain the correspondences among representations (arrays of tiles, verbal descriptions, formula)
- Understand volume and the idea of a volume unit; use multiplication to determine volumes in contextual problems
  - Show and explain the correspondences among representations (orthogonal drawing, formula, concrete models)

### Examples of Instructional Strategies for Supporting Unfinished Learning

- While teaching proportionality in grades six and seven, tables of paired values can be used for quantities in a proportional relationship. The paired values show equivalent ratios. It is a good occasion to re-engage equivalent fractions, which also pair values—the numerator and denominator—that are equivalent in that each fraction has the same quotient; that is, it represents the same number.
- Going more deeply into multiplication, teachers should re-engage the multiplication table by having students explore and articulate in oral or written form why any two rows in the table have the same pattern as equivalent ratios and equivalent fractions.
- The underlying conceptual relationship with multiplication of scaling and scale factor (grades six through eight) with multiples and generating fractions with common denominators (grades three and four) is well worth the time for all students: some will benefit from revising and upgrading unfinished learning, some will deepen insights into the underlying coherence of mathematics.

## Transition to Algebra I

The following conceptual map illustrates how students develop expertise with the eight **Mathematical Practices** and proficiency with the mathematical language, representations, techniques, and tools in the transition from grades six through eight into Algebra I.



In the transition to Algebra I, students will be expected to:

- Understand how relationships between quantities that vary can be modeled with functions:
  - Show and explain the correspondences across representations of functions: equation, table, graph, diagram and “real-world” situation. Show how questions can be answered using different representations.
  - Extend understanding of number line and units to create coordinate graphs
  - Understand the slope of a line and how it relates to rate of change
  - Extend comparison by multiplication and scaling to ratios and proportionality
  - Use rate in expressing proportional relationships. Extend understanding of rate and proportionality to linear functions.
  - Understand how functions determine only one output for each allowable input
  - Show and explain the correspondences among representations (tables, graphs, equations, and descriptions)



- Use the properties of operations, properties of equality and general principles of algebra rather than specialized techniques for specialized problems to create, interpret, and solve one-variable linear equations and pairs of simultaneous two-variable linear equations.
  - Use the properties of operations to create equivalent expressions that include variables
  - Use the properties of equality to create equivalent equations (linear only)
  - Use the structure of expressions rather than special methods for special situations
  - Understand that a solution to an equation is the value for which the equation is true. Emphasize what the solutions refers to in the problem context.
  - Represent the relationships among quantities in a problem
  - Show and explain the correspondences among representations (tables, graphs, equations, and verbal descriptions)

At the amusement park adult tickets cost \$6 each. Child tickets cost \$4 each. At the end of the day 100 tickets were purchased. The total amount paid for these tickets was \$470.

1. What are the quantities in this situation? Which quantities vary and which ones stay constant?
2. Create a system of equations that describe the relationships between these quantities.
3. Graph your equations to describe the relationships of the quantities
4. What is the meaning of the solution to your system of equations?

- Use percent to make sense of quantitative situations and solve problems with percent
- Extend understanding of numbers, the properties of operations, and the number line to include rational numbers including negative numbers
  - Show and explain the correspondences among representations (number line, expressions, estimation, mental calculation)
- Understand and work with transformations
  - Use rigid transformations to show understanding of congruence and similarity
  - Describe the effect of dilations
  - Understand the connections between dilation, similarity, scale factor and slope
  - Show and explain the correspondences among representations (coordinate plane, geometry software, visual models, verbal descriptions)
- Develop the concept of probability, sample space and subset of sample space. Connect probability to proportionality.
  - Show and explain the correspondences among representations (visual models, charts, data)
- Use data to ask and answer questions of interest
  - Understand statistical variability and describe distributions of data
  - Draw random samples and understand how a random sample enable inferences about the sampled population. Informally compare populations.

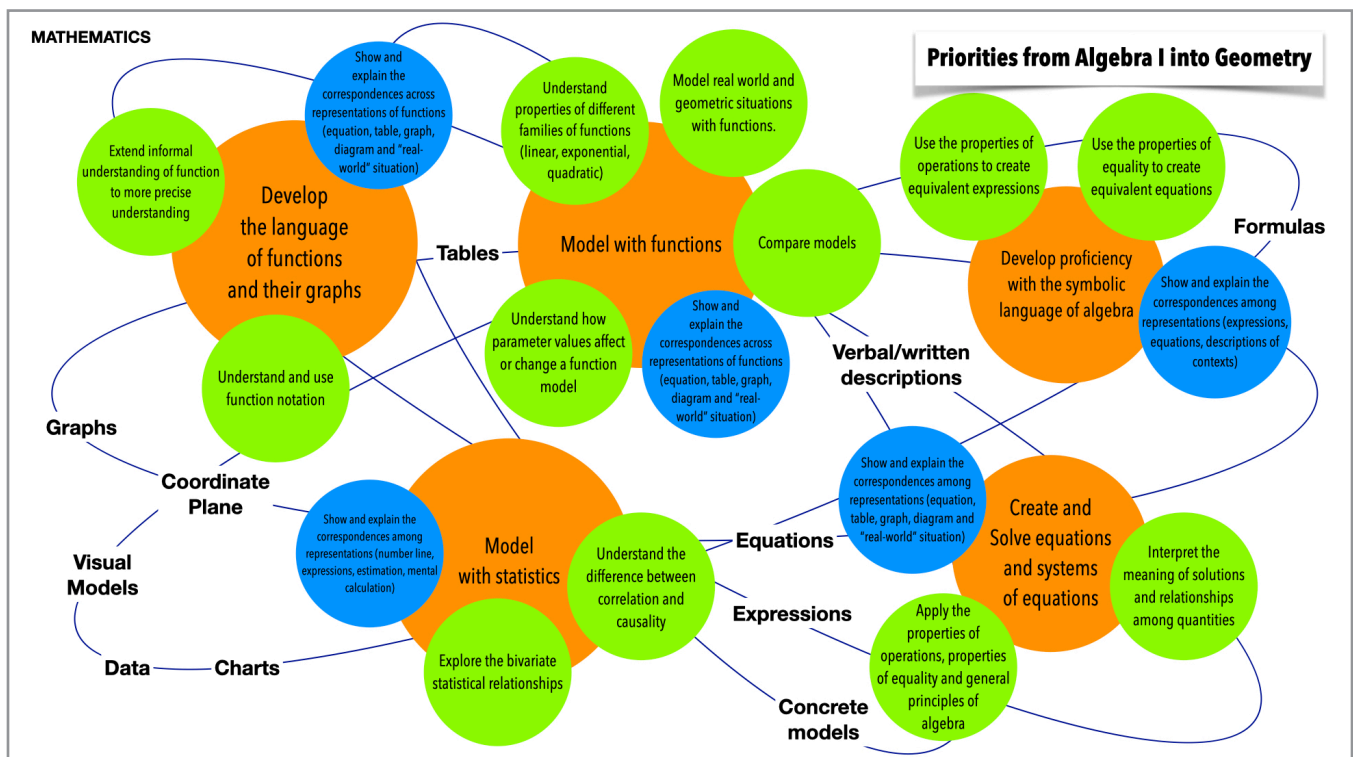
- Represent bivariate data in tables and graphs and investigate associations in bivariate data including informal linear models
- Interpret and represent data in tables, graphs and charts
- Show and explain the correspondences among representations (double number line, charts, estimation)

### Examples of Instructional Strategies for Supporting Unfinished Learning

- Expressions and equations are built from adding, subtracting, multiplying, dividing, using exponentiation and radicals to create other expressions and equations. Teachers can revisit this idea by having students explore this transition from arithmetic expressions to algebraic expressions. Students will re-engage the properties of operations and equality with number expressions and equations while investigating algebraic expressions and equations. Given that the distributive property is a major source of bugs in student work with algebraic expressions, teachers should illustrate this concept using numbers.
- While teaching systems of equations prior to Algebra, teachers should re-engage prior knowledge of how a graph represents the relationship between two quantities: *How do the two axes relate to the two quantities in an equation? What does the graph of each equation represent?* The graph shows points. Each point refers to one value on the horizontal axis and one value on the vertical. These pairs of values are the solutions to the equation. A line shows infinite solutions. *How does the intersection of the lines for the two equations relate to the solution of the system of equations?*

## Transition from Algebra I to Geometry

The following conceptual map illustrates how students develop expertise with the eight **Mathematical Practices** and proficiency with the mathematical language, representations, techniques, and tools in the transition from Algebra I into Geometry.



In the transition to Geometry, students will be expected to:

- Develop the language of functions and their graphs
  - Extend informal understanding of function to more precise understanding, including exactly one output for each input that belongs to the defined domain
  - Understand and use function notation
  - Show and explain the correspondences across representations of functions: equation, table, graph, diagram and “real-world” situation. Show how the mathematical representations can illuminate the real-world situation being modeled by the function.
- Model with functions
  - Understand properties of different families of functions and how they can be used to model different kinds of phenomena
    - linear
    - exponential, especially for modeling exponential growth
    - quadratic
  - Understand how parameter values in a function model correspond to features of the real-world situation, and how changing the value of the parameters change the graph of the function and the fit to the situation being modeled.
  - Model real world and geometric situations with functions. Relate features of the function to features of real-world quantities and their relationship such as intercepts, shape, minima and maxima.
  - Compare models
  - Show and explain the correspondences across representations of functions (equation, table, graph, diagram and “real-world” situation)
- Model with statistics
  - Explore the bivariate statistical relationships. Model the data with functions and find lines of best fit using technology.
  - Understand the difference between correlation and causality
  - Show and explain the correspondences across representations (using two-way tables, scatterplots, lines of best fit)
- Create and solve equations and systems of linear equations
  - Interpret the meaning of solutions and relationships among quantities
  - Apply the properties of operations, properties of equality and general principles of algebra rather than specialized techniques for specialized problems
  - Show and explain the correspondences across representations (equation, table, graph, diagram and “real-world” situation)

- Develop proficiency with the symbolic language of algebra. Become comfortable with simple cases such as  $2(x+5) = 2x+10$  or  $2n - n + 5 = 3n + 2$  is equivalent to  $3 = 2n$ . Develop the habit of working thoughtfully, with purpose and without haste. Avoid technically complicated tasks such as: Simplify  $x/(1-xy) + 2xy = 1/(1-1/x)$ , Factor  $19x^2-7x + 39$ , Expand  $(x+2)(y^2-3x+x^3)(2y-x)$ 
  - Use the properties of operations to create equivalent expressions (e.g., to gather like terms, distribute and factor expressions with variables, reorganize expressions to reveal structure or facilitate solutions)
  - Use the properties of equality to create equivalent equations in the solution of equations
  - Show and explain the correspondences across representations (expressions, equations, descriptions of contexts)

### Examples of Instructional Strategies for Supporting Unfinished Learning

- When re-engaging prior work with graphs during Algebra, it is important for teachers to look ahead as well as back to earlier courses. Student work with graphs in the coordinate plane during Algebra I will be critical support for work with transformations in Geometry. The shape and location of the graph of a function can reveal important properties of the relationship between quantities that vary in a problem situation. As students interpret the graph by explaining how their thinking makes sense in a problem while referring to the quantities in the problem, teachers can use this opportunity to focus the discussion on the scales that form the coordinates of the graph as extensions of number line concepts.
  - Later, while working with transformations in Geometry, students will re-engage with the coordinate system from a fresh perspective. This re-engagement is a good opportunity to develop unfinished learning as well as deepen insights that will be important in future course work studying the graphs of functions.
- Formulas for area, perimeter, circumference and other geometric measures share an important property with functions: formulas give a unique output for a given input. To be functions, they need to also specify a domain. The formula  $A = \pi r^2$ , gives A, the area of a circle, as a function of r, the radius when the domain for r is defined. Students' familiarity with the use of geometric formulas from elementary and middle grades can help support their understanding of functions in grade eight and Algebra. This work with functions in Algebra will then support more advanced use of formulas in Geometry.
  - In Geometry, relationships among geometric measures can often be defined as functions. This is a good opportunity for teachers to make these connections explicit to strengthen student understanding of functions.

## Instructional Priorities in English Language Arts for Key Grade-Level Transitions

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In ELA/literacy, the question of unfinished learning calls for a somewhat different course of action from mathematics. Competencies in speaking, listening, language use, reading, and writing are fundamentally interrelated, and are the sustained focus of teaching and learning across all grade levels. Moreover, the foundational skills that are regarded as the cornerstone of literacy (print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics, word recognition, and fluency) must be systematically taught and robustly practiced, unit after unit and year after year, in a research-grounded sequence supported by complex text. While it is the major focus of instruction during the years of primary school (Kindergarten through grade three) when students are being taught to read, teaching foundational skills—no matter the grade—should be done in tandem with addressing the rest of English Language Arts until reading is automatic and fluent.

Intentional redundancy is threaded throughout these strands and across grade levels—and throughout this section—for that reason. In light of the interconnected design of the ELA/literacy standards, our delineation of the instructional priorities in the transition grades will be framed and addressed using the repeated categories of **Foundational Skills**, **Reading/Listening**, and **Writing/Speaking**.

We will be addressing areas of possible unfinished learning and the essential skills and concepts in these categories at three key transition periods: from grade two to grade three, from grade five to grade six, and from grade eight to grade nine.<sup>6</sup> These grade-level demarcations represent the culmination of a series of iterative learning experiences that signal a milestone in student readiness to read, understand and respond to more complex ideas and concepts as they encounter increasingly more complex, rich literary and informational text and increased sophistication of tasks.

In identifying student behaviors or indicators that signal incomplete or unfinished learning, it is worth underscoring the principles presented in the first section of this report. Unfinished learning does not mean a lack of aptitude or capacity to learn. It is not a deficiency at all, but rather an opportunity for teachers to take students from where they are through targeted, just-in-time instruction rather than resorting to wholesale remediation. In this section we therefore provide not only the indicators of unfinished learning, but a sampling of the instructional strategies teachers can employ to both **reinforce** the knowledge and skills students bring with them to the classroom, and to **develop** those skills and concepts they have yet to master.

We begin our discussion of foundational skills, reading/listening, and writing/speaking with a brief summary of essential skills that can be expected at each major transition point in schooling. Next, we describe ways that unfinished learning can be detected in student work or behavior, and finally we offer suggestions for possible responses at four levels of instructional need:

- For students who exhibit momentary hesitancy or uncertainty, we recommend just-in-time scaffolding, support, or corrective feedback to help students overcome this uncertainty within the context of a grade-level lesson.
- When it appears that students are having difficulty handling grade-level materials because they are out of practice in reading or writing, and it is more than can be handled in the flow of a lesson, we recommend strategies such as shortening the grade-level focus text so it is more manageable, and planning mini-refresher lessons to help students get back on track (e.g., preview, review, opportunities to practice, contextualized front loading of strategically selected academic vocabulary, and linguistic structures).

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<sup>6</sup> Hernandez 2011—Students who are not proficient in third grade are 4 times less likely to graduate on time. Lesnick et al 2010—third grade scores are predictive of 8th grade scores, high school, & college enrollment. Fletcher and Lyon 1998—74% of third graders who read poorly will still be struggling in ninth grade.



- When students appear to have serious gaps in crucial skills and practices in reading and writing that make it difficult to access grade-level instruction, teachers should plan for explicit instruction that is designed to teach those skills using grade-level complex text as the source of the 'just in time' learning whenever possible. Teachers can collect and use data to check for rate of progress. This instruction should be standards-aligned and carefully targeted to prepare students for tackling grade-level reading or writing classwork.
- For students who exhibit the need for instructional attention in reading or writing beyond that which teachers can provide in the context of grade-level instruction, a master school schedule needs to be built that allows for additional support beyond ELA classroom time to address these needs. For example, a double block of ELA that provides intensified and targeted instruction for students; or a WIN block (What I Need) where students get additional support **in addition** to core instruction. Students should never be removed from core instruction to be provided intensified support. A multi-tiered system of support ensures that all students are included in core instruction—grade-level content and work while providing addition time and opportunities to intensify instruction in targeted areas. Effective collaboration between EL teachers and general education teachers can focus the designated English language development instruction on specific language acquisition needs. Addressing instructional needs should never come at the cost of equitable access to age- and grade-appropriate educational opportunity and growth.

## Transition to Grade Three

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### Foundational skills

By grade three the expectation is that students will have developed automaticity in decoding and word-recognition, and will have learned and had sufficient practice using foundational phonics skills to be able to independently read stories and short informational texts with enough understanding to be able to recount stories and to ask and answer who, what, when, where, and how questions to demonstrate their understanding of details from the text. English Learners, regardless of the grade they first enroll in the district, will need to acquire the foundational phonics skills specific to English, building on the phonemic inventories of their home language(s). They may therefore be on a different trajectory in mastering English phonetic patterns.

Specifically, at the beginning of the third grade, students should be able to:

- Read third-grade text fluently: with accuracy, at the appropriate rate for the nature of the text, and with prosody—that is, with intonation, rhythm, pitch, and inflections that indicate the child grasps the meaning of what he or she is reading
- Recognize and read words that contain taught phonetic patterns automatically at first sight. High frequency words should be memorized to the extent that they are recognized on sight and are read with automaticity.
- Read words with common suffixes and prefixes, as well as irregular sound and spelling patterns and should begin to read words with greater automaticity

In third grade reading, unfinished learning may be manifested in various ways. Teachers should expect to spend more time working on quality texts and providing instructional support in the following ways:

- If students have difficulty reading short texts at the beginning of the third grade, teachers can provide a quick reminder of how to read or approach the specific words or morphological features students are finding difficult. Teachers should plan on spending more time working with texts in class to allow for this just-in-time support for students whose skills may be a little rusty at the beginning of the school year. The teacher should also take note of repeated problems with particular words or morphological features that keep appearing and address these in subsequent lessons. For students who are new to English, this additional support should be bifurcated into the unfinished learning relative to the grade-level content and the required instruction to build the student's English proficiency from the current stage of language acquisition.
- If students appear to have difficulty recognizing words they should know by sight and need more help than can be provided without interrupting the flow of the lesson, teachers should plan refresher lessons on those skills for a later time. If the teacher is aware of particular areas of unfinished learning, they should review and plan for upcoming classroom reading to be sure to include practice on those areas just in time for the classroom work.
- Students who exhibit more trouble with reading and word recognition, such as students who read very fast, blurring words, or those who read word by word without expression or attention to punctuation, may need some systematic instruction and practice on those skills. Teachers will need to work with these students on understanding the relationship of words, phrases, and other meaningful units. For example, emphasize how reading with expression and the function of punctuation in reading helps convey meaning to the listener. Show how the same phrase read with different intonation can change the meaning of text. Since decoding with automaticity is prioritized in second grade, it is important for students to get continuous opportunities for practice in areas such as phonics, high-frequency words, sounds, and spelling patterns. Teachers should provide reading instruction that connects foundational skills to meaning-making and provide ample opportunities for student practice with high frequency words, long and short vowel sounds, and decoding.
- Students who have difficulty sounding words out or recognizing words out of context or have few or no strategies for dealing with single or multiple syllable word will need additional support and instruction, in addition to core, that addresses these foundational reading skills. These opportunities can be presented through small group instruction or learning centers. Collaborating with EL teachers in the planning or in the delivery of instruction for English learners would help address the specific foundational reading skills that students need to map the English phonemes onto their existing linguistic knowledge. For English Learners, learning new sounds will be occurring at the same time they are learning new words, requiring a close connection of both instructional activities. In other words, sounds would be taught within the context of words and words within the context of meaning.

### Reading/listening:

Third grade students are expected to independently read relatively more complex texts than they do in the second grade. At the beginning of the third grade they should be able to:

- read stories, poems, and informational texts from the lower end of the grade two to three complexity band with relative ease and understanding
- read beginning grade-three-level texts orally with fluency, accuracy and expression
- listen to read-alouds and actively participate in discussions about the text
- ask and answer questions about key details in a text they have read or listened to as a read-aloud
- describe how key points are supported by details in a text
- express thoughts or ideas about a text in small or group discussions

- keep track of events, activities or ideas discussed in a text and be able to recall them in order
- visualize the events described in a text

In reading activities, teachers can spot issues related to unfinished learning when children have difficulty following a read-aloud or understanding the texts they are reading themselves. When teachers ask children questions about the texts, they can both determine student strengths and identify places where students may need some extra instructional attention or practice. Different levels of instructional support may be called for depending on the circumstances and evidence of student need:

- If students appear to have difficulty responding to questions regarding details in a story or text they have been reading, teachers should try to reframe the question to prompt the student to take a different approach. For example:
  - When students respond with one word or short phrasal answers to questions, provide linguistic frames to support students in expressing their responses. Additional support would be for the teacher to provide an expanded rephrasing of their response, which would provide them useful modeling of the response called for in writing. Both the linguistic frames as well as the expanded rephrasing are modeling strategies that are particularly useful for struggling learners, students with disabilities, and English learners.
  - If students have difficulty following a sequence of ideas or illustrating how a specific sequence comes together to produce a final outcome, teachers can use text-dependent questioning frames to support them: What is the author describing in a text? In what order does the author provide the information? What signal words tell you what the particular order is? What do you think the author is trying to get you to understand by presenting the information in this way? Why do you think that? Can you read the parts in the text that shaped your thinking in this way?
- If students have difficulty making inferences about the text they have been reading, keeping track of who did what, keeping track of events in the order in which they occurred according to information given in the text, or making predictions as to what is likely to happen next without prompting, they may need a refresher on text interpretation, which would take longer to do than is possible during a lesson. In such cases, teachers should consider additional instruction they can offer students at another time. Specifically:
  - Students may need explicit instruction in how to read texts for information or follow a storyline. For example, teachers can show students to identify signal words that convey passage of time or a sequence, and how to take notes or use graphic organizers to keep track of information from texts or suggest rereading and summarizing, stop and jot, as strategies for remembering details from texts. Also consider adopting an instructional strategy that helps students focus on syntax to see the meaning a rich sentence can contain (for example, the “[juicy sentence approach](#)”)<sup>7</sup> to help students learn the language of complex texts.<sup>8</sup>

7 See [Juicy sentence play](#), from the Council of the Great City Schools, and [Juicy sentence guidance](#), from Achieve the Core.

8 See [Choosing “juicy” complex excerpts and sentences](#), Council of the Great City Schools.

- Diverse learners (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, struggling learners) who have difficulty keeping track of what is going on in a text may need an additional scoop of instruction/guidance (e.g., mini-lessons) in which they are shown how to identify language that may not be transparent in meaning, and or places in texts that invite inferences—i.e., guidance on reading between the lines. For example, in a text, “Joe walked into the classroom and thought to himself: “Where is everyone? Where did they go?” the reader is invited to infer that Joe has entered an empty room: no one is in the room Joe has entered. Difficulty in making such an inference when provided language supports to aid with communication (e.g., linguistic frames) would suggest that students need help in visualizing the situation described in the text.<sup>9</sup> For that, teachers can offer scaffolding questions to help students visualize what is happening in the text. (For more examples, see this [Sentence Play resource](#))

Text	Teacher questions
Joe walked into the classroom/ and thought to himself/ “Where is everyone? Where did they go?”	Who is asking these questions? What did he notice when he entered the room? Why does he think that? What do you think that means?

- The following are signs of unfinished learning in text understanding that call for more structured, deliberate, and focused instruction:
  - Students who cannot keep track of what is happening in a text, have difficulty answering recall questions about the text, or struggle to state the main idea in the text or offer a summary of what a text was about are displaying the need for instruction on text understanding. Such indicators would call for informal assessments to determine the kind of focused instruction or specific support students need.
    - Are they having difficulty remembering because they are just reading words and not processing them? Do students have trouble knowing that they must go beyond just decoding the words, and they have to turn the words into sentences that communicate information? In that case, try breaking the text into smaller chunks, stopping and asking students to engage with the text, to connect sentences to the meaning of the text.
    - Have teachers examined the language and modeled how to attend to the text? For ELLs and other students who might be struggling with the language demands of a text, it is important to provide mini-lessons and support that identifies and explains the nature of signal words that convey order and the sequence of events.
  - Do students appear to need more practice and support in decoding and word recognition? In that case, teachers can provide instruction on foundational skills (for example by pointing out the proper pronunciation of a pattern a student is struggling with or showing how to break a longer word into syllables to make decoding possible); provide ample opportunities for student practice with high frequency words, decoding long and short vowel patterns within longer words, or even at the single syllable level as needed sounds, and teaching common syllable patterns and decoding; provide continuous practice and homework with phonics as needed, third-grade-level and high-frequency words, sound and spelling patterns encountered in text, etc. Teachers of English learners can leverage contrastive analysis, cognates, and the transfer of decoding skills from students first language to help English Learners understand how to decode words in English.

<sup>9</sup> Care must be taken to not assume that an inability to communicate understanding through an expected mode signals a challenge in grasping the content. For example, English learners who have difficulty answering probing questions orally may be invited to communicate their understanding via other means, such as visuals or gestures, to be sure that a difficulty with a skill, such as making inferences, is actually an area of struggle.

- Do students understand the vocabulary they are reading? Recognize that some vocabulary can be taught just in time as students encounter it, and some might require more extensive attention—particularly if it is a word that will be critical in the unit or is particularly valuable in understanding the reading or for using it in writing, such as the words “therefore” or “however.” For English Learners, teachers will need to gauge which words may require more explanation because of their multiple meanings depending on the context. Teachers can provide students clarity about the vocabulary while remaining anchored in texts and the content of the lesson. This strategy is particularly powerful for students with disabilities and English learners.
- Teachers can also model metacognitive strategies, such as providing think-alouds while reading a text to teach students so that they understand the connection between self-talk and self-questioning in understanding the knowledge, concepts, and ideas that are presented in a text. If the problem is that students are having difficulty with text complexity, teachers may want to break complex texts down into manageable chunks (phrases and clauses) and ask students to paraphrase the meaning of each chunk as a proposition (a short simple sentence). Calling attention to the connections between parts of a sentence can help students discover how complex language work helps all students but is essential for English learners to access academic content.
- Students who exhibit further need for instructional attention—those who struggle to read, appear to have few or no strategies for reading unknown single or multisyllable words, or have limited sight word vocabularies—will need extra “scoops” of instruction (Tier II) in addition to the core, as well as additional time for intensified, individualized or small group instruction (Tier III) that is narrowly focused and provides ample opportunity to practice and explicit corrective feedback. As stated previously, students should never be removed from core instruction to be provided intensified support. A multi-tiered system of support ensures that all students are included in core instruction and grade-level content and work while providing additional time and opportunities to intensify instruction in targeted areas. It is therefore critical that both Tier II and Tier III instruction is grounded in standards-aligned, grade-level materials to ensure that this ‘just-in-time’ learning is related to and supports general classroom instruction resulting in greater student success.

### Writing/speaking

In the third grade, students are expected to be proficient enough with the basic sub-skills involved in writing to put their thoughts onto paper, using their knowledge of words, spelling, syntax, and writing conventions such as capitalization and punctuation to produce a written text. Among the skills and understandings that can be expected of children at the beginning of the school year are these:

- proper letter formation and legibility in writing
- correct spelling of high frequency words that are used in written texts
- become more proficient in capitalization and end punctuation in their writing
- write an opinion piece that introduces the topic, state an opinion, supply a reason to support the opinion and provide a sense of closure
- use the more precise and formal language of written language writing
- provide text evidence whenever they are writing about what they have read
- recognize and correct sentence fragments into full sentences orally and in writing
- use more complex sentences in their writing
- provide reasons for their opinions and to discuss cause and effect relationships in their writing



During an extended break from the classroom, many students will have written less often. Particularly for younger students, this lack of practice is likely to result in problems in writing fluency. Since writing is one of the most complex and demanding areas of school learning and because it is called for in numerous learning tasks in the third grade (quizzes, note-taking, essays, journals, and homework assignments), unfinished learning is likely to be manifested in many ways. Moreover, unfinished learning for English Learners and other diverse learners in writing and speaking may present differently and at different stages than for native English speakers. Addressing unfinished learning requires teacher-led instruction to attend to the specific student needs to build their capacity to formulate their ideas in writing. Different levels of support will be needed, depending on the kinds of challenges students exhibit in writing, and the amount of time and planning it would take to carry it out.

- Teachers should, more than ever, have students write using evidence from texts all members of the class have had access to. If students have difficulty getting started writing or knowing what to say, teachers might begin by drawing them into a discussion of the text and providing ‘note-catchers’ or sentence starters to help them gather the evidence from the text. Students will also benefit from being assigned to groups where they can work together on the writing assignment. Moreover, teachers should routinely encourage students to practice verbalizing orally before they write, and to read aloud what they have written once they have done so. Oral discussions of ideas can be carried out in English Learners’ home language to facilitate the idea formation. Students with disabilities, too, will benefit from vocalizing their thoughts prior to putting pen to paper.
- Teachers can offer supports for recalling letter-sound relationships and high frequency irregular words with quick reviews and with charts for students to consult. Visual aids such as alphabet strips, word walls, personal dictionaries, and lists of high frequency words can increase writing fluency and remind students of what they have learned the prior year.
- If students are having difficulty knowing how to structure their writing or having difficulty with fluency in their writing, teachers can plan some pre-writing instructional activities in which they go over a model or exemplar and point out its characteristics to the students. By asking students to read the model aloud together, and discuss its parts and contents, teachers can help students gain some clarity as to how they might structure their own pieces. Students would also be helped by pre-writing activities in which writing is modeled in a think-aloud and a jointly-constructed piece of writing that is produced with suggestions solicited from the students. Such demonstrations are especially helpful to diverse learners because they make instruction concrete in a way that verbal instructions seldom are.
- If students are struggling to write complete sentences, or express complete ideas in writing, teachers might plan some instructional activities to help them learn how written language works. Students at the juncture between grades two and three are learning how to use more precise and formal written language, which differs in expression and structure from both the spoken register used in classroom interaction and the simpler structures used in school texts.
  - For example, when students participate in classroom discussions or respond to questions, full sentences are not required in face-to-face conversations where the context makes what is left out redundant. In face-to-face conversation, “doesn’t matter,” is a perfectly good response to the question, “How many reasons do I have to give?” In writing, the answer would be expected to be given in a full sentence: “It doesn’t matter as long as you say why you hold that opinion.”
  - If students need practice forming full sentences in writing, teachers can go over how to tell the difference between a sentence and a sentence fragment, and provide practice turning fragments into full sentences orally—e.g., “What they said”—“What did they say? Can you turn that into a full sentence?”
  - Students may need practice with how language changes depending on the point that students want to get across. For example, the text and structures differ when students are comparing, describing, or expressing an opinion. Tools, such as linguistic frames and grouping of signal words by their language function, can help support students in using such vocabulary and structures in both spoken and written forms.

- English learners whose first languages do not require subject pronouns when context make them unnecessary (e.g., Spanish, Japanese, Korean, and Slavic languages) sometimes leave them off when writing in English. They would be helped with occasional reminders for including them when writing in English, and by charts showing English subject pronoun forms for consultation.
- If students are struggling in more fundamental ways with writing and have significant spelling errors, they may be in need of additional instruction, guidance, and support with basic foundational writing skills in addition to the regularly provided ELA instruction. No student, however, should be immediately placed in Tier III interventions because of spelling errors or unfamiliarity with sight words, for example. For English learners in particular, the teacher must be cognizant of the natural progression of English language acquisition of their students based on the languages spoken, and the need to be explicit about spelling conventions in English.

## Transition to Grade Six

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Grade six marks the transition into middle school where students sharpen and further develop language and literacy skills for learning across the curriculum. For students, however, the transition into middle school represents more than just higher expectations and greater challenges in learning. It is a socially and emotionally stressful change for students even under the best of conditions. Middle school often means a different kind of school setting with multiple classes and teachers and more complex peer group social dynamics. Students know how to navigate the social order of the elementary school by the end of the fifth grade, but on entering the sixth grade they have to reestablish their place in the more complex social order of the middle school. For students entering school in the United States for the first time, acculturation to the ways of American life and schooling will also occur, perhaps on top of acquiring a new language. This is a tough task in the best of times, but when that transition takes place following a prolonged absence from school, it can be a quite daunting and formidable experience. Students are likely to show signs, not only of unfinished learning from school closures, but also of anxiety and the loss of confidence in their ability to participate and perform in either in-person or virtual classroom settings.

### Foundational skills

At the end of grade five, students who have been enrolled since elementary school and educated primarily in English should have learned the foundational skills for reading and writing and have a solid knowledge of the principles underlying the writing system. In reading, students should be able to:

- recognize most grade-level words automatically, read grade-level text fluently, and be able to vary reading rate to match the demands of the type of text they are reading
- know how to use contextual clues for making educated guesses about the meaning of unfamiliar words
- know enough about prefixes, suffixes, and word roots to take complex words apart and figure out the meaning of the whole from the parts
- read a grade five text accurately, fluently, and with appropriate expression
- understand the basic conventions of spelling and grammar

Unfinished learning in foundational literacy skills may crop up during instructional activities across the curriculum and not just during English language arts activities. Among students still in the process of acquiring English, what may appear to be unfinished learning could also be part of the language learning process or limited past engagement with a particular skill. General examples of unfinished learning include:

- When students falter or hesitate while reading, teachers might offer some “just in time” support by asking students to take a look at the unfamiliar word in a phrase and helping them look at the parts of the unknown word and how they provide clues in determining the meaning. Anchor charts to remind students of the strategies (for in-school instruction) or reference sheets can be sent home for students engaged in distance learning. Such supports are helpful for all students, and particularly for ELLs.

- Another manifestation of unfinished learning are students stumbling through a text while reading, with little attention to punctuation. Students may also race through reading without hesitation so that words blur together, which is a sign that they are not attending to the meaning of words or monitoring their understanding of the text. Again, these should not be interpreted as signs that a student is not capable of handling grade-level work, but rather that they are in need of some targeted, ‘just in time’ support from teachers. In such cases, teachers may well want to plan a refresher lesson on foundational skills in which they provide students with a review and the opportunity to practice the skills involved in reading for meaning, paying attention to meaningful units in sentences and to punctuation used to separate sentences, to clarify meaning, and indicate relationships between structures. Anchor charts to remind students of the structure of sentences and the purposeful use of punctuation (for in-school instruction) or reference sheets can be sent home for students engaged in distance learning. Such supports are helpful for all students, and particularly for ELLs.
- A different level of unfinished learning is evident in students at the beginning of grade six who have difficulty understanding or recalling information from the texts they read even if they can sound out and read the words in a text. Teachers can explicitly demonstrate how to use particular strategies to figure out words, word meanings, or text meanings. Students, especially English learners, can be supported through chunking of text, the use of graphic organizers or note-taking strategies, and instruction on research-based cognitive strategies for reading (i.e., self-monitoring, questioning the text, making connections, summarizing while reading and visualizing, etc.).
- Students at the beginning of the sixth grade who read haltingly, one word at a time, or who have a difficult time sounding out words are manifesting unfinished learning that requires more intensified and targeted instruction that may be provided within a multi-tiered system of support. Individualized instruction based on results from additional reading diagnostic assessments may be needed for some students (Tier III). English Learner results from diagnostic assessments should be examined in concert with information about the student’s English proficiency.

### Reading/listening

Students at the beginning of the sixth grade should be able to:

- read grade-level text independently and have the strategies to make sense of relatively difficult texts requiring a productive struggle to get through
- provide the theme or central ideas of the texts they read, and provide supporting details when summarizing a text
- provide explanations for events or ideas presented in a text, and provide evidence drawn from the text in support of their findings
- relate and extend ideas presented in a text to prior experiences to inform their understanding of the text
- understand an author’s point of view, and detect when there is a shift in the point of view represented in a text
- identify characters’ beliefs, personalities, and motivations and their relationships to one another from information provided in the text and from inferences drawn from the text
- cite evidence from texts to compare and contrast ideas, and to examine claims presented by an author

Although reading comprehension problems are often related to unfinished learning in foundational skills, students may also encounter difficulty or confusion while reading and listening for other reasons. For example:

- Students may not be as engaged with texts as they need to be to get much meaning from them. For example, they may have difficulty focusing on key characters, events, and settings in a book they have read to engage in discussion about them, or they may be unable to discuss its content or to compare and contrast aspects of different books read in class. Teachers can help students build their capacity to engage with texts in meaningful ways and recapture their love of reading by designing lessons that:
  - Provide motivation or interest in the topic by linking it to previous readings and learning activities and to the curricular questions they address;
  - Elicit from students what they already know about the topic and give them a heads up about what they will discover about the topic in the text they are going to read.
  - For texts that deal with topics on which some students have little background knowledge, build some by the use videos, photographs, illustrations, maps, or physical objects to stimulate discussion and interest in the topic before a reading. For example, in a text about the jet stream and how it affects global weather patterns, a teacher might download [video clips and materials](#) from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to use in discussions on the topic before the lesson. During such discussions, a teacher would want to draw attention to technical terms, vocabulary, and language structures that students will need to understand and draw meaning from the text while maintaining a focus on the core content. This is a particularly helpful approach for diverse learners including English learners and students with disabilities.
  - Activate interest in the topic of the text by discussing its relevance to student concerns, their lives, or current events. For online learning, create virtual breakout rooms by area of interest where students can discuss their interest in the topic.
- Unfinished learning may also be evident if students consistently miss clues provided in signal words (i.e., sequence words, restatement and contrast words) and connective phrases and clauses necessary for accurately reading and understanding grade-level text.
  - Teachers can provide an explicit list of such words so students all have access to the work these words do in sentences in a transparent way.
  - Teachers can provide a mini-lesson on how paying attention to these words will help them to follow and explain ideas presented in text.
  - Teachers can guide students in slowing down to attend to phrasing and the meaning of the parts of sentences, as well as sentences as a whole.
  - Teachers might want to do a quick parsing of complex sentences to get students to attend to meaningful parts: e.g., “Many different skills/ went into making a clock/, and new tools and methods /were constantly being invented/ to make/ ever smaller, more complicated mechanisms/ that worked with greater precision.”<sup>10</sup>
  - Teachers can go over the language used in text and identify signal words that may present difficulty to ELLs and students with disabilities because they are new, unusual, or not transparent in meaning.

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10 From Koscielniak, Bruce. *About Time: A First Look at Time and Clocks*. Orlando: Houghton Mifflin, 2004.

- Teachers can provide sentence starters and frames to support students in expressing their understanding of the text using the linguistic structures necessary for the task at hand (comparing and contrasting, providing evidence from the text, etc.) Linguistic frames used for oral expression can also support students in their written responses.
- Teachers can provide anchor charts to remind students of the strategies (for in-school instruction), or reference sheets can be sent home for students engaged in distance learning. Such supports are helpful for all students, and particularly for ELLs.
- If students do not comprehend what they read and do not know what to do to improve their understanding, they may need more support in addition to core instruction (Tier II). Teachers can help students recapture the purpose for reading by:
  - Prompting students to do a ‘first read’ to get an overall picture of what the text is saying. If students have difficulty doing this first read independently, teachers can do it as a read aloud, think aloud, or in partner reads. Engage students in a discussion of the ideas and details to see what they understood.
  - Selecting a portion of the text that includes key details or elements for students to re-read closely to gain a deeper understanding of the text. Students can then discuss their understanding with partners, in small groups, or possibly in virtual break-out sessions. Teachers should provide students with suggestions of words, text features, or details that can lead to a deeper understanding of the whole text.
  - Asking students to go deeper in their third reading of the text, this time focusing on efforts to integrate their understanding of the text.
- When students are unable to explain what they don’t understand about the text, retell what is going on in a text they have read, or paraphrase what is going on in a story they have listened to as a read-aloud, this indicates that students are either not making much sense of the texts because they find them too complex to follow, or they are unfamiliar with the language structures and forms that are used in the text. Teachers should under no circumstances set aside the grade-level texts that students might find too difficult to work with on their own. Instead, teachers should employ instructional activities that help students work with the language of complex grade-level texts in the following ways:
  - Consider adopting an instructional strategy that helps students focus on syntax to see the meaning a rich sentence can contain (for example, the “[juicy sentence approach](#)”)<sup>11</sup> to help students learn the language of complex texts.<sup>12</sup>
    - Break complex texts down into manageable chunks (phrases and clauses) and ask students to paraphrase the meaning of each chunk as a proposition (a short simple sentence), calling attention to connectives between parts in order to help students discover how written English works.
    - Provide visuals by writing sentences from the text that are especially complex on strips of paper, and guide students in seeing where phrasal and clausal boundaries are. Ask students to help you figure out what each segment means. Divide the strips of paper up by phrases and ask students to put them back together again into the sentence. Some parts (especially time adverbials) are movable, and some parts are not.

