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ED COVID-19 HANDBOOK

Roadmap to Reopening Safely and
Meeting All Students' Needs



U.S. Department of Education

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Introduction

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) has [exacerbated](#) existing inequities and inadequacies across a range of social structures, including our nation's education system. The pandemic has also had a [more damaging impact](#) on communities and people of color, including many who already faced health challenges. Congress has provided significant federal funding, including most recently through the historic [American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 \(ARP\)](#), to support the safe reopening of schools. However, this is the first of many steps ahead. For most schools, returning to the status quo will not address the full impact of COVID-19 on students' social, emotional, physical, mental health, and academic needs or the impact on educator and staff well-being. Approaches to school reopening must be designed in ways that meet the needs of students, educators, and staff. President Joe Biden has called on us all to consider how we can "build back better." Just as we continue to look to the evolving science as we work to reopen schools safely, so too should we turn to research and evidence, as well as the voices of students, educators, staff, and their families, to inform efforts to address the social, emotional, mental health, and academic impact of COVID-19.

With the passage of ARP, states, districts, and schools now have significant federal resources available to implement evidence-based and practitioner-informed strategies to meet the needs of students related to COVID-19, including students most affected by the pandemic and for whom the pandemic exacerbated pre-existing inequities. This guidance document is intended to be a resource for states, districts, schools, and teachers as they reopen schools safely and support students. Separately, the Department will issue guidance on specific provisions of ARP statute and program implementation.

Specifically, funding under ARP can be used to:

- Implement COVID-19 prevention strategies to safely reopen schools and maximize in-person instruction and that align with public health guidance, including upgrading school facilities for healthy learning environments;
- Address the impact of lost instructional time by supporting the implementation of evidence-based interventions that respond to students' social, emotional, and academic needs;
- Address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, English learners, students who are migratory, students experiencing homelessness, students in correctional facilities, and students in foster care;
- Provide afterschool, or other out-of-school time, programs that address students' social, emotional, and academic needs;
- Address the mental health needs of students, including through using funds to hire counselors and other staff;
- Provide integrated student supports, including through the use of full-service community schools;
- Provide students with evidence-based summer learning and enrichment programs, including through partnerships with community-based organizations;
- Connect K-12 students to high-quality home internet and/or devices;
- Stabilize and diversify the educator workforce and rebuild the educator pipeline;

- Provide children and youth experiencing homelessness with integrated student support services and assistance with attending school/participating in activities; and
- Provide for any activities allowed under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (ESEA), the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

These funds also provide an opportunity to address the most urgent needs of students, teachers, and staff while making the kinds of investments that build state, district, and school capacity in ways that sustain meaningful and effective teaching and learning. If well-invested, funding through ARP can help address gaps in educational opportunity and outcomes — not just during the COVID-19 pandemic, but beyond.

As stated in [Executive Order 14000, Supporting the Reopening and Continuing Operation of Schools and Early Childhood Education Providers](#), every student in America deserves a high-quality education in a safe environment. The Biden-Harris Administration (Administration) believes strongly that returning to in-person learning as soon as possible is essential for all students and families. This is why the Administration moved quickly to release [Volume 1: Strategies for Safely Reopening Elementary and Secondary Schools](#) of this COVID-19 Handbook to aid educators in implementing the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Prevention](#) (K-12 Operational Strategy) by addressing common challenges and providing practical examples.

As stated in Volume 1, the Administration acknowledges the unique impact of COVID-19 on, and trauma experienced by, underserved students, including students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) students, English learners, students with disabilities, migratory students, rural students, American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, and Asian American Pacific Islander students, students in foster care, students in correctional facilities, and students experiencing homelessness. The Administration recognizes that communities of color have borne a [disproportionate burden](#) of illness and serious outcomes from COVID-19 and require additional considerations.

Volume 2: Roadmap to Reopening Safely and Meeting All Students' Needs is intended to offer initial strategies for providing equitable and adequate educational opportunities that address the impact of COVID-19 on students, educators, and staff, focusing on evidence-based strategies for:

- **Meeting students' social, emotional, mental and physical health, and academic needs, including through** meeting basic student needs; reengaging students; and providing access to a safe and inclusive learning environment;
- **Addressing the impact of COVID-19 on students' opportunity to learn, including** closing the digital divide; implementing strategies for accelerating learning; effectively using data; and addressing resource inequities; and
- **Supporting educator and staff well-being and stability, including** stabilizing a diverse and qualified educator workforce.

Within these areas, this volume shares underlying research, implementation recommendations, and considerations — with a focus on underserved students — and examples of practice. The U.S. Department of Education (the Department) is grateful to the more than 60 education organizations that shared research, recommendations, examples, and resources, as well as the perspectives of students, families, and school staff members, that were used to inform Volume 2 of the COVID-19 Handbook. These recommendations and resources were submitted through a Department email shared broadly as part of the Department's stakeholder engagement efforts and listed in Volume 1. The Department also hosted six listening sessions attended by more than 30 organizations to gather insights into challenges students, educators, and staff

are facing and promising practices and to make recommendations to address the impact of COVID-19 on the school community. The research, recommendations, examples, and resources that the Department received will also help inform future guidance and resources issued by the Department.

Funding under ARP may be used by states, districts, and schools to ensure that all students have access to the educational opportunities they need to succeed in response to COVID-19. The same way listening to the science will lead us out of this pandemic, we must listen to the researchers, the educators, the students and their families to lead us to a changed education system that is designed to build capacity, support systems of continuous improvement, and which at its core is committed to equity, adequacy, and the limitless potential of each and every student.

Engaging the School Community

As emphasized in Volume 1, as schools and districts work to develop and implement strategies, including those included in this Volume, engagement with educators and staff (including their unions), students, families, and the school community is key. School representatives should include, at a minimum, administrators, teachers, specialized instructional support personnel, related service providers, early childhood education providers, school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, and nurses, as well as custodial personnel, transportation personnel, food personnel, and family services representatives.

Strategic planning for the long-term recovery should include student and parent representatives, and individuals and organizations that represent the interests of students, staff, and parents with disabilities and limited English proficiency. To that end, schools and school districts should also conduct active and specific engagement with historically underserved students and families — including parents of students of color, English learners, students with disabilities, American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students, students in foster care, students in correctional facilities, and students experiencing homelessness.

For example, in Oak Park, Illinois, a local nonprofit organization, prior to COVID-19, created an approach to family engagement and partnered with parent teacher organizations leaders and the district's Culture and Climate Coaches to launch [Come Together](#), family dinners where teachers, families, and students connect and work to identify and solve challenges in their school over the course of the school year. During the pandemic, the group successfully pivoted to online gatherings, reaching nearly 2,000 participants in an effort to open dialogue over the issue of remote learning. In the remaining months of the school year, these virtual gatherings will focus on transitions and on-going support using community organizing strategies to intentionally reach all families.

This engagement should begin early in the decision-making process and should be ongoing and collaborative. This will help to select strategies designed for systemic change that can build buy-in and capacity at the local level for the long-term.

Legal Requirements

Districts and schools can use funding under ARP to support the following strategies and interventions to address the impact of COVID-19, consistent with ARP requirements and the Uniform Guidance in 2 CFR Part 200. Other than statutory and regulatory requirements referenced in the document, the contents of this volume do not have the force or effect of law and do not bind the public and school communities. This document is intended only to provide clarity regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies. Further, this document does not substantively address federal disability law, which requires schools to provide certain educational and related services to students with disabilities and to take an individualized approach to providing specialized instruction and related services, consistent with the

student's individualized education program (IEP) developed under IDEA or plan developed under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (504 plan), as appropriate. Additional guidance on these issues may be provided. For information on the rights of students with disabilities and schools' obligations, please refer to information provided by the Department's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services and [Office for Civil Rights](#). Please also refer to [the Department's COVID-19 Resources for Schools, Students, and Families](#).

Legal Disclaimer

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I. Creating Safe and Healthy Learning Environments

a. Meeting basic needs: providing school meals regardless of educational setting

Healthy eating is important for child and adolescent growth, development, well-being, and academic performance. According to the National School Lunch Program, before COVID-19, about 22 million students received free or reduced-priced lunches each day — providing them with access to this [basic need](#). In fact, children consume [as many as half](#) of their daily calories at school. When the pandemic-related school closures began in March 2020, schools quickly realized that this could threaten or eliminate students' access to school nutrition services — even if districts used hybrid approaches to learning — and significantly affect schools' ability to meet this basic need.

In response, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) provided [flexibilities and waivers](#) including allowing meals to be served in a drive-thru or walk-up setting, offered as “[grab-and-go](#)” meals. Multiple meals (i.e., breakfast, lunch, snack, and dinner) can be provided as well as multiple days' worth of meals at a time, regardless of whether they are tied to an educational or enrichment activity, and meals can be provided to parents or guardians without the presence of a child. School districts have taken advantage of these flexibilities and established various creative food distribution models, including curbside distribution, home delivery, school bus route delivery, and delivery to accessible community locations (such as library parking lots) during remote or hybrid instruction. These new strategies enhanced schools' abilities to provide this critical resource to students and families. Information on waivers and flexibilities that have been approved can be found on the [Child Nutrition Programs: COVID-19 Waivers by State](#) webpage.

As more schools plan for reopening, feeding and food distribution will continue to be essential. School nutrition staff, school nurses, and transportation staff are vital members of the district and school reopening teams. Where fewer meals have been provided, there might be less money from federal reimbursements and decreased revenue from a la carte services. School leaders should communicate with nutrition directors to assess how the meal programs are faring financially and plan for ways to address any challenges exacerbated by the pandemic, including using federal funding provided under ARP, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA), and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act).

As part of these plans, districts and schools will also need to implement COVID-19-related safety protocols for food distribution. CDC provides [online resources](#) for safely distributing school meals, either away from school or in school, including a checklist for school nutrition professionals for serving meals at school and strategies for reducing crowding, increasing ventilation, and serving grab-and-go meals. Detailed information on COVID-19-adapted school meal serving models and adapting school spaces can be found on CDC's [Safely Distributing School Meals During COVID-19](#) webpage.

Meal programs should be tailored to meet the local community and individual school needs. Learning about these needs might include conducting family surveys to inform distribution of meal kits (e.g., whether students pick up meals for a week or two days at a time, the time of day meals are available for pick up, and whether a grab-and-go service, delivery services, or some combination would be most effective) and ensure they are responsive to dietary restrictions. School leaders should design a variety of distribution meal schedules to ensure equity among recipients. For example, following a consistent alphabetical format might place families with surnames in the second half of the alphabet at a disadvantage in terms of availability of food items. Meal service plans should ensure there is adequate staff available on a sufficiently flexible or extended schedule (with appropriate compensation or use of volunteers) to maintain services for hybrid or remote students (e.g., bagging meals, staffing grab-and-go sites), while also staffing kitchens for in-person students.

As districts and schools plan for summer learning and enrichment programs, they should also develop a plan to provide meal programs in non-school settings. On March 9, 2021, USDA announced the nationwide extension of several waivers that allow all children to continue to receive nutritious [meals during the summer](#) and that allow for safe meal distribution sites that serve all children for free regardless of family income. These flexibilities have been extended through September 30, 2021. In addition, USDA is expanding the [Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer \(P-EBT\) program](#) to support families with lower incomes with children and replace the value of school meals missed when schools are closed. On January 22, 2021, USDA announced that it would increase the P-EBT benefit by approximately 15%. In addition, ARP expanded P-EBT through the 2020–2021 school year, as well as during summer months.

As an example of how one state has approached this effort, the Tennessee School Safety Center established principles at the onset of the pandemic for developing a school meal plan. These principles include involving the community in school nutrition strategies, including community organizations, such as afterschool programs, shelters, local safety personnel and emergency managers, and transportation directors; identifying important [safety protocols in food distribution](#), even after schools reopen; forecasting operational needs for 30, 60, and 90 days; organizing the work and determining clear lines of responsibility; and analyzing lessons learned during the pandemic and updating plans to incorporate those lessons learned.

Meal planning should include an ongoing assessment of the needs of underserved students, including students not attending in-person instruction for the full five days per week, highly mobile students, such as students experiencing homelessness, migratory and foster youth, students who have become disengaged, and populations with limited food resources or restricted dietary requirements.

