



Coronavirus and the Classroom: Recommendations for Prioritizing Equity in the Response to COVID-19

Educators are on the front line of the national response to COVID-19. Although school buildings are closed nationwide, schools remain central to the national strategy for meeting families’ basic needs while educators strive to continue teaching students remotely.

Long-standing gaps in educational opportunity and access have been further exposed and widened by this crisis and are under threat to deepen. During this time, the needs of students and families are enormous and will continue to grow. The largest infusion of federal funding to address the crisis so far—the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Stimulus (CARES) Act—provided \$31 billion overall to support the education system during the response to the pandemic, including \$13 billion dedicated to elementary and secondary education and \$3 billion for discretionary use by governors. But this initial investment is dwarfed by **projected state budget shortfalls**. States and school districts already facing dramatic declines in revenue will be unable to meet the basic, social, emotional, and academic needs of students and families without further significant federal investments. We agree with **governors** and **state educational leaders** about the urgent need for substantial, additional federal funds and urge the U.S. Congress to provide

further relief for states and local communities and prioritize K–12 education in future coronavirus aid packages.

In drafting these recommendations, we began with a shared understanding about the current context:

- The COVID-19 crisis has caused unprecedented disruption to every aspect of our education system, including the learning and well-being of our nation’s students and educators.
- Our most vulnerable students—like those from low-income backgrounds, students experiencing homelessness, immigrant students without comprehensive access to our social safety net, and all students who have been historically underserved—have been hit first and hardest by the disruptions. Without an intense and intentional focus on equity, they also will be the last to recover academically, socially, and emotionally.
- As resources grow scarce, and likely become scarcer, we must target funds and supports to our most vulnerable students. We must design emergency response and recovery programs that prioritize these students from the beginning, rather than include them as an afterthought.



Consistent with this shared understanding, we provide recommendations in six areas to support states and districts in an equity-focused response to COVID-19 in the near term and in the recovery to follow:

1. **Ensuring equity in fiscal policies**
2. **Meeting students' basic needs**
3. **Expanding and improving remote learning**
4. **Easing the high school-to-college transition**
5. **Extending learning time**
6. **Determining students' academic, social, and emotional needs**

The unprecedented challenges before us must be met by an unprecedented level of commitment and collaboration. Our organizations appreciate the tireless efforts of states and districts and are eager to support them.

Ensuring Equity in Fiscal Policies

States and districts should ensure that resources—including funds from the CARES Act and any future federal funds allocated by Congress to support recovery efforts—are distributed equitably to support vulnerable populations and spent on practices with proven effectiveness. Such policies include the following:

- **Distributing resources equitably among high-poverty and low-poverty schools within districts** by ensuring that per-pupil allocations of emergency-response funds are greater in schools serving high concentrations of students from low-income backgrounds compared to wealthier schools within the same district. As part of these efforts, states should require districts to allocate federal stimulus funds to schools with the greatest needs. If such requirements on district uses of funds are not permitted under applicable federal law, then states should provide guidance and incentives to ensure equitable distribution of resources.
- **Targeting funds to students disproportionately affected by the pandemic, including students with disabilities, English learners (ELs), and students experiencing homelessness.** These students face unique obstacles in engaging in distance learning and receiving the supports they need to succeed. For instance, states should require districts (or provide guidance and incentives, if such requirements are not permitted) to direct a minimum percentage of any federal stimulus funds to each of these groups. The following bullets provide examples of how districts should use available resources to support these students:
 - For **students with disabilities**, districts could obtain state-of-the-art assistive technology devices and

COVID-19 Resources

We are in this together. In these difficult times, our organizations stand ready to assist educators, school leaders, and policymakers who are on the front lines of supporting students through the COVID-19 crisis. To contact our organizations or access additional resources we have developed in response to the coronavirus, visit the links below.

- **Alliance for Excellent Education:**
all4ed.org/coronavirus
- **Center for American Progress:**
americanprogress.org/tag/coronavirus/
- **Council for Exceptional Children:**
cec.sped.org/Tools-and-Resources/Resources-for-Teaching-Remotely
- **Migration Policy Institute's National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy:**
migrationpolicy.org/topics/coronavirus
- **National Center for Learning Disabilities:**
nclld.org/covid19
- **National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools:**
ncsecs.org/covid-19/
- **National Urban League:**
nul.org/education-covid-19
- **The Education Trust:**
edtrust.org/covid-19-impact-on-education-equity-resources-responding/
- **UnidosUS:**
unidosus.org/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19/education

provide training on their use, along with training on the use of built-in accessibility features on digital learning platforms, to enhance access to the general curriculum. Furthermore, districts could provide professional development for special education and general education teachers focused on evidence-based, culturally, and linguistically competent strategies for online instruction to increase local capacity to provide specialized instruction and related services. Districts also should support transition coordinators who work with high school students with disabilities and develop plans for students with disabilities to receive compensatory services once the COVID-19 pandemic subsides.

