Restarting and Reinventing School

Learning in the Time of COVID and Beyond

Linda Darling-Hammond, Abby Schachner, and Adam K. Edgerton

in collaboration with Aneesha Badrinarayan, Jessica Cardichon, Peter W. Cookson Jr., Michael Griffith, Sarah Klevan, Anna Maier, Monica Martinez, Hanna Melnick, Natalie Truong, and Steve Wojcikiewicz

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Executive Summary

Across the United States, state education agencies and school districts face daunting challenges and difficult decisions for restarting schools as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. As state and district leaders prepare for what schooling will look like in 2020 and beyond, there is an opportunity to identify evidence-based policies and practices that will enable them to seize this moment to rethink school in ways that can transform learning opportunities for students and teachers alike.

Our current system took shape almost exactly a century ago, when school designs and funding were established to implement mass education on an assembly-line model organized to prepare students for their "places in life"—judgments that were enacted within contexts of deep-seated racial, ethnic, economic, and cultural prejudices. In a historical moment when we have more knowledge about human development and learning, when society and the economy demand a more challenging set of skills, and when—at least in our rhetoric—there is a greater social commitment to equitable education, it is time to use the huge disruptions caused by this pandemic to reinvent our systems of education. The question is: How we can harness these understandings as we necessarily redesign school? How can we transform what has not been working for children and for our society into a more equitable and empowering future?

This report provides an overarching framework that focuses on how policymakers as well as educators can support equitable, effective teaching and learning regardless of the medium through which that takes place. This framework provides research, state and local examples, and policy recommendations in 10 key areas that speak both to transforming learning and to closing opportunity and achievement gaps. It illustrates how policymakers and educators can:

1. Close the digital divide
2. Strengthen distance and blended learning
3. Assess what students need
4. Ensure supports for social and emotional learning
5. Redesign schools for stronger relationships
6. Emphasize authentic, culturally responsive learning
7. Provide expanded learning time
8. Establish community schools and wraparound supports
9. Prepare educators for reinventing school
10. Leverage more adequate and equitable school funding

Each of these 10 policy priorities will help schools reinvent themselves around principles of equity, authentic learning, and stronger relationships, and they require shifts from policymakers and educators alike.

Priority 1: Close the Digital Divide

The digital divide parallels the educational divide, and unless it is closed now, it will result in an ever-widening learning gap. Universal broadband and device access is the absolute minimum for ensuring that every child can continue learning throughout the 2020–21 school year, and the costs of closing the divide are small relative to the overall investments being made to address the pandemic. To accomplish this, policymakers and educators can:

1. **Prioritize federal efforts to close the digital divide.** To stem learning loss, every student, no matter her or his living situation, needs access to an adequate computing device and internet connectivity. Given the major economic downturn and state revenue declines accompanying pandemic-related shutdowns, federal recovery funds to education are needed to supplement state budgets for this purpose. Less than half of 1% of what the federal government has already spent on the recovery is needed to close the digital divide for schoolchildren.
2. **Expand broadband access through state and city initiatives.** States and cities can follow the lead of pioneers that have significantly expanded broadband access through progressive regulation and leveraging of public and private funding streams.
3. **Organize access to devices and connectivity.** Once every home has the potential for internet access, many students will still need Wi-Fi and a device adequate to support schoolwork in order to participate in distance and hybrid learning. States and districts need to survey device needs and work proactively with service providers and families to buy devices and hot spots in bulk and help them become usable in many different contexts.

Priority 2: Strengthen Distance and Blended Learning

Once all students have access to high-speed internet and devices, the challenge of implementing high-quality distance learning and blended learning models remains. Plans for continuity of learning are essential to enable teaching to occur without disruption. To strengthen distance and blended learning, policymakers and educators can:

1. **Share pioneering efforts among districts.** While this new era may feel like uncharted educational waters, educators can be guided in part by successful pioneers and by principles rooted in equity and authentic learning. Strategies can be informed by pioneering districts such as Miami-Dade in Florida, and Lindsay Unified in California.
2. **Support high-quality distance and blended learning models with educator training and materials.** To be effective, online learning should follow research-based principles to be as interactive and authentic as possible, combining live interaction among students and teachers with interactive multimedia materials that support well-designed assignments and projects that students may complete at home.
3. **Give special consideration to early childhood learning.** As the National P-3 Center and Edutopia have outlined, early childhood is a unique developmental period that requires a customized approach, including modeling and teaching strategies to caregivers at home, using accessible materials to promote equity.
4. **Develop standards for digital learning that articulate how technology should be used to empower learners.** Productive policies for using technology involve using interactive technologies in concert with teachers and peers to enable learners to explore and create

rather than to experience "drill and kill." States can encourage these more effective uses of technology by creating standards and guidance and offering strong models for others to learn from.

5. **Enact distance learning with attention to equity.** Strategies such as creating "learning hubs" that transform community spaces for student support are needed to ensure that students with the highest needs, including youth experiencing homelessness, those without internet, and those with working parents who cannot afford child care, can engage productively in distance and blended learning.
6. **Shift from measuring seat time to engagement.** The role of attendance in a hybrid, student-centered learning system shifts from time spent in class to engagement, participation, and student outcomes. Many states need to rewrite attendance laws and regulations so that they can track student engagement through competency-based tasks.

These principles and practices can help districts and schools successfully implement strong and more equitable models of learning that will serve students in the current crisis and in the future.

Priority 3: Assess What Students Need

Schools need to take stock of all of their students' experiences and needs as they build safe and welcoming communities, both in person and virtually, when school begins. To support the use of effective assessment processes moving forward, policymakers and educators can:

1. **Ensure that schools have the time and tools to take stock of children's overall needs.** School leaders can use surveys and other tools to learn what students and staff have been experiencing and ensure social and emotional supports. They can also identify and leverage community partners and resources to support all students across in- and out-of-school settings.
2. **Prioritize assessments that illuminate student growth and learning.** State and local leaders can emphasize authentic diagnostic and formative assessment approaches rather than decontextualized summative assessments; provide access to diagnostic assessment tools; support locally relevant assessments connected to curriculum and instructional resources; and avoid overtesting by making use of expertise, tools, and assessment data that are already available.
3. **Support acceleration of learning, not remediation.** While many districts and educators may feel pressure to address learning loss by holding students back or tracking them for remedial instruction, research shows that grade retention and "down tracking" actually undermine achievement. Formative assessment that includes actionable feedback immediately applied through practice and revision of work can more rapidly improve learning, especially when used with tailored acceleration strategies. This personalized instruction is best informed by the use of high-quality performance tasks such as those from the Balanced Assessment of Mathematics or the Developmental Reading Assessment that provide rich information, not just scores.

4. **Invest in teachers' knowledge and skills for formative assessment.** Policymakers and school leaders can support ongoing and embedded teacher professional learning for formative assessment, including through micro-credentialing, and build capacity for meaningful use of existing assessment information that is already part of a teacher's repertoire.
5. **Move toward more coherent systems of assessment of, for, and as learning.** Formative and summative assessments should represent ambitious learning goals and be coherently linked through a well-articulated model of learning that incorporates learning progressions, along with intermediate stages and instructional means for reaching those goals. States and districts can use this moment to consider how to create more thoughtful systems of assessment that accomplish these goals, as New Hampshire has done and a growing number of other states are doing, using federal waivers that may set the stage for new approaches when the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is reauthorized.

While it is important to assess what students learned at home over the past several months, it is equally if not more important to shift away from deficit-oriented strategies and decontextualized modes of assessment toward authentic, formative assessments that are part of a coherent strategy to improve student learning.

Priority 4: Ensure Supports for Social and Emotional Learning

Integrating social and emotional learning (SEL) into the life of a school is essential to mitigate the pandemic's impact on lifelong success and learning. To ensure supports for SEL, policymakers and educators can:

1. **Implement a comprehensive system of support.** Effective school environments take a systematic approach to promoting children's social, emotional, and academic well-being, including counseling and additional behavioral, mental health, and trauma supports.
2. **Ensure opportunities for explicit teaching of social and emotional skills at every grade level.** These include locating a place in the curriculum and school day in which students and educators can develop and practice key skills and competencies, such as morning meetings and advisories; developing or adopting an evidence-based SEL program; and using strategies for managing stress, such as mindfulness and other techniques that calm and center thinking and emotions.
3. **Infuse SEL into instruction in all classes.** Students need opportunities to develop social and emotional skills throughout their school day. Schools can leverage readily available curricular resources, such as Facing History and Ourselves, EL Education, and Transforming Education, that include embedded SEL. They can also provide guidance and training to help educators integrate SEL skills, including executive function, collaboration, and productive mindsets, into daily work.
4. **Institute restorative practices.** SEL programs cannot enable meaningful long-term growth for students in environments that are otherwise authoritarian, punitive, and exclusionary rather than educative and inclusive. Instilling more educative and inclusive environments can be accomplished by ending zero-tolerance policies and exclusionary discipline and adopting equity-oriented restorative practices in their place.

5. **Enact policies that enable SEL and restorative practices.** States and districts can help schools to implement these practices by adopting clear standards and guidance for SEL, trauma-informed practices, and restorative practices as well as providing funding and supports for curriculum resources and ongoing professional development.

Priority 5: Redesign Schools for Stronger Relationships

Research shows that school designs that support caring and continuity in student–teacher relationships are more able to address trauma and strengthen achievement than traditional factory model schools. In addition, the latest international and U.S. guidance makes clear that safely reopening school buildings and resuming in-person learning requires having fewer students and staff interact face-to-face. Relationship-centered cohort designs will be key. To redesign schools for strong relationships, educators and policymakers can:

1. **Create structures that foster health and safety, as well as personalization and trust, among children and staff.** Policymakers and school leaders can help schools put these structures into place by offering models of new designs and removing regulatory impediments. This can be accomplished by maximizing relationships through looping, advisories, and small mentored groups and by restructuring schools to create small cohorts or houses that stay together.
2. **Strengthen partnerships with families.** Out of necessity during school closures, many schools and districts have found new strategies and routines for connecting with families that should not be lost with reopening but rather should become part of the core approach to education. Virtual home visits are one of the many strategies that schools can use to build relational trust and make families feel welcome.
3. **Cultivate supportive environments filled with emotional safety and belonging.** To provide the emotional supports students need to learn, schools and educators can dedicate time at the start of the year for intentional community building while designing learning experiences and cohorts that promote inclusion and reduce segregation, allowing children to interact and learn in heterogeneous groups and classes.
4. **Enact policies that support relationship-centered designs.** These include removing impediments to and providing supports for relationship-centered school designs. These designs can be paired with policies that provide time and funding for collaboration and capacity building among staff and for staff outreach to students and families, including home visits and regular check-ins.

These strategies can help foster strong relationships even in virtual environments and in ways that can promote the health and success of the entire school community for generations to come.

Priority 6: Emphasize Authentic, Culturally Responsive Learning

Schools that have successfully motivated students to engage in learning even when schooling has been disrupted have connected lessons to real-world applications, allowing students to explore the world around them and to demonstrate what they know through projects and presentations that display the products of their work. To support this kind of learning, policymakers and educators can:

1. **Offer guidance for how schools can restart by focusing on authentic learning and assessment strategies.** States and districts can support curriculum that emphasizes opportunities for students to meet standards through student-driven projects.
2. **Provide curriculum tools and professional learning for educators to support more authentic learning and assessment.** States and districts can offer schools and educators opportunities to engage in professional learning; to join networks of schools that have created productive approaches to learning; and to access standards-based curricula they can draw upon and adapt to develop authentic learning experiences for students—such as project-based learning and performance-based assessments, including capstone projects.
3. **Ensure that authentic learning is also culturally connected and culturally sustaining.** Schools and districts can support educators in developing and using culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogies as a means for engaging and deepening student learning by recognizing their students' experiences as a foundation on which to build knowledge.
4. **Build capacity for inclusive, identity-safe, culturally responsive practice.** State and local leaders can help build the capacity of school staff by providing resources, time, and space for professional learning that include identity-safe schools and classrooms, strategies to address stereotype threat and implicit bias, and proactive approaches to anti-racist practice and culturally responsive pedagogies.
5. **Redesign assessments to emphasize applied learning and complex problem-solving.** A growing number of states, schools, and districts are working together in collaboratives from New York and Massachusetts to California and Hawaii to create equitable and high-quality performance assessment systems that support authentic learning and focus schoolwork on higher-order skills. This is the time for these efforts to redefine curriculum, instruction, assessment, and accountability as focused on the ability to apply meaningful learning in deep and transferable ways.

Given the shifts in schooling that will continue to occur, this is the time to reinvent educational practices so that teaching is guided by the science of learning and supported through high-quality opportunities for authentic learning and assessment that can support meaningful, relevant, and complex learning experiences in the classroom and virtually.

Priority 7: Provide Expanded Learning Time

A critical approach to restarting and reinventing school is to provide expanded learning time (ELT) and opportunities for all students, with special attention paid to students with special education needs, students who are English learners, and students who have been disconnected during the pandemic. ELT is not just an add-on program, field trip, or enrichment opportunity; it complements the learning that takes place during the typical school day. To better structure and expand ELT, policymakers and educators can:

1. **Infuse high-quality tutoring within and beyond the school day.** There is a well-established literature on the positive effects of tutoring, which can produce large gains that can be achieved cost-effectively both in-person and virtually.
2. **Expand high-quality after-school programs.** Research shows that after-school extensions of learning time, when used well, can accelerate learning and reduce the opportunity gap. After-school learning opportunities are made more meaningful when they

align with the school's academic learning goals and incorporate meaningful activities that engage deeper learning pedagogies with content that is connected to students' cultural backgrounds and lives outside of school.

3. **Create high-quality summer programs.** States and districts should plan to provide ELT for students in summer 2021 and in future summers, when learning loss typically occurs. Well-designed summer programs have a purposeful curriculum, have stable staff, and are culturally relevant and engaging enough to stimulate consistent attendance; these programs are most effective when students experience them for multiple summers.
4. **Expand the reach and duration of early learning programs.** The gap in learning time between students from lower-income and upper-income families begins in early childhood and continues into k–12; therefore, one critical way to expand learning time for children is to ensure high-quality early learning. While some part-day programs have shown strong results, most of the highly effective programs are full-day.
5. **Enact policies and access funding to support expanded learning time.** States can use a variety of federal programs to support districts and schools to add instructional days to the calendar and extend the length of the school day to provide meaningful increases in learning time for students, including multiple funding streams under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), CARES Act funds, and state-level funding.

By integrating ELT with existing school programs and making it culturally relevant for students and families, schools and districts can help counteract the negative impacts of the pandemic.

Priority 8: Establish Community Schools and Wraparound Supports

Community schools offer a path forward to coordinate services for supporting children and families during this stressful time and have demonstrated their capacity to meet students' needs during the pandemic. To establish and expand community schools and wraparound supports, policymakers and educators can:

1. **Enact local policies that support well-designed community schools.** These policies should be grounded in four evidence-based pillars: integrated student supports, expanded and enriched learning time, active family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership practices.
2. **Enlist regional agencies that can provide technical assistance and help coordinate local services.** Technical assistance in this context includes the various supports needed to launch and sustain community school initiatives at scale, such as coordination of state and county services from multiple agencies, professional development and coaching for district and school staff, support for strategic planning, and partnership development that brings resources to schools (e.g., direct staffing, service provision, and funding).
3. **Create reliable funding streams to support community school needs.** State and local leaders can blend and braid federal, state, and local funding streams to provide integrated health, mental health, and social services alongside high-quality, supportive instruction in community schools.

4. **Create Children's Cabinets at the federal, state, and county levels to coordinate, integrate, and streamline services across agencies.** Leaders at multiple levels can help enable more effective and efficiently provided resources for services to children and youth by creating a Children's Cabinet or other vehicle to coordinate services at the top of the system so that they flow smoothly and seamlessly to districts and schools.

Priority 9: Prepare Educators for Reinventing School

Everything described here requires knowledgeable, skilled, dedicated educators; there is no other way to get the kind of teaching we need. While the immediate needs of communities will create major pressures on budgets, it is important for policymakers to recognize how critically important it is to recruit, develop, and retain a strong educator workforce so that other aspirations for education for our children can be realized. The incentives needed to accomplish this reside at the federal, state, and local levels. To ensure that educators are prepared for the daunting work they undertake, policymakers and educators can:

1. **Invest in high-quality educator preparation, especially for high-need communities where shortages continue to be problematic.** High-quality programs begin with strong, research-aligned standards for teaching, which policymakers can update and strengthen to reflect the needs of today's students. Policymakers can support high-retention strategies and pathways, including service scholarships and loan forgiveness programs, teacher and leader residencies, and Grow-Your-Own programs.
2. **Transform educator learning opportunities to match current needs.** Expectations of educators are higher than they have ever been. Educator preparation programs need more effective ways of developing and sharing expertise across the profession, such as through the Educator Preparation Laboratory, collaboration to spread best practices for teacher and leader preparation across the profession, and strategies like micro-credentialing, which may become increasingly important in identifying teaching experts in distance and blended learning, as well as other intensely needed skills.
3. **Support mentoring and new teacher roles.** Policymakers and school leaders can consider new teaching roles and arrangements that support novice teachers and address the health concerns of veteran teachers. This may include veteran teachers serving as virtual mentors for colleagues and new teachers; leveraging student teachers and paraprofessionals as members of teaching teams; and utilizing technology to increase professional expertise sharing, such as by streaming lessons offered by expert teachers and providing job-embedded learning.
4. **Create collaboration time.** As many states and districts are thinking very differently about their use of time and are developing innovative teaching and learning schedules, a part of the new normal should include efforts to secure more collaboration time for teachers and opportunities for them to work in teams.
5. **Take the long view.** Policymakers can also use this time to plan ahead to ensure that, as resources come back into the system, they are spent to leverage greater teaching expertise. States (and countries) that have made substantial gains and closed achievement gaps have made systemic investments in educator quality. Preparation to make such investments can begin now, informed by the changing needs of today's students and schools.

Priority 10: Leverage More Adequate and Equitable School Funding

Even before COVID-19, most state education finance systems were not working for students from low-income families, students of color, and those with a range of needs. Without a determined effort to produce a different outcome, funding cuts made to education now could be as long-lasting as they were after the Great Recession. To leverage more equitable funding, policymakers and educators can:

1. **Leverage federal funds for equity.** States and districts have an opportunity to use the funds provided through the CARES Act and any subsequent federal aid by making strategic investments that build local capacity to support all students—and especially the most marginalized—throughout the school year *and* in times of crisis.
2. **Adopt more equitable state school funding formulas.** States can seize the moment of the economic downturn to transform their funding systems to create new funding formulas that are designed to distribute funds more equitably as resources return to the system, as California and Rhode Island did during the Great Recession.
3. **Include preschool in funding formulas.** Policymakers can add preschool programs to school funding formulas. Even in the midst of recessions, state policymakers have added preschool through strategies such as the 10-year phase-in period used in West Virginia.

Policymakers have the opportunity during economic downturns to redesign both federal aid and state and local funding systems to lead to increased educational equity over time.

Conclusion

As states, districts, and schools prepare to restart and reinvent in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative that we transform our ideas of school to match the demands of this historic moment. It is clear that returning to business as usual in education is not possible and that we must think of "school" in deeply different ways. Irrespective of the approach taken to instruction or the medium through which it takes place—online, in person, or a hybrid—policymakers and educators can take steps to ensure that all children, regardless of income and internet access, can participate in supportive and meaningful learning experiences. To accomplish this, our education system needs to transform our ideas of school to match the demands of this moment. Reinventing school means focusing on authentic learning and equity and harnessing the knowledge of human development, learning, and effective teaching accumulated over the last century and needed for the next.

Introduction

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to spread throughout the United States, every school district faces a series of difficult decisions about what is best for children, families, and the community. It is now clear that picking up where we left off and returning to business as usual in education is not possible. But since its inception, our education system has been deeply unequal and erratic in delivering on the promise of a quality education for all of America's children. This pandemic puts a stark light on an emerging truth—education as we know it is over, and we must think of "school" in deeply different ways.

As the crisis began, millions of children lacked fundamental internet and device access to make remote learning possible, creating even greater equity gaps than before. But some states and districts have risen to the challenge of providing ongoing learning and supports to students and their families. Many of their creative responses hold promise for new and enduring ways to address educational quality and inequity. We now have the opportunity to follow the many inspiring examples educators have set and to shift our very idea of school to match the demands of this historic moment.

Why We Should Aim for Reinvention

Our current system took shape almost exactly a century ago, when scientific managers were looking for ways to accommodate the huge influx of students into urban areas from migration and immigration, coupled with the spread of compulsory education. The primary goal was preparing students for manual work on farms and in factories, as factory and landowners sought efficiencies from the rise of assembly-line technologies and new model bureaucracies. Schools were developed to maximize rule following and rote learning and to minimize relationships. Only a small number of students were identified for access to the higher-order skills needed for thinking work. Funding, school assignment, and tracking systems designed to allocate students to their "places in life" were enacted within contexts of deep-seated racial, ethnic, and cultural prejudice.

Educators and policymakers have sought to evolve this system over the ensuing decades, with recurring eras of reform that have made small dents in the systems we have inherited. However, in a moment when we have more knowledge about human development and learning, when society and the economy demand a more challenging set of skills, and when—at least in our rhetoric—there is a greater social commitment to equitable education, it is time to use the huge disruptions caused by this pandemic to reinvent our systems of education.

We now know a great deal that we did not know 100 years ago. We know much about how people learn; how to enhance children's development through productive relationships in supportive settings; and how to enhance their learning through inquiry-oriented, culturally relevant pedagogy and curricula, as well as through authentic, formative assessments.

The question is: How can we harness these understandings as we necessarily rethink school? How can we transform what has not been working for children and adults? As state and district leaders prepare for what schooling will look like in 2020 and beyond, there is an opportunity to identify evidence-based policies and practices that will enable them to seize this moment to

strengthen learning opportunities for students. Currently, these efforts are highly variable and inequitably available, but growing coordination across state and district lines can solve some of our greatest challenges.

While deep inequalities have pervaded every aspect of education since schools were closed in the spring, remarkable areas of innovation and change have also occurred. We have seen more rapid progress in 2020 in bridging the digital divide than we have seen in the last 20 years. We have seen more uptake of technology-driven innovations in teaching, more outreach directly to families, and more collaboration time for teachers than were thought possible even a few months before the pandemic shut down in-person learning.

The initial changes were made quickly to meet immediate needs, but a broader question should guide our efforts throughout this year and beyond. How can we redesign schools to be:

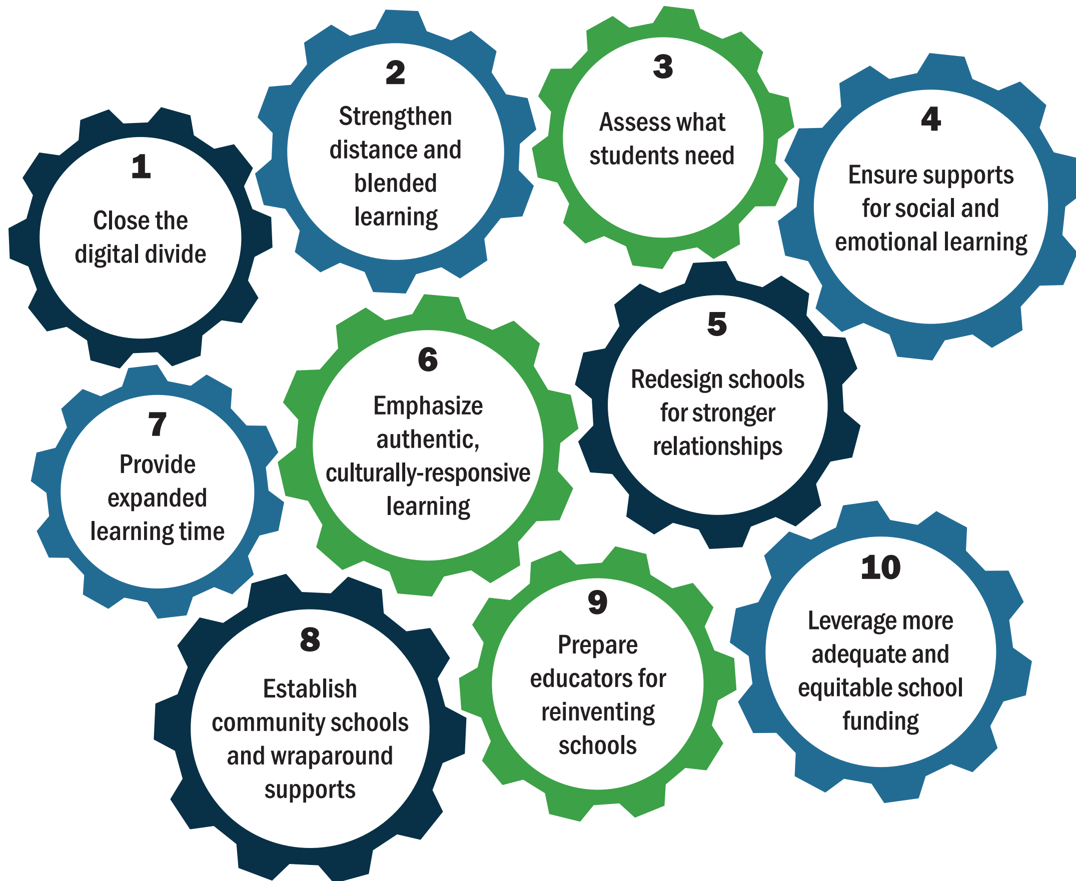
- student-centered in ways that support the whole child's social, emotional, cognitive, moral, and identity development;
- focused on deeper learning that meets the demands of today's society;
- culturally and linguistically connected and sustaining;
- grounded in collaboration among students, staff, families, and communities; and
- equitable in the opportunities provided and outcomes achieved?

The Purpose of This Framework

Policymakers, educators, students, and families face daunting challenges as the 2020–21 school year begins. As communities continue to suffer from surging outbreaks of COVID-19, districts are considering a range of differing approaches to online, hybrid, and in-person instruction while they balance health and safety considerations. The framework presented here does not try to replicate the guidance that has been issued related to health and safety guidelines for reopening schools and how to organize school schedules to allow for social distancing, distance learning, and blended learning (see resources below).

This report builds on this guidance and focuses on how policymakers as well as educators can support equitable, effective teaching and learning regardless of the medium through which that takes place. It provides an overarching framework to inform the restart of schools for the 2020–21 school year while also providing a long-term vision that can guide leaders toward new and enduring ways to address educational quality and inequity (see Figure 1). The framework provides research, state and local examples, and policy recommendations in 10 key areas that speak to both transforming learning and closing opportunity and achievement gaps.

Figure 1
A Framework for Restarting and Reinventing School



This framework builds on and recognizes other student-centered, equity-oriented frameworks that have been developed, synthesizing key ideas while organizing them within a broader framework focused on authentic learning and equity and grounded in research spanning early childhood through secondary schooling. Woven throughout the framework and included, as relevant, in the areas of focus identified above is the important role that engagement of children, families, educators, and communities plays in creating and advancing a vision for quality and equity in our schools and school systems.

Resources

Health and Safety

- Considerations for Schools (Centers for Disease for Control and Prevention)
- Framework for Reopening Schools (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization)
- A Plan to Safely Reopen America's Schools and Communities: Guidance for Imagining a New Normal for Public Education, Public Health and Our Economy in the Age of COVID-19 (American Federation of Teachers)
- Ready Schools, Safe Learners: Guidance for School Year 2020–21 (Oregon Department of Education)
- Reopening Schools in the Context of COVID-19: Health and Safety Guidelines From Other Countries (Learning Policy Institute)

Strategies for Reopening

- All Hands on Deck: Initial Guidance Regarding Reopening School Buildings (National Education Association)
- A Blueprint for Back to School (American Enterprise Institute)
- COVID-19 Resources for Field Leaders (Science of Learning and Development Alliance)
- Guidance on Culturally Responsive-Sustaining School Reopenings: Centering Equity to Humanize the Process of Coming Back Together (Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools)
- Guidelines for Reopening Schools (American Association for School Administrators)
- Planning for Reentry & Recovery: A Guide for Promoting Equity, Improvement, and Innovation (FourPoint Education Partners)
- Recommendations for Prioritizing Equity in the Response to COVID-19 (Alliance for Excellent Education)
- Restart & Recovery: Considerations for Teaching & Learning Overview (Council of Chief State School Officers)
- Restart & Recovery: Considerations for Teaching & Learning: States Policies and Actions (Council of Chief State School Officers)
- The Return: How Should Education Leaders Prepare for Reentry and Beyond? (Chiefs for Change and Johns Hopkins University Institute for Education Policy)
- Reunite, Renew, Thrive: Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Roadmap for Returning to School (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning)
- Reopening: Moving Toward More Equitable Schools (EL Education)

Priority 1: Close the Digital Divide

The COVID-19 crisis has made it clear that technology-supported learning will be part of the future of education and that all children must be provided with access. Schools may reopen only to close again for periods of time over the coming school year; some may reopen with schedules that blend distance learning with social distancing on-site; and, even when schools reopen, students will need to stay home if they have been exposed to the virus, so they may have to plug in to distance learning at any time. Even once the pandemic passes, natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods, and fires will continue to shutter schools for periods of time.

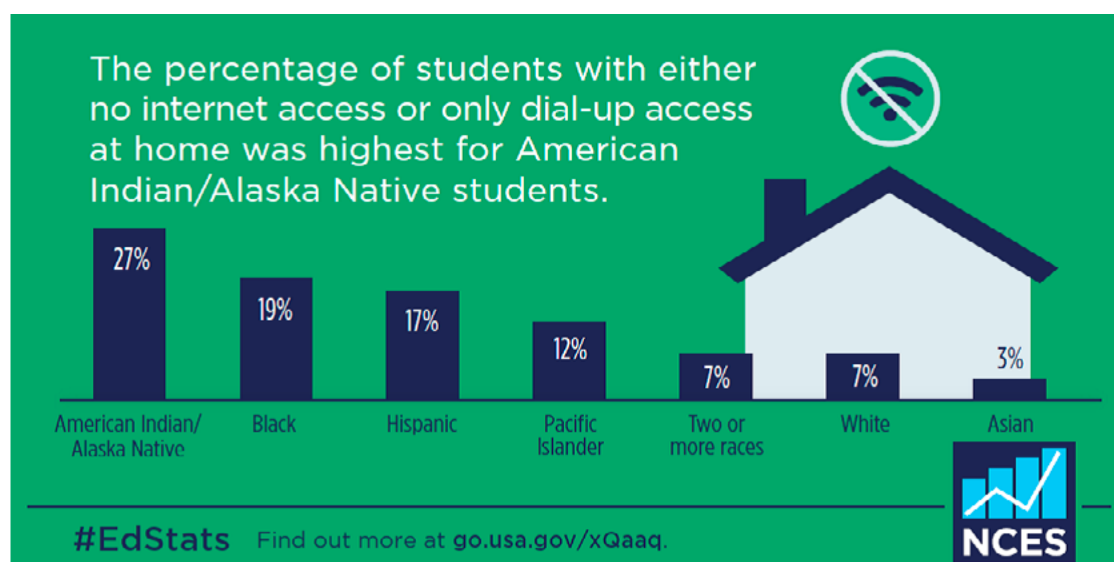
What Students Need

Computers and connectivity are to today's schools what textbooks and chalkboards were to the schools of the past. Cell phone access is not enough. Every student needs access to high-speed connectivity and to computers that are adequate to support not only streaming of videos and access to information, but also the capacity to write and revise text; create spreadsheets and engage in mathematical modeling; engage in simulations; and develop PowerPoint presentations, websites, and web tools in various forms.