Additional suggestions for meeting the nutritional needs of underserved students include:

- Working with the state nutrition agency to determine how to provide students with free meals during afterschool and summer learning and enrichment programs, including through the USDA [Afterschool Program](#) and [Summer Food Service Program](#).
- Providing information and maps of meal sites in multiple languages and in multiple accessible formats (e.g., social media, flyers, phone calls, community listservs) and distributing information through partners (e.g., government agencies, local nonprofit organizations, places of worship) taking into consideration that some families might be reluctant to access meal programs and services (e.g., families with a member without documentation).
- Supporting families in accessing meals during hybrid learning and during non-school days, such as weekends and holidays. For example, through the [P-EBT](#), funds are provided on pre-loaded cards to families of children who would normally receive free or reduced-price meals.
- Partnering with local food banks and pantries to provide boxes of groceries along with meals or with [Child and Adult Care Food Program \(CACFP\)](#) operators to offer CACFP foods along with meals.
- Establishing school-based wellness teams comprised of representatives from administration, teachers, counseling, nursing, and support staff to ensure all families in need are identified and provided with resources to access food and meals. For example, team members could be assigned to families as “case managers” to identify specific needs and to ensure families have access to nutritious meals and food.
- Where applicable and to increase the reach of services, decentralizing food preparation and distribution by activating multiple school kitchens and delivering meals to school bus stops or directly to students’ homes.

- Creating schedules that provide families with equitable access to food distribution and flexibility in schedule to provide time offerings that are conducive to working families. Food distribution should not be limited to school hours.
- Providing flexible pick-up hours to maximize access to meals at strategically located meal pick-up sites. Provide meal packages with multiple days' worth of meals. For in-school meals, allow students access to breakfast meals even after the morning bell, including by allowing students to bring grab-and-go meals into the classroom.
- Staffing delivery buses with school nurses, counselors, and social workers. School leaders should be mindful of the potential impact of enlisting police officers to assist with meal site logistics (i.e., the sight of police might elicit fear in some families).
- Ensuring that liaisons for students experiencing homelessness and personnel serving students with disabilities have the [information](#) they need to ensure students can access food inside and outside of school and to provide training to school district staff or community members on identifying and serving students experiencing homelessness or students with disabilities.
- Ensuring policies do not prevent or delay providing free meals to students due to unpaid fees.



b. Meeting the social, emotional, and mental health needs of students

Many students have been exposed to trauma, disruptions in learning, physical isolation, and disengagement from school and peers, which negatively affects their mental health. Students learn, take academic risks, and achieve at higher levels in [safe and supportive learning environments](#) and in the care of responsive adults they can trust. However, the ongoing impact of COVID-19 has contributed to student experiences that are far from universal — with underserved students experiencing a disproportionate burden of the pandemic. As a result, many students might require additional supports and interventions to take risks in their learning so they can achieve at higher levels.

Homelessness, foster care, and juvenile justice are adverse experiences that might disproportionately affect students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, [English learners](#), and students with disabilities. These adverse experiences may also create unique and severe barriers to access and participation in programs and services. School leaders, educators, and staff who work with students with these backgrounds should acknowledge the intersectionality (the overlapping identities) among these groups. This framing will help educators understand the multiple layers of disparities and complexities encountered by impacted students and the mobile and changing nature of homelessness, foster care, and the juvenile justice system and the disproportionate impact that COVID-19 has had on these students.

Research on the [science of learning](#) has established that while adverse experiences can have profound effects on students, learning environments and conditions can be designed in ways that can help students overcome these effects and thrive. This research also shows that social, emotional, identity, cognitive, and academic development are all interconnected. Improving academic outcomes for students requires nurturing each of these areas of development in ways that are asset-oriented and personalized to meet students where they are as they return to school. For example, California provides resources for creating asset-based approaches to teaching, such as culturally responsive pedagogy.

While there is concern regarding the impact of lost instructional time as it relates to student academic performance, meeting the social and emotional needs of students must be foundational to efforts to improve academic outcomes for students. The teaching of social and emotional skills can be woven into how teachers design instruction and the kinds of learning opportunities they provide to students. Such learning can be developed through explicit instruction in social, emotional, and cognitive skills (including intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, and decision-making) and integrating social and emotional skills, habits, and mindsets within classroom lessons and activities. For example, Baltimore City Public Schools built upon existing social and emotional learning implementation efforts and developed social emotional learning (SEL) lesson plans aligned with grade groupings and weekly themes around compassion, connection, and courage.

Key evidence-based practices that maximize students' social, emotional, and academic benefits include:

- Creating a framework for meeting students' social, emotional, and academic needs;
- Building strong and trusting relationships among students, families, and educators;
- Establishing safe, positive, and stable environments;
- Explicitly teaching critical [social, emotional, and academic skills](#);
- Actively engaging students in meaningful and culturally and linguistically relevant learning experiences rooted in high academic expectations for all students;

- Providing supportive and specific feedback to encourage skill growth across all domains;
- Providing access to support from school counselors, psychologists, and trusted staff members; and
- Establishing building-level wellness teams to address the SEL needs of both students and staff.

While a schoolwide approach benefits all students, school-based mental health professionals, such as counselors, social workers, and psychologists might need to provide additional and more intensive support to students with the most urgent needs that have been caused or exacerbated by the pandemic. A multi-tier system of supports (MTSS) framework, like [positive behavioral interventions and supports](#), relies on a continuum of evidence-based practices matched to student needs. The tiers provide an increasing amount of support and intervention moving from support provided to all, then to some, and finally providing the most intensive support to a few. Successful approaches to MTSS begin with leadership teams who (1) meet regularly to collect student data through ongoing screening to determine student needs; (2) monitor student progress; and (3) analyze schoolwide data to address emerging or new needs to add or adjust personnel to provide additional services and expertise.

Supporting student voice and choice in how they learn, often referred to as “student agency,” should also be considered as part of the work ahead. For example, an educator in [Allentown, Pennsylvania](#), describes using scaffolding to allow students to engage in a productive struggle, giving students the tools to design their own learning, and being purposeful about also developing collaboration skills. Providing opportunities for students to express themselves and make decisions about their learning after experiencing a stressful year with many factors out of their control can instill a connectedness with self and others.

SEL can encourage self-awareness and mindfulness, which may ultimately translate to more thoughtful and engaged citizens who feel a sense of duty to their communities.¹ For example, classroom activities can include writing letters, discussing with peers how the last few months have impacted them, journal writing, poetry, artwork, music, or other creative outlets. The [Social Justice Humanitas Academy in Los Angeles](#) uses councils as part of their school’s advisory classes to build community and create space for “[the practice of listening and speaking from the heart](#).” During this time, students and teachers take turns sharing the positive and difficult things happening in their lives.

With this mindset, educators can consider how civics education can be an important lever to bridge the social and emotional competencies learned in school to empower students as citizens who are equipped with the critical thinking skills to create a better society. Robust civics education that includes youth participatory action research and opportunities for activism on issues students care about may benefit all students, and in particular has the potential to engage and uplift students of color, LGBTQ+ youth, students with disabilities, and those from immigrant or low-income communities who face barriers to civic participation.

A districtwide or schoolwide approach to meeting social, emotional, and mental health needs that is responsive to the trauma of COVID-19 and grounds itself in equity can help all students feel seen and valued. It is important for educators to recognize that social and emotional competencies can be expressed differently across cultures, especially considering that young students of color are living through, witnessing, and making sense of historic moments in American history and their place in it. Schools are microcosms of society; therefore, [culturally responsive practices](#), intentional conversations related to [race and social emotional learning](#), and helping students understand the skills they are building in school are the foundation for participating in a democracy and should be anchor tenets in building a schoolwide system of educational opportunity.

To support students' social and emotional learning as schools reopen, educators are encouraged to:

- Measure social and emotional well-being through the use of engagement surveys;
- Provide time for regular check-ins with students and families;
- Implement [restorative circles](#) or “mindful moments” that provide students with space to self-regulate emotions;
- Establish morning or closing meetings, or other rituals within each school day; and
- Provide opportunities for student voice to be represented in classroom or school decision-making.

School communities implementing a social emotional approach on a schoolwide basis for the first time, or that are in the early stages of this work will need to consider how to provide extensive professional development for educators on how to effectively implement programs alongside other school staff, such as school counselors and afterschool staff to ensure coordination and appropriate support. This work is important to the whole school community, and every member of the community has a role in upholding and maintaining a safe, inclusive, and welcoming school community.

The Department will be providing additional information on how to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of students in future guidance documents and technical assistance opportunities.

Supporting Student Mental Health Needs

In addition to meeting the social and emotional needs of students, schools should also be prepared to meet the mental health needs of their students. There is no question that COVID-19 has taken a toll on the mental health of many students. For example, [data from CDC](#) shows that the proportion of student emergency department visits related to mental health has [increased dramatically](#) during the pandemic. A National Association of Elementary School Principals survey reported in December that 84% of elementary school principals are very concerned about student mental health needs and 68% report that they do not have sufficient school-based mental health professionals to adequately meet those needs.² Further, during the pandemic, since many underserved students rely on school-based mental health services, it is likely that many went without these mental health services if their schools were not able to provide telehealth services.

An example of a statewide mental health program is the SafeUT program in Utah. The free app, SafeUT, is a statewide service that provides real-time crisis intervention to youth through live chat and a confidential tip program from a smartphone. All educators, students, and families are encouraged to download the app. Licensed clinicians in the 24/7 Crisis Line call center respond to all incoming chats and calls by providing supportive or crisis counseling, suicide prevention, and referral services. They can help anyone with emotional crises, bullying, relationship problems, mental health, or suicide-related issues in a private, nonthreatening, and open-access way.

Students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, students with disabilities, and English learners often face barriers to diagnosing and treating mental health issues that reach beyond whether there are services available. For students of color, mental health issues are often more likely to be met with discipline rather than to be treated.³ Even when mental health support is provided, it may not be used. The underrepresentation of people of color in the medical profession along with a history of institutionalized racism in medicine has led to a distrust among many toward the medical system and might prevent students from wanting to use services provided. Some students whose first language is not English face language barriers

that affect the quality of care that they receive, which may make them reluctant to access care. Students with sensory or communicative disabilities might also face barriers, such as inaccessible technology or the limited availability of mental health professionals with sign language skills, that affect the quality of care they receive. Native American students traditionally have had higher rates of depression than their peers, and a lack of culturally competent care is a barrier to effective treatment.⁴

These students are most likely to be living in communities that have been hit hardest by COVID-19, and their schools are more likely to have been closed longer for in-person learning versus schools in more affluent communities, leading to even greater needs for supports. Thus, it will be especially important for school communities reopening to develop and operationalize a plan for conducting mental health first aid, mental health screenings, and procedures for referral. To support these efforts, district and school leaders are encouraged to examine the ratio of school counselors, social workers, and psychologists to students in schools and develop a plan to meet recommended ratios for each if they are not met already. Schools can spend ARP funds to meet any of these needs.

Students with disabilities who are eligible under IDEA or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), regardless of the student's disability classification, can also receive a range of mental health-related services, such as counseling services, psychological services, and social work services in schools, if included in their IEP or 504 plan, as appropriate.

It is also important to consider how states, school districts, and school staff can all work together to help destigmatize mental health support so that students feel comfortable and safe in reaching out or receiving the services. Students of color are more likely to report that they do not feel they can reach out to a teacher or counselor if they need mental health support.⁵ Thus, building trusting relationships among educators, staff, and students and their families is essential. To the extent possible, states, districts, and schools can align and agree on shared goals for student mental health. For example, [New York state](#) issued reopening guidance that required all school districts and schools to establish a comprehensive developmental counseling plan; establish an advisory council of students, parents, teachers, and school mental health professionals; and provide professional development to all school staff on how to help students develop coping and resiliency skills.

To help remove the stigma and ensure students can access mental health programs when they are available, the American Psychological Association recommends school leaders and educators:

- Share educational resources with staff and students that provide a better sense of what mental health means;
- Talk about mental health and allow students the opportunity to speak openly about life, school, the future, and anxiety; and
- Let students know they are not alone and that others are going through similar situations and provide them the time needed to heal.