- For **ELs**, states and districts could support targeted investments in digital resources designed to serve ELs' learning needs, especially access to the core curriculum. They also could support professional development for both language instruction and general education teachers focused on instructing

ELs virtually in core subjects and language development. Furthermore, districts should ensure that parents and families of ELs get the equipment, connectivity, and multilingual access to technical support to engage in at-home learning, recognizing the cultural and language access barriers they may face; provide resources for family liaisons and/or community partnerships to identify disengaged students, survey needs, and share critical updates with families of ELs; and offer extended-learning opportunities to support academic learning and English language development.

- o The number of **students experiencing homelessness increased** from just over 1.3 million in the 2015–16 school year to nearly 1.6 million in the 2017–18 school year and will continue to worsen considerably as a result of economic instability and job losses from the pandemic. To support these students, states and districts could consider providing more funding and support for **McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth programs**, including district-level liaisons. Furthermore, states could **reallocate** unspent state McKinney-Vento and Title I dollars to help districts meet the range of urgent academic, social, and emotional needs of students experiencing homelessness.
- **Targeting funds to community-based organizations (CBOs)** with a track record of working effectively with schools and districts and that have strong ties to local vulnerable populations, including immigrant communities and the families of ELs. Partnerships with CBOs can be used not only to translate information into multiple languages, but also to ensure vulnerable populations are aware of, and have access to, academic and other supports, including extended learning time. Districts should prioritize partnering with CBOs with a demonstrated history of building school and district capacity to ensure that services and supports can be maintained for the long haul.
- **Enabling transparent public reporting on local uses of funds.** To promote transparency, states should create reporting portals for districts and public-facing websites to communicate how emergency-response funds (including CARES Act funds and funding specifically for third-party vendors or through CBO partnerships) are spent at the state and district levels. Districts also could consider using funds to build and maintain websites for local data. Detailed reporting at the district level that is shared with the state should include how much districts receive, including any additional federal stimulus funds, and how they and schools within their boundaries use resources to meet the unique needs of students from

low-income backgrounds, students of color, students with disabilities, ELs, students experiencing homelessness, students in foster care, and students engaged in the juvenile justice system.

Meeting Students' Basic Needs

The COVID-19 outbreak has shined a light on how schools are a vital resource for meeting students' basic needs, including food and health care. These needs will continue to grow as the nation absorbs the economic hardship caused by the pandemic. States and districts should consider the following strategies to maximize the impact of emergency-response funding in the immediate and longer term:

- **Ensure 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.** States and districts must maintain school meal programs as increasing numbers of students rely on them to meet their nutritional needs. Districts should make meals easily accessible for students, without requiring any proof of eligibility, through multiple meal pick-up points or, where possible, meal drop-offs via school bus routes or other transportation partnerships. States also should collect and publicize data on meal distribution by district. More broadly, many schools are providing food to anyone in need, **transforming into community food pantries**. Given the growing number of individuals facing food insecurity, states should opt-in to the **Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) program** to provide access to food for both families who have been participating in the school meal program and those who have not but have a high level of need. Congress also should **extend P-EBT** through summer 2020 and into the next academic year to allow households with children receiving free or reduced-price school meals to access food purchasing dollars if the child's school has been closed for more than five



consecutive days and extend these benefits for children younger than five years.

- **Provide ongoing virtual access to mental health supports to students and families throughout the summer and fall of 2020.** For example, states could work with districts to coordinate mental health care and social and emotional support for students via multilingual hotlines staffed by counselors, school psychologists, social workers, and other relevant staff, and provide lists of resources and supports available to meet students' mental health needs. Districts also could provide professional development for staff on how best to deliver these services virtually while protecting students' privacy.
- **Coordinate and address the growing student academic, economic, social, and emotional needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic** by expanding screening for developmental needs across all domains (academic, social, emotional, behavioral, health, and family), categorizing and mapping the availability of local resources and services, and integrating student supports via systems for acting on information gathered about students and families. To build a more integrated system, districts may need to develop protocols for staff in direct contact with students and families, organize data and match resources to needs, and clarify the scope and responsibility for follow up (including systems for referrals to CBOs), as well as create a single point of contact within a school or district boundary to coordinate service delivery.