11 See [Juicy sentence play](#), from the Council of the Great City Schools, and [Juicy sentence guidance](#), from Achieve the Core.

12 See [Choosing “juicy” complex excerpts and sentences](#), Council of the Great City Schools.



- Model and think aloud about a text (e.g., “What main ideas do we find in this text?”) and ask students to raise their own questions about it (“What do you think it is telling us?”).
- Ask students to make connections to other ideas and texts (“Does this remind you of another story we have read? What does this make you think of?” “Can you think of other stories like this that we have already read?”). Have students practice these same skills on their own and in small groups or virtual break-out sessions. When you begin shifting this responsibility primarily to students, stay alert to those who may need more support and attention.
- For English learners, ask students to list the points that are made in a text and the specific language that supports each point; they may need this additional teacher-led support and modeling, especially in identifying points when they must be inferred from the context. (See [Sentence Play resource](#) for examples.)
- Provide graphic organizers and other note-taking structures to assist students in keeping track of important points, details, characters, concepts from the text.

### Writing/speaking

Students at the beginning of the sixth grade should be ready to:

- write essays in response to prompts for opinion and informational pieces
- demonstrate their understanding and engagement with the materials they are learning in writing and in speech
- make use of the more robust language of academic discourse as they further develop their skills in argumentation, explanation, and narration, and to provide evidence for claims and assertions
- provide oral and written summaries of literary text that include story elements such as characters, setting, and conflict
- write written responses in quizzes

Unfinished learning in writing can manifest in various ways. The following are various types of difficulties that students may exhibit in their efforts to produce written products or to participate in classroom discussions:

- Students may appear to lack confidence in expressing their thoughts in discussions or in writing, they may respond to questions with “I don’t know,” or they may have trouble responding to follow-up or probing questions. When students require a lot of urging to start writing, or to participate in a discussion, teachers can help students regain their voice by designing learning experiences that call for whole-group or class oral or written responses, a powerful strategy that is sometimes used when there are diverse learning needs in a class. For example, teachers can pose questions that call for whole-group responses, and students respond verbally in unison with a choral response. Written responses can be elicited by having students work together in groups to come up with responses, or having students write responses in a virtual chat-box.
- Another way teachers can help students get started writing is to model their own writing process, and the inner dialogue that writers engage in as they write: “Ok, so I’ve got to state clearly what it is I am writing about first! When and where did this event happen, and who was involved? How did it happen? What was unusual about it? Why do I think so? What do I make of it? What’s my conclusion about the event?” By engaging students as participants in the co-construction of a text, teachers model the way the students might proceed as they try writing their own such essays. Later, teachers should model the next step in the writing process: editing and revising.

- Another manifestation of unfinished learning in writing can be recognized when students have difficulty responding to writing prompts. In middle school, students are asked to write narratives that take the form of accounts or stories, expository reports of research they are doing, persuasive writing on a problem or issue, and responses to stories they have read. Each of these types of writing has a characteristic structure that students are expected to follow. Teachers can help students understand how to appropriately respond to writing prompts by:
  - Selecting texts that are good examples of each of the modes of writing, and guiding students to identify the parts. Go over several examples with students, discussing the structure, the kinds of language used, the organization of the information.
  - Providing students with enough information on the topics you are asking them to write about: a book they have read, a topic they have been studying, or an expository piece about something the class is working on.
  - Facilitating whole-class writing experiences where students and the teacher collaborate in brainstorming a topic to use in planning and organizing their own writing.
  - Modeling for students how to identify the parts of a writing prompt that show the purpose, topic, context, audience, and format for the writing task.
  - Engaging students in whole-class writing of a prompt where the teacher and students write a prompt together as the teacher models each step in the writing process: brainstorming, drafting, revising, and proofreading. This process would be done over the course of multiple class periods.
  - Offering graphic organizers with brief descriptions of what might be included in each section. This is particularly useful in helping ELLs and students with disabilities plan their writing.
  - Providing anchor charts to remind students of the strategies (for in-school instruction) or reference sheets sent home for students engaged in distance learning is helpful for all students, and particularly for ELLs.
- Student writing may reveal inconsistent use of standard English language such as sentence fragments and run-on sentences, errors in subject verb agreement, and punctuation, to name a few. Once student writing is ready to be edited, teachers should note the common errors that are arising in student writing and address them to varying degrees according to the frequency with which the errors are occurring:
  - For errors that are made by only a few students, teachers can provide “just in time” feedback within the writing assignment itself with quick guided practice showing students how to correct the error, or through additional writing opportunities to practice honing that skill independently.
  - For errors that are common among a large number of students, teachers can provide a mini-lesson for the class that will provide the direct instruction needed to correct those common errors.
- For English learners, the manifestations described above may be the result of the student’s place in his or her trajectory towards English proficiency. Providing opportunities to write and speak in the home language helps the student understand the contrasting linguistic features with English, supporting more sophisticated language development in both the home language and English.

## Transition to Grade Nine

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As with the transition to middle school, the transition from middle into high school is typically marked by mixed feelings of excitement and anxiety. Not only must students take on greater responsibility for their own learning and deal with higher academic expectations, they also have to find their way in new social and physical environments that are initially intimidating and confusing. Such a transition is a big challenge in ordinary times,<sup>14</sup> and will likely prove even more challenging after extended and unexpected school closures. This transition and the unfinished learning students will have from grade eight may take a toll on students' academic agency and self-confidence. Students will require not only instructional support, but social-emotional support from teachers, parents, and peers.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, students will also enter high school with newfound knowledge and skills from having to navigate a difficult time during the pandemic, as well as new ways of engaging with school.

### Foundational expectations

By the time students enter high school,<sup>16</sup> they are expected to have mastered foundational skills for reading, writing, speaking, and listening. They should be able to read grade-level text, recognizing words rapidly and accurately with appropriate intonation and pace, without having to consciously decode words. They should be able to express themselves in writing and speech and effectively participate in high school work, assignments, and classroom discussions.

However, there are students who enter high school with an uncertain grasp and command of necessary foundational literacy skills. For example,

- Students may read slowly, with many pauses, making frequent mistakes, ignoring punctuation, and often in a monotone
- Students may repeat words and phrases, skip words, lose their place, or miss lines during reading
- Students may stumble over multisyllabic words or mispronounce words

In such situations, teachers should first identify the source or cause of the difficulty: Has the student struggled with literacy skills in the past? Does the problem stem from the approach used to teach reading during the students' early years in school? Have previous interventions been ineffective, or lacked fidelity and progress monitoring? Has regular school attendance been an issue? Are there indicators that suggest that the student might have an undiagnosed learning disability such as dyslexia that makes reading difficult? Is it related to language differences or problems? Is the student a newcomer to English? English learners at grade nine include relative newcomers (defined as being enrolled in U. S. schools for less than three years), as well as students who have been in U. S. schools for longer but have not yet been reclassified. The kind of support needed can vary considerably, so teachers should consider individual student circumstances and identify the kind of help that is most appropriate. For example, create a school master schedule that provides additional opportunities, time, and intensity of instruction for students that may need foundational skills (e.g., double block ELA, reading classes). If your high school has students who struggle with reading or cannot read, you must create the opportunity for students to receive targeted reading instruction—not only in ELA but across all content courses.

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14 Lester, L. & Cross, D. (2015) The relationship between school climate and mental and emotional wellbeing over the transition between primary to secondary school. *Psychology of Well-Being*. 2015; 5(1): 9. Published online 2015 Oct 22. doi: [10.1186/s13612-015-0037-8](https://doi.org/10.1186/s13612-015-0037-8).

Cohen, J. S., & Smerdon, B. A. (2009). Tightening the dropout tourniquet: Easing the transition from middle to high school. *Preventing School Failure*, 53(3), 177-184.

15 Johnson, V. L., Simon, P. & Mun, E-Y. (2014). A Peer-led high school transition program increases graduation rates among Latino males. *J Educ Res*. 2014; 107(3): 186-196. Published online 2013 Nov 26. doi: [10.1080/00220671.2013.788991](https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2013.788991).

16 Assuming students have been enrolled in US schools since elementary school and educated primarily in English.

Depending on the source or cause of incomplete mastery of foundational skills, students may need different kinds of instructional support. The following, however, are ways that teachers can include students with such needs in grade-level appropriate instructional activities. Teachers can:

- Seize opportunities to improve fluency while fulfilling other learning tasks connected to grade-level content standards. For example, integrate public speaking opportunities into classroom routines.
- Identify high-value sections of text or literacy tasks (i.e., complex linguistic structures, chunks particularly relevant to content or authors' purpose) for students to spend more time on, and on which to work closely and come to know well.
- Improve fluency by engaging in activities such as choral reading of short texts, especially when phrasal boundaries are marked so students can practice reading in units that are larger than single words to improve and build fluency.
- Have students read aloud with peer reading-buddies, making careful pairings so that more fluent students are working with and supporting ones who are less fluent. Peer reading-buddies are not a substitute for read-alouds led by the academic English expert in the classroom—the teacher, but they can assist with improving fluency.
- Remind students how longer words break into syllables, including prefixes and suffixes, and encourage students to use that knowledge to support their decoding of unfamiliar words. Model this frequently for them while being careful to not diverge from grade-level content for extended phonics instruction.

### Reading/listening

In grade nine students are expected to:

- expand their ability to read literary and informational texts independently and to access academic content from those texts across the high school curriculum
- fully understand and apply the content of written materials, including using evidence from texts to support their inferences
- make connections about how complex ideas interact and develop within (and across) books, essays, articles, or multi-media sources
- Demonstrate their ability to respond to literature by discussing in writing an author's style, purpose, and use of symbolism or figurative language, and compare works by the same or different authors
- understand precisely what an author or speaker is saying, and how to question an author's or speaker's assumptions and assess the accuracy of his or her claims

Unfinished learning in these areas may be manifested in various ways. Students may be able to read a text but unable to make meaning from what they have read. The effects of extended time away from school or unfinished learning may also exacerbate certain typical, unproductive behaviors of students in early high school years. They may be present in class but inattentive, not participating in instructional activities, or going through the motions. Books may be open more or less to the right page, but little effort is made to read. Students may skip homework assignments or turn in very little to review. Or they may exhibit other problematic or non-productive behaviors in class. To address these instructional and engagement issues, teachers can—

- Provide students with explicit instruction and strategies for constructing meaning as they read (e.g., deciding where to pause during reading to figure out what the text is saying, and then summarizing what is known so far).
- Provide additional support within the flow of a lesson by doing read-alouds of stories and asking students to work on excerpts of the text on their own or with peers. This can help students overcome their initial reluctance to participate.

- Plan activities early in the school year to counter the anxiety students may feel at being unprepared for high school. For example, before getting into books and literary works in the ninth-grade curriculum, teachers might put together a set of short stories that students can read and respond to. Teachers can also have students work in small groups to read these stories and to create presentations of the story, characters, and the plot using infographic software such as PowerPoint or free software such as Google Presentation,<sup>17</sup> or Edu.Glogster.<sup>18</sup> Working together with their new classmates on a literacy project such as this may give students the confidence and encouragement they need to tackle longer-form literary and informational texts. Teamwork gives students a chance not only to connect with peers socially but also to reconnect with themselves as learners.

When students have difficulty with the complex texts they are expected to read and to learn from in history, science, or other subjects, or have trouble remembering what they have read, they may need some ‘just in time’ instruction in close reading from the subject area teacher who is expert in the essential content. Students may need some help in dealing with the language of complex texts and the content words specific to that subject. Depending on what appears to be the problem—lack of concentration, lack of background information on the topics covered in the texts, or difficulty with the language of the text—teachers may want to plan a series of refresher lessons or mini-units. Some examples are:

- A refresher unit on strategies for learning from texts: Using bridging techniques to help students understand new knowledge/concepts, including annotations of text, summarizing while reading, questioning the text in various ways by underlining, circling, and making marginal notes.
- Modeling aloud for students how mature readers think while reading a text: what alerts them to the main ideas in the text, the text-dependent questions they ask while reading a text, the connections they make to other ideas and texts, can also be helpful. Following such a demonstration, teachers can guide students to try this kind of attentive reading on their own, in pairs, or in small groups. Such modeling and coached practice sessions can build students’ capacity to better understand and summarize the ideas presented in complex text.

If students appear to be having difficulty dealing with the complexity of the language used in the texts they are reading, teachers may want to plan a mini-lesson in how to read such texts, and how to deal with the complexity they encounter. Many students need help dealing with text complexity in the materials they read for high school classes, and students with disabilities and English learners, in particular, benefit from guidance in how the language, vocabulary and nuances in such texts works, and how to make sense of it:

- Informational density makes for complex texts that are difficult to understand for many students, but especially for English learners. Teachers can help ELLs to make sense of such language and writing by highlighting parts of sentences, and asking: *What does this part tell us? And what about this next phrase? What do you think the writer means by that?* Breaking up a sentence by phrases and clauses helps students discover the structural relationship between parts of a sentence, and even sentences within a paragraph to see how meaning is conveyed.
- Students may find strategic prereading and discussions of texts to be especially helpful. By discussing the topic of the text, teachers can activate the background knowledge students bring to the text, or help to build it when the topic is new for students.

<sup>17</sup> Google Presentation suite of apps for education: GAFE, <https://www.google.com/slides/about/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://edu.glogster.com/>



- Placing the topic of a text in historical, cultural or social perspective, and using visuals such as artwork, photographs, diagrams, websites, and video clips may help provide students with the background needed to make sense of the text. Giving students a list of text-dependent questions may also help to guide their reading of texts. This helps focus student attention on details of a text—an important aspect of close reading.
- English learners and students with disabilities, in particular, will benefit from glossaries of academic or subject-area words and expressions that might be unfamiliar to them. Encourage ELLs to look words up in online bilingual dictionaries, or to ask about their meaning if they do not make sense in a given context.

### Writing/speaking

In the ninth grade, students are expected to produce written texts and to give oral presentations in many of their classes. These writing assignments will be longer than in previous grades, and are expected to exhibit the features and structures of various specialized forms of writing and presentation. For example, research and book reports, journals and records of work over a semester, narrative or expository essays, lab reports of experiments, term papers, and persuasive essays each call for a particular structure and should contain specific sorts of information, and all require the use of complex language and thinking.

In grade nine students are expected to:

- extract information from complex literary and informational texts, and to provide evidence in spoken or written language their understanding of those texts
- use relevant evidence when supporting their own points in writing and speaking, making their reasoning clear to readers or listeners or constructively evaluating others' use of evidence
- develop the flexibility, concentration, and fluency necessary for accomplishing complex tasks that require them to produce logical, well-reasoned writings that are supported by evidence
- produce more writing and participate in a variety of conversations
- exhibit greater care and judgment in making claims in their writing, be ready to defend their assertions, and to express what they know about a subject using appropriate examples and evidence

During the extended break from the classroom, many students will have had less practice writing, presenting in front of a class, and using the language of academic discourse. Teachers can expect to see various manifestations of this lack of practice and unfinished learning in speaking and writing fluency. Moreover, the natural uncertainty that students face in their first year of high school will likely exacerbate these issues. Students may be hesitant or lack confidence in their ability to express what they know in speech and in writing because they worry about revealing that they do not fully understand the content and materials they are working on in school, or that they do not know as much as they believe everyone else does. How are teachers to separate student needs stemming from unfinished learning, natural progressions in academic language acquisition, and the many insecurities that are endemic to young teenage students?

- When students have difficulty getting started with a writing assignment or organizing their thoughts about a topic before writing, teachers can provide students with models of the type of writing or presentation they would like students to produce, lead the class in a study of the model, lead a think-aloud as they look at the model, invite students to help create an outline together, and finally, draft a sample text following the model. This may sound like a time-intensive approach, but if it helps students overcome their “fear of the blank page” or uncertainty in how to get started with their own writing, it is worth the effort.

- Students may need a review on the different types of writing called for in various curricular areas. In middle school, the types of writing that should have been covered included narrative, expository, and persuasive writing. A few refresher sessions on writing genre, their usual structures, rhetorical devices and organizational features, and the language that typifies such writing may help them get started writing. For example, teachers can:
  - Analyze models of expository or explanatory writing. Work together as a class, in small groups, or online breakout sessions to annotate or color code models or benchmark pieces. Identify the key characteristics of an exemplar and discuss how the parts of the piece work together to communicate ideas effectively.
  - Provide think-aloud demonstrations of how to proceed in analyzing and understanding the nature of the prompt, posing the questions a more skilled writer might ask, and modeling the process of planning and organizing what to say, thinking about the intended audience and what objections or questions they might have regarding the arguments a writer is going to make, and how to address those points.
  - Provide guidance and practice in supporting a point or idea with evidence. This practice can be done orally, as well as in writing. Evidence can be drawn from the text, from multimedia, online resources, or even from shared experiences.
- If students struggle with the skills required to produce expository or explanatory essays and reports — reading source materials, citing relevant points and evidence, and ultimately pulling together the information they have collected in support of or against positions on a topic—teachers might want to plan some sessions to help restore or teach these important aspects of writing. For example, the problem may well be that students need help developing arguments and analyzing information, propositions and positions as writers must do in developing the kind of reasoned discourse found in written argumentation and writing. Thus, it would be useful to:
  - Design lessons on critical thinking, which is foundational to any kind of expository or argument writing.<sup>19</sup> In such a unit, the skills to be taught might include asking critical questions when discussing or reading about a problem, gathering and assessing information that addresses a problem, evaluating the sources of information used, critiquing arguments and raising counter-arguments, recognizing different points of views in arguments, and assessing the role played by circumstances or context in evaluating arguments and positions.
  - Students will also need help in structuring and communicating problem/solution frames and formal arguments in writing. Such writing calls for a different kind of organization than narrative writing or the compare and contrast type of writing that students may have done in middle school. Expository and argument writing calls for a different “voice,” or the attitude or tone the writer takes towards the message: students have to learn about taking a rhetorical stance in relation to the problem being discussed,<sup>20</sup> and teachers can help students discover that by guiding them in looking at examples of texts that differ in tone.

19 See for example: Fisher, Alec. (2011). *Critical Thinking: An Introduction* (second edition). Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press.  
 Paul, R. W., Martin, D., Adamson, K. (1989). *Critical thinking handbook: High School*. Foundation for Critical Thinking. <https://www.criticalthinking.org/store/products/critical-thinking-handbook-high-school/153>.

20 Nordquist, Richard. “Definition and Examples of Rhetorical Stance.” ThoughtCo, Feb. 11, 2020, <http://www.thoughtco.com/rhetorical-stance-1692056>.

- If students continue to have difficulty writing or what they do write is too rudimentary for the ninth grade (e.g., they do not vary sentence beginnings in their writing; they use simple sentences primarily in their writing; they do not use appropriate grade-level academic vocabulary in writing tasks; they make many spelling errors throughout writing assignment; or they do not use appropriate paragraph structure in their writing), teachers may have to plan some work on developing both their language and their writing skills. When students have this level of problem with writing, they may also have similar difficulties in reading. This may include:
  - Mini-lessons for individual students or groups of students. For example, if half of the class continues to make the same grammatical errors in their informal and formal writing tasks, it may help to review grammar rules and lead a discussion about the differences in spoken and written language forms.
  - Activities aimed at expanding students’ vocabularies and encouraging them to use words that more precisely express their intentions in their stories, reports, and essays
  - Teaching the use of multiple strategies to clarify the meaning of unknown words and phrases (e.g., context clues, affixes and roots, etc.)
  - Teaching students about derivational processes, namely changing the function of words by the adding suffixes: e.g., analyze (verb), analysis (noun), analytical (adjective)
  - Teaching students how to use dictionaries, thesauruses, and apps such as WordWeb to check on usage
  - Guidance on the accurate use of grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases

## Appendix A

# Additional Resources

Here is a list of additional resources to support districts with prioritizing content and addressing unfinished learning:

Student Achievement Partners, *2020-21 Priority Instructional Content*, [https://www.achievethecore.org/2020-21\\_PriorityInstructionalContent](https://www.achievethecore.org/2020-21_PriorityInstructionalContent)

### Mathematics: Materials for K-12

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Common Core Standards Writing Team. (2013). *Progressions for the Common Core State Standards in Mathematics*. Tucson, AZ: Institute for Mathematics and Education, University of Arizona. <http://ime.math.arizona.edu/progressions/>

Student Achievement Partners. (n.d.). *Mathematics: Focus by grade level*. <https://achievethecore.org/category/774/mathematics-focus-by-grade-level>

### Mathematics: Materials for K-8

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Kobett, B., & Karp, K.S. (2020). *Strengths-based teaching and learning in mathematics: 5 teaching turnarounds for grades K–6*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin; Reston, VA: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. (2020a). *Catalyzing change in early childhood and elementary school mathematics: Initiating critical conversations*. Reston, VA: Author.

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. (2020b). *Catalyzing change in middle school mathematics: Initiating critical conversations*. Reston, VA: Author.

Gray, K., & Liner, K. (2020) Looking to the Fall, Part I: Welcoming and Supporting Students. *Illustrativemathematics.blog*, <https://illustrativemathematics.blog/2020/05/07/>

Gray, K., & Liner, K. (2020) Looking to the Fall, Part 2: Creating a Supportive Resource for K-5 teachers. *Illustrativemathematics.blog*, <https://illustrativemathematics.blog/2020/05/20/>

Petersen, D., & Nowak, K. (2020) Looking Ahead to 2020-21 in IM 6-8 Math and IM Algebra 1, Geometry, and Algebra 2. *Illustrativemathematics.blog*, <https://illustrativemathematics.blog/2020/05/14/>

### Mathematics: Materials for High School

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Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin. (2019). *Launch years: Reimagining mathematics education*. <https://www.utdanacenter.org/our-work/k-12-education/launch-years>

Daro, P., & Asturias, H. (2019). *Branching out: Designing high school mathematics pathways for equity*. <https://tinyurl.com/yagfutsx>

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. (2018). *Catalyzing change in high school mathematics: Initiating critical conversations*. Reston, VA: Author.

## English Language Art/Literacy: Materials for K-12

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Student Achievement Partners. (n.d.). Text Complexity. <https://achievethecore.org/category/1206/ela-literacy-foundational-skills>

Student Achievement Partners. (n.d.). Text Dependent Questions. <https://achievethecore.org/category/1158/ela-literacy-text-dependent-questions>

Student Achievement Partners. Foundational Skills. <https://achievethecore.org/category/1206/ela-literacy-foundational-skills>

Vermont Writing Collaborative. Writing for Understanding. <https://www.vermontwritingcollaborative.org/WPDEV>

Adams, M. J. (2011). Advancing our students' language and literacy: The challenge of complex texts. *American Educator*, 34(4), 3.

Beers, K. (2003). *When Kids Can't Read: What teachers can do*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

Burkins, J. & Yaris, K. (2016). *Who's Doing the Work?* Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers

Cucchiara, M., (2019) "Language of learning: Content rich texts build knowledge and skills." *The Learning Professional*, April 2019 (Vol. 40, No2)

Fisher, D., Frey, N., and Hattie, J. (2016). *Visible Learning for Literacy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin

Hochman, J. and Wexler, N. (2017). *The Writing Revolution: A guide to advancing thinking through writing in all subjects and grades*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Hawkins, J., Ginty, E., Kurzman, K. L., Leddy, D., & Miller, J. (2008). *Writing for Understanding: Using backward design to help all students write effectively*. South Strafford, VT: Vermont Writing Collaborative.

Lehman, C. & Roberts, K. (2014). *Falling in Love with Close Reading: Lessons for analyzing texts—and life*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Liben, D., & Liben, M. (2019). *Know Better, Do Better: Teaching the foundations so every child can read*. West Palm Beach, FL: Literacy Solutions.

Shanahan, T., Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2012). The challenge of challenging text. *Educational Leadership*, 69(6), 58–62. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/mar12/vol69/num06/The-Challenge-of-Challenging-Text.aspx>

Willingham, D. T. (2006). How knowledge helps. *American Educator*, 30(1), 30-37.

Wong Fillmore, L. and Fillmore, C.J. (2012). What does text complexity mean for English learners and language minority students? In *Understanding Language: Language, Literacy, and Learning in the Content Areas* (pp. 64-74). Stanford, CA: Stanford University.



## Appendix B

# Information on Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

For further information on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), please consult the following resources—

Critical Elements of UDL Implementation: Beliefs, Instruction, Planning Process, Blueprint.  
<https://udl-irn.org/home/udl-resources/>

CAST Professional Resources.  
<http://castprofessionallearning.org/free-udl-resources-and-tips/>

Remote Learning Resources.  
<http://www.cast.org/whats-new/remote-learning-resources.html#.XsMrZC-ZOIZ>

## Appendix C

# Advisory Committee

**Harold Asturias** is the director of the Center for Mathematics Excellence and Equity (CeMEE) at the Lawrence Hall of Science; a science center located at the University of California, Berkeley. Before that, he was the Deputy Director of the Mathematics and Science Professional Development at the University of California Office of the President. He provided oversight to the English Language Development Professional Development Institutes (ELD-PDI). Previously, he served as the Director of the New Standards Portfolio Assessment Project and the Mathematics Unit for New Standards—a national project to develop national standards and assessments. In that capacity, he led the development team of experts whose efforts, involving many states and over a thousand teachers, resulted in the successful production of two assessment systems: the New Standards Portfolio and the Reference Examination. In addition, he was part of the team that produced the New Standards Performance Standards. Mr. Asturias was a member of the writing group for the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) Assessment Standards for School Mathematics. He has extensive experience providing professional development in the areas of standards and assessment in mathematics for teachers in large urban districts (Chicago, Los Angeles, New York City) and smaller and rural districts. Over the past few years, he has focused in the area of designing and implementing professional development for K-12 mathematics teachers who teach English Language Learners. Also, he has collaborated with the Council of Great City Schools in the design and implementation of online resources for understanding the interconnectedness of mathematics content and language.

**Phil Daro** was a lead writer of the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics, and continues to work to advance the design and use of leadership tools for improving mathematics instruction and assessment at every level of the educational system. Daro serves on the Board of the Education Development Center, the Board of the Strategic Education Research Partnership, and the Board of Shell Centre Publications at the University of Nottingham. He has formerly served on Board of Open Up Resources and the Board of the Noyce Foundation. He is on the Executive Committee of the International Society for Design and Development in Education, is a Member of the NAEP Validity Studies Panel, and the Advisory Boards for the Algebra for All initiative in New York City schools; Illustrative Mathematics; and Making Mathematics.

In 2012, he received the Walter Denham Award from the California Mathematics Council for his leadership, and in 2014, the Ross Taylor/Glenn Gilbert National Leadership Award from the National Council of Supervisors of Mathematics in recognition of his unique and dedicated contributions to mathematics education.

Phil currently serves on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) Validity Studies Panel. NAEP is the national assessment for the United States. He is Principal Investigator for a study comparing depth and complexity of test items in use on the national tests with items in use on state level tests. This study follows earlier studies of the relationship of test items to standards.

As Director of Mathematics for the Strategic Education Research Partnership, he organized partnerships between the University of California, Stanford, and other universities with the Oakland and San Francisco Unified School Districts. Recent consultation clients in mathematics curriculum and instruction include Japan, Brazil, New York City, Cambridge Mathematics, San Francisco, Oakland and other districts. He was the design lead for a tablet-based K-12 mathematics curriculum.

During sixteen years at the University of California, he directed several large-scale teacher professional development programs, including the California Mathematics Project. He also directed the National Center for Education and the Economy's New Standards Project and was a Senior Fellow for Mathematics for America's Choice. He has held leadership positions with the California Department of Education and served on numerous national committees addressing central issues in mathematics assessment, standards, and instruction.

**Judy Elliott** is the former Chief Academic Officer of the Los Angeles Unified School District where she was responsible for curriculum and instruction from early childhood through adult, professional development, innovation, accountability, assessment, afterschool programs, state and federal programs, health and human services, magnet programs language acquisition for both English and Standard English learners, parent outreach, and intervention programs for all students. Before that she was the Chief of Teaching and Learning in the Portland Oregon Public Schools and prior to that an Assistant Superintendent of Student Support Services in the Long Beach Unified School District in CA. Judy also worked as a Senior Researcher at the National Center on Educational Outcomes at the University of Minnesota. She started her career as a special education classroom teacher and then a school psychologist. During this time, she was an adjunct professor at the State University College at Buffalo New York, where she taught graduate courses in curriculum and instruction and applied behavior analysis in the Department of Exceptional Education. She earned her Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from the State University of New York in Buffalo, NY.

In 2012, she was appointed by Commissioner John King as the first ever New York State "Distinguished Educator" to help support and oversee the Buffalo City School District Priority Schools. Judy continues to assist districts, cooperatives, schools, national organizations, state and federal departments of education in their efforts to update and realign systems and infrastructures around curriculum, instruction, assessment, data use, leadership, and accountability that includes all students and renders a return on investment.

Her research interests focus on systems change and leadership, equitable and accessible effective instruction for all students, data-based decision making, and accelerated student achievement. She has trained thousands of staff, teachers, and administrators in the U.S. and abroad in areas of integrated service delivery systems, multi-tiered system of supports, effective use of data, linking assessment to district and classroom instruction and intervention, strategies and tactics for effective instruction, curriculum adaptation, collaborative teaching and behavior management. She has published over 51 articles, book chapters, technical/research reports and books. She sits on editorial boards for professional journals and is active in many professional organizations.

Judy is nationally known for her work in Multi-Tiered System of Supports/Response to Instruction and Intervention. She has led many successful projects in this area and actively continues to support school districts and national organizations in this work.

**Lily Wong Fillmore** is a linguist whose research and professional endeavors have focused on language learning and development in linguistic minority children in school settings. She was the Jerome Hutto Professor of Education at the University of California at Berkeley.

Much of her research, teaching and writing over the past four and a half decades have focused on issues related to the education of language minority students: on social and cognitive processes in language learning, on cultural differences in language learning behavior, on sources of variation in learning, the loss of family languages by immigrant and indigenous students as they acquire English in school, language revitalization efforts in indigenous communities, and the role played by literacy in language development in school age students. She has conducted studies of second language learners in school settings on Latino, Asian, American Indian and Alaskan Native children.

Since her retirement from the Berkeley faculty in 2004, she has worked with educators in urban school districts (Denver, Boston, NYC, San Francisco, Oakland, Albuquerque and Fresno) and with the Council of Great City Schools to improve academic language and literacy instruction for English learners and other language minority students.

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# **FINANCE REPORT**



# **Financial Issues in the Reopening of Schools During the COVID-19 Crisis**

**June 2020**



## ABOUT THE COUNCIL

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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Council of the Great City Schools

# Financial Issues in the Reopening of Schools During the COVID-19 Crisis



June 2020



# Table of Contents

- Overview ..... 1
- Delivery Models for Improved Student Outcomes ..... 2
- Revenue Strategies ..... 3
  - Local ..... 3
  - State ..... 4
  - Federal ..... 4
- Reductions and Reallocations ..... 5
  - Operational Cost Reductions ..... 5
  - Reallocations ..... 6
- Conclusion ..... 8
- Team Members ..... 9



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# Overview

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, school districts across the country have been able to save money because campuses were closed and operations were reduced (e.g., utilities, fuel, part-time salaries, overtime, substitutes, supplies, contracted services, etc.). At the same time, these savings were typically offset by unexpected expenditures for delivering remote instruction, providing off-site meal services, and supporting students and families. Nevertheless, most Great City School districts will have a positive fund balance at the end of the current 2020 fiscal year.

The challenge moving forward into the 2021 fiscal year and beyond involves the very real possibility of significant revenue declines and the need for districts to develop business strategies that—

- Support the district’s values, goals, and priorities.
- Reflect best- and worst-case scenarios in dealing with declines in income, property, and sales tax revenues.
- Identify and balance the costs of providing alternative levels of services that are not “business as usual” but that continue to *meet or exceed desired standards of instruction and learning and ensure the health and safety of students*; and reset public expectations so there is no surprise when these services are delivered.
- Increase effectiveness and efficiency in ways that reduce ongoing operating costs and result in savings that can be reallocated to help districts avoid insolvency and improve performance.
- Use data visualizations to communicate the implications of various fluctuations in revenues and expenditures in laymen’s terms, so school boards, senior leadership, district staff, and the public have a clear understanding of the near and longer-term financial conditions of the district.<sup>1</sup>

The Council of the Great City Schools assembled a working group of senior managers with extensive experience in financial management in urban education to develop recommendations for financial strategies that would help districts accomplish these goals and remain financially viable, while allowing member districts to continue their focus on student learning in the midst of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

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1 “Planning for the FY 20-21 Budget”, School Board Workshop #2, May 12, 2020 prepared by Financial Management of the Broward County Public Schools; “Strategic Budget Development, Phase VII—Preliminary Recommendations”, Special Board Meeting of the Board of Education, Fresno Unified School District, May 13, 2020; and “COVID-19 Budget Update”, Presentation to Economic Council by Mike Burke, CFO, School District of Palm Beach County, May 13, 2020.

# Delivery Models for Improved Student Outcomes

The key to success in managing possible financial shortfalls due to the COVID-19 pandemic will be the ability of districts to align their decisions to the values, goals, and priorities of competing delivery models proposed by Education Resources Strategies (ERS) in their guide entitled *The Strategic CFO*.<sup>2</sup> These models articulate various strategies for providing remote instruction, face-to-face instruction, and hybrid instruction. In addition, the *General Financial Officers Association* (GFOA) has pointed out that the balancing act among competing models is particularly challenging when there are significant declines in revenues and when budgets “should be formulated in a way that is data driven and results oriented.”<sup>3</sup>

In order to develop and provide achievable and affordable service-delivery models that address their values, goals, and priorities, districts should—

- Assemble a cross-functional instructional team to identify a delivery model, e.g., virtual, hybrid, blended, or traditional, which meets standards of instruction and learning that improve student outcomes.
- Create a cross-functional management team to develop a workplan to ensure the health and safety of students by preparing, responding to, and mitigating the presence and transmission of COVID-19 on district properties.
- Involve the Chief Financial Officer in developing models that are aligned with potential revenues (e.g., share constraints) so time is not wasted pursuing options that are cost prohibitive or unsustainable.
- Identify service mechanisms and activity-based cost estimates for each level of service that roll up to the total cost of ownership (ToC), including expected outcomes (ROIs) for each of the models.
- Recognize that the limited time available to implement the models by the reopening of schools in the fall will not allow for perfection, but will start a process of continuous improvement, allowing districts to adapt and respond to changing conditions (e.g., meeting student needs by moving seamlessly back and forth from classroom to virtual instruction) within the framework of the chosen instructional model.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.erstrategies.org/tap/the\\_strategic\\_cfo](https://www.erstrategies.org/tap/the_strategic_cfo)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gfoa.org/balancing-the-budget-part1>

# Revenue Strategies

## Local

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The adequacy of an unrestricted general fund balance is particularly important since school districts will be subject to unanticipated changes in their financial condition caused by volatile income, property, and sales tax revenue sources and potential reductions in state aid and federal funding.<sup>4</sup>

To have a cushion in one's unrestricted general fund balance, districts should create or review their current fund balance and reserve policies to ensure that there is—

- A clear articulation of the level of unrestricted fund balances that should be maintained in the general fund for general accounting and budgetary purposes.
- A framework and process for how the district can increase or decrease the level of unrestricted fund balance over a specific period.
- Broad guidance for how resources can be directed to replenish the fund balance should the balance fall below a prescribed level.
- Clarity on what portion of reserves could be used and the time over which it can be used to compensate for declining revenues to help manage the district through the financial stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, districts should consider—

- Sweeping all available fund balances into one account, such as an Assigned Fund Balance, so there is a lump sum of money that can be used on one-time expenditures or over a planned period.
- Projecting reductions in funds generated from school food services, student fees, after school programs, facilities rentals, etc.
- Leveraging the resources of corporate, civic, and association partnerships in a communications campaign that sends the message that investments in schools support the well-being of students for the benefit of the entire community.

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<sup>4</sup> GFOA recommends, at a minimum, that regardless of size, districts should maintain an unrestricted budgetary fund balance in their general fund of no less than two months of regular general fund operating revenues or regular general fund operating expenditures. Furthermore, in the current COVID-19 environment, a district's situation may require a level of unrestricted fund balance in the general fund significantly in excess of this recommended minimum level.



## State

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Districts should anticipate impacts on their budgets resulting from state-revenue shortfalls and—

- Provide Boards of Education and senior leadership with an estimate of the negative implications if COVID-19 inflicts an unprecedented amount of stress on the state government that results in a reduction of district funding from state revenue streams.<sup>5</sup>
- Revisit the 2007-2009 Great Recession to understand the lessons learned by your district when states reduced education funding and what strategies you used to manage and mitigate the impact of these reductions.
- Project potential fluctuations in enrollment- and attendance-based state aid due to parental and student preferences or the dislocation or consolidation of extended families caused by unemployment.

## Federal

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Congress has approved \$16.5 billion for Elementary and Secondary Education through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. The funds go directly to states and reach school districts through the Title I formula. The legislation authorizes—

- \$13.5 billion of which 90 percent goes to local education agencies, with the remaining 10 percent left at the state level for “emergency needs.”
- \$3 billion that state governors, at their discretion, can allocate as emergency support grants to local educational agencies and institutions of higher education that have been significantly affected by COVID-19.

Districts should revisit the 2007-2009 Great Recession to fully understand and apply the strategies and lessons learned from the administration of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds during the Obama administration to ensure they get maximum benefits from the CARES Act. For example, districts should—

- Understand both federal and state guidance on how CARES Act funds may be allocated and spent, and the reporting requirements tied to the expenditure of funds.
- Designate a finance department staff member as the point person to ensure that data are tracked, collected, and organized to justify expenditures of CARES Act funds before reporting or compliance requirements come into effect.
- Identify the factors your state uses to allocate funding to ensure data used for student poverty measures are current and accurate, and that funds that go to entities outside the district are recognized.
- Understand that although Medicaid reimbursement rates have increased during the current health emergency, districts’ billable services may be decreased if providers cannot connect with students or deliver services remotely.
- Understand whether the supplanting rule *and/or any other compliance requirements* apply, and if so, how they apply to your district. It should be noted that—
  - There is significantly more flexibility if school-wide projects are approved across the district.
  - Both the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief and the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Funds are subject to equitable services requirements,
  - Due to U.S. Department of Education guidelines, a district might plan for a greater share of stimulus funds to flow to private schools than is the case under the Title I program. (Pay attention to how this issue is resolved since there are likely to be challenges to this rule.)

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<sup>5</sup> Moody’s Analytics Stress-Testing States: COVID-19, April 14, 2020

# Reductions and Reallocations

## Operational Cost Reductions

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Districts should identify operational processes, including specific activities, steps, and procedures, that govern how its resources are used and that could be redesigned to cut costs. Districts should consider—

- Revisiting the functional organizational structure, which could be reorganized with a cross-functional program management office of senior leadership, functional managers, and staff who are competent, credible, and authorized to rethink and redesign the overall core business processes and workflows that could cut costs and better align allowable expenditures with district priorities and plans.
- Maximizing the full functionalities of the district’s various technologies and their interoperability, e.g., the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), Human Resources Management (HRM) systems, to streamline workflow processes.
- Eliminate the use of manually intense, inefficient, and outmoded processes and sub-processes, as well as specialized and fragmented tasks such as—
  - Delivery of pay checks by “snail mail” to schools versus requiring direct deposit.
  - Using numerical factors, e.g., walking distances for students eligible for transportation services.
  - Funding and personnel expenditures where “exceptions” have become the rule.
- Seize easy “wins” with quick cost reductions that could be reallocated to preparing administrative offices, schools, and classrooms for the 2021 school year. These might include—
  - Establishing a purchasing-exception committee to review the propriety and necessity of purchases over a certain threshold, even if appropriations were previously approved by the Board of Education.
  - Removing delegated authority for contract approvals and requiring approval by the Chief Financial Officer for all significant district commitments.
  - Entering into cooperative purchasing agreements with the city, county, or state to maximize the most favorable pricing for commodities.
  - Making significant shifts in current budgeting assumptions and practices, e.g., a funding system where dollars follow students based on objective and measurable characteristics.
  - Reducing funding for internal service funds like workers compensation and general liability, effectively reducing those reserve levels while not impacting the district’s credit rating.
  - Delaying or deferring textbook, curriculum, and instructional software adoptions.
  - Delaying replacement schedules for the entire fleet of school buses, support vehicles, and certain technology equipment.
  - Renegotiating major contracts to reflect reduced revenues.



