

TMI BRIEFS SEPTEMBER 2020

EDUCATION FOR ALL

An equity approach to
teaching and learning
during the COVID-19
pandemic and beyond

LDF
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The COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating pre-existing inequalities in our educational system. The spring 2020 school closings threaten to have the most negative impact on the children who are already the most disadvantaged. The closures have magnified educational disparities between students and between schools, further limiting learning opportunities for Black, Latinx, and low-income students because many of these students do not have what is needed to participate fully in distance learning. Also, many of these children and their families have disproportionately borne the adverse health and economic effects of the pandemic, resulting in higher rates and more severe forms of trauma. Finally, the economic impact of COVID-19 threatens to increase the funding inequities between high-poverty and low-poverty schools, leaving many Black, Latinx, and low-income students with even fewer educational resources than before the pandemic.

We cannot afford to return to school as usual in the fall; our students both need and deserve something better. Education researchers, Sally Nuamah, Ryan Good, Ariel Bierbaum, and Elaine Simon, who specialize in studying school closures, have addressed these concerns in their call to action:

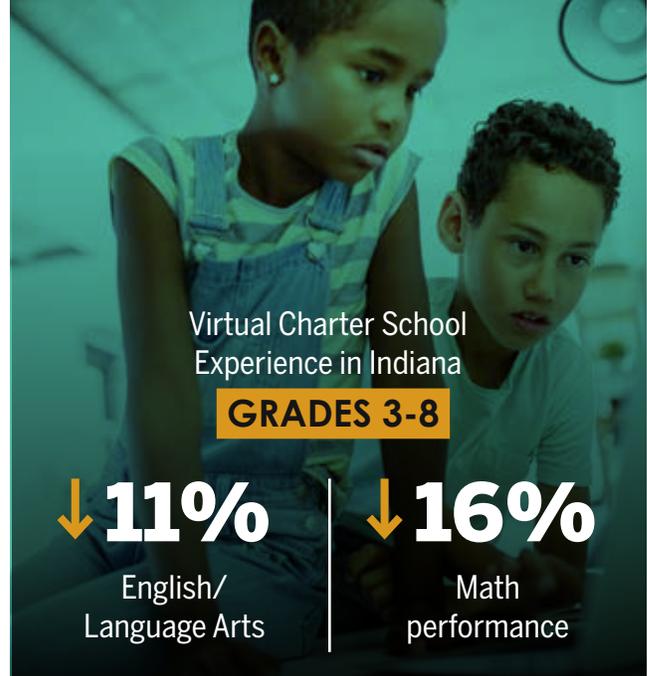
“[W]e call on districts and the public to judge schools on their broader civic and social purposes. We urge school districts and the public to think creatively, not only about how to make up for loss of learning but also loss of social, mental, and physical-health support that schools provide every day in lieu of an adequate social safety net.”¹

Here we outline the educational deficits that are anticipated based on school closings and place them in the fuller context of the structural inequalities that mar our educational system. We discuss the impact of childhood trauma expected to flow from the school closures and other measures implemented during the pandemic and how school district plans for reopening can mitigate this trauma. We discuss instructional and curriculum strategies that can help students most impacted by the overlay of the pandemic on pre-existing inequity. Finally, we set out recommendations for school districts reopening that address safety, trauma, and equity.

The COVID Slide

Three consistent findings of seasonal, often summer break, learning research can help us estimate how much the COVID-19 school closures have limited students learning. We know from seasonal learning research that (1) students experience a decline in learning when out of school, (2) this learning loss is more significant in math than reading, and (3) the proportion of learning loss increases in the upper grades.² Unlike the summer, the school closures during the pandemic included attempts to facilitate distance learning. While the format and effectiveness of distance learning vary, researchers have modeled two potential scenarios for COVID-19 school closures. The first is a COVID Slowdown where students maintained the same level of academic achievement as attained at the beginning of the school closures, without making the additional gains expected from in-person schooling. The second is a COVID Slide where students experienced a learning loss during the period of distance learning that is similar to the learning loss during summers out of school. A COVID Slowdown projects minimal learning loss, but the estimates of a COVID Slide project that students are likely to experience a 30% learning loss overall with a 50% or higher learning loss in math.³ Like the differential pattern in summer, children in more affluent households are likely to experience less learning loss due to the additional resources these families have to support their children's education.⁴