The Department will also be releasing guidance with further information and resources on supporting the mental health needs of students, with a focus on underserved students.

c. Providing all students with access to a safe and inclusive learning environment

The academic disruption COVID-19 has caused has been traumatic for students and their families, educators, and staff alike. For significant portions of two academic years, what it means to be “in school,” and the routines, expectations, and norms associated with those routines, have been vastly different from what most students have ever experienced. School leaders, educators, and staff should ensure physically, socially, and emotionally safe communities that prioritize creating environments that support students and respond to the trauma experienced by many students as school buildings reopen for in-person instruction. It is almost certain that some students in every school will require supports to address the isolation, anxiety, and trauma they have experienced.

As more schools reopen for in-person instruction, districts and schools are revisiting their approach to school safety and inclusiveness, including discipline policies to ensure that those implemented are designed to best support and respond to students — including students with disabilities — returning to in-person instruction after the extended absence due to COVID-19. Research increasingly shows that school safety and discipline practices that create and sustain safe, stable, positive, inclusive, and identity-safe learning environments for all students are more effective in meeting students’ social, emotional, physical and mental health, and academic needs than zero tolerance exclusionary approaches.⁶ Further, safe and inclusive schools can provide the support required to reengage those students most disconnected from school during the pandemic.

For example, public school systems’ role is critical in the lives of students experiencing homelessness, because they are often the only source of identification of, and main source of support for, physical and mental health, social, and emotional needs. Students experiencing homelessness are often left disconnected from critical support when schools are closed, offer very limited programs, or do not provide transportation.

Locating Absent Students and Reengaging Disconnected Youth

Some researchers estimate 3 million students have either been absent from or have not been actively participating in remote learning since the beginning of the pandemic.⁷ These students were more likely to be English learners, students with disabilities, students in foster care, students experiencing homelessness, students from low-income backgrounds, Native American youth, and migratory students. LGBTQ+ students, especially those who are Black or Native American, are **more likely than others** to be homeless. The reasons for their absences or lack of access to instruction or support are varied. Native American, Black, and Latinx youth in particular were least likely to have consistent connections to high-speed broadband to participate in remote learning.⁸

Access to integrated student support has also been a challenge. A recent federally funded study that examined a nationally representative sample of websites from 3,511 traditional public schools, charter schools, and private schools found that the most extensive academic instruction and resources were aimed at the general population, with English learners and students with disabilities receiving less support.⁹ Because of the difficulty of implementing services remotely, English learners lost opportunities to practice language skills with others, and many students with disabilities lost opportunities to receive required academic instruction or related services; such as orientation and mobility training; speech, physical, or occupational therapy services; and other individualized supports while at home that they would have received while attending school in person.¹⁰

No matter the reason for their absences, school district officials should work quickly to locate and reengage students who are chronically absent or disengaged. These efforts should be undertaken in a non-punitive manner; punitive actions include not promoting students to the next grade, failing them in a course, or directing parents to truancy court. Schools should also consider the unique challenges for adolescents created by COVID-19 as they design their approaches to reengagement. Many adolescent students might have new family responsibilities as a result of the pandemic, such as having to help support the family financially or care for a family member. In these instances, additional flexibilities should be provided.

Practice has shown that personal outreach is a promising way to reengage students and their families. Personal outreach to students should be conducted by a school official rather than law enforcement or school-based police because the presence of law enforcement or school-based police might cause confusion or be unintentionally intimidating. For example, Hillsborough County Schools in Florida had more than 7,000 students missing at the start of the 2020 school year. They sent social workers on a door-knocking campaign to homes, hotels, motels, and shelters; created social media pages in Spanish to reach their majority Latinx student population; and shared COVID-19 dashboards to help parents make informed decisions about sending their children back to school. District leaders also held virtual community meetings, further establishing transparency that promoted trust. By December 2020, Hillsborough County Schools had located all but 300 of their students.

In Green Cove Springs, Florida, high school leaders used one-on-one conversations to allow families to openly voice their reopening worries and create dialogue to address community concerns about returning to in-person instruction. Other school districts, such as [Oakland Unified](#) in California, provided stipends to teachers who spent time outside their regular working hours to locate and reengage students who were chronically absent.

Another example of supporting students experiencing homelessness is the work the [Ohio Department of Education](#) did to repurpose funding under the [McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth program](#). Ohio repurposed state activity funds to provide more funds to school districts and provided guidance on how school districts could further support homeless liaisons in meeting the needs of a population that likely increased.

To support students from migratory families, the states that have reported success in locating students have [Migrant Education Program](#) recruiters who have flexible work hours during the week, weekends, nights, and during the summer and who are assigned to specific campuses. These staff have the freedom to canvas the community and work sites in search of agricultural workers and to visit families in their homes.

One example of how partnerships are being formed to support efforts to reengage students after COVID-19 disruptions is the partnership between [City Year](#), an AmeriCorps program that works with under-resourced schools across the country, and the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University. This partnership aims to help educators quickly establish practices that strengthen students' connection to school and has supported an [Action Community](#) of schools in Colorado, Florida, New York, and South Carolina. This community developed and shared a resource intended to increase a student's sense of school belonging and engagement. Strategies included building fun routines, such as choosing a class theme song to mark key moments in the school day to motivate students and ensuring break time for physical movement. With the types of outreach strategies highlighted in this section and a spirit of unity, students and their families can feel a stronger connection to their school communities to recover from a tumultuous year. In addition to reintegrated communities, such strategies may also assist state educational agencies to determine a more accurate enrollment count for funding allocation purposes by the start of the 2021-2022 academic year.

Building Safe and Inclusive Learning Environments

According to [recent data](#) from the 2021 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) School Survey released by the Department's Institute of Education Sciences (IES), while an increasing number of schools are offering full-time in-person instruction, there are significant disparities in who is accessing in-person instruction among students by race and ethnicity. According to data from February 2021, more than half of all Black, Latinx, and Asian fourth graders learned in a fully remote environment, with Asian students at the lowest rate of in-person learning at 15%. By comparison, in the same time frame, about a quarter of white students learned fully remotely, and about half of white students learned in-person full-time. The work of safely reopening schools and reengaging students includes recognizing that even as schools continue to reopen, some Black, Latinx, and Asian families across the country might be more hesitant to send their children back to school for a variety of reasons, including those related to safety. Understanding why some students of color are choosing to not return when presented with the option of in-person learning is critical as schools are working to reengage these learners.

Even while data show remote learning has largely been detrimental to student [academic achievement](#), some families have expressed hesitation to return to in-person learning, citing reasons related to physical, mental, and emotional safety and beyond. While there is no singular study that captures the representative views of all families, some families have provided a variety of reasons for not yet returning to in-person learning. For example, some Asian families [report](#) fears that their children will experience peer pressure or other harassment for the pandemic based on their race. For some Black students, pre-pandemic school exclusion, among other factors, may impact Black families' willingness to return students to in-person instruction. Pre-pandemic, Black students made up 15% of the public school population but represented 39% of students suspended, an overrepresentation of 23 percentage points.¹¹ In addition, while students have been away from in-person learning, many have experienced additional health, economic, and social traumas: People of color are more likely to have experienced the loss of loved ones due to the pandemic, hunger due to lay-offs of family members, and the stress of additional care-taking responsibilities or juggling a job while in school.¹²

Although students are protected from racial discrimination in schools under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, students and families still experience racism and implicit bias in their lives in and out of school. Efforts to reengage students of color can be supported by directly working to address any longstanding feelings of [distrust](#) resulting from students' and [families' of color experiences](#) in school prior to the pandemic and that may have been exacerbated by events of the last year in and out of the school context. Educators and staff should provide safe, welcoming, and inclusive learning environments as they start to rebuild trust, reengage students, and recover from the impacts of COVID-19. For example, schools can start to reengage through surveys, personal outreach, or forums to hear directly from students and families.

One way of building that trust can be ensuring that school policies and practices, do not further perpetuate racial disparities. This includes reexamining the use of exclusionary discipline practices, which have a disparate impact on students of color who are frequently disciplined more harshly than their white peers, especially for subjective offenses. School leaders should consider adopting strategies previously mentioned such as wraparound services, mental health counseling, social emotional learning, culturally and linguistically inclusive curriculums, and a schoolwide multi-tiered system of support. All students should feel safe and welcomed in their school communities.¹³ This also includes creating [identity-safe classrooms](#) and schools that [support](#) our students who are LGBTQ+.

School and district leaders set the tone for school culture and climate. Educators and staff should use [evidence-based](#) strategies to create and sustain school safety and discipline policies that take a holistic, non-punitive, and non-exclusionary approach to support students' academic needs and address their trauma. They should consider using federal funding to provide professional development to help educators and staff build more equitable and inclusive approaches to school climate, especially as they work to reengage students in their safe return to school. A national survey of elementary school principals just before the pandemic found that school climate and social-development-related professional development were the most requested topics for professional development. The pandemic has made the need to ensure safe school climates even more critical than before. Investing in high-quality professional development to support the implementation of these practices should be considered.¹⁴

While providing intentional opportunities to develop student social and emotional skills, covered in more detail in the previous section, is critically important to the work ahead, educators and staff will also need tools to understand and effectively respond to student trauma. Adopting a schoolwide trauma-informed approach can help to meet students where they are, particularly for those coming from families experiencing unemployment, loss of family and friends, and the collective grief and burden of systemic racism, including the upheavals of the past year. This work begins with providing high-quality professional development for all educators and staff on trauma-informed care and teaching practices. [Resources](#) on trauma-informed practices and other approaches to ensuring safe and inclusive learning environments can be found at the Department's [Safer Schools and Campuses Best Practices Clearinghouse](#).

Professional development for all educators and school staff should support individuals in identifying and addressing bias in themselves and in their communities, and help school teams to replace exclusionary discipline practices with social and emotional supports best suited to address the impacts of COVID-19, including [restorative justice approaches](#), social emotional learning, and [positive behavioral intervention and supports](#). Positive discipline practices should acknowledge the lived experience of all students, including implementing culturally inclusive dress codes that do not perpetuate gender stereotypes, and creating an environment that promotes belonging.



Physically Healthy Learning Environments

As described in [Volume 1 of the COVID-19 Handbook](#), CDC recommends five key prevention strategies for safely reopening schools:

1. Universal and correct wearing of masks;
2. Physical distancing;
3. Handwashing and respiratory etiquette;
4. Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including proper school ventilation; and
5. Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine, in collaboration with guidelines from relevant state, local, territorial, and tribal health departments.

These strategies work best in combination and school districts should do what they can to address other infrastructure issues, such as ensuring that preexisting ventilation, roofing, and plumbing needs do not inhibit healthy learning environments as students return to school buildings full-time.

Building administrators, in particular, should be in communication with the custodial team daily to ensure recommendations for cleaning and disinfection of the facility are being followed and to address any concerns proactively. Principals should make it a habit to tour the building to monitor cleaning and provide remedies in areas of need. This may include, but not be limited to, changing or expanding custodial schedules to maximize cleaning, augmenting the budget to ensure necessary supplies and staff are readily available, and communicating cleaning protocols to families to assuage concerns regarding spreading the virus that causes COVID-19.

The importance of well-ventilated spaces extends beyond preventing the spread of COVID-19. Many students are in dilapidated school buildings with windows that do not open; outdated heating, ventilation, air conditioning (HVAC) systems that are costly to replace or update; and other environmental dangers such as mold and leaks that contribute to poor air quality. A 1996 U.S. Government Accounting Office report found that 15,000 schools were circulating air unfit to breathe.¹⁵ Unfortunately, not much has changed with respect to poor air quality in schools 25 years later. Last year, based on a study completed just before the pandemic, the renamed agency, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), estimated that 4 in 10 school districts across the country need to replace their HVAC systems in at least half of their schools, representing about 36,000 schools nationwide that need HVAC updates.¹⁶ Not only do poor physical conditions exacerbate health problems in a pandemic disproportionately affecting communities experiencing poverty and communities of color, those health problems cause students to miss school, negatively affecting academic achievement.¹⁷ States and school districts should do all they can to ensure school facilities are healthy so as not to further perpetuate these inequities.