Salaries, health care, and retirement benefits—which are major cost drivers in school districts—offer the greatest challenges, but they provide the greatest opportunities for reducing costs and reallocating savings. The following are areas where there are opportunities that could be taken advantage of—

- Use professional demographic projections to identify the actual student enrollment anticipated for the reopening of the 2021 school year and right-size the administrative, instructional, and support staff to support the new instructional delivery model; and adjust the staffing required to meet changes in enrollment as the instructional model evolves.
- Freeze all non-classroom and non-essential classroom positions and empower a Position Control Review Board with the authority to review and approve requests for exceptions to the freeze.<sup>6</sup>
- Freeze all non-collective bargaining salaries, bonuses, and promotions, and renegotiate any scheduled automatic step increases.
- Establish city- or district-wide parameters for negotiation of all collective bargaining contracts that are consistent with the district’s financial ability to support staff.
- Collapse central office management and office positions that have been vacant for six months or more.

## Reallocations

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Districts are currently in the process of developing strategies and plans for the reopening of the 2021 school year. These plans include judicious expenditures that were not budgeted in FY 2020 for delivery models that *meet standards of instruction and learning and ensure the health and safety of students*.

Some of these expenditures (e.g., enhanced cleaning, equipment, supplies, and labor costs to prepare buildings and classrooms for students and staff members) might be offset by savings from reduced service needs caused by COVID-19. Funds from the CARES Act could also be used to help offset these costs, including—

- Expenditures associated with modifications to instructional delivery models in order to meet the programmatic needs of those models.
- Costs associated with preparing, responding to, and mitigating the presence and transmission of COVID-19 on district properties.
- Fluctuations in state revenues.

For the longer term, however, districts may need to fine-tune and, in some cases, restructure and reengineer their organizational and management approaches to achieve efficiencies and generate cost savings<sup>7</sup> that would sustain the programmatic needs of the models selected to improve student outcomes.

Based on over 300 reviews that the Council of the Great City Schools’ Strategic Support Teams have conducted in over 60 member districts, there may be opportunities to better manage expenditures by requiring that—

- Major initiatives, programs, and projects are supported by detailed business or action plans to guide the work.
- Milestones, cost drivers, target completion dates, and people responsible for completion of the work are requirements for allocating resources.

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6 No position is filled without this board’s authorization, and Human Resources cannot move forward with a hire and Payroll cannot grant access to the payroll of any individual or any increase in salary without this approval.

7 The Council’s *Performance Management and Benchmarking Project* establishes a common set of key performance indicators in a range of school operations that can be used to benchmark and compare performance, improve operations, increase efficiencies, and reduce costs. These indicators should be used in districts’ planning processes.

- Resource allocations are based on evaluations of program effectiveness, cost/benefit analyses, or returns on investment.
- Administrative structures are periodically reviewed and adjusted, and reporting lines are matched to assigned functions and responsibilities so there is accountability in meeting programmatic goals.
- The right people with the right skills are placed in the right positions to do the required work.
- Formal cross-communications channels are in place and used to coordinate plans for major projects.
- Program management techniques are used to develop, build consensus around, and monitor strategies and initiatives, as well as to resolve issues.
- Performance metrics are used to benchmark, compare, and improve operational performance to increase efficiencies and reduce costs in meeting programmatic goals and objectives.<sup>8</sup>
- A vigorous follow-up process is in place to determine reasons why efforts to initiate projects and strategies are unsuccessful.

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<sup>8</sup> The Council's *Performance Management and Benchmarking Project* establishes a common set of key performance indicators in a range of school operations that member districts have used for a number of years to improve efficiencies and save money.

# Conclusion

Collaboration and teamwork are an essential component of navigating a crisis of this magnitude. No one person has all the answers, and the challenges associated with COVID-19 are truly unprecedented. Chief Financial Officers must not only revamp budgets as revenues plummet but help guide the creation of new education delivery options for students. The Council of the Great City Schools will continue to provide a forum for these discussions and facilitate the development of shared strategies in a collegial fashion. The ongoing sharing of individual experiences and work products will no doubt benefit the whole group. We are in this for the long haul and look forward to working together to ensure the Great City Schools not only survive this pandemic but rise to the challenge of serving our students successfully in this adverse environment.

# Team Members

## Co-Chairs

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**Mike Burke** is the Chief Financial Officer for the School District of Palm Beach County, Palm Beach, Florida. He is responsible for the District's Financial Management and Information Technology division, which includes Accounting, Budget, Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), FTE & Student Reporting, Purchasing, Risk & Benefits Management, and Treasury. Mr. Burke is Past Chairman of the Florida School Finance Council, which is sponsored by the Florida Department of Education and provides input to the Commissioner of Education on various funding issues.

**Nicole Conley** is Chief Business and Operations Officer for the Austin Independent School District, Austin, Texas. For the last decade, she has been responsible for managing a nearly \$3.5 billion budget and capital program. She leads and manages the district's business and operations division, which comprises more than 1,600 team members and includes finance, as well as the \$2 billion bond program, construction management, facilities, HUB program, nutrition and food services, purchasing, service center, transportation, and warehouse operations. Ms. Conley was appointed by the Speaker of the House to serve on the Texas Commission on Public School Finance, whose work culminated in an historic \$11.6 billion state investment in public schools.

**Judith M. Marte** is the Chief Financial Officer for Broward County Public Schools and the former Chief Financial Officer of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools. She began her career at a large CPA firm in Boston where she worked in auditing and consulting services. Ms. Marte received her MBA from University of New Hampshire and her Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (Accounting) from Merrimack College. Ms. Marte was the 2016 recipient of the Council of Great City School's Award for Innovation and Excellence.

**Ruth Quinto** is the Deputy Superintendent and Chief Financial Officer for the Fresno Unified School District, which is the third largest district in the state of California. The district operates 104 schools, serves 74,000 students, and is supported by approximately 15,000 full and part-time employees. She has served as the District's Deputy Superintendent and CFO for over 14 years and was recognized for her work when Fresno Unified was the recipient of the Council of the Great City Schools Award for Excellence in Financial Management. Prior to joining Fresno Unified, Ruthie served as City Controller for the City of Fresno for four years and served as the Assistant City Treasurer/City Controller for the City of Moreno Valley for four years.

**Ron Steiger** is the Chief Financial Officer of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools, the largest school district in Florida and the fourth largest in the nation, with a student enrollment of 356,086. Prior to his appointment as the Chief Financial Officer, he served as the district's Assistant Chief Budget Officer and the Executive Director of the Office of Special Projects. Before focusing his career on urban education, Mr. Steiger was a Senior Consultant with Arthur Anderson.

**Jessica Swanson** is the Deputy Chief of the Office of Finance of the District of Columbia Public Schools. Prior to that, she served in several other roles at DC Public Schools, TNTP, and DC Prep, where she began her career teaching Social Studies to middle school students. A licensed teacher, Ms. Swanson holds a doctorate in Educational Leadership from the University of Virginia.

## Coordinator

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Robert Carlson, Director of Management Services, Council of the Great City Schools



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**GUIDELINES FOR SUPPORTING TECHNOLOGY-  
BASED LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS**

# Guidelines for Supporting Technology-based Learning Environments

July 2020





## ABOUT THE COUNCIL

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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Council of the Great City Schools

# Guidelines for Supporting Technology-based Learning Environments





# Table of Contents

Overview and Purpose of this Report.....	1
Organizational Challenges and Recommendations.....	2
Organizational Challenges.....	2
Recommendations.....	2
Systems Challenges and Recommendations.....	4
Systems Challenges.....	4
Recommendations.....	4
Instructional Challenges and Recommendations.....	6
Instructional Challenges.....	6
Recommendations.....	6
Technology Infrastructure Challenges and Recommendations.....	8
Device Distribution and Management.....	8
Accessibility.....	9
Security.....	9
Recommendations.....	9
Implementation Stages Leading to Improvement.....	12
Awareness.....	13
Adaptation.....	13
Transformation.....	14
IT Task Force.....	15



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# Overview and Purpose of this Report

COVID-19 has shined a bright light on the institutional inequities that exist in our public-school systems, especially in large urban environments with some of the highest concentration of students of color, English learners, and high poverty. These students have traditionally lacked access to the educational resources they need to be successful in the new technology-based environment, including Internet connections, devices, and computers. Despite substantial district efforts to provide teachers and students with computing devices and internet access, many inner-city students still do not have a device or Internet access to connect with educational resources, their teachers, and other students months after the initial school closures.

This crisis therefore presents school district leadership with the opportunity to address these historical gaps in access and find solutions that could transform schools and make a difference in the lives of urban students nationwide. The COVID-19 experience has created an awareness that schools will look different when they reopen for the 2020-21 school year and beyond. Districts are planning to use distance/virtual learning or some part of it with face-to-face conventional classroom instruction in a new hybrid learning environment well into the future. Blended learning is becoming a viable option for teaching and learning. Teachers and administrators are developing the skills to engage, differentiate, and empower students. But to sustain and grow these new learning opportunities districts will need take a longer-term strategic approach, attending to the systems, process automations, and support services necessary to address the challenges inherent in a technology-based learning environment.

To make these changes, districts will need to adapt and improve both the business and process of urban education. A detailed roadmap for cross functional teams at the highest executive levels and managed at appropriate department levels will be required for a successful transition from the classic brick and mortar environment to a virtual one.

To this end, the Council convened a working group of Chief Information Officers with extensive experience managing information and instructional technologies. The working group was charged with identifying crosscutting challenges and hurdles districts may face and developing suggestions, ideas, and recommendations to help address them as member school plan for the upcoming school year. Specifically, the document identifies the challenges and accompanying recommendations in the areas of **organizational structure; systems; instruction; and technology infrastructure**. The report then offers a discussion of the three stages of systems improvement: **awareness, adaptation, and transformation**.

While the challenges may be daunting and without precedent, the Council is confident that the Boards of Education, Superintendents, executive leadership, management, and staff of the Great City Schools will, once again, make the critical changes necessary to carry them through the upcoming school year and redefine the future of public education in our nation's largest urban school districts. The goal of our large urban school districts is not to return to normal, but to reshape our educational systems into a new model that meets the needs of today's and tomorrow's students.

# Organizational Challenges and Recommendations

## Organizational Challenges

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Over the course of peer reviews conducted over the past 25 years in member school districts across the country, the Council has identified several common issues around organizational structures and operating processes that could limit a school system's ability to successfully transition to a new technology-based learning environment. In particular, the Council has found that many districts—

- Lack a formalized position within the overall governance structure for technology units, limiting the ability of these units to set strategic priorities and allocate resources accordingly. As a result, efforts to meet the district's long-term technology goals and objectives are often undercut by ad hoc investments in "bright shiny objectives," which create more problems needing solutions and promote a cycle of reactive, disconnected endeavors.
- Lack the requisite enterprise-level support for developing major strategic projects and initiatives, such as an infrastructure with network and computer systems that would be required as the backbone of a new learning environment. For example—
  - In some districts, Information Technology (IT) Departments are not positioned as a direct report to the Superintendent to ensure that technology issues are articulated and considered at the enterprise or senior executive level.
  - In other districts, IT Departments are headed by Chief Information or Technology Officers (CIO/CTOs) who are not digital strategists or architects in identifying and developing action plans that solve problems and meet district goals and objectives.
- Lack a top-level portfolio management process to coordinate and control major authorized projects and initiatives so there is a balanced and optimized approach to meeting a district's strategic goals and objectives.

## Recommendations

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- Elevate the Chief Information Officer (CIO) to the senior executive level as a direct report to the Superintendent, ensuring that this CIO is a member of the district's enterprise-wide governance structure. The core functions of the governance structure should be to—
  - Develop or select the framework of a new learning environment that includes distance/virtual learning— or some part of it—with face-to-face conventional classroom instruction in a new hybrid learning environment based on the academic goals and priorities of the school system.
  - Allocate resources for the core elements and activities that will drive the rollout and further development of the learning environment throughout the 2020-21 school year and beyond.
  - Delay or stop all non-critical activities so there is a razor-sharp focus on supporting the new environment.



- Fill the CIO position with a digital strategist who has the skills to build collaborative relationships with other cabinet leads and design and implement an educational system that supports district goals. This leader should be capable of creating, maintaining, and enhancing the network and computing infrastructure and integrating the various software systems that are required for new learning environments. At a minimum, the functions of this role would include—
  - Recruiting key department staff who have the technical abilities—such as network and data administration skills—and soft abilities—such as communication skills—to create a collaborative working environment and provide on-going administrative support for the critical work that needs to be done.
  - Acting as a change agent by transforming legacy processes through the adoption of new digital instructional models and optimization of the digital experience of faculty, students, and parents.
  - Supporting the superintendent and district leadership in the development of short-term and long-term initiatives and projects that align with and achieve district goals through the establishment and leadership of the district’s Enterprise Project Management Office (EPMO). Examples of critical projects that could respond to the COVID-19 crisis might include—
    - An enterprise asset management system, including an asset registry, a computerized maintenance management system and other modules, e.g., inventory or materials management, to ensure a coordinated approach to optimize costs, reduce risks, service level performance, and sustainability of the infrastructure.
    - A consolidated service desk with established roles, clear protocols, and a tiered support model with a single point of contact. (See technology infrastructure recommendations for more details.)
  - Partnering with instructional leadership to design and implement an instructional enterprise architecture bringing together transactional systems, interoperability, and data visualization to deliver near real time information and analysis that could transform the interactions with teachers, learners, and content.
  - Establishing and modifying district policies and processes to allow for the effective adoption of new and emerging technologies, including--
    - Development of a cloud strategy to shift from traditional and legacy computing environments to Platform, Software, and Infrastructure as a Service (PaaS, SaaS, IaaS) that would provide more agility and reduce operational costs associated with managing multiple data centers and the ongoing resources required to maintain them.
- Create a top-level Enterprise Project Management Office (EPMO) with the authority to—
  - Organize district resources in a way that is aligned to the vision, strategy, goals, and objectives of the executive leadership team.
  - Use processes, methods, and application packages to manage, monitor, and assess the progress of all existing and new projects and initiatives.
  - Make strategic decisions across all projects to ensure the start-up, maintenance, and enhancements to the new learning environment are completed on time and on budget.
- Establish a multi-disciplinary “Technology Standards Committee” to—
  - Identify standards for all enterprise systems and application development.
  - Ensure that current and future licensing terms and conditions for systems, such as LMS, SIS and Formative Assessments meet the infrastructure standards for functionality, interoperability, privacy, data ownership, etc.

# Systems Challenges and Recommendations

## Systems Challenges

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Many districts have multiple, independent, and competing systems and applications for taking attendance, delivering instruction and assignments, supporting student-teacher interactions, and assessing student progress. Many of these are stand-alone computer processes or software applications specifically tailored for a function, e.g., classroom management at a specific grade level, which do not integrate with other processes or are not scalable so additional functions can't be added without disrupting existing activities.

The multiplicity of these systems and applications have significant organizational impacts, including—

- School Board and community members who find it difficult to determine if quality teaching and learning is happening because access, analysis, and visualization of the data is controlled by administration.
- Separate logins that make it difficult for parents and students to access, navigate and obtain information needed for course work, e.g., assignments completed, quizzes, and test scores.
- Use of highly customized instructional materials that are not scalable for use in other classrooms or grade levels; purchased content materials that cannot be customized for different types of users or grade levels; “free” applications that may create security and privacy issues; and content on the Internet that has questionable value and does not align with standards.
- Creation of workarounds that are temporary changes or solutions to specific systems’ problems and that may later impede a proper solution if the changes are not flagged and may even break the functionalities that the systems was originally intended to perform.

There are therefore multiple benefits to be realized—and challenges to overcome—in the transition to a new learning environment that will use a single, integrated system to provide basic functionalities, e.g., attendance; access to instructional resources for teachers; remote learning opportunities for all students; and assessment of student progress to ensure a year’s worth of growth for each academic year.

## Recommendations

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- Adopt a Learning Management System (LMS) to administer, track, report, and deliver appropriate grade-level instruction and resources. The LMS should be a single point of entry to access a district’s educational applications and reduce the support requirements of many diverse systems. Specifically, the LMS should offer—
  - One system of instruction with various digital content, e.g., textbooks, supplemental content, digital courses, and applications.
  - A single sign-on that allows teachers, students, and parents to log in with an ID and password to any of a district’s several related, yet independent, software systems.



- An operating system that can be simultaneously used by multiple users, e.g., teachers, students, parents, or any combination of these, while allowing some to disconnect to do work on their own while leaving processes running as others log into the system.
- Multiple interfaces, which allow information to be exchanged between teachers and students, computer hardware, software, peripheral devices, and any combinations of these.
- A roster interface system, which enables a secure exchange of key data, including student, course, and related enrollment information between various platforms, such as student information (SIS) and learning management (LMS) systems. (The district should leave room, however, for experimentation and innovation with alternative systems, but the school district should be assessing the efficacy of these systems as they emerge.)
- Leave room for experimentation and innovation at the school and teacher levels with alternative systems, but ensure that the school district is continually assessing the efficacy of these systems as they emerge.

# Instructional Challenges and Recommendations

## Instructional Challenges

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Administrators and teachers, who have worked in a traditional face-to-face classroom structure, often lack the training and background for an immediate transition into a totally new role of observing and supervising, creating appropriate lessons, engaging and monitoring participation, informing practice, documenting progress, and publishing results in the new learning environment. Many districts, for example—

- Have not defined strategies to capture data on remote learning when students access resources, how much time they spend on lessons, and what progress students are making. Therefore, there is no single location to view data to inform practice.
- Have not adopted an interoperability framework to create an operational data store for data analytics and visualization.
- Do not have the contractual rights to access data that is collected by subscribed systems.
- Do not understand the concepts of asynchronous and synchronous components of a course or lesson.
- Do not have anyone to do the analytics on the data, even if it is captured, so it remains in storage.

## Recommendations

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- Develop Interoperability standards to facilitate the integration and integrity of data and provide a platform for reporting and analytics, including—
  - A single-sign-on system so teachers and students can log in with an ID and password to the educational applications. (Cited above)
  - A rostering system so teachers can exchange key data, including student, course, and related enrollment information.
- Review challenges small children have in navigating systems and build modifications into the LMS to improve text-based navigation.
- Survey elementary school teachers and administrators to determine which applications are effective for small children.
- Create content-appropriate lesson templates that accommodate best practices across all grade levels.
- Develop PDF documents, resources, and materials for multiple subjects, including art, music, and computer science that can be downloaded, printed, or mailed to parents.
- Acquire tools for monitoring, reporting, and analyzing student usage, including assignments completed, quizzes, standards, and quality of work completed.

- Identify processes and develop digital tools that principals can use to improve supervision of both teachers and students.
- Develop a portfolio of digital professional development resources with best practices to enhance on-line instruction.
- Provide resources on how to evaluate quality online courses.
- Review software subscription and licensing terms to ensure the district has full access and ownership of the data that is collected by the system.
- Acquire an operational data store (ODS) with dashboards that capture and integrate transactional data from one or more production or source systems into a single structure or data base so the district can report and monitor teacher proficiency and student progress in a new hybrid learning environment.
- Create cross-departmental digital content review teams to—
  - Inventory content available in the district and eliminate duplicates.
  - Identify, prioritize, and publish district approved applications and content for grade level use.
  - Ensure that each of the enterprise systems, e.g., SIS, LMS, Formative Assessments have appropriate functional owners.
  - Create a life-cycle plan for enterprise systems that identifies upgrades, maintenance costs over time, training, and enhancements.
  - Adopt required content and interoperability standards for the selection and acquisition of content.
- Build a professional development portfolio of online teacher-training programs into the district LMS that includes—
  - Social Emotional Learning and the ability to develop personal presence online when training teachers.
  - Pedagogical and content skills.
  - Templates for grade-level and content-area courses.
  - Templates to enroll staff, coordinate communications, and develop skills to advise teachers on best practice.
  - Opportunities for school-based practitioners to innovate with alternative technology.
  - Professional development opportunities for students and parents to familiarize themselves with technology provided through the district for instructional purposes. Several districts are providing professional development for parents through their Parent Universities.

# Technology Infrastructure Challenges and Recommendations

A district's information technology infrastructure is made of the physical hardware computer and network devices, software applications, and resources that provide the data, information, and learning resources for administrators, teachers, and all students, including special education, bilingual, medically fragile, and other at-risk children in the new learning environment. The development, maintenance, and sustainability of this infrastructure will require that—

- The physical components of this environment, i.e., hardware, networks, and software, are designed to be secure and to maintain the integrity of the overall infrastructure.
- Cost-effective changes are made to the physical devices, so that alterations to the network and data used by district staff and students can be made quickly without negatively affecting the continuity of instruction.
- IT staff have the tools to provide end-user support and manage assets and, based on best practices and interoperability standards, maintain, and update the critically important parts of the infrastructure.

## Device Distribution and Management

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There were multiple lessons learned when districts distributed large numbers of computer devices to students' homes during the spring continuity phase that will need to be addressed in this new learning environment. For example, in some instances—

- There was no clear ownership of the devices, e.g., the IT department or the schools, and the process for tagging, configuration, distribution, and tracking of devices was sometimes poorly documented.
- Processes designed to support devices located in school buildings were not able to support devices located in students' homes.
- It was difficult or impossible to refresh, maintain, troubleshoot, repair, or collect devices once they were distributed to students' homes.
- Devices were vulnerable to virus attacks because devices could not receive automated security updates in homes where connectivity was not available.
- It was difficult to identify support needed in students' homes because districts do not always have accurate contact information with home addresses, emails, and cell phone numbers.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This would be most evident in high-poverty and highly mobile communities where English is not spoken, or for students needing continuous instruction or living with separated or divorced parents or in shelters, or temporary situations such as with grandparents and relatives.



## Accessibility

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There were also multiple lessons learned in efforts to provide internet access and adequate bandwidth to support students and parents in their homes. For example—

- Many districts purchased and distributed mobile “hot spots” that were dependent on strong cellular signal availability. In some cases, students were required to be within 100 to 300 feet of a hot spot located on a school bus in outdoor areas, such as parking lots, and many other students lived in areas where there was no available cellular signal.
- Vendors were willing to promote unlimited Internet but reduced data speeds after a certain amount of data used, making connectivity slow and frustrating.
- Extending a district’s Wi-Fi to neighborhoods exposed it to cybersecurity risks and increased safety and supervision concerns in some neighborhoods.
- Some service providers offered free or reduced connectivity for a limited fixed time but recurring monthly fees for internet devices was a requirement that could not be sustained by many families.

## Security

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The spring continuity phase also raised concerns about security and data privacy protocols that will need to be addressed to guarantee a safe and security learning environment. For example—

- Fraudulent attempts to obtain sensitive information, such as usernames and password (Phishing) or threats to publish data or perpetually lock access to it unless a ransom was paid (ransomware attacks), could disable internet services for extended periods and could be extremely expensive to mitigate.
- The increased use of “free” applications and social media sites could expose districts to violations of data privacy and federal compliance about the personal information about children under 13 years of age (Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act, COPPA), the exposure of children to explicit content online (the Children’s Internet Protection Act, CIPA), and the disclosure of student education records (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, FERPA).
- The lack of a security framework that protects the process of selecting, preparing, extracting and transferring data (security migration), and tests the potential for unauthorized access to a district’s systems and data (vulnerability and penetration tests), and a dedicated cybersecurity officer to set policies and procedures, enforce standards and respond to treats could expose a district to additional risks.

## Recommendations

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- Districts should create a comprehensive communications strategy using media, surveys, and direct contact with parents to obtain a clear picture of the type and number of student devices, e.g., desktops, laptops, netbooks, tablets, etc., and the broadband internet technologies that have the enhanced capabilities to allow students to participate in the new learning environment from their homes.



- Districts should acquire modern mobile device management (MDM) software to manage and optimize the functionality, security, and flexibility of its laptops, desktops and all other types of mobile devices, including [mobile phones](#), smartphones, tablet computers, etc. Technology advancements in mobile device management software allow districts to—
  - Remotely provision the devices for students and update equipment, functions, and applications in a scalable fashion.
  - Apply filtering policies at the device level based on student age group and regardless of internet service.
  - Ensure the user equipment is configured to a consistent standard set of applications and functions appropriate for student use.
  - Apply the necessary upgrades and security patches to the devices.
  - Remotely diagnose and troubleshoot equipment.
  - Inventory, monitor, and track the location, status, and ownership of equipment, and locate and disable those that are stolen or pawned.
  - Monitor the use of devices and the participation of students to identify connectivity or other challenges.
  - Integrate device information into the district’s asset and service management applications.
- Districts should leverage partnerships with city and county officials, and community organizations to obtain—
  - Discounted and affordable rates with the internet service providers and cell phone companies that provide internet connectivity for students in low income families.
  - Cost-free wireless access and landlines or wireless, satellite and microwave internet in hard to serve areas where wired internet is not readily available.
- Districts should have an enterprise asset management system that develops, operates, maintains, upgrades, and disposes of its computer and network systems; and ensures a coordinated and sustainable approach to manage costs, support interoperability standards, remove traditional silos in department functions, and increase the service performance of the systems.
- Districts should consider a consolidated districtwide service desk with established roles, clear protocols, and a tiered support model using a single point of contact for students, parents, faculty, and staff. This service desk should employ customer relationship management software to assist in troubleshooting, providing users with answers to questions, and solving known problems. The expanded services could be provided by--
  - Expanding operational hours for an “all-call service desk” with language support that is triggered based on customer’s needs (e.g., device management, academic, or technical).
  - Training high school students to provide basic support and perform basic repairs.
  - Developing programs, partnerships, and internships with local colleges and universities.
  - Training school staff to reduce the demand on the service desk and field technicians during normal hours.
  - Outsourcing service functions to reduce cost and increase service levels.
  - Using Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems to handle repetitive support requests.

- Districts should review their cybersecurity policies to ensure they encompass the risk assessment standards of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST); the information security standards of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO 27001); and the best practice solutions for cyber defense of the Center for Internet Security (CIS).

Owing to its complexity, cybersecurity will be critically important in the new hybrid learning environment due to its reliance on computer systems, wireless networks (Wi-Fi), and the growth of smartphones and various devices that constitute the “internet of things.” Some common countermeasures, techniques, and corrective action that can be taken to reduce, prevent, or eliminate a threat, vulnerability to an attack, and minimize the harm it can cause include—

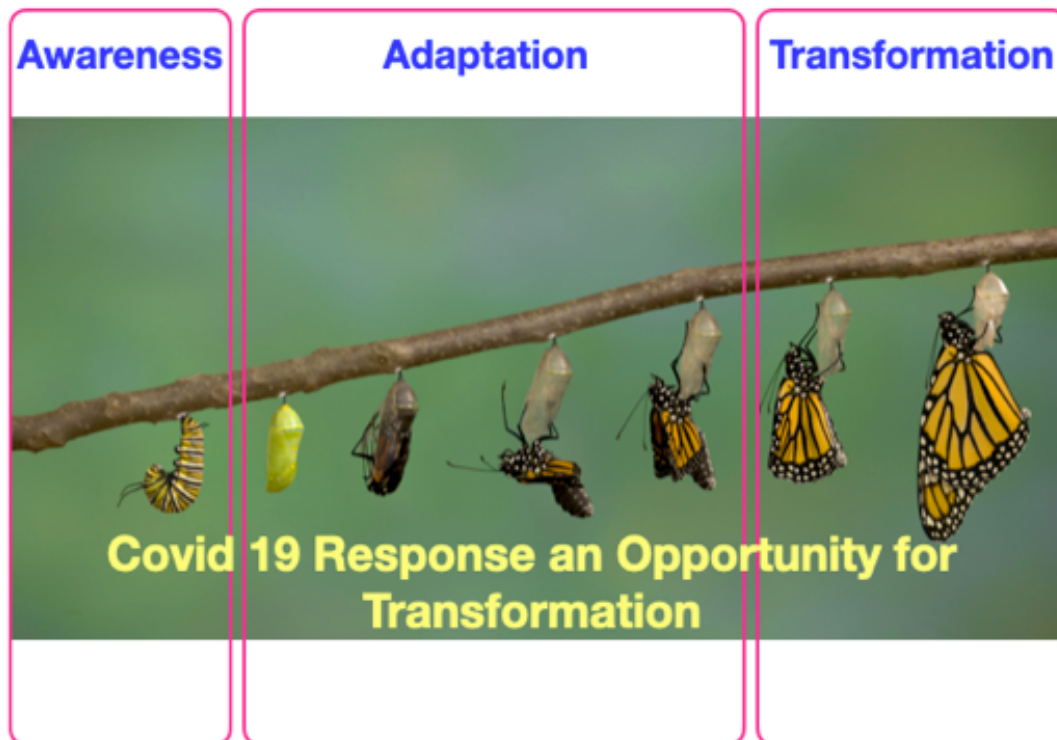
- Identifying, classifying, storing, securing, retrieving, tracking, destroying or permanently preserving employee and student records.
  - Reviewing and renegotiating application and software licensing contracts on data ownership, access, data use and privacy policies.
  - Using strong passwords and a multi-factor authentication method to control access or privileges to specific functions within the systems.
  - Controlling access or privileges only to the specific functions within the overall system.
  - Conducting risk assessments and using audit trail tracking to identify the mechanism and extent of a security breach when it occurs.
  - Having controls to maintain confidentiality, integrity, availability, accountability, and assurance.
  - Creating threat prevention, detection, and response measures, such as firewalls, to shield access to internal network services; user account access controls to protect systems files and data; and intrusion detection systems (IDS) to detect network attacks in-progress.
  - Using scanners or running penetration tests against the computer and network to identify vulnerabilities.
  - Providing end user security training to address the commonly recorded forms of errors, such as poor password management, the inability to recognize misleading URLs, and to identify fake websites and dangerous email attachments.
- Districts should employ preventive or counter measures to protect their computer and networks systems from theft or damage to their hardware, software, or electronic data. These measures will also protect the district against the disruption or misdirection of the services provided by systems, which could be caused by weaknesses in their design, implementation, operation, or internal control.

The preventive or counter measures should be formalized in a business continuity plan, which outlines the precautions or steps that should be taken to keep all essential aspects of the computer and network systems operating during adverse scenarios; and the policies, procedures and tools, i.e., disaster recovery and resilience planning, to enable recovery or continuation if there were a disruption of the computer and network systems that support the critical functions in the new learning environment.

# Implementation Stages Leading to Improvement

The intent of this document is to identify current challenges and recommendations for districts to move forward. Each district is different, and the tactics deployed to transform practices will also be different. Transformation is like a marathon and it will likely take several years to change and enhance our education culture, organization, and human capacity. Therefore, districts should set expectations that are realistic and measurable based on what implementation phase they are in.

The road to systems change will likely pass through three stages: Awareness, Adaptation, and Transformation. These stages progress from simply augmenting current practices with technology to the final stage in which technology assists the district in transforming its instructional practices. Each phase has a set of expectations and appropriate metrics.



## Awareness

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This phase serves as a transitional period for individuals to better understand the desired state. This phase provides time for people to understand “the why” of needed changes and how processes will need to be altered or reinvented. Training is focused on why the change is necessary and how it will address district needs. Using Bloom’s taxonomy, the focus is on knowledge and comprehension. Metrics should be geared toward successful implementation of technology—

- Successful implementation of systems
- Ease of access (single sign-on, rostering)
- Interoperability between systems
- Reliability and access for students and teachers, integration of applications
- Effective communication to and from stakeholders
- Percent of staff trained
- Effective access and use of systems by students and teachers
- Changing user attitudes

## Adaptation

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This phase serves as a transitional period for individuals to better integrate technology into their practice by providing time for the learner to understand how to convert their regular practices into the new model. As people are learning a new technology or system, they apply what they currently do in their work and replicate it in the new system. The Adapting Phase allows people to become comfortable learning the new system and analyzing the differences between current practices and the desired state. Often routine practices become automated and more efficient. Professional development focuses on incorporating the new system into a district’s everyday activities and learning how to use and apply new resources. Metrics in the phase are geared to use and adoption, such as—

- Percent of time using new tools
- Improved user adoption and attitudes toward the change
- Reduction in complaints, frustration, and problem tickets
- Generation of new ideas for improvement
- Increased adoption and integration of assessments, content, and administrative tools
- Redefinition of policies and procedures, (attendance, time and place, scheduling, assessment).

A danger exists, however, that people will not move beyond this stage into the Transformation Phase. Without moving to the Transformation Phase, they risk doing the same things they have always done, but with more expensive equipment.

Ultimately, the district must move to transformation through a focus on how teachers, students, and administrators use creative methods to achieve the goals and objectives of change and not on learning new technology and skills. People are confident in the new skills they have mastered and how to integrate those skills and technology to achieve new levels of learning. In this phase, people are using technology to do things they would otherwise not be able to do.

## Transformation

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It is in this phase that users can change their definition and perceptions of how we do our work. Users have the skills and technology to meet goals and objectives with solutions they could not imagine in the first two phases of the implementation. It is in this phase that districts have changed teacher and student practices enough to compare academic performance. Performance is not based on comparisons to the old model of education but on expanded perspectives of what good teaching and learning should be about. School has moved from a noun describing a place to a verb capturing action. School should no longer be bound by room size, time of day, days in the year, and who does not have access, but focus instead on engaging students and preparing them for a future that is constantly changing.

Although this document points out the short-term immediate steps that should be taken, the overarching transformation of our educational systems will take years. We allow three years to build a new building from drawings to moving in, yet we expect transformation in teaching and learning to be completed after we purchase new computers or implement new software. Starting next school year most districts will be in the awareness phase that will be the foundation for the future.



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**SUPPORTING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS**





# Supporting English Learners in the COVID-19 Crisis

August 2020





## ABOUT THE COUNCIL

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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Council of the Great City Schools

# Supporting English Learners in the COVID-19 Crisis



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August 2020

# Table of Contents

Background and Purpose of this Guide .....	2
Part 1: The Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis on English Learners.....	4
Health.....	5
Financial Stability.....	5
Access to Public Assistance and Resources .....	5
Learning: Devices and Instruction.....	6
Mental Health and Social-Emotional Wellbeing.....	7
Part 2: District Efforts to Support English Learners: Lessons Learned .....	8
Collaboration among Teachers and District Offices.....	8
Language Assistance: Interpretation and Translation.....	9
Instructional Technology.....	9
Gaps in Access to Technology .....	10
Professional Development in Instructional Technology.....	10
Independent Learning and Social-Emotional Growth .....	10
Part 3: Considerations and Recommendations for Supporting ELs in the 2020-21 School Year .....	12
Enrollment, Screening, and Placement .....	13
Accelerated Learning for ELs .....	15
English Language Development.....	16
Focused Language Study (FLS).....	17
Discipline-Specific Academic Language Expansion (DALE) .....	18
The Selection and Use of Instructional Technology.....	19
Strategic Staffing.....	22
High Quality, Relevant Professional Development.....	23
Effective Assessment of EL Learning Needs.....	23
Formative Assessment in the Context of Grade-Level Instruction.....	24
Strategic Collaboration.....	26
Greater Inclusion of All ELs.....	26
Strategic Timing of Assessments.....	27
An Asset-Based Approach to Understanding ELs .....	27
Strategic Scaffolding and Linguistic Accommodations .....	28
Careful Selection of Standardized Assessments .....	28



Family Engagement.....	28
Translation and Interpretation.....	29
Cultural Competence and Responsive Community Engagement .....	30
Appendix A: Priority Education Experiences for ELs .....	32
Appendix B: Executive Summary of 2009 Report, Succeeding with English Language Learners.....	35
Appendix C: Resources.....	37
Appendix D: Digital Learning Resources and Support Tools for English Learners.....	40
Appendix E: Matrix of Digital Resources.....	43
Appendix F: Working Groups and Members .....	48



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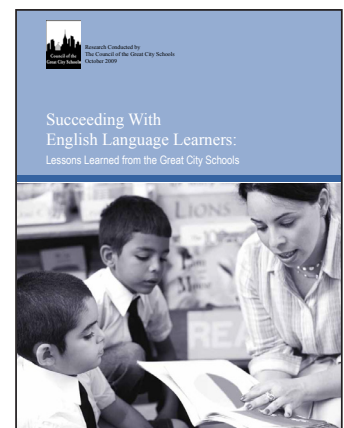
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# Background and Purpose of this Guide

As the nation grapples with the COVID-19 pandemic, the families of English learners (ELs) have experienced disproportionate distress with the shuttering of schools and the economic crisis. The reality of what many EL and immigrant families have faced during the pandemic must be incorporated at the outset into any planning for the reopening of schools to ensure appropriate supports for English learners and their families. ELs constitute a substantial and growing portion of total enrollment in the Great City Schools. Of the 73 districts examined in the Council's latest demographic report, 23 districts (or roughly 32 percent) had ELs who comprised more than 20 percent of total district enrollment. Furthermore, ELs in the Great City Schools are increasingly diverse, representing over 50 language groups.<sup>1</sup> The failure to address the needs of these students in the reopening of schools would jeopardize the educational outcomes of a sizable portion of students and the overall recovery efforts of districts across the country.

This guide is the ninth in a [series](#) developed by the Council of the Great City Schools to help districts as they prepare to reopen schools—whatever that may look like—in the 2020-21 school year.<sup>2</sup> Many of these guides identify some EL-specific needs and challenges. This guide will address the issues facing families of English learners in greater detail. It will also include some of the lessons that districts have learned while working to support their English learner and immigrant communities during school closures. In [Appendix C](#), we provide a list of resources from districts and other sources that we used for examples in the document. In addition, this report provides EL-specific guidance for districts to consider as they plan for the start of the 2020-21 school year. While this guidance does not include an exhaustive review of English learner instructional issues, needs, and best practices, it does reflect priority areas and issues identified by EL leaders across the Council's urban school district membership. Starting in late March 2020, the Council began holding weekly virtual meetings of EL program directors and staff from member school districts to discuss shared challenges and strategies for supporting English learners' continuing access to rigorous instruction in all content areas and academic language development during school closures. Consequently, this document reflects the collective struggle and wisdom of EL leaders on the front lines of the nation's biggest city school systems.

The EL-focused recommendations in this report also reflect a *systems approach* consistent with the findings and recommendations of the Council's seminal report, [Succeeding with English Language Learners: Lessons Learned from Urban School Districts](#).<sup>3</sup> Specifically, the 2009 report shed light on the complex interaction of organizational, structural, instructional, and staffing issues needed to promote the achievement of English learners—in other words, how all parts of the organization



- 1 Uro, G., & Lai, D. (2019, April). *English language learners in America's great city schools: Demographics, achievement, and staffing*. Council of the Great City Schools. [https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/domain/35/publication%20docs/CGCS\\_ELL%20Survey%20Report.pdf](https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/domain/35/publication%20docs/CGCS_ELL%20Survey%20Report.pdf)
- 2 See the Returning to School Series on the Council's [Coronavirus Information Site](#). Council of the Great City Schools. (2020). *Coronavirus information*. Retrieved July 20, 2020, from <https://www.cgcs.org/corona>.
- 3 Horwitz, A. R., Uro, G., Price-Baugh, R., Simon, C., Uzzell, R., Lewis, S., & Casserly, M. (2009, October). *Succeeding with English language learners: Lessons learned from the Great City Schools*. Council of the Great City Schools. [https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/35/Publication%20Docs/EL\\_Report09.pdf](https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/35/Publication%20Docs/EL_Report09.pdf)



needed to work together to develop, communicate, implement, and sustain a clear vision and strategy for EL instructional improvement. This systems approach to addressing the needs of English learners has greater importance now. An executive summary of this 2009 report can be found in [Appendix B](#) of this guide.