The pandemic has highlighted disparities in access to digital devices and the internet. School closures in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis have had a huge impact on families and learning—an impact felt most deeply in low-income communities and communities of color.

Even before the pandemic, there were stark digital divides along racial and ethnic lines. In 2018, the National Center for Education Statistics conducted a study of the percentage of Americans between the ages of 5 and 17 who had access to the internet. The study found wide differences by race and ethnicity (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1
Percentage of Students Without High-Speed Internet by Race and Ethnicity



Source: NCES. (2018). The digital divide: Differences in home internet access.

According to a new report from Common Sense and Boston Consulting Group, based on data from the 2018 census, roughly 30% of the 50 million k–12 students in the United States lacked either high-speed internet or devices with the capacity they need for easy access to digital learning at home. Of these young people, nearly two thirds lacked both high-speed internet and a usable device. Furthermore, at least 300,000 teachers lacked high-speed internet adequate to teach online from home. A report from the Alliance for Excellent Education, National Indian Education Association, National Urban League, and UnidosUS shows that these disparities disproportionately impact students of color, students from low-income families, and students in rural communities.

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While a number of states and school districts reduced this divide with investments in devices and hotspots to enable distance learning during school closings last spring, many of the investments were temporary, as companies offered free internet for short periods of time and devices were often pulled from in-school computer carts to which they will return.

A recent national survey from ParentsTogether in spring 2020 revealed that 13% of parents from low-income homes (earning less than $25,000 annually) reported lacking devices or internet connections, and they were nearly 10 times more likely to say their children were doing little or no remote learning than those from affluent homes (38% vs. 4%). Students from low-income homes were also 3 times more likely to report not having consistent access to a device (32% vs. 10%) and were 5 times more likely to attend a school without distance learning materials or activities (11% vs. 2%).

Another equity concern is access to both basic and assistive technologies needed to support students with individualized education plans. These students may need adaptive equipment and special software. They will also require different kinds of instructional planning and preparation, including ongoing evaluation to determine the appropriateness of particular online and hybrid approaches.

The digital divide parallels the educational divide, and unless it is closed now, it will result in an ever-widening learning gap. The current crisis provides an opportunity to close the educational equity gap and create new and transformative educational strategies based on deeper and authentic learning. The Common Sense Media report estimated that closing the divide will require at least $6 billion in immediate investments for infrastructure and devices at the federal level—of which half would be recurring costs each year. Also needed are changes in policy, so that internet connectivity is treated by federal and state regulators the same way we treat access to telephone services, with rate structures and subsidies that guarantee access and affordability.

What Policymakers and Educators Can Do

With connectivity now clearly essential to ongoing learning as well as families' access to telehealth, employment, and needed benefits, some states and districts, as well as corporations and philanthropies, have made major investments in technology for students. At the federal level,

opportunities already exist through the E-Rate program housed in the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which schools had already been using for internet connectivity.[1] Funds could be expanded and allocated through the FCC's E-Rate program to provide broadband as well as hotspot access to rural areas of the country.

At the state level, there are some outstanding examples of progress being made to close the digital divide. Promising practices include stakeholder outreach and engagement, robust policy frameworks, planning and capacity building, and improved funding and operations, as we describe below.

Prioritize federal efforts to close the digital divide

Every student, no matter her or his living situation, deserves access to an adequate computing device and internet connectivity. An allocation of $500 per student would cover the costs for equipping a household with an inexpensive device, connecting to a high-speed internet provider, and funding training. Given the major economic downturn and state revenue declines accompanying pandemic-related shutdowns, federal recovery funds to education will be needed to supplement state budgets for this purpose, among others.

As outlined in the recent Common Sense Media report, federal policymakers should take swift policy action in the short term by passing the next stimulus bill with funding to ensure internet service and devices at home for students who lack them through expanded funding for federal E-Rate supports and through direct funds to states and districts. They should also take long-term action and invest funding to upgrade and close gaps in the nation's broadband infrastructure. Furthermore, future regulation of broadband should be modeled more closely on the regulation of the telephone industry, which provides incentives to providers and rate structures for households designed to ensure access in every home.

Closing the divide is critical not only to ensuring educational equity but also to sustaining economic security. The work of economist Brian Whitacre at Oklahoma State University demonstrates that there are major economic returns on rural broadband investment in both jobs and income.[2] Despite past failures, policymakers in the United States now have an opportunity to bridge this divide with smart, sustainable, and well-funded policies that support those in need.

Expand broadband access through state and city initiatives

In February 2020, The Pew Charitable Trusts published a comprehensive state-by-state overview, *How States Are Expanding Broadband Access*. Kathryn de Wit, manager of the broadband research initiative at The Pew Charitable Trusts, noted in an interview that "for the better part of a decade, states have been rolling up their sleeves and making meaningful progress on bridging the digital divide. As leaders at all levels of government look for solutions to address broadband challenges, they can learn from states."

At least nine states have made substantial gains in broadband access in recent years. Minnesota has placed most of its broadband program in statute and included clear goals for broadband expansion, a state Office of Broadband Development, and a fund to support broadband infrastructure, and launched the Minnesota K-12 Connect Forward Initiative in 2016. In West Virginia, the legislature established the West Virginia Broadband Enhancement Council to provide policy guidance and technical assistance to communities.

The Colorado Department of Local Affairs centralizes the state's financial and technical assistance to local governments and offers regional broadband planning grants. In Tennessee, the legislature passed a 2017 measure creating the Tennessee Broadband Accessibility Grant Program to support broadband deployment in unserved areas in the state. In Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Broadband Office makes grants to support the deployment of broadband infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas of the state.

Wyoming has also established itself as a leader in expanding access. In 2016, the state of Wyoming was ranked No. 1 in the nation in broadband connectivity, having addressed the needs of 100% of its school districts in a sparsely populated, rural state. This outcome was in large part because of a statewide education technology plan, which has as its goal to "better provide equal access to education through technology." Each of these states has developed strong solutions for ensuring that every child has internet access.

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Cleveland, OH, is a city-level example of access success. The Cleveland Metropolitan School District and the nonprofit DigitalC have worked together since the pandemic struck to hand out over 17,000 devices and provide 4,700 temporary hotspots. In partnership with, and with additional funding from, the city of Cleveland and MetroHealth, the district is paying DigitalC a discounted rate of $16 per household to install antennas and other equipment throughout the city.

Organize access to devices and connectivity

Once every home has the potential for internet access, many students will still need Wi-Fi and an internet-capable device at home in order to participate in distance and hybrid learning. When cellular service is the only viable option, students will need LTE-enabled devices or mobile hotspots. Many state and local reopening plans include a requirement that each district undertake a survey of device needs across families to determine how best to narrow the digital divide.

This work can be centralized in order to ensure quick delivery of laptops and other devices during a time when there are already disruptions in the supply chain. California has already surveyed all of its districts, and in April 2020 established a task force overseeing the California Bridging the Digital Divide Fund, a joint effort of the Governor's Office, the State Board of Education, and the California Department of Education (CDE). The funds raised go directly to equip school districts with resources they need to enable distance learning. With contributions from corporations and foundations, the state has purchased hundreds of thousands of Wi-Fi hotspots and Chromebooks for students to support district efforts. Many county offices and large districts, including Los Angeles, did the same to purchase devices and hotspots in bulk.

In May 2020, California Assemblywoman Rebecca Bauer-Kahan introduced a bill to close the digital divide by providing school districts financial relief through the elimination of the sales tax on device purchases. This new legislation, which is currently being amended in the state senate, builds upon prior efforts, including a 2017 measure sponsored by the California Emerging Technology Fund that created the California Advanced Services Fund Broadband Adoption Account, which provided $20 million for

digital literacy programs. A cross-sector partnership between the California Public Utilities Commission and CDE was formed as part of a broadband in schools initiative to distribute $25 million from the California Teleconnect Fund for Wi-Fi hotspots and internet service for student households.

Nebraska has also quickly responded to both the immediate crisis and the longer-term challenge with the Launch Nebraska initiative, which contains a thorough set of digital learning guidelines. The state has established a hierarchy of digital learning needs, beginning with infrastructure (equity of broadband internet access to every home); proceeding to devices (a computing device for every student), software systems (learning management, content management, collaborative learning technologies, and the integration of these systems), and digital content (online digital resources); and finally to professional development and training (effective methods for teaching and learning in a digital world, whether virtual or face-to-face).

Policymakers can learn from these examples and others that inform efforts to bridge the digital divide. Every family will need both broadband and device access in order to have an uninterrupted education. With COVID-19 surging across broad swaths of the country, learning cannot occur without these foundational investments. Left unaddressed, the digital divide will continue to widen gaps in achievement and attainment. Even with uncertain federal funding and local tax revenues, it will be imperative for states, cities, and districts to move swiftly to make blended and distance learning possible for every child.

Resources

- How States Are Expanding Broadband Access (The Pew Charitable Trusts). This report identifies and explores promising practices for connecting unserved communities through examples in nine states.
- Closing the K-12 Digital Divide in the Age of Distance Learning (Common Sense Media). This report, done in partnership with Boston Consulting Group, analyzes the digital divide for America's k–12 public school students and teachers and provides strategies for moving forward to close the digital divide.
- Digital Learning Plan (Wyoming). This 2017-2018 framework helped the state achieve 100% broadband connectivity and become the national leader in high-speed access.
- empowerCLE+ (DigitalC). This nonprofit organization provides a growing number of communities in the greater Cleveland area with $18/month internet access—a potential model for philanthropic partnerships in other states.
- Return to School Roadmap (Opportunity Labs). This roadmap neatly describes what to do first, what to do before school opens, and what to do when schools are open and operating, including districtwide procedures for devices.

Endnotes

1. Puma, M. J., Chaplin, D. D., & Pape, A. D. (2000). *E-Rate and the digital divide: A preliminary analysis from the integrated studies of educational technology*. Chicago, IL: Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/research/publication/e-rate-and-digital-divide.
2. Whitacre, B., Gallardo, R., & Strover, S. (2014). Broadband's contribution to economic growth in rural areas: Moving towards a causal relationship. *Telecommunications Policy*, *38*(11), 1011–1023.

Priority 2: Strengthen Distance and Blended Learning

Once all students have access to high-speed internet and to devices adequate for managing school work, the challenge of implementing high-quality distance learning and blended learning models remains. Hybrid and blended learning models can facilitate continuity of learning by enabling teaching and learning to occur both in person and online on an as-needed basis. The key goal is that "the modalities along each student's learning path within a course or subject are connected to provide an integrated learning experience."[1] Furthermore, student-centered blended learning models that tap new uses of technology across home and school spaces can, when they guide purposeful use of teacher time, increase equity in learning while offering productive models in this new environment.

What Students Need

Most students will not have access to school buildings for a full 5 days a week this fall. Some will still be engaged in distance learning because of their personal health considerations or until infection rates recede in their community. Others will be in school on alternating days or weeks to allow for social distancing, as recent guidance from the CDC acknowledges. In models in which students are in school only part of the time to allow for social distancing—or alternating on Zoom between synchronous and asynchronous activities—the time in class may be used to introduce new concepts and information to the group and to get students started on the inquiries they will use to further explore or apply that information. Then students may continue those inquiries when they are in asynchronous or distance learning mode by applying newly learned skills; collecting data or evidence; completing additional reading and written reflection; working virtually with a small group to complete tasks; and preparing to present their ideas, findings, solutions, conjectures, or conclusions when they return to a full-class setting, either in person or online. In-school and out-of-school learning needs to be connected and seamless, with the tasks chosen to take advantage of the different settings in which learning is taking place.

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What Policymakers and Educators Can Do

While distance and blended learning models may be an entirely new experience for the majority of k–12 schools in the United States, there is a growing body of evidence about what works in these contexts that can be replicated across contexts.

Share pioneering efforts among districts

While this new era may feel like uncharted educational waters, educators can be guided in part by successful pioneers and by principles rooted in equity and authentic learning. Among the blended learning pioneers is the **Miami-Dade County Public School District** in Florida, where recurring hurricanes and flooding have long required a comprehensive distance learning strategy. The Miami-Dade County approach includes an instructional continuity plan with curriculum

designs, plans for access to devices and connectivity, and supports for parents and teachers that are activated whenever needed to ensure that instruction continues seamlessly. Along with extensive professional development, among the resources the district offers teachers are videos of expert teachers, "Distance Learning Champions," illustrating and discussing their lessons and approaches.

Lindsay Unified School District in California has offered a performance-based learning system over the past 5 years that leverages technology and blended learning as a tool to deliver learning approaches that are learner-centered, inquiry-based, personalized to learner interests, offered at a differentiated pace with multiple means to demonstrate knowledge, balanced between online and in-person settings, and engaged in formative feedback to inform instruction daily.

With personalized, competency-based learning and blended learning implemented, Lindsay Unified was able to transition seamlessly to distance learning during the pandemic. This was made possible because in 2015, the district designed and implemented a free Community Wi-Fi program. Today, all of Lindsay Unified's students and their parents can access filtered internet from their homes, free of charge. This program was not grant-funded or financed externally. Instead, the district repurposed budgets and avoided textbook adoptions to invest in digital formats and systems that support equity and all learners' needs.

According to a recent study, Building Solid Evidence—It's Working at Lindsay Unified, this school district that serves 91% students from low-income families and 41% English learners has maintained a 97% attendance rate for the past 5 years and a 94% graduation rate. Over the past 5 years, Lindsay Unified students' proficiency rates have increased from 26% to 47% on the state's Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium assessment in English language arts, moving the district from the 33rd percentile to the 87th percentile among similar school districts in California.

As noted in the examples below and the resources provided, there are many pioneering districts across the country that can help others think about how to undertake these new challenges well.

Support high-quality distance and blended learning models with educator training and materials

To be effective, online learning should be much more than the teacher talking and the students listening through another medium. It should be as interactive and authentic as possible, combining live interaction among students and teachers with interactive multimedia materials that support well-designed assignments and projects that students may complete at home. A recent synthesis of research on computer-supported distance learning,[2] reinforced by other research,[3] found that:

- **Well-designed online or blended instruction can be as or more effective than in-classroom learning alone.** While many worry that distance learning is necessarily less effective than in-person learning, many studies show that well-designed distance learning that has the features described below is generally more effective than traditional in-classroom learning alone. (One caveat is that most studies are of students in the upper elementary grades and older; less is known about distance learning for young children.)
- **Synchronous and asynchronous instruction should be combined in strategic ways.** Combining synchronous activities in which students meet online or in person with their teachers and classmates with asynchronous activities in which students engage deeply with both the subject matter and groups of peers is more effective than fully synchronous online courses.

- **Student control in how to engage with asynchronous online elements enhances learning.** Students do better when they can go at their own pace, on their own time, when they have some choice over their learning strategies, and when materials enable them to engage deeply and critically with course content. For example, in one study, students who were allowed to watch assigned videos in any order, and fast-forward, rewind, and replay them, significantly outperformed those who had to use the videos in a predetermined standardized fashion. Similarly, student control over when and how to use other learning materials enhances their motivation and performance.

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- **Frequent, direct, and meaningful interaction is critical.** The more intense the interaction among students, teachers, and interactive content, the deeper the learning. In online learning environments in which there is little student–student, student–instructor, and student–content interaction, students are more likely to become disengaged and are at higher risk of dropping out. Fully online courses with little high-quality interaction also contribute to gaps in educational success across socioeconomic groups.
- **Interaction should focus on solving problems and developing ideas.** Opportunities for students to engage in interdependent cooperative learning are important. This includes group engagement in shared projects and presentations as well as opportunities to interact with peers and the teacher in multiple formats. For example, whole-group and small-group discussion in synchronous instruction (for example, in Zoom breakout rooms), chat rooms and discussion boards that may be synchronous or asynchronous, and quick polls and votes followed by debate and discussion are all means to improve engagement and create positive effects on learning gains, as are interactive materials.
- **Interactive materials are extremely important.** High-quality distance learning should not rest on static textbooks or worksheets but on the use of interactive multimedia materials, typically during asynchronous learning. For example, 8th-grade students whose teachers integrated the use of the Pathways to Freedom Electronic Field Trips—an online collection of interactive activities designed by Maryland Public Television—in their teaching about slavery and the Underground Railroad outperformed those who had the same unit without these materials. Fifth-grade science students in Taiwan who used a virtual web-based science lab, which allowed them to conduct virtual experiments while teachers observed student work and corrected errors online, outperformed those who did an in-person manual science lab. Elementary special education students across five urban schools who used a web-based program that supports writing in action (by prompting attention to the topical organization and structure of ideas during the planning and composing phases of writing) outperformed those who had the same materials in hard copy in the classroom.

- **Opportunities for formative feedback, reflection, and revision strongly enhance learning.** For example, students performed better when they used a formative online self-assessment strategy that gave them feedback when they answered an item incorrectly: They were told that their response was not correct, and they were given additional resources to explore to find the correct answer. (They were not given the right answer.) Students who received quizzes that allowed them the opportunity for additional practice on items they answered incorrectly did better over time than those who received quizzes identifying only right and wrong answers. Studies have found positive effects on online learning of a variety of reflection tools, ranging from prompts asking students to reflect on their problem-solving activities to prompts asking them to provide explanations regarding their work; student reflection exercises during and after online learning activities; and learning guidance systems that ask questions as students design studies or conduct other activities that support their thinking processes without offering direct answers.
- **Self-management strategies should be explicitly taught.** Students who receive instruction in self-regulation learning strategies, such as managing study time, goal-setting, and self-evaluation, perform better in online learning. One tool found to promote success was a form on which students could record their study time and environment, note their learning process, predict their test scores, and create a self-evaluation.

Successful online teachers describe how these principles come alive in their practices and can be sources of professional development for other teachers. For example, teacher John McCarthy notes how important it is to:

1. **Establish structures for self-regulation and interaction.** Many students need help managing work time and productivity when adapting to a virtual environment. Provide checklists that are readily available to students and parents that break out the steps for task completion to help them understand the scope of the work and the milestones they'll accomplish along the way. Do check-ins to monitor progress on checklists and collect assessment data on students' growth. Include discussion boards and/or links to external dialog tools such as Flipgrid, and encourage students to discuss, review, and post links and other content that supports their learning.
2. **Provide choice and control by offering a variety of assignment or task formats.** Rather than assigning only worksheets or reading questions, which often leads to frustration and disengagement, offer students different approaches so they can build and apply knowledge. For example, provide a recorded lecture, two or three videos, and two readings about the topic. The students must listen to the lecture and then choose to complete a combination of the remaining content options. Provide links to reading assignments at different reading levels so that all students find a path to comprehension, with tools such as Newsela, Rewordify, News in Levels, and more. Give two or three choices for completing a task, such as writing; recording a video; building a slide deck; or using Minecraft Education to demonstrate math concepts, historical events, and literary ideas. Allow students to upload their work onto the classroom learning platform to share with peers.

3. **Keep it real.** Make the content relevant to authentic purposes outside of school. Connect assignments to career-related tasks, such as business plans, lab experiments, survey statistics, or recorded presentations. Identify an audience from the community whose occupation applies the concepts being taught, or give students a target audience for the tasks they are doing.
4. **Make work public.** Curate and publish student work for viewing by a target audience, such as the local community or organizations that might benefit from or appreciate a different perspective. Students who contribute to their communities see that their voice matters, and being published shows them the value of their evaluation and synthesis of curriculum. Work can also be shared with others in the classroom—as in book reviews to inform peers or presentations of work to others in the school. Learners tend to take more care with their work when the intent is to share with an audience beyond the teacher.

Teacher and professional development provider Kathryn Welby describes how to structure distance learning to support students with individualized education plans (IEPs), including how to:

- engage parents, set goals, and support them in supporting their child;
- create synchronous activities that are doable, engaging, fun, and productive; and
- create asynchronous supports including visuals, schedules, routines, movement breaks, and effective tools and materials, as well as a range of ways for students to show their learning.

Give special consideration to early childhood learning

Because very young children are also now learning from home, there is a danger that the digital divide might be baked in at an early age. Edutopia has published distance learning principles for educators to use in working with very young learners and their caregivers that offer a systematic approach meant to empower all families by:

- modeling everything that is being taught;
- speaking directly to caregivers about how they can support their young learners;
- ensuring equity by tailoring tasks and supports to families' needs and capacities; and
- creating a collaborative community among the families who are part of the class.

Early childhood and the early grades (pre-k through 3rd grade) is a unique developmental period that requires a different approach when conceptualizing and supporting distance learning than the upper grades. Despite this, few states required districts to give special consideration to the unique needs of distance learning for pre-k through 3rd-grade students. The National P-3 Center has identified the following principles to guide districts' and schools' at-home learning supports for pre-k through 3rd-grade students based upon fundamentals of child development and equity:

- Focus on relationships and social-emotional development. When technology is used, it should be used as a means to encourage interactions between children and adults and among children.
- Emphasize active, experiential learning. Focus on creating and promoting experiences that spark children's natural curiosity, foster self-directed investigations, and involve physical activity rather than passive screen time.

- Consider the unique needs of English learners. Work from an asset-based lens when offering supports, and partner with families to build upon multilingual families' funds of knowledge. Websites such as Ellevation from the Wide Open School project offer distance learning activities and other resources to supplement existing and new curricula.
- Consider the unique needs of students with IEPs. Utilize universal design for learning (UDL) to ensure that children with developmental delays and disabilities have access to the same opportunities as the rest of the student population, and leverage technology for IEP meetings and assessments. *On the Road to High-Quality Early Learning* offers a detailed look at how to implement these systems, and there are promising models for recruiting and retaining diverse, high-quality early childhood educators who can meet the needs of students with IEPs.

Develop standards for digital learning that articulate how technology should be used to empower learners

As research confirms, productive policies for using technology do not try to replace teachers with electronic workbooks, which many studies have found to be ineffective; rather, they use interactive technologies in concert with teachers and peers to enable learners to explore and create rather than to "drill and kill." One literature review summarized succinctly the typical uses and effects of technology in relation to different learner populations, noting that "the drill and practice activities favored in low-SES [socioeconomic status] schools tend to be ineffective, whereas the uses of technology disproportionately used in high-SES schools achieve positive results."[4] An analysis of data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) illustrates the point:

> As research confirms, productive policies for using technology do not try to replace teachers with electronic workbooks, which many studies have found to be ineffective; rather, they use interactive technologies in concert with teachers and peers to enable learners to explore and create rather than to "drill and kill."

> The use of simulations/applications in eighth grade and games in the fourth grade positively affected test scores, whereas drill and practice at the eighth grade negatively affected the scores. In science, games … word processing … simulations … and data analysis … all positively affected test scores. And in eighth grade reading, use of computers for writing activities positively affected test scores, but use of computers for grammar/punctuation or for reading activities (which usually involve drill or tutorials) negatively affected test scores.[5]

States can encourage these more effective uses of technology by creating standards and guidance and offering strong models for others to learn from. For example, in addition to its No. 1 ranking for internet access, Wyoming has created a Digital Learning Plan that provides a robust structure for digital learning and implementation, focusing on personalized, student-centered learning. (See Figure 2.1.) This research-based framework includes seven key "gears": (1) curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (2) use of space and time; (3) robust infrastructure; (4) data and privacy; (5) community partnerships; (6) personalized professional development; and (7) budget and resources. This framework guides professional learning and other supports for educators.

Figure 2.1
Wyoming's Framework for Digital Learning

Source: Wyoming Department of Education Digital Learning Plan.

Another resource is the International Society for Technology in Education's (ISTE) standards for student learning in the digital age, which are the foundation for resources available through ISTE Connect. Reflecting the ways in which technology is a tool for empowerment, the seven standards suggest the ideal student in the digital age is:

1. An Empowered Learner: Students leverage knowledge to take an active role in choosing, achieving, and demonstrating competency in their learning goals, informed by the learning sciences.

2. A Digital Citizen: Students recognize the rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of living, learning, and working in an interconnected digital world, and they act and model in ways that are safe, legal, and ethical.
3. A Knowledge Constructor: Students critically curate a variety of resources using digital tools to construct knowledge, produce creative artifacts, and make meaningful learning experiences for themselves and others.
4. An Innovative Designer: Students use a variety of technologies within a design process to identify and solve problems by creating new, useful, or imaginative solutions.
5. A Computational Thinker: Students develop and employ strategies for understanding and solving problems in ways that leverage the power of technological methods to develop and test solutions.
6. A Creative Communicator: Students communicate clearly and express themselves creatively for a variety of purposes using platforms, tools, styles, formats, and digital media appropriate to their goals.
7. A Global Collaborator: Students use digital tools to broaden their perspectives and enrich their learning by collaborating with others and working effectively in teams locally and globally.

Enact distance learning with attention to equity

Distance and hybrid or blended learning models carry their own equity challenges that will need special attention from school districts.

For example, Portland Public Schools in Oregon has proposed a model for reopening in which the first 2 weeks of school are dedicated to foundational activities conducted virtually prior to students returning to school buildings in small A/B cohort models. These activities include ensuring that every student has a working device and online access along with multiple opportunities to become familiar with the learning technology, to learn new health protocols, and to have their social and emotional needs assessed.

Other districts are creating educational support hubs to enable students to succeed at distance and blended learning. San Francisco schools, which will start the school year with remote learning, will help up to 6,000 students this fall with their distance learning needs by transforming dozens of recreation facilities, libraries, and community centers across the city into "learning hubs"—spaces where young students who may struggle with remote instruction can go each day to access their digital classwork and the social interactions that virtual schooling cannot provide. As Maria Su, the Executive Director of San Francisco's Department of Children, Youth and Their Families, noted:

> The barriers for distance learning are not just access to Wi-Fi. It's making sure that children have a quiet place to even connect in to their Zoom calls and have the support they need to … submit homework and participate virtually.[6]

The hubs will offer computers and internet connections necessary for students to connect with their teachers and classwork remotely, along with some of the trappings of ordinary scholastic environments, such as meals, snacks, exercise, and peers. The first 40 such hubs will prioritize serving low-income families, children in public housing or the foster care system, youth experiencing homelessness, and others in living situations that make remote learning particularly challenging. At first, the hubs will serve students in kindergarten through 5th grade, a group that has lower rates of infection, but officials will consider making the hubs available to older students. They will operate 5 days a week during ordinary school hours and will be staffed by experienced nonprofits and other organizations—many of which already partner with the city to provide after-school programs.

A similar plan in West Contra Costa Unified School District will be managed by education professionals for the 25% of families who have reported they struggle to facilitate distance learning for their children. A district leader explained:

> What we're doing is taking the homeschooling process out of the living rooms and dining rooms of some of those 25%, and providing them a place with qualified people who can facilitate and help them if they've got issues with wellness or technology or nutrition or attendance or English language or academics.[7]

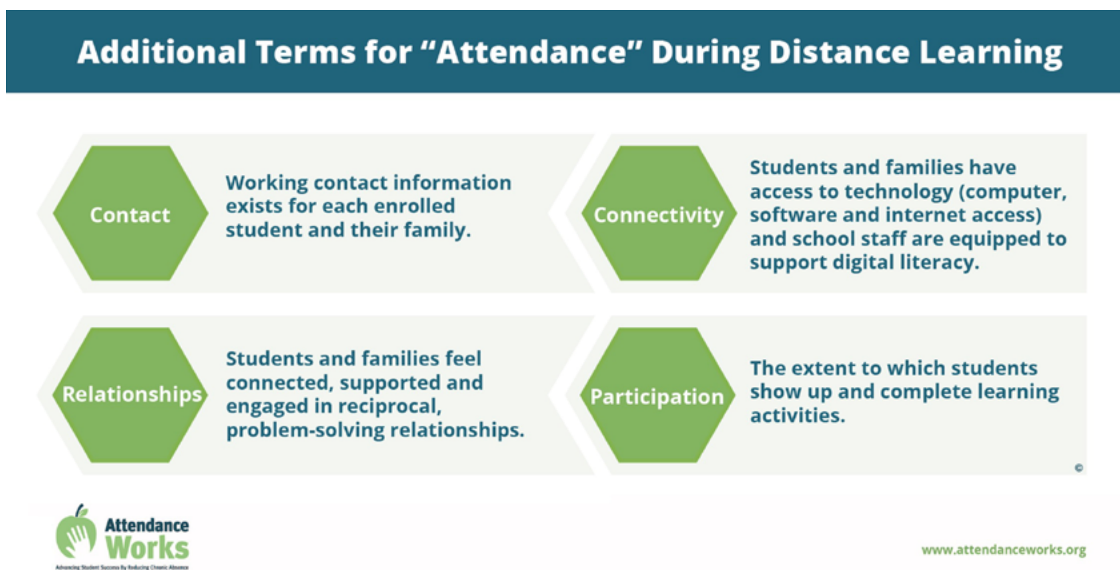
The plan prioritizes serving high-need students in three tiers. Those in the first tier are the first priority for student support hubs: They include students with high numbers of absences, students from underserved populations, students in special education, youth in foster care, and children experiencing homelessness. The second tier includes students who have had little participation in distance learning, as well as students who are learning English as a second language and students with mental health concerns. The third tier includes students whose parents have expressed the need for out-of-home support for distance learning.

Shift from measuring seat time to engagement

Key to the new models of learning that are emerging is for states to rethink how they count attendance—which is often tied to funding as well as to compulsory education laws and requirements for instructional minutes. The role of attendance in a hybrid, student-centered learning system shifts from time spent in class to engagement, participation, and student outcomes. Attendance Works defines attendance in this context as relying on contact, connectivity, engagement around wellness and social and emotional learning and supports, and participation in learning activities (see Figure 2.2).

> The role of attendance in a hybrid, student-centered learning system shifts from time spent in class to engagement, participation, and student outcomes.

Figure 2.2
Additional Terms for "Attendance" During Distance Learning



Source: Attendance Works. Monitoring Attendance in Distance Learning.

States such as Kentucky and California have redefined attendance for the coming school year when students are in distance learning mode to include not only the time students are logging in to online instruction, but also the time equivalents for their work on assignments and assessments. Student completion of assignments, collaboration on projects, and other measures of student engagement, including check-ins with peers and teachers, can give students more ownership of the learning process, while encouraging engagement in meaningful work. Further, in personalized, competency-based models, teachers can track students' development of knowledge and skills through their progress on projects, portfolios, and performance assessments and by monitoring their learning progressions. Using these examples and the resources provided, even inexperienced districts and schools can successfully implement strong and more equitable distance learning.

Resources

- ISTE Standards for Students (ISTE). This interactive website provides additional detail and illustrative videos on seven standards for leveraging technology. The site helps educators, schools, and districts adopt these standards and put them into practice in order to create authentic learning opportunities that empower student voice and prepare students to be future-ready, lifelong learners.
- At-Home Teaching and Learning in PreK-3rd Grade (National P-3 Center). This document provides specific guidance related to school districts' and elementary schools' supports for at-home learning across the primary grades (pre-k to 3rd grade) based on fundamentals of effective teaching and learning in early childhood.

- Attendance Playbook: Smart Strategies for Reducing Chronic Absenteeism in the COVID Era (Attendance Works and FutureEd). This playbook provides a detailed, three-tiered approach to addressing a lack of student attendance whether classes are held in person or online.
- Restart & Recovery: Considerations for Teaching and Learning: Academics (Council of Chief State School Officers). This resource includes strategies states might consider as they work to support their districts as they adapt instruction in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- What Will Return to School Look Like This Fall? A Look Inside Hybrid Learning Plans (Panorama Education). This website describes additional examples with links to states and districts that are developing hybrid learning models for fall 2020.
- Supporting Learning in the COVID-19 Context (Policy Analysis for California Education). This research brief provides 10 recommendations with accompanying resources for implementing distance and blended learning.