Virtual schools produce less effective outcomes than in-person schooling.⁵ In a study of virtual charter schools serving students in Indiana in grades 3–8, participation produced an 11% loss in English/Language Arts and a 16%



loss in Math performance on statewide standardized tests within the first year.⁶ The learning loss experienced by students switching to distance learning mid-year due to the pandemic may be comparable to learning loss associated with full-time online public schools, or worse.⁷ It may be worse because the quick transition to distance learning in response to the pandemic left many teachers unprepared for successful online learning. A recent survey of teachers found only 14% had “a great deal of experience” with remote instruction before the pandemic, and 44% listed the “challenge of moving instruction from the classroom to online” as a severe obstacle to implementing distance learning effectively.⁸

The disruption in education, as well as the social and emotional disturbance from the pandemic, suggests that students will require more academic and social-emotional supports in the upcoming school year and beyond. However, many Black, Latinx, and low-income students were already in schools and classrooms that pre-pandemic failed to provide them with a quality education. Thus, reopening schools without paying attention to issues of equity will only exacerbate the challenges these students face.

Pre-COVID Educational Inequity

Focusing on racial disparities in educational achievement often leads people to think that the factors causing these differences are deficits in students rather than the educational system that serves them.⁹ An analysis of the opportunity gap draws attention to inequalities in students' access to high-quality educational environments that generate differences in educational attainment. As Christina Samuels, the Educational Equity Project Editor for Education Week concludes:

“Too often, students who come to school with the most needs, such as students from low-income families or historically marginalized groups such as African Americans and Hispanics, get less than students from other backgrounds: less chance to be taught by highly qualified teachers, less access to rigorous coursework, less opportunity to see their cultural backgrounds embraced and valued.”¹⁰

Acknowledging the opportunity gap demands that we affirm the value and potential of every student and restructure schooling in a manner that is more equitable for all.¹¹

Overall, students that are White, Asian, and non-poor have better opportunities to learn than students who are Black, Latinx, and students who live in poverty. At all levels of school poverty, White students have greater access to quality educators than any other race/ethnic group. Within high-poverty schools, Black students' access to quality

educators is eight percentage points lower than White students.¹² Racial differences in access to high-quality learning environments cannot be explained away by economic differences.¹³ Black students who are non-poor have fewer opportunities to access enriching learning environments than their White and Asian peers, and students who are both Black and low-income have even fewer opportunities.¹⁴

Schools that primarily serve Black and Latinx students typically had overcrowded classrooms before COVID-19.¹⁵ For example, in Michigan, one in four Black 9th graders are in classes with 40 or more students for at least one core academic subject, which is twice the rate of Latinx students, and more than three times that of White students. Black and Latinx students are in high-poverty schools at twice the rate of the overall student population. In contrast, White students are in high-poverty schools at only one-fourth the rate of the total student population.¹⁶ In every state, more than 90% of teachers buy unreimbursed classroom supplies, spending a national average of \$459 per year.¹⁷ Unreimbursed teacher spending is higher in high-poverty schools, where teachers spend \$523 per year to provide supplies for students.¹⁸

Black and Latinx students are more likely to experience homelessness compared to students of other racial and ethnic groups.¹⁹ Homelessness creates significant hurdles to academic success.²⁰ Homeless students are less likely to reach grade level proficiency standards before high school and less likely to graduate on time than their housed peers.²¹

Post-COVID: Magnified Educational Inequality

COVID-19 has the potential to exacerbate pre-existing inequities apparent by race and income. The order to “stay at home” assumes access to shelter or a fixed housing location and a parent or adult at home for supervision. These orders increased the challenges for students who depend on the support of their local schools and community centers. For many children, schools provide a safe place for students to learn during the day, adequate supervision, technology, internet access, and free school meals. The shelter at home orders surfaced additional public health challenges for students who experience housing instability. The number of homeless students will likely increase due to job instability and unemployment related to the virus.

UNEQUAL ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY FOR DISTANCE LEARNING

The transition to distance learning has magnified the educational inequalities embedded in U.S. schools and society. In 2018, 25% of school districts had less than one technological device per student.²² A new weekly survey collected by the U.S. Census Bureau reveals that despite our efforts to expand access to technology and broadband service during the spring of 2020,

many students continue to lack the resources to participate in distance learning. Twelve percent of the low-income households surveyed reported that their children do not have a device available for distance learning, and almost 10% of them stated that their student does not have access to the internet.²³ Students who live with unemployed adults in households experiencing food insecurity and those living in more impoverished states are even less likely to have the resources needed for online learning.²⁴