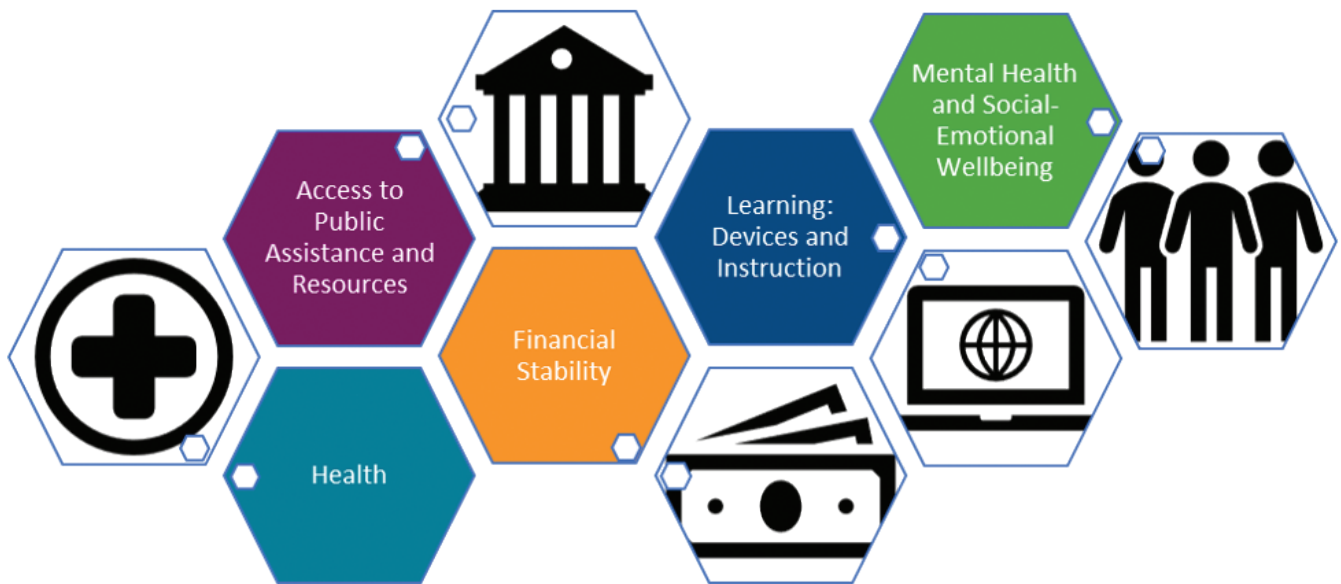
The suggestions made in this document build on the notion of shared responsibility across school district departments and the importance of a well-articulated curriculum for the success of English learners; and it covers a range of areas: screening and placement, instructional practices and technology, English language development, staffing, professional development, assessment, and family engagement. The specificity of the guidance is constrained, however, by the wide range of demographic and organizational contexts existing in Council-member districts. Considerations and suggestions in the report, therefore, are meant to be customized by each school district.

## Part 1

# The Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis on English Learners

The unique circumstances facing many English learner families have placed them in particularly vulnerable positions during the COVID-19 pandemic. School districts learned about these COVID-19-related hardships as they worked to support families and sustain teaching and learning during school closures. Many member districts re-deployed staff, including EL educators—teachers, coaches, instructional assistants, and bilingual family liaisons—to conduct check-in calls with students, nurture existing relationships, and determine the needs of EL families. Districts’ efforts to identify the challenges, needs, and concerns of their families were particularly important for understanding and responding to the needs of EL families.

In particular, we identify five main areas where the COVID-19 crisis has had a disproportionate impact on vulnerable students and communities: health, financial stability, access to public assistance and resources, learning (access to devices and instruction), and mental health and social-emotional wellbeing.



## Health

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The data are clear about the disparate health effects the COVID-19 pandemic has had on different populations. Communities of color, including Blacks and Latinos, are among the hardest hit by the disease, making up the largest shares of both confirmed cases and hospitalizations, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Hispanic/Latinos accounted for over one third of all COVID-19 cases and even higher rates for individuals under 44 years of age.<sup>4</sup> The conditions affecting Hispanics/Latinos are particularly relevant to ELs because the vast majority of English learners in U.S. schools speak Spanish.

## Financial Stability

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The Pew Research Center found that Hispanic women, immigrants, young adults, and those with less education were hit the hardest by COVID-19 job losses, because they were employed in sectors where social distancing of workers was difficult or the option to telework was nonexistent. Immigrants and women had high participation rates in leisure and hospitality jobs, education and health services, and retail trade sectors, which accounted for 59 percent of all nonfarm job losses between February and May.<sup>5</sup>

English learner families also are more likely to have at least one parent who is an immigrant and have lower overall household incomes in comparison to native-born households. According to the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), immigrants experienced a greater increase in unemployment rates during the first months of the pandemic than U.S.-born workers. Adults, ages 25 and older, who are foreign-born with no high school diploma were most affected. For instance, the unemployment rate among immigrants in the leisure and hospitality industry was four percent in January 2020 but close to 40 percent by April 2020.<sup>6</sup> An Urban Institute analysis of data from the Federal Household Pulse Survey revealed similar disparities. As of June 9, 2020, 62 percent of Hispanic/Latino households had at least one person who lost employment.<sup>7</sup>

## Access to Public Assistance and Resources

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The COVID-19 pandemic unveiled holes in existing safety nets and relief programs for low-income families. In fact, many low-income immigrant families were left out of the CARES Act relief funds entirely, despite paying billions in tax dollars into the Treasury. Immigrants who used an Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN)<sup>8</sup> were deemed ineligible to receive CARES Act relief funds. The latest data available for 2015 shows that 4.35 million people paid over \$13.7 billion in net taxes using an ITIN.<sup>9</sup>

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4 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, June 1). Cases in the U.S. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/cases-in-us.html>

5 Kochhar, R. (2020, June 9). *Hispanic women, immigrants, young adults, those with less education hit hardest by COVID-19 job losses*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/06/09/hispanic-women-immigrants-young-adults-those-with-less-education-hit-hardest-by-covid-19-job-losses/>

6 Capps, R., Batalova, J., & Gelatt, J. (2020, June). *COVID-19 and unemployment: Assessing the early fallout for immigrants and other U.S. workers*. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/covid-19-unemployment-immigrants-other-us-workers>

7 Brown, S. (2020, July 1). *The COVID-19 crisis continues to have uneven economic impact by race and ethnicity*. Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/covid-19-crisis-continues-have-uneven-economic-impact-race-and-ethnicity>

8 The ITIN program was created by the IRS in July 1996 so that foreign nationals and other individuals who are not eligible for a Social Security number (SSN) can pay the taxes they are legally required to pay.

9 American Immigration Council. (2020, July 1). *The facts about the individual tax identification number (ITIN)*. <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/facts-about-individual-tax-identification-number-itin>

Additionally, national data show that the majority (60 percent) of Hispanic and Black low-income family households had no or limited access to banks.<sup>10</sup> Low-income families who are eligible for federal relief funds may still have difficulty accessing them if monies are distributed through direct deposit.

Moreover, high percentages of Black and Hispanic households do not have access to other financial resources, like credit. About 36 percent of Black households and 31.5 percent of Hispanic households have no mainstream credit tools (e.g., credit cards, mortgages, student loans, personal loans, etc.). The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) found that lower-income households, less-educated households, Black and Hispanic households, households with working-age disabled individuals, and foreign-born, noncitizen households were also more likely not to have mainstream credit. With limited access to banking and no mainstream credit, these households faced more financial hardship during the COVID-19 pandemic than other families.<sup>11</sup>

## Learning: Devices and Instruction

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COVID-19-related school closures have resulted in significant hurdles for schools as they continue to provide robust opportunities for ELs to acquire English and develop academic language for success with grade-level content. Without interaction with schoolteachers who are often the sole role model for students in using academic English, schools have quickly turned to technology applications and online platforms for language learning that were freely available for students to practice and learn independently. Unfortunately, research suggests that the learning activities in these popular language-learning programs do not necessarily provide the type of feedback that would be most helpful to English learners in becoming language proficient.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, research and practitioner-reported experience indicate that many language-learning programs are not aligned to English Language Development (ELD) standards or to content standards, nor are some of them even designed for K-12 students.

Moreover, a December 2019 report from the U.S. Department of Education found that few teachers reported assigning English learners to digital learning resources outside of class, in part because of concerns about students' lack of access to technology at home. The same report also showed that teachers who work with English learners are more apt to use **general** digital resources rather than tools designed specifically for English learners and that English learner educators reported fewer hours of professional development with digital learning resources than did mainstream teachers.<sup>13</sup>

Experience during the pandemic-related school closures confirmed that teachers were concerned about English learners' access to devices and internet connectivity. Even in districts that had already implemented a one-to-one device program ensuring that all students had sufficient and consistent access to the internet for online learning was a challenge. The inconsistent access to technology and connectivity were significant barriers to equity and continuity of instruction. Teachers also found themselves with inadequate devices to use the learning platforms and connect with students.

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10 Guzman, L., & Ryberg, R. (2020, June 11). *Most low-income Hispanic and Black households have little-to-no bank access, complicating access to COVID relief funds*. National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families.

11 Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. (2018, October 22). *2017 FDIC national survey of unbanked and underbanked households*. <https://www.fdic.gov/householdsurvey/>. <https://www.hispanicresearchcenter.org/research-resources/the-majority-of-low-income-hispanic-and-black-households-have-little-to-no-bank-access-complicating-access-to-covid-relief-funds/>

12 Bajorek, J. P. (2017). L2 pronunciation in CALL: The unrealized potential of Rosetta Stone, Duolingo, Babbel, and Mango Languages. *Issues and Trends in Educational Technology*, 5(1), 24-51.

13 U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service. (2019, May). *Supporting English learners through technology: What districts and teachers say about digital learning resources for English learners* (Volume 1). National Study of English Learners and Digital Learning Resources. <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/title-iii/180414.pdf>

## Social Justice

It would be impossible to publish this document, at this time, without acknowledging the fact that in addition to the stress and trauma created by the COVID-19 pandemic, our nation has been undergoing considerable civil unrest resulting from its long history of inequity and injustice. The disparities that have come to light regarding the pandemic have also illuminated the intersecting disparities in health care, health outcomes, education, safety, and criminal justice. Many of our EL families who may be experiencing a disproportionate impact from the virus may also be experiencing acts of intolerance, racism, and violence. People of Asian descent, for instance, have been unjustly targeted and blamed for the outbreak, while many Black and Brown people have been subject to racial slurs, insults, accusations, and more as a result of participating in protests<sup>14</sup> or simply because they are wearing masks.<sup>15</sup> The level of fear and trauma is heightened by feelings of distrust of authority and lack of safeguards.

## Mental Health and Social-Emotional Wellbeing

While school closures have affected all students and families, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented levels of stress to low-income families, immigrant families, and communities of color. As discussed above, these communities were most at risk of contracting the virus and the most likely to sustain job losses, because of the economic shutdown. The shuttering of schools added to the already stressful situations for these families, a situation that was exacerbated by gaps in access to technology and other home educational resources.

In addition to the social-emotional stress of social isolation, food and shelter insecurity, and COVID-19 related health scares, English learners likely had to confront other challenges. For instance, it is common that students who are English learners have more English proficiency than their immigrant parents, and thus, often must deal with the landlord, social service agencies, and school—if no interpretation services are offered. In addition, older ELs likely have to support younger siblings in navigating remote learning and helping them connect to digital platforms. Finally, in some instances where parents were laid off, English learners may have found employment, providing vital income to help support the family. All these new responsibilities are likely to add pressure to English learners during the pandemic.

14 During the more than three weeks following the onset of protests, researchers found no evidence that the protests contributed to COVID-19 case growth. Dave, D. M., Friedson, A. I., Matsuzawa, K., Sabia, J. J., & Safford, S. (2020, June). *Black Lives Matter protests, social distancing, and COVID-19*. National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w27408>.

15 Ruiz, N. G., Horowitz, J. M., & Tamir, C. (2020, July 1). *Many Black and Asian Americans say they have experienced discrimination amid the COVID-19 outbreak*. Pew Research Center.



## Part 2

# District Efforts to Support English Learners: Lessons Learned

While the challenges discussed above may seem daunting, our weekly conversations with district personnel indicate that staff, teachers, students, and parents across Council-member districts have used this time as an opportunity, working outside the walls of the school building, to provide support and advance learning in innovative ways. For example, in some districts, school closures have led to greater collaboration among teachers and district offices, spurred innovative approaches to providing distance learning and language assistance, and increased access to technology for EL families.

Moreover, our discussions with school officials have provided a valuable reminder of the resilience and resourcefulness of EL and immigrant families and students. During school closures, considerable independent and experiential learning has occurred. Districts will need to capture and build on this learning as they examine the strengths and needs of ELs returning to school.

## Collaboration among Teachers and District Offices

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EL staff report that the breakdown of physical school walls has been an opportunity for teachers and central office staff to collaborate without the need for complex scheduling or logistical coordination, or the need to provide substitute teachers or additional pay that would be needed for intra-district travel during or after the workday. The sense of urgency, coupled with the capabilities of technology, gave way to important educator-driven enterprises, such as—

- EL office staff developing ELD lessons for teachers with different levels of comfort with technology;
- EL offices hosting collaborative sessions for content-area teachers to work with EL teachers in planning lessons to address the English development needs of ELs, anchored in grade-level content;
- Central offices supporting collaborative sessions during which general education and ESL/ELD teachers co-developed lessons that addressed grade-level content and language acquisition;
- EL offices holding weekly webinars to assist teachers in developing lessons that addressed academic language needs;
- EL office staff creating districtwide repositories of sample lessons, activities, and instructional materials to support English language development; and
- Central offices and schools establishing co-teaching protocols and opportunities using videoconferencing platforms that enabled both general education and ESL teachers to deliver lessons with EL-embedded supports.

## Language Assistance: Interpretation and Translation

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The closure of schools compelled districts to augment how they communicated with students and families who speak languages other than English. In many cases, this involved learning to use tools districts already had at their disposal. Districts found that some built-in features of their web-based platforms incorporated principles of universal design and benefited not only students with disabilities but also English learners. Similarly, personnel fluent in the most frequent languages spoken by EL families became highly valuable resources to districts in communicating with EL families about the rapidly changing nature of school operations. For instance,

- EL offices partnered with other departments in crafting effective communications approaches for reaching EL communities and strengthening existing relationships with EL communities.
- Several EL offices, in collaboration with relevant departments, created videos to guide EL parents on helping their children access their district’s virtual learning platform.
- Multilingual personnel provided live support through phone hotlines in the most frequently spoken languages by EL families.

## Instructional Technology

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Prior to COVID-19 school closures, instructional technology was often used as an extension of classroom instruction to supplement and support student learning. The shuttering of schools moved technology increasingly to the center of instruction as a primary delivery vehicle or source of content, tools, and accommodations. As districts ramped up their capacity to virtually support ELs in content-area learning and provide ELD, some found new opportunities in technology.

For example, videoconferencing platforms allowed EL teachers to join in core content classes, to lead small-group instruction, and even provide individual mini-lessons to preview or review content with a focus on academic language. The online platforms offered more flexible scheduling of lessons to teach and support ELs in content classes, especially with the recording capability that allowed students to access the class at any point in the day and to listen to instruction as many times as desired. In addition, remote learning also offered new opportunities for ELs to be engaged in extended academic discourse and writing tasks beyond what may have been offered in the traditional classroom. Districts embraced these opportunities by—

- Using videoconferencing capabilities in digital learning platforms in ways that allowed other EL teachers, coaches, and/or specialists to join in the class to co-teach with or support a teacher and ELs;
- Using the capabilities in digital learning platforms to record their lessons so students could watch asynchronously whenever it was best for them and more than once, if needed;
- Virtually creating safe learning spaces, such as smaller groups, that enabled ELs to feel more comfortable in expressing their thinking in English; and
- Creating lessons, classes, and mini-lessons for groups of English learners, such as newcomers to address specific needs.

In [Appendix D](#), we provide a list of technology-related tools and programs—or digital learning resources and digital support features—that Council-member educators found helpful during COVID-19 school closures. **This list contains examples that illustrate the application of various technologies and is not intended as an endorsement by the Council of any product or program.** The list also shows examples of their features, since technology is quickly adapting, and new tools are constantly appearing in the education space.

Of course, while technology has enhanced some aspects of teaching, learning, and communication during school closures, its increased use has also led districts to discover some limitations—particularly for EL instruction. As discussed earlier, many of the popular language-learning applications and programs employed for distance learning during school shutdowns were not aligned to district standards or English Language Development (ELD) standards. In planning for the upcoming school year, which may bring a sustained reliance on distance learning, many district staff have been working to identify online instructional programming that is better aligned to grade-level content standards and that meet the English language development needs of ELs. Later in this document, we provide general considerations and resources to help educators select digital resources to support ELs.

### Gaps in Access to Technology

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Ensuring that all families have a device for online learning has been a challenge in many districts, particularly those that did not already have a one-to-one plan. To address this gap, many districts mounted ambitious campaigns to purchase and distribute devices in communities that historically lacked access to technology and internet connectivity. For EL families, this situation has proven to be a greater challenge than expected due to multiple factors—language barriers, concerns around being responsible for expensive equipment, or distrust of strangers coming to their home to deliver equipment. As districts ramped up their device deployment systems, school districts learned that requiring a government-issued ID to deliver or receive equipment—rather than just a signed form or the student’s name and school assignment—presented a significant barrier for some EL families.

To address these and other technology-access challenges, districts also have had to employ low-tech solutions, such as packets with paper-and-pencil activities. Some districts sought to maximize the technology that students and families already have access to, such as cell phones and television, to spur outreach and instructional quality. For example, several districts partnered with their local public television stations and/or major Spanish-language networks to offer several hours of instruction each day, while other districts expanded their use of texting applications that immediately translated communications between educators and EL parents.

### Professional Development in Instructional Technology

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School closures have also revealed a critical need for professional development in the use of virtual tools and platforms. In the early days and weeks of school closures nationally, school districts quickly found that many teachers were either unaware of or not quite comfortable with using instructional technology in their daily instruction. Many required substantial—and immediate—professional development in this area.

To address these challenges, many districts quickly deployed systemwide professional development to support teachers. For instance, EL teams in several districts created professional development on every digital tool they used and made this training available to everyone in the school district. One district held weekly professional learning communities (PLCs) with teachers to discuss the technologies being used.

### Independent Learning and Social-Emotional Growth

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While the weekly calls between Council staff and district EL staff provided a forum for districts to discuss the myriad challenges faced by English learners and immigrant families during the COVID-19 crisis, they also served as a regular reminder that time away from the classroom has not always been detrimental. Considerable experiential learning occurred, and our resilient English learners were advocating and negotiating for resources and services for their families, obtaining jobs to help with family expenses, and were teaching and caring for younger siblings and neighbors.

Moreover, while English learners will have faced difficult moments with COVID-19, they may also have developed important skills and perspectives as a result. To be sure, students will need supports to better understand and process these moments in a healthy way. But having survived the crisis may help students grow in new ways, resulting in new knowledge and resilience to navigate challenging future situations.

In addition to this experiential learning, school closures have prompted considerable independent learning and growth. Technology often paved the way. For older students who may not have been able to take advantage of synchronous lessons because of family or job responsibilities, digital tools allowed them to work on their own time. Spending more time with technology may also have opened a world of new experiences with art galleries around the world, music and writing tutorials, home language development opportunities, and connections with different cultures across the globe.

Many districts have been creative in supporting the independent learning of ELs at home, responding to challenges faced by parents of ELs when communications were provided only in English and work schedules and extenuating circumstances made it difficult to support their children. For example,

- Districts prepared instructional materials that required minimal parental support, including videotaped lessons and taped read-alouds organized by grade and content.
- Other districts used web-based learning platforms to deliver lessons, especially helpful for newcomers, that could be translated into additional languages with publicly available applications.
- Others translated and recorded—in the top languages spoken by EL families—instructions to access lessons and/or support accessing online lessons to allow students to work independently *via* virtual drop-in hours and “helplines.”

It is too early to tell, but the net effect of the independent learning and social-emotional growth that districts witnessed and, at times, facilitated may become evident when students return to school, whether physically or virtually, and they will demonstrate their increased autonomy and agency as learners.

## Part 3

# Considerations and Recommendations for Supporting ELs in the 2020-21 School Year

As schools plan for the 2020-21 school year, it is important to remember that families will still face many of the same health and economic challenges they faced before school reopening. These issues may be worse in families that have been unemployed, have recently lost jobs, and/or experienced illness or death due to COVID-19 since the end of SY 2019-20. Planning for the physical or virtual return to school will therefore need to include the following considerations—

- **Ongoing basic needs.** EL families distressed by health conditions or with limited resources due to job loss will have ongoing needs that, if unmet, will result in challenging learning environments for students at home. Meal and device distribution and district-supported access to the internet will continue to be important to families in need. Wrap-around services will be needed to address health concerns, food insecurity, rent insecurity, and job loss of parents (and students).
- **Social-emotional supports and student engagement.** As districts develop plans to provide instruction and needed supports to address the social-emotional needs students have as they return to school, it will be important that EL-specific needs are included.
- **Student employment.** As a result of family job losses, EL students may be working to provide much needed resources. Flexibility in learning approaches should therefore not only apply to health concerns but also allow high school students to remain employed and continue their education.
- **Childcare needs.** For adults to rejoin the workforce, free or affordable childcare should be provided during remote learning times. Otherwise, young children may be left home alone or older siblings will not be able to attend school due to childcare duties while parents work outside the home.
- **Transportation.** Because immigrant families are less likely to own cars or have access to alternative transportation, school districts that rely on mass transit to transport students need to work to modify service schedules when planning in-person school options.
- **Safety.** In addition to ensuring the health and safety of students returning to school buildings, school personnel, including bus drivers, need to be vigilant to potential bullying behavior or harassment related to COVID-19 that English learners may experience.

In addition to these basic considerations, the complexity of reopening schools requires systemwide planning across district offices. For too long, the provision of services and instruction for English learners has been undertaken by EL departments working in isolation with insufficient resources, authority, and input into districtwide decision-making and planning. As such, programming and planning for ELs is often an afterthought in instructional initiatives, undermining the efforts of EL teachers and staff and limiting the effectiveness of instruction and other supports these students need to succeed academically.



To address the heightened needs of English learners, school districts need to adopt a systems-oriented approach to EL services that are supported by all departments. Specifically,

- Schools and educators need district guidance on how to plan instruction, even in the absence of annual English proficiency assessment scores, to continue progress in developing English proficiency.
- Schools require clear guidance on how to determine needed levels of support in content area instruction, the number of periods and delivery of English language development, and necessary monitoring and supports for recently re-designated ELs.
- Districts need to determine how stand-alone ELD classes are delivered during remote or hybrid instruction, particularly with high school courses that may be credit-bearing, and in districts that have strict ELD time allocations delineated in state law or regulation, or in compliance agreements with the U.S. Department of Justice or the Office for Civil Rights.
- Teachers need long-term, hands-on professional development and ongoing coaching to build capacity to meet the needs of ELs, especially in using technology to deliver remote or hybrid instruction.

Throughout the following section, we describe system-level supports that will be critical in meeting the needs of English learners as schools reopen with new methods of delivering instruction: well-designed screening and placement protocols; accelerated learning strategies to address unfinished learning within the context of grade-level instruction; comprehensive language development strategies for ELs that are integrated into the district curriculum; use of instructional technology; strategic staffing; high quality, relevant professional development; assessments that effectively gauge both English language development and content learning needs; and strategic and effective communications with EL families.

## Enrollment, Screening, and Placement

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As districts and schools develop their plans for reopening, screening, identification, the placement of ELs in a timely and efficient way will require thoughtful consideration of the large numbers of ELs enrolled in Council-member districts. Administration of state-required comprehensive language proficiency assessments poses health-related complications as well as logistical challenges due to the sheer number of students who were not screened during the pandemic and the large number of entering Pre-K or kindergarten students.

### Considerations for Supporting EL Families in Enrollment, Screening, and Placement

- Informational materials are user-friendly and in the top languages spoken by EL families
- Technology used is familiar to EL families with access to 'live' support
- Availability of options (e.g., enrollment forms submitted online or at a drop-off location)
- Welcoming locations that are convenient to get to and offer safe conditions for families
- EL placement is clearly explained, especially regarding hybrid or remote instruction

**New enrollment and kindergarteners.** Many school districts resorted exclusively to online enrollment between March 2020 and the end of the school year due to COVID-19. Many may continue this practice in the upcoming year. Online enrollment can be difficult for EL families to navigate for multiple reasons—

- Information might be mostly in English;
- EL parents might not have an email address; and/or
- Parents may not be familiar with a computer or navigating a website and online forms, especially if uploading documents is required.

Greater use of well-designed and universally understood graphics and carefully curated information would improve online registration for all. Many current online registration forms are lengthy and require documents to be scanned and uploaded, which may present hurdles for families navigating language barriers, learning new technologies, and/or lacking access to scanners.

In addition, districts can support EL families with online registration in the following ways—

- Creating ‘how-to’ videos in the top 5-7 languages most spoken by the district’s EL families, explaining how to use the online enrollment process, including how parents can use their cell phone to scan documents, take pictures of required physical exam forms, and upload forms to online registration sites;
- Including a live “chat” feature with access to help in the top languages, where parents can ask questions using their home language as they register or use video conferencing via screen sharing with staff members who could provide support;
- Collaborating with refugee resettlement agencies, community-based organizations, or faith-based organizations to assist EL families with online registration;
- Considering drop-off locations that parents can use when they have trouble uploading documents, including libraries where families can also receive assistance with accessing websites;
- Deploying assessment teams with personal protective equipment to different locations across the city/county, so students can finish the registration process; and
- Creating a “one-pager” for EL parents with relevant information on services and supports for newly enrolling families.

**Initial screening for ELs.** During the last four months of the 2019-20 school year, when enrollment and registration was exclusively online, students could not be formally screened to determine their English language instructional needs. If formal procedures for screening are not practical, school districts may wish to use provisional screener questionnaires developed by the Council.<sup>16</sup> If hybrid delivery models are in place, school districts can set up a safe and controlled process that allows for comprehensive initial screening of students to determine their needs for English language instructional services and supports. The following are suggestions for safely managing the screening process—

- Necessary PPE and safety equipment/protocols to protect staff, students, and families that enable students and screeners to see one another’s mouths for effective communication and assessment;
- Designated school sites that can safely carry out formal language screening and have a safe waiting area for families or determine whether a centrally located site needs to be established to conduct English language proficiency screening; and
- Crowd control protocols, such as carefully scheduled appointments for language screening, at locations that are centrally located and easily accessible via public transportation.

<sup>16</sup> Council of the Great City Schools. (2020, May). *Assessing language proficiency during extended school closures: Sample questionnaires*. [https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/35/CGCS\\_SampleQuestionnaire\\_K-12\\_v6.pdf](https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/35/CGCS_SampleQuestionnaire_K-12_v6.pdf)

**EL services and placement.** Explaining to EL families the services, programs, and placement of their children requires a detailed conversation with a knowledgeable school staff person. The complexities of how English language development (ELD) will be delivered using hybrid and remote methods and the implications of program placement need to be carefully explained to families. Hybrid and remote learning models will likely require that children stay at home on some days, which is a challenge for many EL families, especially if they are new to the city. Newly arriving EL families will be less familiar with state child welfare laws and local support services. School districts will also need to provide EL families with information on and referrals to necessary wrap-around services that may be required during hybrid and remote learning.

## Accelerated Learning for ELs

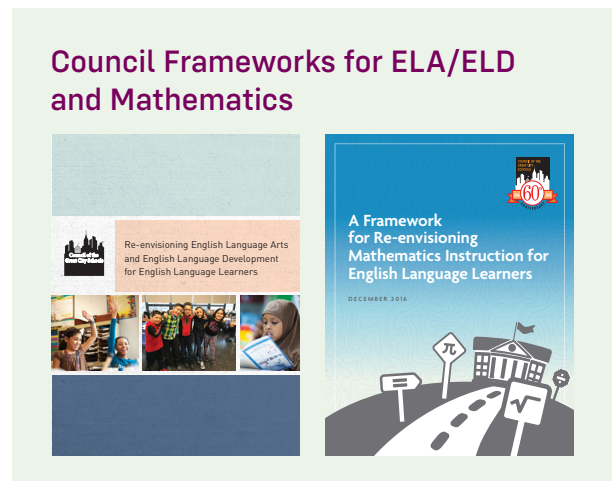
Returning to school—whether in person, virtually, or some combination of both—will require that learning for ELs be accelerated rather than remedial. Given the varied instructional experiences during the last three months of the 2019-20 school year and the summer, educators needed to cull key concepts and essential learning that would promote access to and success with grade-level content.

The challenges that districts have always faced regarding EL program design will be even more complex as districts reopen within narrow health and safety guardrails. For instance, online and hybrid instructional delivery models will require key EL learning supports and engagement. **A vision for accelerating learning of content and language will be essential**, including specific steps to establish and/or maintain student engagement and address challenges to realizing that vision.

Despite the obstacles, there may be new opportunities for ELs in hybrid instruction. For instance, videoconferencing can expand opportunities to integrate language development with content learning through co-teaching arrangements allowing students access to both general education and ELD/ESL teachers. Furthermore, more flexibility is permitted in offering content-based ELD through short, small group instructional “previews” before regular content class begins. There may also be opportunities for educators to co-plan and share resources and professional learning across the district, transcending the brick-and-mortar barriers of school walls.

Appendix A describes educational experiences that may be important to accelerating learning for English learners and mitigating the impact of reduced instructional time due to COVID-19. These educational experiences are grounded in principles from the Council’s ELA/ELD<sup>17</sup> and mathematics<sup>18</sup> frameworks. Specifically, districts should ensure that instruction for ELs—

- **Reflects high expectations.** Rigorous grade-level and age-appropriate assignments should be used to ensure that ELs access grade-level content and instructional rigor. Lesson planning should be built around high-quality, complex, and culturally responsive texts with pre-reading activities and supports designed to foster “just-in-time” instruction to address unfinished learning. Teachers should use scaffolding strategically to support ELs in working with complex texts and concepts without removing the productive struggle needed to build intellectual capacity (e.g., progressively complex linguistic frames and models).



17 Council of the Great City Schools. (2017, May). *Re-envisioning English language arts and English language development for English language learners*. [https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/domain/4/darrell/CGCS\\_ReinvisEngLang\\_pub\\_Rev\\_final.pdf](https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/domain/4/darrell/CGCS_ReinvisEngLang_pub_Rev_final.pdf)

18 Council of the Great City Schools. (2016, December). *A framework for re-envisioning mathematics instruction for English language learners*. [https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/domain/4/darrell/FrameworkForMath4ELLS\\_R10\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/domain/4/darrell/FrameworkForMath4ELLS_R10_FINAL.pdf)

- **Advances English language development.** Instruction should address all aspects of language acquisition, including foundational skills, academic language, and extended discourse in ways that are connected to grade-level content. English language development should also provide a bridge to ELA and other content standards in increasingly complex ways.
- **Acknowledges the interdependence of language and content learning.** Effective instruction for ELs requires explicit attention to the language demands inherent in grade-level tasks and assignments. Teachers can maximize opportunities provided by remote learning platforms to employ multiple modes of content and concept representation, including students' ability to use their first language (L1). Teachers should also provide thematic coherence that ties language development to essential questions related to grade-level content.
- **Applies an asset-based approach.** Teachers should acknowledge the skills and knowledge that English learners acquired by living through the COVID-19 pandemic and use these to strengthen the learning of grade-level content through texts and tasks that are culturally relevant and responsive.
- **Promotes shared responsibility.** School closures brought about new ways for general education/content teachers and ESL/ELD teachers to collaborate as well as a heightened sense of shared urgency in Council-member districts to ensure that ELs could access remote learning resources. A heightened sense of shared responsibility for EL success can fuel teacher collaboration in ways that result in stronger instructional coherence, English language development, and grade-level content instruction.

## English Language Development

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In addition to ensuring effective instructional design and teacher supports to provide ELs access to grade-level curriculum, a district's EL program needs to include attention to the development of English proficiency. In advancing English language development amidst all the unknown contextual factors during the 2020-21 school year, districts face several hurdles, including—

- The required number of ELD periods by English proficiency level according to state law or in compliance agreements with DOJ or OCR will limit a district's flexibility in student assignments.
- The grouping of EL students is complicated by unknown levels of English proficiency following five months of being away from brick-and-mortar schools during which language assessment has been limited.
- The persistent shortage of EL-qualified educators will be further exacerbated when reopening will require greater strategic deployment of limited staff to provide ELD and content instruction and support general education teachers working in hybrid and remote modalities.

**Appendix A** lays out a set of educational experiences we consider to be priorities for ELs as schools reopen, especially if instruction is delivered remotely or in a hybrid fashion. The experiences are organized according to the Council's ELD framework.<sup>19</sup> This framework lays out two main components of a re-envisioned ELD program that address the dual learning goals for ELs. Specifically, **Focused Language Study** (FLS) attends to the explicit needs ELs have for learning how English works, especially in the school setting, while **Discipline-specific Academic Language Expansion** (DALE) recognizes the interdependence of language and content learning, calling on all teachers with ELs in their classrooms to attend to the development of academic language anchored in grade-level content. Below are brief descriptions, considerations, and recommendations for districts in each of these categories.

<sup>19</sup> Council of the Great City Schools. (2017, May). *Re-envisioning English language arts and English language development for English language learners*. [https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/domain/4/darrell/CGCS\\_ReinvisEngLang\\_pub\\_Rev\\_final.pdf](https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/domain/4/darrell/CGCS_ReinvisEngLang_pub_Rev_final.pdf)

## Focused Language Study (FLS)

An EL instructional program should include dedicated time for targeted English language development regardless of instructional modality—remote, hybrid, or in-person. FLS or dedicated ELD time provides teacher-led instruction that reveals how English works through instruction in phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and sentence structure. Whether ELs are receiving face-to-face learning or mostly remote instruction, districts will need to develop activities and use technologies that sustain the social interaction necessary for continued language acquisition. Districts have used several ways to maintain instructional focus on English language development and have found ways to ensure that English learners benefit from live—even if remote—interaction with (a) an English-fluent adult—the teacher—who provides modeling and immediate feedback and (b) peers who are more English-proficient. Some solutions rely on technology while others are low-tech with varied opportunities for listening, speaking, reading, and writing—

- **Receptive language development.** To support ELs in their ongoing development of listening and reading, some districts have created short instructional videos or narrated PowerPoints with captioning to enable visual input, speech, and written language simultaneously. These supports allow ELs to remain engaged with complex and compelling grade-level text, providing the needed exposure to academic English language forms.
- **Productive language development.** Online platforms and technological solutions may provide ELs with greater opportunities to engage in speaking and extended discourse than what they often receive during the traditional school day.
  - For writing, ELs need regular, timely, and clear feedback on how to improve their writing.
  - For speaking, individual and small group virtual sessions provide strategic opportunities for ELs to interact with teachers and other students.
  - Teachers’ creative use of technology has allowed students to show their work in different ways, encouraging students to practice English at home by uploading recorded videos and recorded interviews with family, neighbors, etc.

Instructional videos, PowerPoints, and other resources need not be limited to virtual platforms. Districts distributed these on flash drives along with packets and supplies at school meal distribution sites. In several districts, ESL staff also developed instructional “packets,” connected to grade-level content, for English language development (ELD) at home.

**Planning Considerations.** Careful design and delivery of ELD should be intentionally linked to the essential learning identified by the school district for the reopening of schools. No matter the instructional delivery system, collaborative planning between EL and general education teachers should allow for focused language study to provide the necessary supports for learning new concepts, addressing misconceptions, and building academic language to enable ELs to engage with grade-level content. While

the “focused” aspect of FLS should provide the foundational skills needed to support access to grade-level content, collaborative planning of activities and assignments ensures that language acquisition is not decontextualized grammar or phonics instruction but rather is anchored in grade-level content.

*...collaborative planning of activities and assignments ensures that language acquisition is not decontextualized grammar or phonics instruction but rather is anchored in grade-level content.*



## Discipline-Specific Academic Language Expansion (DALE)

Providing instruction that emphasizes language through content, called *Discipline-Specific Academic Language Enrichment (DALE)* in the Council's Framework,<sup>20</sup> is predicated on the need to engage students in complex thinking and expect them to express their ideas about grade-level content. Careful planning and collaboration among educators are imperative, as is an investment in professional development that equips all general education teachers with the understanding and strategies needed to attend to academic language development that supports grade-level content and provides EL teachers with in-depth understanding of the essential grade-level learning so they in turn can support the teaching of that content.

- **Rigor and thematic coherence.** To keep ELs engaged and excited about learning content, a high level of rigor must be maintained, and topics should be compelling and interesting. Complex, universal themes of global importance, particularly during these turbulent times, provide the kind of content that will engage ELs and keep them coming to school. The goal is to provide sustained, in-depth learning about exciting and engaging topics of grade-level content through activities and tasks that are rigorous and standards-aligned. These activities can then provide the basis for formative assessments.

*Careful planning and collaboration among educators are imperative, as is an investment in professional development that equips all general education teachers with the understanding and strategies needed to attend to academic language development that supports grade-level content...*

- Several districts have ESL teachers and general education teachers collaborate in developing thematic units to make instruction more focused and coherent, tied to grade-level content, and then made these lesson plans and units of study available districtwide through a digital repository.
  - As part of the collaborative lesson planning, teachers developed corresponding formative assessment tasks and activities to measure student attainment of both grade-level content and English language development. In the remote learning environment, teachers used available technology platforms and tools to create and administer these tasks.
- **Academic language development.** The core of DALE is that explicit development of language—not just lists of vocabulary but the language—of each discipline as well as the academic language of schooling are explicitly taught in an integrated manner to accelerate content mastery. As teachers model the use of academic language in their teaching, they reveal for English learners how language is used in individual content areas and for particular purposes. During school closures, teachers have found new sources of content-specific academic language and innovative ways to model the use of this language. For example,
    - Teachers carefully curated online videos that provided both engaging content and models for academic language used to present knowledge and explain concepts.
    - Districts developed lessons embedded with teacher moves that showed students the specific language structures and functions of a specified text being explored as students learned engaging standards-aligned content.
    - Students then learned to use academic language with supports, such as linguistic frames, to engage grade-level content and convey what they know.

<sup>20</sup> Council of the Great City Schools. (2017, May). *Re-envisioning English language arts and English language development for English language learners*. [https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/domain/4/darrell/CGCS\\_ReinvisEngLang\\_pub\\_Rev\\_final.pdf](https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/domain/4/darrell/CGCS_ReinvisEngLang_pub_Rev_final.pdf)

Particularly in hybrid and remote learning modalities, where learning takes place at home, ELs should be given opportunities for and encouraged to use their home language to support content learning, especially if they are grappling with new and complex ideas. For instance, teachers might assign an activity that requires students to explain (verbally) a concept to a sibling, parent, or neighbor and upload the recording. For writing assignments, students and teachers can avail themselves of translation features available in some learning platforms currently being used in districts.

**Planning Considerations.** Designing and delivering coherent, grade-level, engaging learning experiences—especially for hybrid or remote instruction—require even greater collaboration among teachers who bring differing strengths to their instruction. Districts and schools play an important role in facilitating teacher collaboration in ways that avoid asking educators to choose between competing priorities and prevents burnout. For instance,

- Creative and district-supported schedules can maximize teachers’ time to plan together and share strategies.
- Centrally managed virtual repositories of model lesson plans and materials aligned with the districts’ general curriculum facilitate collaboration between ESOL and content educators in ways that support academic language development across content areas. The repository needs to be easy to navigate and easily accessible.
- District-supported teacher collaboration can also lead to the development of **formative assessments** as part of planning engaging lessons and activities to support both language and conceptual learning. The EL office in one district helped teachers embed formative assessment activities into lessons using their lesson template to address language acquisition and literacy connected to content.



## The Selection and Use of Instructional Technology

As districts pivoted to remote learning in the weeks following widespread school closures, schools quickly began using their technology to promote academic literacy and content learning for all students. For ELs, research indicates that technology can be particularly helpful in the following ways—

- **Language supports and scaffolds.** The use of computers and the internet can provide supports for extensive and independent reading and writing, assist with language scaffolding, and provide opportunities for authentic research and publication (Warschauer, Grant, Del Real, & Rousseau, 2004).<sup>21</sup>
- **Native language materials.** The internet can be an important source for instructional materials in a range of native languages and can afford educators substantially greater alternatives for fostering language learning with contextual and cultural depth.