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Priority 3: Assess What Students Need

As students return to school in the fall, they will be bringing with them a wide range of learning experiences from the previous 6 months since COVID-19-related school closures began. Even students who were in the same class when schools initially closed will have had different home lives, experiences, and responsibilities during school closures; different access to devices and support for distance learning; and different emotional reactions to the ongoing and unfolding situation.

Some may have been in daily online learning with a well-planned curriculum supported by teachers and counselors since the week after schools closed, while others may have had only hurriedly assembled instructional packets to complete on their own during this time. Some may have sheltered in place safely with all of their needs met, while others may have experienced illness and the loss of loved ones, or their families may have lost employment, housing, and health care. Teachers will need to take stock of all of students' experiences and needs—social, emotional, health-related, potentially trauma-related, and academic—as they build safe and welcoming communities in person or online (or a combination of both) when school begins.

What Students Need

The ongoing pandemic will have lasting impacts on students' social, emotional, and physical wellness, all of which can influence student learning moving forward. Students may have lost loved ones, lost homes and food security due to family members' unemployment, and been negatively impacted by social isolation over the past several months. A panel of assessment experts convened by the Center on Reinventing Public Education identified a set of principles for effective assessment as schools reopen. They emphasized that educators should prioritize understanding student experiences, forging caring connections, surfacing considerations of what students have had the opportunity to learn, and connecting students to the appropriate supports within school and community systems.

A first step in assessing students' needs will include evaluating their contexts and their social and emotional needs in order to make appropriate supports available and to foster strong, trusting relationships. (See also "Priority 4: Ensure Supports for Social and Emotional Learning" and "Priority 5: Redesign Schools for Stronger Relationships.") Regardless of what school reopening looks like, students' success depends on their entry into a caring community and on academic supports that focus on *growth over remediation*, taking a forward-looking view of learning status and progress rather than a deficit-oriented view of student abilities that starts off the year under a cloud of discouragement and self-doubt. Instructionally relevant assessment processes can help teachers and students recognize, celebrate, and leverage current student understanding and skills to propel student thinking forward through opportunities for feedback, reflection, and continuous improvement.

Because learning happens progressively—that is, we learn by building on our current and prior thinking, rather than just adding new knowledge to a blank slate—knowing how to surface and grow from these learning experiences is essential for supporting all learners, including those with unique learning needs such as students with disabilities, English learners, students placed in foster care, and students experiencing homelessness. Diagnostic and formative assessment processes—those that provide feedback both to teachers about what students have learned and are ready to learn

next and to students on *how* they can improve their learning—can play a tremendous role in student learning and performance gains when they are tailored to individual student experiences and the specific learning progressions students are working along.

What Policymakers and Educators Can Do

State and local leaders have an opportunity to support systems of assessment that both take account of students' broader needs and support their learning. With respect to learning supports, it is critical to prioritize curriculum-embedded formative assessment processes—which research shows can lead to some of the largest learning gains when coupled with supportive instructional practices.[1] This shift from a measurement culture to a learning culture is imperative now, so that we can support diverse learners well: It paves the way for assessment systems that are designed to transform learning and close opportunity and achievement gaps, rather than just surface them, as many current assessment systems do.

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State and local leaders should consider these recommendations to support meaningful assessments as students restart school and to incentivize the use of effective formative and diagnostic assessment processes moving forward.

Ensure that schools have the time and tools to assess the needs of the whole child

Following the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning's (CASEL) Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Roadmap for Reopening School, school leaders can help engage students and staff to learn about what they have been experiencing as well as identify the partners, resources, and community assets that they can leverage to support all students across learning settings.

In Oregon, as part of Portland Public Schools' proposed reopening plan, the first 2 weeks of school are dedicated to virtual activities to prepare staff, students, and staff for the new year of learning ahead. One of these activities will be for teachers to connect individually with students and families to learn about their social and emotional needs and experiences during the months that school was closed. States such as Kentucky provide detailed guidance on how to begin these conversations, offering advice on how school communities can grieve their losses while also maintaining a sense of optimism and resilience.

In order to understand the strengths and needs of all students, schools will need a collaborative process to help them learn from and leverage the insights of diverse members of the school community, going beyond traditional school leadership positions. There are multiple ways to accomplish this, but the goal should be to include representation from students, families, educators, and community partners (e.g., early childhood, after-school, extended learning, and youth development programs, as well as mental health providers) to plan for and tailor social and emotional supports based on the specific experiences of each school community.

This may be done by setting up structures for connecting and communicating, such as phone calls, video conferences, or surveys, and by creating a transition coalition that includes students, as recommended by CASEL. (See Figure 3.1.) Back-to-school surveys, such as those created by Panorama, and measures of social, emotional, and academic well-being, such as those created by California's CORE Districts, can be helpful both at the start of school and throughout the year.

Figure 3.1
Sample Questions for Stakeholder Engagement

Put it Into Practice

Learn From Families, Students, and Community Partners

The sample questions below can be used as a starting point for phone/video conferences or written surveys that engage stakeholders in sharing their perspectives.

- What has your experience been like since school has been closed?
- What is on your mind as you think about next school year? What are your biggest hopes or worries?
- What has our school done well during the past months, and what could we have done better?
- How might you like to contribute as we prepare to transition to a new school year?
- What will help you learn this upcoming year?
- What can we do to make school feel even more like a community that cares for you?

Source: CASEL. (2020). *An initial guide to leveraging the power of social and emotional learning as you prepare to reopen and renew your school community*.

Some states, such as Louisiana and North Dakota, are advising schools to implement universal social, emotional, and behavioral health screening. Universal screening is conducted for all students (including those already receiving special education services or other supports) and repeated in the fall, winter, and spring. Optimally, screening occurs within a tiered system of support to enable educators to connect students with what they need.[2]

School reopening surveys can also be used to determine the needs of students and families. In addition, informal assessment processes may involve engaging students in discourse, written and oral reflections on their experiences, reading and writing activities that are culturally and linguistically sustaining, use of math in low-stakes problem-solving, and other instructionally embedded strategies that can help teachers and students understand how students' out-of-school experiences are influencing their thinking and approach to learning while providing an opportunity for teachers to build caring, feedback-oriented relationships with students.

Regardless of the specific approach, schools should create ongoing opportunities for connection and for identifying students who need additional support, taking care to be inclusive of and give additional focus to students who are English learners, are experiencing homelessness, are undocumented or from mixed-immigration-status families, have a disability, live in rural areas, or are impacted by the juvenile justice or foster care systems.

Some districts are also pioneering new digital solutions to offer continuous feedback to school leaders and educators about students' social and emotional and additional learning needs. California's CORE Districts partnered with Education Analytics to provide districts across the state with a new interactive platform, Rally, that will help teachers and school leaders track data on students'

well-being and academic progress by putting multiple sources of available data in one place. The goal is to support teachers in their responses to the unique needs of each individual student, to address the trauma that many students experience, and to work toward equity and racial justice.

Prioritize assessments that illuminate student growth and learning

When it comes to assessments used for diagnostic purposes, local needs—and particularly those of teachers and students—must be centered. As state and local leaders compile and release guidance about how assessments should be used in the fall, it will be crucial to emphasize the use of tools and instructional tasks that will provide the most useful kinds of information to move student learning forward within the classroom. State and local leaders should emphasize authentic diagnostic and formative assessment approaches rather than decontextualized summative assessments.

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What Are Formative and Diagnostic Assessments?

Experts identify three primary goals of assessments, including:

1. **Assessment *of* learning:** Assessments that are used to monitor student progress at the end of instruction (e.g., summative assessments).
2. **Assessment *for* learning:** Assessments that are used to directly surface current student understanding and provide feedback for next steps in learning (e.g., diagnostic and formative assessment processes).
3. **Assessment *as* learning:** Assessments used for either summative or formative purposes that take a performance-based approach, asking students to show what they know and can do by actually doing certain tasks (e.g., writing an essay or designing an experiment), thus engaging students in the learning process while surfacing student understanding.

Formative assessment, or assessment *for* learning, is carried out as part of the instructional process for the purpose of adapting instruction to improve learning. Formative assessment is contrasted with summative assessment, which measures the outcomes of learning that has already occurred.

Diagnostic assessment is a particular type of formative assessment intended to help teachers identify students' specific knowledge, skills, and understanding in order to build on each student's strengths and specific needs. Because of their domain specificity and design, diagnostic tools can guide curriculum planning in more specific ways than most summative assessments.

Combined with insights from diagnostic assessments that help teachers identify students' current thinking and chart next steps, **formative assessment processes** allow students and teachers to monitor and adjust learning together, in real time, as they progress along an identified path.

Formative assessment processes provide feedback both to the teacher and the learner; the feedback is then used to adjust ongoing teaching and learning strategies to improve students' attainment of curricular learning targets or goals on a day-to-day and minute-to-minute basis. Formative assessment processes are fundamentally grounded in relationships, providing participatory ways for students and teachers to attend to the full set of student experiences. These processes are linked to instruction and designed to support growth, as suggested in the following table.

Instructionally relevant assessment that supports growth looks *less like...*	Instructionally relevant assessment that supports growth looks *more like...*
• Standardized, multiple-choice tests or banks of items	• Contextualized opportunities for students to make their thinking (not just right or wrong answers) visible to inform next steps in learning
• Assessment opportunities that happen entirely separately from learning experiences	• Embedded checks on student understanding that happen as part of learning sequences
• Assessments that assume a single right answer and a dominant way of knowing as the goal	• Assessment processes that illuminate facets of student thinking and understanding that build complex cognition in multiple ways
• Emphasis on assigning grades and scores	• Emphasis on descriptive feedback
• Assessments that occur after learning has occurred and focus on locating deficits for remediation	• Processes that treat current student understanding as a resource for extending learning and making connections
• Assessments that focus on content as the primary goal for learning	• Assessments that integrate content and disciplinary practices so that students develop and consider evidence as part of acquiring knowledge
• Processes that focus on mastery of discrete learning goals	• Processes that take into account learning progressions and curricular models of learning
• Processes that focus on educators and policymakers as the consumers of assessment data	• Processes that include students' participation in their learning through self-assessment, reflection, and goal-setting
• Focus on the instrument	• Focus on the process

Provide access to diagnostic assessment tools that pinpoint student thinking relative to learning progressions and provide actionable guidance over time for how to move students along. Diagnostic assessments are only as useful as the student thinking they surface. It is essential that the assessments used give students the opportunity to make their thinking—and not just right or wrong answers—visible and that they include careful interpretation guidance that helps teachers and students understand which next steps in learning will move student thinking forward. State and local leaders should consider assessments that include performance tasks, which teachers can build upon and modify to suit their needs, and reports on individual student progress relative to multiyear learning progressions rather than a focus on percentile scores and rankings.

For example, California provides districts with a state-approved set of options they may want to consider as part of their assessment strategies for the upcoming school year. The list includes assessments such as the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), which provides opportunities to individually assess students through both performance tasks and guided interviews multiple times a year. The DRA connects student performance to strengths, areas for growth, and personalized learning pathways to move forward. It is individually administered to students several times a year, allowing teachers to determine each student's independent and instructional reading level by evaluating reading engagement, oral reading fluency, and comprehension. The diagnostic DRA Word Analysis assessment provides additional information on how struggling and emerging readers attend to and work with various components of spoken and written words. The resulting individualized plan documents what each student needs to learn next and enables teachers to differentiate instruction and select books at the appropriate level. Teachers can then intentionally "scaffold up" to provide students with the support they need to engage with grade-level texts.

Support locally relevant assessments, rather than selecting a single statewide assessment for all students. Formative assessment processes are an essential part of effective teaching and learning. While states may feel some pressure to provide a statewide measure of student learning early in the year, a summative test that delivers only a set of scores or proficiency levels will not help educators or students as much as tools that diagnose where students are in more fine-grained ways and inform decisions about teaching. Moreover, they distract teachers from valuable instruction time by introducing both testing and preparation time that could be better spent connecting with students, understanding their learning needs, and moving them forward.

Many districts have already chosen and integrated a diagnostic or interim assessment strategy into their curriculum and teaching plans. Preserving access to these existing approaches will allow districts to evaluate where students are in their learning when they return to school—relative to their progress in the prior year—and to follow their progress in the year ahead.

Furthermore, research shows that assessments to support and inform learning are most effective when they are connected to planned curriculum, instructional approaches, and materials for learning. While there are research-based learning progressions that span multiple grade levels in many disciplines, student learning is deeply connected to local contexts—the scope and sequence a district is pursuing, the curriculum teachers are using, and students' experiences in and outside the classroom.

For example, many diagnostic assessments are linked to specific next steps for teaching that may be embedded in a particular curriculum, such as a culturally relevant classroom library with leveled texts in multiple languages, or a familiar software program that supports practice in particular math skills. A school for newly immigrated students may most need to assess English language development progress for its students, rather than using an inaccessible test in English that provides little information for the teaching needed. This makes it particularly challenging to find a "one-size-fits-all" approach to diagnostic assessments. To be useful, they have to be tied intentionally to local decisions about how student learning is supported and structured.

States could consider providing guidelines while enabling local ownership of which assessments—integrated into curriculum and instructional strategies—are most productive to use. This could include providing guidance about a range of assessment options that might be useful, with considerations for schools and districts to weigh as they determine which is most useful for their context, and/or providing a set of common performance tasks that teachers and schools can decide to implement in instructionally relevant ways.

Do not overassess: Make use of expertise, tools, and data that are already available. There is an abundance of information about individual and groups of students' progress already available within schools and districts, if educators and leaders are supported in using it. In addition to summative test scores, report cards, teachers' classroom records, and school-level cumulative records, many schools and districts have diagnostic and formative assessment processes in place already. In many cases, these processes are part of their ongoing teaching and learning efforts, and the schools and districts have built capacity and routines to support teachers and administrators in understanding and using the resulting data. Rather than adding new tests, schools and districts should be supported in making effective use of the tools they already have in place, designed to be useful within their local contexts.

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Additionally, individual teachers collected a wealth of information about their students during the 2019–20 school year and should be supported with time and opportunity to share that information with the students' new teachers in the fall. Leaders can intentionally cultivate horizontal and vertical networks across subjects within a grade and across grade-level instructors to ensure that teachers are going into the fall term with the best possible understanding of student learning. Students with learning disabilities and English learners are at particular risk of being overassessed. TESOL has published guidelines for serving English learners in this time of the COVID-19 crisis, including methods for using informal and performance-based assessments for these students that can minimize the number of sit-down tests they encounter as well as supporting teachers in meeting their instructional needs.

Support acceleration of learning, not remediation

While many districts and educators feel pressure to address learning loss through remedial instruction, research shows that grade retention and "down tracking" actually have the opposite effect: Students who experience these deficit-oriented approaches are more likely to fall further behind their peers, as they are often prevented from engaging with rich curriculum opportunities and are subjected to stigma, which undermines their confidence, motivation, and learning.[3] Educators and leaders should commit to strategies that focus on scaffolding up: that is, providing students with opportunities to participate in engaging learning opportunities that are within their zone of proximal development, providing appropriate supports and "just-in-time" scaffolds to support strong progress. Informal (and more formal) formative assessment information can be used to identify students' current thinking, skills, and ideas, allowing teachers to provide students with the specific supports to be able to engage with targeted material.

Tailored acceleration strategies use formative assessments to help teachers explicitly address learning gaps associated with skills that were meant to be previously learned. Linking formative assessments to grade-level concepts can help students make faster progress than remedial courses that provide little opportunity for them to truly catch up. Such strategies are also more successful than plowing through grade-level standards without attention to skill gaps that create failure for many students. (See "Priority 7: Provide Expanded Learning Time" for additional strategies to support accelerated progress.)

Emphasize actionable feedback as a means for improvement. Some of the largest gains in student performance come from teachers and students themselves (both self and peers) providing actionable, descriptive feedback using criteria applied to tasks that are grounded in student performance. Most important is that students have the opportunity to respond to this feedback as they practice and revise their work. Conversely, grades and scores often limit student motivation and learning.[4] Formative assessment processes can accelerate and advance learning for all students if they focus on providing students with detailed and descriptive feedback—rather than scores and grades—about performance and, importantly, how to improve.[5]

State and local leaders can consider ways to increase the footprint of formative assessment processes within their assessment systems, and they can support teachers' knowledge and skills for using these kinds of assessments. Teachers can learn to use both informal processes (e.g., check-ins with students, listening to student discourse, evaluating student-generated artifacts produced as part of a learning cycle, and exit tickets) and formal processes (e.g., structured assignments that are evaluated according to particular criteria and assessments that are administered multiple times throughout the year). In both cases, educators and leaders should emphasize measures that produce descriptive feedback that can improve learning while learning is ongoing, through strategies and tasks that students can engage in to grow toward learning goals and success criteria.

This approach is important for all children and is often best exemplified in early childhood assessments. For example, many early childhood assessments are based on teacher observation of students performing a work-embedded task and produce descriptive feedback that can be shared with children and families. These assessments, such as the Desired Results assessment used in California, ask teachers to observe students two to three times throughout the year and observe their progress on multiple domains of development, including physical, social and emotional, language and literacy, English language, math and science, and approaches to learning. The rubric used to measure progress helps identify not just whether students are on track, but what the next stage of development might be, and includes a progression of skills that can be measured from infancy to kindergarten. The information gained from the assessment can be used to guide teaching and inform conversations with families.

Promote the use of high-quality performance tasks that provide rich information, not just scores. Performance-based approaches to assessments can provide students and teachers with information about both student performance relative to learning goals and students' thinking and understanding, which can be leveraged into next steps. This makes such approaches particularly compelling assessment tools, as they can provide avenues for detailed formative feedback while both holistically surfacing evidence of student thinking and providing learning opportunities through the assessment. Performance assessments are particularly well suited for feedback based on transparent rubrics, which can help students identify how they are progressing and how they

Performance-based approaches to assessments can provide students and teachers with information about both student performance relative to learning goals and students' thinking and understanding, which can be leveraged into next steps.

can grow and improve their knowledge and skills. States can play a variety of roles in incentivizing performance assessments, from making their use a formal requirement (such as Oregon's Local Performance Assessment Requirement) to cultivating libraries of vetted performance tasks (such as the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium's Tools for Teachers) that can be modified and used locally.

One example of an instrument that uses performance-based assessments to support formative processes is the Mathematics Assessment Resource Service suite of assessment resources, which includes lessons that embed research-based performance tasks in math (Balanced Assessments of Mathematics) that can be used to formatively support student learning. In addition to end-of-instruction performance tasks, these assessment resources provide teachers with modifiable lessons that embed performance-based formative assessment opportunities, with clear support for teachers around learning goals, interpreting student performance, and next steps for teachers to pursue. These lessons and tasks are grounded in descriptive rubrics rather than scores and prioritize next steps over labeling student performance. Many of these tasks have also been incorporated into the Acuity diagnostic assessment system that is used by many states and districts.

Invest in teachers' knowledge and skills for formative assessment

Formative assessment is fundamentally a *process* between students and teachers. No matter which tools are used, effective formative assessment practices depend on teachers who know how to interpret student responses and take next steps to move forward. Research suggests that while teachers often have access to assessment data, they are poorly supported in understanding how to interpret that information and take next steps in response.[6] Investing in teachers, and their understanding of theories of learning, learning progressions, and formative feedback cycles, is imperative to support student success.

Support ongoing and embedded teacher professional learning that encourages teachers to adopt culturally responsive and sustaining formative assessment processes as part of their existing teaching responsibilities. Such assessments are responsive to students' base of experience, respectful of their cultures, and grounded in their learning in the classroom. In many districts, professional learning to support formative assessment practices is limited or missing altogether; is provided primarily by assessment instrument developers and tied to the instruments themselves; or is something teachers have to pay for out of pocket. Given the centrality of formative assessment processes in learning—and the particular urgency around effective formative assessment processes in light of COVID-19—it is essential that states and districts allocate funding and dedicated, sustained time for collaborative teacher learning. This is particularly effective when connected directly to teachers' practice, such as being centered on task development and student work analysis of tasks that are actually administered in a given teacher's classroom.

The National Education Association (NEA) has created a micro-credentials site with certification banks on a wide variety of topics to make it easier for educators to access professional learning opportunities. NEA micro-credentials provide options for educators to participate in a learning community and are performance-based. The Assessment Literacy certification bank includes six micro-credentials for educators to develop their knowledge and skills to utilize meaningful assessment practices.

Build capacity for meaningful use of assessment information that is already a part of a teacher's repertoire, rather than introducing new tools with little support for implementation or process. Without attention to assessment literacy and developing teacher practice with formative assessment, there is a limit to how much new assessments and tools can impact learning—and indeed, they may actually detract from meaningful learning. By working in communities of practice centered on student work, teachers can more effectively use the assessment information available to them in their classrooms.

Washington is one example of a state that is dedicating professional learning resources for assessment. For several years, the state has provided a 2-day professional development session for kindergarten teachers at the beginning of the school year related to WaKIDS, the state's kindergarten readiness assessment. The assessment is linked to the state's preschool curriculum but has been modified to be more culturally responsive and includes a parent engagement component. In professional development, teachers learn how to conduct objective student observations and how to use the assessment results as a mechanism for parent engagement through one-on-one meetings. The assessment is also used as a means of creating conversations between preschool and kindergarten teachers, who often have limited lines of communication, about fostering student development.

Anticipate moving toward more coherent systems of assessment of, for, and as learning

As education leaders focus on assessment *for* learning in this time of crisis, it may also become possible to start a new conversation about summative assessments, which have typically driven learning in the United States toward decontextualized, multiple-choice modes of learning and teaching that are disconnected from real-world applications of knowledge and out of sync with the demands of a knowledge-based economy and society in which information is exponentially increasing every day.[7]

Ultimately, formative and summative assessments should be coherently linked through a well-articulated model of learning that incorporates learning progressions representing ambitious learning goals, along with intermediate stages and instructional means for reaching those goals.[8] Both formative and summative assessments should represent these goals and stages well and should foster the kind of instruction that will lead to critical thinking and problem-solving, transfer of knowledge to new situations, and the ability to continue to learn.

Assessment reform efforts in states such as New Hampshire, which have emphasized formative processes and the use of performance tasks for measuring learning more frequently and authentically, may lead the way toward more coherent and meaningful assessment policies across the country. More states are taking advantage of assessment waivers from the U.S. Department of Education, and the Every Student Succeeds Act is eligible for reauthorization at the end of 2020, which may provide an opportunity to create new ground rules that will allow assessment to become a more useful tool for learning.

Resources

- Learning as We Go: Principles for Effective Assessment During the COVID-19 Pandemic (Center on Reinventing Public Education). Based on a consensus panel of experts, this document provides a set of principles that can help schools, districts, and states make decisions about assessments to inform instruction as schools reopen. While these principles can inform good assessment practices in general, they are particularly salient in our current environment.
- Using Formative Assessments to Create Coherent and Equitable Assessment Systems (University of Colorado Boulder). This brief describes principles and examples for building coherent assessment systems, informed by research and lessons learned from 3 decades of assessment reform.
- Formative Assessment and Next-Generation Assessment Systems: Are We Losing an Opportunity? (Council of Chief State School Officers). This paper can serve as a catalyst and resource for ongoing conversations and planning. It describes why it is critical to make the distinction that formative assessment is not a tool, but a process true to the practice of effective teaching and learning.
- Blueprint for Testing: How Schools Should Assess Students During the COVID Crisis (FutureEd). This resource provides guidance on how and when states, school districts, and schools should use assessments to gauge and help accelerate students' learning and provide systems-level insights.
- Guidance on Diagnostic and Formative Assessments (California Department of Education). This implementation tool assists district leadership in selecting and using diagnostic assessments to understand students' academic needs throughout the school year. It describes approved diagnostic assessments that are aligned to Common Core standards and provides information about how to use the expanded interim and formative assessment tools provided by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium to inform instruction for all students.
- School Reopening Surveys (Panorama Education). These reopening surveys can invite students and families into the reopening process as well as enable districts to determine those students and families most in need of additional in-person instruction.
- The Informal Formative Assessment Cycle as a Model for Teacher Practice (STEM Teaching Tools, University of Washington Institute for Science and Math Education). This research brief summarizes and illustrates, through examples of informal assessment conversations, the nature of informal formative assessment and its connection to student learning.
- Beyond "Misconceptions": How to Recognize and Build on Facets of Student Thinking (STEM Teaching Tools, University of Washington Institute for Science and Math Education). This resource presents things to consider; discusses how to attend to equity; and provides recommendations for actions educators can take to be able to recognize, build on, and respond to the range of ideas, or facets of students' thinking, during instruction.
- NEA Micro-Credentials in Assessment Literacy (National Education Association). The NEA micro-credentials site was created to make it easier for educators to access professional learning opportunities. The Assessment Literacy certification bank includes six micro-credentials for educators to develop their knowledge and skills to utilize meaningful assessment practices.
- Best Practices in Universal Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Screening: An Implementation Guide (School Mental Health Collaborative). This guide summarizes research-based best practices and resources for selecting, implementing, and using data from universal social, emotional, and behavioral screening.

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Priority 4: Ensure Supports for Social and Emotional Learning

> I'm concerned about food, jobs, money, my education. Racism toward Asian Pacific Islander folks is a big concern for us too. I miss being around my friends, and I'm feeling really, really depressed, but I can't really tell my family.
>
> —Oakland Student

The COVID-19 crisis has stretched families to the breaking point, as many struggle to balance the demands of work with caring for their loved ones—often at a distance. Children of all ages are grappling with the ensuing stress and trauma. The results of racial discrimination have also been clear throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, as children and families of color have experienced greater infection and mortality rates, unemployment, housing and food instability, and the digital divide. Although adversity impacts learning, the psychological effects of these traumatic experiences can be partly mitigated by strong, trusting relationships, social and emotional supports, and opportunities to develop social and emotional learning (SEL) skills. These skills, coupled with mental health supports and restorative practices, are critical for supporting children, youth, and adults as they cope with the challenges, uncertainty, and stress presented by the pandemic, the economic crisis, and systemic racism. Infusing SEL through both virtual and in-person instruction will help to mitigate the pandemic's impact on lifelong success and learning.

Social and emotional skills, coupled with mental health supports and restorative practices, are critical for supporting children, youth, and adults as they cope with the challenges, uncertainty, and stress presented by the pandemic, the economic crisis, and systemic racism.

What Students Need

Recent data indicate that young people are experiencing chronic stress and trauma as they navigate basic needs and health concerns, a lack of connectivity to their school communities, and exhaustion from constant anxiety about the future. The pandemic has been disruptive for nearly everyone but has also exposed and exacerbated existing inequities, including those in health and safety, mental health, and learning opportunities and experiences. As one middle school teacher described, although her students were hungry to learn, they faced many barriers to participation:

> Many of my students are refugees, fleeing violence in their home countries, children who have been separated from their families, and longtime English language learners.… My students fight a silent battle against inequity every day. Distance learning has made this battle so much harder.

In order to buffer a generation of children and youth from the negative impacts of these cumulative inequities, schools need to nurture the whole child by intentionally integrating social and emotional learning. As part of this effort, in this moment of deep trauma converging with deep

awareness of racial injustice, children and youth need their schools to dismantle practices that have perpetuated systemic racism, including discriminatory discipline practices that have too often criminalized and marginalized children of color. These should be replaced with restorative practices that help students get the help they need while acquiring the social and emotional skills, habits, and mindsets necessary to be successful in school and in life.

The science of learning and development, which builds on rich developments over the past 2 decades, helps us see that academic, social, and emotional learning are interrelated and reinforcing and that learning is inherently social and emotional.[1] For instance, children and youth learn best when they feel safe, find the information to be relevant and engaging, are able to focus their attention, and are actively involved in learning. This requires the ability to combine skills of emotion regulation and coping strategies with cognitive skills of problem-solving and social skills, including communication and cooperation.

Attitudes, beliefs, and mindsets also matter for school and life success. Educators and school personnel play an important role in shaping students' beliefs about their own abilities, their sense of belonging, and their academic mindset. Self-efficacy is enhanced by a student's confidence that effort increases competence. A growth mindset enables students to engage more productively in academic and personal pursuits. All of these are supported by an inclusive learning environment that uses educative and restorative approaches to support behavior rather than relying on punitive methods that exclude and discourage students.[2]

The pandemic, economic uncertainty, and heightened awareness of long-standing racial injustices have made it abundantly clear that children and youth need an adaptive and responsive school system that supports them to fully develop their social and emotional capacities and leverages children's assets to strengthen their learning and well-being.

What Policymakers and Educators Can Do

With support from state and local education leaders, educators have an opportunity as schools and communities restart, recover, and reinvent to prioritize policies and practices that are immediately responsive to students' and adults' social and emotional needs while building capacity for a whole child approach going forward.

Implement a comprehensive system of support

Effective school environments take a systematic approach to promoting children's social, emotional, and academic well-being in all facets of school life and in connections to the community. Students' personal responses to the pandemic, economic crisis, and racial injustices may vary widely, and some students may need targeted or intensive supports.

CASEL's SEL roadmap for reopening school recommends that schools develop an "adaptive and responsive system of tiered supports that leverages students' assets to help them cope, navigate and strengthen their social and emotional competencies." As schools learn about and identify the strengths and needs of students, they will need clear processes (e.g., screeners, referrals) and structures (e.g., tiered, integrated systems of support) for school staff to work with families and

partner with school-employed or community-based mental health and trauma professionals to connect students with additional targeted (tier 2) or intensive (tier 3) supports to meet their needs. (See, for example, North Dakota's well-developed resources for multi-tiered systems of support.) This may include counseling and additional behavioral, mental health, or trauma supports; it may also include providing connections to food, housing, technology, transportation, or other resources. (See "Priority 8: Establish Community Schools and Wraparound Supports" for more on integrated supports and services.) Schools must ensure that these processes avoid labeling students and do not rely on assumptions about students based upon their race, their language, or their socioeconomic status.

Ensure opportunities for explicit teaching of social and emotional skills at every grade level

While a whole-school approach to social and emotional learning is necessary, schools also need to set aside a time and place to focus explicitly on social and emotional skill building.[3] By explicitly teaching the interrelated set of cognitive, social, and emotional competencies that underscore the way people learn, develop, maintain mutually supportive relationships, and become psychologically healthy, educators can ensure that students and staff have tools for both the short term and long term. Teaching students how to recognize and manage their emotions, access help when they need it, and learn problem-solving and conflict resolution skills makes schools safer. A meta-analysis of more than 200 studies found that schools using SEL programs reduced bullying and poor behavior while supporting increased school achievement.

Teaching students how to recognize and manage their emotions, access help when they need it, and learn problem-solving and conflict resolution skills makes schools safer.

Locate a place in the curriculum and school day in which students and educators can develop and practice key skills and competencies. In early childhood education and preschool programs, this may take place through scripted stories and books, and intentional activities embedded throughout the day. In elementary classrooms, this might take place in morning meetings or another dedicated block in the day. In middle and high schools, this can take place in advisories. (See "Priority 5: Redesign Schools for Stronger Relationships" for more detail.)

Baltimore City Public Schools built upon existing SEL implementation efforts and developed SEL lesson plans aligned with grade groupings and weekly themes around compassion, connection, and courage.