Because of pre-existing resource inequities, remote learning disadvantages students living in poverty and rural areas most. An Educators for Excellence poll found that teachers at schools where two-thirds or more students were living in poverty were the least likely to use e-learning tools.²⁵ The survey also found that 41% of teachers in high-poverty schools believed “students’ lack of necessary technology skills” to be a “very serious” obstacle in implementing distance learning.²⁶ Nationally, Black students are more likely than all other racial groups to lack the resources needed for online instruction. Among Black households surveyed, 9% reported that their children rarely or never have access to a device for learning, which was 4% higher than all other racial groups.²⁷

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↑ **4%**

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DISPARITIES IN TRAUMA

COVID-19, like other natural disasters, can cause serious psychological harm to students resulting from loss of home and possessions, grief from the death of loved ones, seeing parents/caregivers under stress, neglect or abuse associated with increased parental stress, social isolation, as well as disruptions in social networks and local economies.²⁸ Trauma impacts children and adolescents both through the event trauma (negative stressors associated with the event itself) and process trauma (ongoing disorder and disruption of daily life resulting from the experience).²⁹ Three months after Hurricane Andrew, 54% of 3rd to 5th graders showed moderate to severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).³⁰

Given that COVID-19 disproportionately adversely impacts racial minority and low-income communities,³¹ students from these communities are more likely to be severely impacted by trauma. Black and Latinx communities are also more likely to experience more intense exposure to the damaging impacts of COVID-19. Increases in the severity of exposure to traumatic events are associated with heightened harmful effects on mental health.³² A survey of adolescent teens revealed that 74% of Black students and 87% of Latinx students worried about the impact of COVID-19 on their families compared to 56% of White students.³³

Students will likely return to school after the pandemic with acute trauma that will negatively impact their academic performance and behavior at school. Students experiencing trauma perform worse in all academic subjects at all grade levels.³⁴ Students experiencing severe trauma resulting in a diagnosis of PTSD performed even lower academically than their

non-PTSD peers.³⁵ Students with PTSD showed a three times greater average academic decrease than those without PTSD symptoms. In addition to decreased academic performance and ability to concentrate, children experienced a range of psychological and physical signs of distress in their post-disaster recovery period. These symptoms included increased fear, guilt, physical complaints, hypervigilance, withdrawal, anger, denial, aggression, delinquency, and in the most extreme cases, increases in suicide attempts.³⁶

Students were less engaged with teachers and received less social-emotional support precisely during the time that they were experiencing increased trauma. Less than 25% of surveyed schools reported they were meeting students' mental health needs at the same level as before distance learning brought on by the pandemic.³⁷ The rate was worse for urban schools, with less than 5% reporting similar levels of mental health support for students.³⁸

As we prepare to reopen schools, we can expect that all students will have experienced some degree of trauma that is likely to impact their learning and behavior in school. This trauma will likely be more severe and ongoing for Black, Latinx, and low-income students.

TEEN SURVEY



worried about the impact of COVID-19 on their families compared to **56%** of White students

COST OF COVID SLIDE AT THE INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY LEVEL

Estimates of the COVID Slide suggest that some students may have lost up to 50% of their usual academic school year learning.³⁹ A Brookings Institute blog post highlighting their recent research indicates that students enrolled in kindergarten through undergraduate will earn an estimated \$33,500 less per student (in today's dollars) throughout their careers because of lost schooling during the coronavirus crisis.⁴⁰ The researchers suggest that entering the labor force instead of pursuing a college education drives most of this income loss.⁴¹

Projections of individual academic and earnings loss assume that students can quickly recover from the school closures and that the learning loss does not extend into the upcoming academic year and beyond. However, the trauma that students have experienced suggests that, without proper supports, Black, Latinx, and low-income students will continue to have restricted opportunities to learn in the upcoming years. Unaddressed trauma interferes with academic learning and makes students more vulnerable to punitive school discipline policies that further alienate and remove them from schooling.⁴² Students experiencing trauma are more likely to be suspended from school, and the pattern of school suspensions increases their likelihood of dropping out of high school.⁴³ Again, the student's race influences the relationship between trauma and high school dropout rates. Black students with a childhood diagnosis of trauma-related disorders were more likely to drop out of high school than their similarly diagnosed White peers.⁴⁴

We can heed the valuable lessons about promoting educational equity amidst an economic crisis by learning from the federal

STUDENTS WILL EARN

↓ **\$33,500**

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response to education funding in the wake of the Great Recession. During the 2009 recession, teacher layoffs occurred disproportionately in schools serving students of color and low-income students. Such schools employ a higher share of junior teachers, who are more likely to be laid off under last-in, first-out policies. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 ("ARRA"), passed by Congress in response to the Great Recession, provided approximately \$100 billion in federal funding for education.⁴⁵ These ARRA grants successfully stabilized school district budgets during the state and local funding shortfall, saving nearly 275,000 education jobs.⁴⁶ However, federal aid ran out before the economy recovered, causing many states to address continuing budget shortfalls by cutting education spending.⁴⁷