21 Warschauer, M., Grant, D., Del Real, G., & Rousseau, M. (2004). Promoting academic literacy with technology: Successful laptop programs in K-12 schools. *System*, 32(4), 525-537.

- **Productive learning environments.**

Technology can also play an important role in the construction of productive learning environments for the youngest English learners (Castek, 2007).<sup>22</sup>

However, to the extent districts continue to use online applications for independent language learning and provide ELs the opportunity to practice English, they will need to be more discerning about their adopted programs, as not many deliver on their marketing promises. For example, many programs develop vocabulary in a decontextualized manner and fail to provide concrete feedback to ELs on how to produce English phonemes. In fact, the “fun,” gamified language-learning applications widely available to the public are generally not designed for English learners in K-12 schools in the U.S., and therefore, are not aligned to English proficiency standards for speaking and listening or to grade-level themes and content. EL educators have also found that web-based and gamified language-learning programs use an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) rather than an English as a Second Language (ESL) approach. EFL instruction primarily focuses on language acquisition for everyday communication without the important integration of grade-level content knowledge required in the ESL approach for English learners in U.S. schools.

To use these applications responsibly and effectively, they need to be carefully embedded in a broader ELD instructional experience designed by educators. For example, web-based language programs can help with the “EFL portion” of speaking, listening, and understanding of communications, while teachers can address the “ESL portion” of instruction that attends to content learning, developing academic language, and building coherence across all instructional streams.

In addition, when selecting instructional technology tools and resources to support ELs, districts need to consider what they learned from the rapid rollout of technology tools and applications during school closures at the end of SY 2019-20—

- Instructions for programs are rarely provided in languages other than English;
- Tools that required parents to have multiple passwords or accounts became difficult to navigate, especially for EL parents with little familiarity with computers or web-based programs; and
- EL families expressed fear that their child and family privacy was being compromised through digital programs.

Moreover, as districts extend their reliance on virtual delivery and digital content, it is critically important to ensure that digital resources increase student engagement, support academic literacy, and deepen conceptual understanding of grade-level content. The Council’s framework documents (ELA/ELD<sup>23</sup> and mathematics<sup>24</sup>) discuss these features and the use of instructional technology to support EL success. In a hybrid, remote learning environment certain criteria become more critical—

- **Grade-level remote learning.** Digital resources should ensure full access to grade-level instructional rigor and content.

### Instructional Technology Supports

In hybrid learning, instructional technology can support English learners in important ways—

- Remote access to grade-level learning
- Supporting instructional coherence
- Enhancing engagement
- Supporting academic language development
- Making connections with peers and teachers

22 Castek, J., Leu, D. J., Jr., Coiro, J., Gort, M., Henry, L. A., & Lima, C. O. (2007). Developing new literacies among multilingual learners in the elementary grades. In L. L. Parker (Ed.), *Technology-mediated learning environments for young English learners: Connections in and out of school*.

23 Council of the Great City Schools. (2017, May). *Re-envisioning English language arts and English language development for English language learners*. [https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/domain/4/darrell/CGCS\\_ReinvisEngLang\\_pub\\_Rev\\_final.pdf](https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/domain/4/darrell/CGCS_ReinvisEngLang_pub_Rev_final.pdf)

24 Council of the Great City Schools. (2016, December). *A framework for re-envisioning mathematics instruction for English language learners*. [https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/domain/4/darrell/FrameworkForMath4ELLS\\_R10\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/domain/4/darrell/FrameworkForMath4ELLS_R10_FINAL.pdf)

- **Instructional coherence.** Digital resources should fit together to seamlessly advance English language development and content learning for ELs during hybrid or remote learning. Furthermore, all materials need to fit into a larger vision of instruction for ELs.
- **Engagement.** Digital resources should facilitate student involvement in cognitively engaging projects (e.g., analysis and creation of purposeful texts in a variety of media and genres) (Warschauer et al., 2004).<sup>25</sup> Technology-supported feedback should be timely, meaningful, and of high quality for content that is individualized for students' unique needs (Zhao & Lai, 2007).<sup>26</sup>
- **Academic language development.** Digital resources should include linguistic scaffolds and opportunities for language development that are linked to expanding understanding of content. Technology can support academic language development in several ways:
  - Promoting independent reading by offering language scaffolding and contextualized vocabulary instruction to facilitate reading comprehension; and
  - Expanding access to more complex text and higher levels of literacy through screen reading features.
- **Making connections.** Digital resources should assist students in making connections among multiple representations (e.g., verbal, symbolic, abstract, visual, algebraic, etc.) and facilitate student use of these representations in expressing their reasoning.

### Further Guidance and Resources for Selecting Digital Learning Resources

In 2018, the U.S. Department of Education developed a toolkit geared towards educators, *Using Educational Technology—21st Century Supports of English Learners*,<sup>27</sup> which provides guiding questions and sources that are helpful for educators seeking to maximize the capabilities of technology to support English learners. The toolkit also provides two matrices with comprehensive descriptions of technology supports in two categories—

- *Digital learning* resources that refer to applications (apps) software, programs, or websites that engage students in learning activities and support students' learning goals. These resources are divided into three subcategories, each with particular features of education technology; and
- *Digital support features*, which are embedded features in digital learning resources that assist students in understanding or communicating content.

In [Appendix E](#), we share the two matrices from the U.S. Department of Education Toolkit that describe the types and uses of digital learning resources and digital support features. These descriptions are largely consistent with the experiences described by Council-member educators. As schools prepare to reopen in entirely virtual or hybrid modalities, the toolkit could be helpful in determining which technological supports are suitable for districts to incorporate into their lesson plans, assignments, and activities to maximize learning and engagement for English learners.

25 Warschauer, M., Grant, D., Del Real, G., & Rousseau, M. (2004). *Promoting academic literacy with technology: Successful laptop programs in K-12 schools*. *System*, 32(4), 525-537.

26 Zhao, Y., & Lai, C. (2007). Technology and second language learning: Promises and problems. In L. L. Parker (Ed.), *Technology-mediated learning environments for young English learners: Connections in and out of school*.

27 U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service. (2018, October). *National Study of English Learners and Digital Learning Resources, Educator Toolkit: Using Educational Technology—21st Century Supports for English Learners*. Retrieved July 20, 2020, from <https://tech.ed.gov/edtech-english-learner-toolkits/educators/>

## Strategic Staffing

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The ongoing challenge of hiring and deploying EL teachers is exacerbated by multiple factors related to reopening schools in the COVID-19 context. The situation is aggravated by the potential reduction in the teaching force due to funding cuts and teacher decisions about returning to their classrooms. The extent of in-person instruction that can be offered is affected by these two factors and others. For districts that rely on international hiring to supplement their EL teaching force, the cancellation of relevant immigration visas further intensifies the staffing challenge.

The strategic staffing of EL-qualified educators ensures that schools have the necessary teachers to serve ELs. It also ensures that central offices have sufficient EL coaches and specialists to provide needed supports for general education teachers with whom ELs spend most of their school day. For instance, during school closures, EL staff from central offices played an important role in designing lessons and courses for districtwide dissemination, holding office hours to support general education teachers, and working collaboratively with general education teachers in co-planning or co-teaching lessons.

Many districts assign itinerant EL teachers to multiple schools on a rotating basis to meet the needs of ELs when they enroll in small numbers within specific schools. As districts explore ways to meet instructional needs with fewer staff, staffing arrangements to virtually allow for the following might be considered—

- Districtwide courses to be delivered online by EL-qualified teachers who can open new possibilities to provide ELs access to courses that may not have been available at their brick-and-mortar school; and
- Grouping ELs by proficiency levels across clusters of schools to create schedules that maximize opportunities for students to be engaged with effective, qualified EL teachers—whether in-person or through videoconferencing platforms.

Nonetheless, any new, more flexible staffing configurations might be subject to contractual parameters involving teachers and other certificated staff. In addition, teacher evaluations and oversight might need to embrace new work configurations that are not limited to brick-and-mortar assignments. Again, protocols in place for itinerant teachers can serve as a starting point for expanded arrangements. For example, districts would need to look at such protocols as—

- How student groups are structured for accountability purposes (e.g., student learning objectives (SLOs), etc.) when an EL grouping draws students from more than one school;
- How teachers are assigned or transferred between schools and/or roles based on changing needs;
- How to create sustained opportunities for teachers working across schools to engage meaningfully with teachers assigned to a single school for planning purposes and supporting school culture;
- How curricular materials and pacing can be coordinated to maintain alignment between lessons conducted by EL teachers with students (perhaps simultaneously from several schools) and lessons being delivered in core content classes;
- How principals set expectations for teachers who are supporting additional schools and ensure that these teachers are reasonably integrated to support overall goals and the culture of their schools in a way that sustains collaborative relationships with school-site teachers; and
- How to ensure that the evaluation process for teachers in flexible positions, serving ELs and other students districtwide or across several schools, is fair and that data systems are in place to accurately track/link teachers working across schools to the students they serve.



## High Quality, Relevant Professional Development

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The pandemic created an immediate demand for professional development that could quickly equip teachers to deliver instruction with relevant supports for ELs using technology and remote videoconferencing platforms. The urgent need to learn how to create engaging lessons delivered using technology during school closures opened new opportunities for how professional development is delivered. The distance learning environment brought down walls that may have prevented teachers from coming together. Collaboration is amplified when, for example, third grade teachers from across a district can learn together and share resources, plan and develop lessons jointly, and can harness the brain power of many minds focused on creative solutions to the challenges they are facing. EL offices in districts responded to this urgent need for professional development in several ways, including—

- Offering “on demand” training videos;
- Holding weekly webinars to learn about effective strategies for working with ELs; and
- Having EL offices hold drop-in office hours during which teachers could virtually connect for assistance in designing and incorporating scaffolds and using technology to support ELs in remote instruction.

*Quality professional development can build educators’ capacity to recognize the natural progression of English language development of ELs, and thus not mistake this for being behind or needing reading remediation.*

As districts prepare to reopen schools, a priority for professional development is to prepare teachers with the ability to assess students’ unfinished learning as well as recognize the strengths that students bring from accrued experiences while away from school. To adequately support ELs, this assessment capacity needs to include the ability of teachers to recognize the natural progression of English language development, and not mistake it for being behind or needing reading remediation. In other words, districts need to ensure that professional development is meaningful, aligned to the overall instructional framework and vision for ELs, and is provided in accordance with best practices (i.e., promotes collaboration, uses opportunities to practice, and provides continuous feedback and support, etc.).

Districts have made the most of systemwide professional development to expand the number of teachers with the skills and strategies to help ELs build their academic English proficiency. It will be important that future efforts to provide professional development opportunities for teacher recertification or to fulfill required annual professional development hours be well-aligned to the instructional priorities for reopening schools.

## Effective Assessment of EL Learning Needs

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As schools reopen for SY 2020-21, data-driven decision-making will be more critical than ever. Students will be returning to or newly enrolling in schools after a wide range of educational experiences during remote instruction at the end of the previous year. Teachers will be charged with accelerating learning as they work to shepherd all students toward achieving grade-level college- and career-readiness standards. With the prospect of considerable unfinished learning and perhaps limited face-to-face instruction, the time that teachers have for instruction may be more limited. Strategically designed and purposefully conducted assessments can enable teachers to better target their instruction while providing appropriate support. Specifically, for English learners, assessments should measure the progress in content learning and help identify students for whom language development was halted during remote learning in SY 2019-20.

While diagnostic and summative assessment results can show some unfinished learning, attentive instruction with embedded formative assessments is better suited to probe and address specific areas of unfinished learning through an accelerated rather than remedial approach that risks enlarging learning gaps.<sup>28</sup> (See [Addressing Unfinished Learning After COVID-19 School Closures](#) for further discussion on the limitations of assessments.)

Of course, assessment data are only as useful as the quality of the instruments and the knowledge of educators using the data. In planning and administering assessments, as well as interpreting and responding to assessment results, districts will need to account for a number of items, including grade-level content, strategic collaboration, assessments that are designed with ELs in mind, strategic timing, scaffolding and linguistic accommodations, and criteria for the selection of standardized assessments.

### Formative Assessment in the Context of Grade-Level Instruction

A defining feature of EL education is the simultaneous learning of English and academic content knowledge. Yet typical diagnostics or standardized assessments are generally not designed to capture progress on both fronts in an instructionally meaningful way for ELs at various English language proficiency levels. For English learners, the purpose of formative assessments is twofold—

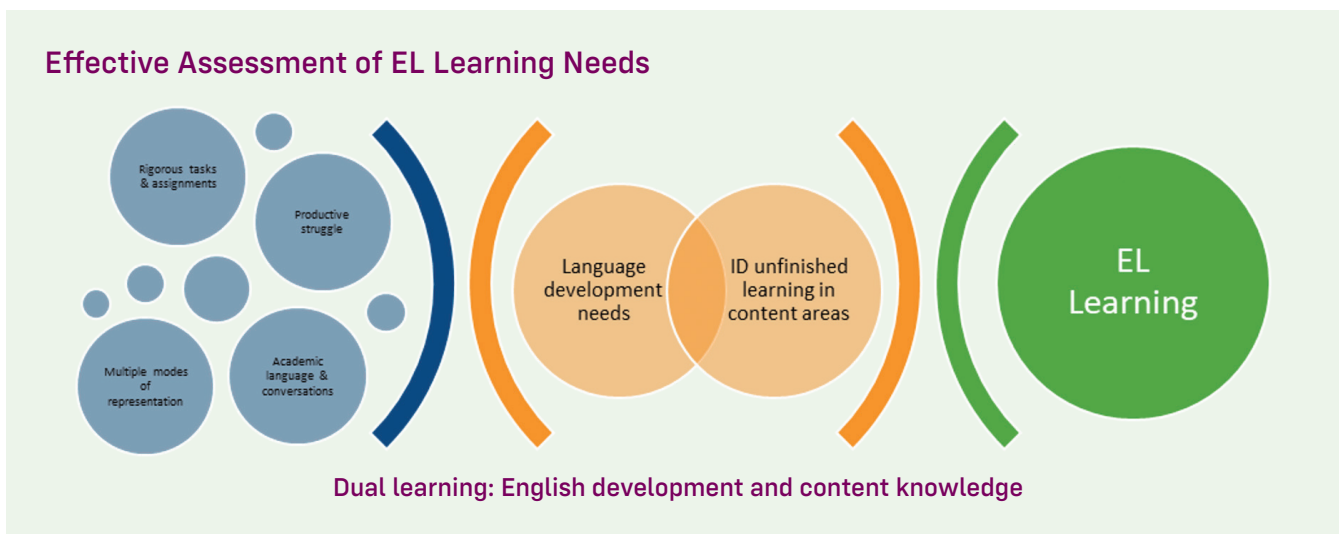
1. **Determining language development needs.** Formative assessments that reveal English learners' unfinished learning of academic language will help situate students along an English proficiency continuum to determine appropriate language supports and instructional next steps.
2. **Identifying unfinished learning in content areas.** Formative assessments of students' understanding of content knowledge, independent of their English proficiency, should reveal if a student has gaps or misconceptions in content areas. ELs who experienced interrupted instructional opportunities during school closures may show signs of unfinished learning in one or more content areas.

When designing formative assessments for the remote learning context, four areas of focus are suggested to ensure that both language development and grade-level content are measured—

- **Employing rigorous tasks and assignments.** All assessment activities and tasks conducted virtually should be aligned to rigorous college- and career-ready standards and engage the intended levels of cognitive demand and rigor outlined by the standards in full. Assessment activities should not rely solely on features of a district's learning management system or specific instructional product; the strategic use of technology tools can promote engagement and open doors for more assessment activities.
- **Encouraging productive struggle.** Formative assessments facilitate learning when they provide students opportunities to wrestle with new learning—i.e., productive struggle. Teachers need to carefully select supports students may need to carry out formative assessment activities or tasks in a virtual setting, especially if students do not have access to the teacher. Educators should keep in mind that remote learning demands new ways of detecting when a student is frustrated with or is productively grappling with new content.
- **Employing multiple modes and representations.** When learning a new language, the various language domains (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) develop at varying rates, depending on the relative strength of these domains that an individual already has and the instructional focus that each domain receives. Consequently, ELs will use different domains to explain or demonstrate their conceptual understanding of grade-level content. Virtual assessment activities and tasks should allow students to demonstrate what they know in a variety of ways, including multiple representations and various language domains.

28 Council of the Great City Schools. (2020, June). *Addressing unfinished learning after COVID-19 school closures*. [https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/313/CGCS\\_Unfinished%20Learning.pdf](https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/313/CGCS_Unfinished%20Learning.pdf)

- **Supporting academic language and conversations.** As college- and career-ready standards call for students to engage with the language of varying academic disciplines, educators must intentionally foster language development, including critical conversations that help students refine and demonstrate their conceptual understanding. Accordingly, formative assessments should include tasks and assignments that demonstrate language development across content areas. Districts have found it helpful to supplement the features (e.g., file uploads and discussion boards) of their learning management systems with other technologies that facilitate conversations via synchronous video or asynchronous video/voice uploads.



Though formative assessment can and should be conducted in a variety of ways, they do not always need to result in a traditional work product (i.e., reports, models, etc.). **Writing prompts**, for instance, can be a particularly powerful formative assessment task for gauging language and conceptual knowledge development, when they are aligned to the listed focus areas. Furthermore, they can serve as a launching point for further formative assessments involving the domains of speaking and listening (e.g., peer conversations about writing, collaborative revisions, etc.). Additional benefits and considerations for using writing prompts include—

- **Tangible evidence of progression.** A well-designed prompt as part of content instruction can serve the dual purpose of providing a baseline or formative assessment of a student’s developing grasp of grade-level language demands and their conceptual understanding and English proficiency level. (An examination of writing products over time can yield critical insights into a student’s progress.)
- **Asset-based understanding of student experiences.** Especially for students returning to schools after experiencing COVID-19, the use of asset-based prompts will be important to help educators understand what students have learned and experienced during school closures. They will also provide students an opportunity to process what they experienced. Such prompts should enable students to process and share what they have learned in ways that are connected to the content.
- **Collaboration for development.** Collaboration between EL and content-area educators facilitates the integration of language and content, and it helps ensure that the protocol for administering the writing prompt is responsive to EL needs. Just as important, collaboration is key to designing common rubrics and scoring guidance to review writing samples.
- **Rubrics accounting for language development needs.** Interpretive tools or evaluation guidance should include descriptors of imperfect writing that are likely to be common when students are reacclimating to academic writing after months away from school. Similarly, descriptors should include common writing mistakes made by students who are new to the English language.

## Strategic Collaboration

Greater collaboration between English language development educators and content area educators is important for developing (and/or selecting) assessments, reviewing assessment data, and planning instruction based on results on simultaneous language and content development. Ensuring integration of language and content in instruction and assessment is best accomplished when the expertise of English learner staff and content area staff are jointly leveraged.

Collaboration can also help make sense of and contextualize the data by acknowledging the factors that may have influenced EL performance. For instance, EL performance on content assessments may reflect students' familiarity with technology and testing modalities, the degree of acculturation to schooling in the United States, unaddressed trauma, and/or interrupted English acquisition during extended time away from school. Moreover, assessment results may reflect a student's insufficient access to instruction due to the lack of technology and/or variations in teachers' ability to provide language-related support during remote instruction. When unfinished learning is the result of students not receiving instruction or other factors, educators should be careful not to assume learning difficulties, the need for amplified language supports, or the need to change academic programming.

## Greater Inclusion of All ELs

The impact of school closures and the pandemic have been disproportionately harsh on EL families. The effects underscore the importance of including ELs in any district effort to assess unfinished learning. Occasionally, English learners at lower levels of English language proficiency and students with interrupted formal education (SIFE) are excluded from formal diagnostic/benchmark assessments or, perhaps, even formative assessment activities used in the classroom. These practices, which may be well-intentioned and used in the absence of valid and reliable instruments, limit the information educators need for instructional planning and progress monitoring. Every effort should be made to assess all English learners on the same grade-level content, with appropriate accommodations and assessment instruments, as non-ELs are assessed.

Including all ELs will also require an understanding of and access to disaggregated data on various language groups to allow for better instructional strategies and necessary supports. Districts will need to closely monitor students to determine language development needs after multiple months of school closures, especially of—

- ELs who were “disconnected” or had low attendance during remote learning;
- ELs who prior to school closures were at lower levels of English proficiency, and who were less likely to practice English socially or academically with peers, siblings, and other family members during remote learning;
- ELs who have not been reclassified in the absence of ELPA scores but who may be at higher levels of proficiency;
- Former ELs who were reclassified in the weeks preceding school closures; and
- Provisionally placed ELs who enrolled during school closures. Guidance from the U.S. Department of Education indicates that students who were placed when formal language screening was not possible should be closely monitored to ensure they receive language-related supports, if needed, until formal screening can take place.<sup>29</sup>

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29 U.S. Department of Education. (2020, May 18). *Providing services to English learners during the COVID-19 outbreak*. <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/coronavirus/covid-19-el-factsheet.pdf>

**Linguistic screeners.** When schools closed in March 2020, districts ceased conducting formal language screeners and administering annual assessments of English proficiency (ELPA). Some districts completed ELPA assessments, while others had not. In the absence of English proficiency scores from either formal screeners or annual progress assessments, some districts considered using linguistic screeners that were typically used for initial identification to assess general levels of language proficiency to help determine instructional needs. Not all ELs or potential ELs should be administered a linguistic screener, however. Instead, districts should focus on determining which students, from the categories listed above, would benefit from linguistic screeners based on multiple measures (e.g., engagement in distance learning, writing samples, formative assessments, teacher observation, etc.).

### Strategic Timing of Assessments

As discussed in greater detail in *Addressing Unfinished Learning After COVID-19 School Closures*,<sup>30</sup> the timing of diagnostic and baseline assessments should be considered carefully. As schools reopen in SY 2020-21, the temptation to determine through testing where students are academically and what they need will be high. A focus on immediate assessments, however, may produce less valid results as students need time to reacclimate to school. For English learners who faced challenges in accessing remote learning or were disconnected from schools, premature assessment results may reflect lost opportunity and non-academic needs more so than true knowledge gaps. Rather, formative and diagnostic assessments administered after students have settled into school for some period and have begun tackling grade-level content might be more useful. Districts can help students reacclimate to school and assessment practices. For instance,

- In cases where students lack familiarity with virtual testing platforms, districts might devote time to computer literacy at the beginning of the year, while students are acclimating, prior to administering computer-based assessments; and
- In cases where students are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with speaking into microphones, districts might develop a list of appropriate technologies and suggestions for using them to practice skills needed for online assessment.

### An Asset-Based Approach to Understanding ELs

The knowledge that students possess from past instruction and life experiences is relevant to accelerating instruction and addressing unfinished learning. Consequently, assessments should highlight what students know, rather than solely emphasizing knowledge gaps. This will provide teachers with valuable information about EL's current knowledge and what assets they bring to new learning. Careful consideration should be given to ensuring that English learners have opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge through a variety of methods. This means that—

- Assessment activities and tasks should be situated in culturally responsive contexts that elicit from ELs their experiential knowledge while supporting their English with appropriate linguistic accommodations, such as linguistic frames, visuals, etc.; and
- Rubrics and score reports should show a progression in performance levels, pinpointing what a student already knows, helping educators to focus on how to bridge toward grade-level content expectations.

30 Council of the Great City Schools. (2020, June). *Addressing unfinished learning after COVID-19 school closures*. [https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/313/CGCS\\_Unfinished%20Learning.pdf](https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/313/CGCS_Unfinished%20Learning.pdf)



## Strategic Scaffolding and Linguistic Accommodations

The valid assessment of content knowledge for ELs is contingent on the provision of appropriate linguistic accommodations. In the same way that English learners may need linguistic-related accommodations and supports to access content during instruction, ELs may also need access to tools or supports—such as linguistic frames and visuals—to demonstrate the full extent of their learning during closures. Technologies for the assessment of English learners should therefore contain embedded tools for scaffolding (e.g., interactive dictionary with visuals, text-to-speech readers, linguistic frames, multiple response modes, etc.) in addition to general supports consistent with Universal Design for Learning Principles that maximize appropriate language engagement and content learning.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, guidance and professional development are necessary to build teacher capacity to strategically select and use scaffolds in dynamic ways to meet changing student needs.

## Careful Selection of Standardized Assessments

Assessing the dual trajectory of grade-level content knowledge and English acquisition is best done through formative assessments that feature the language demands of the respective content area rather than assessing language skills out of context. Nevertheless, districts often find themselves having to select assessments (for formative assessment or other purposes) for all students, including English learners, from somewhat limited options. We suggest the following considerations for determining assessments to be used with ELs—

- a. *Whether assessments were piloted and validated specifically for English learners.* If they were not, one cannot assume that assessment results will be valid for ELs or will provide accurate information to guide instructional next steps.
- b. *The efficacy and familiarity of testing modalities for ELs.* If the assessment relies on technological modalities and features that are unfamiliar to ELs, EL participation may reflect this unfamiliarity more than unfinished learning. Also, if the assessment equipment, the program, and/or the scoring algorithms are not calibrated with ELs in mind, and thus, are unable to recognize responses by English learners at various language developmental stages, the measurement will not be valid.
- c. *Alignment to college- and career-readiness standards* is necessary—not just alignment to English language development (ELD) standards.
- d. *Embedded supports and linguistic accommodations.* Some assessment platforms have built-in supports and accommodations. These are valuable if they do not compromise the intended cognitive demand of the assessment items.

## Family Engagement

Under normal school operations, communicating effectively with families is an important component of supporting student success. During the COVID-19 closures, however, the need to inform and engage parents has become critical. Parents and families have gone from being valuable stakeholders to being essential partners in the work of educating students. Specifically, parents and families will be responsible in the coming school year for—

- **Navigating schedules and services.** In the coming school year, schools will likely open with new, unfamiliar schedules. If hybrid instruction takes place on alternate days, for example, EL parents will need to know how and when their children will receive required English Language Development instruction, as well as content classes. EL parents may not be able to help students with English language development, but they can help ensure students sign on to virtual learning and complete their homework if they know the schedules, services, and classes.



<sup>31</sup> See “#4. Ensure inclusion of each and every learner” (pp. 5-6) in [Addressing Unfinished Learning After COVID-19 School Closures](#) (CGCS, 2020).

- **Connecting to remote learning.** Parents will provide required supports to their younger children to keep assigned devices safe and charged and will assist them in connecting to district learning platforms. If remote instruction takes place synchronously, parents will need to follow the schedules designed for their child to engage with teachers. If asynchronous instruction is provided, parents will need to help manage their child’s time to ensure that, within the flexible schedule, they are signing on to do the work.
- **Creating environments conducive to learning.** Parents will also be responsible for finding adequate space and time for English learners to study. This may be a challenge for EL families, since many of them are under-resourced, live in close quarters, and have older ELs caring for younger siblings.



In other words, the stakes for effective EL parent engagement have never been higher. At the same time, the rich diversity of languages spoken by EL families in urban districts—over 50 in many school districts—and the likelihood that EL families are less familiar with the U.S. school system add further complexity to the work of establishing effective communications.

School districts, therefore, need to tailor their communications strategies for EL families that may experience language barriers and/or for whom the U.S. school system is unfamiliar. To begin with, districts should bridge language barriers by developing comprehensive language assistance plans. However, effective communication 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. These two dimensions of effective communication with EL families are discussed below.

### Translation and Interpretation

The translation and interpretation services provided by school districts should, ideally, be part of a districtwide language assistance plan, best developed with a focus on customer service. Districts that have systemically implemented these plans have made progress in building the capacity of disparate departments to address EL needs—rather than relying solely on the EL office to meet such needs. This is important because EL families need to communicate with all departments in a school district. A districtwide language assistance plan can provide a clear direction for communicating with EL families. It can also help determine resource needs. For example,

- 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.

**Managed system for translation and interpretation.** The quick pivot from in-person to remote instruction because of the pandemic created an unprecedented need for translation and interpretation services. While many districts had documents that needed translation, most instructional materials had not been translated because they were used in classes with teacher-provided EL supports. The remote learning environment led to the creation of numerous new documents on how to access online learning materials and how to understand the new learning schedule, etc. All these instructional guides had to be translated, because there was no teacher available to provide guidance, and districts had to rely on parents to guide their children in accessing instruction from home. Coordinated, well-targeted, and quality translation and interpretation services became necessary for meaningful EL family engagement.

In most districts, the EL office handles districtwide translation and interpretation services. These offices experienced an unprecedented surge in requests for translation and interpretation services from an expanding array of district departments. Districts that had a formal centralized process for handling such requests were better equipped to handle the surge. These procedures typically involve having a dedicated link for submitting requests, an expected timeframe to carry out the translation, and parameters to determine which documents are prioritized.<sup>32</sup> A centralized translation process allows districts to better determine demand, and thereby, accommodate staffing and/or contractual requirements and corresponding budget needs.

A centrally managed system for language access also facilitates quality control as well as the effectiveness of tools for EL families. For example, in addition to providing materials that are translated into various languages, districts and schools should provide curated information to EL families that is 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. 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.

Finally, a systems approach to meeting the language needs of EL families allows districts to review, evaluate, and invest in technology and tools that best serve entire school communities.

### **Cultural Competence and Responsive Community Engagement**

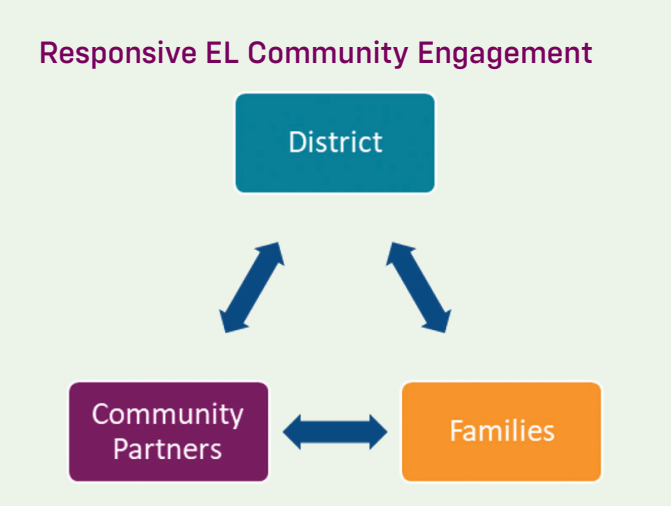
Effective engagement of EL families requires not only an understanding of linguistic differences, but the broader cultural characteristics of EL and immigrant communities. Several factors make these EL communities more unique and complex than native English-speaking communities. For instance, one or more languages—other than English—may be the primary language spoken at home or in the community; EL families may include U.S.-born individuals as well as immigrants; and EL families are more likely to be multigenerational. EL families may also have varying levels of education. Although many children in EL families may be in U.S. schools, the adults are less likely to be familiar with the U.S. school system. Moreover, in EL families, the parental role may fall on multiple individuals beyond the parents. Older siblings, especially those who are more proficient in English, may take on parental roles in helping younger siblings navigate the school system or help with homework. Oftentimes, grandparents or aunts and uncles may step in to help.

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<sup>32</sup> For example, Shelby County uses a centralized request form for translation and interpretation services. Shelby County Schools. (n.d.). *Interpreter/translation request*. Retrieved July 14, 2020, from <http://www.scsk12.org/esl/form?PID=1545>.

Engaging EL families, therefore, requires that districts 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 and Twitter, or text-based applications like WhatsApp.<sup>33</sup> 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.

Culturally responsive, two-way communications with EL families allows school districts and schools to construct accurate depictions of EL families’ experiences with their respective school district. These depiction are important to understand EL student and family experiences in designing responsive programs and supports as well as measuring their effectiveness in meeting EL needs. EL offices that engage in ongoing cross-departmental collaboration bring their understanding of the EL community to other district offices to help ensure that the EL experience is considered in all endeavors of the school district. For example, EL families will be nervous if districts begin asking for more personally identifiable information to access online programs or receive devices. Similarly, EL families are worried that any benefits they receive would be considered “public charge,” and thus have adverse implications for immigration.


<sup>33</sup> Depending on how recently families arrived in the U.S. and app restrictions or availability in certain countries, some families may only be familiar with a small number of apps that are possibly not mainstream in the U.S. (e.g., WeChat in China).


## Appendix A

# Priority Education Experiences for ELs

FOCUS AREA	PRIORITY EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES & SUGGESTED STRATEGIES	
<p><b>FOCUSED LANGUAGE STUDY (FLS)</b></p> <p>Dedicated time for targeted English language development</p> 	<b>STUDENT EXPERIENCES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Continued opportunities to interact and use language in meaningful ways. For newcomers, small groups for synchronous instruction can be particularly helpful.</li> <li>■ Strategic scaffolds (language frames, visuals, videos with captions, etc.) support student access and engagement with grade-level content. Students can record (audio and video) or write responses to be sent to teachers.</li> <li>■ ELs at all levels of English proficiency are engaged in rigorous, grade-level content, with the necessary just-in-time scaffolds as well as timely and clear feedback on how to improve respective academic language.</li> </ul>
	<b>TEACHER ACTIONS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Teachers record read-alouds or lessons using videos with subtitles/captions, or audio when video is not possible.</li> <li>■ Save pre-recorded content to flash drives for students who have connectivity challenges.</li> <li>■ Plan instructional lessons and activities with strategic student groupings to foster equitable participation of ELs with different levels of proficiency.</li> <li>■ Focus on providing instruction and practice in all four modalities (listening, speaking, reading, and writing).</li> </ul>
	<b>PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Collaborate with general education teachers to align the instructional language focus with grade-level units of study and lessons, focusing on vocabulary and particular language structures of the content areas.</li> <li>■ Strategically group students heterogeneously with a range of no more than three proficiency levels.</li> <li>■ Prioritize small group work for synchronous instruction, focusing on clarifying and extending important content, revealing how the English language works, and attending to foundational skills.</li> </ul>



FOCUS AREA	PRIORITY EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES & SUGGESTED STRATEGIES	
<p><b>DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC ACADEMIC LANGUAGE EXPANSION (DALE)</b></p> <p>Integrated language instruction in the context of grade-level content</p> 	<b>STUDENT EXPERIENCES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Learn how to use tools and scaffolds, such as linguistic frames and dictionaries, to express thinking about grade-level content.</li> <li>■ Receive linguistic support to access content in asynchronous and synchronous ways (e.g., recorded mini-lessons to be accessed immediately prior to content instruction as well as after for review, small group video conferencing to preview language demands of grade level content, etc.).</li> <li>■ Have opportunities for extended academic writing and discourse that allow learning of the different linguistic structures and genres used by the content area.</li> <li>■ Have access to multi-media resources (e.g., video, audio recordings, text, etc.) to learn grade-level content.</li> <li>■ Engage in projects, assignments, and tasks that involve representing concepts in multiple ways to express understanding and to share with classmates, including in home languages.</li> </ul>
	<b>TEACHER ACTIONS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Implement lessons that explicitly attend to the language demands of content and tasks in coherent ways that continue to build content knowledge.</li> <li>■ Provide models of academic English use for learning standards-based content.</li> <li>■ Create engaging remote learning. For example, provide virtual “cliffhangers” to motivate students to return to the virtual environment (climax of a story, interesting question or answer to a question, and activities that can be safely done at home), assignments to go around the home to collect artifacts, conduct interesting research, etc.</li> <li>■ Schedule small group and one-on-one time with students to clarify, answer questions, gauge understanding, and provide social-emotional support.</li> </ul>
	<b>PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Collaboration of EL and general education teachers to develop engaging, rigorous content lessons that include purposeful development of academic language of the content area.</li> <li>■ Collaboration of grade-level teams to research and create repository of curated online materials for instruction.</li> <li>■ Apply concepts of universal design to lesson planning and execution—multiple means of engagement, of representation, of action and expression, and meaningful formative assessment.</li> </ul>

FOCUS AREA	PRIORITY EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES & SUGGESTED STRATEGIES	
<p><b>INDEPENDENT LEARNING AND PRACTICE</b></p> <p>Integrated language instruction in the context of grade-level content</p> 	<b>STUDENT EXPERIENCES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Activities that promote and encourage meaningful interactions with siblings, parents, or extended family at home.</li> <li>■ Activities that balance screen time with other activities and, if possible, include outdoor activities.</li> <li>■ Activities that encourage students to share the grade-level work they have produced (e.g., record themselves in video or audio, pictures, etc.).</li> </ul>
	<b>TEACHER ACTIONS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Provide information, narrated PowerPoints, images, video, and audio files on a flash drive, particularly where there are connectivity barriers.</li> <li>■ Plan for ways to collect and give feedback on student work that has been completed at home (e.g., take a picture, text a response, collect at distribution sites for food, packets, etc.). Build accountability into the independent activities for completed work.</li> <li>■ Encourage families to read, speak, and write in their home language.</li> <li>■ Establish robust communication with parents using available technologies.</li> </ul>

## Appendix B

# Executive Summary of 2009 Report, *Succeeding with English Language Learners*

The 2009 Council report on ELs<sup>34</sup> shed light on the complex interaction of organizational, structural, instructional, and staffing issues behind the achievement of English learners. The study examined the experiences of diverse districts that had differing levels of success at raising EL student achievement from 2002 to 2006 to identify potential strategies for EL instructional reform in school districts as well as factors that may hinder progress. Dallas, New York City, St. Paul, and San Francisco were selected for the study based on sizable EL enrollment (ELs at least 10 percent of total enrollment and at least 9,000 ELs) and 3rd or 4th grade EL achievement on state reading/ELA assessments. These districts were compared to two unnamed districts that had similar demographics but did not demonstrate progress on EL achievement during the study period. The historical, administrative, and programmatic context and district-level strategies to improve EL achievement and reduce disparities between ELs and non-ELs were examined through a review of materials and site visits for interviews and focus groups. Despite the diversity of districts included in the study, the practices in improving districts were consistent.

The report identified seven districtwide practices that were promising in realizing program improvements for ELs to scale.

- A. **Comprehensive Planning and Adoption of Language Development Strategies for ELs.** The EL program reform was an integral part of a larger district reform initiative that included EL instructional strategies with an explicit focus on supporting academic language action.
- B. **Extensive and Continuous Support for Implementation.** Implementation of reforms was a long-term commitment of time and resources.
- C. **A Culture of Collaboration and Shared Accountability.** A shift in culture that sustained increased collaboration at the central office and school levels for the success of all students.
- D. **Hybrid Models of Instructional Management and Local Empowerment.** Managed instruction and school-based accountability for student progress was coupled with some flexibility and autonomy for school leaders.
- E. **Strategic School Staffing.** Strategic deployment of EL teachers, coaches, specialists to support quality instruction and consistency across schools.
- F. **High Quality, Relevant Professional Development.** Professional development initiatives that target not only EL teachers but all teachers of ELs as well as principals and school administrator. Professional development efforts tended to be rigorous and long-term, providing educators with hands-on practice with effective strategies for teaching ELs.
- G. **The Use of Student Data.** Districts had a data-driven culture that expanded the accessibility, quantity, and types of student data available to educators to make informed decisions about instructional response to student needs.
- H. **Reallocation and Strategic Use of EL Funds.** EL program improvement efforts benefited from increased funding beyond EL-categorical funds and the strategic reallocation of existing resources.