Figure 4.1
Strategies for Explicitly Addressing Social and Emotional Learning at Every Grade Level

Put it Into Practice

Addressing Students' Developmental Needs During Transition

Students go through many transitions from early childhood to young adulthood, such as the annual return from summer break or the transition from middle to high school. What happens during these transitions, and the degree to which students' developmental needs are met, influence their social and emotional competencies and long-term success. To help students with the important transition into this coming school year, identify ways to meet their developmental needs. For example:

- **In early childhood programs:** Provide young children with simple strategies for exploring, discussing, and regulating their emotions. Read alouds offer an easy way to prompt conversations about how big changes make them feel.
- **In elementary school:** Support students in developing relationship-building and conflict-resolution skills by helping them co-create shared agreements for their new class or distance learning environment.
- **In middle school:** Offer adolescents an opportunity to reconnect and create a sense of closure from the previous school year, such as by writing letters to their former classmates or teachers, or discussing with peers how the last few months will impact their perspectives as they enter a new grade.
- **In high school:** Provide older students with a way to reflect on and document their experience and what they've learned about themselves during the pandemic, either through journal writing, artwork, music, or other creative outlets.

For more practices, review the SEL Providers Council website.

Source: CASEL. (2020). *An initial guide to leveraging the power of social and emotional learning as you prepare to reopen and renew your school community*.

Develop or adopt an SEL program. Schools may develop their own approach or adopt an evidence-based SEL program. However, adopting a program is not enough to ensure positive outcomes. To be successful, educators need ongoing support beyond an initial training (e.g., coaching, follow-up training). It is important that administrators and school leaders support the effective implementation of SEL programs by setting high expectations and allocating resources for programming.[4] School leaders who model the use of SEL language and practices and endorse the use of SEL practices throughout the school create a schoolwide climate for SEL.

States and districts can support the adoption and implementation of social and emotional learning by establishing SEL curriculum specialists in leadership positions to support sustainable use of SEL activities for students, educators, and families. School-based SEL coalitions of educators, community organizations, and families, supported by these district specialists, can ensure the creation and high-quality implementation of SEL supports based on local needs of staff and students in every grade. In its reopening plan, Oregon emphasizes the need to incorporate multiple non-dominant voices in such coalitions and to formalize an SEL lead for each school.

It is important to prevent potential equity pitfalls by avoiding a deficit mindset that assumes that the purpose of SEL is to develop skills that some students do not possess and to underemphasize the meaningful development of student agency. Because social and emotional competencies can be expressed differently across cultures, if leaders and educators implement SEL without an appreciation of similarities and differences, with an underemphasis on student agency, some students may feel more alienated. The National Equity Project has developed guidance with recommendations to prevent such pitfalls, as has CASEL, which offers a five-part webinar series.

> It is important to prevent potential equity pitfalls by avoiding a deficit mindset that assumes that the purpose of social and emotional learning is to develop skills that some students do not possess and to underemphasize the meaningful development of student agency.

Consider using mindfulness strategies. The use of mindfulness strategies and other techniques for calming oneself, as well as monitoring and redirecting attention, also shows benefits for learning and stress management.[5] Mindfulness practice—which cultivates greater awareness of one's experience infused with kindness[6]—and related contemplative practices have also been linked to greater social and emotional competencies, including capacities for regulation, as well as reductions in stress and implicit bias.[7] Mindfulness strategies can be integrated into instruction to include educators and school staff to support their self-care and stress management abilities. Pure Edge provides several free tools that have been adopted by districts such as Jackson, MS, and Philadelphia, PA; and by entire states, including Delaware and Rhode Island.

Infuse social and emotional learning into instruction in all classes

Students need opportunities to develop social and emotional skills throughout their school day. Research shows that when SEL opportunities are embedded throughout the school day and integrated into other subject matter, the benefits are even more pronounced.[8] Capitalizing on teachable moments reinforces and provides more opportunities for children to practice the skills they are learning through explicit SEL instruction.

Integrate SEL skills into curriculum and instruction. Schools and educators that have not already been working to infuse SEL skills into their academic instructional practice may feel daunted by the task and be unsure of how to do it, but there are helpful resources readily available. For example, Facing History and Ourselves, EL Education, and Transforming Education have tools and curricula that include embedded SEL components. Resources based on the science of learning and development are also available from the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, CASEL, and Greater Good Science Center.

At Lakewood Elementary School in Sunnyvale, CA, teachers and leaders understand that SEL should be integrated into every aspect of the school, from explicit classroom instruction and infusion into academic content to school climate and culture (see Figure 4.2).[9] Teachers at Lakewood use strategies such as the Chillax Corner, which offers space and activities for students to regulate their emotions when upset; building relationships through team-building exercises; and collaborative academic work that allows students to put into practice social and emotional competencies such as active listening, understanding others' perspectives, and resolving disagreements.

Figure 4.2
Ways That Social and Emotional Learning Can Be Integrated Throughout the School Day

Source: Melnick, H., & Martinez, L. (2019). *Preparing teachers to support social and emotional learning: A case study of San Jose State University and Lakewood Elementary School*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

Washoe County School District in Nevada is creating weekly distance learning plans incorporating practices for all grade levels to continue students' in-school SEL lessons at home. These efforts are connected to longer-term investments in SEL curriculum and professional development the district began making prior to the pandemic. For instance, Washoe developed and trained SEL lead teams, composed of school staff, to share and debrief data on school climate and on students' social and emotional skills, habits, and mindsets. The district also developed early warning indicators of students at risk of dropping out of school to look at trends in the data to inform student engagement efforts. These efforts have included student data summits that district leaders believe have led to greater student engagement and empowerment.[10] As a result, in partnership with WestEd and the Regional Educational Laboratory West (REL West), Washoe County School District developed a toolkit of student engagement exercises to gather data and analyze student experiences.

All educators can play an active role in co-regulating students' behaviors by providing them with a repertoire of words and strategies to use in different situations to help them develop their self-regulation skills. For example, teachers might use disagreements as opportunities to help students practice conflict resolution by walking students through a structured, stepwise process that involves calming techniques, turn-taking (in which each student acknowledges the other's perspectives and emotions), and collaborative solution development. As a component of the school's advisory class, Social Justice Humanitas Academy in Los Angeles uses councils to build community and create space for "the practice of listening and speaking from the heart." During councils, students and teachers take turns sharing the positive and difficult things happening in their lives while sitting together in a circle. North Dakota's reopening plan specifically suggests expanding advisory classes to better meet current needs.

It is important that teaching for self-regulation not be implemented in ways that suggest that students cannot fully express their emotions or demonstrate their feelings, or that students should exhibit equanimity in the face of trauma and injustice. Concerns have emerged that some interpretations of SEL have been used to undermine student expression, to manage student behavior in ways that are culturally insensitive, and, in some cases, to extend policing into interactions around students' emotional self-expression. The Abolitionist Teaching Network identifies ways to engage colleagues and students in conversation in the pursuit of anti-racist, abolitionist SEL.

Provide guidance and support to develop students' executive functions and productive mindsets. In addition to emotional awareness and specific skills for handling emotions and engaging in prosocial behavior, there are a set of habits and mindsets that can have a powerful effect on students' learning and achievement. Holding a growth mindset and connecting academic endeavors to personal values supports learning and helps students persevere in the face of challenges. Four key mindsets have been identified as conducive to perseverance and academic success for students:

1. Belief that one belongs at school
2. Belief in the value of the work
3. Belief that effort will lead to increased competence
4. Sense of self-efficacy and the ability to succeed[11]

The types of messages conveyed by teachers and schools and corresponding attitudes may be especially relevant with adolescents whose self-perceptions and perceptions about school have a strong effect on their motivation and behavior. Effective programs that promote stronger learning for adolescents involve creating climates in which adolescents feel respected, affirmed, and challenged with the opportunity to improve through feedback, supports, and chances to revise their work.[12]

Institute restorative practices

End zero-tolerance policies and exclusionary discipline. SEL programs cannot enable meaningful long-term growth for students in environments that are otherwise authoritarian, punitive, and exclusionary, rather than educative and inclusive. Zero-tolerance policies that were widespread in many states and districts have led to high rates of suspension and expulsion that have also proved to be discriminatory, with students of color and students with disabilities disproportionately excluded from school. Evidence shows that this is not because of worse behavior but because of harsher treatment for minor offenses, such as tardiness, talking in class, and other nonviolent behavior.

In this moment, as many schools are considering eliminating the police presence in schools that has often been associated with harsh punishments for trivial offenses and criminalization of children of color, it is essential to replace police with restorative practices, rather than leaving a vacuum.

Rather than teaching students how to change their behavior, exclusionary punishment undermines student learning and attachment to school and increases the chances of students dropping out. Even one suspension can double the odds of a student dropping out, feeding the school-to-prison pipeline, which for some children begins in preschool.

In this moment, as many schools are considering eliminating the police presence in schools that has often been associated with harsh punishments for trivial offenses and criminalization of children of color, it is essential to replace police with restorative practices, rather than leaving a vacuum. As Tiana Lee, the Alternatives to Suspensions Specialist at Brooklyn Center High School, described:

> The impacts of suspensions were clear: our neediest students were falling further behind and excluding them did little to improve their behavior. But simply ending suspensions was not enough, as we had still not begun to address the root causes of students' misbehavior.

Accumulating research evidence suggests that shifting to restorative practices reduces the use of exclusionary discipline, resulting in fewer and less racially disparate suspensions and expulsions while also making schools safer, improving school climate and teacher–student relationships, and improving academic achievement.[13] Restorative practices enable educators and school leaders to understand how they may unintentionally trigger or escalate problem behavior; these practices help students and staff cultivate strategies for resolving conflict and creating healthier, more positive interactions.[14]

Adopt equity-oriented restorative practices that enable students to solve problems. Restorative justice practices support the overarching goal of strengthening school climate by developing a restorative mindset in adults that allows them to establish and sustain relationships and build a sense of community that is a precursor to community members' understanding that violating community norms harms their community. Central to a restorative justice approach is the belief that all people have worth and that it is important to build, maintain, and repair relationships within a community.[15]

Relationships and trust are supported through restorative practices, including universal interventions such as daily classroom meetings in which students and staff regularly share experiences and feelings, community-building circles, and conflict resolution strategies. These are supplemented with restorative conferences when a challenging event has occurred, often managed through peer mediation. A restorative justice approach deals with conflict by identifying or naming the wrongdoing, repairing the harm, and restoring relationships. As a result, restorative discipline is built on strong relationships and relational trust, with systems for students to reflect on any mistakes, repair damage to the community, and get counseling when needed. Creating an environment in which students learn to be responsible and are given the opportunity for agency and contribution can transform social, emotional, and academic behavior and outcomes.

The more comprehensive and well-infused the approach, the stronger the outcomes. For example, a continuum model including proactive restorative exchanges, affirmative statements, informal conferences, large-group circles, and restorative conferences substantially changed school culture and outcomes rapidly in one major district, as disparities in school discipline were reduced every year for each racial group, and gains were made in academic achievement across all subjects in nearly every grade level.[16]

At the school level, Bronxdale High School in New York City illustrates what can happen when a comprehensive program of equity-oriented educative and restorative behavioral supports is put in place. An inclusion high school that serves a disproportionate population of students with disabilities in a low-income community of color, the once chaotic and unsafe site is now a safe, caring, and collaborative community in which staff, students, and families have voice, agency, and responsibility. At Bronxdale, community building—accomplished through SEL work in advisories, student-designed classroom constitutions, and supportive affirmations and community development in all classrooms—is integral to the now successful restorative approach. As Bronxdale Principal Carolyn Quintana described, restorative practices have value only when there is something to restore and that something is "the community, relationships, and harmony."[17] Restorative deans support the building of community and implementation of a restorative justice approach; teaching students behavioral skills and responsibility; and repairing harm by making amends through restorative practices such as peer mediation, circles, and youth court. Their work is also supported by teachers, social workers, counselors, and community partners who are part of the school's multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) that enables trauma-informed and healing-informed supports for students.

Now a demonstration site for restorative justice in New York City, Bronxdale is known for its low suspension rate and strong academic program and results. Although most of its 445 students enter Bronxdale performing far below proficiency levels on standardized tests, they leave having outperformed their peers in credit accrual, 4- and 6-year graduation rates, and enrollment in postsecondary education.

Importantly, restorative practices can be implemented at all grade levels. Building community and supporting children by teaching them the skills to resolve conflicts and repair harm can begin in early childhood. For example, Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) in California has been scaling implementation of its restorative justice program since 2007. Glenview Elementary School in OUSD is one of the schools implementing schoolwide restorative justice practices, and one of its key strategies is the use of dialogue circles (illustrated in this video) to check in, settle disputes, teach skills, and build community.

Enact policies that enable social and emotional learning and restorative practices

Adopt standards and guidance for SEL and restorative practices. Throughout this pandemic and beyond, states and districts can support schools by developing clear guidelines and standards for children's learning and development in these domains. Standards can span preschool through grade 12 and specify the social and emotional skills children should be able to demonstrate, describe how to promote those competencies in children, and specify the conditions and settings that cultivate these competencies. They can also specify the necessary preparation and ongoing professional learning for educators to infuse social and emotional skills into all school experiences.

Washington state has worked to develop and implement social and emotional learning standards, benchmarks, indicators, and a constellation of professional learning resources, including an SEL Online Education Module that covers trauma-informed, restorative, and culturally responsive and affirming practices as well as promoting social awareness, relationships skills, self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making skills.

Illinois and Minnesota are two states that have developed restorative practice guidance and resources for schools. Minnesota has developed a suite of resources, including key principles to guide restorative practices in schools and implementation guidance to provide school districts, administrators, and educators with resources to integrate restorative practice into schoolwide climate, discipline, and teaching and learning. The key principles, each of which has corresponding practices, include:

- Principles that develop a restorative mindset—including putting relationships first and providing support and accountability so that those in positions of authority (teachers, staff, and administrators) do things *with* students rather than *to* or *for* them;
- Principles for just and equitable learning communities—including the belief that history, race, justice, and language matter; that interconnection and innate goodness matter; and that balancing relationship building and problem-solving in the process matters; and
- Principles of just and equitable discipline—including emotional literacy and discipline as guidance to repair harm, make amends, and give back to the community.

The Dignity in Schools Campaign has developed a model code and several additional resources that provide recommended language for alternative policies to pushout and zero-tolerance policies. The campaign's guidance supports removing police from schools and replacing them with effective staff-led strategies for classroom management, conflict resolution, and mediation. When staff lack strategies for managing behavior, focused supports may be needed. Using class-level data to provide targeted professional development for teachers may also be effective.

Provide funding and supports for curriculum resources and professional development. States such as Minnesota and cities such as Cleveland, OH, have developed curriculum resources for educators to infuse social-emotional skills into school experiences and have funded counseling and wraparound supports that enable children to cope with the many challenges they are experiencing.

State agencies and districts can use ESSA funds as well as federal stimulus funds from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act to support SEL programs and teacher training in SEL. (See "Priority 10: Leverage More Adequate and Equitable School Funding" for more detail on how to leverage federal funding.)

School leaders can also create working conditions (e.g., time and space for professional learning and self-care) that help adults feel connected, empowered, and valued. Studies have found that efforts to support SEL are strongest when they are conducted by school personnel who have opportunities to support and deepen their own skills,[18] which highlights the critical need for ongoing professional development as a vital element for promoting these capacities in students. Districts can take advantage of hybrid learning schedules that allow for a transition day between cohorts to dedicate more time to professional development and collaboration.

Professional learning should focus on trauma-informed SEL practices; culturally responsive, affirming, and anti-racist practices; restorative justice; and the promotion of social and emotional competencies for educators and school leaders to engage in self-care in order to respond to the needs of students. Organizations such as Sanford Inspire, part of Sanford Harmony at the National University System, and the Friday Institute at North Carolina State University have developed free courses to support educators in building their capacity to support SEL and their own social and emotional skills. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has also developed professional learning resources and lessons to support educators' capacity for SEL-informed and trauma-informed practices.

Professional learning should focus on trauma-informed social and emotional learning practices; culturally responsive, affirming, and anti-racist practices; restorative justice; and the promotion of social and emotional competencies for educators and school leaders.

Resources

- Reunite, Renew, and Thrive: Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Roadmap for Returning to School (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning). This guide provides school leaders with whole-school, anti-racist SEL strategies centered on relationships and built on the existing strengths of a school community. Specifically, the guide provides concrete *SEL Critical Actions* with *essential questions*; actions as schools *prepare*, *implement*, and *sustain* their integrative SEL work; and *tools* to help them along the way.
- Guidance on Culturally Responsive-Sustaining School Reopenings: Centering Equity to Humanize the Process of Coming Back Together (Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools). This guide poses questions and practices for policymakers, district and school leaders, and school personnel to consider for engaging in culturally responsive, equitable, and sustainable school reinventions.

- The Whole Child: Building Systems of Integrated Student Support During and After COVID-19 (Center for Optimized Student Support at Boston College). This action guide offers practical steps for schools to develop a system of integrated support.
- A Model Code on Education and Dignity (Dignity in Schools Campaign). The Model Code toolkit is organized into five chapters: (1) Education; (2) Participation; (3) Dignity; (4) Freedom From Discrimination; and (5) Data, Monitoring, and Accountability. Each of these chapters addresses a key component of providing a quality education and reflects core human rights principles and values. Each chapter includes recommended policies for states, districts, and schools.
- Restorative Practices: Fostering Healthy Relationships & Promoting Positive Discipline in Schools (National Opportunity to Learn Campaign). This guide provides examples of restorative practices, along with implementation tips and strategies as well as examples from school districts.
- Restorative Justice: Resources for Schools (Edutopia). This is a compilation of resources and case studies for bringing restorative justice into schools and classrooms.
- Social-Emotional Learning and Equity Pitfalls and Recommendations (National Equity Project). This chart highlights potential pitfalls and provides guidance on how to avoid them as schools advance equity and inclusion in the implementation of SEL.
- Social and Emotional Development Matters: Taking Action Now for Future Generations (Pennsylvania State University). This broad policy brief indicates a number of steps with actions to take at every level (federal, state, district, school, classroom, and home) to integrate SEL into a whole child approach.

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Priority 5: Redesign Schools for Stronger Relationships

Widespread school closures, social isolation, food scarcity, and parental unemployment brought about by the pandemic have destabilized children's support systems in a way that is traumatic to most children. When schools reopen—whether virtually, in person, or in a hybrid model—educators will need to address a wide range of learning needs, both social and emotional and academic, and these needs will remain in a future that promises to disrupt schooling further.

School designs that promote supportive, responsive relationships with caring adults provide the foundation for healthy development and learning and can mitigate the effects of adversity.[1] In addition, the latest international and U.S. guidance makes clear that safely reopening school buildings and resuming in-person learning requires a reduction in the number of people with whom school staff and students interact face-to-face—which can be accomplished through relationship-centered cohort designs (see "Cohorting"). Thus, this moment poses an opportunity to shift from the depersonalized structures of factory model schools inherited from the designs of a century ago to structures that allow students to be well known and allow teachers to care for students more effectively.

> The latest international and U.S. guidance makes clear that safely reopening school buildings and resuming in-person learning requires a reduction in the number of people with whom school staff and students interact face-to-face—which can be accomplished through relationship-centered cohort designs.

Cohorting

CDC guidance notes that an important strategy for minimizing exposure to the virus is *cohorting*, or forming "pods." Cohorting forms groups of students, to the greatest extent possible with the same teachers or staff, that stay together throughout the school day. The guidance notes that, ideally, students and staff within a cohort would only have physical proximity with others in the same cohort. This practice decreases opportunities for exposure to or transmission of the virus; facilitates more efficient contact tracing in the event of a positive case; and allows for targeted testing, quarantine, and isolation of a single cohort instead of schoolwide closures in the event of a positive case or cluster of cases.

Cohorting can be done as part of a traditional model, with all students attending school in person, on a full-time basis, or as part of a hybrid school model (i.e., students attending in-person school on an alternating schedule). Cohorting is a commonly used strategy in many elementary schools, in which students have the same teacher and classmates during the entire day and often for the entire school year. In secondary schools, schools may keep a single cohort together in one classroom and have teachers rotate between cohorts, or have small cohorts move together in staggered passing schedules to other rooms they need to use (e.g., science labs) without allowing students to mix with others from distinctive cohorts. Schools may also assign student cohorts to specific days or weeks for in-person and online learning.

What Students Need

We know from the science of learning and development that warm, caring, supportive pupil–teacher relationships, as well as other child–adult relationships, are linked to better school performance and engagement, greater social competence, and increased ability to take on challenges.[2] However, the basic structures of the factory model system of education on which most U.S. schools are still based can undermine schools' efforts to support strong relationships.

These designs have been critiqued for their impersonal structures, fragmented curricula, segregated and unequal program options, and inability to respond effectively to different student needs.[3] Designs that follow the Prussian age grading model adopted in the early 1900s typically move students to another teacher each year, and in secondary schools, to another teacher every 45 or 50 minutes (with students seeing as many as seven or eight teachers daily). These models also assign counselors to attend to the personal needs of hundreds of students. Especially in large schools where thousands of students experience these kinds of fragmented encounters with adults, there is neither time nor opportunity for strong continuous relationships, personalization, or community building. In this model, teachers and counselors, despite their best efforts, are unable to know and attend to all of the personal needs of all of their students or their families. Students who experience adversity may have no one to turn to for support.

Enabling the development of relationship-centered schools so that they are the norm and not the exception will be more important now than ever before. Educators will need to provide children and youth a sense of physical and psychological safety in order for learning to occur, because fear and anxiety undermine children's cognitive capacity for learning.[4] Schools that have been designed to support caring and continuity in teachers' relationships with students—for example, by allowing teachers to loop with students for more than 1 year or to serve as advisors to a small group in secondary school—are more able to address trauma and strengthen achievement than is possible in traditional factory model schools.[5] In addition, school designs in which a team of teachers shares a group of students around whom they can plan a coherent, interdisciplinary curriculum and for whom they can be mutually accountable can personalize secondary education in ways that traditional fragmented scheduling does not allow.

Students who were already at higher levels of risk for poor outcomes can especially benefit from nurturing relationships with teachers and other adults as a means to increase student learning and support their development and wellness,[6] especially when these relationships are culturally sensitive and responsive.[7] Students learn best when they can connect their cultural contexts and experiences to what they are learning in school, when their teachers are responsive to their strengths and needs, and when their environment is "identity safe,"[8] reinforcing their value and belonging. (See also "Priority 6: Emphasize Authentic, Culturally Responsive Learning.") For these reasons, and because children develop through individual trajectories shaped by their unique traits and experiences, adults need to know them well to create productive learning opportunities.[9] This is especially important given the stress and trauma children are experiencing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and even more so for those children who were already experiencing systemic racism and living under adverse conditions prior to the pandemic.

One of the most important approaches to reduce risks of COVID-19 infection and transmission is to organize small cohorts of students that remain constant with a common set of continuous staff—such as homeroom-based cohorts and teaching teams that share students with extended block

schedules so they see fewer teachers each semester and remain together with the same teachers. Additionally, ensuring physical distancing will often require small class sizes and groupings. These approaches not only reduce the risk of disease transmission but also provide opportunities for teachers and staff to know students and their families well. When combined with intentional structures that enable greater continuity in relationships between students and teachers—such as looping teachers with their students from the previous year—schools can put into place designs that research has shown will strengthen students' academic success and ability to cope with trauma.

What Policymakers and Educators Can Do

With traditional structures of school having been upended during the pandemic, there is a need and opportunity for school, local, and state leaders to consider ways to organize children and adults that build strong relationships and also reduce risk of infection. This means small, stable cohorts and built-in time for school staff, teachers, students, and parents to connect and develop continuous relationships. Redesigning schools to support stronger relationships was and will always be important for children and youth to succeed, but times of crisis make it especially so.

Create structures that foster health and safety, as well as personalization and trust, among children and staff

Developing strong relationships can be difficult in schools where organizational structures minimize opportunities for personalized relationships that extend over time, as is often the case in many U.S. schools. Policymakers and school leaders can help schools put into place these structures that foster health and safety, personalization, and relational trust by both offering models of new designs and removing regulatory impediments enforcing antiquated notions of how time and staff are organized in schools, as described below.

Minimize transitions and maximize relationships. Whether in person or online, strengthening the relationships that students form with teachers as well as each other leads to greater comfort, engagement, and motivation to learn.[10] When teachers work with students over multiple years and come to know their students well, they can better support academic and social and emotional learning (SEL), connect with families, and attend to a range of needs. (For more implementation information, see "Priority 4: Ensure Supports for Social and Emotional Learning.")

> When teachers work with students over multiple years and come to know their students well, they can better support academic and social and emotional learning (SEL), connect with families, and attend to a range of needs.

For this reason, some teachers and other experts are recommending that students return next year to their teacher from last year (a practice known as looping), staying with that teacher for at least the first quarter or—when plausible—for the entire year. Similarly, Chiefs for Change recommends that secondary school students return to small mentored groups when school reopens. The Connected Learning Model recommends encouraging teachers to hold office hours and schedule one-on-one check-ins with each student to provide a safe haven for students to discuss their

feelings and experiences. California has developed a set of essential questions for districts to consider when developing continuity of relationships and learning plans. Its reopening schools guidance emphasizes the importance of cohort groups.

Restructure schools to create small cohorts that reduce disease transmission and foster strong relationships. Organizing students and staff into small, stable cohorts across primary and secondary grades serves not only to minimize disease transmission but also to ease transitions, strengthen relationships, and enable more continuity between distance and in-person learning. This is relatively common and straightforward to put into place for preschool and elementary school students through **homeroom-based instructional models**. Students are assigned a consistent homeroom teacher, and when students return to in-person learning, they stay in their homeroom classes—avoiding contact with other groups—for class time, lunch, recess, and any special classes, such as art or library. It is important that teachers also work with only one cohort, so as not to create a vector of transmission between two or more groups. This approach has been used effectively by other countries, including Denmark and Taiwan.

Although less common in middle and high schools, models and examples exist for organizing older students and staff into **small cohorts through the house system, combined with block scheduling**.

The House System

The house system was a traditional feature of schools in England in the 19th century, when students were divided into subunits called "houses" to which teachers were also assigned. (Think of Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin, the four houses at Harry Potter's Hogwarts.) American public schools have reintroduced the house system, a smaller learning community within a larger building, as a way to help students feel more connected and to develop a sense of belonging. Some schools that serve students who have had their education interrupted due to homelessness, mobility, or family circumstances also divide their students into smaller learning communities called "arenas" to provide them with a consistent set of experiences and relationships as well as the opportunity to personalize learning.

Although some houses in large comprehensive schools are 300 to 600 students, the ideal for the current context would be to identify much smaller cohorts of perhaps 80 to 120 students within such larger units that share the same set of teachers throughout the school day and school year, preferably in a dedicated space, separate from others. Where interdisciplinary courses are possible (e.g., humanities and math/science), cohorts might be as small as 40 to 60 students. This provides students with the opportunity to interact with the same set of teachers consistently so they can make stronger bonds and connections while running a much lower risk of infection than would be the case if they were in classes with other students outside the cohort. In this case, as well as the elementary case above, it is important for teachers not to be assigned across cohorts so that they do not then become vectors for transmission.

Some middle and high schools combine courses in interdisciplinary team block schedules in which teachers from two or more courses share a common group of students—such as a combined math and science course taught by one teacher alongside a combined English language arts and social studies course (often called humanities) taught by another teacher. Often these courses are

co-planned with other math or science or humanities teachers so that all teachers get the benefits of each other's disciplinary expertise, even as they are teaching smaller groups of students for longer blocks of time individually. Team block schedules can further reduce the total number of individuals with whom students and teachers interact while also fostering greater collaboration among teachers to coordinate curriculum.

The kind of cohort organization needed for safe schools may combine block scheduling with smaller learning communities. For example, Vista High School, a traditional large comprehensive high school serving the needs of a diverse small suburban and rural community north of San Diego, CA, combines block scheduling with a house system. The freshman class was broken into six houses of 100 to 130 students who shared a set of four teachers to cover core subjects and one special education teacher. Each house was located in a dedicated area of the Vista High School campus so teachers and students could have space to build stronger positive relationships (including relationships between students, between students and teachers, and between teachers within the house structure). Each team defined how spaces in and around their classroom and house could be used to meet the learning needs of students and reimagined how the grouping of students and grouping of teachers within that space and time could positively impact student learning.

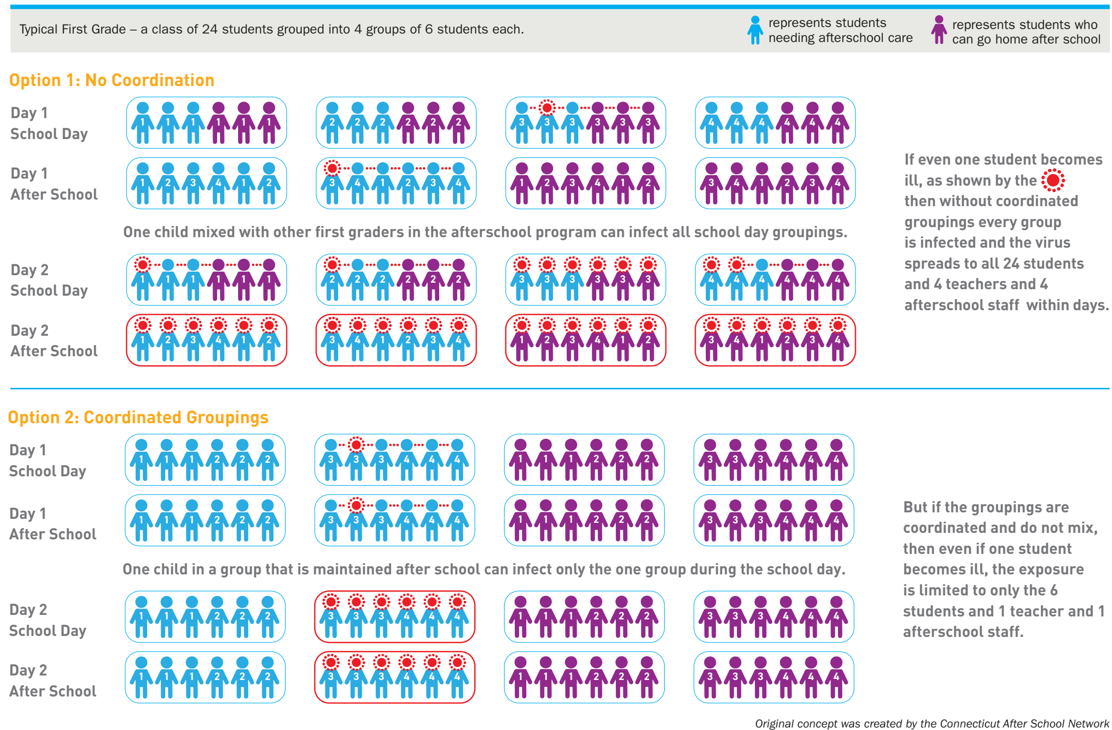
Hillsdale High School in the San Francisco Bay Area uses cohorts within a house system to help achieve personalization within a student body of nearly 1,500. Within the three houses, there are teams of subject matter teachers representing each of the core academic fields who share a group of about 110 to 120 heterogeneously grouped students. The school worked hard to eliminate tracking so that all students would experience a curriculum aimed at deeper learning and so that the groups would not become segregated. Each 9th-grade teacher also has a group of these students as an advisory class that continues through the end of their sophomore year, at which time the students graduate up to another team and advisory group for their junior and senior years.

Four teachers coordinate with one another in mostly adjacent classrooms as they teach those subjects. Teachers have time in their schedule both for joint curriculum planning and for separate meetings in which they talk about students they share, seeking to solve emerging problems and to share their insights about how to support each one. Hillsdale Principal Jeff Gilbert says, "You know every family, and you know every student. You stop dealing with them in these sort of large, abstract cohorts, in addition to allowing for much more individualized responses."[11]

A similar strategy is used at the Internationals High Schools that serve newcomers successfully. A team of four core content area teachers shares a group of about 80 to 100 students, with a counselor attached to the cohort, and loops with them from 9th to 10th grade. These personalized supports are especially important in some of the network schools, where as many as one third of students arrive as unaccompanied minors and struggle to manage housing, food, health care, and other basic supports, as well as learning the language and customs of a new country.