Experts critique ARRA for failing to direct funding to the districts where it was needed most. Congress apportioned ARRA funds in almost equal per-pupil allocations without regard for pre-existing funding imbalances among communities.⁴⁸ As a result, "ARRA did not mitigate—and, in some cases, exacerbated—the spending gap between districts most and least adversely affected" by the recession.⁴⁹ Flat budget cuts across districts disproportionately affect vulnerable students because their schools have less capacity to buffer funding losses without hurting crucial programming.⁵⁰



How Do We Reopen Schools Safely, Effectively, and Equitably?

Schools are an essential part of a post-COVID-19 recovery for both students and society and should return to in-person schooling as soon as it is safe to do so. Ensuring the physical and emotional safety of students is foundational for schools and a prerequisite for students' ability to engage in academic learning. An equity-based approach to teaching will enable us to address the trauma that students are experiencing, the COVID Slide learning loss, as well as the pre-existing racial and class inequalities in education. School reopening plans must consider the extent of the virus in the community and include the ability to follow public health guidelines around safety protocols. Until it is safe for all students to receive in-person schooling, schools should prioritize instruction in school buildings for students in K–6, students with disabilities, and students who do not have resources to participate in online learning. Elementary students and students with special needs who are receiving in-person schooling will need developmentally appropriate instruction in school safety protocols.

Schools should consider equity in all decisions made about budget, staffing, curriculum, and student services. Focusing state and school district budget cuts on more affluent areas will enable school districts to maintain spending levels for students with the greatest need. Wealthier communities rely less on state funding and can more easily make up funding shortfalls from property taxes. Ohio Governor Mike DeWine has already taken this approach, cutting only 1% of state funding (\$109 per student) from Cleveland's school district, where the vast majority of students are low-income, while cutting 40% of state funding (\$302 per student) from Solon, a wealthy Cleveland suburb.⁵¹

Black, Latinx, and low-income students deserve to have access to a diverse, highly qualified faculty. Given the critical role that faculty play in the academic success and well-being of students, these teachers need proper resources so that they can do their jobs effectively. Valuable teacher resources include

incentivized retention and recruitment programs; high-quality professional development in online learning, trauma-informed care, and culturally relevant pedagogy; a safe and inclusive school climate grounded in the principles of restorative justice; and expanded mental health counselors, nurses, and social workers to help meet the needs of students and their families. Additional funding, especially for high poverty schools, is necessary to ensure that schools can provide these critical resources.

PROTECTING HEALTH AND SAFETY IN SCHOOLS

Safety, both physical and psychological, is a critical component of adjustment post-trauma. Schools are an essential site for reaffirming safety.⁵² By using the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”) recommendations to restructure the physical and social organization of schools, we are protecting the health and safety of students, staff, and the broader community. Schools should give the highest priority to both creating practices to protect student safety and communicating the science and rationale behind these procedures to address students’ fears about infecting themselves or their loved ones. School reopening plans should explicitly identify methods to continue parental, school staff, and community engagement and involvement in decision-making. Districts should make specific efforts to ensure non-English speaking parents are fully informed and able to participate in such collaborative decision-making.

Local public health data on the extent of the disease’s community spread and early CDC guidance should inform the decision to open or close schools. School staff should be involved

in decision-making regarding school reopening so that we can protect their rights to a safe and healthy working environment. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) released a 22-page road map for safely reopening in-person schooling after a decline in the local number of new COVID-19 cases for at least 14 straight days.⁵³

Once community spread is low enough to consider reopening, there are numerous measures that school districts can undertake to ensure that opening will be safe. International examples of school opening make clear that when students return to school, they should be separated as much as possible to reduce the risk of spreading the contagion.⁵⁴ The public health guidance is abundantly clear: social distancing, handwashing, and face coverings are essential to reducing the spread of COVID-19. Community facilities, like schools, must be frequently and thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.⁵⁵ The federal government needs to allocate additional funding to ensure that all schools can make the necessary adjustments for proper airflow and filtration, clean running water, and have the required custodial and teaching staff to implement social distancing guidance.⁵⁶ The plan to reopen schools should also ensure that students have safe transportation to and from school. Policies guiding school-operated transit⁵⁷ and public transit should incorporate social distancing guidelines.