34 Horwitz, A. R., Uro, G., Price-Baugh, R., Simon, C., Uzzell, R., Lewis, S., & Casserly, M. (2009, October). *Succeeding with English language learners: Lessons learned from the Great City Schools*. Council of the Great City Schools. [https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/35/Publication%20Docs/EL\\_Report09.pdf](https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/35/Publication%20Docs/EL_Report09.pdf)

In addition to identifying the promising practices, the 2009 report identified limiting factors that impeded district efforts to improve the achievement of English learners—

- **No Coherent Vision or Strategy for the Instruction of ELLs Systemwide.** Neither comparison district effectively articulated or communicated a vision for the kind of instructional programming it would pursue on behalf of ELLs. The instructional needs of ELLs appeared to have been an afterthought.
- **Site-Based Management without Support, Oversight, or Explicit Accountability for Student Progress.** There was a widely expressed feeling that schools in the comparison districts were “on their own,” with no clear articulation of ELL instructional models, no system in place to support or monitor the implementation of adopted programs, and little accountability for ELL results.
- **Lack of Access to the General Curriculum.** In the comparison districts there was no system in place for ensuring that ELLs had access to the core curriculum or were being taught to the same standards as other students.
- **No Systematic Use of Disaggregated Student Data.** There was no clear strategy in either comparison district for tracking the academic progress of ELLs or making student assessment data available to schools and teachers in a meaningful, timely way.
- **Inconsistent Leadership.** High turnover in district leadership positions made it nearly impossible to sustain a coherent instructional program or reform agenda.
- **No Systemic Efforts to Build ELL Staff Capacity.** The comparison districts did not have a coherent strategy for building ELL staff capacity through the identification and placement of qualified ELL teachers, targeted professional development, or the strategic deployment of qualified instructional aides.
- **Compartmentalization of ELL Departments and Staff.** ELL staff at both the district and school levels appeared to work in isolation from other instructional departments and programs. This resulted in the ineffective use of funds, less access to instructional resources and training, and the general sense that ELL staff and teachers—alone—were responsible for the achievement of ELLs.
- **The ELL Office Lacked Capacity and Authority.** The ELL offices in both districts at this time lacked the authority and resources to take strong leadership roles on ELL issues.

## Appendix C

# Resources

### Instructional Support for Educators

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Boston Public Schools. (2020, March 25). *Digital learning for English learners during school closures*.  
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yxPE03Pbhgz7PSdVwh9eHbnMpYn6B8iZlkMdfKTc17M/edit>

Boston Public Schools prepared an *English Learner Teacher Virtual Teaching Guide* that includes general considerations for online learning and a wealth of resources, including supplementary supports and resources for ELs with disabilities.

Chinn, K. (2020, May 12). *Supporting ELLs through distance learning* [Video]. YouTube.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKX0XrpXPOM&t=334s>

Oakland Unified School District produced an instructional video with accompanying slides and a summary document that includes tips for educators as they plan and implement online learning for ELs. Slides can be found at: [tinyurl.com/DistanceLearning4ELLs](http://tinyurl.com/DistanceLearning4ELLs). A summary document is located at:  
[https://docs.google.com/document/d/17oVcD649mE2ag\\_jhf7sUNRP4SfdRuzUFg83Vinl7D6c/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/17oVcD649mE2ag_jhf7sUNRP4SfdRuzUFg83Vinl7D6c/edit).

Empatico. (n.d.). *Home-to-home connections*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from <https://empatico.org/at-home/connect>.

Empatico is a free tool for connecting classrooms around the world through video. It now has resources available to facilitate connections at home between families with children ages 6-11 to provide opportunities for peer-to-peer socialization to help children to break through isolation and experience togetherness.

Fresno Unified School District. (2020). *Continuity of learning*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from  
<https://www.fresnounified.org/learningguides#educators>

The Fresno Unified School District website includes webinar recordings and “on demand training videos” of distance learning PD for educators.

Understanding Language. (2020, June). *Formative assessment process in remote learning environments webinars*.  
<https://ell.stanford.edu/content/FA-process-remote-learning-webinars>

Understanding Language at Stanford has produced two one-hour virtual sessions to give guidance on using the Formative Assessment process to support language and content development as well as social emotional learning in remote and non-remote environments.

### School District Webpages and Supportive Resources for EL Families

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Austin Independent School District. (n.d.). *Refugee/immigrant resources*. AISD Learning At-Home. Retrieved July 14, 2020, from <https://sites.google.com/austinisd.org/aisd-learning-at-home/refugeeimmigrant-resources?authuser=0>

Austin Independent School District has developed a webpage for EL families with help videos in various languages for accessing distance learning.



Boston Public Schools. (2020). *Multilingual library for English learners*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from <https://sites.google.com/bostonpublicschools.org/boston-public-schools/week-4-april-6-april-10/multilingual-library-for-english-learners>

To support parents at home, Boston Public Schools has compiled a list of online bilingual resources for them to watch and use with their child or children. They can watch stories read in their native language or access books to read together.

Broward County Public Schools. (2020). *Continuing education opportunities for students*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from <https://www.browardschools.com/learningnevercloses>

Broward County Public Schools has a comprehensive webpage for continuous learning in the event of school closures. It includes links to “Five Steps to Getting Started with Broward County Public Schools Distance Learning” in several languages and a host of information, videos, and supports for students, parents, and teachers.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. (2020). *EL parent & community outreach*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from <https://sites.google.com/cms.k12.nc.us/el-parent-community-outreach/home?authuser=0>

Charlotte-Mecklenburg’s parent-friendly website includes immediate translation to Spanish and clear links leading to everything from community resources to language and technology help, resources for learning at home, free food options, COVID-19 updates, and more.

Fresno Unified School District. (2020). *Continuity of learning*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from <https://www.fresnounified.org/learningguides>

Fresno Unified School District’s website has a variety of resources to support distance learning, including a *Continuity of Learning Guide* (for all families) that includes daily schedules by grade level to help families provide structure for their children and distance learning support for English learners. The site also includes a listing of supportive technology tools (<https://www.fresnounified.org/learningguides/Pages/english-learners.aspx>).

Immigrant Connections. (2020, May 14). *Google Classroom and more in multiple languages*. Retrieved July 20, 2020, from <https://www.immigrantsrefugeesandschools.org/post/google-classroom-and-more-in-multiple-languages?postId=5eb992f422f75e0017ade2bc>

This resource provides links to short tutorials, in a variety of languages, on how to use digital platforms, including Google Classroom, Zoom, Seesaw, Canvas, and ClassDojo.

Switchboard. (2020, March 10). *A round-up of multilingual resources on COVID-19*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from <https://switchboardta.org/blog/a-round-up-of-multilingual-resources-on-covid-19/>

This blog post contains fact sheets, posters, multimedia resources, and links to live updates in multiple languages about COVID-19, its symptoms, and how to prevent it. Key CDC resources are listed first, followed by materials from other sources organized by type. (Sources include federal, state, and local government agencies and selected nonprofit organizations).

## Student-Friendly Web Resources

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Dallas Independent School District. (2020). *At-home learning*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from <https://sites.google.com/dallasisd.org/athomelearningplans/home>

Dallas Independent School District’s *At Home Learning* portal includes instructional videos, access to lessons, summer learning, and virtual field trips. Also included is a link for students and parents to obtain help and to give the district feedback on its performance.

## Instructional Technology

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U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service. (2018, October). *National Study of English Learners and Digital Learning Resources, Educator Toolkit: Using Educational Technology—21st Century Supports for English Learners*. Retrieved July 20, 2020, from <https://tech.ed.gov/edtech-english-learner-toolkits/educators/>

The U.S. Department of Education has developed a toolkit for all educators—including teachers and administrators—who want to use digital learning resources to help their English learners gain proficiency in English and meet academic goals.

## Translation/Interpretation Support

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Shelby County Schools. (n.d.). *Interpreter/translation request*. Retrieved July 14, 2020, from <http://www.scsk12.org/esl/form?PID=1545>

Shelby County Schools has developed an interpreter/translation request form to ensure timely access to information and interpretation services in a variety of languages.

Tulsa Public Schools. (2020). *Parent notification of language assistance services*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from <https://www.tulsaschools.org/about/teams/language-cultural-services/parent-notification-of-language-assistance-services>

Tulsa Public Schools has a Language Assistance Plan, including an Assistance Request Form available in English and Spanish, as well as bilingual assistance contact information.

## Other Resources

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Council of Chief State School Officers. (2020, May 27). *Restart & recovery: Serving English language learners during COVID-19*. [https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/CCSSO\\_Serving\\_Eng\\_Lang-v4.pdf](https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/CCSSO_Serving_Eng_Lang-v4.pdf)

As part of its Restart & Recovery resources, the Council of Chief State School Officers compiled resources for providing supports to traditionally underserved students, including English learners. This document is a compendium of resources developed by states and a number of organizations for supporting English learners during remote and virtual instruction.

## Appendix D

# Digital Learning Resources and Support Tools for English Learners

This list contains examples to illustrate the application of technology and is not intended as an endorsement by the Council of any product or program. Tools are mentioned as examples according to the features they offer, as it is understood that technology is quickly adapting, and new tools are constantly appearing in the education space.

### Speaking and Listening

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- **Speech to text:** Provides means to express ideas, enhance literacy development, and practice pronunciation. *[Microsoft 365, Google Read & Write, Google Docs Voice – Typing, etc.]*
- **Closed captioning of PPTs and presentations:** Provides visual support to listening, allowing for greater access to content and academic language. *[Microsoft 365, closed captioning capabilities on YouTube (English, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, or Spanish), etc.]*
- **Echo feature (response to speech):** Provides practice of pronunciation, grammar, and oral expression. *[Amazon Echo, Google Home, Apple HomePod, etc.]*

### Interaction/Collaboration

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- **Flash disks, cellphones (text, translate, camera, etc.):** Provides visuals and examples at a distance in addition to a way to submit work.
- **Video making/editing/publishing:** Provides visual and audio support for introducing new concepts, extending learning, and ways to demonstrate learning. *[Screencastify (Chrome extension), YouTube, Flipgrid, Loom (video messaging), etc.]*
- **Virtual meeting with small group breakouts:** Provides forum for small-group instruction and increased opportunities for participation. *[Zoom, Google Meet, Go to Meeting, Uber Meets, Microsoft Teams, Schoology, etc.]*
- **White board or discussion board:** Provides a space for academic discourse, collaboration, and interaction.
- **Instant or real-time translation:** Provides students support using native language and generally facilitates comprehension. *[Google, Microsoft, Zoom, etc.]*

## Reading Complex Text and Supporting Literacy

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- **Text to speech:** Provides ELs access to more complex text and grammar as well as opportunities to hear enunciation and pronunciation while reading. Can also help with comprehension. [*Microsoft Office 365 Immersive Reader, etc.*]
- **Screen reader:** Provides auditory and visual supports to access complex text for learning new content. [*Microsoft Office 365, Apple VoiceOver, Google TalkBack on smart phones, Immersive Reader on OneNote, etc.*]
- **Dictionary:** Provides just-in-time definitions, synonyms, and translations to support comprehension and writing. [*Microsoft 365, Google Read & Write, etc.*]
- **Picture dictionary:** Provides just-in-time visual support for introducing vocabulary and new concepts in addition to extending learning and understanding. [*Google Read & Write, Microsoft Office 365 Immersive Reader (available in several languages and includes parts of speech feature for many of them), etc.*]

## Writing Activities

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- **Dictionary:** Provides just-in-time definitions, synonyms, and translations to support comprehension and writing. [*Microsoft 365, Google Read & Write, etc.*]
- **Picture dictionary:** Provides just-in-time visual support for introducing vocabulary, new concepts, and extending learning and understanding. [*Google Read & Write, Microsoft Office 365 Immersive Reader (available in several languages and includes parts of speech feature for many of them), etc.*]
- **Text summarization:** Provides support for text comprehension, research, and writing. [*Google Read & Write, etc.*]
- **Shared/collaborative writing:** Provides ability for multiple students to share a document to co-write, to annotate, and add comments. Allows teachers to provide feedback in real-time. [*Google Docs, Microsoft SharePoint, Microsoft OneNote, etc.*]
- **Word/text prediction:** Provides writing support to enable students to focus on conveying content as they learn spelling. [*Google Read & Write, etc.*]
- **White board or discussion board:** Provides a space for academic discourse, collaboration, and interaction. [*Zoom, Padlet (virtual post-its), Microsoft Teams, etc.*]

## Instructional Delivery and Access to Content

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- **Videotaping or live-streaming:** Provides access to students across the district classes taught by teachers and students alike who need to maintain physical distance due to health concerns. [*Canvas, Microsoft Teams, etc.*]
- **Video-making/editing/publishing:** Provides visual and multimodal support for introducing new concepts, extending learning, and demonstrating learning. [*Screencastify (Chrome extension), YouTube, Flipgrid, Loom (video messaging), etc.*]
- **Learning platforms:** Provides ways for students to engage with learning and content uploaded/curated by teachers. [*Schoology, Canvas, Seesaw, Nearpod, etc.*]
- **Content-area video and reading passages:** Provides access to grade-level content for ELs. [*BrainPOP, Common Lit (thematically arranged readings and compelling EQs), TED-Ed lessons, etc.*]

- **Check for understanding:** Provides ways to increase engagement and opportunities to check for understanding. [*NearPod, etc.*]
- **Digital books:** Provides sharing of anchor charts, general resources, and performance tasks across schools. [*Book Creator, etc.*]

## Family Communication

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- **Family engagement platforms:** Provides ways for schools to communicate with families using tools they may regularly use and that have easy-to-use interfaces and translation features. [*ClassDojo, Talking Points, WhatsApp, etc.*]



## Appendix E

# Matrix of Digital Resources

### MATRIX 1: Digital Learning Resources

The term **Digital Learning Resources (DLRs)** refers to digital resources such as applications (*apps*), software, programs, or websites that engage students in learning activities and support students' learning goals. There are three categories of DLRs: digital academic content tools, digital productivity tools, and digital communication tools. DLRs as defined here do not include the hardware or infrastructure needed to use the digital resources.

DLR Category	Definition	Category	Types and Examples
<b>Digital Academic Content Tools</b>	Software, applications ( <i>apps</i> ), programs, or websites that offer academic content resources and/or engage students in activities to learn academic content or skills, including, but not limited to, language and literacy content or skills.	<b>Designed learning activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Interactive tutorials or lessons (adaptive and other)</b> that guide students in learning and demonstrating new content or skills, such as an interactive lesson on the life cycle of a butterfly or a math tutorial on fractions.</li> <li>■ <b>Practice and assessment tools</b> that provide activities to review concepts and skills, such as a math app that provides multiple opportunities to practice addition skills.</li> <li>■ <b>Dynamic modeling or simulation tools</b>, such as a physics simulation that lets students manipulate virtual equipment, change parameters, and see the results.</li> <li>■ <b>Virtual worlds</b> that immerse a student in a fully interactive environment, such as one that allows a student to roam in a period of past history or explore a desert environment.</li> </ul>
		<b>References/resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Dictionaries, encyclopedias, e-books, topic blogs, and/or topic-focused websites</b> that serve as information resources, such as an online encyclopedia that offers students pictures, facts, and videos about mammals or a digital dictionary.</li> <li>■ <b>Visual and auditory topic-related resources</b> such as a YouTube video on earthquakes and plate tectonics.</li> </ul>
		<b>Language resource tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Translation tools</b> that assist students by providing a translation to another language.</li> <li>■ <b>Articulation tools</b> that assist a student to accurate production of a language, such as by showing images of how a sound should be produced and/or by letting a student record and listen to his/her own voice to compare with the model.</li> </ul>

DLR Category	Definition	Category	Types and Examples
<b>Digital Productivity Tools</b>	Software, applications ( <i>apps</i> ), programs, or websites that students use to plan, document, organize, and analyze content. They do not contain academic content.	<b>Presentation tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Presentation and publication tools</b> that allow students to demonstrate what they have learned about a topic or to publish a digital story about a memorable day. These may include music, images, and/or video.</li> </ul>
		<b>Word processing tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Word or text processing tools</b> that enable students to create, edit, and print documents such as in creating a newspaper based on topics from history class or reporting on a field trip.</li> </ul>
		<b>Information analysis tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Spreadsheet and data analysis tools</b> that allow students to organize and analyze information, such as tracking local rainfall over time or analyzing and summarizing factors that led to the migration from the American Dust Bowl to the West in the 1930s.</li> </ul>
		<b>Information organization tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Concept-mapping tools</b> that let students visually represent relationships among sets of information, such as creating a mindmap of the American Revolution or a concept map for the causes of the Civil War.</li> <li>■ <b>Story templates</b> that assist students to communicate a narrative using text and/or images, as in retelling a story they have heard.</li> </ul>
<b>Digital Communication Tools</b>	Software, applications ( <i>apps</i> ), programs, or websites that students use to communicate, collaborate, network, or present information. They do not contain academic content.	<b>Asynchronous/synchronous text communications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Discussion boards or forums</b> that provide platforms for students to post reactions and/or comments and share perspectives, such as in providing analyses of a novel they have read and sharing feedback on their peers' analyses.</li> <li>■ <b>Emails, text messaging, chats</b>, for example, using a chat function to share peer feedback on a report.</li> </ul>
		<b>Reflection tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Blogs or student journals</b> that allow students opportunities to share and/or reflect on their learning experiences, such as a student who uses a journal entry to reflect on her understanding of particular math concepts.</li> </ul>
		<b>Video-conferencing/meeting tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Videoconferencing or meeting tools</b> that provide a remote means of seeing and speaking with others in real time, such as in enabling a science class to see and talk with NASA experts, or allowing students in a Spanish dual-language class to see and share a geography game with Spanish-speaking peers in Mexico.</li> </ul>
		<b>Project collaboration tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Document or project-sharing tools</b> that provide an online platform where students can work on products together, as in jointly editing a shared book report.</li> </ul>

Multiple individual DLRs can be combined in an Integrated DLR Set

DLR Category	Definition	Category	Types and Examples
<b>Integrated DLR Sets</b>	A structured combination of individual DLRs to provide a complete core or supplemental curriculum. Often, DLR sets are licensed as a package by a school district.	<b>Core Curriculum Integrated DLR Set</b>	For example, a math program for grades 6–8 that combines visual lessons with embedded assessments, productivity tools, and flexible class management tools into one package.
		<b>Supplemental Integrated DLR Set</b>	For example, a math intervention for at-risk students in grades 6–12 that provides tutorials, practice activities, and progress monitoring tools to inform instruction.

Note: This summary matrix was adapted from Zehler, Annette M., Yilmazel-Sahin, Yesim, Massoud, Lindsey, Moore, Sarah C., Yin, Chengbin, and Kramer, Kat. (2012, April). *Technology-based resources in instruction of English learner students*. Poster presentation at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Vancouver, British Columbia.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service. (2018). *National Study of English Learners and Digital Learning Resources*. Washington, DC: Author.

## MATRIX 2: Digital Support Features

**Digital Support Features** are specific embedded features in digital learning resources (DLRs) that assist students in understanding or communicating the content and/or activities provided in the DLR. This is a preliminary list to prompt further discussion among developers and educators.

Support Feature Category	Definition	Category	Examples
<b>Visual Support Features</b>	Provide visual images or other visual supports to assist a student in understanding and/or communicating a concept or idea.	<b>Visual definition</b>	Links to a video or image(s) providing a visual definition of a concept or word.
		<b>Interactive visual features</b>	Manipulable visual representation of a concept, such as a graphing calculator feature integrated into a DLR, providing representations of concepts based upon information that a student enters.
		<b>Closed captioning</b>	Text shown on the video screen provides print as well as audio that is useful for English learners still developing their ability to understand spoken English.
<b>Auditory Support Features</b>	Provide speech or other use of sound to assist a student in understanding and/or communicating a concept or idea	<b>Auditory definition</b>	Allows students to click on a word to hear a definition of a concept or word.
		<b>Text-to-speech for text selection</b>	Reads aloud text such as a selection on academic content, a story, directions for a lab experiment, or math questions; might include options to play, pause, adjust the volume, and/or control the speed at which the text is read. The language used may be English or another language, depending on the materials used.
		<b>Text-to-speech for highlighted word</b>	Allows readers to hear an individual word or phrase.
		<b>Record and replay voice</b>	Enables students to record their voice; replay it so that they can hear their own voice, perhaps make adjustments to and/or practice pronunciation, practice their part in a presentation, or save for sharing with others.

<b>Support Feature Category</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<b>Translation Support Features</b>	Provide embedded functions to translate from one language to the other, in either speech or print, and for either a word or limited text.	<b>Spoken word translation</b>	Enables a student to hear a spoken translation in his/her home language of an unfamiliar English word.
		<b>Printed word translation</b>	Enables a student to view a written translation in his/her home language of an unfamiliar English word.
		<b>Spoken text translation</b>	Enables a student to hear spoken statements in one language as spoken in another language.
		<b>Printed text translation</b>	Enables a student to view a section of text in one language as written in another language.
<b>Collaboration Support Features</b>	Embedded functions that students use to communicate, collaborate, work, or share information about academic content.	<b>Document sharing</b>	Allows multiple students to share a digital document and use annotation tools to add notes or comments.
		<b>Collaboration based on proficiency level</b>	Allows students to collaborate with peers according to their proficiency levels (e.g., peers at the same Lexile reading comprehension level).
<p>Note: This matrix is a preliminary summary of supports created for the toolkits based on insights gained through the NSELD research.</p> <p>Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service. (2018). <i>National Study of English Learners and Digital Learning Resources</i>. Washington, DC: Author.</p>			

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service. (2018, October). *National Study of English Learners and Digital Learning Resources, Educator Toolkit: Using Educational Technology—21st Century Supports for English Learners*. Retrieved July 20, 2020, from <https://tech.ed.gov/edtech-english-learner-toolkits/educators/>.



## Appendix F

# Working Groups and Members

### Assessing & Addressing Unfinished Learning

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<b>Atlanta Public Schools</b>	Margaret McKenzie
<b>Baltimore City Public Schools</b>	Maria Reamore
<b>Buffalo Public Schools</b>	Nadia Nashir
<b>Duval County Public Schools</b>	Ingrid Carias
<b>Fresno Unified School District</b>	Elizabeth Fralicks
<b>Guilford County Schools</b>	Mayra Hayes and Soledad Lardies-Dunst
<b>Jefferson County Public Schools</b>	Eli Beardsley
<b>Kansas City Public Schools</b>	Stephanie Easley
<b>Los Angeles Unified School District</b>	Lydia Acosta Stephens
<b>Metropolitan-Nashville Public Schools</b>	Vanessa Lazon
<b>Newark Public Schools</b>	Marisol Diaz

### Family Engagement/Communication & Translation and Interpretation

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<b>Atlanta Public Schools</b>	Joana Garcia, Margaret McKenzie, and Sally Luna
<b>Austin Independent School District</b>	Alejandro Góngora
<b>Bridgeport Public Schools</b>	Ana Sousa-Martins
<b>Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools</b>	Charlotte “Nadja” Trez
<b>Clark County School District</b>	Lisa Medina
<b>Duval County Public Schools</b>	Ingrid Carias
<b>Guilford County Schools</b>	Adriana Gullo and Jackie Martinez Vesga
<b>Jefferson County Public Schools</b>	Eli Beardsley
<b>Los Angeles Unified School District</b>	Lydia Acosta Stephens
<b>Metropolitan-Nashville Public Schools</b>	Vanessa Lazon
<b>Milwaukee Public Schools</b>	Sarah Borges
<b>Minneapolis Public Schools</b>	Leticia Guadarrama
<b>Newark Public Schools</b>	Marisol Diaz
<b>Shelby County Schools</b>	Debra Frantz
<b>Tulsa Public Schools</b>	Laura Grisso

## EL Student Engagement

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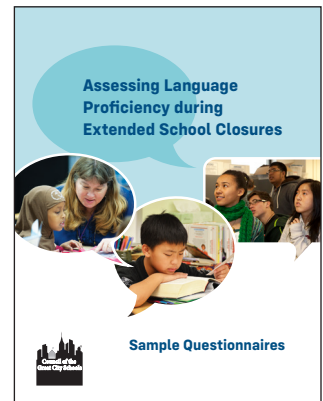
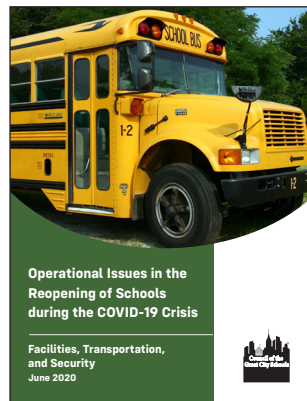
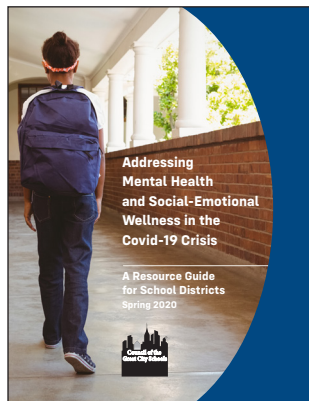
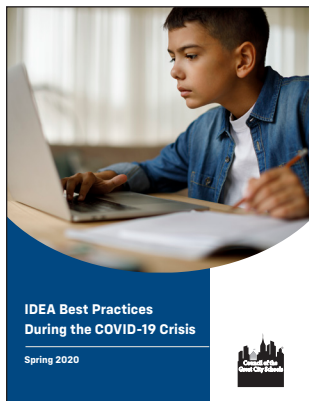
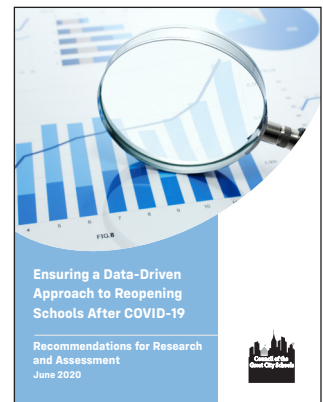
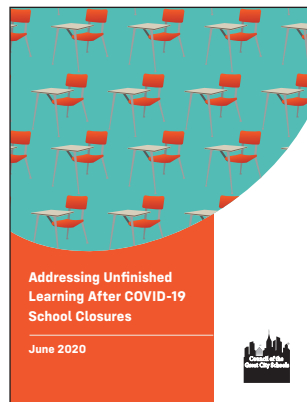
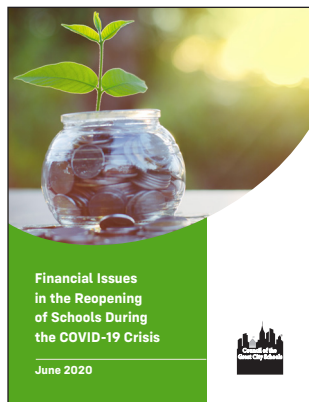
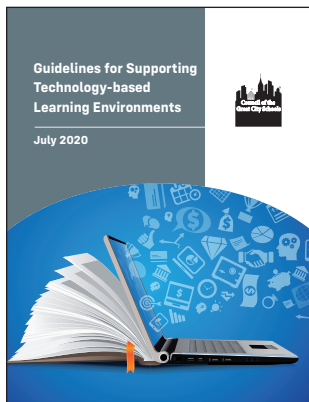
<b>Anchorage School District</b>	Natalie Moten
<b>Atlanta Public Schools</b>	Margaret McKenzie
<b>Bridgeport Public Schools</b>	Ana Sousa-Martins
<b>Buffalo Public Schools</b>	Nadia Nashir
<b>Columbus City Schools</b>	Michael Sain
<b>District of Columbia Public Schools</b>	Maria Joie Austria and Nicole Ugel
<b>Fresno Unified School District</b>	Elizabeth Fralicks
<b>Guilford County Schools</b>	Alicia Serrano
<b>Indianapolis Public Schools</b>	Jessica Dunn
<b>Jefferson County Public Schools</b>	Eli Beardsley
<b>Los Angeles Unified School District</b>	Lydia Acosta Stephens
<b>Oakland Unified School District</b>	Nicole Knight
<b>San Francisco Unified School District</b>	Miguel de Loza
<b>Seattle Public Schools</b>	Teresa Boone
<b>Shelby County Schools</b>	Debra Frantz
<b>St. Paul Public Schools</b>	Yeu Vang
<b>The School District of Palm Beach County</b>	Francisco “Harvey” Oaxaca
<b>The School District of Philadelphia</b>	Allison Still
<b>Wichita Public Schools</b>	Shannon Benoit

## Technology and Opportunities to Practice Listening and Speaking

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<b>Atlanta Public Schools</b>	Margaret McKenzie
<b>Birmingham City Schools</b>	Glorious Bates
<b>Bridgeport Public Schools</b>	Ana Sousa-Martins
<b>Buffalo Public Schools</b>	Nadia Nashir
<b>Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools</b>	Charlotte “Nadja” Trez
<b>Fresno Unified School District</b>	Elizabeth Fralicks
<b>Guilford County Schools</b>	Beth Biester, Bob Egan, and Randall Saenz
<b>Houston Independent School District</b>	Anna White
<b>Jefferson County</b>	Eli Beardsley
<b>Los Angeles Unified School District</b>	Lydia Acosta Stephens
<b>New York City Department of Education</b>	Kyle McDonald
<b>Newark Public Schools</b>	Marisol Diaz
<b>Portland Public Schools</b>	Veronica Magallanes
<b>The School District of Philadelphia</b>	Allison Still

# The Council of the Great City Schools Returning to School Series



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**COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT**

# Communications Toolkit for Reopening Schools after COVID-19

Recommendations for  
Communication Departments  
September 2020



## ABOUT THE COUNCIL

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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CEO Cleveland Metropolitan School District

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**Michael Casserly**

Council of the Great City Schools

# Communications Toolkit for Reopening Schools after COVID-19

## Recommendations for Communication Departments



September 2020

# Table of Contents

- Contributors..... 1
- Introduction and Purpose of the Document ..... 2
- Checklist of Strategic Principles in Communicating the Reopening of Schools..... 3
  - 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. .... 4
  - Provide clear, specific, concise, frequent, and timely communications about schools reopening to both internal (staff) and external (students, families, stakeholders) audiences..... 4
  - Identify your “surprising and irrefutable advocates.” ..... 8
  - 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..... 9
  - 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. .... 10
  - Show that you “get it” but do not overpromise. .... 10
  - Understand the appeal of those who disagree with your approach..... 11
- Conclusion ..... 18
- Appendix A: Messaging Do’s and Don’ts ..... 19
- Appendix B: Bringing It All Together: Messaging Scenarios ..... 24



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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 Home

In a hybrid schedule, student pods will start or end their week learning independently at home and accessing digital curriculum resources. On Wednesdays, both pods will engage in three hours of real-time virtual classroom instruction together with their teacher. This model will allow students, staff, and families to maintain a stable weekly schedule while affording educators the necessary time to plan for various instructional needs.

**1** Students will work independently and access digital curriculum resources

**2** On Wednesdays, students will engage in three hours of real-time instruction with their peers and teacher via Google Meet.

**3** Students will work independently and complete work at their own pace.

# 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**.



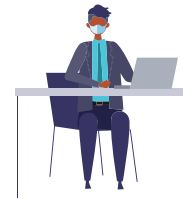
5

**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**.



10

**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.

**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.



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.”

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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.

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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.

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- 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.

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- 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.

<b>Pinellas County Schools’ weekly COVID-19 report, encompassing data from Saturday 9/5 through Tuesday 9/8.</b>			
<b>Locations affected</b>	<b>Number of positive employees</b>	<b>Number of positive students</b>	<b>Bus/Classroom Impact</b>
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](#)

<b>Milwaukee Public Schools’ Communications Timeline</b>	
<b>July 2020</b>	<b>Prepare to Deploy Communications Strategy</b>
<b>Goal:</b> Reiterate the school reopening decision that was selected, what new procedures and processes are going to happen, what next steps look like.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Develop and distribute a press release about the school reopening decision.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Engage press for media coverage/interview about school reopening decision.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 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.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Plan student, family, and staff online engagement opportunities.</li> <li>■ Continue to promote enrollment options.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Create a webpage dedicated to the school district’s reopening plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Refine Crisis Communications Plan.</li> </ul>

August 2020	Implement Communications Strategy
<p><b>Goal:</b> Deployment of fall school reopening materials and resources to education and answer questions all stakeholders have for the school in the fall.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 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.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Ensure communication materials are translated into families’ language preference.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Encourage parents to always update their contact information for timely communication delivery.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Distribute informational materials, videos, flyers etc. to students, families, and staff.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Use advertisements (TV, radio, bus, billboards) to help carry school reopening messages to the public.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Engage press for media coverage/interviews related to school reopening.</li> <li>■ Host student, family, and staff online engagement opportunities.</li> </ul>
September 2020	Continue to Implement Communications Strategy
<p><b>Goal:</b> Deployment of all school reopening materials and resources to education and answer questions all stakeholders have for the school in the fall.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Continue to give students, families and staff up-to-date information about the pandemic and school reopening plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Ensure that students, families, and staff can access key information to begin school.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Continue to work with schools to ensure websites and other forms of communications are up to date to keep students and families informed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Continue to gain feedback from students, families, and staff to update or create communications or materials needed for school reopening.</li> </ul>

# 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
<p><b>DO: Ground your message in empathy and acknowledge the challenges we are all facing.</b></p> <p><i>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.</i></p>	<p><b>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.</b></p> <p><i>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.</i></p>
<p><b>DO: Lead with a strong, unequivocal message that the decision-making process starts with safety.</b></p> <p><i>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.</i></p>	<p><b>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.</b></p> <p><i>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.</i></p>
<p><b>DO: Utilize messengers from local hospitals and health organizations to attach a human face and trusted local expertise to your safety planning.</b></p> <p><i>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.</i></p>	<p><b>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.</b></p> <p><i>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.</i></p>



DO's	DON'Ts
<p><b>DO:</b> Continue to root your messaging in your core values and principles as a district, while acknowledging the challenges ahead.</p> <p><i>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.</i></p> <p><i>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.</i></p>	<p><b>DON'T:</b> 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.</p> <p><i>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.</i></p>
<p><b>DO:</b> Address the wide range of impacts that the pandemic is having on kids.</p> <p><i>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.</i></p>	<p><b>DON'T:</b> Focus so narrowly on academic results that the mental health and safety of students and staff are given secondary priority.</p> <p><i>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.</i></p>



DO's	DON'Ts
<p><b>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.)</b></p> <p><i>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.]</i></p> <p><i>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.</i></p>	<p><b>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.)</b></p> <p><i>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.</i></p> <p><b>DON'T #2: Vaguely reference community input, without giving specifics about the sources, extent of input, or how it was actually used.</b></p> <p><i>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.</i></p>
<p><b>DO: Focus on your approach.</b></p> <p><i>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.</i></p>	<p><b>DON'T: Call out those you perceive as fearmongering or exaggerating the extent of the threat we face.</b></p> <p><i>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.</i></p>

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

DO's	DON'Ts
<p><b>DO:</b> 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.</p> <p><i>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.</i></p>	<p><b>DON'T:</b> 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.)</p> <p><i>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.</i></p>
<p><b>DO:</b> Be honest about what did not work in the spring, and how your approach for the fall addresses this.</p> <p><i>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.</i></p>	<p><b>DON'T:</b> Assess your response with rose-colored glasses or paper over challenges in ways that risk seeming out-of-touch.</p> <p><i>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.</i></p>
<p><b>DO:</b> 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.</p> <p><i>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.</i></p>	<p><b>DON'T:</b> Send vague messages about high expectations without giving teachers clear guidelines or the specific information they need to do their jobs.</p> <p><i>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.</i></p>

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

DO's	DON'Ts
<p><b>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.)</b></p> <p><i>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</i></p>	<p><b>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.</b></p> <p><i>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.</i></p>
<p><b>DO: Demonstrate that you are prepared to meet students' needs no matter what happens, even if long-term remote learning is necessary.</b></p> <p><i>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.</i></p>	<p><b>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.</b></p> <p><i>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.</i></p>
<p><b>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.</b></p> <p><i>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.</i></p>	<p><b>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.</b></p> <p><i>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.</i></p>



## 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

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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

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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

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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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Albuquerque, Anchorage, Arlington (Texas), Atlanta, Aurora (Colorado), Austin, Baltimore, Birmingham, Boston, Bridgeport, Broward County (Ft. Lauderdale), Buffalo, Charleston County, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Chicago, Cincinnati, Clark County (Las Vegas), Cleveland, Columbus, Dallas, Dayton, Denver, Des Moines, Detroit, Duval County (Jacksonville), El Paso, Fort Worth, Fresno, Guilford County (Greensboro, N.C.), Hawaii, Hillsborough County (Tampa), Houston, Indianapolis, Jackson, Jefferson County (Louisville), Kansas City, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Manchester, Miami-Dade County, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Nashville, New Orleans, New York City, Newark, Norfolk, Oakland, Oklahoma City, Omaha, Orange County (Orlando), Palm Beach County, Philadelphia, Pinellas County, Pittsburgh, Portland, Providence, Puerto Rico, Richmond, Rochester, Sacramento, San Antonio, San Diego, San Francisco, Santa Ana, Seattle, Shelby County, St. Louis, St. Paul, Stockton, Toledo, Toronto, Tulsa, Washington, D.C., Washoe, and Wichita



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**SPOTLIGHT ON... INCREASING VENTILATION  
AND IMPROVING AIR QUALITY IN SCHOOLS**



# Spotlight On...

## Increasing Ventilation and Improving Air Quality in Schools

Council of the Great City Schools

Improving air quality and increasing ventilation in our school buildings is one of the most important steps districts need to take to prepare school facilities for the return of students, teachers, and staff during the COVID-19 crisis. The following recommendations offer simple and low-cost strategies, which, when used with other practices recommended by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)<sup>1</sup>, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)<sup>2</sup>, the Harvard School of Public Health's *Risk Reduction Strategies for Reopening Schools*<sup>3</sup>, American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) *Reopening Schools and Universities*<sup>4</sup> and others, increasing ventilation can be part of a plan to help protect people indoors.

### Recommendations for Maintaining Ventilation Systems

Ventilation in school buildings is provided through a combination of the following systems. These systems help increase ventilation, improve indoor air quality, and lower the potential for COVID-19 circulating in school buildings.

- Supply and exhaust fans that do not require operable windows.
- Windows and exhaust fans, and windows that have four percent of total square footage of the room opened when occupied.
- Combinations of supply, exhaust fans, and windows.
- HVAC Systems- roof top units, air handling units, central plant and dedicated outside systems in newer buildings, and univents.

To ensure that these ventilation systems are well-maintained and fully functional for the reopening of schools, districts should consider taking the following steps—

- 1 <https://www.epa.gov/coronavirus/guidance-cleaning-and-disinfecting-public-spaces-workplaces-businesses-schools-and-homes>
- 2 <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools.html>
- 3 <https://schools.forhealth.org/risk-reduction-strategies-for-reopening-schools/>
- 4 <https://www.ashrae.org/file%20library/technical%20resources/covid-19/ashrae-reopening-schools.pdf>
- 5 Refer to ASHRAE Filtration and Disinfection system section for additional information. <https://www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/what-merv-rating-1>

### Filter Changes – MERV 13

Filtration is an effective tool for removing respiratory droplets from the air, a critical aspect of healthy classrooms. We recommend that return air filters in HVAC systems be changed to a minimum MERV 13 filter (or equivalent) with the greatest depth allowed by the equipment, typically 2" where possible. When selecting the filter, review the pressure drop data and select a new filter that is like the old filter so that system performance won't be affected.<sup>5</sup>

If MERV 13 filters cannot be installed, consider the following options, e.g.,

- A mitigation measure to operate return air systems with 100% outside air.
- Provide a recirculation fan filtration unit and duct into the return of units.
- Provide portable HEPA filtration unit which re-circulates air within the space.
- Consider Air Ionization system or static charge on filters.
- Consider UV treatment but review location to avoid impacts of liners and other internal components.
- Consider alternate filter locations in return duct or grille but consider static pressure drop implications and relationship with outside air dampers.





# Spotlight On...

## Increasing Ventilation and Improving Air Quality in Schools

### Daily Air Flush Out

One simple change that facilities departments can make is to change the control settings and schedules to increase the times that the ventilation systems and fans are running for a minimum of two hours in occupied mode, with peak outside air rate, before teachers and staff arrive each day.

### Retro-Commissioning

As a long-term strategy, districts should establish a proper unit baseline for ventilation, operation, and condition by having your sites retroactively commissioned so that equipment, ductwork, and controls meet standards and are providing the intended ventilation rate based on planned capacity.

### Measure and Monitor CO2

Automated or hand-held devices can be used to measure CO2 levels in buildings and classrooms to determine if sufficient ventilation is being provided when they are occupied.

### Open Doors and Windows

One critical and simple strategy that schools can use to improve ventilation rates in cases where there is no central HVAC is to open doors and windows two hours before occupancy and at other times throughout the day.