Importantly, in order to further reduce the risk of disease transmission as well as bolster continuity in relationships and learning, it is critical that schools, after-school programs, and community programs can work together to co-construct cohorts between school and extended learning programs. As the Connecticut After School Network illustrates, schools that coordinate student cohorts with extended learning providers greatly limit COVID-19 infection and transmission (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1
Coordination Between Schools and Extended Learning Programs Is Critical to Limiting the Spread of COVID-19



Source: Connecticut After School Alliance. (2020). *Stopping the Spread of COVID-19: Coordination Between Schools and Afterschool Programs*.

Strengthen partnerships with families

Out of necessity during the period of school closures, many schools and districts have found new strategies and routines for connecting with families by phone, email, and web-based platforms, creating much more frequent communication and supporting parents with everything from technology supports to partnership in the co-teaching activities they have undertaken.

These more robust connections with students' homes is something that should not be lost with school reopening. Families are critical to providing deeper knowledge of their children and greater alignment between home and school, especially as we move between in-person and distance learning. We know, too, that collaboration and relational trust between school and district staff and parents and caregivers is an essential ingredient to sustaining change and improvement. A multiyear study of Chicago elementary schools found that relational trust fostered open and honest conversation, built alignment toward a shared vision among staff and parents, and contributed to improvements taking hold more broadly across a school.[12]

Relational trust is fostered in stable school communities by skillful school leaders who nurture authentic parent engagement, grounded in partnerships with families, in order to promote student growth and capitalize on their cultural assets. Relational trust requires authentic listening and sharing power. Families are far more likely to partner with schools when the school's norms and values reflect their own experiences and when the school makes them feel welcome.

Schools can cultivate partnerships and trust with families by using multiple approaches to relationship building with families as part of the core approach to education. This may include planning teacher time for virtual home visits; student–teacher–parent conferences that are flexibly scheduled around parents' availability and designed to help teachers learn from parents about their children; outreach to involve families in school activities; and regular communication through positive phone calls home, emails, and text messages.[13] Importantly, schools that succeed in engaging families from diverse backgrounds embrace a philosophy of partnership in which power and responsibility are shared. It is important to recognize that in some communities in which trust has been violated—for instance, as a result of racial injustices or incidents of police brutality—relationships must be rebuilt through a proactive, authentic process that includes extensive listening and demonstrations that educators are trustworthy.

Parent–teacher home visits have been found to be a particularly effective strategy for engaging families and combating implicit bias, particularly in communities where educators and families differ by race, culture, and/or socioeconomic status.[14] A number of states and districts, including Oregon and Sacramento, CA, are already exploring and encouraging the use of virtual home visit techniques to stay connected with families during the protracted reopening period. Stand for Children Leadership Center recommends starting the school year with virtual home visits and has developed a page dedicated to virtual home visit resources, including a how-to guide.

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Cultivate supportive environments filled with emotional safety and belonging

Children learn when they feel safe and supported, and their learning is impaired when they are fearful or traumatized.[15] Thus, they need both supportive environments and well-developed abilities to manage stress and cope with both the results of the pandemic and evidence of racial injustice that are surfacing, as well as the inevitable conflicts and frustrations of school and life beyond school. Therefore, it is important that state and local leaders ensure that schools provide a positive learning environment that offers a measure of security and support that maximizes students' ability to learn social and emotional skills as well as academic content.

Dedicate time to creating opportunities for intentional community building. A supportive learning community encourages student agency and leadership in the context of a culturally responsive curriculum that values diverse experiences and involvement in the community. Such environments foster a sense of belonging and safety, with shared norms—which students have helped create—represented in all of the school's activities. School staff can learn about the strengths

and needs of students as well as their families' funds of knowledge through regular check-ins and class meetings, conferencing, student journaling, close observation of students and their work, and regular connections and outreach to parents. These practices can foster developmentally informed relationships among students, parents, and staff, which is arguably even more important now, when other avenues for connecting with peers and community are limited during the pandemic.

Design learning experiences that promote inclusion and reduce segregation. Students also need opportunities to form relationships across lines of socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic difference. As part of reopening and learning continuity plans, schools can promote equity and inclusion in learning experiences by creating cohorts that are socioeconomically, racially, and ethnically diverse.

As part of reopening and learning continuity plans, schools can promote equity and inclusion in learning experiences by creating cohorts that are socioeconomically, racially, and ethnically diverse.

States and districts can support schools to eliminate tracking and exclusionary remediation practices. In a recent post, Halley Potter of the Century Foundation and Josh Starr of PDK International describe how well-intentioned proposals to automatically hold back large groups of children or place them in remedial groups pose a risk of exacerbating dropout rates and reinforcing academic tracking that separates students into different classes based on perceived ability levels. As they outline the decades of research on how tracking harms students by reducing achievement for those exposed to a low-level curriculum, they also describe strategies to catch students up without reinstituting segregative tracking systems. (See also "Priority 3: Assess What Students Need" and "Priority 7: Provide Expanded Learning Time" for more discussion of how this can be accomplished.)

To avoid tracking students in ways that become more segregative, teachers may need additional supports in the form of both curriculum tools and professional development to teach successfully in heterogeneous classes, and students may need additional time and supports to catch up on some skills. (See "Priority 7: Provide Expanded Learning Time.")

One more threat to equity is the recent emergence of learning pods clustered within wealthy neighborhoods, largely formed by well-resourced families to supplement distance or hybrid learning, which have the potential to exacerbate inequities and segregation. Districts and schools can promote equity by working with child care providers and families to connect with those in their inclusive school-based small cohort when forming learning pods and by providing strategies to make the groups more diverse. Schools can focus on implementing inclusive, heterogeneous learning settings and experiences that allow children to interact and learn across lines of racial, socioeconomic, linguistic, and other differences. (See "Priority 2: Strengthen Distance and Blended Learning" for additional examples of how to support equitable learning in out-of-school settings.)

Enact policies that support relationship-centered school designs

State and district leaders can remove impediments to new school designs that may exist in traditional formulas for staffing allocations and schedules and for collective bargaining agreements that assume traditional teaching assignment patterns. They can also provide supports for

relationship-centered school designs. These designs can be paired with policies that provide time and funding for collaboration and capacity building among staff as well as for staff outreach to students and parents, including home visits and regular check-ins. Features that have been consistently identified as critical to the success of student-centered schools[16] include:

- **structures that enable adults to know children well** and develop strong, personalized relationships, including advisors and advisory classes, looping, block scheduling, longer grade spans, and small learning communities;
- opportunities for **collaboration among school staff** to share knowledge about students and achieve a shared developmental approach, which can be achieved through interdisciplinary teaching teams and dedicated blocks for staff collaboration;
- **supports for outreach to families** to engage them in partnership around their children's education; and
- efforts to **preserve stability in school staffing** for both principals and teachers that support stronger trust, relationships, and continuous improvement.[17]

States and districts can encourage redesign of schools by rethinking staffing designs and ratios embedded in state and local policies and providing flexibility for local leaders to adopt new approaches to staffing that favor personalization across boundaries of grade levels, departments, and other traditional organizing features that have sometimes fragmented schools.

Allow for new designs that enable stronger teacher–student relationships and time for staff collaboration. Many approaches are possible in pursuing these goals. For example, in its guide *Preventing a Lost School Year*, Stand for Children has identified advisors for all students and grade-level staff teaming as two of its six essentials for motivating and supporting students. The group also recommends that English learners be assigned to advisory staff who speak their native language to the greatest extent possible and that staff who are assigned students with individualized education plans (IEPs) be well versed in their advisees' IEPs and be in regular communication with IEP case managers.

An Advisors for All how-to guide is based on the pioneering "Every Student Every Day" advising approach of Phoenix Union High School District in Arizona, where every student in the district's 21 high schools is "connected to a caring adult who monitors the teen's progress, attendance, and social-emotional well-being."[18] Prior to the pandemic, students connected with advisors daily, and when brick-and-mortar schooling closed in March 2020, the district recruited administrators and school board members into the advisory program to be able to reach out to all students at home for wellness check calls. District advisors documented their calls and either provided resources or connected families to other programs or community organizations for assistance meeting their needs.

Districts can partner with networks of schools that have demonstrated, at scale, how to successfully secure the necessary structures that allow schools to design for stronger relationships, deeper learning, and equity. Among those that work with schools around the country are Big Picture Learning, the Internationals Network for Public Schools, and New Tech Network.[19] A recent study shows how these three networks partner with districts to redesign schools for student-centered, deeper learning models by rethinking the structures governing how teachers are organized to work with students and with each other to support learning. This includes creating schools that allow for advisory systems, teacher teaming, and teacher looping, along with flexible schedules that provide ample time for teachers and students to engage in collaborative and applied learning.

To achieve this time for teacher collaboration as well as strong relationships with students, districts need to be willing to consider new approaches to scheduling; staffing allocations to schools; teacher assignments; and, sometimes, collective bargaining arrangements that may be grounded in factory model assumptions about how teachers do their work.

Another such network that partners with districts to redesign schools is the Institute for Student Achievement (ISA), a national nonprofit organization specializing in high school redesign that collaborates with school leaders and staff to implement ISA's research-based design principles. Supported by district policies enabling flexibility in staffing and school design, these principles guided Bronxdale High School in New York City—an inclusion high school serving high proportions of students with disabilities as well as students of color from low-income families—in reorganizing to develop community and relationships.[20] Among the school's strategies are:

- **small class sizes** (approximately 22 students per course) to create more opportunities for teacher support to students, particularly English learners and students with IEPs;
- **advisors** assigned to each student and advisory class two to three times per week;
- **teaching teams** in which staff work in community groups to develop shared norms and practices so that a cohort of interdisciplinary teachers (English, math, science, and social studies) teaches the same students;
- **explicit relationship building** leveraged through advisories and teaching teams;
- **attention to student voice and needs** through student engagement in research and "passion projects" on topics of concern and student leadership in advisories and clubs; and
- **outreach to families** that includes frequent communication with parents to engender a sense of belonging within the Bronxdale community.

Provide time, funding, and supports for outreach to students and families. State and district leaders can support schools to meaningfully partner with students and families by providing time, funding, and guidance for regular outreach, including home visits and regular check-ins (as described above). Enacting policies that provide teachers with dedicated time and compensation for home visits, for instance, is critical to the success and longevity of such initiatives. The Parent Teacher Home Visits Project is an inexpensive and easily replicable model for parent engagement, with a platform for connecting online, that has been shown to build trust, respect, and the capacity for cultural competency among parents and school staff. States and districts can leverage ESSA Title I, III, and IV and federal CARES Act funds to support training for family engagement, such as home visits, and outreach efforts. (See "Priority 10: Leverage More Adequate and Equitable School Funding" for more detail on how to leverage federal funding.)

Reopening guidance can also include recommended measures, such as expanded advisory or mentoring periods, mandatory communication teams, and regular virtual check-ins and home visits. In Louisiana, the state's Strong Start 2020 Plan states that schools will "implement a strategic communications plan to: connect with every student daily; provide feedback on student work at least weekly; and help families understand their role in supporting their child's continuous learning."[21]

Ensure greater stability of teacher and principal assignments. Research clearly indicates that organizational conditions such as low turnover among school staff and leadership promote higher achievement for students[22] and also promote relational conditions that are conducive to caring. Teacher turnover is reduced in settings that enable greater collaboration, professional learning, and engagement in decision-making—and where principals have longer tenures.[23] Principal turnover is a great concern given the critical role played by principals in leading long-term school improvement efforts, as schools plagued by turnover exhibit lower commitment to improvement.[24] Principal turnover leads to teacher turnover, which causes dissatisfaction and burnout and decreases the possibility of satisfying, caring relationships. This especially affects schools in high-poverty neighborhoods that have greater student mobility. Constant reshuffling of principals, common in many U.S. districts, is a policy that needs to be reexamined, as research increasingly suggests the value of maintaining effective principals in their schools.

Research clearly indicates that organizational conditions such as low turnover among school staff and leadership promote higher achievement for students and also promote relational conditions that are conducive to caring.

In sum, while it has long been important to redesign schools to support stronger, long-term relationships, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerates the urgency to do so. In this moment of crisis, state, district, and school leaders can leverage these insights from the science of learning and development to rethink century-old factory model assumptions in ways that can promote the health and success of the entire school community for generations to come.

Resources

- Reunite, Renew, and Thrive: Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Roadmap for Returning to School (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning). This guide provides school leaders with whole-school, anti-racist SEL strategies centered on relationships and built on the existing strengths of a school community. Specifically, the guide provides concrete SEL critical actions with essential questions; actions as schools prepare, implement, and sustain their integrative SEL work; and tools to help them along the way.
- Preventing a Lost School Year: The Crucial Importance of Motivating Students & Engaging Families (Stand for Children Leadership Center). This guide identifies essentials for motivating and supporting students and for strong partnerships with families, including advisors for all, staff teaming, and virtual home visits, accompanied by tools and resources.
- The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Karen L. Mapp, Eyal Bergman, & the Institute for Educational Leadership). The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Version 2) was designed to help districts and schools chart a path toward effective family engagement efforts.
- Making Families Feel Welcome (Siegel, Esqueda, Berkowitz, Sullivan, Astor, & Benbenishty [2019], via Greater Good Science Center). This brief reflection activity for school staff lists methods for making students' families feel valued and respected.

- Family-School Partnerships (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning). This webpage provides a list of resources for starting, supporting, and strengthening family–school partnerships, from accessible blogs and videos to interviews with veteran researchers.
- Insights From Networks Video Feature (Learning Policy Institute). In these videos, school and district educators and network representatives share their insights on the strategies and practices to support designing schools to be student- and relationship-centered.
- Building a Positive School Climate (Learning Policy Institute). This brief focuses on state efforts to build a positive school climate and also provides policy considerations and resources for helping states and districts help schools improve their climate.
- Identity Safe Classrooms: Places to Belong and Learn (Dorothy M. Steele & Becki Cohn-Vargas). This website, based on a book of the same name, includes activities, practices, and resources for creating identity-safe classrooms.
- COVID-19 and Homelessness: Strategies for Schools, Early Learning Programs, and Higher Education Institutions (SchoolHouse Connection). This resource provides guides, checklists, and strategies for meeting the needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness.

Endnotes

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Priority 6: Emphasize Authentic, Culturally Responsive Learning

> Reprioritize. This is the time to see if something can be different. To reset the system, we have to take a loss, but we can recoup the loss if we actually get kids excited about education and create a more positive space for them to learn.
>
> —Michelle Ampong, Atlanta parent and school volunteer[1]

Schools that have successfully motivated students to engage in learning even when schooling has been disrupted have been connecting lessons to real-world applications, allowing students to explore the world around them and to demonstrate what they know through projects and presentations that display the products of their work. There may be a temptation when school resumes to set aside this kind of authentic work and double down on the kind of decontextualized learning that traditional transmission teaching typically offers—often in preparation for tests that measure learning in equally decontextualized ways.

However, many innovative schools have demonstrated that standards can be better taught and learned when students are motivated by the opportunity to dive deeply into serious questions, demonstrating what they have learned by showing and explaining the studies, products, and tools they have developed. Furthermore, in the blended learning world that is now a necessity, this kind of learning process can, with the right kind of teaching supports, help students develop the skills for planning, organizing, managing, and improving their own work and becoming more self-directed—skills that will be essential both for this more complex educational world and for the world of college and careers beyond.

What Students Need

Research from the learning sciences has shown that people learn by building on their prior knowledge and experiences, drawing on their cultural and community contexts, and connecting what they are learning to what they already understand.[2] In order to make meaning of new ideas, we need to apply them to new contexts. People are also motivated to learn by questions and curiosities they hold—and by the opportunity to investigate what things mean, and why things happen. Humans are inquiring beings, and the mind is stimulated by the effort to make connections and seek answers to things that matter.

A group of more than 400 researchers offering advice about education during this time urged that schools "provide the most personalized and engaging instruction possible." Learning opportunities are most effective when they start with meaningful questions; provide opportunities for inquiry in interaction with others; enable hands-on experiences and applications to meaningful contexts; and provide frequent, informative feedback on what students are doing and thinking in identity-safe environments.

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This kind of learning is also more suited to the 21st-century demands in knowledge-work jobs for critical thinking and problem-solving skills; the capacity to find, analyze, synthesize, and apply knowledge to novel situations; interpersonal skills that allow people to work with others and engage effectively in cross-cultural contexts; self-directional abilities that allow people to manage their own work and complex projects; abilities to competently find resources and use tools; and the capacity to communicate effectively in many ways.

Learning also depends on strong, positive relationships between and among teachers and students in identity-safe learning environments that eliminate the social identity threats that undermine achievement for many students. Such threats—often identified as stereotype threats—occur when children encounter biases inside or outside of school that communicate negative views about one or more of the groups they are associated with.[3] Social identity threats make students—especially students of color, students with disabilities, LGBTQ students, immigrant students, language-minority students, and students from low-income families—feel as if they cannot be seen and valued for who they actually are. Students under threat can experience acute anxiety born of fear of discrimination and uncertainty that their efforts will be positively received or produce positive outcomes—concerns that translate into lower performance when stereotype threats are activated.[4]

To address these threats, educators must eliminate sources of bias from the school environment and affirmatively communicate the value they hold for each child by creating strong, trusting relationships and offering culturally responsive instruction that connects to students' experiences, acknowledges cultural assets, and promotes cross-cultural relationships. Support for cultural pluralism that builds on students' experiences and intentionally brings students' voices into the classroom helps create an identity-safe and engaging atmosphere for learning to take place[5] and enables a positive school climate, particularly for students of color.[6]

Elements of Identity-Safe Learning Experiences

Identity-safe learning experiences and communities promote student achievement and attachments to school.[7] The elements of such experiences, found to support strong academic performance for all students, include:

- **Teaching** that promotes understanding, student voice, student responsibility for and belonging to the classroom community, and cooperation in learning and classroom tasks.
- **Cultivating diversity as a resource** for teaching through regular use of diverse materials, ideas, and teaching activities along with high expectations for all students.
- **Relationships** based on trusting, encouraging interactions between the teacher and each student and the creation of positive relationships among the students.
- **Caring, orderly, purposeful learning environments** in which social skills are proactively taught and practiced to help students respect and care for one another in an emotionally and physically safe classroom, so each student feels attached to the others.

Source: Darling-Hammond, L., & Cook-Harvey, C. M. (2018). *Educating the whole child: Improving school climate to support student success.* Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

To enable authentic, culturally responsive learning in identity-safe settings, students need opportunities for voice and agency. Engagement and effort are supported in settings where children feel they are respected and valued by their teachers and peers, where they see that they can improve with effort (for example, by receiving feedback and revising their work), and where they are working on things that matter to themselves and others—including projects they choose and pursue to accomplish improvements in their lives, families, and communities.

Finally, students need opportunities to demonstrate what they know and can do in ways that are as authentic and meaningful as the learning they have undertaken. In order to encourage and measure authentic learning, performance assessments that reflect how students acquire and use knowledge to solve real-world problems will increasingly be needed. Before the No Child Left Behind Act, many states used assessments like those common in high-achieving nations today that require students to solve complex real-world problems and defend their ideas orally and in writing. These assessments—which include research projects, science investigations, mathematical and computer models, and other products—are mapped to the syllabus and the standards for the subject and are selected because they represent critical skills, topics, and concepts. Research shows that schools that are using such assessments better prepare students for college and careers.[8]

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A growing number of districts and states, as well as innovative schools, are revisiting the possibilities of redesigning assessments to shape the curriculum in ways that stimulate more meaningful learning; that give teachers timely, formative information they need to help students improve; and that help students learn about how they learn.

What Policymakers and Educators Can Do

Given the shifts in schooling that will continue to occur, there is no better time to reinvent educational practices so that teaching is guided by the science of learning and supported through high-quality opportunities for authentic learning and assessment that can support meaningful, relevant, and complex learning experiences in the classroom and virtually. States and districts can consider several strategies to support this kind of learning.

Offer guidance for how schools can restart by focusing on authentic learning and assessment strategies

Oregon's guidance for the 2020–21 school year, *Ready Schools, Safe Learners*, indicates that districts should seek to "support student-centered project-based educational experiences that ignite student agency, identity, and voice." The guidance asks educators to:

- Establish clearly stated learning goals and outcomes based on grade-level Oregon State Standards. Integrate quality, culturally sustaining instructional strategies and materials (e.g., Oregon's Tribal History/Shared History bill).
- Design curricular experiences that utilize authentic and deeper learning experiences to engage students. Provide opportunities for students to meet the standards in nontraditional ways, such as through student-driven projects that honor student identity and context.

- Implement opportunities for students to earn credit by proficiency.
- Design experiences using research-based design principles, such as universal design for learning (UDL), that improve access to learning for all participants.
- Use assessment to celebrate student strengths, identify needs, document learning as it progresses, and verify student performance in comparison to levels of expectation or proficiency.
- Implement assessments that are embedded in instructional practices to identify progression toward grade-level content knowledge and skills that need attention.
- Collect varied evidence of learning related to student strengths and interests.
- Provide multiple ways for students to show what they know.
- Prioritize descriptive feedback that provides students with actionable next steps.
- Evaluate goals and objectives based on progress markers for students supported through an individualized education plan (IEP) or 504 Plan.

This guidance may also include statements of goals and competencies at the state and district levels that prioritize higher-order skills that students need to solve problems and learn to learn, with processes to incorporate these skills more fully into curriculum, assessments, and professional development. For example, curriculum and assessments can include the skills students need to:

- **read for meaning** to use what they learn in other contexts, to discuss and debate ideas, and to solve problems of importance to them;
- **conduct research and evaluate information** to answer questions they care about;
- **collaborate to solve problems**, understand more deeply, and design tools;
- **conduct investigations** in which they collect evidence, observe phenomena, analyze data, and write up results to explain what they did and what they found; and
- **give and receive feedback** as they revise their work.

States can also offer supported opportunities to redesign schools to cultivate these competencies. One approach is demonstrated by the "Kansans Can" project, which is grounded in a graduate profile that redefined student learning competencies to emphasize not only academic and cognitive preparation but also technical skills, employability, and civic engagement through higher standards, a more student-focused system, and increased collaboration. The Kansans Can School Redesign Project invited districts to apply for funding and technical support to redesign selected elementary and secondary schools to support these competencies. The Kansans Can Star Recognition Program also recognized districts for accomplishing goals ranging from social and emotional growth and kindergarten readiness to high school graduation preparedness, civic engagement, and postsecondary success.

Similarly, Virginia provided high school innovation planning grants to school divisions to develop or implement programs that promote Virginia's 5 C's—critical thinking, creative thinking, collaboration, communication, and citizenship—while preparing students for careers and postsecondary education. The legislature defined the essential elements of high school program innovation as student-centered learning; progress based on proficiency; "real-world" connections aligned with local workforce needs and emphasizing transitions to college or career or both; and varying models for educator supports and staffing.

Provide curriculum tools and professional learning for educators to support more authentic learning and assessment

States and districts can also offer schools and educators opportunities to access standards-based curricula they can draw upon and adapt to develop authentic learning experiences for students, engage in professional learning opportunities, and join networks of schools that have created productive approaches to learning. These include public schools and districts that work with networks providing curriculum resources for project-based learning such as New Tech Network and International Baccalaureate, as well as curriculum tools in particular subject areas, such as EL Education in English language arts and the Mathematics Improvement Network in math. Organizations such as reDesign and inquirED offer guidance on how to reshape curriculum around inquiry-based learning.

Recognizing the importance of this kind of learning, Chicago Public Schools offered standards-aligned projects in every grade level and subject that students could engage in during the time of school closures. The American Federation of Teachers also supported teachers nationwide with a virtual initiative on capstone projects that allow students to show what they have learned in innovative, meaningful ways at any grade level, linked to standards. Student work ranges from writing essays about a favorite book to researching a current issue to preparing and participating in online debates. California's guidance to educators includes platforms that can be used to demonstrate learning through the use of performance-based assessments that sharpen critical thinking and communication skills.

Schools that routinely engage in project-based learning were able to carry students' projects through to virtual defenses of students' completed research projects and portfolios at the end of the year. These initiatives—with teachers providing guidance and support—enabled students to develop greater agency and metacognitive skills that allow them to continue to learn strategically, preparing them more fully for the kind of work they will experience in college and in life.

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For example, before schools were closed, teachers at Oakland High School had designed an authentic project on safety issues related to commuting to school—a community challenge students had identified. Students addressed the question: How can we improve the journey to school for teachers and students? Their client was the City of Oakland Department of Transportation. They also worked with a community partner, Y-PLAN, a local initiative based out of UC Berkeley's Center for Cities and Schools. Students researched solutions to the logistical challenge of getting 1,600 people on and off campus safely every day. This required them to observe the many challenges in the areas around campus; conduct interviews; and develop, administer, and analyze a community survey. After schools were closed, students met virtually in teams to complete their research and to identify solutions, supported by teachers through Zoom sessions and telephone calls. At the end of the year, nearly 30 students made a virtual presentation, "A Competent, Convenient Commute (CCC)," to members of the Oakland Department of Transportation, Berkeley SafeTREC (the Safe Transportation Research and Education Center), Y-PLAN, and Oakland High's staff, in which they advocated for curb striping, crosswalk lights on the road, and pedestrian islands.

In the course of this project, students had to learn to identify and frame problems and questions; conduct research; evaluate evidence; develop arguments; explain and defend their thinking; communicate clearly in writing as well as orally, quantitatively, and graphically; plan a complex project; receive and incorporate feedback; revise their work; seek out resources; and overcome obstacles. The performance tasks supported these cognitive skills as well as extending and authenticating core academic activities.

COVID-19 hit as middle school students from the School for Examining Essential Questions of Sustainability (SEEQS) in Honolulu, HI, were embarking on self-directed projects as part of their yearlong interdisciplinary exploration of sustainability. The students had more autonomy to design and implement their projects at home while sheltering in place, and many students connected their work to the emotional, physical, and economic threats of COVID-19. Projects included rain catchers and irrigation systems to sustain home gardens, developing a Twitter bot to remind people to wash their hands to prevent COVID-19 infection, creating sidewalk art, and researching and engaging in healthy activities to alleviate stress. The school's virtual exhibition was presented to all of the SEEQS community members and many others beyond.[9]

Similarly, at the UCLA Community School, one of the interdisciplinary projects students conducted on issues affecting their community was a 10-week inquiry process in which students investigated the disparate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color and the responses of local students, teachers, and parents who have organized to work for justice in and beyond schools. After reading articles and reviewing current data and the latest research on the virus, students reported on how these issues were affecting them, their families, and their communities. There was no difficulty getting students to participate because they were learning something they deeply cared about and could use to improve their own lives and those of their loved ones.

Recognizing the value of this kind of learning, school districts in Oakland, Los Angeles, and Pasadena, have been working to incorporate project-based learning and performance assessments into graduation portfolios that students prepare and defend in high school. These districts have established policies focused on ensuring the tools, staffing, and professional development needed to support the quality of these efforts and greater student access to this work.[10]

Ensure that authentic learning is also culturally connected and culturally sustaining

Schools and districts can encourage educators to develop and use culturally responsive pedagogies as a means for engaging and deepening student learning by recognizing their students' experiences as a foundation on which to build knowledge.[11] This foundation is created when educators spend time getting to know their students' experiences and social identities as well as their strengths and needs, using this knowledge as a basis for choosing texts and representations of ideas and for drawing curriculum connections. Teachers can use discussions, regular check-ins, class meetings, conferencing, close observations of students and their work, and connections to families to learn about their students' experiences, interests, and concerns. They can also use dialogue journals and offer writing prompts that give students a chance to share their unique experiences (e.g., What did you think about the story we read today? Can you reflect on a time when you…?).

At Social Justice Humanitas Academy (SJHA) in Los Angeles, students engage in projects that help them learn concepts through the lens of their personal identities. For example, in a 9th-grade ethnic studies course, students spend time analyzing their personal histories. One SJHA teacher explained

that the project allows students to move into later grades having "already looked at their history and their past, and the way that they see the world, and how [they can] become better for it."[12] In a related assignment, students read the memoir *Always Running* by Luis Rodriguez, in which the author recounts his experience as a young Chicano gang member surviving the dangerous streets of East Los Angeles Students were asked to reflect on and write an essay about how the author overcame adversity and setbacks and achieved self-actualization (a core value at SJHA that guides students' own reflections).

These kinds of assignments allow students to engage diverse perspectives, exercise higher-level analytic skills, participate in respectful debate and discussion with their peers, grow their emotional intelligence, and reflect upon their own attitudes and identities in ways that also help them develop insights about how to survive and thrive, strengthening their attachment to school and their social and emotional reserves at the same time.

States and districts can also offer strong models and supports to develop and implement high-quality curricula that are culturally relevant. Chiefs for Change highlights how several districts, such as Baltimore, MD; Palm Beach County, FL; and Philadelphia, PA, were already developing such materials prior to the pandemic, noting research suggesting that culturally relevant curriculum has been found to increase student attendance, GPA, and course completion.

Additionally, school networks can be sources of such curriculum models. For example, the Internationals Network for Public Schools, a network of 27 schools in public school districts across the nation that serve secondary school students who are recent immigrants and English learners, has demonstrated how to build capacity and put into place culturally responsive and culturally sustaining learning experiences along with rigorous instruction.[13] The network expects that all of its students will graduate ready for college, career, and life, and that all students will be ready to pursue a meaningful postsecondary path. To meet these expectations, Internationals has developed a school model that emphasizes challenging academics offered through project-based learning, linguistic dignity, and bilingualism. In addition to strong cohort models, teaching teams, and an inclusive advisory culture that addresses students' academic and social and emotional needs, the schools help educators develop cultural competency skills to work with immigrant youth from many different countries and cultures and pedagogical skills for teaching language and content through inquiry methods. The curriculum units developed over 30 years of successful practice are available across the network and are a continually growing source of support for effective teaching.

Build capacity for inclusive, identity-safe, culturally responsive practice

Personalizing structures are important to set the stage for the kinds of caring, consistent, continuous relationships children need to support their development, and thoughtful curricula help support engagement in learning. However, the messages students ultimately receive depend greatly upon the attitudes, beliefs, skills, and capacity of staff.

State and local leaders can help build the capacity of school staff by providing resources, time, and space for professional learning that includes the development of identity-safe schools and classrooms; strategies to address stereotype threat and implicit bias; and proactive approaches to anti-racist practice, cultural pluralism, and culturally responsive pedagogies.

Educators can use these tools as they plan for a restorative opening of schools. A key starting point is learning about students and seeing them—and affirming them—for who they are. For example, educators can learn about how to start the year with affirmation interventions that guide students

to share their personal goals for learning with their teachers in notes to which teachers respond. Such strategies have been found in multiple studies to reduce the effect of stereotype threat among middle school students, resulting in higher academic performance for Black students as much as 2 years later.[14]

As described in guidance from New York University, reopening schools in a culturally responsive–sustaining manner should also include incorporating a set of regularly used healing practices, such as restorative circles, mindfulness, advisories that support social and emotional learning, and affinity groups. Equally important is a joyful curriculum connected to students' interests alongside anti-bias, anti-racist practices.

> Reopening schools in a culturally responsive–sustaining manner should also include incorporating a set of regularly used healing practices, such as restorative circles, mindfulness, advisories that support social and emotional learning, and affinity groups.

Educators can also learn how to create environments that are caring and purposeful by including students as active participants in classroom management and conflict resolution and by organizing classroom structure around communal responsibility, rather than compliance and punishment. For example, educators may engage students to help establish classroom norms that define their classroom's rule and culture and have students take ownership of dozens of activities in the classroom that teachers might otherwise do by themselves, ensuring that all students have voice and membership in the classroom design, norms, and management.