Other recommendations in the AFT road map include: broad testing and contact tracing, handwashing stations, symptom screening for students and staff, daily school sanitization, personal protective equipment (“PPE”) for teachers and support staff, smaller class sizes, split scheduling to limit the number of students present inside the buildings, and staggered arrival times and meal times, with students potentially

eating in classrooms.⁵⁸ The report also calls for protections for at-risk staff and students, as well as considerations and added funding for students with underlying conditions, disabilities, and special-education requirements.⁵⁹

Schools should allocate more in-person time to students in the greatest need of in-person instruction. Prioritized students should include younger students, students who cannot access online learning, and students whose IEPs mandate services and accommodations not easily transferred into a distance learning format. Students in grades K–2 learn more during the school year than children in subsequent grades.⁶⁰ In a forecast model, researchers predict the most significant learning loss from COVID-19 in the 3rd grade, followed by more moderate deficits in 4th, 5th, and 6th grades.⁶¹ Finally, research on distance learning suggests that younger students have more trouble processing content delivered online, even if delivery is synchronous.⁶² Synchronous instruction refers to live teaching when students interact with teachers and peers in real-time through videoconferencing platforms like Google Meet. Synchronous instruction is most similar to in-person instruction, allowing

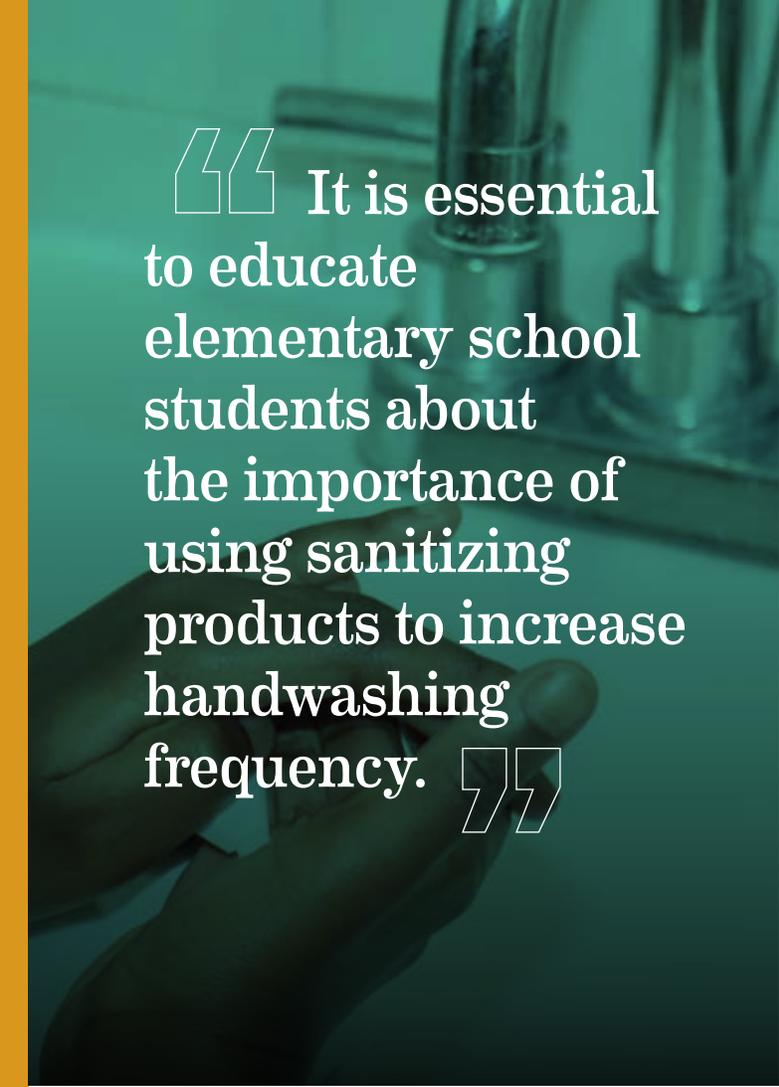
for immediate feedback about learning as well as promoting social interaction and collaboration among students. Asynchronous instruction occurs when teachers provide video recordings, or other instructional materials, uploaded onto a digital platform (i.e., Google Classroom) that students can access at any time.

The CDC states that school administrators should communicate, educate, and reinforce appropriate public safety measures in a developmentally appropriate way.⁶³ Children can feel scared of face coverings because they are unable to see smiles or expressions to put them at ease.⁶⁴ Children need time to practice wearing masks. Teachers can help children make or decorate their face coverings to help them feel ownership and control. With younger children, it may be essential to introduce a sense of play to ease tension.