Districts also may consider using emergency-response funds to invest in community schools, which are an **effective long-term strategy** to meet the ongoing academic, health, and wellness needs of the most

marginalized students and families by leveraging partnerships with CBOs and building school-level capacity.

Expanding and Improving Remote Learning

As **schools have closed** nationwide, states and districts have launched remote instruction to try to maintain continuity of learning. Many students, however, lack the computer hardware and connectivity necessary to participate meaningfully. **Nearly 12 million children do not have broadband at home**, putting them at a severe disadvantage when instruction must occur online. In response, districts and states are **frantically purchasing laptops and hot spots** to distribute to students in need. However, new devices or internet connections will be of limited effectiveness if teachers are not supported in learning how to shift their instruction and adapt lessons to a distance learning environment.

Lack of technical resources is a significant obstacle to participation in remote learning, and states and districts should use emergency-response funds to help close the connectivity gap as quickly as possible. But they should do so purposefully by planning before purchasing. They should look beyond the 2019–20 school year and consider how online learning could be a long-term strategy for delivering high-quality instruction—both because COVID-19 closures may continue into summer and fall 2020, and remain intermittent when schools reopen, and because, if done well, online learning can enhance instruction and learning gains beyond the current crisis. In using funds to expand and improve remote learning, states and districts should consider the following:

- **Purchase and distribute connectivity and computer hardware necessary for all students to participate meaningfully in remote learning.** While states and districts must move quickly to reach disconnected students, they should plan before purchasing equipment and prioritize purchases for which there is greater long-term potential for use so that new technology will support high-quality online instruction *through fall 2020 and beyond*. Even when schools are running at their maximum capacity, students without access to the internet lack the ability to do school work at home, contributing to the homework gap. In particular, states should consider how to leverage their bulk purchasing power or **partner with businesses and internet providers** to offer laptops/tablets and expanded internet service in high-poverty and remote communities.
- **Provide educators with immediate training and support to deliver remote instruction in the current context, during the summer, and into fall of 2020, while building long-term capacity to deliver high-quality online**

instruction as a primary or supplemental instructional tool. Districts should support educators specifically in adapting lessons and differentiating instruction in virtual environments; accessing instructional materials and technology; and using online platforms to connect with students, including built-in accommodations and features that increase accessibility. In addition to information about accessibility features, educators need instructional strategies for including all students in continued learning during school closures, especially students with disabilities, ELs, and students with limited access to devices and internet connectivity. Since relationships are a critical component of education, professional development offerings should help educators develop strategies for maintaining strong relationships with students and personalizing instruction in a remote environment.

Professional development should be research based, collaborative, sustained, and job-embedded. As it is unclear when it will be safe for schools to reopen, and intermittent closures may occur even with schools open, these activities likely will continue to be relevant. States can lean on the expertise of schools and institutions that already engage in remote learning, such as universities, districts that have online learning protocols in place to deal with weather events, or online K–12 providers with track records of success, to help educators shift to online instruction. Critical topics for collaborative and ongoing professional development include

- o accessing, identifying, and/or developing high-quality, aligned, culturally responsive curricular materials in ways that allow for personalization and maximum accessibility;
 - o protecting student privacy in online classrooms;
 - o communicating with parents and families about students' academic progress and collaborating with families to implement remote learning plans, including those whose primary language is not English, those whose students have disabilities, and those who lack reliable home internet access;
 - o maintaining commitments under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to support students with disabilities;
 - o utilizing instructional strategies for including all students in continued learning, including ELs; and
 - o addressing students' social, emotional, and academic needs and well-being during extended periods of social distancing.
- **Ensure remote learning is accessible for all students, including ELs and those with disabilities.** In developing and implementing any remote learning plan, states and districts should consider the unique needs of ELs and

students with disabilities. States should provide resources for districts and schools to support these students, including a centralized website that houses high-quality instructional materials and language supports. States should work with districts and use funds to ensure that students with disabilities continue to have equal access to the curriculum, customized to meet their needs, and receive the specialized instructional and related services outlined in their Individualized Education Program (IEP) and/or 504 plan to the greatest extent possible. This includes ensuring technology purchases are accessible for the range of students with disabilities and that learning platforms and software are compatible with assistive technology. Likewise, states and districts should identify and/or develop digital resources designed specifically to address both the language and academic content knowledge development of ELs to ensure that ELs do not fall further behind during this crisis.