District and school leaders in these communities face difficult funding decisions, but mental and physical health and wellness and learning will suffer if students, educators, and staff learn and work in environments that make or keep them sick. If schools are unable to bring their HVAC systems up to the relevant recommended health and safety standards (e.g., [CDC supported standards](#)) in the short-term, there are cost-effective [prevention strategies such as air filters and cleaners](#) that can be used in the interim. Educators can look for opportunities to get students outside to the extent practicable, including outdoor recess, periodic mask breaks, and learning time in nature. Some New York City schools have converted blacktop roofs normally reserved for physical activity into outdoor classroom spaces when the weather permits. Many schools in more temperate climates, like Arizona, have opened outdoor learning classroom

spaces for use by all grade levels and all subject areas. Providing clean air quality in every school is a commitment that state and local agencies aggressively work to meet. It should also be a part of state and district cross-agency efforts to ensure that beyond the school doors, students and their families live in communities with clean air.

Ensuring physically healthy environments includes more than just upgrades to ventilation. The 2020 GAO report found that 54% of school districts need to replace [multiple](#) building systems that include roofing and plumbing, for example. At least a quarter (26%) of the country's school districts need to update or replace at least six systems in many of their schools. Access to safe drinking water and water for cooking purposes was not guaranteed in all public schools prior to the pandemic. For school districts with older school buildings and plumbing systems, officials will need to be mindful of stagnant water from prolonged shutdowns and may need to test to ensure clean water for safe handwashing and drinking, among other health concerns.¹⁸ Roofing and ceiling damage that allowed for leaks, moisture, and falling debris in schools prior to the pandemic did not provide safe learning and working environments for students and staff and will be especially critical to address.



II. Addressing Lost Instructional Time

a. Accelerating learning through instructional approaches, tutoring, and expanded learning time

Initial research shows the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on the achievement of students who were already underserved, including students of color. Recent studies have used fall 2020 assessment data to measure the extent to which lost instructional time is affecting student performance. A comparison of fall 2020 Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress Growth assessment data to fall 2019 data found that students in grades 3-8 performed similarly in reading to same-grade students in fall 2019, but about 5 to 10 percentile points lower in math. In addition, the study found that most students had made some learning gains in both reading and math since spring 2020; however, gains in math were lower than average compared to prior years.¹⁹ Another study similarly found that achievement gaps that existed prior to the pandemic persisted over the past year, and in some cases widened.²⁰ Researchers also noted that some students have become disengaged from schooling, so the results of these assessments might not include data for those students.

Accelerating learning provides opportunities for students to learn at grade level rather than through tracking or remediation, which can narrow educational opportunities for students and might lead them to become disengaged. Acceleration builds on what students already know as a way to access new learning. Studies have shown that when students tie background knowledge to new information, they are better at making inferences and retaining the new information more effectively.²¹ Collaboration between any partners providing additional support to students and classroom educators is critical. Schools and districts should organize programming in a way that allows time for ongoing two-way communication. Learning acceleration focuses on quickly diagnosing gaps in critical skills and concepts that may impede students from accessing grade-level coursework. Acceleration provides instruction in prior knowledge and teaching prerequisite skills that students need to learn at a pace that allows students to stay engaged in grade-level content and lays a foundation for new academic vocabulary.

Educators face three key questions in determining the most appropriate interventions for acceleration: 1) *where* is each student in their mastery of critical skills and concepts, 2) *what* interventions are most effective, and 3) *when* will accelerated learning take place? Regarding the last question, learning acceleration can take place before, during, or after school; on weekends; during school breaks; or over the summer. Schools may incorporate accelerated learning into electives and expanded learning time to provide more time in school to address challenging subjects. This section will address four approaches, each of which can be used in combination with the others:

- 1. In-school acceleration;**
- 2. Tutoring programs;**
- 3. Out-of-school time programs; and**
- 4. Summer learning and enrichment.**

To determine appropriate evidence-based intervention models, schools should consider the extent of the need for acceleration; available resources and staff to support interventions; family input; and existing partners, such as community organizations, that could support the intervention.

In-School Acceleration

To address lost instructional time, educators are encouraged to think differently about time, grade levels, and collaboration. Key approaches include:

- Ensuring educators and grade-level teams have time to learn [new instructional strategies](#) for acceleration and to coordinate to ensure that students learn without relying on remediation or pull-out instructional practices. That is, instructors (and partners or tutors, as feasible) can provide needed supports for students within the context of grade-level work and within the classroom setting;
- Using high-quality assessments, such as diagnostic and formative assessments that provide timely information to help educators know where to focus for particular students. Educators should differentiate instruction without tracking students or serving them inequitably;
- Asking teacher leaders and district instructional leaders to identify critical content (e.g., “priority” or “power” standards) on which to focus. To avoid overwhelming students, focus on the most essential knowledge and skills, particularly the content that is foundational to subsequent grade levels. One [resource for teaching and learning](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic includes additional information on this concept;
- Making time for teachers to collaborate across grade levels. Educators might need to realign their focus in spring, summer, and fall 2021, and as necessary beyond, to help get students back on track;
- Supporting educators in using approaches to acceleration that prioritize engaging students and peer collaboration, including through project-based learning and opportunities for students to support each other in their learning; and
- For highly mobile students, when they enroll in a new school or district, securing a student’s records and connecting with a counselor or teacher from the sending school to ensure the student is quickly enrolled, placed in the correct grade, and awarded credits for work already completed.

At the system level, education leaders are encouraged to consider whether to pursue an expanded day, week, or year to provide additional instructional time. While each of these approaches has the potential to benefit students, the extra time should be used effectively, including providing students with access to a well-rounded education and opportunities for enrichment, and staff should be adequately supported and compensated.

COVID-19 has also [impacted](#) the number of students matriculating from high school to postsecondary education. There are a number of strategies that high schools can implement to support the successful transition:

- Leverage data and technology to facilitate [enhanced college advising](#), [summer bridge programs](#), assistance to students and families in navigating the [financial aid process](#), and other activities with a track record of improving postsecondary access and success. Districts should emphasize outreach and engagement efforts toward first-generation college students, which can be conducted in partnership with community-based organizations.

- Support [dual enrollment](#) and [early college high schools](#), which studies show increase postsecondary preparation and enrollment. These programs can serve as effective mechanisms at exposing high school students to college course-taking, providing a college reengagement strategy for students who are at risk of not continuing to postsecondary education upon high school graduation. [Research](#) suggests these dual or concurrent enrollment experiences must be well-designed with scaffolded supports to ensure equitable experiences and outcomes for all students.
- Provide college and career pathways that integrate rigorous academic coursework, career and technical education, work-based learning, and support services. Evidence from multiple approaches to college and career pathways, such as [Career Academies](#), [Linked Learning](#), and [P-Tech](#), demonstrates they increase preparation for postsecondary education among other outcomes. [Work-based learning](#) can enhance student engagement which is especially important during the COVID-19 recovery as many students have been disengaged from learning.
- [Support students](#) in completing their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®) form which is the first step students and families can take in accessing federal dollars for postsecondary education. In addition to federal student aid, submitting the FAFSA form also can unlock opportunities for aid from some states, postsecondary institutions, and private organizations.

High-Quality Tutoring

One strategy that districts can also use ARP funds for is tutoring. Because ARP funding is available to be spent through September 2024, districts will be able to hire and retain tutors for the critical time when students will most need assistance. Tutoring can be an effective intervention for a wide range of students [if implemented in particular ways](#). High dosage tutoring (i.e., tutoring that is provided consistently by well-trained tutors or educators at least three days per week for at least 30 minutes at a time in groups of five or fewer students), led by a certified teacher or a paraprofessional, and conducted during the school day tends to have the largest impact.²² When scheduling tutoring during the school day, schools should do so in a way that ensures students still receive instruction on core content and have opportunities for enrichment. For example, tutoring could take place during study hall or flexible periods, during independent practice portions of a class, or as a complement to instruction in partnership with the classroom teacher.

One example of statewide use of tutoring is being provided by the Louisiana Department of Education, which is encouraging tutoring for all students, recommending that it occur in high-dosages (at least 30 minutes three times per week), and providing comprehensive materials aligned to state academic standards through the [Accelerate program](#). In 2007, four studies reviewed by the Department's What Works Clearinghouse found that peer tutoring had positive effects on English language development for [English learners](#). By contrast, less formal, inconsistent tutoring, that is held in larger groups unconnected with classroom content is unlikely to help students.

Most recently, a [study](#) from the University of Chicago Education Lab shows that personalized, intensive tutoring can double or triple the amount of math high school students learn each year, increasing their grades and reducing course failures in both math and other subjects. The program included in the study reflects the previously described features of effective tutoring. Provided to students in the Chicago Public School system, 9th and 10th grade students received 45-50 minutes of personalized math instruction in groups of two students per tutor. Tutors worked closely with teachers, students, and families, complementing in-classroom learning to help students meet grade-level standards. The study shows that these student learning gains persisted over time and increased achievement in other courses. Investments in these kinds of approaches to tutoring can be particularly effective in addressing the impact of COVID-19.

Evidence-informed tutoring practices checklist²³

The best available evidence suggests educators should:

- ✓ **Use trained educators as tutors.** Tutoring works best when led by teachers, paraprofessionals, teaching candidates, recently retired teachers, or highly trained tutors who receive a stipend (e.g., AmeriCorps members) and when time for planning and collaboration is provided with the classroom teachers.
- ✓ **Wherever possible, conduct tutoring during the school day.** Tutoring programs that take place during the school day appear to have the largest effects. Afterschool tutoring programs have also been shown to have positive, although smaller, effects.
- ✓ **Provide high dosage tutoring each week. For example,** programs that include frequent sessions (e.g., daily or at least three sessions per week) of at least 30–50 minutes work best. The youngest students (e.g., early childhood through 1st grade) benefit from increased weekly sessions.
- ✓ **Align with an evidence-based core curriculum or use an evidence-based program and practices.** Take specific actions to support student learning, including [using quizzing](#), asking [deep explanatory](#) questions, [spacing learning](#) over time, [incorporating](#) worked example solutions with problem-solving exercises, connecting and integrating abstract and concrete [representations](#) of concepts, and combining graphical representations — like [figures and graphs](#) — with verbal descriptions.²⁴
- ✓ **Emphasize attendance and focused worktime during out-of-school tutoring.** Experts have suggested that afterschool tutoring programs may have shown smaller effects than in-school programs because less tutoring occurs. However, out-of-school time programs can be effective. To promote the best results, ensure these programs provide high-dosage tutoring.

Out-of-School Time Programs

To support students, districts and schools have long offered programming before and after the regular school day, as well as on weekends or during school breaks. These programs may help students get back into an educational routine; feel connected to their peers, schools, and instructors; augment instruction of academic content they may not yet have mastered; and provide enrichment opportunities.

Funds from programs like the [Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers Grant Program](#) and [ARP](#) can be used to support high-quality afterschool programs, with the goal of providing students with important opportunities for academic support and access to enrichment opportunities that help develop social, emotional, and leadership skills. These benefits are particularly important to students from low-income backgrounds, students who are struggling, and students at risk for later academic disengagement. High-quality afterschool programs have demonstrated positive effects on student math and language arts achievement, and programs strongly rooted in the school context can also have a positive impact on school-related student outcomes, including greater self-confidence, increased civic engagement, better school attendance, improved high school graduation, and decreased delinquency.²⁵

To best accelerate learning, out-of-school time programs should include evidence-based approaches. Programs ideally:

- Target students needing additional support (including using information provided by diagnostic assessments);
- Have certified teachers deliver the academic instruction; and
- Engage the students in using experiential instruction that incorporates hands-on activities, project-based learning, enrichment, and field trips.