Teachers can also build lessons and reminders into the school day to ensure that students are following healthy practices. It is essential to educate elementary school students about the importance of using sanitizing products to increase handwashing frequency.⁶⁵ Schools can make it easy for students to practice healthy

“**Teachers can help children make or decorate their face coverings to help them feel ownership and control.**”





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hygiene by making spray bottles or disinfectant wipes available in classrooms. Studies have consistently found that scheduled handwashing programs reduce the spread of illnesses in elementary school students.⁶⁶ Classes that received alcohol-based hand sanitizer and quaternary ammonium wipes to disinfect classroom surfaces daily for eight weeks reduced illness-related absenteeism in elementary school students.⁶⁷ While both soap and hand sanitizers are effective at reducing the spread of viruses, hand sanitizers may be more beneficial because students often prefer them.⁶⁸

ADDRESSING TRAUMA IN SCHOOLS

A growing body of trauma research shows that school-based approaches can be instrumental in helping students recover from trauma.⁶⁹ Schools should integrate a trauma-informed approach into both in-person and online instruction. Trauma-informed care in schools should include evidence-based practices, such as professional development training and support of teachers as front-line workers of trauma-informed care; the expansion of school mental health counselors and professionals responsible for social-emotional learning; a two-staged approach to addressing trauma in students, including screening and supports for students with more severe trauma; and a restructuring of school discipline policies including the removal of police assigned to work in schools as School Resource Officers (SRO).

Teachers and schools are a part of the “natural circle of support” for school-age children and their families.⁷⁰ In a study of students displaced by Hurricane Katrina, students were more likely to seek needed help from schools than social service agencies.⁷¹ Students who have supportive relationships with teachers also experienced greater psychological well-being after a traumatic event than those students who do not have such supports.⁷² Fifty-one percent of the displaced students in the study talked with teachers about problems they were having adjusting to their new lives.⁷³ Those students who received positive support from teachers showed greater health satisfaction, less physical discomfort, higher self-esteem, took fewer risks, showed better problem-solving skills, and greater family involvement.⁷⁴ However, students who asked for help from teachers but did not find the teachers supportive experienced worse outcomes than students who did not ask for help at all.⁷⁵ Positive

teacher-student relationships predict both higher academic achievement and fewer disciplinary problems.⁷⁶

Because teachers are a primary source of emotional support for students, school administrations should engage teachers in planning interventions to promote students' social and emotional well-being. They should also provide teachers with the needed support to fulfill their critical role in helping students navigate these demanding circumstances.⁷⁷ This support for teachers could include professional development, resources on social-emotional learning, and teacher support groups to exchange ideas and provide social support for one another. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, teacher professional development for both in-person and online instruction⁷⁸ should focus on effective trauma-informed care, culturally relevant pedagogy, and successful online learning.

Schools should also invest in school-based mental health providers proven to improve school climate and safety, such as counselors, nurses, social workers, and psychologists.⁷⁹ Counseling and mental health services lead to improved attendance and graduation rates and fewer disciplinary incidents, suspensions, and expulsions.⁸⁰ In managing tighter education budgets expected under the pandemic, it is crucial to prioritize funding for equity and resources that are known to be integral for students' academic success. Hence, schools should reinvest funds for SROs into teacher and counselor salaries and supportive services for students. Zero studies have found that SROs make schools safer, and the harms of police in schools are well-documented.⁸¹ Research on students displaced by Hurricane Katrina suggests that students who return to school after experiencing trauma often display PTSD symptoms such as

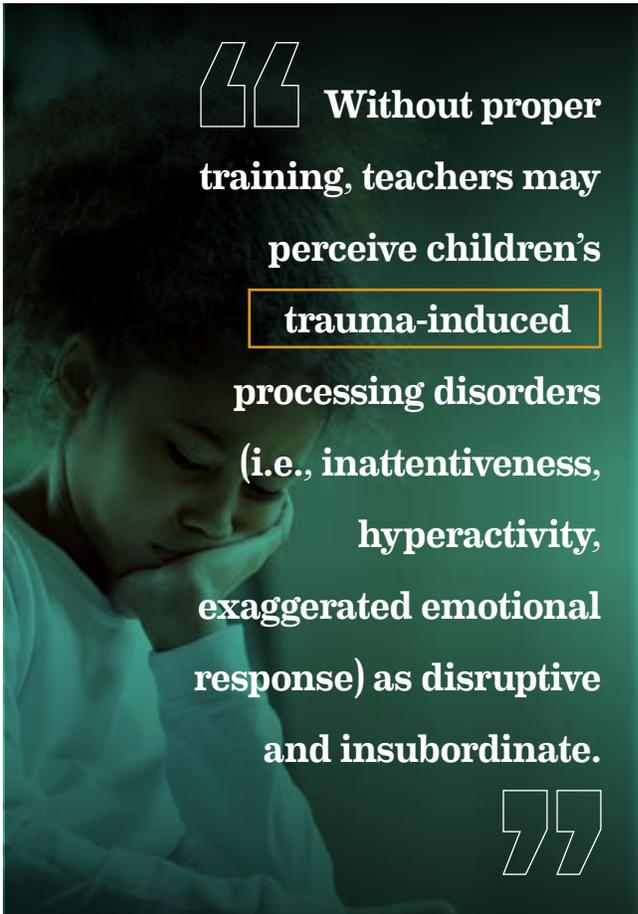
“ Because teachers are a primary source of emotional support for students, school administrations should engage teachers in planning interventions to promote students' social and emotional well-being. ”