Redesign assessments to emphasize applied learning and complex problem-solving

Students can also take agency in their learning through performance assessments that evaluate the inquiries they undertake. A number of schools and districts are working together in collaboratives to create equitable and high-quality performance assessment systems that are accompanied by clear criteria, expectations, and processes that drive teaching strategies and learning at the school level. Drawing on tools like the Performance Assessment Resource Bank, schools and districts can help provide school-embedded learning opportunities for educators to work together to develop the different components of a performance assessment system (curriculum planning documents, rubrics, and student and teacher directions) that are aligned to goals for student learning.

These collaboratives include the Quality Performance Assessment initiative of the Center for Collaborative Education in New England, which supports, among other initiatives, the Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment (MCIEA)—a collaborative of eight districts with their local teacher unions that are working together to create a new accountability system that uses performance assessment instead of standardized testing. The districts' accountability framework has been built around multiple measures, including academic, social and emotional, and school culture indicators, in order to provide a comprehensive picture of school performance.

Several networks of public schools—from EL Education elementary schools to high schools in networks such as the New Tech Network, Big Picture Schools, and the Internationals Network for Public Schools—have demonstrated significant gains in student learning as they have developed

and enacted authentic learning strategies grounded in curricula that teach students how to learn through guided inquiry; collaboration; connections to culture and community; and the production of complex papers, projects, and products.

Often these performance tasks are designed to illustrate core modes of inquiry in the disciplines, such as scientific investigation, mathematical modeling, literary analysis, social scientific inquiry, or artistic performances. Disciplines serve as the organizing principles for performance assessments for the schools associated with the New York Performance Standards Consortium. The group of 38 schools associated with the Consortium are authorized to use these disciplinary performance assessments as part of a graduation portfolio accepted in lieu of Regents examinations by New York State, authorized by a waiver in effect since 1995. The Consortium's system asks students to exhibit their learning in rigorous defenses in front of panels that include external judges as well as teachers, students, and parents. This approach is one that will be highlighted in a report on diploma options that a Blue Ribbon Commission will make to the New York State Board of Regents in fall 2020.

Performance assessment collaboratives of schools and districts using systems of performance assessment for graduation and throughout the grades have also been launched in California and Hawaii, among other places. As students are developing their performance tasks, they self-assess and receive feedback from teachers and peers against clear criteria, often expressed in a rubric, as comments rather than grades, with immediate opportunities to apply that feedback. Hundreds of studies have found that this kind of ongoing formative assessment process produces significant learning gains,[15] especially when students have several opportunities to review and revise their work.[16] This approach to performance assessment allows students to internalize standards, become self-aware of their learning strengths and needs, and take control of their own learning.

States and districts are increasingly supporting this work. When the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was adopted in 2015, states were instructed to implement assessments that measure higher-order thinking skills and understanding. Because traditional multiple-choice tests are insufficient for these goals, the law explicitly allows the use of portfolios, projects, or extended-performance tasks as part of state systems.

New tests that were developed to evaluate more challenging standards, such as the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and the College and Work Ready Assessment, include some open-ended items and performance tasks that require students to engage in research, problem-solving, and analysis, and to explain their reasoning and conclusions.

ESSA invited states to apply for an innovative assessment pilot to develop and pilot new approaches to assessment, refine the assessments, and gradually scale them up across the state. Just this year several states joined New Hampshire in undertaking such pilots. The ambitious work in New Hampshire through the Performance Assessment of Competency Education program has been underway for several years, authorized by the federal pilot. It combines standardized assessments once in a grade span with a series of standards-based common performance tasks that engage students in inquiry. District and statewide performance assessments ask students to show what they know through projects and products scored reliably by trained teachers using common rubrics. Several other states are now developing performance assessments as part of evolving systems that emphasize feedback throughout the year.

More than 25 states have joined together as part of the State Performance Assessment Learning Community to create performance assessments as part of their overall systems of assessment, with initial collaborative efforts in science, in which investigation and problem-solving are key to the new standards and require hands-on inquiry.

This is the time for these efforts to accelerate and redefine curriculum, instruction, assessment, and accountability as focused on the ability to apply meaningful learning in deep and transferable ways.

Resources

- California Performance Assessment Collaborative (Learning Policy Institute). This website provides information, videos, and lessons captured from the educators, policymakers, and researchers in CPAC working to study and advance the use of authentic approaches to assessment that require students to demonstrate applied knowledge of content and use of 21st-century skills.
- Mathematics Improvement Network Adaptable Tools for School and District Leaders (Mathematics Network of Improvement Communities [Math NIC]). The Math NIC design team collaborated with district administrators, principals, mathematics coaches, and teachers representing 10 school districts and professional organizations to develop tools for improving in their mathematics programs.
- Performance Assessment Resource Bank (SCALE, SCOPE, CCSSO). The Performance Assessment Resource Bank is an online collection of performance tasks and resources—collected from educators and organizations across the United States and reviewed by experts in the field—to support the use of performance assessment for meaningful learning.
- Reopening: Moving Toward More Equitable Schools (EL Education). EL Education's framework provides guidance and support for schools and districts to help them emphasize authentic learning and assessment regardless of whether school takes place in school buildings or through distance or blended learning. The framework is organized around five domains: empowering leadership, crew culture, compelling curriculum, students as leaders of their own learning, and deeper instruction.
- Guidance on Culturally Responsive-Sustaining School Reopenings: Centering Equity to Humanize the Process of Coming Back Together (NYU Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools). This guide poses questions and practices for policymakers, district and school leaders, and school personnel to consider for engaging in culturally responsive–sustaining school reopenings through an equity lens.
- Ready Schools, Safe Learners: Guidance for School Year 2020–21 (Oregon Department of Education). Oregon's state reopening guidance provides direction for districts to "support student-centered project-based educational experiences that ignite student agency, identity, and voice" that others can draw upon.

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Priority 7: Provide Expanded Learning Time

Since schools closed nationwide in March, students have had uneven access to distance learning. A June 2020 survey of nearly 500 nationally representative districts found that, while 85% delivered some kind of materials to students, only one third required teachers to provide remote instruction in which they engaged and interacted with all of their students around the curriculum content (e.g., through online lessons, recorded lectures, or one-on-one support via phone or computer). These expectations were greatly disparate between affluent and lower-wealth communities, as well as between urban and rural districts. Some districts in which students lacked consistent internet access simply sent packets of worksheets home.

The lost opportunities for school-year instruction were compounded by the lack of summer and after-school enrichment opportunities, particularly for students from low-income or immigrant families. Those who traditionally have had the fewest educational opportunities have received even less support over the past several months.

The unequal access to learning during the pandemic further exacerbates the vast differences between learning opportunities that students from lower-income and upper-income families are routinely exposed to during out-of-school hours. Research suggests that students from middle- and upper-income families typically spend 6,000 more hours in educational activities than students in low-income families by the time they reach 6th grade.[1]

These opportunity gaps translate to substantial differences in academic achievement. Research estimates that the cumulative summer learning gap over multiple years accounts for more than half of the 9th-grade achievement difference between students from lower-income families and their more affluent peers, which in turn contributes to whether or not students enter college-track high school programs and meet college-going requirements.[2] The U.S. public education system's 6-hour day and 180-day year cannot, on its own, offset the gap in out-of-school learning opportunities between students from more and less affluent families.

With 55 million students out of school and receiving highly disparate education due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the effects of lost learning time will be widely felt. A McKinsey report suggests that these negative effects could last a lifetime and disproportionately impact Black and Latino/a students from low-income families. Expanded learning time (ELT) is a means by which to recover lost learning opportunities, whether in person or online.

What Students Need

As a number of back-to-school frameworks have argued,[3] a critical approach to restarting and reinventing schooling will be to provide expanded learning time and opportunities for all students, with special attention paid to students with special education needs and those who are English learners. ELT takes place before and after the typical school day and over summer vacation and other scheduled breaks and is one of the four pillars of a comprehensive community school strategy.[4] (See "Priority 8: Establish Community Schools and Wraparound Supports.") While many schools offer after-school programs and weekend enrichment opportunities, these opportunities do not necessarily constitute ELT. Quality ELT is not just an add-on program, field trip, or enrichment opportunity; it complements the learning that takes place during the typical school day in ways that support essential curricular standards and the learning activities developed to achieve those standards.

The impact of ELT has been studied by researchers and program evaluators for decades, and an extensive body of research indicates that additional high-quality learning time leads to positive achievement and engagement outcomes for students. For example, a meta-analysis of 15 empirical studies selected for their methodological rigor found that 14 of the studies of extended days and/or years demonstrated positive achievement outcomes for students.[5] Additional research reviews point to similar findings, often emphasizing that ELT is especially beneficial for students from low-income families, students of color, and students who are academically behind.[6]

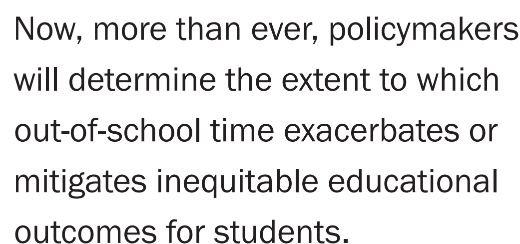
In the current context, ELT will be particularly important for English learners. For many of these students, these months away from school have meant a lack of exposure to English and adequate online instruction. As a consequence, many will need additional learning time—above and beyond that provided for other students. Students who are English learners will benefit from targeted language instruction (preferably in both English and their primary language) to catch up, as well as regular opportunities to be mixed with other students. In many cases, they will also need social and emotional supports due to the stress they have experienced given recent Administration efforts to break up families and deport parents.

A research synthesis from the Wallace Foundation notes that quality out-of-school programs that produce positive effects on outcomes offer targeted instruction focused on particular academic and/or social and emotional skills; create a warm, positive climate; enable consistent and frequent participation; and employ a stable group of trained, dedicated instructors who work effectively with youth. Given the strong evidence base that links well-designed additional learning time to positive student outcomes, it is encouraging to see that ELT appears in the majority of state plans for reopening schools that have been developed thus far.

Another form of extended learning is preschool education. Investments in early childhood programs, such as Head Start, lead to substantial gains in attainment and earnings,[7] and those investments could be greatly expanded to reach more eligible children. But high-quality preschool is not available to many eligible students both because of inadequate public funding and because many programs run for only 3–4 hours each day, making them inaccessible to many children from working families. Part-day programs, furthermore, are less effective than school-day programs in boosting child outcomes.

What Policymakers and Educators Can Do

Now, more than ever, policymakers will determine the extent to which out-of-school time exacerbates or mitigates inequitable educational outcomes for students. COVID-19 has further illuminated what we have long known: Our current school schedule cannot meet the needs of many students. Innovations made now will have lasting benefits, as school closures are likely to become more common, not only due to public health emergencies, but also due to increasingly common climate crises.[8]


Now, more than ever, policymakers will determine the extent to which out-of-school time exacerbates or mitigates inequitable educational outcomes for students.

In the short term, state and local education leaders can provide opportunities to help make up for learning time lost to the COVID-19 pandemic with resources focused on students who have been most impacted by school closures. In the long term, policymakers also have an opportunity to promote ELT in order to alleviate the out-of-school time opportunity gap by providing high-quality, meaningful learning opportunities for all students. These opportunities should focus on acceleration rather than remediation, building on students' strengths rather than adopting a deficit-based approach.

Infuse high-quality tutoring within and beyond the school day

As one team of researchers noted in explaining the rationale for investing in tutoring:

> Students who fall behind grade-level material tend to stay behind. When these students miss developing crucial foundational skills, they can have major difficulties in subsequent learning tasks, which worsens the gap between them and their grade-level peers as they move from one grade to the next. This persistent mismatch between the learning needs of students and what classroom instruction delivers can seriously undermine students' chances of success in the workforce and beyond.[9]

There is a well-established literature on the positive effects of tutoring, which can produce large gains even when conducted virtually.[10] When students return in the fall, whether in-person, online, or in some hybrid form, many will need individualized attention to support learning gains. Effective tutoring is accomplished not by a cadre of ever-changing, untrained volunteers, but by a focused group of trained individuals working consistently with individuals or small groups of students. In particular, research supports high-dosage tutoring in which tutors work consistently every day for full class sessions (during or after school) with students one-to-one or in very small groups, often accomplishing large gains in relatively short periods of time.

Effective tutoring is accomplished not by a cadre of ever-changing, untrained volunteers, but by a focused group of trained individuals working consistently with individuals or small groups of students.

These may be specially trained teachers, as in programs such as Reading Recovery that use a set of well-defined methods one-on-one or in small groups and have been found to have strong positive effects on reading gains for struggling readers,[11] including students with special education needs and English learners.[12] They may also be recent college graduates, including AmeriCorps volunteers, who receive training to work with students, as in the Boston MATCH Education program, replicated by SAGA Education in Chicago. In daily 50-minute sessions added to their regular math classes, two students working with a tutor gained an additional 1 to 2 years of math proficiency by focusing on the specific areas they needed to master while also preparing for their standard class. Tutors in programs such as these have the advantage of a well-developed curriculum with frequent formative assessments to gauge and guide where support is needed.[13]

Although districts often think of tutoring as too expensive to undertake as a strategy for helping students master missed skills, because of the fact that it can be structured to be conducted by cross-age peers, volunteers, paraprofessionals, or trained teachers—and because of the size and speed

of the gains students can make—economists find that tutoring is one of the more cost-effective strategies to promote accelerated student learning.[14] In light of this powerful evidence, the United Kingdom is now investing more than a billion dollars for tutoring to help all students catch up on what they missed during the spring.

Tutoring is also a powerful tool for ensuring that every child has an adult in school whom they can trust. Lawrence, MA, was one of the lowest-performing districts in the state prior to a state-led turnaround. Extended learning time was an important part of the district's success in raising achievement. The district partnered with MATCH Education to offer intensive mathematics tutoring during or after school to pairs of the 9th- and 10th-grade students attending two of the district's lowest-performing high schools. In addition, expert teachers were recruited and paid to offer "Acceleration Academies" over weeklong vacation breaks. These provided struggling students with targeted, small-group instruction in a single subject.[15]

Expand high-quality after-school programs

Extended learning time and opportunities, used well, can accelerate learning and reduce the learning opportunity gap between what students from low-income families and their peers from middle- and upper-income families experience during out-of-school hours.

Additional time will not in and of itself promote positive student outcomes; **additional learning time must be high quality and meaningful in order to move the needle on student achievement and engagement.**[16] Among the things that can make out-of-school programs more meaningful are connections to the work students are doing in school and culturally relevant strategies that make learning engaging and allow students to explore ideas deeply.

A strong example of this type of collaboration exists in Oakland Unified School District's community schools, where ELT is a core model of their full-service community schools approach. Schools in Oakland, CA, use a number of different strategies to increase collaboration, such as including partner staff in monthly faculty meetings and providing regular opportunities for ELT staff to meet with teachers to learn about current curricular goals and units. In some Oakland schools, ELT staff are further integrated into the regular school day; they provide extra assistance to teachers by mentoring students and conducting pullout sessions for small-group instruction. A study of the implementation of the community schools approach in Oakland highlighted one school in which ELT staff and regular teaching staff worked so closely together that the principal no longer referred to ELT as "after-school programming." In this school, where nearly all of the 6th- and 7th-grade students stay after the traditional school day to participate in coding classes, dance classes, and STEM, the after-school program is referred to as the 8th and 9th periods, indicating an incorporation of ELT into the regular school schedule. In this way, the close collaboration among all adults who work with students allows for a seamless integration of all student learning opportunities.[17]

Similarly, an extended school-day program offered by Meriden Public Schools District in Connecticut integrated expanded learning time with traditional instruction. In 2012, the superintendent and the local teachers union in Meriden, CT, partnered with the YMCA and the Boys & Girls Club to add 100 minutes per day (roughly equivalent to 40 additional school days) of personalized learning time at three low-performing schools. The three participating schools reengineered their schedules to include an enrichment block, during which community partners staff the classrooms as teachers and provide instruction in three key enrichment areas: healthy

living, literacy, and STEM. A key component of Meriden's after-school program is that staff at the community organizations worked closely with teachers to align after-school activities with learning during the traditional day and with the schools' instructional goals. Additionally, the participating schools included community partners in professional learning communities with school staff. This type of collaboration between teachers and providers of ELT ensures that additional learning time is strongly linked with the learning opportunities during the school day and that all learning opportunities complement one another in service of supporting primary instructional goals. The results in Meriden were promising: Two of the three participating schools saw gains in attendance rates, core subject test scores, and teacher ratings, which exceeded districtwide averages.

In addition to aligning activities with a school's academic learning goals, **ELT learning opportunities can be more successful if they incorporate meaningful activities that engage deeper learning pedagogies with content that is connected to students' lives outside of school.**

Citizen Schools (CS) is an example of ELT programming that engages deeper learning pedagogies for students. CS youth participate in apprenticeships that consist of hands-on learning projects led by volunteer citizen teachers. Apprentices work in small groups to do project-based work such as litigating mock trials, publishing children's books, and building solar cars. These apprenticeships are complemented with activities that help students develop their organizational and study skills, along with homework help. Programs culminate with opportunities for participants to publicly present their projects. CS's 8th Grade Academy also includes programming to help students develop their leadership and decision-making skills to prepare for college.[18] A rigorous, quasi-experimental evaluation of the academy identified positive effects on attendance and enrollment, math and reading achievement, promotion, and graduation.[19]

As is the case with all learning, ELT can be more meaningful and engaging if the curriculum authentically connects to student backgrounds. ELT should aim to ground learning in students' prior knowledge and cultural backgrounds and to connect learning to real-world issues. This could include their individual experiences with COVID-19 in their communities. Programming should also prioritize the increased need for addressing the social and emotional needs of students, who may be experiencing increased levels of anxiety, grief, and uncertainty about the future due to the pandemic.[20] Nearly every state that has developed a plan for reopening schools post-COVID-19 has emphasized the need to integrate social and emotional learning into traditional curricula, and this emphasis should extend to ELT as well, particularly learning opportunities designed to address lost instructional time for those students who were most impacted by school closures. (See "Priority 4: Ensure Supports for Social and Emotional Learning" for more information.)

Create high-quality summer programs

States and districts can plan to provide expanded learning time for students next summer, even as this summer comes to a close. Well-designed summer programs are most effective when students experience them for multiple summers. Many types of summer programs, offered to all grade levels, have been found to be effective, including summer programs focused on learning at home, social and emotional well-being, and employment and career development, as well as those focused on academic learning. In a systematic review conducted by the RAND Corporation, more than 40 of 43 summer programs that have been rigorously evaluated showed positive impacts on at least one youth outcome, ranging from reading fluency to increased social and emotional skills and GPA.[21] When developing or selecting a summer program, it is important to invest in programs that are intentionally designed to

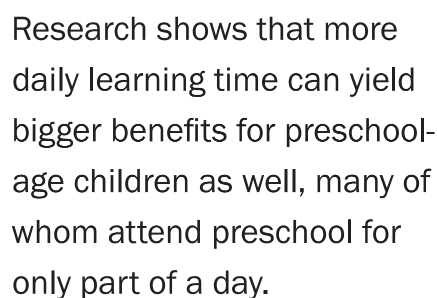
meet student and community needs; are of sufficient duration to make an impact; and provide high-quality, meaningful learning opportunities. These include stable, trained staff; a systematic approach to the curriculum; and strategies to ensure consistent, stable participation by students.

Getting high rates of student participation depends on an engaging curriculum that is highly motivating for students. A summer program that illustrates this principle with a well-developed community-based philosophy is the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom Schools. CDF Freedom Schools are modeled after the 1963 Mississippi Freedom Schools, which sought to invest in communities by developing leaders who could exercise their political power. CDF Freedom Schools partner with community organizations, churches, and schools to provide literacy-rich summer programs for k–12 students. Programs vary in length from 5 to 8 weeks and include a curriculum designed to promote cultural and historical consciousness. The program incorporates five content areas: social action and civic engagement, intergenerational leadership, nutrition and health, parent and family involvement, and academic enrichment.

A typical CDF Freedom School day begins with a community meeting called Harambee (a Kiswahili word that means "let's come together"). This is followed by a 3-hour block of literacy instruction during which students engage with the Integrated Reading Curriculum (IRC). The IRC incorporates a carefully selected array of books that reflect a wide variety of cultures and experiences as well as activities that are designed to be engaging and develop students' love of reading. Afternoons are dedicated to activities related to the themes included in the IRC. Social action and community services are key components of CDF Freedom Schools. At the start of the program, staff and students work together to identify issues affecting their community, and throughout the course of the program, students develop and implement a social action plan to address the community issues they identified. These social action projects embody a foundational idea that the CDF Freedom Schools work to instill in students: I can and must make a difference. A multiyear evaluation reported that participation in CDF Freedom Schools was associated with positive character development outcomes and achievement on standardized reading tests.[22]

Expand the reach and duration of early learning programs

One critical way to expand learning time for children is to ensure high-quality early learning. In addition, research shows that more daily learning time can yield bigger benefits for preschool-age children as well, many of whom attend preschool for only part of a day.[23] While some part-day programs have shown strong results, most of the highly effective programs, especially for children from low-income families, provide full-day preschool. An evaluation of the long-term impact of the Chicago Child-Parent Centers, for example, showed that children attending the program for a full day scored better on measures of social-emotional development, math and reading skills, and physical health than similar children attending the same program for only part of a day.[24] A national evaluation of Head Start also suggests that children who enrolled in the full-day program performed better in reading and math.[25]



Enact policies that support expanded learning time

Several states and localities are leading the way by supporting districts and schools to provide meaningful increases in learning time for students. For example, to expand early learning time, Michigan's state preschool program, Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP), allocates funds based on part-day slots but provides a full-day option in which local grantees can use either two part-day GSRP slots or blend a part-day GSRP and part-day Head Start slot together to create a full-day slot. All Head Start and GSRP policies and regulations must be applied to the blended slots, with the highest standard from either program given precedence, ensuring quality.[26] As a result, approximately 80% of children attend high-quality full-day GSRP programs that operate for at least the same length of day as the local school district's or charter school's 1st-grade program.[27]

In 2005, the Massachusetts Legislature established the Expanded Learning Time Initiative. The initiative provides grants for schools serving high-need students to provide an additional 300 hours of instruction to their school year. Schools that received the grant were able to use funding to add days to their school year, lengthen their school day, or both. The initiative requires that additional time be used for high-quality learning opportunities that engage students in core subjects as well, and that enrichment activities are aligned with state standards. Additionally, it directs schools to set aside time for lesson planning for teachers as well as professional development for teachers and staff from community-based organizations that partner with schools to provide additional programming.[28]

In 2012, the Florida Legislature funded an additional hour per day of literacy instruction and reading time in 100 elementary schools with the state's lowest reading scores. Two years later, the initiative was expanded to include 300 elementary schools (out of roughly 1,800 elementary schools across the state). The Florida extended-day program requires that instructional approaches during additional time are evidence-based, adapted for student ability, and cross-curricular (incorporating reading material from other core subjects). During additional instructional time, students must have opportunities for guided practice and instruction that includes vocabulary, fluency, phonemic awareness, phonics, and comprehension. A rigorous evaluation found that the extended school day had significant, positive effects on student reading achievement; in one school year, student test scores improved by the equivalent of one month of extra learning.[29] These findings are aligned with research reviews of ELT, which suggest additional time will be most effective when it is aligned with student needs.[30]

In its recently approved budget and reopening plan, Florida has already allocated $64 million toward summer recovery in July and August for students with significant academic needs, and it has allocated school-year funding toward the YMCA and the Boys & Girls Club.[31] States can also provide a suite of options even in the absence of additional funding. Oklahoma, for example, advocates for modified scheduling with longer periods, longer days, and longer breaks to allow for Acceleration Academies—a strategy that appears in many state plans. Even in times of fiscal crisis, communities have options for learning beyond the traditional school day in order to ameliorate the negative effects of the pandemic.

States can use a variety of federal programs for these purposes, including multiple funding streams under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (see Table 7.1).

Table 7.1
Examples of Federal Funding Streams Through ESSA That Can Support Summer Programs

- Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies (Title I, Part A)
- Migrant Education Program (Title I, Part C)
- Improving Teacher Quality State Grants (Title II, Part A)
- Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN) State Literacy Discretionary/ Competitive Grant (Title II, Part B)
- Student Support and Academic Enrichment Programs (Title IV, Part A)
- 21st Century Community Learning Centers Grants (Title IV, Part B)
- Promise Neighborhoods Discretionary/Competitive Grant (Title IV, Part F)
- Full Service Community Schools Program Discretionary/Competitive Grant (Title IV, Part F)

Source: McCombs, J. S., Augustine, C. H., Unlu, F., Ziol-Guest, K. M., Naftel, S., Gomez, C. J., Marsh, T., Akinniranye, G., & Todd, I. (2019). *Investing in successful summer programs: A review of evidence under the Every Student Succeeds Act*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2836.html.

Resources

- A School Year Like No Other Demands a New Learning Day: A Blueprint for How Afterschool Programs & Community Partners Can Help (Afterschool Alliance). This blueprint offers building blocks for school–community partnerships to address equity and co-construct the learning day in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Afterschool Programs: A Review of Evidence Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (Research for Action). Based on a literature review of studies published since 2000, this review summarizes the effectiveness of specific after-school programs. The review uses the ESSA evidence framework to assess the evidence of over 60 after-school programs. A companion guide provides profiles of each after-school program included in the review as well as studies of each program's effectiveness.
- Getting to Work on Summer Learning: Recommended Practices for Success, 2nd Ed. (RAND Corporation). Based on thousands of hours of observations, interviews, and surveys, this report provides guidance for district leaders and their partners for launching, improving, and sustaining effective summer learning programs.
- Investing in Successful Summer Programs: A Review of Evidence Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (RAND Corporation). This report provides current information about the effectiveness of summer programs for k–12 students to help practitioners, funders, and policymakers make evidence-based investments. The review uses the ESSA evidence framework to assess the effectiveness of summer programs and includes descriptions of 43 summer programs that align with ESSA evidence standards.
- Time in Pursuit of Education Equity: Promoting Learning Time Reforms That Cross Ideological Divides to Benefit Students Most in Need (AASA). This *School Administrator* article authored by Jeannie Oakes provides implementation lessons that school leaders and policymakers can use as they seek to expand learning time.

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Priority 8: Establish Community Schools and Wraparound Supports

To effectively meet the urgent needs of students and families as schools reopen, state and district leaders should consider establishing and expanding community schools. Community schools replace the fragmented, bureaucratic, social services gauntlet that families in need must often navigate with a student-focused approach that organizes resources from community partners where they can be most easily accessed: in school. In community schools, students and families are engaged as partners in the educational process and have access to a broad range of well-coordinated supports and services. These kinds of services will be even more necessary in the coming year, one that will be traumatic for so many students and families.

While some community schools have school-based services, including health clinics, many wraparound models coordinate services that exist in the community in addition to or in lieu of housing them on-site. For example, students and families at Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School in New York City have access to comprehensive health services (including a specialized teen clinic) through a partnership with the Children's Aid Society Bronx Family Center, located three blocks from the school. Through a partnership with the Helen Keller Institute, free vision screenings and eyeglasses are available to any student who needs them, while a health educator and a full-time social worker provide support during the school day. An extended learning program focuses on youth development, including culinary arts and a student government engaging with local officials.

When the school closed in response to COVID-19, staff were able to respond quickly and effectively. Led by the community school director, they mobilized to distribute Chromebooks to students and to set up systems to provide breakfast and lunch to up to 500 families daily. The community school director, family engagement coordinator, social worker, and other staff offered virtual tutoring, college coaching, and mental health support. They also helped families with housing and immigration issues, which can be complex and difficult to navigate.

What Is a Community School?[1]

A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the education system, the nonprofit sector, and local government agencies. While the specific programs and services vary according to local context, there are four key pillars of the community school approach.

1. **Integrated student supports.** Includes mental and physical health care, nutrition support, housing assistance, and other wraparound services.
2. **Expanded and enriched learning time.** Includes lengthening the school day and year, as well as enriching the curriculum through real-world learning opportunities.
3. **Active family and community engagement.** Includes both service provision and meaningful partnership with parents and family members to support children's learning.
4. **Collaborative leadership and practices.** Includes coordination of community school services as well as site-based leadership teams and teacher learning communities.

What Students Need

Skyrocketing unemployment rates and widespread school closures due to COVID-19 are creating economic instability and food insecurity for many children and families. In addition, some parents have expressed concerns that their families' mental health will suffer and that their children will fall behind in school, especially in lower-income communities. Even before COVID-19, more than half of the nation's schoolchildren (25 million) lived in low-income households.[2] They and their families have borne the brunt of a broken social safety net and long-term disinvestment in schools, particularly in primarily Black and Latino/a neighborhoods.[3] As the California School Boards Association reopening guide notes, "equity" and "equality" are not equivalent. Some students need extra supports—such as technology access, food assistance, and mental health services—in order to access educational opportunities. It is important that plans for the new school year ensure that all students have access to the supports that they need.

Community schools have emerged as a democratic and collaborative response to structural inequities in the education system. These schools are designed to address systemic barriers to education such as poverty or housing insecurity. They do so by drawing upon a community's assets and culture to bring powerful supports and learning opportunities to students and families.

For example, Oakland International High School supports newcomer students who have recently immigrated to the California Bay Area by providing free legal representation, after-school tutoring, English classes for parents, mental health and mentoring services, and after-school/weekend soccer programming. Oakland International staff conduct home visits and participate in "community walks" led by students and families to get to know the neighborhood better. A Community School Advisory Committee (a site leadership team) and a Coordination of Services Team (a team linking students with services) include community members in collaborative decision-making at the site.

Evidence shows that community schools can improve outcomes for students, including attendance, academic achievement, high school graduation rates, and reduced racial and economic achievement gaps.[4] A recent RAND study of New York City's 250+ community schools initiative shows that community schools can work at scale.[5] Promising results include a drop in chronic absenteeism, with the biggest effects on the most vulnerable students, and a decline in disciplinary incidents.[6] Students were more likely to progress from grade to grade on time, accumulate more course credits, and graduate from high school at higher rates.

Evidence shows that community schools can improve outcomes for students, including attendance, academic achievement, high school graduation rates, and reduced racial and economic achievement gaps.

In the present moment, community schools offer a path forward for supporting children and families during a stressful time and can be leveraged across the education spectrum, from early childhood to high school. In the long term, this approach can offer a more inclusive and engaging learning experience that is grounded in research and designed to respond effectively to student and family needs.

What Policymakers and Educators Can Do

The COVID-19 crisis has laid bare the fraying social safety net in the United States, as well as the important role that schools play in filling current service gaps. Many schools have scrambled to provide digital access to students and to-go meals to families in response to widespread closures. Community schools are especially well positioned to meet the many needs of students and families during this time. For example, community school leaders in Baltimore found that they have been able to accomplish "at least 80%" of their normal school functions—despite school closures—thanks to the partnerships they already had in place. Baltimore staff have spent hours on the phone checking in with students and families, addressing needs from child care to emergency housing. They have done so by relying on a network of community partners who can provide services to families in crisis.

Similarly, at Duarte High School (which is part of the community schools pilot initiative led by the Los Angeles County Office of Education), when schools were physically closed, the community school coordinator ensured that the families of all 770 students received a call in their home language to assess needs related to technology, food, and mental and physical health supports. This task was distributed across school staff after the school shut down, with notes from each call entered into a shared spreadsheet. Once school reopens, a similar process will help to pinpoint the needs of individual students and families as well as prioritize services for the school community as a whole.