Anticipating that remote learning may be necessary at times during the 2020–21 school year, states should plan with their districts now to improve and deepen access to remote learning and supports for both ELs and students with disabilities so that these students have equal access to the full curriculum. For example, over time, states and districts could improve their strategies for students with disabilities to receive the services outlined in their IEPs and/or 504 plans during periods of remote instruction. Districts also must prepare for a return to school that quickly resumes the provision of all special education and language instruction services and provides additional services to address any learning loss due to inaccessibility of distance learning opportunities.

- **Equip families and caretakers with the knowledge and resources to support remote learning.** Families and caretakers are now serving as virtual teachers' aides to support their students' academic progress, but they need assistance in home-based, online instruction to make remote learning effective. States and districts should provide guidance and easily accessible resources for families and caretakers. For example, districts—through the creation of a virtual hub—could provide tips and strategies in weekly communications, with opportunities for families to receive direct, regular support from educators. Districts also should provide a physical location where families can retrieve learning packets, devices, hot spots, or other equipment to simulate the schooling environment within the home.

States and districts also must recognize that the challenges of remote learning can be particularly acute for families of ELs and students with disabilities, who need to navigate new methods of service provision as well as

instruction. Districts, for example, should address the language and cultural barriers faced by parents of ELs and provide supports, consultation, and other services that parents of children with disabilities may need as they serve as both caretaker and teacher during the school day.



- **Build state and local educational agency capacity to support the effective use of technology.** Agency staff (both those in technology departments and organization-wide) should be prepared to support schools with professional development, guidance, and technical assistance on the effective use of technology generally and in supporting learning that occurs completely, or predominantly, online when needed. As remote learning likely will continue in some fashion into the fall, state departments of education and district central offices should continue to invest in efforts to build their capacity in virtual learning so that they can support best practices locally; provide schools and educators with needed professional development and technical assistance; assist in the purchase of high-quality tools; establish and enforce standards and expectations for third-party vendors; and update policies and guidance on students' online and data privacy.

Easing the High School–to–College Transition

The graduating Class of 2020 has been **affected uniquely** by COVID-19 school closures. Students may have been relying on class credits and course grades or results from spring 2020 assessments to earn a diploma. Even in cases where districts quickly shifted to offer courses online, students may lack the devices or connectivity to complete them. In addition, graduating seniors may not have access to school counselors and other supports to navigate their postsecondary plans, including college enrollment and financial aid deadlines, and the transition plans of students with disabilities have been interrupted, right before they will lose the support of the K–12 education system and enter postsecondary education or the workforce. Moreover, if intermittent school closures remain necessary during the 2020–21 academic year, this scenario could repeat for the graduating Class of 2021.

Unfortunately, students who were most at-risk of not graduating prior to COVID-19 are also most likely to become **disengaged from schooling entirely** during COVID-19–related closures. Students who have not been in daily contact with teachers or who are unaccounted for should be prioritized in state and district outreach and planning. To support successful postsecondary transitions, states and districts should consider the following:

- **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. States and districts should update and share graduation guidance directly with families, as well as with principals, educators, and counselors. Model **guidance** includes policies for students to attain credits via online learning or demonstrations of competency; issuing course grades to students for work completed before and during school closures (e.g., moving to pass/fail or allowing work completed after school closures to boost, but not hurt, final grades); and flexibility or waivers of graduation testing and/or course or pathway requirements (e.g., eliminating exit exams for the Class of 2020 or streamlining elective credit, internship, or work experience requirements). Guidance also should steer students and families to available supports, especially summer learning opportunities for students just shy of meeting credit requirements, and build awareness of key deadlines and other info to help graduates transition from high school to postsecondary education and work.
- **Implement summer bridge and credit recovery programs** (remote and in-person, where possible) to fill gaps in learning that will have occurred for students as a result of COVID-19 closures, help students complete graduation requirements, and prevent “**summer melt**”

among students planning to enroll in college in the fall, prioritizing underserved and first-generation college students. For example, community colleges and districts could **join together** to offer **free, online dual-enrollment courses** during the summer to help students fulfill remaining course requirements or shore up content knowledge before the fall 2020 semester. In addition, despite the best efforts of states and districts to support graduating seniors through the pandemic, some students may become disconnected from school entirely or be unable to fulfill their remaining graduation requirements online or during the summer. States and districts should help these students reconnect with school by expanding existing outreach, counseling, and credit recovery (in-person and/or online) for disconnected youth.