anxiety and depression.⁸² Due to a “scarcity of mental health providers available for displaced students” following Hurricane Katrina, schools often responded to students’ symptoms with classroom discipline, rather than diagnosing and treating “psychological, stress-related problems.”⁸³ Rather than repeat this mistake, schools should expand mental health counseling and other socio-emotional support for students.

Teachers and counselors trained in trauma-informed care can help schools implement a two-stage approach toward addressing trauma. This approach involves a curriculum-based intervention delivered to all students, followed by specialized targeted help for students who have PTSD.⁸⁴ The intervention should be evidence-based, avoid direct processing of traumatic events, focus on building resiliency, and incorporate the cultural values and meaning systems of student communities.⁸⁵ An example is the ERASE Stress curriculum evaluated in a quasi-randomized control study of students recovering from the tsunami disaster in Sri Lanka. This curriculum covered the following topics: Understanding the Stress Continuum, Strengthening Your Personal Resources, Inhabiting Your Body, Knowing Your Feelings, Controlling Your Emotions with Your Mind, Dealing with Fears, Dealing with Anger and Rage, Coping with Grief and Loss, Building a Social Shield, Boosting Your Self-Esteem, Turning Crisis into an Opportunity, and Seeking a Better Future, and was shown to produce a significant reduction in PTSD severity, functional problems, somatic complaints, and depression, as well as an improvement in hope.⁸⁶ Alongside this universal intervention, school districts should also enact a series of social-emotional screening measures. These screenings should be administered by school counselors and followed with school therapy sessions by school personnel specially trained in trauma-informed care.⁸⁷

When school discipline policies and practices are not trauma-informed, students run the risk of being retraumatized, denied opportunities to learn, and referred to the criminal justice system at higher rates.⁸⁸ Students experiencing unaddressed trauma are likely to exhibit behaviors that create problems for them in school and increase their likelihood of school suspensions and dropping out of high school.⁸⁹ Without proper training, teachers may perceive children’s trauma-induced processing disorders (i.e., inattentiveness, hyperactivity, exaggerated emotional response) as disruptive and insubordinate.⁹⁰ Schools with higher rates of suspensions and expulsions have a lower quality school climate and school governance as well as a higher proportion of teacher and administrator time focused on discipline.⁹¹

Black students are overrepresented in school suspensions and expulsions, regardless of their socioeconomic status or actual rates of violence/disruption.⁹² Racialized perceptions and practices of school educators and administrators are often the cause of racial disparities in suspensions



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and expulsions. Research indicates that Black students are likely to be disciplined more severely for less severe behavior and for more subjective reasons.⁹³ Some of the institutional characteristics associated with differences in discipline rates of students of color are a lack of teacher preparation in classroom management, lack of training in culturally competent practices, and racial stereotypes.⁹⁴ Given the existing problems associated with school discipline policies and the likely increase in trauma-related behavior problems post-COVID-19, schools should use trauma-informed care to rethink both curricular and discipline practices to best address students' unmet needs.

Thus, it is wise for school districts to place a moratorium on school suspensions and adopt an evidence-based practice to reduce school suspensions and improve school climate through a multi-tiered system of support model.⁹⁵ Over 600 school districts in California implemented this framework and showed demonstrable success in addressing students' learning and behavioral needs through a variety of non-punitive, educational interventions.⁹⁶ Such programs show promise in helping students feel more connected to each other and the school.