By supporting community schools through stronger policies, funding, and coordination of services, state and local leaders have an opportunity to respond to the immediate needs of students and families and to support teachers as schools reopen, while laying a lasting foundation for a student-focused approach to learning.

Enact local policies that support well-designed community schools

Sound community school policies:

- provide a comprehensive definition of the approach;
- incorporate the four evidence-based pillars—integrated student supports, expanded learning time, community partnerships, and collaborative practices;
- address key aspects of implementation (such as how schools can become community schools, how coordinators will be funded, and how services will be accessed);
- invest in professional development for school staff (including principals); and
- identify collaborative leadership structures and practices (such as decision-making committees that involve students, families, educators, and community partners).

At the local level, a number of different entities can pass policies in support of community schools. Local school boards can pass resolutions in support of community schools that address important elements of implementation, as New York City and Baltimore have done. For example, in 2016 the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners approved a community school strategy that lays out a vision, describes key features of implementation, and establishes a Community Schools Steering Committee to oversee the initiative. Both cities have been building comprehensive approaches since then that have made a substantial difference in schools' abilities to support students during the pandemic.

Cincinnati has an especially strong policy infrastructure, with a 2009 Community Learning Center (CLC) policy accompanied by a board-approved set of guiding principles, partnership parameters, and community involvement policy. The master facilities plan aims to redesign all Cincinnati public schools as CLCs through a community engagement process in which community members and school stakeholders identify their needs and assets and develop a strategy for rebuilding the school as a CLC. Each of these schools will have a resource coordinator funded by both Title I and local philanthropic organizations. This CLC financing philosophy is unique, as CLCs are not wholly dependent upon school budgets.

Enlist regional agencies that can provide technical assistance and help coordinate local services

State leaders can support community schools by working with regional leaders (such as County Offices of Education in California, Boards of Cooperative Educational Services in New York, or Educational Service Districts in Washington State) to coordinate services and provide technical assistance for district community school initiatives. Technical assistance in this context includes the various supports needed to launch and sustain community school initiatives at scale, such as professional development and coaching for district and school staff, support for strategic planning, and partnership development that brings resources to schools (e.g., direct staffing, service provision, and funding).

Technical assistance can also come from local organizations, including districts (as with the New York City Office of Community Schools or Oakland's Community Schools and Student Services division); nonprofit partners (as with the Community Learning Center Institute in Cincinnati or Children's Aid in many cities); and universities (such as Binghamton University and Fordham University, which operate Technical Assistance Centers in New York State).

State leaders can play an important role in supporting and expanding these efforts by providing funding, training, and guidance to regional leaders. For example, the West Virginia Board of Education passed State Community Schools Policy 2425 to define and provide guidance for implementing sustainable community schools. Local boards of education that decide to implement the state guidance can receive technical assistance through the state education agency, which also developed a resource guide for community schools.

Strong examples of regional support for community school initiatives can be found in different parts of the country. For example:

- In California, the Los Angeles County Office of Education is leading a community schools pilot that involves partnering with over a dozen Los Angeles county agencies to provide a range of services—including counseling, mental health education, enrollment support and case management of social services, parent workshops, after-school programming, and field trips—to 15 pilot high schools. Funding from the state Mental Health Services Act (administered in partnership with the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health) supports a full-time coordinator and family outreach worker at each pilot site.
- New York State has funded three Community Schools Technical Assistance Centers to provide a range of supports to community schools in their regions, including professional development for community school practitioners via webinars and conferences; site visits to provide in-person coaching; working with district and school leaders to build capacity

through implementation and improvement science approaches; and maintaining a database of community partners, programs, and resources that can support community schools. In addition, Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) in New York can support community schools across districts through a cooperative service agreement, such as the agreement established by the Rockland BOCES.

Many re-entry plans—including those from the Alliance for Excellent Education, Transcend Education, and CASEL—emphasize the importance of coordinating local services to meet students' basic needs (such as food and health care) and address trauma and loss to promote whole-child well-being. As schools reopen, local leaders (such as an administrator, a community partner, or a community school coordinator) can start by conducting a needs and assets assessment as students return. The School Mental Health Collaborative offers a universal screener, which can identify high-priority areas of need as well as existing programs on the school campus or in the surrounding community that can help to meet those needs. Information for the assessment can come from surveys; administrative data review; focus groups; and/or interviews of students, families, school staff, and community partners (including early education providers).

> The School Mental Health Collaborative offers a universal screener, which can identify high-priority areas of need as well as existing programs on the school campus or in the surrounding community that can help to meet those needs.

Once the school community's needs and assets are identified, local leaders can build on or expand existing initiatives to coordinate services. These initiatives may include state-, district-, or school-level efforts to help providers coordinate, deploy, and target their services efficiently. For example, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) are part of a statewide initiative in California, and Coordination of Services Teams have been central to Oakland Unified School District's community schools initiative.

Initiatives may also build upon and include early education. The Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (DMH) has allocated funds to Los Angeles Unified School District for an effort focused on early education and services for children from birth to age 8. Funding from multiple sources supports this work, including First 5 and the Mental Health Services Act (allocated by DMH). These funds are used to train social workers and resource navigators to coordinate services at early childhood centers and nearby elementary schools, and to implement trauma-informed practices, support the development of self-regulation skills in young children, and engage families. The mental health team has also received extensive training in early childhood mental health consultation.

Create reliable funding streams to support community school models

As states implement plans to reopen schools, some are addressing community schools as a key support. For example, Maryland's plan notes that community schools in the state have distributed food, hygienic supplies, technology equipment, and school supplies during closures, and have provided internet access, mental health services, housing information, and other crisis supports to families. As schools reopen, the plan calls for community schools to draw on existing needs

assessment data, reach out to families, and leverage community partnerships to provide academic enrichment and extended learning time, as well as family supports such as adult language classes and employment and health services. Importantly, Maryland passed a 2019 bill that provides 2 years of funding to ensure that all schools serving high concentrations of students living in poverty will have a community schools coordinator and associated wraparound supports.

State and local leaders can blend and braid federal, state, and local funding streams to provide integrated health, mental health, and social services alongside high-quality, supportive instruction in community schools. In the short term, this can involve drawing on federal stimulus funds to provide integrated student supports as schools reopen. For example, the CARES Act Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund awards grants to state education agencies for the purpose of providing local education agencies with emergency relief funds to address the impact of COVID-19. These grants can be used to support any activity authorized by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), including community schools. Relevant activities that are specifically named by ESSER include the provision of mental health services and supports, as well as planning and coordination to meet the needs of students during school closures. Similarly, the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund can be used to support the community school approach in districts that have been significantly impacted by COVID-19.

In the long term, funding for community schools can come from a combination of federal (including Every Student Succeeds Act Titles I and IV, as well as Medicaid), state, and local sources. Local funding can come from city or county government, school or district budgets, or private philanthropy. For example, community schools in Lincoln, NE, were piloted using $100,000 in seed funding from a local community foundation. In this early stage of the initiative, costs for site-based coordinators were split between foundation resources and contributions from the lead agencies partnering with each of the four pilot community schools. Now, 29 of the district's 59 schools are community learning centers. These schools are funded through a combination of 16 sources, including district and city general funds, Title I, a federal 21st Century Community Learning Center after-school programming grant, financial and in-kind contributions from lead agency partners, and private foundation grants.

State policymakers can play an important role in reducing barriers to blending and braiding through actions such as streamlining and aligning application and reporting requirements for different funding sources, when possible.

States can also establish direct funding streams for community schools. Kentucky has long supported Family Resource and Youth Services Centers (dating back to the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990). Schools in which at least 20% of the student population is eligible for free or reduced-price meals may compete for funding. In 2019, there were over 850 centers across the state, providing vital programs, services, and referrals to students and their families. Also in 2019, New Mexico approved a bill that created a community school framework and authorized $2 million for a competitive grant program.

New York has annually set aside increasing amounts of its school funding formula to support community schools in districts designated as high need. This went from $100 million in 2016–17 to $250 million in 2019–20, which the state maintained in its enacted 2020–21 budget. In addition to supporting new community school initiatives, set-aside dollars can be used to sustain existing community school programs that had been funded under a prior community schools grant program.

Create Children's Cabinets at the federal, state, and county levels to coordinate, integrate, and streamline services across agencies

> Children's Cabinets can start to streamline and integrate partner programs, assist with managing multiple funding streams, and create efficiencies where there are now bureaucratic barriers.

Leaders at multiple levels can help enable more effective and efficiently provided resources for services to children and youth by creating a Children's Cabinet or other vehicle to coordinate services at the top of the system so that they flow to districts and schools more seamlessly. A centralizing approach can streamline the blizzard of programs and expectations placed upon schools, which can easily overwhelm school-based administrators and coordinators. Children's Cabinets can start to streamline and integrate partner programs, assist with managing multiple funding streams, and create efficiencies where there are now bureaucratic barriers.

Children's Cabinets at the state or local level are typically composed of agency heads who govern a comprehensive range of child, youth, and family-serving programs. Some cabinets also have community, philanthropic, education, and business stakeholders appointed by the governor or mayor. These groups meet regularly to identify common outcomes, coordinate services, and develop joint plans to support children's healthy development. This approach is becoming increasing popular, with the Forum for Youth Investment operating both local and state Children's Cabinet networks.

As one example, the Maryland Children's Cabinet includes the secretaries from the Departments of Budget and Management; Disabilities; Health; Human Services; Juvenile Services; as well as the State Superintendent of Schools for the Maryland State Department of Education and the Executive Director of the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention. According to the current 3-year plan, the Cabinet's strategic goals include improving outcomes for disconnected youth and reducing childhood hunger and homelessness. In service of these goals, the Children's Cabinet Interagency Fund (authorized by Human Services administrative code) provides dedicated grant funding for Local Management Boards to support wraparound services. Such structures are essential to managing the multitude of health and human services desperately needed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Resources

- Community Schools Playbook (Partnership for the Future of Learning). This playbook provides model legislation, real-world examples, and many additional resources for state and local leaders who want to support community schools.
- Financing Community Schools: A Framework for Growth and Sustainability (Partnership for the Future of Learning). This finance brief discusses community schools funding in depth. It provides a framework for financing community schools and examples of how community schools at varying stages of development can identify and implement financing strategies.

- Leveraging Resources Through Community Schools: The Role of Technical Assistance (Learning Policy Institute). This brief provides information and examples of how local governments and nonprofit agencies in counties can play an essential role in supporting and providing technical assistance to community school initiatives in school districts.
- Planning for Re-Entry & Recovery: A Guide for Promoting Equity, Improvement, and Innovation (FourPoint Education). This guide provides a planning tool that emphasizes the importance of family, school, and community partnerships. Specifically, the guide suggests that district and school leaders can maintain a list of key community partners to connect families with, communicate with these partners about re-entry plans, and identify how partners can deploy their resources to help with re-entry and recovery and create a more integrated support system for students.
- The Whole Child: Building Systems of Integrated Student Support During and After COVID-19 (Center for Optimized Student Support at Boston College). This action guide offers practical steps for schools to develop a system of integrated support.

Endnotes

1. Information in this text box comes from: Maier, A., Daniel, J., Oakes, J., & Lam, L. (2017). *Community schools as an effective school improvement strategy: A review of the evidence*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.
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Priority 9: Prepare Educators for Reinventing Schools

Everything we have described here requires knowledgeable, skilled, dedicated educators; there is no other way to get the kind of teaching we need. Meanwhile, for these educators, the expectations are higher than they have ever been before.

What Educators Need

Even before the onset of COVID-19, an emerging consensus in the science of learning and development highlighted the need to provide all students with access to deeper learning experiences in ways that promote greater equity. This raised the bar for educators, and for educator preparation.[1] Now, even greater efforts are called for in meeting the social and emotional needs of children and implementing trauma- and healing-informed practice, all while making up for learning loss through unpredictable combinations of distance learning, blended learning, and in-classroom learning.

This unbelievably complex scenario would challenge even the most well-prepared, stable, and experienced teacher workforce. Unfortunately, most states do not have such a teacher workforce in place. Education spending still has not recovered from the Great Recession, when layoff and salary cuts shrank the number of teachers, discouraged aspiring educators from entering the classroom, and reduced preparation program enrollment and capacity.

This attenuated pipeline into teaching, combined with inadequate salaries and poor working conditions, has led to substantial shortages. As a result, more than 100,000 U.S. teaching positions were left vacant or were filled by underprepared teachers in 2018–19. Moreover, these shortages, concentrated in the STEM fields, special education, and English learner development, have been most severe in communities serving students of color and those from low-income families. Under-resourced, high-poverty schools have too often been staffed by a highly transient group of inexperienced and untrained teachers.[2]

COVID-19 and ensuing state cuts to higher education will make it even harder for students from low-income families to access higher education, including high-quality teacher preparation programs. Already, the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on the higher education plans of people of color, with half of Latino/a students and about 40% of African American and Asian American students canceling or otherwise changing their plans, including delaying enrollment, reducing courses, or switching institutions. This raises concerns for efforts to increase the diversity of the teacher workforce, which will be difficult to accomplish without additional higher education and college affordability investments. As teachers of color have been found to boost achievement and attainment for students of color,[3] this is particularly problematic.

Now, with one out of five teachers saying they are unlikely to return if schools open physically in the fall, we face the prospect of a new wave of resignations and retirements,[4] which, combined with potential staff cuts to meet budget shortfalls, and piled on top of preexisting workforce challenges, may create the counterintuitive outcome of simultaneous shortages and layoffs in the educator workforce. It is critically important that current educators be well-supported in meeting the challenges that they face and that well-trained educators be recruited into the profession.

What Policymakers and Educators Can Do

While the immediate needs of communities will create major pressures on budgets, it is important for policymakers to recognize how critically important it is to recruit, develop, and retain a strong educator workforce, so that other aspirations for education for our children can be realized. The incentives needed to accomplish this reside at the federal, state, and local levels.

Invest in high-quality educator preparation, especially for high-need communities where shortages continue to be problematic.

Strong educator preparation, which increases teacher efficacy and retention,[5] is needed now more than ever. While many of the demands being placed on teachers and school leaders are new, the ingredients of high-quality educator preparation programs are not: They are built around a coherent vision and well-defined standards and include the modeling of research-based, effective practices in courses that are integrated with strong clinical experiences and performance assessments.[6] A policy agenda that supports such preparation incentivizes programs to provide it and aspiring teachers to pursue it.

High-quality programs begin with **strong, research-aligned standards** for teaching and school leadership, long recognized as a foundation of high-achieving education systems[7] and as a key feature for influencing preparation program quality and supporting student learning. Policymakers can update and strengthen these standards to reflect the needs of today's students—including new knowledge about social, emotional, and cognitive development; culturally responsive pedagogies; and trauma-informed practices—and then ensure that these standards are reflected in licensure requirements, performance assessments for teacher and administrator candidates, and performance-based accreditation for programs.[8] California provides an example here, having strengthened standards to address teacher and administrator knowledge and skills that are ever-more important today[9] and developed teacher and administrator performance assessments to evaluate these skills.[10] The state also incorporated performance-based aspects, such as candidate assessment and survey results, into its new accreditation system.

Incentives for individuals to enter teaching should address cost as a key barrier to quality preparation, particularly for candidates of color and those from low-income backgrounds, as this is a problem that will likely grow with the economic effects of COVID-19. Service scholarships and loan forgiveness programs can help candidates meet those costs and have been shown to aid in teacher recruitment and retention for high-need locations and subject areas (such as special education, bilingual education, math, and science) and especially for candidates of color.[11] This should be a major agenda at the federal level, where support for training needed medical personnel has long been a key factor in addressing shortages of physicians in key fields and communities.

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Policymakers can also support high-retention pathways such as teacher and leader residencies, which not only address the cost issue through financial support for candidates but also show promise in producing effective educators who work in high-need subject areas and schools and who stay in the profession at higher rates.[12] By ensuring these candidates get a top-flight preparation at little or no cost through strong programs that arrange for excellent clinical preparation under the wing of expert educators in high-need communities, these programs improve the quality of teaching and school leadership for students furthest from opportunity. California, Delaware, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, and Texas are among the states that have aimed to address existing shortages by adopting such models.[13] Federal funding for these programs as part of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and Higher Education Act (HEA) should be expanded to support state efforts.

In considering how to meet unprecedented needs in changing times, state and local leaders should also seek ways to leverage innovation that is currently underway in educator preparation. They could support communities already seeking localized solutions to existing shortages through **Grow-Your-Own (GYO) programs**, which recruit teacher candidates from local communities, including paraprofessionals, who are more likely to reflect local diversity and to continue teaching in their communities over the long term.[14] To ameliorate its shortages, Tennessee is using CARES Act funding to expand GYO programs that train teachers for special education or English learner development along with an additional credential, such as elementary education. The funds will allow candidates to engage in paid paraprofessional roles during their preparation and experience strong clinical training alongside their credential coursework.

Transform educator learning opportunities to match current needs

The new skills needed by teachers and school leaders are many. It will be critically important for both incoming and current educators to learn how to engage productively in distance learning as well as blended and hybrid learning models. Educators also need to be increasingly knowledgeable about how to engender authentic learning supported by formative assessments, enable social and emotional learning, and engage in trauma-informed and healing-informed practice.

To accomplish this learning, we will need even more effective ways of **developing and sharing expertise across the profession**. Innovative teacher and leader preparation programs, such as those that are part of the Educator Preparation Laboratory (EdPrepLab) network—which is focused on supporting deeper learning and equity—are developing means to share their practices with each other and with other programs in the field through affiliation groups, site visits, webinars, a practice-based website, and partnerships with other organizations that reach the field. EdPrepLab members are also sharing strategies for responding to the challenges of COVID-19, demonstrating how institutions can support each other in learning to meet emerging needs.

Similarly, educators in the field need means to learn from one another so that innovative practices developed in one school or classroom can travel to others. As districts figure out how to structure intense, effective professional learning and recognize those educators who can lead the way for others, micro-credentialing may become increasingly important. Micro-credentials recognize specific areas of skills teachers have acquired based on demonstrated performance, rather than seat time. These may range from areas such as distance learning or competencies in designing performance-based assessments to skills for supporting social and emotional learning and trauma-informed practice to more general skills of mentoring.

Some states are developing systems of micro-credentialing for both pre- and in-service educators. Digital Promise offers a wide range of micro-credentials for teachers and school leaders, including a number that are focused on concerns that are prominent as a result of the pandemic, such as securing digital access for students and working effectively with parents during distance learning. Districts may want to use micro-credentialing as a means to identify mentors and professional development leaders so that they can more quickly develop the expertise of colleagues in particular areas.

Support mentoring and new teacher roles

With the probability that teachers in the 2020–21 school year will face a mix of online, hybrid, and in-person instruction, and with some teachers unable to staff in-person classrooms for health reasons while schools adjust to social distancing arrangements, policymakers and school leaders will need to consider new teaching roles and arrangements. These new roles could apply to novice and experienced teachers as well as student-teachers and could be built around both the challenges and the emerging opportunities presented by COVID-19.

Policymakers and school leaders will need to consider new teaching roles and arrangements. These new roles could apply to novice and experienced teachers as well as student-teachers and could be built around both the challenges and the emerging opportunities presented by COVID-19.

For example, some veteran teachers who might be considering retirement due to health concerns associated with in-person teaching could, with strong professional development, support online instruction for the students who will not be able to return to school due to school designs or their own health considerations. These veteran teachers may also be able to provide mentoring and support for colleagues, including new teachers.[15] New teachers whose student-teaching was altered by COVID-19 in the spring of 2020 may need additional support as they begin their careers, but they may also bring new perspectives and practices informed by their experiences, including an awareness of the equity issues raised by the pandemic.[16] Student-teachers may be able to take on new roles, functioning as assets to districts by working with small groups of students through remote settings, bringing knowledge of technology to bear in supporting virtual instruction, and making unique contributions even as they themselves are learning.[17]

The most expert teachers can support other teachers in a variety of ways. Long Beach Unified School District in California capitalized on the opportunities provided by distance learning to enable students and teachers from across the district to tune in to the lessons offered by expert teachers so that they could learn both the content and the teaching strategies these teachers used.[18] In some cases, as many as 2,000 students and dozens of teachers tuned in to watch lessons taught by teachers famous for their abilities to teach particular content or in particular ways. Some of these teachers will be livestreamed and video recorded during the coming school year as part of demonstration classes used both for professional development and student learning.

New models of professional expertise sharing, such as the Instructional Leadership Corps (ILC) in California, can be adapted to these needs as well. The ILC was created by the California Teachers Association, the National Board Resource Center at Stanford University, and the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education to enable accomplished teachers to support professional

development for implementing new state standards in their home districts. This network of just over 250 teachers and administrators has served over 100,000 educators in more than half of the state's districts since 2014, offering job-embedded learning to rave reviews from colleagues and adapting their supports to contemporary needs.

Create collaboration time

Factory model school designs have meant that U.S. educators have had much more time during which they are responsible for students and much less time for collaboration than their counterparts in other countries. The international TALIS surveys found that U.S. middle school teachers teach more students on average and are responsible for student instruction about 8 hours more per week (40% more on average) than their peers internationally—ranking first in the world for instructional hours and near the bottom of all countries for planning and collaboration time. Thus, it is not surprising that U.S. teachers were less likely than the TALIS average teacher to report that they ever observe other teachers' classes and provide feedback, ever teach as a team, or ever take part in collaborative professional learning. Yet collaboration time is ranked by teachers as among the most important variables for their learning and retention in the profession, and research finds that those who work in collegial work settings grow more rapidly in effectiveness.[19]

In many districts this has changed overnight with distance learning, with more teaming and collaboration time organized among teachers than ever before. And many states and districts are thinking very differently about the use of time for the return in the fall. The notion of a 4-day teaching week, with a fifth day for collaborative planning among teachers, is widespread among the proposals for the coming year. As we consider innovative teaching and learning schedules, securing that time for U.S. teachers—the 8 hours on average that their international colleagues experience—should become part of the new normal.

As one example, in Iowa, the Johnston Community School District has released a draft proposal with Fridays reserved not only for deep cleaning but also for a full day of professional learning (see Figure 9.1). Wednesdays can serve a similar purpose if a day is needed for cleaning between two groups of students within the same week. These modified schedules present an unprecedented opportunity for educators' professional development and to enhance their ability to collaborate and deliver hybrid instruction. With a day every week designed for planning and collaboration, this change may quadruple the amount of time teachers previously had, when many districts offered professional learning only during monthly meetings on early-dismissal half-days.

Figure 9.1
Example A/B Schedule

A/B Week Rotations of Groups of Students

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week 1	Group A (On-Site)	Group A (On-Site)	Group A (On-Site)	Group A (On-Site)	School Cleaning/ Teacher Planning/Office Hours/Professional Learning
	Group B (Remote)	Group B (Remote)	Group B (Remote)	Group B (Remote)	
Week 2	Group B (On-Site)	Group B (On-Site)	Group B (On-Site)	Group B (On-Site)	
	Group A (Remote)	Group A (Remote)	Group A (Remote)	Group A (Remote)	

Source: Johnston Community School District. (2020). Return to Learn: Hybrid Learning Model (Draft).

Take the long view

Policymakers can also use this time to plan ahead to ensure that, as resources come back into the system, they are spent to leverage greater teaching expertise. States (and countries) that have made substantial gains and closed achievement gaps have made systemic investments in educator quality.[20] There is no reason why preparation to make such investments cannot begin now, informed by the changing needs of today's students and schools.

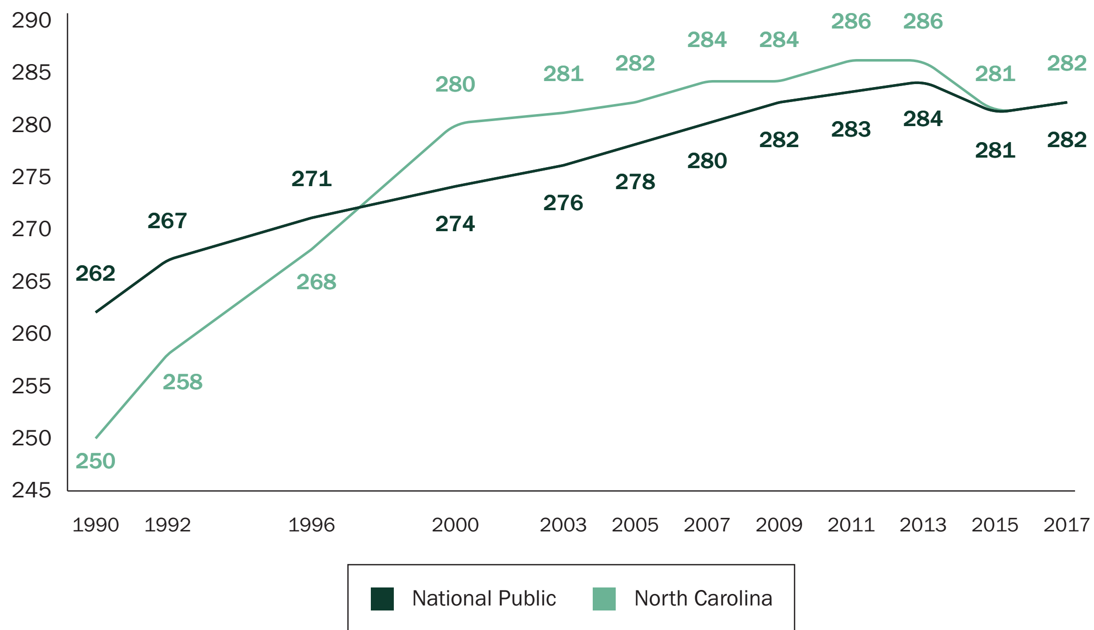
Policymakers can also use this time to plan ahead to ensure that, as resources come back into the system, they are spent to leverage greater teaching expertise.

California, which has transformed its system of educator certification and preparation program accreditation over the past decade, began this work at a low point in funding and capacity caused by the Great Recession of 2007–08. The state's education budget dropped 14% from 2007–08 to 2010–11, and the teacher workforce declined by almost 10% by 2012. At the same time, the state's Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) began looking ahead, launching a new strategic plan in December 2014 and collaborating with the California Department of Education and State Board of Education to produce a report, Greatness by Design, which laid out cross-agency priorities for improving the state's educator quality system. For the remainder of the decade, the state has built upon this foundation, transforming state standards and expectations, implementing them through performance-based assessment and accreditation, and monitoring progress through new data systems and dashboards. As the state invested more money more equitably in its education system and moved to incorporate emphasis on deeper learning within a whole child framework, the transformations in preparation supported strong gains in achievement and attainment for students.

Other efforts, undertaken earlier, show similar results. For example, during the 1980s and 1990s, in response to desegregation litigation, Connecticut launched ambitious efforts to equalize educational opportunity while improving teaching. Its Education Enhancement Act coupled major increases in teacher salaries with higher standards for teacher education and licensing. Funds were allocated based on district need and the number of fully certified teachers, creating incentives for districts to recruit those who met the new certification standards and for individuals to meet those standards. With these incentives, plus service scholarships to underwrite preparation for high-need candidates, the state eliminated emergency credentials and attracted high-ability teacher candidates. Connecticut also invested deeply in training for principals and ongoing professional development for teachers, while it enacted new standards and performance-based assessments for students, focused on higher-order thinking skills. By 1998 Connecticut 4th-graders ranked first in the nation in reading and mathematics, and its 8th-graders topped the rankings in writing and science on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, despite increasing numbers of students from low-income families, students of color, and new immigrant students in its public schools during the decade. The achievement gap between White students and students of color decreased, and Connecticut's Black and Hispanic students substantially outperformed their counterparts nationally.

Similarly, during the 1980s and 1990s, North Carolina made substantial investments in its teaching force—increasing standards for entering teaching and school administration, requiring improvements in educator preparation, boosting salaries, and investing in high-quality mentoring and professional development. Importantly, the state invested in greater expertise throughout teachers' careers, authorizing a noted service scholarship program—the North Carolina Teaching Fellows—to recruit talented individuals and prepare them well for teaching while also enacting a 12% salary increase for teachers who achieved National Board Certification, an accomplishment that has been associated with greater teacher effectiveness. It also substantially upgraded principal training, including support for intensive internships, another move associated with greater effectiveness. During the 1990s, North Carolina posted the largest student achievement gains of any state in mathematics (see Figure 9.2) and realized substantial progress in reading. It was also the most successful state in the nation in narrowing the achievement gap between White students and students of color.

Figure 9.2
North Carolina Achievement Trends (NAEP 8th-Grade Mathematics Scores)



Source: Darling-Hammond, L. (2019). *Investing for student success: Lessons from state school finance reforms*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. Based on data from National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). (n.d.). Data tools: State profiles.

These efforts show that purposeful action to support teaching can make a major difference in the long-term learning opportunities of children.

Resources

- EdPrepLab (EdPrepLab Network). This network of leading-edge teacher and leader preparation programs supports research, policy, and practice aimed at helping practitioners use the science of learning and development to support equitable deeper learning. EdPrepLab offers a practice-based website that provides teaching resources and policy exemplars that enable improvements in educator preparation policy and practice, including strategies for responding to the challenges of COVID-19.
- Effective Teacher Professional Development (Learning Policy Institute). This brief and report summarize seven widely shared features of effective teacher professional development (based on a review of methodologically rigorous studies) and can be used to guide professional development design and investments.
- Micro-Credentials and COVID-19 (Digital Promise). This curated library of micro-credentials that can be earned outside of the classroom and without students can be used to help educators continue their professional learning during social distancing and beyond.

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Priority 10: Leverage More Adequate and Equitable School Funding

COVID-19's impact on our economy has been unprecedented: Since mid-March, one in five employed Americans has either temporarily or permanently lost their jobs. The downturn in our economy has dramatically impacted state revenue: According to the most recent estimates by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, state revenue shortfalls will likely reach about 10% in the current year and more than 25% in the next. On top of this, states are facing additional costs related to health care, unemployment, and education. Even conservative estimates of state funding cuts to schools suggest that states will need between $200 billion and $300 billion to stabilize their k–12 education budgets over the next year and a half. Because states cannot engage in deficit spending, and education accounts for a large share of state budgets, substantial cuts are inevitable without federal assistance.

These budget reductions are coming at a time when school districts and early childhood programs are also seeing increased costs because of COVID-19, including additional costs for providing devices and connectivity for distance learning, resources for expanded learning time, and additional food services for students from low-income families and students with special needs; costs to meet COVID-19 health and safety guidelines; and costs for additional staff to support physical distancing. Altogether these costs could total $370 billion over the coming year.