### Preventive Maintenance Inspections and Repairs

Regularly scheduled HVAC preventive maintenance inspections should also be conducted to ensure units and systems are operating properly and providing adequate ventilation. An effective maintenance and repair program should include—

- Maintaining all HVAC systems regularly, replacing belts, and adjusting linkages and damper controls to ensure proper operation so the maximum amount of outside air is entering the school buildings.
- Opening outside air dampers and using the building management system or adjusting manually if required.
- Cleaning, replacing, or modifying air filters to ensure that they are cleaned, replaced, or modified as required.
- Ensuring lower window sash frames have stops limiting their opening to 4”.

The following checklist provides steps that support these systems.

#### GENERAL

- Assess existing indoor air quality issues and address.

#### NATURAL VENTILATION

- Use natural ventilation when possible and safe to do so.
  - Make sure windows can open and stay open.
  - Make sure open windows are not a fall hazard—install window guard as appropriate.
  - Use window fans to promote air flow into a space (if not placed where it blows from one person to another or presents excess noise).

#### MECHANICAL VENTILATION

- Make sure ventilation systems or units are working properly.
- Ensure systems are properly cleaned such as univents, outside air intakes, etc.
- Perform semi-annual/annual scheduled equipment maintenance.
- Review air distribution conditions of existing spaces.
  - Increase total airflow supply to occupied spaces, if possible.
- Maximize fresh outdoor air/ avoid or minimize indoor air recirculation.
- Improve central air filtration when used.
  - Increase air filtration to as high a level as possible without significantly diminishing design airflow.
  - Inspect filter housing and racks to ensure appropriate filter fit and check to minimize filter bypass.
- Make sure bathrooms and restrooms have operating exhaust fans and are working properly.



# Spotlight On...

## Increasing Ventilation and Improving Air Quality in Schools

- Consider running HVAC systems at maximum outside airflow for two hours before and after spaces are occupied, in accordance with manufacturer’s instructions or recommendations.
  - Operate mechanical systems for at least one week before reopening schools, while making sure that outside air dampers are open.
- Use the highest rated filtration compatible with the currently installed filter rack and air handling systems—at a minimum MERV-13 or industry equivalent or greater (e.g., HEPA).
- Change HVAC filters regularly.
- Make sure HVAC condensation pans are draining.
- Make sure roof exhaust fans operate properly (air flows out).
- Keep roof air intakes open, even at minimum setting.
- Make sure that vents in chemical and trash storage areas are operating properly.
- Remove obstructions in supply and exhaust vents.
- Remove obstructions—such as nests—blocking or near air intakes.

### ADVANCED AIR QUALITY TECHNIQUES

- Attempt to maintain relevant indoor humidity between 40 percent and 60 percent.
- If unable to get enough fresh air into a room, use a HEPA air purifier/cleaner.

### OTHER TECHNIQUES

- Make sure air from plumbing stacks and exhaust outlets flows away from outdoor roof air intakes.
- Identify potential sources of air contaminants near the building (e.g., chimneys, stacks, industrial plants, or exhaust from nearby buildings).
- Use chemicals only with adequate ventilation and when building is unoccupied.
- Check for combustion gas and fuel odors and identify source of smells.
- Make sure that combustion appliances (e.g., water heaters, ovens) are well maintained and have flues or exhaust hoods.
- Make sure there is no soot on inside or outside flue components.
- Pour water down floor drains (approximately one quart of water) and sinks (about two cups of water) once per week to ensure proper drain trap maintenance.
- Flush toilets at least once per week to ensure proper drain trap maintenance.
- Minimize use of pesticides to the extent possible.
- Move dumpsters and trash bins away from doors, windows, and outdoor air intakes.
- Discourage drivers from idling vehicles near outdoor air intakes.

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**SPOTLIGHT ON...WATER SAFETY IN REOPENED  
SCHOOL BUILDINGS**



## Spotlight On...

# Water Safety in Reopened School Buildings

Council of the Great City Schools

The coronavirus is not the only illness that district staff, teachers, students, and visitors have to worry about as schools reopen this school year. School districts should be mindful about the risk of *Legionella*<sup>1</sup> which can be directly tied to the prolonged shutdown and the under-use of water systems— including potable and non-potable water systems; cooling towers; and heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems—and the degradation of water quality in thousands of schools buildings over the past several months.

The [Water Quality and Health Council](#) has reported that “when a school’s water system is not in use, stagnant water fills the pipes, tanks, and other water features. Legionella along with other pathogenic microorganisms can thrive in stagnant water, particularly in hot water heaters and pipes that have cooled to temperatures in the Legionella growth range of 77–108°F (25–42°C).”<sup>2</sup> This is because the chlorine or chloramine disinfectant residual, typically provided in treated water from a local drinking water utility, has decayed due to reaction with organic and inorganic compounds or has disappeared entirely.

The extended closures of school facilities may therefore lead to unsafe building water systems conditions. For example, an August 27, 2020 article in the *New York Times*<sup>3</sup> cited reports that Legionella had been found at five schools in an assortment of towns in Ohio and at four schools in a district in Pennsylvania.

There are currently no national regulations or requirements, so Legionella testing and reporting programs are tied to specific school districts and are largely voluntary. Moreover, most school districts do not have the budgets to test for Legionella and often lack the knowledge and authoritative guidance on how to respond.

The *New York Times* article also pointed out that some preventive steps schools may take to limit coronavirus infection risk could inadvertently add to Legionella concerns. For example, many schools are turning off drinking fountains and some bathroom sinks to ensure social distancing. However, that practice can create reservoirs for bacteria and can contribute to lead levels in drinking water fountains.

In the case of the affected Pennsylvania schools, some officials opted for thermal shock and flushing, while at least one Ohio school sent a high level of chlorine solution through their building water system in addition to flushing. Because confirmation of tests for *Legionella* can take weeks, many of those schools in Ohio and Pennsylvania had to rely solely on operational risk-reduction precautions only prior to opening their doors to students.

1 If Legionella grow during low-use periods, students, teachers, staff and visitors have a higher risk of contracting Legionnaires’ disease and Pontiac fever during the shutdown as well as when occupancy occurs.

2 *Legionella Bacteria Concerns Grow As Schools Reopen*, by the Water Quality and Health Council, September 11, 2020

3 *Reopened Schools Find Health Risks in Water After Covid-19 Lockdowns*. *The New York Times*, August 27, 2020



# Spotlight On...

## Water Safety in Reopened School Buildings

### Recommendations for Ensuring Safe Water

District officials need to review their reopening protocols to ensure public health protection and address stagnant water in order to protect students, teachers, staff, and visitors when they reopen closed or partially closed school facilities. At the very least, entire building water systems (hot and cold) need to be flushed before opening school buildings after any prolonged shutdown. And, preferably, the CDC’s [Guidance for Reopening Buildings After Prolonged Shutdown or Reduced Operations](#) should be followed to minimize Legionella risk and ensure the safety of returning staff, teachers, and students. For example, school districts should—

- Develop a comprehensive water management program (WMP) for school water systems and all devices that use water.
- Ensure water heaters are properly maintained and temperatures are correctly set to at least 140° F.<sup>4</sup>
- Ensure that the risk of Legionella growth is minimized by regularly checking (and measuring) water quality parameters such as temperature, pH, and disinfectant levels.<sup>5</sup>
- Flush hot and cold water to replace all water inside all building piping and points of use, including drinking fountains, showers, sink faucets, and toilets systems.
- Clean all fountains so they are free of slime or biofilm.
- Ensure cooling towers and basins are well-maintained, clean, and free of slime, debris, and biofilm before start-up.
- Regularly flush, clean, and disinfect safety equipment, including fire sprinkler systems, etc.

By thinking through and implementing procedures to address stagnant water conditions now, school officials and building operators can help protect students, teachers, staff, and visitors as formerly closed or partially closed school buildings continue to reopen throughout the 2020-21 school year.

4 Water temperature and hyperchlorination are the significant factors retarding *Legionella* growth. Although the optimal growth range for Legionella is between 77 °F (25 °C) and 108 °F (42 °C), it can survive and grow outside of this range. To reduce bacteria growth, hot water at all distal locations should be kept above 122 °F (50 °C) and cold water below 74 °F (23 °C).

5 Because chlorine disinfectant residual, typically provided in treated water from local drinking water utilities, decays in school water systems that are not used, stagnant water fills pipes, tanks, and other water features creates pathogenic microorganisms that increases the risk of *Legionella* that can cause Legionnaires’ disease for those that have compromised immune systems. The Water Quality and Health Council pointed out in a May 15, 2020 article that “The threat from Legionnaires’ disease may be compounded because its victims tend to share similar symptoms as coronavirus patients, including cough, chills, and fever, making misdiagnosis a possibility.”

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**SPOTLIGHT ON... SAFEGUARDING THE RIGHT TO  
VOTE IN THE GREAT CITY SCHOOLS**



# Spotlight On...

## Safeguarding the Right to Vote in the Great City Schools<sup>1</sup>

Council of the Great City Schools

As the 2020 presidential election nears, there are legitimate concerns about the safety of students, teachers, staff, and visitors in school facilities used as polling places. Despite the risks involved, school buildings play an important role in ensuring access to in-person voting. In 2014, the Presidential Commission on Election Administration recommended school buildings as the best sites for polling places because they have ample, desirable space, and are inexpensive, widely available, conveniently situated, and accessible for people with disabilities. “With almost no exception, the testimony received from state and local election administrators identified schools as the preferred venue for polling places.” In the 2012 presidential election, about one third of voters cast their ballots in schools.

Districts will face a number of options on November 3. Some districts that have already reopened schools may opt to make the facilities available on election day, but keep students, teachers, and staff away from campuses. Others may designate November 3 as a staff-only or “in-service” day, allowing them to remove students from the equation while providing teachers with professional training and allowing administrators to perform administrative functions. In other cases, districts will face the challenge of maintaining the safety and security of students and school staff who are present on election day, as well as the community members using the schools to vote.

### Recommendations for Reducing Safety Risks on Election Day

While threat levels from COVID-19 and other issues that have surfaced during a heated presidential campaign may vary from community to community, there are a number of specific steps all school districts should consider taking to provide secure school sites and reduce safety risks on election day. These steps include, but are not limited to—

- District administrators and school safety and security personnel should meet prior to election day with their elections board administrators to discuss safety and security issues and guidelines for poll workers and poll operations. School officials should provide guidelines for the use of their facilities and site-specific information on assigned voting locations that election board administrators can distribute to election supervisors and polling place leaders in advance of the election.

- Building administrators and facility/custodial managers should meet with on-site elections supervisors upon their arrival to review school-specific polling locations, parking procedures, designated ingress and egress locations, emergency communications systems and protocols, and related information.
- Schools should restrict election voting to one location or area of the school that has its own entrances and exits so election staff and voters can enter and leave the designated voting area without going through other parts of the school building.
- If the school site is to remain open for students and school staff, voters should be required to park on the streets around the school if this is logistically possible based upon its location and design. If parking on campus is the only option for election staff and voters, parking areas separate from staff and student parking should be designated with clearly marked signage, preferably parking closest to the entrance to the designated voting area.

<sup>1</sup> The Council of the Great City Schools deeply appreciates the leadership and guidance provided by the National School Safety and Security Services, a national school safety consulting firm based in Cleveland (Ohio), whose public school district is a Council member.



# Spotlight On...

## Safeguarding the Right to Vote in the Great City Schools

- Voter entrances and exits from the school building should be clearly marked with signage, and doors not authorized for voter access should be clearly marked and direct voters to the appropriate entrances for their use.
- For schools that are in session, re-evaluate transportation drop-off and pick-up points used by school buses and parents to lessen congested areas and consider—
  - Increasing the amount of supervision in parking lots and transportation areas, utilizing school administrators and staff throughout the school day—particularly during student arrival and dismissal times. \*Any use of municipal and district police patrols, school security staff, and School Resource Officers (SROs) should be used in accordance with local laws and with special consideration of historical concerns around voter suppression.
  - Providing protocols and training to bus drivers for managing their transportation operations on election days; and reminding and encouraging them to maintain a heightened awareness at bus drop-off and pick-up areas, on streets around schools, and elsewhere on their assigned routes.
- Ensure there is two-way communications capability (telephones, two-way radio, and/or cell phones) in the voting area so polling workers and school staff have the immediate ability to call for assistance if needed.
- Designate an isolation room in the immediate voting area for emergency use if a case of COVID-19 is identified among voters or election polling staff so they cannot pass throughout the building.
- Review incident action or school emergency plans and related guidelines so procedures can be activated if a real emergency associated with the election required lockdowns, evacuations, or additional steps to secure a building.
- Increase the presence of municipal and district police patrols, school security staff, and School Resource Officers (SROs) in and around schools, both during and after regular school hours and for the entirety of the time that polls remain open. Importantly, elections board administrators and school district officials should discuss and clearly define areas of responsibilities and costs to be assumed by municipal police patrols and district security staff.
- Review security procedures with staff, students, and parents and stress the need for heightened vigilance and awareness on election day. Ensure that all stakeholders clearly understand what actions are permitted in accordance with election supervisors, as well as state and local laws. Remind everyone: ***If you see something, say something.***
- Use existing surveillance cameras and associated security technology, if available, to monitor parking lots, entrances, exits, hallways, and related areas leading to the voting areas.
- Conduct regular patrols/checks of building perimeters and grounds before the opening of school and throughout the day for suspicious items or persons and other unusual or disruptive activity.
- Thoroughly clean the polling areas according to COVID-19 guidelines immediately after the balloting to ensure that they are safe for reuse as school space.

The Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of the nation’s largest urban public schools, advocates the value of the democratic process and respects the right and responsibility of Americans to vote. Since schools are a significant part of the community, the Council believes it is appropriate they are used as election day polling places even with the many new challenges facing the safety of election staff, voters, students, and district staff in this pandemic.



# Spotlight On...

## Safeguarding the Right to Vote in the Great City Schools

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**PERSPECTIVES AND PAPERS**



Optimism in the Time of Coronavirus  
Published in  
Education Next  
Fall 2020  
By  
Michael Casserly, Executive Director  
**Council of the Great City Schools**

At the Cleveland High School for Digital Arts, principal Jasmine Maze and colleagues created an “Instaschool,” allowing students to complete assignments focused on the pandemic just by using their phones and a private Instagram group. Cherry Malaque, a special education teacher in Albuquerque, makes home visits to her students as they complete their assignments. She shows up on each student’s doorstep, at some risk to herself, dressed in her superhero uniform with a toy in hand to remind her students that they are missed and important—and to do their homework. Francine Lazarus, an elementary school principal in Tampa, created a food pantry at her school with donations of shelf-stable food and cash from neighbors. The pantry provides an alternative for parents who have difficulty picking up district-provided meals at the scheduled times. Linda Webb, a high-school principal in Austin, has marshaled her quilting group to make hundreds of masks for workers in the school district and elsewhere.

Isolated examples? No. AT the Council of the Great City Schools, a research and advocacy coalition of urban public-school districts, we hear them every day. Staff and teachers in big-city public schools are going to extraordinary lengths to serve their children in ways that go well beyond teaching. The scale of this support is mind-boggling. Television shows like “60 Minutes” have reported on how corporate giants like Amazon and Ford Motors and Amazon (turning to the manufacture of medical supplies) have mounted crash production and distribution efforts during the coronavirus crisis. Viewers marveled at their capacity and expertise. None of it, however, comes close to what our nation’s urban school districts have produced or delivered throughout this challenging time.

The Council estimates that the nation’s largest city public school systems have delivered upwards of 150 million meals to children and families in need, and they have supplied as many as 3.2 million instructional devices to students who lack such technology at home. The New York City Department of Education alone served more than 8.5 million meals from mid-March, when schools closed, to the middle of May. As of this writing, it is delivering some 475,000 meals a day. The department has also supplied about 430,000 instructional devices to students who did not otherwise have them. The Chicago Public Schools served some 10.5 million meals from 305 sites and distributed about 112,000 instructional devices between March 17 and mid-May. Los Angeles Unified School District provided 18.1 million meals and supplied Internet connections for 464,819 students.

Numerous city school districts have purchased mobile hotspots, retrofitted their buses with Wi-Fi, and worked with their Internet providers to help narrow the digital divide in their communities. Kansas City, Missouri, for instance, has been buying and distributing hotspots and placing wi-fi on school and city buses, in parks and public libraries, and elsewhere to shrink digital-access. The Atlanta Public Schools launched a major initiative with its Internet provider to create access throughout the city. Dallas and Miami have done the same.

School officials in Cleveland, Austin, Tulsa, Anchorage, Broward County, and other urban areas have also set up call centers and help lines in multiple languages to deliver counseling and mental health supports to growing numbers of children experiencing stress and abuse. In Chicago educators are working on lessons focused on the study of the coronavirus and on student discussions about what their experiences during the outbreak.

In all of the Council's 76 member districts, educators have loaded up instructional devices with classroom lessons before distributing them to students, or they have issued accompanying printed materials (or both). Broward County has been convening teams of elementary school teachers by grade level to develop lessons, provide professional development, and ensure consistent quality. Teachers in many places are banding together using crowd-sourcing tools to develop lessons and teach live classes. School systems in Los Angeles, Albuquerque, Orlando, and other cities have arranged instructional lessons through their public broadcasting systems. Oakland is providing weekly webinars for their English language teachers. Multiple districts have partnered with their local libraries to provide reading materials.

City schools have even gone beyond their core mission during the crisis. Districts like Charleston, Cleveland, and Wichita have gathered up masks, gloves, sanitizer, and other medical supplies from their school clinics to distribute to local hospitals.

### **Is It Working?**

How have all these efforts played out in the delivery of services to students? Not everything has gone swimmingly, to be sure. The energy and commitment of educators is not always enough to overcome the complications of distance learning during a pandemic. Many districts are tracking the frequency of student and teacher interactions, but others are having trouble locating all their students. In Philadelphia and Clark County, the Las Vegas district, staff members are repeatedly calling students and even going out to knock on their doors if necessary. Student engagement in the academic work is high in some places and lower in others. Meal delivery has sometimes been curtailed for short periods when staff became infected with the virus. Labor negotiations have gone smoothly in some cities but less so in others. Districts have sometimes struggled to provide English language development support to students living in households where no one speaks English. Owing to health and safety concerns during the outbreak, schools have found it impossible to deliver face-to-face services for students with disabilities, but they are working hard to meet individual student goals. And no matter how much progress schools make in transitioning to virtual instruction, the research on the efficacy of online learning—the only way we have of reaching students at this point—is unconvincing, at best. There is simply no fully adequate substitute for the face-to-face instruction provided by a skilled teacher.

Still, I have read some harsh criticisms of school districts. At the end of April, Robin Lake of the Center on Reinventing Public Schools wrote in *The 74* that there is “No plan to prevent what could be long-lasting academic casualties, particularly among economically disadvantaged children of color in large urban districts unprepared to provide rigorous and effective remote learning.” About two weeks later, Jeanne Allen of the Center for Education Reform asserted on Forbes.com that “in the majority of cases, education is still not being delivered at all—remotely, digitally, or any other way.” And in early May, Marguerite Roza of Georgetown University warned in *The 74* that “asking for more money is an incomplete strategy.” School districts also “need to start work on a Plan B now. They need to develop cost-cutting strategies and should not delay tough decisions.”

Not only are these critiques unfounded and unproductive, they also suggest that the authors are spending too much time on websites, including our own, and not enough time actually talking with school leaders who are doing the work on the ground. Many cities, such as Miami and Dallas, have robust instructional continuity plans that they continue to revise. As pundits and critics are busy decrying the failure of schools, districts are preparing for summer school, working on professional development for teachers and administrators, identifying instructional strategies for addressing unfinished learning, creating resources and programming to attend to the social-emotional and mental health needs of students and staff, and planning for an upcoming school year that will likely be marked by further shutdowns and disruption.

In addition to the work that is going on in individual cities, the Council of the Great City Schools has launched several working groups to pool the collective experience of urban education leaders to help districts tackle the many instructional, operational, and logistical issues they face: school board members are discussing the best ways to fulfill their monitoring and fiduciary responsibilities under these new circumstances. Chief academic officers are addressing calendar options and the best ways to address unfinished learning without resorting to reteaching and remediation. Experts on English language learners and students with disabilities are thinking through the specialized needs of diverse learners.

The Council has also organized a mental-health group to look at best practices in districts that have led in this area. A group of chief financial officers is working on how to redeploy resources to support new instructional realities and how to handle severe multiyear budget shortfalls. A communications group is devoted to helping to shape public confidence; a technology group is focusing on the many on-line issues that schools face going forward, and a testing group is dealing with assessment issues. We have operational groups working on options for transportation, food services, security, and facilities. On a broader level, a group of district leaders re-envisioning what the future of public education could look like.

### **A Cohesive Plan**

Ultimately, the work of all of these groups will need be integrated to ensure that district staff and leaders can act from a cohesive, unified plan of action rather than relying on the compartmentalized, siloed approaches of the past. While the pandemic crisis has brought urgent challenges, there are enduring issues in public education that still need to be addressed.

Will educators and school leaders get everything right? No, they will not. But the extraordinary efforts, determination, and skill of our urban public schools to meet the needs of their students and families during unprecedented circumstances makes me optimistic about our future. We do not have the luxury—or any intention—of halting instruction or abandoning students. What we do have is an opportunity to rethink and reshape our practices to meet the demands of a new day. And that is what we are doing.

## ***Education Week—Straight Up with Rick Hess***

# **Coronavirus Closures: How Urban Schools are Responding**

By [Rick Hess](#) on March 31, 2020 9:00 AM

*As families, educators, and community leaders wrestle with COVID-19, we'll be trying to bring conversations to readers that will be helpful in confronting the challenge.*

Mike Casserly has been the executive director of the [Council of the Great City Schools](#), a coalition of the nation's large urban public school districts, for more than two decades. Prior to this, he was the organization's director of legislation and research for 15 years. I recently talked to Mike about what the coronavirus has meant for urban schools, and how they've been dealing with the challenges it's presented. Here's what he had to say.

**Rick:** What's the biggest thing that people don't understand about what districts are dealing with right now?

**Mike:** I think a lot of people would be surprised at how early big-city public school systems started planning for this. Most of our districts started developing plans and sharing strategies with one another around the third week of January. That doesn't mean that we are fully on top of everything, but the early planning gave us a head start that has helped all of us.

Like hospitals, one major thing we are dealing with now is serving our students and families while trying to make sure that our own people don't get sick. Even with stay-at-home orders, we have food-service workers, bus drivers, custodians, administrators, and security staff in the field delivering meals and electronic devices for instruction. These are our first responders, and they are doing incredible work under difficult circumstances. I suspect the public doesn't quite understand the extent of the efforts being made.

**Rick:** What are some of the other major challenges that your districts are facing?

**Mike:** We have substantial challenges despite our early start on much of the work. Our biggest challenge will be how to ensure equity. But there are a number of others including figuring out how to conduct evaluations for students with disabilities, how to register incoming students new to the country, how to retrofit school buses that are delivering meals with refrigeration, how to deal with devices that don't work, how to provide mental-health services for those in need, and how to pay for the services we're providing and the people who are providing them.

**Rick:** What's got you most concerned about all this?

**Mike:** Our immediate concerns are around the virus itself and keeping people safe. Obviously, we will get through this in a matter of weeks or months, but my biggest concern is around the unfinished learning we may face when students go back to school next fall. When schools reopen, we are likely to face not only the instruction for the new school year but also a lot of catch-up instruction for students who did not grasp the concepts they will need going forward. Our folks are working triple time to provide the instruction students need now, but there will be gaps, especially with our struggling learners, students with disabilities, homeless, and English-learners.

**Rick:** Your districts serve a lot of kids who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. Can you talk a bit about efforts to continue serving those kids and how they're going?

**Mike:** Every one of our districts has put multiple food-service operations in place. Some districts are providing meals every day; others are providing meals for multiple days at a time. All are providing at least one meal a day, and some are providing three. Meals are being provided at pickup stations, and some are being dropped off where students live—including homeless sites. In a couple of instances, at sites where our food-service workers have gotten sick, the districts have had to temporarily shut those down, deep clean them, and redeploy meals and staff to differing sites.

You can see great examples in every city. Philadelphia is distributing three breakfasts and three lunches per student two days per week at 49 schools and locations. Portland, Oregon has 15 meal-distribution sites with walk-up or drive-thru service, with one breakfast and one lunch provided to each child. St. Paul serves some 42,000 meals a day at school curbsides, on bus routes, and some home delivery. Each student gets a box with five breakfasts and five lunches included. All districts are making tactical changes to their meal-delivery services as numbers grow.

**Rick:** What is the state of the districts' instructional programs as they are dealing with the virus?

**Mike:** It's a work in progress. Some districts like Cleveland are distributing hard copies of lessons; others are moving to online instruction. Many use a combination. Miami-Dade County has distributed nearly 60,000 devices for online learning; has trained some 18,000 teachers; set up a call center for students, parents, and teachers; and is working with its service providers to identify and close internet deserts in the county. Los Angeles is using its Public Broadcast System television station to provide lessons. Long Beach is using crowdsourcing strategies to assemble teachers for joint lesson development and planning. Baltimore is providing devices to its students with adaptations for students with disabilities. Wichita is providing online professional development for teachers every hour on the hour on how to provide blended learning. New York City is setting up hot spots in its public housing. Orlando is creating a virtual Parent Academy. San Diego is working with students and families to provide appropriate accommodations with their online devices. Dallas is providing virtual meetings for their special education parents in lieu of their regular in-person meetings. The District of Columbia has developed and distributed instructional packets for English-learners without internet service. And Boston and many others are holding their board meetings online.



**Rick:** How are you thinking about planning into this summer and beyond? Is reopening schools likely? What are the considerations?

**Mike:** Most of our districts did initial planning with the expectation that they might be able to reopen in mid-April. Obviously, this is not likely, so they are spending a lot of time planning for meals, instruction, graduations, etc., through the remainder of this school year. Reopening schools during the summer or earlier in the fall will depend on all kinds of things from collective bargaining agreements, to funding, to whether states will allow it. Several states, for instance, bar schools from opening too early in the fall in order to protect their tourism business. This may have to be rethought. When the time comes to return to school, we will need to build confidence in the public that having students return to their classrooms and buses is safe.

**Rick:** What are your districts doing for staff? Are they being paid? How are you thinking about this?

**Mike:** Yes, staff are being paid for the most part, but some hourly employees may not be if they are not working. Unfortunately, the Trump administration and Congress didn't help us much on this front when they established a new federally required expenditure for additional paid emergency sick leave and family and medical leave but prohibited school districts and other governmental entities from receiving the same federal payroll-tax-credit subsidy that private-sector employers will receive for identical emergency paid-leave expenditures.

**Rick:** OK, so what should Washington or the states be doing to help right now?

**Mike:** Send money, waive everything waivable, and file charges against any vendor who tries to price-gouge. We saw a recent example where one of the milk suppliers jacked up prices substantially on a district trying to provide meals for its students.

The states and the federal government should know that districts do not yet have good projections on their loss of school revenue for the current and upcoming year. There is always a lag between the onset of any economic downturn and its effects on school revenues. School districts are being asked to keep track of their spending on virus-related activities, but we won't know the effects on revenues for a while. Some longer-range thinking and planning on the part of the federal government and the states on how to maintain the financial underpinnings of public education will be necessary.

**Rick:** Is there anything else you'd like people to know?

**Mike:** There are several things that might be useful. One, there is just no substitute for students being with teachers as lessons are being taught. Our districts are using all kinds of mechanisms to ensure that teachers have access to their students. But even distance learning, as good as it can be, is no replacement for a teacher. Two, if your district has asked for and received a waiver from its state, a parent does not have to have a child with them when they pick up a meal. Three, most of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is not waivable, and the Department of Education cannot set aside the law on its own. Recent legislation asks the department to review and recommend provisions that Congress might consider for flexibility, but

it is Congress' prerogative. Four, parents should be careful with the online educational tools that are now flooding the airwaves. Check with your child's teacher on what is appropriate.

**Rick:** If people want more information about what's going on, where could they go?

**Mike:** They could go to [www.cgcs.org/corona](http://www.cgcs.org/corona) if they'd like to know more. We keep a running update city-by-city of what people are doing.

**Rick:** OK, last question. What have you seen that's most promising or heartening?

**Mike:** Every time we are involved in responding to one of these situations or something like it—whether its hurricanes, floods, shootings, bombings, 9/11, or earthquakes; man-made or natural disasters—I am always heartened by the extraordinary compassion, energy, and skill of our big-city school folks who move mountains to make sure that our communities get what they need. Milwaukee is providing a nice example where teachers are creating and distributing lessons over YouTube and ClassDoJo; kitchen crews are getting up early to cook some 12,000 meals a day and distribute them to 20 sites across the city; and print-shop staff ran 30,000 supplemental instructional booklets for students. The spirit of collaboration is palpable.

## EDUCATION WEEK

# Council of the Great City Schools Chief on Coronavirus and What's Ahead

By [Rick Hess](#) on May 12, 2020 9:00 AM

*As families, educators, and community leaders wrestle with COVID-19, we will be trying to bring conversations to readers that will be helpful in confronting the challenge.*

Mike Casserly has been the executive director of the [Council of the Great City Schools](#), a coalition of the nation's large urban public school districts, for almost three decades. I talked with Mike back in March when schools were being shuttered across the land but thought it worth checking back in to see how where things stand and what's ahead for fall. Here's what he had to say.

**Rick:** Mike, when we spoke six weeks ago, districts were just starting to adjust. Now, close to two months after school closures, what's different?

**Mike:** For one, we are all a lot more tired than when we went into this pandemic. People are really working quadruple time to address all the complications that these shutdowns have brought. Several other things are different as well—some good and some not so much. For instance, the logistics of meal deliveries have evolved over time, but they are now reasonably efficient and effective at meeting a very high volume of demand. Many districts started by delivering meals most every day, but most are now [providing the same number of meals on a reduced number of days per week](#) in order to reduce worker exposure to the virus. St. Louis is a good example where the school district shifted to a once-a-week distribution of kits with meals for seven days. We have also secured and distributed hundreds of thousands—possibly millions—of technology devices and hotspots to students. New York City alone has distributed some 430,000 devices. Ultimately, these logistical lessons we have learned in delivering meals and technology will put us in a better position going forward. The not so good side involves

the unbudgeted expenses we are incurring for meals and devices. They are really piling up, and the scale of our longer-term revenue shortfalls is just now coming into view.

**Rick:** What have some states done that you have found especially helpful?

**Mike:** States are particularly helpful when they talk to us and do not spring decisions on us that they expect us to implement overnight. They have been the most unhelpful when they seek waivers to federal maintenance-of-effort rules and reduce their state funding allocations by the amounts that we receive in federal CARES aid.

**Rick:** What have federal policymakers gotten right and wrong during all this?

**Mike:** The initial down payment of some \$13 billion in federal education aid will certainly help to offset some of the unbudgeted expenses we incurred this spring. That was something federal policymakers got right from our vantage point. There are several areas, however, where federal policymakers have made life more difficult. First, if Congress and the administration do not approve substantial additional funding, state and local revenue losses will result in teacher layoffs and cuts to other supports and services that will take a generation to recover from in terms of restoring district instructional and operational capacity. Second, federal policymakers did not do us any favors in the initial supplemental appropriations bills by not treating public school districts—or state and local governments for that matter—as employers. In fact, school districts are among the largest employers in the country. But the legislation did not treat them as such when they excluded them from payroll tax credits for employee retention or emergency paid family and sick leave. Both the Family First Coronavirus Response Act and the CARES Act prohibited school districts from offsetting our additional personnel costs against our employer share of Social Security payroll withholding payments, while granting that flexibility to private businesses. Third, the U.S. Department of Education was not very helpful in writing that there were no areas of additional flexibility needed in the Individuals with Disabilities Act after Congress invited them to submit suggestions. We think there are areas where reasonable people could agree on some temporary elasticity in the law to accommodate the special circumstances all schools are currently facing. Fourth, the department recently issued guidance that would have us spend funds on nonpoor, private school children that are

not otherwise eligible for Title I services. The procedure could reduce our much-needed CARES Act allocations by hundreds of millions of dollars.

**Rick:** Where are districts at as far as planning for the summer and fall?

**Mike:** Most of our urban school districts will be holding summer school this year, but they are planning for online programming given the continuing uncertainty about how quickly states will allow schools to open (and the possibility of rolling school closures in the future). In some cases, like Boston, schools are considering limited, small-group instruction face to face with students who had not otherwise been engaged online or who are furthest behind. For the fall, districts are mostly weighing various structural or calendar options, costing them out, working on staffing issues, and articulating what high-quality instruction should look like now that we have some of the more obvious technology supply problems worked out. The complexities of the issues are mind-boggling. Everything from language screening for newly arriving immigrant students to labor negotiations over job descriptions for workers pulling multiple duties to how to assess and address the degree of unfinished learning to the cleaning of buses in between runs to accommodate staggered schedules. Many of these challenges are unprecedented, so districts are having to rethink traditional approaches and innovate in real time.

**Rick:** When it comes to remote learning, what do you see as a couple of real success stories?

**Mike:** One of our districts that is furthest along on remote learning is the 345,000-student Miami-Dade County public schools. They have distributed some 115,000 devices and trained over 20,000 teachers on a variety of instructional applications. The Florida district has been particularly aggressive in reaching out to students and has achieved a daily online student and teacher check-in rate of over 90 percent. Moreover, the district has launched a call center that is able to provide students and parents with assistance in three languages. And the district has been particularly attentive to the quality and alignment of the instructional software on the devices. They have a two-part summer school planned, and they have thought through the redeployment of



underutilized buildings as part of their reopening plan. In the middle of all of this, they have also prepared and distributed some 1.5 million meals.

**Rick:** Can you talk a bit about what the budget picture looks like?

**Mike:** Based on our experience with the 2008-09 recession and the projections of many of our chief financial officers, we were estimating an average shortfall of local and state dollars of around 20 percent. That initial estimate may not be far off, as entities like the California Department of Finance have recently issued a letter to the governor warning of an \$18 billion, or 22 percent, reduction to schools. Other school budgets in states like Florida expect to take a pounding because of the collapse of the tourism industry, and in Texas, revenues from oil and gas have dropped substantially. Sales-tax revenues have already taken a beating. Property taxes, usually a lagging revenue source, are also expected to drop over the next two years. Several districts, like Fresno (Calif.), are thinking about their finances according to three possible scenarios: an optimistic scenario where there are no cost-of-living increases and no revenue growth; a middle-of-the-road scenario that reflects what happened in the 2008-09 recession; and a severe scenario where the economy completely collapses and the downturn lasts for multiple years. Our 20 percent estimate is based on the second scenario, but that may be optimistic.

**Rick:** Have districts been able to save money at all with schools closed?

**Mike:** Yes, districts have saved some money because of the closures, but the savings are being more than offset by the unexpected spending on meal service and instructional devices. Areas where some savings have been realized include utilities and fuel, but the amounts are insufficient to compensate for new spending.

**Rick:** Are all staff still getting paid, or have districts started to furlough or lay off nonessential staff?

**Mike:** Staff in most districts are still being paid. Exceptions include many transportation workers, substitute teachers, and others. In addition, some districts are paying staff who are in direct contact with others, like food-service workers, at higher rates. Most cities

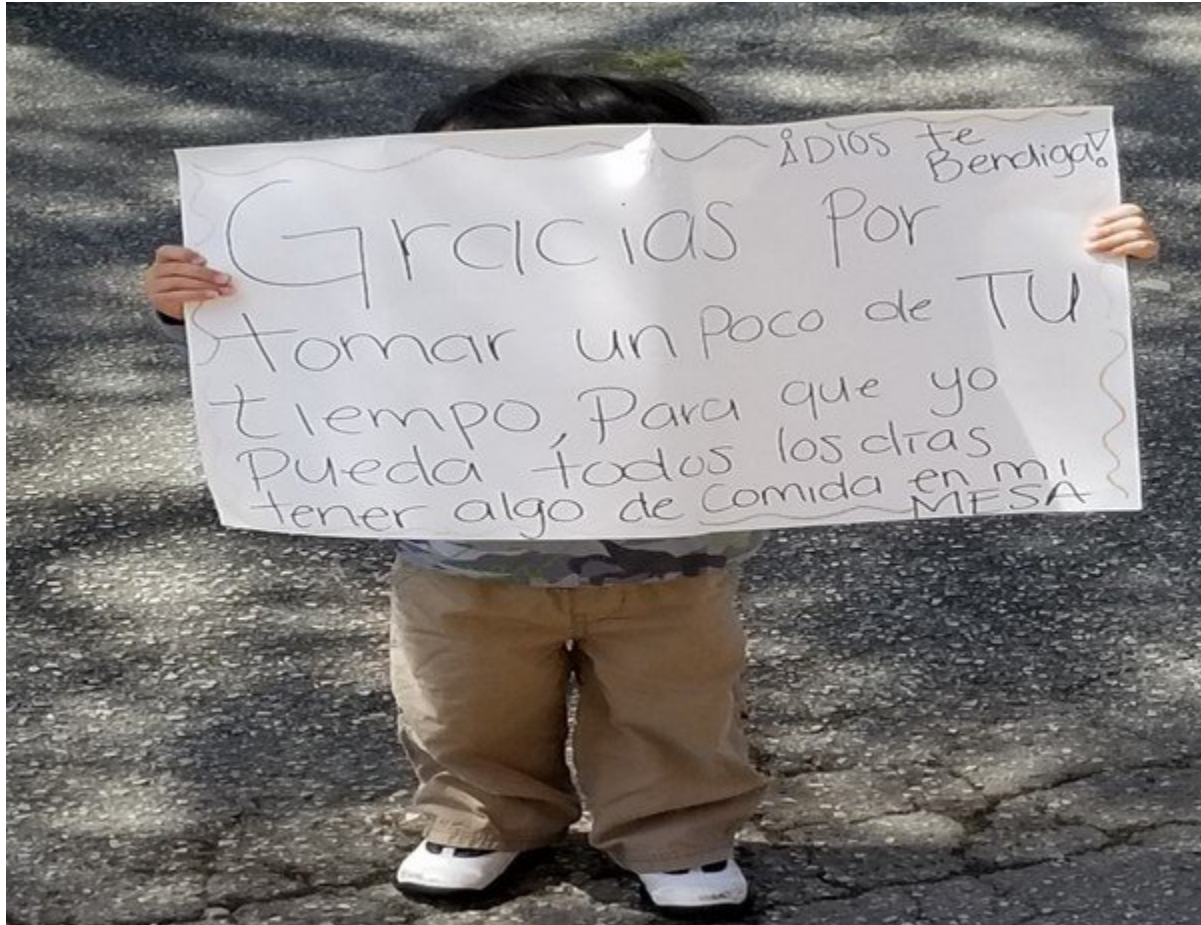
have put into place hiring freezes at either the school or district levels as an initial step to control costs, and they will rely on regular staff attrition to realize cost savings in the short run.

**Rick:** How are you working with your districts now?

**Mike:** Essentially, we are reminding them that they do not have to reinvent everything on their own. Collaborating across districts helps. Under the aegis of the Council of the Great City Schools, urban districts are planning together and assembling working groups composed of school boards, superintendents, chief academic officers, chief information officers, chief financial and operations officers, and many others. These groups are sharing approaches and ideas, and together they are developing strategies for addressing the instructional and operational problems school districts will face in the coming months and years. The goal is to ensure that families and school and district staff will be confident returning to school either in person or online.

**Rick:** All right, last question. Two months in, what is the most heartening thing you've seen?

**Mike:** I am going to answer this question by showing you one of the many heartwarming signs that we see. This is of a young student in San Antonio whose family had just received their meal packets from the school district. In English, it reads, "God bless you. Thank you for taking some of your time so that I can have some food on my table every day."



*Young student in San Antonio whose family had just received their meal packets thanks the school district. In English, it reads, "God bless you. Thank you for taking some of your time so that I can have some food on my table every day."*

*— Courtesy of the San Antonio Independent School District.*

*This post has been edited and condensed for clarity.*

# How School Boards Should Respond to Coronavirus

By Rick Hess on April 23, 2020 9:00 AM

*As families, educators, and community leaders wrestle with COVID-19, we'll be trying to bring conversations to readers that will be helpful in confronting the challenge.*

**AJ Crabill, 2019 recipient** of the prestigious James Bryant Conant Award, is a national school board guru and director of governance at the **Council of the Great City Schools**. Prior to this, AJ served as deputy commissioner in Texas. I recently had the chance to talk to AJ about the role of school boards during the coronavirus. Here's what he had to say.