Elementary students in particular might need supervision for independent academic work to improve their academic achievement. Strong out-of-school time programs have been found to have a positive effect on skills for both elementary and secondary students.²⁶ Aligning instructional curriculum in out-of-school time or summer school programs with in-school material is important. Consistent attendance in high-quality programs is also needed for students to benefit.²⁷

Summer Learning and Enrichment Programs

Summer learning programs can offer another opportunity to accelerate learning, especially for those students most impacted by disruptions to learning during the school year. Schools and districts should design programs that work best in the local context and reflect the characteristics that evidence suggests lead to successful summer programs. These characteristics include: programs are voluntary, full-day lasting five to six weeks, include three hours of language arts and mathematics taught by a certified teacher each day, and include enrichment activities and experiences. Research points to the potentially positive benefits of strong summer programs. A longitudinal study of summer programs showed students who participated in the summer programs that were reviewed received some benefits in mathematics; however, students with high rates of attendance who attended programs for consecutive summers experienced the greatest learning gains. The amount and quality of instruction influenced the academic benefit, with the highest benefits to students attending programs with high-quality instruction provided by a certified teacher and high academic time on task.²⁸

Summer learning programs should also be designed to meet the social and emotional needs of students and provide them with engaging and enriching experiences. Camps can also play a role in summer learning, depending on the design and quality of the experience. Local leaders should reduce barriers (e.g., transportation, cost, enrollment process) to attending high-quality summer camps, which might support academic, social, emotional, and health outcomes, particularly for [underserved children and youth](#). For example, in Illinois, a local nonprofit used grant funding to build on an existing afterschool program to include a summer program in partnership with the library, a local university, the school district, and other community partners in a program called “[A new kind of summer school](#).” The model prioritizes relationships with students, using daily restorative circles, student-led projects on social justice, and daily enrichment activities.

For older students, these opportunities can include a work-based learning or community service component. Leaders can look for opportunities to partner with high-quality mentorship or workforce training programs to help reengage disconnected youth. Creating more pathways for underserved youth to participate in high-quality enrichment serves a dual role in many communities in the summer for youth who, in some cases, face additional challenges in their home or community.²⁹ Purposeful strategies to reengage disconnected youth through youth violence reduction programs, mentorship, and strengthening youth skills through workforce engagement and training also have the potential to reduce community violence. For example, the “[Becoming a Man](#)” mentorship program, based out of Chicago with chapters in other cities and supported by

the [My Brother's Keeper Alliance](#), provides small-group youth counseling and teaches young people how to de-escalate and manage violence-prone situations. The program decreased violent crime-arrests by 45% and increased high school graduation rates by 12% to 19%.³⁰

A parallel small group counseling program for young women who have witnessed or experienced violence, "[Working on Womanhood](#)" uses a trauma-informed approach to teach social emotional competencies. Student participants report a decrease in depression and increase in self-confidence.³¹ Program providers should offer the necessary supports to ensure all students have access to these programs, including students with disabilities, English learners, students from low-income backgrounds, and students experiencing homelessness, who, for example, may need transportation support.

Cross-Cutting Acceleration Implementation Considerations

In addition to the considerations identified regarding the individual approaches noted above, the following apply across interventions:

- **Partner with families.** Give family members specific resources and strategies to support their children's learning, consistent with legal requirements to communicate in a language and format they can understand. For example, [ourBRIDGE for KIDS](#) in North Carolina focuses on supporting immigrant and refugee families, with assistance that includes translating COVID-19 resources into many languages. Other programs incorporate parent classes focusing on nutrition, computer literacy, career development, or college preparation;
- **Ensure there is a tangible benefit for students.** For older students, this could mean offering course credit; providing career exploration; arranging for pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities, as applicable; and offering apprenticeships or internships;
- **Focus on relationships.** Sustained and strong adult-student relationships can result in higher attendance and better student outcomes;
- **Include enrichment opportunities that support social, emotional, and academic development.** The activities provided can include tutoring and homework help, along with a broad array of enrichment activities ranging from science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) activities, [career and technical programs](#), youth development, physical fitness and health education, and arts programs;
- **Make programs free, inclusive, and supportive of families.** Programs should not charge fees for families to participate, should include free transportation and meals, and be available to students with disabilities, English learners, and other underserved students;
- **Provide flexibility to increase access.** For example, summer programs can be provided in full-day or partial day options, with flexible drop off and pick up times. If students can only participate in afterschool or summer programs for some of the time, this kind of participation should be allowed for and supported;
- **Scale up existing programs that have demonstrated results.** Enrichment activities and experiences might be provided by community partners. Consider partners that already have existing programs that have benefitted students and work with them to support afterschool, weekend, and summer enrichment opportunities for students enrolled in these programs;

- **Build in frequent program assessment and evaluation.** [Continuous quality improvement](#) and frequent evaluations of the program assist the providers in analyzing and making improvements to better provide students with engaging opportunities that improve their lives. Use early warning indicator systems to identify students with the greatest needs (see section on “Using data about students’ opportunity to learn to help target resources and support”); and
- **Implement [policies](#) that support the enrollment, placement, and credit accrual for students who are highly mobile.** For example, school districts could award partial credit for courses that a student might have finished partially before moving and allow flexibility around certain “required” courses or offer a waiver if a comparable course was completed in a previous school/state.

It is important to note that strategies like in-school acceleration, tutoring programs, out-of-school time programs, and summer learning and enrichment are supplemental instruction and cannot replace a program of special education and related services based on a student’s IEP and the decisions of the IEP Team. Similarly, these types of strategies cannot replace the special education and related services and other supports included in an IDEA-eligible student’s IEP as determined by the student’s IEP Team or the regular or special education and related aids and services documented in a 504 plan, or the decisions made by a group of people who are knowledgeable about the child, the meaning of evaluation data, and placement options as required by Section 504.

In addition, inclusion of students with disabilities in district or schoolwide interventions to address lost instructional time does not relieve a district of its responsibility to make individualized decisions required under the IDEA about needed special education and related services for a student with a disability. These could include providing extended school year services as defined in IDEA when determined necessary to ensure that the student maintains the skills necessary for the student to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) if educational services are not continued during periods when school is not in session, such as the summer. Similarly, Section 504 requires schools to make individualized decisions about services needed for a student with a disability. Consistent with IDEA and Section 504 and respective applicable standards, students with disabilities might be entitled to additional instruction and services, often referred to as compensatory services to make up for any skills that might have been lost if it is individually determined that the student was unable to receive FAPE, as a result of the closure of school buildings or other disruptions in services during the COVID-19 pandemic.



b. Supporting equitable access and effective use of technology

Before COVID-19, schools across the country were at different stages in learning how to leverage technology to support teaching and learning. However, COVID-19 required a sudden and complete shift to hybrid and remote learning for most schools. As schools continue to reopen and look beyond COVID-19, technology will continue to play an important role in instructional design and learning both in and out of the classroom. As we work to move forward from the current crisis-driven use of technology, we should continue the work of supporting educators in learning how technology can be effectively used to support diverse learners and provide school and district leaders with flexible models to support learning wherever it occurs.

Unfortunately, too many students, including English learners, students of color, students in rural or tribal communities, and students from low-income backgrounds, have less access to the internet, digital devices, and high-quality, technology-enabled learning experiences focused on inquiry, collaboration, and content creation.³² Expanding access to the internet and devices (the digital access divide) without also addressing the divide in how technology is used (the digital use divide) runs the risk of proliferating low-quality learning experiences for students. Likewise, attempting to provide high-quality technology-enabled experiences without addressing the digital access divide runs the risk of amplifying existing inequities. To effectively bridge both digital divides, we must improve the entire digital learning system by addressing both how students have access to devices and connectivity, and how those devices are leveraged by educators to create high-quality learning experiences.

The digital access divide runs deep. A June 2020 [report](#) from Common Sense Media found that up to 16 million K-12 public school students live in households either without an internet connection or without a device adequate for remote learning at home. The digital access divide is more pronounced in rural communities and for Black, Latinx, and Native American households.³³ In rural communities, internet service providers (ISPs) often choose not to build and maintain expensive fiber networks to geographically remote locations with low population densities due to the limited return on investment. In urban communities, there is documented evidence of “digital redlining,” where ISPs invest in building fiber infrastructure in wealthier neighborhoods, while under-investing in the broadband infrastructure in low-income communities, resulting in low-income broadband users with more expensive, slower access.³⁴ Consistent access to broadband can also be a challenge for families who are experiencing homelessness and lack a permanent address or who are highly mobile.³⁵

Disparate connectivity results in significant consequences for educational opportunities and outcomes. According to one study, “Students who do not have access to the internet from home, or who are dependent on a cell phone alone for access, perform lower on a range of metrics, including digital skills, homework completion, and grade point average.”³⁶ Families with low incomes tend to be more smartphone-dependent and often lack access to connected devices, such as tablets or laptops, or assistive technology for students with disabilities, that are required for more robust technology-supported learning opportunities.³⁷ For example, students with disabilities served under IDEA or Section 504 who have been learning remotely might not have been able to access the same assistive technology devices and services they would receive if they were attending school in person.

The digital use divide is often under-emphasized but also runs deep. The presence of devices at schools alone does not make an instructional system effective or accessible to individual students. While hard to quantify, there has been evidence of inconsistent or misguided technology integration for some time. Using technology for instruction without integrating it with strong instructional practice is likely to widen inequities in student opportunities and outcomes. For example, studies have shown that even when devices are available at school, students from low-income backgrounds and students of color tend to receive instruction

that leverages technology for routine drills focused primarily on repetition with lower levels of adult support, whereas students in higher income schools experienced technology as a creative and playful medium.³⁸ While we have limited insight at a national scale into the kinds of instruction that students received over the last year, there is evidence to suggest that the instruction provided to students from low-income backgrounds and students of color through technology was less authentic and engaging.³⁹

As schools reopen and move to use more technology-based solutions, it is likely that these inequities could be exacerbated if particular attention is not given to the quality of the technology-enabled experiences. Any effective use of technology must be part of a coherent model of instruction aligned to instructional goals that addresses any inequities in student access.

To help close the digital access and use divides as schools reopen, districts and schools are encouraged to:

- Set clear goals and aggressive timelines for providing all students with access to high-speed broadband, devices, and accessible technology they can use when school is not in session. Districts and schools should conduct ongoing [needs assessments](#), including through the use of student surveys, to determine the extent to which students have access to high-speed internet and devices and the quality of that access. For example, it is important to know whether a student only has home access through a cellular data plan, which might be subject to data caps that increase cost and slow down service once the cap is reached. It is also important for schools to know whether each student has a dedicated learning device, or if a student is sharing one device with other family members;
- Set standards for digital learning that are integrated into the broader learning experience and create learning plans based on those standards. For example, some groups have worked to provide model [standards](#) for student learning. Wyoming provides an example of how one state has created a research-based [Digital Learning Plan](#) for student-centered digital learning and implementation;
- Provide extensive professional development opportunities for educators that support improvements in instructional design and empower them to effectively use technology to support student learning. [Research](#) shows technology is most effective when it is integrated into instruction, and activities are designed by teachers for students to explore, learn, and create. Recent studies have found that teacher professional learning in technology is the most significant predictor of the type and quality of classroom technology use by students, suggesting that providing effective training to teachers can help close the digital use divide. Education technology coaches and [school librarians](#) can also provide ongoing support for educators in adopting and implementing new learning technologies;
- Use technology in ways that support students who are performing at different levels — which may be an even more common occurrence when students return to in-person instruction — in part by leveraging technology to support one-on-one or small group work with students and by using student-centered learning models (e.g., competency-based education,⁴⁰ project-based learning,⁴¹ universal design for learning⁴²). A [video](#) of Eastern Senior High School in Washington, D.C., demonstrates how educators can use technology to use their own time more purposefully in the classroom and implement instructional approaches that allow for student self-direction, personalization, and collaboration. Another example is the Lindsay Unified School District in California, where more than 90% of students are from families with low-income backgrounds and 41% are English learners, which has seen steady and significant gains in academic performance by [using technology](#) to create learner-centered, inquiry-based, and personalized learning opportunities for students; and

- Engage families in effectively using technology by providing support, such as tutorials, on the use of technology and platforms provided by the school. Consider [partnering](#) with trusted community-based organizations to provide technology support and digital literacy training for families in their home language. Technology can also be used to support parent-teacher engagement and can be a good way to get information to parents as well as support student learning.

