



# Coronavirus and the Classroom: Executive Summary

## Recommendations for Prioritizing Equity in the Response to COVID-19

The COVID-19 crisis has disrupted nearly every aspect of our education system. Our most vulnerable students have been hit first and hardest by these disruptions. Without an intense and intentional focus on equity, they also will be the last to recover. The federal government has provided \$31 billion to support state education systems during the pandemic, but this investment is modest relative to **projected budget shortfalls**. As resources grow scarce, states and districts must target their resources and design emergency response and recovery programs that prioritize our most vulnerable students from the beginning. Together, our organizations offer recommendations in six areas to support states and districts in crafting an equity-focused response to COVID-19.

### Ensuring Equity in Fiscal Policies

States and districts should ensure that resources are distributed equitably to support vulnerable populations and are spent on practices with proven effectiveness. Such policies include the following:

- **Distributing resources equitably among high-poverty and low-poverty schools within districts.** Per-pupil allocations of emergency-response funds should be greater in schools serving high concentrations of students from low-income backgrounds in comparison to wealthier schools within the district.
- **Targeting funds to students disproportionately affected by the pandemic,** including students with disabilities, English learners (ELs), and students experiencing homelessness.
- **Targeting funds to community-based organizations** with a proven track record of serving vulnerable populations like immigrant communities and the families of ELs.
- **Enabling transparent public reporting on local uses of funds.** States should build systems and public-facing websites to report how they and their school districts spend emergency-response funds.

### Meeting Students' Basic Needs

Schools are a vital resource for meeting students' basic needs, including food and health care, and these needs will grow as the nation absorbs the economic hardship caused by COVID-19. States and districts should do the following:

- Ensure that students who rely on **school meals** continue to receive them, including through the summer of 2020 and into the fall, even if in-person instruction does not resume fully.
- Provide ongoing virtual access to **mental health supports** to students and families throughout the summer and fall of 2020.
- Coordinate and address **students' growing academic, economic, social, and emotional needs** by expanding screening, mapping the availability of local services, and integrating student supports.

### Expanding and Improving Remote Learning

Many students lack the computer hardware and connectivity necessary to participate meaningfully in remote learning. To expand access and improve online instruction, states and districts should do the following:

- Purchase and distribute **connectivity and computer hardware** necessary for all students to participate in remote instruction while prioritizing purchases for which there is greater long-term potential for use.
- Provide immediate **training and support for educators to deliver remote instruction,** while building long-term capacity to deliver high-quality online learning as a primary or supplemental instructional tool.
- Ensure remote learning is **accessible for all students,** including ELs and those with disabilities.
- **Equip families with knowledge and resources** to support remote learning, including providing guidance and accessible resources.



- **Build state and local educational agency capacity** to support the effective use of technology in schools.

- **Providing professional development for educators as in-person instruction resumes** to help them support students and adjust to changes in school calendars, structures, and policies in the district's reopening plan.
- **Extending in-person instructional time during the 2020–21 school year**, including into the summer of 2021.

## Easing the High School–to–College Transition

The graduating Class of 2020 has been affected uniquely by COVID-19 school closures. To help students graduate and ensure successful postsecondary transitions, states and districts should consider the following actions:

- Conduct graduation **outreach to high school seniors and their families** to indicate whether students have met graduation requirements and, if not, which requirements they have not fulfilled.
- Implement **summer bridge and credit recovery programs** (remote and in-person, where possible) to fill gaps in learning as a result of COVID-19 school closures.
- Provide counseling, academic assistance, and other individualized **supports to high school students who are most at-risk of not graduating**, including ELs and immigrant newcomers.
- Provide resources and professional development to the professionals who implement **transition plans and programming for students with disabilities**.
- Organize **remote college counseling and financial aid support** for students and families.
- **Coordinate with the public system(s) of higher education** to extend deadlines and offer flexibility related to enrollment and financial aid for the 2020–21 academic year and beyond, if necessary.

## Extending Learning Time

To help fill gaps in learning that will result from the unprecedented school closures, states and districts should extend learning time for students. More specifically, states and districts should consider the following:

- **Expanding high-quality remote instruction** through the summer and fall of 2020 to extend instructional time for all students or as a targeted strategy to help struggling students.
- **Developing reopening plans to provide students with in-person instruction as soon as it is safe to do so**—prioritizing students who lack technology and connectivity and/or are at-risk of falling most behind.

## Determining Students' Academic, Social, and Emotional Needs

To help determine students' academic, social, and emotional needs, districts should use low-stakes, high-quality diagnostic assessments. Specifically, states and districts need policies and initiatives for the following purposes:

- **Identifying available diagnostic assessments** that are valid, reliable, and consistent with state standards in core subjects, as well as in English language development for ELs, and designed to inform instructional practice.
- **Enabling districts to purchase high-quality diagnostic tools and make them readily available**, such as by creating a menu of available, high-quality diagnostic assessments from which districts may choose.
- Providing teachers with **professional development in administering diagnostic assessments and interpreting results** to identify the areas and extent of learning loss for students.
- Providing **student-level information from fall 2020 diagnostic assessments** to parents, educators, and school leaders as soon as possible.
- **Aggregating information from diagnostic assessments** for decisionmakers so that school- and district-level data can be used for planning and targeting resources to students who are most in need.
- **Assessing students' long-term academic, social, and emotional needs as they recover from COVID-19**.

The unprecedented challenges before us must be met by an unprecedented level of commitment and collaboration. We will continue to advocate strongly for Congress to provide additional funds to support students during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis and ensuing recovery, and for states and districts to prioritize equity in spending those funds. Our organizations are eager to support districts and states in their tireless work for students and families.