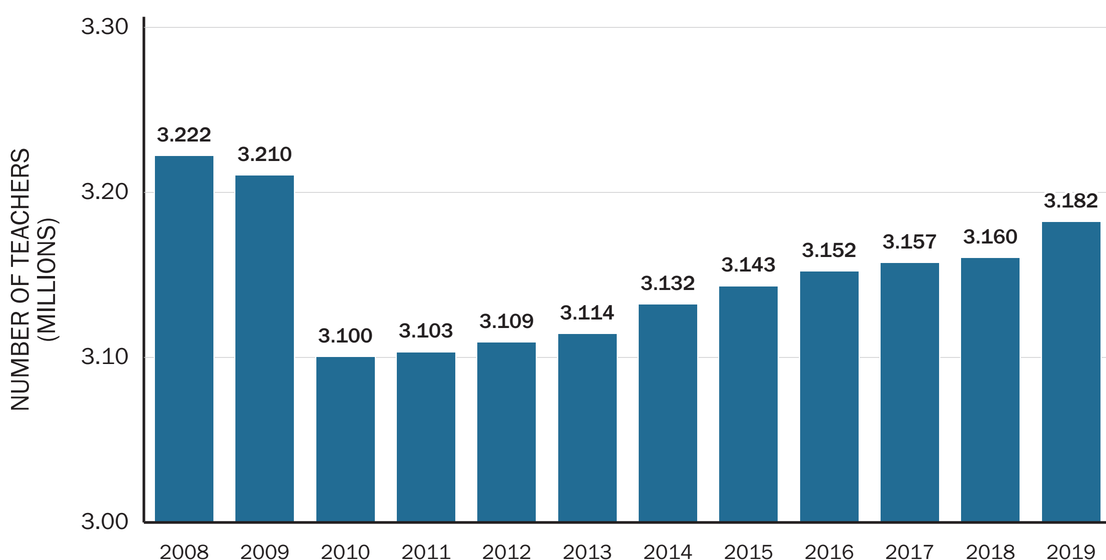
The communities most impacted by these budget shortfalls are those that serve the students from low-income families and students of color who have been and will be most affected by the health, employment, and housing impacts of COVID-19. Prior to the pandemic, school districts serving the largest proportions of Black, Latino/a, and Native American students already received about $1,800 less per pupil than those serving the fewest students of color. Declines in state revenue and increased costs will disproportionately hit schools in communities with high proportions of students from low-income families and low property wealth, which rely more on state education funding from sales and income taxes than on more stable local property taxes, thus furthering the divide.

This is because the United States' reliance on local revenues has produced one of the most unequal school funding systems in the industrialized world. Despite strong evidence that money matters for student achievement and other important life outcomes, especially for students from low-income families, relatively few states have yet redesigned their systems to create more adequate and equitable funding. Those that have made such changes show much stronger outcomes.

Without a determined effort to produce a different outcome, funding cuts made to education now could be as long-lasting as they were during and after the Great Recession. While we are now several years removed from the end of the last recession, we still have 40,000 fewer public school teachers than we did in 2008 (see Figure 10.1).

Without a determined effort to produce a different outcome, funding cuts made to education now could be as long-lasting as they were during and after the Great Recession.

Figure 10.1
Public School Elementary and Secondary Teachers



Data source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center on Education Statistics

Furthermore, with the exception of those few states that seized the moment to transform their funding systems, school resources became more inequitable over that period of time.[1] However, as we describe below, states such as California and Rhode Island used the event of the recession to create new funding formulas that were designed to distribute funds more equitably as resources returned to the system—and they emerged from that era with more equitable and higher-performing systems. This is something that both federal and state policymakers should be considering as they take a long view to the years ahead.

What Students Need

Even before COVID-19, most state education finance systems were not working for students from low-income families, students of color, and those with a range of needs—many of which are exacerbated in high-poverty communities where food and housing insecurity, lack of health care, and inadequate community services are commonplace. Given the great inequalities in our society, including the highest rates of child poverty in the industrialized world, schools should be providing more intensive services for children in high-poverty areas than in more affluent areas. However, the opposite is true. In most states, districts serving affluent students receive as much or more money than those serving children in poverty, and only a handful have funding systems that provide resources that are both adequate and equitable.

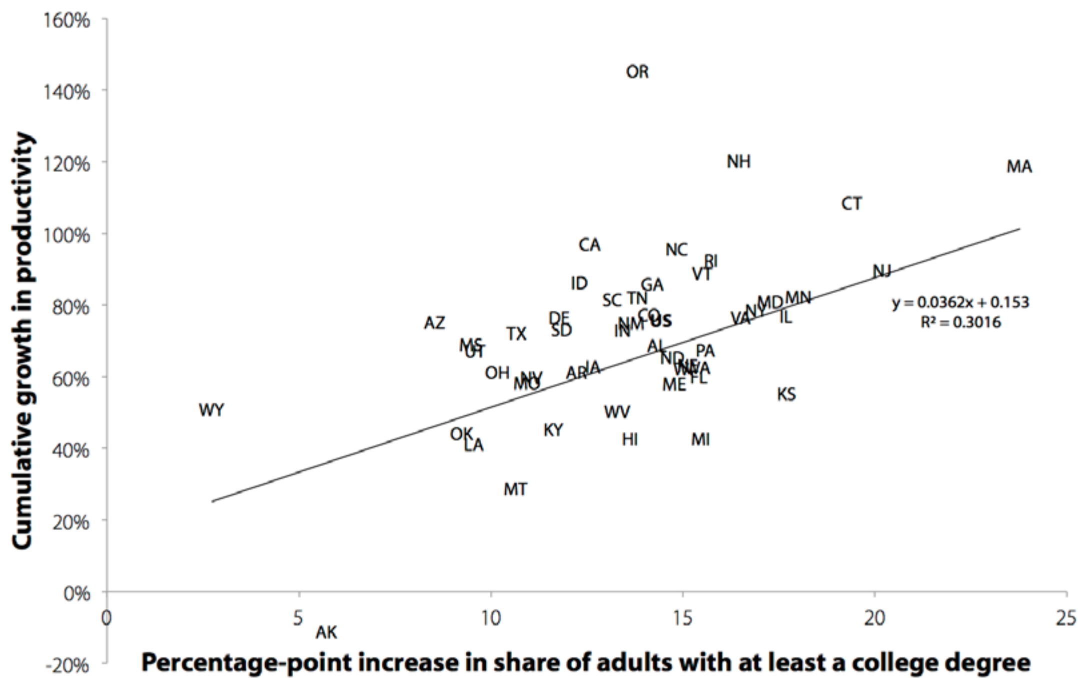
Funding inequities are even more apparent when it comes to access to high-quality early learning. Based upon the *Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education* consensus study report, early childhood programs only received approximately 37% of the public funding estimated to be needed to provide high-quality care and education to children. As a result, the burden to cover the costs falls upon parents, an expense few can afford. Due to the lack of affordability, too few infants of working families have access to the early care and education they need, and just 53% of 3- to 5-year-olds attend preschool—making the United States an outlier among economically developed countries.

Without robust public funding, programs often operate on shoestring budgets, with teachers paid one third to one half as much as their k–12 colleagues. The COVID-19 pandemic threatens to set our early childhood education system back even further financially. State-subsidized early education programs are likely to take dramatic hits, given current projections for major decreases in state funding, and private pre-k programs may close permanently due to increased costs and decreased revenue. The combination could mean the loss of up to 4.5 million child care slots, according to one estimate.[2] Part of what makes state early childhood education budgets so vulnerable is that early childhood programs rely on a patchwork of funding streams to make ends meet, many of which are vulnerable to cuts in bad economic times.

Students who live in poverty, those who are homeless or in foster care, those who are English learners, and those with learning disabilities cost more to educate and should be recognized in school funding formulas with greater per-pupil spending weights. And districts with concentrations of such pupils carry more responsibility to provide wraparound services and intensive teaching and learning opportunities, which need to be recognized in school funding systems as well. Until the United States repairs its tattered safety net for children, so that poverty, hunger, and housing instability are not constant companions for many young people, it should fund their schools and early childhood programs at much higher rates and in more purposeful ways to support their healthy learning and development.

When students receive these kinds of supports, society benefits. As educational attainment increases with investments in schools, so does state economic productivity.[3] (See Figure 10.2.)

Figure 10.2
Relationship Between State Productivity Growth and Increase in College Attainment From 1979 to 2012



Source: Berger, N., & Fisher, P. (2013). *A well-educated workforce is key to state prosperity.* Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute. https://files.epi.org/2013/A%20well-educated%20workforce%20is%20key%20to%20state%20prosperity.pdf.

Two of our highest-achieving states bear this out. Massachusetts assumed its No. 1 ranking in state student achievement—held for more than 2 decades—after adopting a more progressive funding formula in 1993 as a result of litigation. The formula provided additional weights for funding to students from low-income backgrounds and English learners; funding for early childhood programs increased fivefold in the first years of the reforms as well. Importantly, the changes in school funding led to greater investments in educators in high-poverty areas, which research suggests may leverage the largest gains in student performance. The state expanded access to high-quality professional learning for teachers and school leaders and created a program to attract qualified teachers into high-need fields and locations. The state also funds community schools and wraparound supports for students, working in multiple ways to support child health and development.

New Jersey—a state now serving a majority of students of color—ranks No. 2 in the nation on achievement and graduation rates, following a similar school finance reform that began in the late 1990s. It is one of the nation's top-spending states, with one of the most progressive funding formulas. It allocates roughly 20% more per pupil in districts in which at least 30% of students are in poverty. It changed its funding formula after a series of court decisions starting in the mid-1990s that called for more equal funding for urban districts serving predominantly low-income families. Funds were allocated to support whole school reform, which included reductions in class size; investments in technology; improvements to facilities; and supports for health, social services, and summer programs to help students catch up. Added resources were directed largely to instructional personnel in the highest-need districts, and there were noticeable improvements to the achievement of all students—including students from low-income families and students of color—on statewide and national tests. One of the most prominent reforms was the funding of 2 years of high-quality, universal preschool for 3- and 4-year-old children in the poorest districts. Studies show that students who received 2 years of preschool showed sustained and significant achievement gains in 4th- and 5th-grade math, literacy, and science far exceeding those of students who did not experience preschool.

What Policymakers and Educators Can Do

Policymakers at the federal and state levels can use this moment to dramatically increase the equitable allocation of school resources by:

- Allocating federal funds in the recovery acts and, ultimately, in other federal programs in more equitable ways—including supports for the investments in technology, wraparound supports, and educator development that are needed to enable successful education.
- Adopting more equitable state funding formulas and phasing them in as resources return to the system.
- Including preschool in equitable school funding formulas, streamlining sources of funding to ensure that those with greater needs receive the resources that will help them thrive.

Leverage federal funds for equity

In the near term, federal recovery aid can be used to enhance equity at the state and local levels. The federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act provided early childhood settings, schools, and districts with nearly $16.75 billion in initial funding to help respond to the

crisis. Additional aid is under debate in Congress at the time of this writing. States and districts have an opportunity to use the funds provided through the CARES Act and any subsequent federal aid to invest in strategies that have been shown to advance equity and support the academic success of students.

Federal funds can be used to close the digital divide by purchasing technology (including hardware, software, and connectivity) that supports substantive educational interaction between students and teachers, focusing on the needs of students from low-income families and, for students with disabilities, the use of assistive technology or adaptive equipment. But new devices or internet connections will be of limited effectiveness in closing opportunity gaps if teachers are not supported in learning how to shift their instruction and adapt lessons to a distance learning environment. Technology investments should be paired with investments in research-based professional development on the uses of technology for high-quality learning. Additional school staff, such as guidance counselors and social workers, also need support to learn how to effectively use technology to deliver services to students.

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States and districts can also use these funds to invest in wraparound services through community schools, which can serve as an effective long-term strategy for meeting the ongoing academic, health, and wellness needs of our country's most marginalized students and families. In times of crisis, when the already frayed social safety net is insufficient to meet the basic needs of students and families, these multipurpose schools are stepping in to fill the gap. (See "Priority 8: Establish Community Schools and Wraparound Supports.") States and districts can use dollars to jump-start the development of community school models that provide health, mental health, and social services to children and families alongside supportive instruction; these funds can also be used to build the infrastructure and expertise for technical assistance to schools implementing this approach, so that a more permanent capacity for meeting students' needs will exist even after the pandemic is over.

If and when more funds are allocated, it will be critically important for state and local governments to make strategic investments that build local capacity to support all students—and especially the most marginalized—throughout the school year *and* in times of crisis. These high-impact strategies at the k–12 level include investing in a high-quality teacher workforce in high-need schools (see "Priority 9: Prepare Educators for Reinventing Schools"), especially given the disparities in access to a stable group of well-prepared educators in these schools, which undermines all other reforms that may be attempted.

Looking ahead, the federal government will have opportunities to support these kinds of investments beyond the pandemic through the regular congressional appropriations process, the next reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and administrative action. These opportunities include:

- **Expanding and equitably allocating federal education funding across states.** The federal government invests less than 2% of its budget across all levels of education and has not maintained its commitments to local schools. For example, the 2002 reauthorization of ESEA promised nearly $26 billion for Title I, Part A programs and school improvement by fiscal year 2007, yet today funding is at $16.3 billion. Title I funding should be substantially increased and allocated more equitably to the states based on pupil needs rather than state spending levels.
- **Investing in strategies to close the digital opportunity gap.** This includes policies and resources across agencies ranging from the Departments of Education and Commerce to the Federal Communications Commission to ensure access and make investments that provide all schools and households with the technology and the broadband capacity necessary to access information and support learning. To develop a deeper understanding of needs and successful strategies for digital access and instruction, the federal government could establish a national research center to monitor access and track, evaluate, and disseminate successful practices.
- **Supporting and providing incentives to states to provide adequate and equitable resources to districts.** To ensure school finance reforms are grounded in research-based practices that will deliver adequate and equitable resources, a federal commission on school finance could be established to examine federal, state, and local school funding and provide ongoing research, recommendations, examples, monitoring, and support. A competitive grant program could be designed to support state efforts to restructure their school finance systems and make the shift to a new system.

Adopt more equitable state school funding formulas

Meanwhile, states should be examining how to better account for pupil needs in their funding formulas. One way to do this is to fund schools based on equal dollars per student, adjusted or weighted for specific student needs such as poverty, limited English proficiency, foster care or homeless status, or special education status. In large states, this might be further adjusted for geographic cost differentials, while also taking into account the transportation and other needs of sparse, rural districts.

Use the moment of the economic downturn to support rethinking. While states are in the middle of both a recession and a pandemic, it may sound unrealistic to suggest that now is the time for states to consider changing their school funding system. However, in the past, some states have taken the opportunity to revise their school funding formulas during a recession, with funding flowing into the new formula as it gradually increases.

There are at least two reasons why a state may want to consider changing its funding formula now:

1. Formulas will be changing in most states anyway: As states start to adjust their school funding to take into account reduced revenue, they will most likely be making changes to their education funding system. The changes that states will be making are born out of

a necessity to cut—not on a plan to help students. If major changes will happen anyway, it may be possible to design some of them to aid students in the longer term, even if the change will take some time to implement.

2. Eventual growth in funding will help to raise all ships, making change easier: Some states wait to change their funding system until they have additional dollars to do so. However, some states have found that the best time to change their funding system is when they have hit the bottom of an economic cycle. Once state budgets begin to improve, and as new money eventually flows to schools, a revised formula could ensure that all districts receive increased funding while those with greater need receive more.

Maryland adopted a new funding formula in 2002, during the post-9/11 economic downturn. The formula, enacted in the Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act, was designed to provide districts with more adequate and equitable funding while implementing a new assessment and accountability system. The formula increased state spending on education and also equalized funding based on a district's wealth and targeted more funding to high-need student groups. The Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act also reshaped accountability around the state's new learning standards, eventually leading to comprehensive yearly master plans that describe "the goals, objectives, and strategies that will be used to improve student achievement,"[4] and increased the number of students meeting state and local performance standards. Maryland's achievement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress increased sharply in reading and math over the following decade, with reduced achievement gaps. Although the rate of improvement slowed during the cutbacks of the Great Recession, the state has just enacted another round of equity-oriented funding reforms.

Rhode Island acted to adopt a new school funding formula in 2010, in the immediate wake of the Great Recession. The new formula was designed to provide more significant equity in the school funding system while also aligning with the state's preexisting accountability system, known as the Basic Education Program. According to a report from the Center for American Progress, the formula was implemented without any additional funding initially. Instead, all districts were held harmless from financial loss for up to 10 years. As new funding became available, it was slowly distributed through the new formula. This slow phase-in approach created relatively little political discord, and 70% of students ultimately received more state aid. In the wake of the formula change, the state's 4th- and 8th-grade students climbed from below to above the national average in reading achievement and saw modest gains in math.

California is another case in point. In 2013, after years of severe budget cuts, and while still experiencing the effects of the Great Recession, California began to implement a new, more equitable Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) with a plan for achieving targeted funding increases over 8 years—a span of time that was ultimately shortened when the economy improved. (Full funding was achieved by 2018–19.) The plan:

- eliminated the majority of the state's categorical programs;
- instituted uniform per-pupil "base" grants to school districts, charter schools, and county offices of education, adjusted by grade level;
- created "supplemental" grants equal to 20% of the adjusted base grant for each English learner, student in foster care, and student from a low-income family; and

- established “concentration” grants for local education agencies with enrollments of more than 55% English learners, students in foster care, and students from low-income families. Students who meet more than one eligibility criteria are only counted once.

The new formula allocated billions of new dollars to districts serving high-need students and provided all districts with broad flexibility to develop—in partnership with parents, students, and staff—spending plans aligned to state and local priorities and needs. As part of these Local Control and Accountability Plans, districts must annually evaluate student progress for all student groups in relation to the state’s eight priorities, expressed in a multiple-measures accountability system that takes into account key inputs (such as rich curriculum, positive climate, and qualified educators) as well as a range of outcomes (attendance, graduation rates, and college and career readiness, as well as tested achievement). Budget decisions must be made transparently and reported in terms of how they will move the needle on these important priorities for all students.

These structural reforms coincided with the state’s implementation of the Common Core State Standards and Next Generation Science Standards, implementation of the Smarter Balanced Assessment System, and development of new educator preparation and licensure standards to support the more rigorous academic goals. Within only a few years, the LCFF positively impacted student outcomes, especially for students from low-income families, and shrank achievement gaps. These results showed up in significant gains for the state’s students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress as well, moving the state from 48th and 49th in reading and math, respectively, to near the national average in reading and halfway to the national average in math.

In this past year, California also used an equity-based formula similar to the LCFF to allocate $5.3 billion in additional federal funds to schools, going well beyond the portion of the CARES Act specifically identified for k–12 education, thus doubling down on equity and seeking to maintain the gains it has achieved.

Use equity principles to allocate funds within districts and schools. Once funding reaches districts, it is also important for it to be spent equitably to meet student needs. A key principle of continuous improvement is that it requires continuous transparency. In California, districts must explain in their Local Control and Accountability Plans how they will use their supplemental and concentration grant funding to meet the needs of the students who generated the funding. In Los Angeles Unified School District, community advocates proposed an Equity Index, which is now used to help guide those allocations to the schools with the highest needs.

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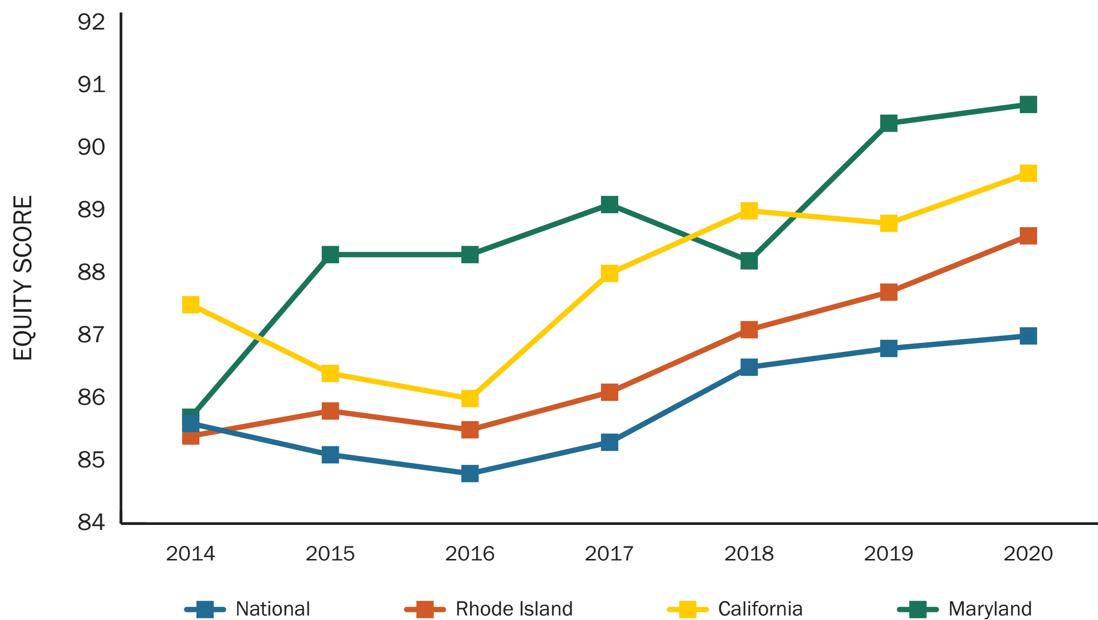
Include preschool in school funding formulas

Another key change that states can make to promote equity is to add preschool to their school funding formulas. Two states, Oklahoma and West Virginia, have school funding formulas that fund preschool for 4-year-olds as an additional grade of school.[5] The District of Columbia funds preschool for 3-year-olds as well as 4 year-olds through its formula, with an additional weight that

accounts for the higher staffing levels needed for young children. These states have some of the highest levels of enrollment in preschool or Head Start in the country, with 69% of all 4-year-olds served in West Virginia and 85% in both Oklahoma and Washington, DC.[6] West Virginia was able to add preschool to its funding formula in 2002, in the midst of the post-9/11 downturn, despite the legislature's concerns about the cost. Policymakers did so by agreeing to a 10-year phase-in period and tying the agreement to a larger bill related to k–12 school funding.

The funding changes in California, Maryland, and Rhode Island have all led to increased equity in their education finance systems over time (see Figure 10.3). As revenue increased in states after the recession, the new funding formulas were able to close the gap between wealthy and poor districts. *Education Week*'s annual Quality Counts report showed that all three states' finance systems warranted increased equity scores between 2014 and 2020, with each of them now having scores that exceed the national average.

Figure 10.3
***Education Week* Equity Scores**



Note: *Education Week* calculates equity scores using a combined indicator of the degree to which a school district's revenue is correlated with property wealth, per-pupil expenditures below the state median, the level of variability in funding across a state, and the difference between the 5th and 95th percentile of districts.

Data Source: *Education Week* Quality Counts School Finance Report Cards.

In sum, changing how we fund schools is never easy, and it might seem like it is an impossible task during a recession. However, this pandemic has raised equity issues to a new level of consciousness that may allow innovative policy responses to emerge in many contexts, from preschool through high school. In the past, some states have changed their systems during difficult economic times in ways that have led to improved equity and adequacy in funding while also supporting strategies for higher student achievement. While it may appear to be counterintuitive on the surface, policymakers should take advantage of this recession to redesign both federal aid and state and local funding systems.

Resources

- How Much Will COVID-19 Cost Schools? (Learning Policy Institute). This state-level tool calculates the effects of declines in state revenues on education budgets, along with the increased COVID-19-related costs for those estimating needed spending increases or state finance measures.
- Restart & Recovery: Considerations for Teaching and Learning: State Policies and Actions (Council of Chief State School Officers). This document outlines the critical state-level policies and actions that align with each section of the guidance, which include System Conditions, Wellness and Connection, and Academics.
- Lead With Equity: What California's Leaders Must Do Next to Advance Student Learning During COVID-19 (Policy Analysis for California Education). This policy brief provides research-based policy recommendations to ensure adequate monitoring, support, and resources that prioritize equity in learning for state leaders in California and other states.
- Making School Budgets Whole and Equitable During and After COVID-19 (Learning Policy Institute). Michael DiNapoli Jr. outlines the magnitude of need with cost estimates and strategies that policymakers can use for their upcoming school year budgets.
- State Education Funding: The Poverty Equation (FutureEd). This article delves into the reasoning behind poverty measures in funding formulas and shows how different definitions of poverty (either at the student or district level) can lead to more or less adequate funding of those most in need.
- 5 Things to Advance Equity in State Funding Systems (The Education Trust). This fact sheet provides weights and other equity measures that states can better incorporate in post-COVID-19 funding formulas.

Endnotes

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Conclusion

As policymakers and educators prepare to restart schools in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative that we transform our ideas of school to match the demands of this historic moment. It is clear that returning to business as usual in education is not possible and that we must think of "school" in deeply different ways. Irrespective of the approach taken to instruction or the medium through which it takes place—online, in person, or a hybrid—policymakers and educators need to ensure that all children, regardless of income, can participate in supportive and meaningful learning experiences. To accomplish this, our education system needs to transform our ideas of school to match the demands of this moment, focusing on authentic learning and equity and harnessing the knowledge of human development, learning, and effective teaching accumulated over the last century and needed for the next.

This report provides an overarching framework to inform the restart of schools for the 2020–21 school year while also providing a long-term vision that can guide leaders toward new and enduring ways to address educational quality and inequity. Building upon other student-centered, equity-oriented guidance that has been developed, this framework synthesizes key ideas, evidence, state and local examples, and policy recommendations and organizes them within a broader framework focused on authentic learning and equity and grounded in research spanning early childhood through secondary schooling. It is our hope that this work will help enable state, district, and school leaders along with educators to seize this moment to strengthen learning opportunities and close opportunity and achievement gaps.

About the Authors

Linda Darling-Hammond is the Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education Emeritus at Stanford University and founding president of LPI, created to provide high-quality research for policies that enable equitable and empowering education for each and every child. She is past president of the American Educational Research Association and author of more than 30 books and 600 other publications on educational quality and equity, including the award-winning book *The Flat World and Education: How America's Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future*. In 2006, she was named one of the nation's 10 most influential people affecting educational policy, and in 2008, she directed the education policy transition team for President Obama.

Abby Schachner is a Senior Researcher at LPI, where she co-leads the Early Childhood Learning team and is a member of the Deeper Learning team. Her work focuses on translating research on children's social, emotional, and academic development and the contexts that support such development to inform policy and practice. Schachner has more than 13 years of experience in conducting policy-relevant research on learning and development to better understand what works for whom and under what circumstances so that all children can succeed. She holds a Ph.D. in Human Development from the University of California, Davis, and a B.A. in Psychology from Georgetown University.

Adam Edgerton is a Senior Researcher at LPI, where he is a member of the Educator Quality team. His work focuses on teacher and principal professional development and the implementation of k–12 standards at federal, state, district, school, and classroom levels. Edgerton has 7 years of experience as a teacher and administrator and 4 years of experience as a Researcher at the Center on Standards, Alignment, Instruction, and Learning (C-SAIL). He holds a Ph.D. in Education Policy from the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education, an Ed.M. in Teaching and Curriculum from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and a B.A. in English/Creative Writing from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Aneesha Badrinarayan supports LPI projects related to performance assessments. For the last decade, her work has focused on supporting states, districts, and educators to develop and implement student-centered systems of assessment that support all learners. Her passion for coherent and balanced systems of assessment stems from a commitment to high-quality teaching and learning for all and a deep interest in helping practitioners and leaders navigate their systems to achieve that vision. Badrinarayan earned an M.S. in Neuroscience at the University of Michigan, where she served as a research fellow for the National Institute of Mental Health, and a B.A. in Biology from Cornell University.

Jessica Cardichon is the Director of LPI's Washington, DC, office and the Director for Federal Policy. She is also a member of LPI's Educator Quality, Deeper Learning, Equitable Resources and Access, and Early Childhood Education teams. She is the lead author of *Protecting Students' Civil Rights: The Federal Role in School Discipline* and *Advancing Educational Equity for Underserved Youth* and is co-author of *Making ESSA's Equity Promise Real: State Strategies to Close the Opportunity Gap*, *Investing in Effective School Leadership: How States Are Taking Advantage of Opportunities Under ESSA*, and *Identifying Schools for Support and Intervention: Using Decision Rules to Support Accountability and Improvement Under ESSA*.

Peter W. Cookson Jr. co-leads LPI's Equitable Resources and Access team and provides leadership for several equity initiatives. In addition to teaching sociology at Georgetown University, he co-leads the American Voices Project, a joint research project of Stanford University, Princeton University, and the American Institutes for Research. Cookson began his career as a caseworker in New York City and then worked as a teacher in rural Massachusetts. Most recently, he was Managing Director of the think tank Education Sector and founded the Equity Project at the American Institutes for Research. He is the author of 16 books and numerous articles on education and inequality, social stratification, school choice, and 21st-century education.

Michael Griffith is a Senior Researcher and Policy Analyst at LPI. He is part of LPI's Equitable Resources and Access team, focusing on school funding issues. Before joining the LPI team, Griffith was a school finance expert, first with the Education Commission of the States and then as an independent contractor. Over the past 20 years, he has worked with policymakers in all 50 states to help them reshape and reform their school funding systems, always to improve student achievement and education equity. His research work has focused on the condition of state and district budgets, the adequacy and equity of state finance formulas, and promising practices in funding programs for high-need students.

Sarah Klevan is a member of LPI's Deeper Learning team, working on projects focused on whole child education. Prior to joining LPI, Klevan was a Research Associate for the Research Alliance for New York City Schools, where she led several research projects focused on the New York City school system. An overarching question frames Klevan's research: How and in what ways do schools simultaneously reproduce and disrupt patterns of inequality? Situated within this broader interest, she has conducted research studies on a variety of topic areas, including best practices for immigrant youth, college-readiness initiatives, anti-racism education for teachers, and restorative approaches to school discipline.

Anna Maier is a Research Analyst and Policy Advisor at the Learning Policy Institute. She co-leads the Deeper Learning team, with a focus on community schools and performance assessment. She oversees the California Performance Assessment Collaborative. She is also the lead author of *Community Schools as an Effective School Improvement Strategy: A Review of the Evidence* and *Leveraging Resources Through Community Schools: The Role of Technical Assistance*. Maier has experience with a variety of roles in k–12 education. She began her career managing an afterschool program for elementary school students in Oakland and went on to teach 2nd and 3rd grade in the Oakland Unified School District and Aspire Public Schools. She was also a member of the research and evaluation team at Coaching Corps, a youth sports nonprofit in Oakland. As a graduate student fellow with the Center for Cities & Schools at UC Berkeley, she worked with West Contra Costa Unified School District on implementing a full-service community school initiative.

Monica Martinez provides strategic direction and support for multiple initiatives across LPI, most specifically focused on performance assessment. Martinez has spent her career focused on addressing college success at both the higher education level and the k–12 level. She has served as a President Obama appointee to the White House Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanics, the President of the New Tech Network, the Vice President for Education Strategy at KnowledgeWorks, and a Senior Associate at the Institute for Educational Leadership. Martinez holds a Ph.D. in Higher Education from the Steinhardt School of Education at New York University and a B.A. in Sociology from Baylor University.

Hanna Melnick is a Research Analyst and Policy Advisor at LPI, where she co-leads the Early Childhood Learning team. Her research has focused on school climate, social and emotional learning, and accountability, as well as building effective early learning systems. Previously, Melnick conducted research on California's Local Control Funding Formula and early learning programs. She began her career in education as an elementary school teacher. Melnick holds an M.P.P. from the Goldman School of Public Policy at the University of California, Berkeley, and received her B.A. from Harvard University.

Natalie Truong is a member of the State Policy and Whole Child Education teams at LPI, where she works to connect research and evidence-based policies to support state policymakers and leaders toward whole child student success. Prior to joining LPI, Truong was Policy Director at the Aurora Institute (formerly iNACOL), where she provided research and technical assistance to state policymakers on transforming k–12 education. Truong holds a master's in Education from Johns Hopkins University and a B.A. in English and Political Science from Grinnell College. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Education Policy and Research Methods at George Mason University.

Steve Wojcikiewicz is a member of LPI's Educator Quality team. He is a co-author of the book *Preparing Teachers for Deeper Learning* and of several case studies of educator preparation programs that are part of that project. His focus is on initiatives related to educator preparation research, practice, and policy, including the Educator Preparation Laboratory (EdPrepLab), an initiative of LPI and the Bank Street Graduate School of Education focused on teacher and leader preparation for deeper learning and equity.

1530 Page Mill Road, Suite 200
Palo Alto, CA 94304
p: 650.332.9797

1301 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20036
p: 202.830.0079
@LPI_Learning | learningpolicyinstitute.org

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