**Rick:** How should school boards be thinking about the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic for schools?

**AJ:** Strange as it may sound, the pandemic by itself doesn't create a governance emergency. It certainly creates an emergency for management, but that's the superintendent's job.

As hard as this can be for school board members—we tend to be overachieving do-gooder types—right now, it is critical to step back and let the educational first responders (superintendents, principals, and teachers) manage the pandemic. For the same reason you don't want to see members of the hospital board running around the ER with defibrillators looking for cardiac patients to light up, it does more harm than good for members of a school board to rush in and try to manage a crisis.

**Rick:** OK, so besides staying out of the way, how can school board members be helpful?

**AJ:** There remains plenty of governance work to be done, it's just not first-responder type work. I place this work into three buckets: near-term student learning, budgetary impacts, long-term student learning.

Regarding near-term student learning, school boards should be asking their superintendent to identify which instructional model the school system will aim for during temporary school closures. Once the superintendent has defined the instructional model, school boards should request routine monitoring reports from the superintendent describing progress toward implementation. I wrote a more detailed [thought piece](#) on this if you'd like to know more.

Regarding budgetary impacts, most of the school systems I'm talking to are seeing their expenses going up as they take on the near-term additional costs of teaching at a distance—things like devices, hotspots, and new teacher training. At the same time, projected state and local tax revenues are likely to decline. Next fiscal year, school board members will likely be asked to cover the gap out of existing fund balances. Hiring freezes are likely, which could result in class-size variances, another matter that often requires school board action. Increasingly, school systems are encountering families whose mobile phones are turned off—and along with them, the primary (or only) means of contacting families going away.

Regarding long-term student learning, planning should begin immediately. Instead of assuming that everything will go back to the exact way it was before COVID-19, let this be the occasion for school systems to address longstanding instructional and organizational inequities. This is the right time for the board and superintendent to review the school system's goals for student outcomes and theory of action. Supporting difficult operational and political recommendations from the superintendent today—more equitable distributions of teacher and principal talent, more conservative budgets, building utilization conversations, hiring freezes, and more—can help prevent even more difficult decisions tomorrow.

**Rick:** OK, and what advice would you give school boards trying to look ahead right now?

**AJ:** School boards will need to revisit their three- to five-year goals since the conditions have changed sufficiently that adjustments and wholesale changes may be needed. They'll also want to consider more conservative assumptions in their budgeting since sales- and property-tax collections in many areas will likely decline. In addition, I've



been coaching boards to postpone major decisions—goal setting, leadership changes, bond packages, facility utilization, etc.—until after state governments lift the declarations of emergency. These are the types of decisions that are better made when boards have the benefit of knowing when in-school instruction is likely to return and what the calendar and financial picture will be. The Philadelphia school board is setting a good example by delaying rollout of new goals in order to get more stakeholder input and have the opportunity to analyze the impacts COVID-19 is having on its students and staff before proceeding.

**Rick:** School boards aren't typically in the business of overseeing distance learning. How should board members who don't know much about virtual education be thinking about their role right now?

**AJ:** First, the function of school boards is to represent the vision and values of their communities. They were never selected to be educational experts. In that regard, nothing has changed. School boards need to remain focused on representing the community's vision and values by adjusting the pre-COVID-19 goals and adopting policy guardrails to guide what the administration shouldn't do. This means answering questions like, "What do we want our children to know and be able to do?," and "What are the circumstances that we want to protect against?"

Second, it's key for school boards to make clear that leaving students without access to meaningful instruction for 4-6 months is unacceptable because it can do nearly irreparable harm to students' long-term success. Before COVID-19, school boards generally took for granted that instruction was happening; such assumptions no longer hold given varying access to devices and internet service. It's appropriate for school boards to monitor this. Our English-learners, students receiving special services, and other vulnerable populations in particular are already challenged on a normal day; that vulnerability is expanded now and is worthy of the school board's attention. Great examples of places where school boards and superintendents are confronting these challenges head on include Miami and San Antonio, where school systems have overseen the acquisition and distribution of tens of thousands of devices and hotspots in a matter of weeks and have begun aggressively moving instructional materials online for teachers and families to use. In Cleveland, teachers are trying to do weekly virtual

parent/teacher conferences to ensure students are getting the learning supports they need.

**Rick:** What are the potential challenges that might arise from the coronavirus disruption even after schools are able to eventually reopen?

**AJ:** One major change that the fall might bring is modifications to school calendars. Already, school systems like Houston are openly contemplating significant changes in this area such as lengthening the school year or beginning the school year early. And more school systems are doing so quietly with likely announcements coming in the next two weeks. Many districts are **being advised** that any summer programming intended to combat "corona slide" will need to remain virtual.

**Rick:** You preach a relentless focus on what works for kids. How does that translate to the new educational environment we're dealing with?

**AJ:** Sadly, I'm having to adjust my sermons. Improving student outcomes is still the focus, but the logistics of serving students just got a lot more complicated. Before we can educate children, we have to ensure that they are not completely distracted by unmet needs—physiological, psychological, and sociological. Meeting all of these fundamental needs is the starting point—then come the technical challenges around devices and internet access and effective support for frontline teachers. A **great example** of a board tackling this hierarchy of needs is the work of the Tulsa, Okla., school board regarding the district's deployment of wellness care and family assistance. The board is getting it right—supporting resource allocation and monitoring impact—while leaving the logistics to the experts.

That said, it's vital for school boards to remember that school systems only exist to improve student outcomes. Feeding students is not why school systems exist—doing so is just a means to an end. There are many things school systems need to do: balance budgets, maintain appropriate facilities, provide wraparound services, feed students, attend to employee morale, and so forth. But school boards can't be seduced into thinking that any of these important and necessary things are why school systems exist.

They are necessary and important, but they must be contextualized as the means, not the ends. School systems only exist to improve student outcomes.

**Rick:** What have you seen boards doing that is worrisome?

**AJ:** Again, this is not a governance emergency, so I generally coach boards toward moderation in their reactions. So I'm worried by the school board that provides no special flexibility to their superintendent to meet the unique emergent needs of students during the pandemic. And I am worried by the school board that hands the keys entirely to the superintendent and heads home until this all blows over. Both approaches fail to adequately accomplish the school board's core function: to represent the community's vision and values.

**Rick:** On the flip side of that, what have you seen them doing that's reassuring?

**AJ:** On the positive side, I see school boards that are using this time to rethink not only what public education should be providing for students today but also using this as the occasion for sparking a larger conversation about reimagining public education. We had **unresolved challenges with inequitable distribution** of educational resources before COVID-19. This period of upheaval can be an opportunity for bold choices to address those as well. I see a few school boards discussing this opportunity to address inequity, like the Des Moines, Iowa, and Jackson, Miss., school boards, and that excites me. Their consideration of goals, guardrails, and progress measures that focus on measuring disparities between student groups and the provision of social/emotional learning may become practices for other school boards to consider.

**Rick:** How can school boards set themselves up to perform responsible governance without in-person meetings, face-to-face briefings, or being able to sit down with community members?

**AJ:** Every school board I've visited with has already made the transition to video-based meetings. After a few hiccups, most seem to be going smoothly. Pro tips: Wear clothing and keep it on, encourage those walking behind you to wear clothing, and generally try to avoid winning at **Zoom bingo**. I still put on professional clothing for my video

meetings with school system leaders (before slipping back into my more comfortable day pajamas like everyone else). That's because we're still public leaders; during public meetings, we should continue to dress like it and behave like it.

Most states have relaxed open-meetings laws to allow important business to continue while protecting the well-being of public officials. Every school system I've observed is honoring that enhanced responsibility to the best of their technological ability. So, is it a very different experience for community members? Certainly. But it appears that board members are generally acting in good faith. Great examples are Boston and Chicago, where the board meetings use technology to allow community members to publicly address the school board during the meeting without leaving their own homes.

**Rick:** All right, last question. What's the one most heartening thing you've seen come out of all of this?

**AJ:** Teachers have always been amazing, and the more hardship our students face, the more apparent that becomes. From teachers sitting on front porches guiding instruction through a window for students without internet access, to teachers reading stories to their students via Zoom, to teachers helping make sure that school lunches find their way to students, to teachers helping seniors prepare for and apply for colleges in video conferences, and so many more examples. Teachers are a gift to our nation's children. All of us, not just school board members, should be expressing gratitude for their commitment at every opportunity.

## Update from the Great City Schools on the Coronavirus Pandemic

By the

Council of the Great City Schools

April 15, 2020

Revised April 20, 2020

On Friday, March 13, the Council of the Great City Schools held its first official conference call with superintendents across the country to get an update on the steps they were taking to address the growing health crisis in their communities. By that time, schools in Bridgeport, Des Moines, Houston, Indianapolis, Memphis, and other major cities across the nation had closed. Some, like Des Moines, which was the first school district in Iowa to close its doors, were the subject of harsh public and press criticism. Within days, most other big city school districts were closed through at least early April. Some of these closures were mandated by governors, like in Ohio, but some were at the initiative of individual cities. New York City was one of the last on March 15. As of the third week in March, every major city public school system in the nation had closed.

Following the call, district leaders agreed to convene weekly meetings thereafter to share information, strategies, and lessons. The Council also quickly established weekly sessions with its school boards, chief academic officers, chief financial officers, chief operating officers (along with food service and transportation directors), special education directors, general counsels, bilingual directors, chief information officers and IT directors, communications directors, labor negotiators, human resource directors and talent managers, and testing and research directors. Calls with transportation, food services directors, and facilities managers were arranged on a rotating basis every two to three weeks.

These calls provide school leaders with an invaluable forum for sharing and learning from one another. They also provide a wealth of real-time data on the efforts and strategies being employed in big city school districts—districts that already serve as models and incubators for educational reform efforts, and now find themselves on the front lines in sustaining support and learning for the nation’s most diverse, vulnerable children.

The Council has resisted conducting formal surveys of its members during this time, because the people who would be filling them out are needed in the field. It was also clear early on that there was a never-ending list of questions that we might ask, and that survey results would be out of date by the time they were compiled. This memo, therefore, is drawn from those weekly discussions with senior leaders in the Great City Schools.

We have divided this memo into two sections. The first describes the current situation in several governance and operational areas. This includes how the work has evolved to date, and how districts are approaching the remainder of the school year. The second section discusses how the districts have started to think about the challenges ahead as they plan for the upcoming school year. We conclude with a brief discussion.



## I. The Work to Date

### *School Board Governance*

Most member school boards, like other elected and appointed governing bodies, have had to obtain waivers from their states to hold their meetings virtually rather than in person. For the most part these waivers have been granted, but they also resulted in delays in some boards holding meetings on schedule. In fact, most boards delayed their initial sessions after closing for the better part of two to three weeks. At this point, most boards have held their initial meetings or will hold them within the next week. Most, like Boston, Chicago, and Oakland, are convening through either Microsoft Teams or ZOOM (webinar version), since these packages allow boards to take attendance, hold votes, and receive public input. Some districts like Indianapolis also stream their meetings live through Facebook or other platforms (like YouTube) and record and post them on district websites for later viewing.

Receiving public comment appears to be the main challenge for most districts now, although the platforms cited allow the system manager to unmute those making public comment or allow them to use chat features in the programs. Others have set up separate email addresses to facilitate the process of collecting public input. Some districts, in fact, are finding that public participation has increased since people do not have to travel to an in-person session.

Now that school board sessions are beginning anew the question has emerged from districts like Houston about how the boards ought to be using their time. Most agree that boards should be suspending their usual academic monitoring responsibilities in lieu of keeping an eye on how the districts are setting expectations for current work and planning for long-term challenges like academic performance and financial short falls. Portland (OR), for example, has indicated that regular briefings by their administration are important in keeping the board connected to what the school district is doing during the crisis.

Finally, some districts like Newark have delegated additional emergency powers to their superintendents to allow for expedited action on immediate issues facing the district. Other districts like Albuquerque suspended its superintendent search during the closure, while Long Beach moved ahead and appointed a new leader.

In general, boards report that the public seems pleased that they have reconvened and are providing them with mechanisms to share input and concerns.

### *General Instruction*

School closings, whether mandated by the state or initiated by the districts, were done quickly. There was minimal time for extensive planning. Still, most districts used their spring breaks, when students and teachers were not expected to be in class, to plot next steps and make logistical arrangements. This period was critical for most districts as they attempted to get ahead of the situation. At the same time, however, most school leaders were being told by their states that closures were expected to last only through about mid-April. The result was that most districts calculated that their instructional strategies only needed to be short-term, since classes were expected to resume sometime this month.

The prospect that they will be closed for the remainder of the school year has brought a new array of challenges. Nonetheless, several big-city school districts launched online instruction early in the COVID-19 shutdown. Long Beach, for instance, created Google Classroom learning opportunities as early as the third week in March. Teachers there also used crowd-sourcing APPs to gather and work together on online lessons. They augment their math lessons with Khan Academy and have developed printed materials that they distribute along with meals. In the early weeks, the district did not grade student work.

The instructional work was similar in Miami. They launched their work with surveys to parents on technology needs and conducted professional development webinars for their over 18,000 teachers on the delivery of online instruction. Like most other districts, Miami used the instructional programs that they were using before the shutdown rather than procuring new programming. The district tracks student use of programs electronically on a daily basis. It also has a call-center for students, parents, and teachers to help with instructional and technology problems. The full launch of the effort occurred on April 6.

Several districts are supplementing their online and hard copy lessons with instruction through local television stations. This is the case in Los Angeles, Albuquerque, Baltimore, Palm Beach County, and the District of Columbia. Baltimore also uses daily videos from Eureka Math that students can access from almost any platform.

In Milwaukee, the district developed its own instructional learning packets and distributed those, as did Cleveland. San Antonio is creating and posting lessons now one week at a time. Philadelphia started by distributing paper copies of lessons, but it has now moved to online instruction using Google Classroom and Grade Book along with paper copies for the considerable number of students in the city without internet access.

The District of Columbia like others used its spring break for planning and began its remote instructional program with learning packets that parents picked up along with meals. It then distributed devices, starting at the high schools first—like others. Students who were poor or English learners were prioritized for devices and T-Mobile helped provide hotspots to boost internet access. The district also distributed laptops to teachers to help with the transition to online instruction. Like others, the District of Columbia Public Schools is making liberal use of Microsoft Teams, along with CANVAS and YouTube to coordinate teachers and provide instruction to students. Principals are required to meet remotely once a week with their teachers.

At this point, most big-city school districts are using a combination of online instruction of around four hours a day and paper lessons to provide instruction. Reports on student usage vary from city to city, but most urban school districts report increasing usage over time.

Finally, several districts are providing online or call-in counseling and mental health services for students and sometimes families. Cleveland, Miami, and Pinellas County (St. Petersburg) are good examples. Districts are also training staff to look for signs of possible child abuse as well.

### *English Learners*

Work by districts to ensure comprehensive instruction for English learners is also evolving. To support its dual language learners, Denver developed lessons that students could use with minimal parental support. Jacksonville has created an online blended platform for its ELLs and instructional packets for its ESL and dual language students. Materials are provided by English-language proficiency level and domain.

Minneapolis is also providing instructional packets by English-language proficiency level, which the district distributed by email and some home visits. Tulsa is developing its packets by language level as well, and it is delivering instruction through its CANVAS platform. Guilford County continues to use the Council's Professional Learning Platform and 3Ls model for instruction with ELLs.

Seattle and Anchorage have also distributed learning packets for ELLs but do not require that students return their work yet. Oakland, on the other hand, is providing its content and language instruction in integrated online platforms. Likewise, Denver co-developed lessons with its curriculum and instruction department in order to imbed EL strategies into the general lessons.

Most districts have finished or discontinued English-proficiency testing for the year, but they are reaching out to new arrivals and linking them with teachers and other families. A good example is in Dallas. Anchorage finished their ELD testing before closing, as did Clark County, St. Louis, and Norfolk. Districts are mostly enrolling new students without language screening, but they are using the Home Language Survey results for basic information. Denver and the District of Columbia developed specific newcomer ELD lessons for newcomers. Charlotte-Mecklenburg created CANVAS courses in the core content areas for newcomers. And Los Angeles has developed professional development modules that nearly 2,000 ELL teachers have participated in.

### *Students with Disabilities*

Districts are struggling with ways to provide educational and related services to students with disabilities. One of the major challenges facing districts involves how they conduct evaluations and re-evaluations when students and staff must shelter in place. Issues of flexibility are particularly pronounced in the area of disabilities since the Secretary of Education does not have the authority under IDEA to waive most provisions of federal law. In the CARES Act, Congress did ask the Secretary for recommendations for what parts of the law might be waived, but there is considerable pushback on waiving any parts of the law.

Second, districts are struggling with holding IEP meetings, but several districts are resuming these meetings virtually. Several districts are offering parents options for how they would like to meet.

Third, districts are struggling with how they meet various IEP goals on the same timelines they laid out in the plans and how they measure progress. Timeline issues, in general, continue to be an area that districts are working on, particularly timelines around due process.

Other issues include how districts provide some related services, like physical therapy, directly to the students when staff are not able to visit the home. Issues around what FAPE or compensatory education mean in the current circumstances continue to challenge districts, as well. Medicaid claiming for services that districts provide is also an area of uncertainty.

### *Testing*

The U.S. Department of Education has granted a waiver to the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) for the annual testing requirements under the law. States are required to request the waiver, but to date almost every state has asked and been granted a waiver.

Still, there are numerous data and assessment issues that districts are considering. For instance, districts like Pittsburgh are differentiating their data dashboards into ‘before’ and ‘after’ shut-down categories. This issue of what the effect of the shutdowns will be on student academic outcomes and how to report data year over year is a primary concern for research and testing directors across cities. New York City and other districts are thinking about using regression models to predict what learning might have been had the schools not had to close.

In addition, there is active discussion about whether diagnostic assessments should be given at the beginning of the next school year to measure unfinished learning and learning loss. Districts such as Dallas are considering the possibility of deploying their initial quarterly exams at the beginning of the year to use results as both a summative measure of the current school year and a starting point for next year. In addition, districts participating in the Trial Urban District Assessment of NAEP like Charlotte-Mecklenburg are viewing next year’s NAEP tests as an important gauge on the amount of learning that has been lost because of the closures.

Districts like Buffalo, Indianapolis, and Richmond are also reporting that even though their states have been granted waivers to their ESSA accountability tests they are still required to report other data like enrollment, finance, and personnel information to their states on schedule.

In addition, most big-city school districts report suspending their testing for gifted and talented and English language learners until next school year, although most districts indicated that they finished their WIDA or other English language proficiency testing before they shut down.

### *Graduations*

One of the most surprising things that districts are dealing with involves graduations. Most districts expected to be closed for several weeks, but they are now increasingly being told they will be closed for the balance of the school year. High school graduation is a seminal event in the lives of almost everyone and cancelling them incurs emotional responses that range from sadness to anger. Districts are now just beginning to weigh their options for how to hold alternative events. Many, like Jacksonville and Tulsa, are surveying their graduating seniors to determine their preferences. Responses there and in many other places suggest that most students seem to want to hold actual ceremonies even if they are delayed. Orange County (Orlando) for instance is

considering holding their graduations in June or July, but even those dates are uncertain. Dallas is delaying theirs as well, but it is also surveying seniors to determine their wishes.

Some districts are moving toward virtual graduation ceremonies. Albuquerque, for instance, has developed a template by which they are creating online videos that start with a message from the superintendent, contain a musical selection, move to the national anthem—sung by a district graduate who has made it big in Nashville—then have a keynote address, followed by video presentations by the graduating classes in each high school. Their main rule: all graduating seniors must appear in each school’s video. The district has also arranged for local grocery stores to provide discounts on all graduation cakes and other party supplies. The model is being well received so far.

### *Food Services*

Much of the initial work in districts was devoted to school meals. About 75 percent of students enrolled in the Great City School districts are eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch. The vast majority of these are in the free-meals category. Large percentages of students also rely on school breakfasts. Decisions were made quickly as schools were closing that meals would continue, since they were often the only nourishment that children received. Most districts started by distributing meals *via* a variety of means: at schools, curbside, at drive-by sites, at regular school bus-stops, and at home or at shelters. The timing of deliveries differed from city to city. Some delivered or provided meals five days a week; some did so two to three days a week. In all cases, packets contained enough meals to last five to seven days a week.

The number of meal pick-up sites also varies and has changed over time. Guilford County initially set up 38 food distribution sites; Dallas set up 48 sites; Fresno had 18; Denver had 12; Newark had 16; Sacramento set up 13 sites; and St. Louis had 27. In Austin, the district started with 16 curbside sites and 13 buses, making 54 stops to deliver meals. It then added another 50 stops. Detroit had 58 schools providing meals and delivered meals with 67 buses to the residences of 1,484 students with disabilities. The New York City Department of Education has set up 400 feeding sites across its five boroughs and Chicago has established about 300 meal sites.

Initially, school districts found that participation was low, sometimes only five to 15 percent of eligible students. Clark County (Las Vegas), for example, was serving only three percent of its normal daily rate on the second day. Los Angeles served only four percent initially. Most districts made a conscious decision that they would provide meals to anyone who showed up for them and claimed a need—no questions asked. At the beginning, there was some confusion about whether a student had to be present for meal pickups, but waivers through the U.S. Department of Agriculture resolved this. As the weeks have passed, participation rates have increased substantially, and the numbers of meals served has approximated pre-coronavirus eligibility levels.

By the first week in April, many districts were starting to rethink the frequency of their meal deliveries. This was largely the result of district food service staff getting sick or staff indicating



that they were no longer willing to risk their health to deliver or serve meals. Many districts now deliver meals one to three days per week—with enough food to last the week.

At this point, districts are facing several challenges. The first involves the availability of staff to prepare and deliver the meals. In a few instances, meals were stopped at some locations in some cities like Detroit, Memphis, and Houston when staff became sick. In these cases, meal delivery is typically switched to another location or staff is changed. Cities like Reno use local medical students to conduct checkups on food service employees.

The second challenge involves how long the meals last. As districts cut food deliveries from five days a week to one to three, they are finding that families are running through the meals before the next delivery. To date, the supply of food has not been a major issue.

The third challenge also involves having to curtail delivery to a lower number of days per week. In this case, the boxes of food are sometimes too heavy to carry. This is particularly true when very young children show up alone at drop-off sites and cannot lift the meal boxes. The theft of food has also been an issue in some places.

Most city school systems have also partnered with various community food banks to prepare and deliver food. These partnerships are typically long-standing and did not take much time to develop or expand. In Fort Worth, the school district also provides grocery delivery service.

At this point, the major city school districts have served substantial numbers of meals. For instance, Albuquerque had served 425,000 meals as of April 10. Orlando has served 600,000 meals to 275,634 students. Miami has served over 800,00 meals, and Des Moines serves some 20,000 meals a day. While there are continuing logistical challenges in providing meals to the community at this volume, city school systems and their staff are receiving significant plaudits from the public for their efforts.

### *Transportation*

As one would expect, transportation services in many big-city school systems have largely stopped. This infrastructure is now frequently used to deliver meals throughout their communities. Sometimes this is done with buses retrofitted with refrigeration units and other cases departments use various delivery vehicles. Aurora, for instance, delivers some 16,000 meals a day from its school buses. School buses in many cities are also being equipped with wi-fi, so students picking up meals can download instructional lessons.

District transportation systems are also being used to deliver technology and other instructional devices to students along with their meals and lessons.

Most big-city school districts have a mix of their own buses and drivers and contracted buses and drivers. Most districts, as of this date, have retained their drivers or are paying them at a reduced rate. Charleston, for instance, is paying their contract drivers at 85 percent of their daily rate. Nashville has picked up 70 percent of their drivers; the contractor is covering 30 percent. Boston is still paying their drivers but is redeploying them for other purposes.

Controversy has broken out, however, over language in the CARES Act that appears to require districts receiving funds through the Education Stabilization Fund to retain their contract workers. Vendors have written to districts demanding that the law be followed, except that many fail to mention that the legislation requires staff retention only to “the extent practicable.” Still many districts are retaining drivers when they can, because they fear that they may not get them back. Other districts have made the calculation that the national shortage of school bus drivers is likely to improve as the unemployment rate rises.

In most cases, drivers are receiving either hazard pay or time-and-a-half when they work. They are typically equipped with gloves and masks. Buses are disinfected and sanitized daily, dry-steamed, or are germ blasted. Several districts, like Palm Beach County, are reporting that they are running out of sanitizing chemicals and are finding them hard to purchase.

Finally, most districts are rotating their mechanics since all buses are not in service, but districts continue to pay them. Some districts are also experiencing more thefts out of their bus yards because more buses are sitting unused for long periods.

### *Technology*

Many but not all big city school systems moved to online learning relatively quickly after they closed in mid-March. Some districts, like Cleveland, stayed with hard copies of lessons that were distributed with meals; most moved to distance learning or used a mixed delivery system of both online and hard copies.

Several districts like St. Paul had moved to 1:1 (one device for each student) some years ago and were better prepared for the transition than others. Others like Miami had an extensive number of devices in storage they could distribute quickly after the need had been established. Still, some districts that had large inventories of devices discovered that much of it was out-of-date and could not be used or had equipment that had to be refurbished before being distributed.

Most districts surveyed their students and families to determine need. To close the gaps, most districts had to buy and/or distribute large numbers of devices. San Antonio, for instance, distributed 17,000 devices and ordered another 30,000. Hillsborough County (Tampa) had delivered 30,000 Chromebooks as of April 10 and had placed orders for another 40,000. Louisville had distributed 20,000. Denver has distributed about 40,000 devices. Philadelphia distributed 50,000. And Miami has sent out some 80,000 devices.

Most districts that needed to buy and distribute devices did so by delivering it to students and families at schools or along with meals. In some cases, devices were delivered directly to where students were living. In most situations, students or parents had to sign for the equipment.

The issue of internet access has also been a challenge, although parent surveys in some cities like Atlanta found a surprisingly high number of students with internet connections—at least through iPhones. Still, some 6,000 students had no access whatsoever. Conversely, cities like Newark have found through their surveys that about one third of their population has no internet access. Districts have moved to address internet deserts as quickly as possible, but this continues to be a work in progress. Most districts have attempted to work with their internet providers to fill gaps

in service. The experience districts are having with this effort is mixed at best. Some districts report that their providers are aggressively partnering with them; in other cases, like Wichita, vendors have been reluctant to do more than try to sell more families on connections. Districts like Kansas City have also been buying and distributing hotspots and placing wi-fi on school buses, city buses, parks, city libraries, and the like to close gaps.

One of the main challenges that districts have had when they set up wi-fi connections on buses was that the range was only several hundred feet and battery life was often short. Guilford County was exploring the prospect of equipping some buses with solar panels to extend this battery life.

Help desks are also being set up by districts to help students and parents operate the devices or solve software problems as they emerge. San Antonio, for instance, has set up a help desk with 15 people and is seeing heavy use. In addition, most districts seem to have focused initially in making sure that secondary grade students were equipped with devices before moving to the elementary grades.

In addition, several districts are enlisting their local television stations to run instructional lessons over the airwaves. Los Angeles, which owns two local public broadcasting stations, is broadcasting school lessons over the airwaves daily. They are also expanding statewide.

Overall, districts are building their technological capacity not only to meet the current challenge, but they are also thinking about the future.

### *Facilities*

Member school districts are also handling several facilities issues related to coronavirus. In most cases, maintenance and operations staff continue to work, cleaning building and handling infrastructure matters as they occur. Most districts have closed their buildings to all staff, but there are several—like Chicago—where buildings remain open on a limited basis, necessitating security and cleaning staff. In addition, building security remains an issue as some districts have had to deal with graffiti and theft. Most districts, moreover, are continuing their capitol projects and some are even saving money on them as they are able to complete work faster than expected.

Finally, the facilities directors of the Council have formed a work group to develop protocols and indicators they can use to demonstrate that buildings are safe to reenter once school reopens. The group is using CDC guidelines but is augmenting them for school buildings.

### *Finances and Budget*

Financial issues are consuming most big city school districts now. Congress approved the CARES Act about 10 days ago. The legislation provided about \$13 billion for elementary and secondary schools, of which the Great City School districts are expected to garner some \$3.5 billion. At this point, however, the U.S. Department of Education has not released any district-by-district estimates or told the states when funds are likely to become available. The department has waived the 15 percent carryover requirement, however, which will allow districts to stretch their federal funds over a longer period.

While this \$13 billion amount is an important down payment, it will not come close to meeting the projected needs of schools in the aftermath of the current health crisis. For context, it is nowhere close to the \$100 billion that Congress provided to education in 2009 under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). At the time, ARRA was a lifeline to urban schools and others weathering the Great Recession. The situation now, however, is far more severe and promises to cause much more substantial damage. Unlike in 2008 and 2009, schools nationwide have had to close beginning around mid-March and will likely stay shuttered through the balance of the school year.

In addition, districts have already incurred substantial unexpected expenditures and some softening in revenue collections. San Francisco, for instance, reports that it expects to spend some \$18.9 million this school year that it did not expect to spend on meals and instructional costs. Pandemic costs in San Diego could reach \$71 million before the school year finishes.

Districts are already indicating that they are seeing downturns in sales taxes, their ability to collect delinquent revenues, and how quickly they realize interest earnings.

Projected financial short falls for next school year are just beginning to come in. Preliminary projections from Fresno, for instance, suggest shortfall of around 15 percent. San Diego is estimating losses of 20 percent. That level of revenue shortfall would amount to some \$20 to \$30 billion in cuts to the Great City Schools in the aggregate next school year. If schools start early or involve extra time next year, districts like Columbus (OH) project that it would cost them some \$2.0 million a day to pay their teachers.

The Council and other education groups have therefore argued for an additional \$175 billion in education funding in a fourth supplemental appropriations bill, but Congress has not come to agreement on any additional funds over and above some \$250 billion for small businesses.

### *Staffing*

Most districts have kept their staff for the remainder of the school year. The exception to this has involved bus drivers, as discussed in the previous section on transportation. In addition, several districts have had to lay off their substitute teachers, particularly their short-term substitutes. In general, construction and major capital projects have been deemed essential and those efforts and staff continue. Cooks, security staff, grounds crews, and custodians are being kept as well, although some are deployed for other tasks on at least a part-time basis. Security staff, for example, often accompany buses conducting meal deliveries to homeless sites or public housing projects.

As indicated earlier, front-line staff in places such as Dallas are being paid time-and-a-half or hazard wages. Even so, some districts like Cincinnati have had trouble coaxing some of their employees to work. Some districts like Charleston have had to rely on volunteers for tasks involving meal distribution.

For the most part, districts also continue to recruit staff for the next school year. Boston and Dallas are examples, but both districts have placed freezes on other types of spending.

Finally, districts are finding they have to go back into bargaining with their unions to work out every detail on who is kept and who is not; what people are paid and at what rates; and the conditions under which people work.

### *Other*

It has been interesting on the regular calls that the Council holds with its members that our school districts have been routinely gathering their medical supplies and providing them to local hospitals. We saw good examples of this in Charleston and Wichita.

## II. Looking to Next Year and Beyond

Our weekly calls with district staff and leaders have revealed that districts are anticipating several common needs and challenges. These challenges and needs include the following—

1. **Addressing Student and Adult Trauma.** In asking our superintendents and chief academic officers about this it was clear that while this is a priority for our districts, they have not devoted extensive time on this issue except in a few districts. As indicated above, several of our school districts are providing online counseling, monitoring for abuse, and providing other online or remote mental health supports for students. But the needs will grow when students and teachers return to school in the fall.

District leaders are anticipating having to identify and equip schools with the necessary support and mental health services for both students and faculty in dealing with the traumas they have experienced. Teachers, for their part, will need guidance and resources for integrating social-emotional learning into their classrooms. School and district leaders will also need to develop communication and outreach plans to more closely connect with families and communities in order to enhance student wellness.

Several districts are talking about how they might use the student COVID experience to teach lessons on biology, math, health education, and the like. These same districts are also thinking about leveraging common experiences to shape student discussions about their fears, worries, and concerns about their well-being and their futures. Chicago is an example of a district that is working on lessons around the study of the coronavirus and student discussions about what they have gone through.

2. **Organizing and Supporting Learning After Reopening.** Discussions and regular conference calls with our superintendents, chief academic officers, and research directors indicate that they are thinking intensely about these issues, although no single game plan has emerged. Several districts have indicated that they are thinking about conducting diagnostic testing at the beginning of the school year by moving up their first quarterly assessment from the middle of the fall to somewhere in the first several weeks of the upcoming school year. Most are suggesting that they would use their ongoing MAP assessments, iReady, or other tests. There is also some pushback on this idea as it is being discussed. Some are exploring use of their state summative exams that have been waived, although most admit that they are bound to yield poor results.



In contrast, several districts are exploring not doing any beginning-of-the-year diagnostics, but instead employing statistical procedures to predict learning loss. And some districts are simply reporting that they may leave these assessments of student status up to the teachers. In short, districts are talking through their options on this front, but no one—as far as we know—has reached a firm decision yet about how they will handle this issue. The Council has not guided the members towards any strategy for the moment, but we are talking through the pros and cons of the various options they are considering.

Districts are also thinking through their options for how to structure or organize next school year to make up for unfinished learning. To date, major options appear to include summer school; evening sessions; starting the upcoming school year early; holding extended day or Saturday classes; blended classes and additional co-teaching; moving the fourth quarter of the current school year into next year; moving to year-round instruction; and redesigning class schedules.

The superintendents and chief academic officers are also thinking about the sequencing of instruction. Here there appears to be more agreement among cities, although the degree of expertise to carry out this work differs from one location to another. Districts are thinking about the standards and concepts that are typically taught in the fourth quarter of the school year—those that scaffold to key concepts in the next year, particularly in critical transition grades—and then reinforcing those foundational areas early in the upcoming year. This will entail careful planning, clear guidance to teachers, and professional development, but this broad strategy appears to make sense as a way of ensuring that key skills are not lost, and that excessive compensatory education is avoided.

Several districts are moving in this direction in combination with efforts to concentrate instruction in core subjects when they return in the fall. The Council has started sketching out for several districts what those critical concepts are and how they might be linked across years, but considerably more work is needed to make this successful.

### **3. Maintaining Instructional Continuity Amid Potential Rolling Closures Next School Year.**

Another challenge district leaders must prepare for is the very real possibility of continued disruptions to physical school attendance in the next school year. Having had to completely reconfigure instruction in real time over the past few weeks, districts now need to apply those lessons learned to make the transition between in-school and online learning more seamless and less disruptive in the future. This will involve strengthening communication between schools and families, and developing more responsive strategies for meeting the needs of all students—including students without access to technology or internet access, students with disabilities, English language learners, etc. I haven't seen the districts explicitly plan for rolling shutdowns next school year, and I suspect that they won't do much more planning other than to reflect on what they did over the last month or so and ask themselves what worked and what could we do better.

### **4. Strategically leveraging human and financial resources to address heightened learning needs in a period of significant budget reductions.**

As detailed above, students will be returning to school next year with significant unfinished learning. This will coincide with significant budget cuts and revenue shortfalls if Congress fails to provide a much-needed infusion of funds. As such, districts will need to make hard but strategic decisions concerning teacher layoffs, deployment, and training, as well what added flexibility in terms of provision of services they will require given school closures and budget constraints. The districts will face twin challenges in deciding what staff to furlough and how to redeploy remaining staff if they are required through their collective bargaining agreements to give teachers preference of teaching assignments based on seniority. Most districts have not gotten to the point yet, but the possibility of both things happening simultaneously could easily crater student achievement for years. We have seen it many times over the years and it is a situation that is very hard to work around.

Ultimately, the foundations will never have enough resources to counter the revenue shortfall that big-city school districts are likely to face in the next two years. The main challenges districts will face involve—

- How to restructure instructional time in 2020-21 and 2021-22 to ensure that students are adequately prepared to graduate and be close to college or career ready,
- How to sequence the curriculum and critical standards and concepts (and possibly skip less critical concepts) so students can build the skills they need in the years ahead;
- How to integrate technology into future instruction in a way that compliments face-to-face teaching and does so in a way that is more efficacious than the current research suggests,
- How to redefine and provide professional development to teachers when bargaining agreements may not readily allow for expanded training;
- How to address inequities that have been exacerbated by the current crisis;
- How to assess student academic status and progress in a way that does not fall into the trap of using standardized and unaligned measures to determine where students are and remediating with the results,
- How to rethink district organization and workflow if there is reason to believe that some jobs will become unnecessary, and
- How to re-envision the institution or how to decide if re-envisioning is necessary given the inevitable advocacy for a more individualized, choice-based system.
- How to address a fall-off in public confidence in the institution if that happens.

There are not be a lot of organizations or service-providers who can effectively help big-city districts think through their options and how they might reinvent themselves either partially or

existentially. I suspect that a handful of smart actors and skilled practitioners will be key to figuring out the direction of the institution. Groups like the Council of the Great City Schools—and some of its closest partners—come as close to the ideal in the work ahead as currently exist. At this point, the Council envisions—based on discussions with its members—that work is most needed in five ways.

*One*, it appears that the members could use a forum by which they identify lessons learned from the current experience. Some lessons may not be usable in the future, but there are bound to be things that we have drawn from the last several months that are important going forward.

*Two*, the members—at all levels of the organization—are very hungry for detailed examples of what worked, particularly in the instructional area. District leadership is looking for models of effectiveness in enough specificity that they could try for themselves what others have done. This is a continuous refrain in the Council’s work, but the members are more conscious of borrowing ideas from one another than ever before. One sees this not only in how members share suggestions on our weekly calls, but how our research directors are gathering data to determine what approaches were the most effective.

*Three*, the members are acutely aware that they will need to fundamentally rethink how instruction is provided in the years ahead. The experience of the last several months have been disruptive in a positive sense in that it has compelled leadership to question how they do their work and why. This dynamic will force the membership to redesign its institution to more effectively address the educational needs of the next generation as we move ahead. This will require imagination and creativity, but the rethinking will need to be grounded in what may need to be retained. Unfortunately, there is not a strong track record of reform-minded and improvement-oriented individuals or groups being able to figure out why and how big-city school districts improve and what is worth keeping. Still, there is a clear need voice by our membership for this rethinking to be done.

*Four*, the members are also expressing the need for help implementing new models and ideas in their own districts beyond the typical vendor and consulting-based practices. These models are not only expensive, but many times they are not well-informed by the complexity of how school districts operate, and they do not help build capacity in the organizations that outlast the contracts. Many of the districts appear to be yearning for more expert peer-based thinking and technical assistance that is well grounded in strong evidence of effectiveness.

*Finally*, our membership is anticipating that they will need to rethink and revamp their policy platforms. In other words, policies from the school board level on up to at least the state level may need to be rethought. For instance, state policies grounded in student “seat time” may need to be revamped. School board policies and use of time around what is monitored may also need to be re-envisioned. I can only start to imagine what these items might be.

The Council of the Great City Schools has already established a series of work groups of our smartest and most thoughtful superintendents, CEOs, and chancellors to start on lessons learned,

design work, and policy questions. Additional groups have also been set up of academic, research, and technology staff to work on more tactical instructional design issues and models of effectiveness. A third set of groups made up of finance, IT, security, and transportation staff have been set up to address operational problems. And a fourth group of communications directors has been established to think through issues involving public confidence.

The main charge to these groups is threefold: (a) To think through what the public may need to hear from us to be confident that it is safe to send their children back into our schools; (b) to rethink and reimagine what an effective blended instructional system might look like; and (c) articulate what it is that we need to have done to be ready to receive our children either this summer or next school year. Clearly, one of our central tasks will be to create a new framework for instructional delivery—using college and career-readiness standards—that would produce better outcomes for students than we currently get and to incorporate enough political buy-in to make the system viable. The Council already works with some of the best instructional experts in the nation, but we would be open to additional support and thinking from experts recommended by the philanthropic community and others. We would also welcome additional resources to support these work groups and outside experts they might need to help them think through what the future might look like and how to be ready for it.

To be sure, the Council of the Great City Schools has been extremely aggressive in helping our members through the current crisis, and it stands ready to engage its members in meeting the challenges ahead.