- **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. As disconnected youth may lack consistent, high-speed home internet access, resources could be provided online as well as through telephone hotlines or text messages/push notifications to ensure students receive critical supports, guidance, and resources—particularly students who failed to graduate on-time but could successfully earn a diploma with summer learning and credit recovery. Professional development should be available for counselors and other staff to ensure they are trained on how to effectively provide these services virtually.
- **Provide resources and professional development to the professionals who implement transition plans and programming for students with disabilities**. Students with disabilities planning to exit or age-out of the public education system in the next few months will be reliant on the real-life skills and work experiences they were obtaining in their transition programs. It is essential that these programs continue and that students continue to receive the individualized supports and learning opportunities they need, even virtually, during this time. Professional development should be available for special education professionals and others who work with students in transition programs to ensure they can effectively provide transition services and programming virtually during the remainder of the 2019–20 school year and during the summer, including providing opportunities for students to gain workforce skills virtually and working with local employers to offer paid internships and job placements.
- **Organize virtual college counseling and financial aid support for students and families**, including **completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®)**.

States and districts should consider partnerships with their state system of higher education or local, private nonprofit colleges and universities, and college access networks to provide capacity and develop common tools and resources that can be deployed now and throughout the summer, including to students without broadband access (e.g., by reaching out to students via text messages or push notifications). These resources should be targeted to vulnerable populations, such as first-generation college students whose families may have less familiarity with transition planning, processes, and applications. States and districts also will need to continue providing determinations of independent status for the FAFSA® for unaccompanied homeless youth.

Depending on whether schools can remain open continuously during the 2020–21 school year, districts also should be planning how they can offer virtual college advising, application support, and other postsecondary transition activities for seniors in the Class of 2021. States and districts should prepare now for offering a comprehensive set of virtual transition supports and identify partners (e.g., college access networks, CBOs, nonprofits, and institutions of higher education) who could support this work.



- **Coordinate with the public system(s) of higher education** to extend deadlines, to offer flexibility related to enrollment and financial aid for the 2020–21 academic year (e.g., policies regarding college admissions and placement exams), and to adopt programs (e.g., evidence-based remediation strategies) to support students who enter higher education with learning gaps. In particular, states may want to **coordinate** across the public higher education system to ensure policy changes, such as pass/fail grading and the cancellation of standardized assessments, do not negatively impact admissions. These policies, revised deadlines, and other

flexibilities adopted for the graduating Class of 2020 may need to be extended to the graduating Class of 2021 as well, depending on the extent and duration of any school closures in the 2020–21 academic year.

Extending Learning Time

Students have lost weeks of learning time due to school closures, and the number of missed hours of instruction will continue to grow. Although states and districts have launched remote learning programs, participation rates are **alarmingly low**, particularly among historically underserved students. Virtual chronic absenteeism rates are surging as students struggle with connectivity, technical issues, and the lack of time, space, and support they need to participate in online instruction.

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As a result of reduced hours of instruction and limited participation in remote learning, the learning losses associated with school closures will be staggering. According to a recent **estimate by the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA)**, students could lose up to 30 percent of their reading gains from this school year, and more than half of their math gains—without taking into account the additional trauma and disruption students may face that is unique to COVID-19. It is paramount that states and districts think beyond the bounds of the 2019–20 school year and use resources to extend learning time before, during, and/or after the 2020–21 academic year to help accelerate students’ academic, social, and emotional recovery. 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.** For example, districts could offer online summer school for students who have been disconnected or are struggling academically, as well as virtual credit recovery programs for high school seniors who did not graduate in the spring. They also could use remote instruction to extend the school day if it is only safe to resume in-person instruction for limited hours or days

each week. Remote learning could fill the gaps left by limited in-person instruction and allow schools to extend instructional time for students.