Schools must also ensure that English learners and students with disabilities have equitable access to content provided by the school's technology or as part of the school's educational program. [To support English learners](#), for example, districts and school should provide multilingual technological support and ensure that rich curricular content is available on devices in multiple languages. Federal [disability law](#) requires that students with disabilities receive all of the education benefits provided by technology in an equally effective and equally integrated manner as their peers. Schools can build accessibility features for students with disabilities into their technology by ensuring that websites and documents are compatible with screen reader software and providing accurate captioning or embedded sign language interpreting for video content. This might also include leveraging technology for IEP Team meetings to ensure that parents understand the proceedings at the meeting if, for example, a parent requires a sign language interpreter or printed materials in accessible formats for someone with visual impairments. Further, when developing, reviewing, or revising an IEP for a student with a disability, the IEP Team must consider whether the child requires assistive technology devices or services in order to receive a free appropriate public education. States and school districts must ensure that assessments are compatible with assistive technology devices.



c. Using data about students' opportunity to learn to help target resources and support

While schools and districts work to ensure a physically safe learning environment, they should work just as urgently to understand students' social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs and identify strategies to address those needs. Data on student performance, as well as data on the context for that performance, can help schools and districts to fully understand student needs, strategies to address them, and how best to target resources.

One way to better understand the context for student performance is by considering the opportunities that students have to learn. The use of opportunity to learn (OTL) indicators “generally refers to inputs and processes within a school context necessary for producing student achievement of intended outcomes.”⁴³ The [Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access](#) at the University of California, Los Angeles includes as examples of OTL indicators qualified teachers, clean and safe facilities, up-to-date books and quality learning materials, high-quality coursework, and school conditions that provide students with a fair and equal opportunity to learn and develop critical knowledge and skills.

Research emphasizes that data on OTLs serves a critical role in identifying student needs, particularly when considered alongside student performance indicators, and targeting resources.⁴⁴ States and districts should consider prioritizing OTLs that are related to student outcomes in understanding where increased investments could be made. For example, research has documented the relationship of preschool participation and student outcomes.⁴⁵ Another study⁴⁶ examining districts in California in which students performed better than expected on California's statewide assessment describes the OTL indicators associated with the performance of students in these districts, including teacher preparedness (using credentialing and experience as proxies for teacher preparedness) as key predictors of student performance. Additional research highlights high schools that have developed International Baccalaureate (IB) curricula to provide opportunities for accelerated coursework to students for whom such opportunities did not previously exist.⁴⁷

Educators, policymakers, and researchers have long sought to make better use of data to drive instructional decision-making. When paired with other data, including data on student achievement, OTLs can [provide information](#) for local recovery efforts, including the targeting of resources and the selection of evidence-based practices demonstrated to improve student outcomes.

In addition to data on school funding, including per-pupil expenditures, evidence-based OTL indicators can be used to identify where improvement is needed and where to target intervention, resources, and supports. These can include, among others, measures of student access to:

- A safe, healthy, and inclusive learning environment. Measures can include:
 - Chronic absenteeism rates;
 - Discipline rates, including in-school and out-of-school suspension (including multiple suspensions and length of suspensions), and expulsion rates;
 - Data from student, staff, and family surveys; and
 - The ratio of students to nurses, counselors, social workers, and psychologists, and access to integrated support services.

- Access to qualified and supported educators. Measures can include:
 - Educator certification (e.g., full certification in the area assigned, additional certifications such as National Board Certification);
 - Educator experience;
 - Educator effectiveness;
 - Educator chronic absenteeism and turnover rates; and
 - Educator supports such as mentors, induction programs, evidence-based professional development, and leadership opportunities.
- High-quality curricular and instructional design. Measures can include:
 - Internet access (in school and at home) and student device ratios (e.g., 1:1); the quality of remote learning (e.g., engagement with high-quality curricula and instructional materials); and educator access to personalized, job-embedded professional learning opportunities on the effective use of technology;
 - Advanced course participation and completion, including in Advanced Placement (AP), IB, dual enrollment, and early college programs, gatekeeper courses, and high-quality STEM and career and technical education pathways;
 - Culturally and linguistically responsive curriculum designs;
 - The adoption of high-quality diagnostic assessments to inform instruction; and
 - Access to project-based, experiential learning opportunities that meet the individualized needs of students.

In addition, to better understand where and how resources should be targeted as schools reopen and beyond, states, districts, and schools should:

- Use locally collected data, in accordance with applicable law, to determine whether different subgroups of students who have been historically underserved are participating in in-person instruction proportionate to their enrollment in the school and school district and, if they are not, conduct enhanced, ongoing active and specific outreach and engagement, including to school communities where broad concerns exist;
- Disaggregate any new data that is collected at the state or local level in addition to data included in the Statewide Accountability and Improvement System as required by ESEA, including by student subgroup, consistent with data standards and privacy protections, including the [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act](#) (FERPA). Data can also be disaggregated by classroom and grade level to better target supports, unless doing so reveals students' personally identifiable information. When looking at the data, districts and schools are encouraged to not equate low numbers or percentages of students from high-need populations with low degrees of need. For example, after reviewing its data on students experiencing homelessness and migratory students and finding few such students enrolled, the district and school should take steps to identify and provide needed services to these students and to ensure that their data are accurate;
- In addition to collecting data from OTL indicators, as students return to school, conduct an initial assessment of student access to learning opportunities during school closure and their well-being consistent with applicable privacy protections, including the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment. For example, this can include collecting and reviewing data on student engagement in ["risk](#)

behaviors,” as defined by CDC, and providing universal screening for anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress. Additional contextual data relevant to student well-being can include community COVID-19 cases, death rates, and economic impact;

- Clearly establish how frequently data will be collected and analyzed and identify who has, and is legally permitted to have, access to which data and for what purposes. This can be supported through data dashboards that are designed to provide a comprehensive set of OTL and student outcome data across the state and its districts and schools. Data dashboards can also include data on systemic inequities that extend beyond student, teacher, and school-level data. For example, states, districts, and schools can collect, report, and use additional data on [racial equity](#) within the school system. These efforts can also be supported by existing state longitudinal data systems, which are designed to help districts and schools make data-driven decisions from preschool through college and the workforce;
- Establish [early warning indicator \(EWI\) systems](#) to promote targeted engagement strategies and recovery planning. EWI systems can track attendance, assignment completion, and grades. When viewed at the classroom and student level, this data can [strengthen a school's ability](#) to provide specific and timely interventions;
- Collect data on the successful transitions of students [from preschool](#) into K-12, between middle and high school, and between high school and postsecondary education. For example, schools with a 9th grade can use [on-track indicators](#) to assess how well students are making the transition into high school. To support a smooth transition between high school and postsecondary education, districts can provide enhanced college advising that can help students navigate the financial aid process and select a postsecondary institution that is the best match for them. Districts can also employ strategies to ensure students are prepared for college, such as summer bridge programs, and partner with local college access programs to ensure students accepted into college actually enroll;
- Assess current processes for determining who has access to advanced courses in an effort to continually expand access, including through targeting resources to increase course offerings (including ensuring teachers received the professional development necessary to provide these courses) and providing universal screening to expand access;
- Ensure that interrupted instruction due to COVID-19 does not narrow students' opportunities for advanced coursework, which might include determining student access to these courses, waiving certain requirements to enroll students in these opportunities, and providing students with access to these courses over the summer or providing additional course offering to make up for lost opportunities;
- Help parents and caregivers understand students' progress by sharing information on student opportunities to learn and academic and other progress. One approach to providing information to parents and caregivers is by creating [parent portals](#) that provide information (including training and tutorials on how to access and use data) to parents in accessible formats for people with disabilities and in a language parents can understand to ensure meaningful access; and

- Support shared decision-making regarding how resources should be targeted that includes superintendents, school leaders, teachers and staff, students, parents and caregivers, and community-based organizations. Shared decision-making is an opportunity to reassess how schools are funded, what resources are available, how they should be allocated, and the effectiveness of those allocations for improving educational opportunity and outcomes. This should include targeting resources in ways that build district and school-level capacity and support systems of continuous improvement. For example, the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Northeast & Island's [Continuous Improvement in Education: A Toolkit for Schools and Districts](#), provides an overview of continuous improvement processes in education and offers tools and resources that educators can use to implement continuous improvement processes in their own schools and districts.



d. Addressing resource inequities

By virtually any measure, students in communities experiencing poverty and districts that serve a high proportion of students from low-income backgrounds and students of color are [afforded fewer resources](#) than those in districts that serve fewer students from families with lower incomes or students of color. A substantial body of research documents inequities in per-pupil funds across and within states and districts.⁴⁸ Other research focuses on inequities in the distribution of practices and personnel that enrich students' academic experiences and have the potential to positively affect student achievement, including advanced coursework,⁴⁹ access to gifted and talented programs,⁵⁰ and strong teaching, leadership, and support.⁵¹ Recovering from the impact of COVID-19 will be incredibly difficult if the resource inequities that existed prior to COVID-19, and which have only been further exacerbated, are not addressed.

Allocating resources in ways that advance equity and ensuring they are adequate for providing the opportunities and supports students need to succeed is particularly important as we recover from the disparate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color and communities experiencing poverty. Addressing the many [dimensions of resource equity](#), including equitable and adequate school funding, access to a well-rounded education, well-prepared, effective, and diverse educators and staff, and integrated support services, can begin to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on schools and students and can close [long-standing gaps in educational opportunity](#).

ARP includes several key fiscal equity provisions intended to advance equity and adequacy. The **"maintenance of effort"** provisions require that states maintain support for elementary and secondary education in fiscal years (FY) 2022 and 2023 at least at the percentage of the state's overall spending used to support education averaged over FYs 2017, 2018, and 2019. The **"maintenance of equity"** section requires that school districts and schools serving high concentrations of students from low-income backgrounds are protected from disproportionate cuts in state and local funding during FYs 2022 and 2023. In addition, in FYs 2022 or 2023, a state may not reduce state funding (as calculated on a per-pupil basis) for any highest poverty district below the level of funding (as calculated on a per pupil basis) provided to that district in FY 2019. These maintenance of equity provisions are crucial, but they only prevent *disproportionate* or deep cuts — they do not stop budget cuts from occurring altogether. Because states and districts are making decisions about where to target federal, state, and local resources and how they should be used, this is an opportunity to do so in ways that advance equity and adequacy in educational opportunity.

Equitable and Adequate School Funding

School finance reforms that reduce inequity and inadequacy have been shown to improve students' academic outcomes.⁵² In the wake of the pandemic, states and districts have a historic opportunity to consider the way they make resources available to students and what changes they can make to improve equity and adequacy for the long term.

There is precedent for making significant change in the wake of an economic downturn. Following the Great Recession, some states, such as [California and Rhode Island](#), undertook a reevaluation of how their schools were funded and began working towards new finance systems that targeted additional funding to the students and communities furthest from opportunity and who are experiencing the cumulative effect of schools that have been underfunded decade after decade. The current crisis can serve as a call to action for states to address, in some cases, long-standing disputes regarding funding for education. Adopting more equitable funding formulas is an opportunity to direct additional financial resources to schools in ways that account for the additional support students may need (such as students with disabilities and students experiencing homelessness), and promoting practices that help high-need schools recruit and retain qualified educators. How these resources are used is as important as where they are targeted. Funding provided

under ARP, as well as state and local resources, can be invested in evidence-based strategies that have been shown to improve outcomes for students.

Providing a Well-Rounded Education

As students continue to return to in-person instruction and educators and staff work to address the impact of lost instructional time and reengage students, it is important students have access to an enriched and well-rounded education to support these efforts. ESEA defines a well-rounded education as including not only core academic subjects, such as reading or language arts and mathematics, but also disciplines such as writing, music, arts, computer science, and career and technical education. A well-rounded education supports the success of learners of all ages, from young students who need rich context as they begin “reading to learn” to students in high school preparing for college and careers.

Unfortunately, not all students have access to well-rounded educational opportunities and COVID-19 has only served to further limit those opportunities. Prior to the pandemic there were clear differences in opportunities and access for underserved students compared to their peers throughout their educational careers (e.g., elementary school gifted and talented programs, 8th grade algebra coursework). The lack of availability of these courses — or access when they are provided — affects later opportunities (e.g., [dual enrollment](#), AP, and IB courses).⁵³ The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine panel proposed a series of indicators and measures that can identify disparities in students’ access to opportunities for a well-rounded education, including disparities in “access to and enrollment in rigorous coursework... curricular breadth ... [and] high-quality academic supports.”⁵⁴

In order to recover from the impact of COVID-19 and reengage students after more than a year of disruption, districts and schools should work to address inequities in access to a well-rounded education and can look to some of the following evidence-based practices for increasing student access to a well-rounded education:

- The Arts Education Partnership’s [ArtsEdSearch](#). Supported by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Department, this website focuses on arts education program outcomes;
- The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine panel reports on implementing STEM programs, including [Teaching K-12 Science and Engineering During a Crisis](#), [Successful K-12 STEM Education](#), [Science and Engineering for Grades 6-12](#), and [English Learners in STEM Subjects](#). These reports provide specific examples of state, district, and school practices that can promote STEM learning; and
- ED’s [What Works Clearinghouse](#) offers summaries of effective programs, products, practices, and policies across a range of topics, including [career academies](#) and [dual enrollment programs](#) that are designed to promote success in high school and the transition to college.