- **Developing reopening plans to provide students with in-person instruction as soon as it is possible and safe to do so, perhaps beginning in the summer of 2020.** It will be critical for states to provide detailed guidance to districts about strategies for reopening schools safely and effectively, including multiple reopening strategies based on various public health scenarios. These plans should consider strategies for extending learning time, which could include starting the school year early, year-round schooling, or summer school. If students can return safely to school before the 2020–21 school year would otherwise begin, states and districts could consider bringing students back to school early—either to return to their previous year classes before starting the new school year or engaging in a period of review of the previous year’s material. These strategies might be particularly effective for students who lack the connectivity, technology, or conducive environment necessary to learn at home. For example, states and districts might consider bringing smaller groups of students together for instruction before in-person classes can resume at scale. Alternatively, states and districts might prioritize in-person instruction for students who lack technology and connectivity and/or are at-risk of falling most behind while delivering distance learning to other students. States and districts should consult with stakeholders in the development of reopening plans.
- **Providing professional development for educators to help them support students during the 2020–21 school year as in-person instruction resumes** and adjust to any needed changes in school calendars, structures, and policies included in the district’s reopening plan. This should begin immediately—to support educators in providing instruction during the summer—and continue through the 2020–21 school year. For example, states and districts could use emergency-response funds to offer longer and more intensive planning time for educators prior to the start of the school year.

Specifically, states and districts may need to support teachers in rethinking curriculum, scope and sequence, and scheduling so that educators have additional time to cover material students typically would have mastered in the previous year in an engaging way and to plan for possible disruptions to in-person instruction in fall 2020. Where possible, states and districts may want to consider “looping” educators with students as they advance to the next grade level so that students can continue learning

from, and building relationships with, the same teacher and peers from their classes prior to any COVID-19–related closures. The most effective professional learning is collaborative, ongoing, and job-embedded, so districts also should plan for and provide time for consistent professional development opportunities during the 2020–21 academic year. States and districts may need to adjust professional development offerings in real-time, based on feedback from educators and as new needs arise as a result of evolving public health scenarios and guidelines.

- **Extending in-person instructional time during the 2020–21 school year.** States and districts should consider using available resources to extend the school day and/or the school year, including into the summer of 2021, particularly to meet the needs of underperforming students. For example, emergency-response funds could support additional teacher compensation and personnel costs, as well as other expenditures (e.g., transportation) associated with a longer academic year. In addition to increasing instructional time for all students, districts also might use funds to expand afterschool programming or invest in intensive, evidence-based tutoring programs for students who are the furthest behind. Strategies for extending instructional time could include providing flexible and innovative approaches to scheduling and programming in the 2020–21 school year, such as extending blocks of learning time and creating additional opportunities to personalize instruction and provide enrichment opportunities. Block scheduling also can be used to provide teachers additional time for collaborative professional development. Innovative approaches to scheduling can allow students to receive the instructional support they need while also providing them access to the well-rounded educational activities that they have missed. Districts may want to consider leveraging partnerships with afterschool providers and CBOs to extend and enrich instructional time.

Determining Students’ Academic, Social, and Emotional Needs

During the summer, students can lose between two weeks and two months of academic growth. However, learning losses associated with prolonged school closures due to COVID-19 may be even more dramatic, especially for historically underserved students. For example, according to the NWEA [estimate](#) previously referenced, students could return to school in the fall of 2020 having lost between half and all of the math progress they typically make during the school year.

One of the most critical tasks for states and districts to support students’ academic recovery and acceleration will be measuring their academic needs at the beginning of the 2020–21 school



year. It will be important to assess the extent to which extended social isolation and other stresses related to the pandemic might have caused traumatic experiences for students that need to be addressed. Low-stakes, high-quality diagnostic assessments administered at the district level will help educators and school leaders tailor curriculum and instructional materials, professional development, daily instruction, and other supports to meet students’ academic, social, and emotional needs and help them stay on-track. **We do not recommend states use these diagnostic assessments for high-stakes purposes, including school accountability and improvement.** However, data from diagnostic assessments can be useful for state and local policymakers who need to make systemic decisions about additional targeted funding and resources to help students recover from COVID-19–related closures.

To determine the scope of students’ needs as reentry and recovery begins in the 2020–21 academic year, states and districts should consider the following:

- **Identifying available diagnostic assessments that are valid, reliable, and consistent with state standards** in core subject areas—and in English language development for ELs—and that are designed to inform instructional practice to address learning loss. States should survey districts about diagnostic assessments they currently use, identify other diagnostic tools that may be available, and develop criteria to evaluate the quality of common diagnostic assessments. As intermittent school closures could be necessary during the 2020–21 school year, states also may want to study the feasibility and availability of online diagnostic assessments, as well as assessments and tools that measure the social, emotional, and academic needs of students to inform practice.
- **Enabling districts to purchase high-quality diagnostic tools and make them more readily available upon students’ return to school.** States have an important role to play in helping to ensure all districts have high-

quality diagnostic tools to measure students' academic, social, and emotional needs. Therefore, states should use their quality criteria to create a menu of available diagnostic assessments from which districts may choose. States could then take advantage of economies of scale to negotiate with vendors for procurement of high-quality assessments on behalf of districts at discounted rates, or use funds to make high-quality diagnostic assessments on the state-vetted list available to districts free of charge. States also could consider implementing a statewide diagnostic tool to ensure quality and equity across districts. At minimum, each district should use the same diagnostic assessment in all its schools for a given grade span. States and districts also could provide for diagnostic tools, including student and staff surveys, that assess the mental, social, and emotional well-being of students and staff.

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Education systems ... will suffer irreparable harm if Congress does not provide substantial stabilization and recovery funds to states to support K–12 education programs directly.

- **Providing teachers with professional development in administering diagnostic assessments and interpreting results** to identify the areas and extent of learning loss for individual students. During the summer and beginning of the 2020–21 school year, states and districts should provide professional learning on diagnostic assessments and data literacy since it will be critical for teachers to use the data to differentiate instruction and deliver comprehensive, individualized supports to the students who are the furthest behind academically in ways that meet their social, emotional, and academic needs.
- **Providing student-level information from fall 2020 diagnostic assessments** as soon as possible. In addition to supporting administration of diagnostic assessments, states and districts should report assessment results to classroom educators, school leaders, parents, and families so that those closest to students clearly understand students' academic, social, and emotional needs and whether students remain on-track academically at the onset of the 2020–21 school year.
- **Aggregating information from diagnostic assessments to the school and district level and, if possible, state level for decisionmakers.** State and local policymakers should use data from diagnostic assessments for

ongoing planning and budgeting so that federal and state resources are targeted to the students that are furthest behind and most in need and to the communities that have been most affected by COVID-19. However, policymakers should not use diagnostic or formative assessment data for high-stakes purposes, including school ratings and identification of additional schools for support in fall 2020. All states have received a one-year waiver from federal accountability and related reporting requirements, but they must continue to support, during the 2020–21 school year, any school that had been identified for improvement prior to the pandemic.

- **Ongoing assessment of students' long-term academic, social, and emotional needs as they recover from COVID-19.** Educators will need to continually measure students' academic, social, and emotional needs and progress during the 2020–21 school year—especially if intermittent school closures are necessary. As a result, states and districts should consider providing ongoing professional learning for educators related to administering and using data from diagnostic and formative tools; developing or using additional assessments and tools on a regular basis with students and staff; and building state and local data and reporting systems to better monitor student progress and engagement (whether instruction occurs in-person or remotely) and track early-warning indicators as they recover from COVID-19–related learning loss and trauma.

Conclusion

While we recognize the bleak financial picture for education and the fiscal uncertainty confronting states and school districts, we hope that these recommendations will help prioritize spending in ways that address the most urgent needs of our most vulnerable students. The CARES Act provided a welcome infusion of resources; however, it is but a fraction of what states and districts will need to support students during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis and the ensuing recovery. State and local budgets have been decimated already, and the worst is yet to come. Since the onset of COVID-19, **more than 40 million people have filed for unemployment** and experts estimate that the pandemic could lead to 47 million lost jobs and unemployment rates as high as 30 percent—higher levels than seen even during the Great Depression. With declining revenue and increased unemployment, state and local budgets are bracing for the worst. Education systems—which account for roughly half of each state's budget—will suffer irreparable harm if Congress does not provide **substantial** stabilization and recovery funds to states to support K–12 education programs directly. We hope **Congress** will provide these funds and that states and districts prioritize equity in spending them.

The **Alliance for Excellent Education** (All4Ed) is a Washington, DC–based national policy, practice, and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all students, particularly those underperforming and those historically underserved, graduate from high school ready for success in college, work, and citizenship. all4ed.org

The **Center for American Progress** is an independent nonpartisan policy institute that is dedicated to improving the lives of all Americans, through bold, progressive ideas, as well as strong leadership and concerted action. Our aim is not just to change the conversation, but to change the country. americanprogress.org

The **Collaborative for Student Success** is a nonprofit advocacy organization that works to defend high standards, high-quality assessments, and strong systems of accountability, to ensure that all kids are prepared for college or career. forstudentsuccess.org

The **Council for Exceptional Children** (CEC) is the professional association of educators dedicated to advancing the educational success of children and youth with exceptionalities through advocacy, standards, and professional development. cec.sped.org