When implementing evidence-based practices in support of a well-rounded education, leaders should consider the following three factors:

1. The extent to which important opportunities are widely available and for which students.

- States, districts, and schools can, in accordance with applicable law, regularly and consistently use disaggregated student data to determine whether there are disparities in access to and success in key gatekeeper and advanced courses that contribute to a well-rounded education, use the data to eliminate unnecessary barriers to entry and success, and implement active outreach to and support for historically underserved students;

- States, districts, and schools can partner with community-based organizations to expand the availability of well-rounded courses, including music and art opportunities;
 - States, districts, and schools can partner with local institutions of higher education (IHEs) to offer dual enrollment or early college opportunities and enrichment opportunities for K-12 students, which might also benefit university students, including those interested in education; and
 - States and districts should ensure students are taught by well-qualified (fully certified in the area they are assigned to teach) educators skilled in providing instruction in the relevant format and ensure that all students have access to devices and connectivity needed to take advantage of them.
2. **Ways to eliminate barriers to accessing available opportunities.** Rather than using student test scores or instructor recommendations as barriers to enrichment or advanced coursework, school leaders can allow “open enrollment” in advanced or career-oriented courses.⁵⁵ Flexible scheduling can improve students’ ability to participate while balancing other obligations. States, districts, and schools can also consider how they can leverage technology to expand access to advanced coursework, expertise, and new learning experiences where resources and geography present challenges.
 3. **Proactive approaches to encourage student participation in well-rounded education programs.** This can include family engagement strategies that support families in understanding the full range of available program options and their potential benefits, beginning in middle school or earlier,⁵⁶ providing students with a personal adult advocate to help them personalize the educational experience,⁵⁷ and using individualized planning to help students take advantage of available opportunities.

Well-Qualified Educators

As discussed in the following section on supporting educators, periods of economic downturn can destabilize the educator workforce, having a disproportionate effect on underserved students, including students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. Well-qualified teachers are essential to the learning and development of the students they serve, influencing decisions that can affect students into adulthood, such as the likelihood students attend college and the quality of those colleges. Yet we are already [seeing the impact](#) of COVID-19 on teacher shortages. In December 2020, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported an 8.6% decline in the local government education workforce over the previous 12 months, to its smallest size for the same month since 1999.⁵⁸ This decline in the workforce paired with the more than 40 states experiencing [shortages](#) in math, science, and special education at the beginning of the pandemic, are signs of an immediate challenge that needs to be addressed. To support students in recovering from the impact of COVID-19, states and districts will need to ensure they have access to strong teachers.

Inequities in financial resources among and between districts and schools affect the distribution of fully-certified teachers, one indicator of teacher quality.⁵⁹ Further, schools in communities experiencing poverty and schools that educate higher proportions of students of color are among those most likely to employ teachers with fewer years of experience or who are not fully certified (or not certified in the area they are assigned to teach, such as special education).⁶⁰ Although several factors shape the career pathways of teachers, among the most important is how states allocate resources to districts.⁶¹ Given the importance of highly skilled teachers on the student experience and outcomes, the resulting inequities can have profound impacts on the lives of learners. To address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, states and districts will need to prioritize reversing these inequities and fund schools in ways that make significant investments in their educator workforce.

Integrated Student Support Services

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, many students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, and other underserved students faced non-academic barriers to achieving their full potential in the classroom. A substantial body of research has documented that hunger, inadequate access to physical and mental health care options, housing insecurity, and the lack of high-quality early childhood and child care programs can negatively impact student achievement. In response, many schools have developed integrated student support (ISS) systems that seek to leverage the school site and community-based resources to ensure students' social, emotional, physical, mental health, and academic needs are better met, improving outcomes for students and their families.

Research on at least some of these programs demonstrates the potential of ISS services to improve attendance among young students as well as on-time and high-school graduation rates.⁶² States and districts considering implementing ISS programs have a variety of potential models that can be used to inform their approaches that vary in the range and intensity of services provided, as well as on student populations of emphasis. Active collaboration within and beyond schools can positively affect students' perception of caring adults in their lives and attitudes toward education.⁶³

Examples of Integrated Student Support Services Models
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The City Connects program structures collaborations between school counselors (or social workers) and instructional staff to develop customized support plans that address individual student needs. Based on those plans, the program provides enrichment, offers early intervention services, or, in the case of students in crisis or in need of more serious intervention, promotes referrals to community resources.• The Communities in Schools program emphasizes dropout prevention. Similar to City Connects, Communities in Schools offers both schoolwide and more intensive interventions, including those related to academics, basic needs and physical health, mental health, and social and life skills, among others.• The National Wraparound Initiative focuses on providing wraparound services to students who struggle with behavior or are experiencing serious mental health challenges.

The Department offers [grants for Full-Service Community Schools](#) to improve coordination, integration, accessibility, and effectiveness of services for children and families, especially those attending under-resourced schools. ARP specifically refers to full-service community schools as a model that can support the provision of mental health services and supports and for which ARP funding may be used in response to COVID-19.

Implementation Considerations

Addressing resource inequity requires action at the state, district, and school levels and should include robust stakeholder engagement focused on clear goals throughout the process. Specifically:

At the state level

- Analyze the extent to which state funding is equitably distributed across and within districts using, for example, the [per-pupil expenditure data](#) required for ESEA report cards, and consider whether changes to state funding formulas are needed;
- Identify statewide programming or grant opportunities to increase equity;
- Promote transparency by engaging stakeholders in funding decisions;
- Identify [ways to improve](#) the equitable distribution of educators to ensure all students have access to well-qualified (fully certified in the subject area they are assigned to teach), experienced (e.g., [three or more years](#)), and effective educators;
- Revise policies that may [create or exacerbate barriers](#) to entry to the teaching profession for diverse educator candidates; and
- Consider whether partnering with IHEs and community-based organizations can expand access to well-rounded education opportunities.

At the district level

- Analyze the extent to which state and local funding is equitably distributed among schools using, for example, the per-pupil expenditure data required for ESEA report cards, and consider how changes to funding formulas could improve equity;
- Use the flexibility provided by ESEA, section 1113 to provide more funds per student from a low-income background under Title I, Part A (Title I) to Title I schools with higher poverty than to Title I schools with lower poverty;
- Identify and implement approaches to promote educator equity, such as expanded leadership opportunities that allow highly effective teachers to coach or support new or struggling teachers, and incentives to work in high-need schools and among communities most affected by COVID-19;
- Establish community schools;
- Ensure all students have access to a well-rounded curriculum, including advanced and career and technical education courses, extracurricular activities, and academic rigor; and
- Promote local transparency by engaging stakeholders in district funding decisions.

At the school level

- Determine which sources of funding the school has direct control over and analyze the extent to which such funds equitably support all students, particularly students with the greatest needs;
- Promote local transparency by engaging stakeholders in school-level funding decisions; and
- Analyze the extent to which all students in the school have access to a well-rounded curriculum and to educators who are well-qualified (fully certified in the subject area they are assigned to teach), experienced, and effective.



III. Supporting Educator and Staff Stability and Well-Being

a. Stabilizing a diverse and qualified educator workforce

COVID-19 has not only taken a toll on our nation's students, it has impacted our nation's educators. According to a [national survey](#), as of March 2021, teacher satisfaction with their employers is down more than 25 percentage points since last year at this time, to 44%, and more than a third have considered changing jobs as a result of working during the COVID-19 pandemic. They have reported [increased stress and increased working hours](#) due to pandemic-related transitions. As discussed above, as of December 2020, there had been an 8.6% decline in the local government education workforce over the previous 12 months.⁶⁴ This drop could result from accelerated retirements, educators leaving the profession, or layoffs due to budget constraints.

If limited state or local funding leads to educator layoffs, as we learned from the Great Recession, these layoffs could disproportionately impact students from low-income backgrounds and students of color.⁶⁵ Prior to the pandemic, students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, English learners, and other underserved students were already less likely to have teachers who are well-qualified, experienced, and effective.⁶⁶ These critical lessons can inform how states and districts design policies to stabilize the workforce — and the pipeline into the profession. ARP provides funds that should help states and districts avoid layoffs, support additional necessary staff to safely reopen schools and address students' needs, and implement policies to stabilize the educator pipeline and workforce in the face of COVID-19 disruptions.

School and District Approaches to Retain Qualified and Effective Educators

In the short term, leaders may consider inter-related strategies to promote equity while addressing the impacts of COVID-19 on teaching and learning. These strategies are particularly important given the need for additional educators and school staff to support smaller class sizes to accommodate social distancing, particularly in older grade levels, and support accelerating learning, increase student services, and provide tutoring or other personalized efforts to accelerate learning. Specifically, schools and districts can:

- *Extend the reach of effective teachers* using teacher leaders who:
 - Support partner teachers across a school;
 - Teach larger groups of students (or multiple classrooms) with co-teachers providing small group and individualized support;
 - Lead remote instruction for a larger group of students, if remote instruction is still needed for some students after schools reopen for in-person learning with co-teachers providing small group and individualized support; or
 - Lead professional development, professional learning communities, and grade-level or subject-area teams for educators across the school.
- *Increase availability of qualified adults to support educators, students, and staff, such as:*
 - Teaching candidates in partnership with local schools of education at IHEs;
 - Recently retired educators; and
 - Non-instructional staff who can identify and support students who are highly mobile or chronically absent, such as students who are migratory, students experiencing homelessness, and students in foster care. These staff members can support finding and enrolling students on days and at hours convenient to families, as well as help students develop a sense of belonging in their new schools and identify challenging coursework and peer supports mid-year. In addition, these staff can support migratory students and their families with understanding the IEP processes or completing college applications.

- *Build and maintain a cadre of high-quality substitute teachers* who can assist by:
 - Stepping into the classroom to support continuity for students when educators need to take time off, especially due to illness or when in isolation or quarantine;
 - Co-leading small group learning; and
 - Supporting release time for educators to allow for teacher professional development.
- Implement *flexible and creative scheduling* to support students while providing planning and collaboration time for teachers by, for example:
 - Holding entire days focused on a single core academic subject;
 - Offering all “special” subjects (e.g., music, art, physical education) on the same day so grade-level teams can plan together; and
 - Holding shorter learning cycles, with more frequent breaks, some of which educators can use for planning.
- *Use targeted incentives* to encourage educators to work in high-need subject areas and high-need schools.
- *Offer relevant, flexible professional learning*, including by leveraging existing digital learning options. For example, some state approaches include:
 - Michigan Virtual has provided “[Keep Michigan Learning](#),” to offer tools and resources for teachers and school leaders;
 - The Nevada Department of Education created a statewide “[Digital Learning Collaborative](#)”;
 - The Tennessee Department of Education offers “[Best for All Central: Tennessee’s Hub for Learning and Teaching](#)”; and
 - Wyoming offers a [self-paced course](#) for educators to learn about using education technology.

While there are no quick fixes, there are tools that can serve as a starting point. For example, the Center for Great Teachers and Leaders at the American Institutes for Research provides [evidence-based toolkits](#) for equitably building the educator workforce, including the [Talent Development Framework](#) and considerations specific to [COVID-19](#), as does the [Learning Policy Institute](#). The [New England Consortium on Secondary Schools](#), [Learning Policy Institute](#), and [Comprehensive Center Network](#), among others, have also outlined strategies for increasing both the diversity and qualifications of educators, including for [educators of Native American students](#) specifically. These strategies include cultivating interest in teaching among children of color at earlier ages, considering competitive compensation and retention packages, providing supports to complete preparation programs, and streamlining certification and licensure processes.