Education Reform Now (ERN) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit think tank and advocacy organization that promotes increased resources and innovative reforms in K–16 public education, particularly for students of color and students from low-income families. We seek forward progress in public education—at the federal, state, and local level—developing and advocating for new, bold ideas and mutually reinforcing policies in elementary, secondary and postsecondary education. edreformnow.org

Founded by public school teachers, **Educators for Excellence** is a growing movement of more than 30,000 educators, united around a common set of values and principles for improving student learning and elevating the teaching profession. We work together to identify issues that impact our schools, create solutions to these challenges, and advocate for policies and programs that give all students access to a quality education. e4e.org

The nonpartisan **Migration Policy Institute** seeks to improve immigration and integration policies through authoritative research and analysis, opportunities for learning and dialogue, and the development of new ideas to address complex policy questions. The National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy is a crossroads for elected officials, researchers, state and local agency managers, grassroots leaders, service providers, and others who seek to understand and respond to the challenges and opportunities today's high rates of immigration create in local communities. migrationpolicy.org

The **National Center for Learning Disabilities** (NCLD) is a Washington, DC–based national policy, advocacy, and research organization that works to improve the lives of the 1 in 5 children and adults nationwide with learning and attention issues—by empowering parents and young adults, transforming schools, and advocating for equal rights and opportunities. nclcd.org

The **National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools** (the Center) is an independent, nonprofit organization formed in 2013. The Center is committed to ensuring that students with disabilities have equal access to charter schools and to fostering effective implementation of practices that will benefit students with disabilities in both charter and traditional public schools by proactively working with states, authorizers, charter school and special education advocates, as well as other stakeholders. To increase our collective understanding of the challenges, identify viable solutions, and ensure effective charter school practices that justify the trust of families and students with disabilities, the charter sector needs a credible entity that will be a reliable resource for key stakeholders, both in the charter sector and the special education advocacy community. Our goal is to advocate for students with disabilities to ensure that if they are interested in attending charter schools, they are able to access and thrive in schools designed to enable all students to succeed. ncsecs.org

The **National Urban League** is a historic civil rights organization dedicated to economic empowerment in order to elevate the standard of living in historically underserved urban communities. The National Urban League spearheads the efforts of its 90 local affiliates through the development of programs, public policy research and advocacy, providing direct services that impact and improve the lives of more than 2 million people annually nationwide. Visit nul.org and follow us on Twitter and Instagram: @NatUrbanLeague.

Stand for Children is a nonprofit education advocacy organization focused on ensuring all students receive a high-quality, relevant education, especially those whose boundless potential is overlooked and under-tapped because of their skin color, zip code, first language, or disability. Stand makes an impact by:

- Partnering with parents to support their children's education journey and to become strong advocates.
- Advocating, mainly at the state and local level, for proven policies and funding focused on helping students reach make-or-break milestones.
- Ensuring the changes we champion for reach classrooms and directly support students. stand.org

Teach Plus is a national teacher leadership organization with the mission of empowering excellent, experienced and diverse teachers to shape key policy and practice issues that advance equity, opportunity and student success. We believe that when we invest in developing our most talented teachers into teacher leaders who are well-informed, persuasive, and prepared to lead, they have deep leverage in advancing equity for students—especially for students of color, low-income students, and those from underserved communities. Teach Plus works to fulfill our student opportunity mandate: All students deserve the opportunity to achieve their potential in an education system defined by its commitment to equity, its responsiveness to individual needs, and its ability to prepare students for postsecondary success. teachplus.org

The **Education Trust** (Ed Trust) is a national nonprofit that works to close opportunity gaps that disproportionately affect students of color and students from low-income families. Through our research and advocacy, Ed Trust supports efforts that expand excellence and equity in education from preschool through college, increase college access and completion particularly for historically underserved students, engage diverse communities dedicated to education equity, and increase political and public will to act on equity issues. edtrust.org

UnidosUS, previously known as NCLR (National Council of La Raza), is the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. Through its unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs, and an **Affiliate Network** of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico, UnidosUS simultaneously challenges the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Latinos at the national and local levels. For more than 50 years, UnidosUS has united communities and different groups seeking common ground through collaboration, and that share a desire to make our country stronger. For more information on UnidosUS, visit unidosus.org or follow us on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/unidosus), [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/unidosus), and [Twitter](https://twitter.com/unidosus).