At the local level, leaders should review school and district demographic data to best identify the unique needs, gaps, and opportunities in specific communities. For example, the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform ([CEEDAR](#)) Center at the University of Florida offers resources to consider root causes and solutions for [shortages in special education](#) staffing, including a data analysis tool. The Department’s Office of Special Education Programs also has resources related to [attracting, preparing, and retaining](#) educators, particularly those who serve students with disabilities. Improving transparency around educator demographic and retention data can help communities target additional attention where there is a lack of educator diversity or where there is high teacher turnover.

Supporting Principals

Strong principals are a key driver to retain teachers and other school staff members and improve outcomes for students. Supporting principals and their well-being is essential to ensure that they can provide their school staff members with the focused work time, mentorship, and collaborative opportunities they need to successfully meet students' needs. Strong principal support is especially critical for new teachers, special educators, educators of English learners, and **teachers of color** who might have less access to the peer support they need to be successful. Given the important role principals play in school stability and in teacher retention, principals need extra support during these challenging times. Extensive decision-making and logistical operations have been added to principals' workloads as they lead their schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Principal supervisors at the district level can work to enable principals to stay focused on their roles as instructional leaders. School and district partnerships with local health departments can also support principals in focusing on instruction while relying on public health experts for COVID-19 support, such as a partnership in [Marin County, California](#). In addition, principal candidates, such as those working through a principal pipeline, can help support principal workloads.

The Effect of COVID-19 on a Diverse Educator Pipeline

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, barriers challenged the educator pipeline, particularly for teaching candidates of color. Expensive teacher preparation programs, when paired with low starting salaries for educators, might serve as a deterrent. Some students of color are likely to face greater student loan debt than their peers, which can make these financial disincentives especially notable.⁶⁷ While residency programs can be powerful tools, lower-capacity districts might have fewer staff available to establish and nurture them, even as they are most in need of high-quality educator candidates. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates existing financial and logistical hurdles for both aspiring teachers and districts. More extensively affected by the health and economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, educators of color might be less likely to begin or continue a program if they are experiencing more financial, physical, and emotional stress.

Educator diversity benefits all students⁶⁸ and in particular benefits students of color who have at least one same-race teacher in the early grades.⁶⁹ However, while over 50% of American students are students of color,⁷⁰ **less than 20%** of the educator workforce are teachers of color. Increasing educator diversity begins with planning and leadership. [Connecticut](#), [Kentucky](#), and [Massachusetts](#), for example, have prioritized educator diversity through strategic, action-oriented goals or leadership committees. Massachusetts has initiatives to increase racial and ethnic diversity of both teachers and superintendents.

As states and districts work to stabilize their educator pipeline, a variety of strategies have been identified that can both support the preparation and development of new educators and encourage them to work in high-need schools. Evidence-based approaches include:

- Providing loan forgiveness, grants, or service scholarship programs that significantly underwrite the cost of postsecondary education in exchange for a commitment to teach in a high-need field or school for a minimum number (e.g., four) of years (see the [North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program](#));⁷¹
- Developing and implementing high-quality comprehensive teacher residency programs (further described below) that provide extensive clinical experience and have been shown to increase teacher retention and effectiveness;⁷² and

- Developing and implementing professional development programs and mentoring models, particularly for newer teachers, that emphasize building effective instructional strategies and provide time for ongoing collaboration.⁷³

Programs that engage students early and give them hands-on opportunities to learn about the teaching profession, such as “[Grow Your Own](#)” programs, might be particularly effective in recruiting educators who reflect the diversity and specific needs of our most underserved students. “Grow Your Own” programs often also support paraeducators, high-quality substitute teachers, and others in a community who are interested in transitioning into roles as educators by supporting their training and path to certification. Partnerships with educator preparation programs and especially Minority Serving Institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities can provide pipelines and opportunities that best prepare candidates for the real-world experiences of teaching in high-need communities. Partnerships among schools, districts, and IHEs (including community colleges) can support recruiting diverse educators.

[States and districts](#) can shape programs that meet their specific needs. For example, the Washington State Professional Educator Standards Board supported several districts in [building infrastructure](#) for local “Grow Your Own” initiatives. In Colorado, a partnership with the Council of Chief State School Officers supports efforts to recruit male educators of color, particularly for work in high schools. Connecticut has used programs like [TEACH CT](#), [Educators Rising](#), and [NextGen Educators](#) to promote teaching and support high school and college students, especially students of color, in becoming educators. The [American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education](#) has recently reviewed and recommended strategies for educator preparation programs to use in promoting candidate diversity.

Extensive clinical experience is critical, including during a pandemic. To support new educators who were unable to complete their clinical training as a result of the pandemic, the Illinois State Board of Education, in collaboration with the Illinois Education Association and the Illinois Federation of Teachers, created a [comprehensive virtual instructional coaching and mentoring program](#) leveraging CARES Act funds. [Residency programs](#), especially those that allow new teachers to earn income, have also shown promise in both supporting new educators and diversifying the pool of educators. These programs give teaching candidates extended, year-long opportunities to learn alongside mentor teachers in ways that are tightly coupled with their coursework. Candidates completing these experiences can provide crucial support for accelerating learning as students recover from the impact of COVID-19. For example, the [Tennessee Department of Education](#) used CARES Act funds to expand teaching residency programs.

Stabilizing the educator workforce requires listening to and empowering educators — and making needed changes to help them continue to support students through this unprecedented time. Navigating through adversity can be an opportunity to reset approaches to the educator workforce. Beginning with planning and leadership, states, districts, and schools can chart a new course that will improve education for both students and teachers by intentionally increasing educator diversity and creating the conditions that help diverse educators enter and remain in the classroom in order to effectively address the unique needs of all students.

b. Supporting educator and staff well-being

Now, more than ever, supporting educator well-being is a critical priority for school and district leaders because COVID-19 has exacerbated pre-pandemic challenges in the educator workforce. The most common reason educators have cited for leaving school employment in the last year is stress, followed by insufficient pay and challenges related to remote instruction and technology.⁷⁴ As educators continue working during a global health crisis, educator well-being and support will be essential to school and district success. Surveys show educator well-being is tied to feeling supported, valued, and heard by school and district leaders, as well as peers. [Research](#) shows that educator well-being is closely connected to educator retention and effectiveness in providing student support.

As schools reopen, it is important to consider that educators and staff will also be returning to school changed. Some will be coping with grief, elevated levels of anxiety, and loss. Many teachers, including special education teachers and paraprofessionals, homeless liaisons, migrant education program personnel, teachers in correctional facilities, and mental health professionals, may be struggling as they watch the students they serve and care deeply about going through challenging experiences. And still others, like principals and others school leaders, will be continuing to wear multiple hats, for example as school instructional leaders, social workers, and nutrition service planners. To be effective in meeting student well-being and academic needs, the adults in the community must prioritize their own basic mental, emotional, and physical health needs. Thus, addressing the needs of all school staff must be a priority in planning for reopening.

Mental health professionals are not the sole resource for addressing educator burnout and providing mental health care. Social and emotional wellness is a community responsibility that everyone plays a role in. Some educators have reported that being intentional in prioritizing their own self-care is restorative, especially as they balance the possible burnout and disconnection with their professional and personal dedication to education.

Connections and relationships that are important for students are equally critical for educators and staff. Responsive relationships and strong connections act as protective factors that have specific and tangible benefits that improve educator mental health. For school staff to create regulated, yet physically and emotionally calm and settled climates, they, too, must be emotionally connected in safe and responsive relationships. For communities that are implementing schoolwide social and emotional learning approaches, they find that all stakeholders, not just students, benefit. For example, in implementing schoolwide SEL approaches, Stratford Public Schools in Connecticut provided SEL professional development and found that the professional learning also acted as cathartic sessions for the educators and staff to relate to one another, which boosted adult morale. Small staff cohorts now lead the social emotional learning growth specifically for the adults in each school.

Relatedly, any opportunities for educators and staff to be involved in reopening planning allow staff to contribute substantively to the process, feel that their voices are valued, and allow school leaders to delegate and share reopening responsibilities. Across all these relationships is the need for intentionally incorporating community-building and [self-care](#) in all activities in the school. For example, some school districts have staff tasked with building community, and report that they boost positive culture. Other school districts, such as Hillsborough County in Florida, leverage teacher leaders to take on COVID-19 lead roles in their schools. Efforts to prioritize communication and collaboration between staff and leadership nurtures, and models, a sense of connectedness that is crucial to supporting teaching and learning.

The pandemic should also prompt school communities to reevaluate compensatory time off and sick leave policies and practices. Policies should be applied equitably and consider hybrid or remote teaching accommodations for staff with health conditions, consistent with CDC guidance. At a minimum, school districts should provide time for educators and staff to get vaccinated if states or school districts are not providing on-site vaccination opportunities. To the greatest extent practicable, school districts should provide necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) or leverage other community resources to obtain the [PPE](#) required to effectively reopen schools.

To build intentional systems that support educator and staff well-being, district and school leaders should focus on developing:

- **School leader-to-educator support systems.** Leaders can build in time for recurring debrief sessions with all staff members and, when necessary, hold debrief sessions after stressful days. This can be supplemented with unplanned drop-ins into classrooms as a positive touchpoint (e.g., leave a handwritten note highlighting the effective work that was observed). Leaders should also regularly survey educators to gather data on wellness, including staff perception on workload and morale. Leaders can use these data to identify gaps and to enhance current efforts. Leaders should also be a model for well-being; in addition to encouraging educators and staff to prioritize self-care, district and school leaders should model that self-care themselves (e.g., observing blackout times for work emails). Finally, during a pandemic, it is important for district and school leaders to communicate to teachers that they trust them as professionals. For example, [Virginia](#) issued guidance encouraging school leaders to build cultures of instructional risk-taking where educators feel flexibility to “fail forward” or learn from what went wrong.
- **Peer-to-peer support systems.** School leaders can set shared staff norms on well-being expectations, such as how and when staff interact with one another (e.g., blackout times for email communication and boundaries for meeting times). School leaders can prioritize educator mentoring programs to build support systems and prevent burnout (for non-teaching staff such as social workers or school counselors, school districts can explore being creative in building mentorships across campuses). This can include a “buddy” system to build peer-to-peer support systems on a regular basis. Leaders can encourage these check-ins weekly or monthly. Some school leaders have reported providing weekly school staff support circle time that mirrors the practices in student circles and creating new systems for regular staff-to-staff shout-outs via morning announcements or bulletin boards. School district officials should welcome educator-initiated cross-district affinity groups for teachers of color and early career teachers.
- **Considerations for educator workloads.** School leaders can schedule staff planning time (including for non-teaching staff, such as school counselors, and operations and technology staff) into work hours, and to the extent practicable schedule a monthly planning day. This is an important way to ensure educators are set up for success within work hours and can prioritize personal self-care after the school day is over. School leaders should consider balancing meetings to communicate information and providing time to check in with staff. For example, rather than a daily meeting to communicate news, school leaders can send daily bulleted news updates via email to save time and instead provide some of the time for virtual or in-person office hours. In addition, schools and districts should consider how they can prioritize strategies and interventions to meet student needs so as not to place multiple responsibilities on individual educators.

- **Transparency in district and school mental health supports.** School districts should increase awareness of available school and district human resources support for all staff (e.g., who to contact and what supports are available). When possible, school districts should make human resource representatives present on school campuses regularly. School districts should strive to make accessible the health services staff need through employee assistance programs. This can include regular campus visits or easy user guides. Schools can also leverage local wellness resources from local health departments, community partners, or [federal resources](#) to provide wellness services remotely or visit school campuses following the proper safety and prevention protocols. This can include hosting on-campus wellness fairs, providing free wellness check-ups, free or reduced gym memberships from local community partners and other self-care.
- **Intentional space for educators to recharge.** In educator development plans, school districts may consider incorporating a focus on adult wellness and sustainability, with educators on a continuum of learning best practices to preserve their wellness and to support their peers in doing so. Also, leaders or culture committees can consider building a quiet and comfortable space, consistent with appropriate COVID-19 mitigations, for staff to recharge and reset daily at work. All staff members benefit from a space to recharge to better support students.



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