EQUITY APPROACHES TO INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT

Education should not depend on the knowledge of White, middle-class culture. Equity-based instruction establishes a learning environment that does not unfairly privilege middle class, White students, and unfairly penalize students from different racial and economic backgrounds.⁹⁷ Teaching and assessments that do not consider equity and privilege and that

validate certain types of learning over others can undermine the confidence of diverse learners. Some promising equity-based strategies to correct this process and create high-quality learning environments, both online and in-person, are listed below:

EQUITY-BASED INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

1. culturally relevant pedagogy;
2. complex instruction;
3. culturally responsive assessments;
4. evidence-based math and literacy intervention;
5. teacher looping;
6. technology devices and support; and
7. a combination of synchronous and asynchronous instruction.

Culturally relevant pedagogy aims to “produce students who can achieve academically... demonstrate cultural competence, and develop students who can both understand and critique the existing social order.”⁹⁸ In culturally responsive pedagogy, teachers draw upon aspects of students' cultures as a resource to make the course material relevant to them, increase their skill acquisition and engagement, as well as to improve student learning outcomes.⁹⁹

Complex instruction builds upon the principles of culturally relevant pedagogy and social-emotional learning by creating cooperative and diverse student workgroups.¹⁰⁰ Complex instruction is consistent with the recommendation from Chiefs for Change, a

nonprofit, bipartisan network of diverse state and district education chiefs. They recommend that secondary students return to small mentored groups for both *in-person* and *online schooling* in the upcoming year.¹⁰¹ In this model, students are assembled in groups of 12 or less and assigned a teacher as a mentor. A highly qualified teacher with a demonstrated record of excellence instructs large groups of students. At the same time, teacher-mentors facilitate deeper learning through small group discussions about the course material with their assigned students.¹⁰² This model allows both students and teachers to learn from master teachers and provides students with the opportunity to develop trusting relationships with peers and faculty.

Culturally responsive assessment engages students (i.e., identity, culture, and everyday experiences) throughout the entire assessment process, including the development of learning outcomes, the development of the assessment tool, data collection and interpretation, and the use of results.¹⁰³

Culturally responsive assessment is: mindful of the student populations the institution serves, using language that is appropriate for all students when developing learning outcomes, acknowledging students' differences in the planning phases of an assessment effort, developing and/or using assessment tools that are appropriate for different students, and being intentional in using assessment results to improve learning for all students.¹⁰⁴

A recent initiative of the National Science Foundation, The Advancing Coherent and Equitable Systems of Science Education Project, engaged educators to create culturally responsive instructional and assessment resources. These resources use students' cultural knowledge and everyday experiences to learn the scientific concepts embedded in the state's core curriculum for public schools.¹⁰⁵

Schools should provide all students with culturally responsive diagnostic assessments at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year as well as an instructional plan to address pivotal learning gaps. Because the COVID-19 learning loss has not been measured, teachers will need to assess students returning to school immediately, either formally or informally, to gauge their academic needs. Because learning requires building on prior knowledge, teachers must be able to plan based on what students know already.¹⁰⁶ Culturally responsive assessments should be used throughout the year to help teachers and students more accurately monitor what students learned and what still needs to be acquired.

Given that we expect math to be a subject of significant learning loss from the COVID Slide and that math is already a subject of substantial inequity in achievement, school districts should identify an evidence-based math intervention program. Literacy and math instruction in small groups with multi-tiered systems of support are useful strategies to address learning loss from school closures. Expanded learning time (i.e., summer school, after-school, Saturday school, year-round schooling) can also substantially shrink learning gaps caused by the COVID Slide. Research shows that ten additional days of math instruction can reduce the Black-White learning gap by 25%.¹⁰⁷

Where appropriate, schools should plan for teacher looping – assigning students to the same teacher for a second time – as an attempt to address learning loss due to school closures. Teacher looping has demonstrated benefits on student performance. One recent study of elementary school students found that it produced test score gains. These gains were more pronounced among minority students and benefited students across all grades and subjects.¹⁰⁸ Teacher looping also increases student motivation and students’ perception of control over academic performance.¹⁰⁹

All students may not be able to attend in-person schooling safely, and schools may need to transition to distance learning for individual students, classrooms, or the entire school based on COVID-19 transmissions. Thus, schools should ensure that every student in every grade level has access to a personal computer and high-speed internet. School administrators should survey families in the district to better understand and address their technology needs. Schools should

regularly access and make public the percentage of students who have a computer and high-speed internet for online instruction. A technology help desk would also help support quality online learning by providing students and their families with technical support.¹¹⁰

Whenever used, online learning should maximize synchronous and asynchronous learning. States are encouraging asynchronous over synchronous learning to accommodate households with many family members with competing needs and few devices.¹¹¹ However, the research on synchronous distance learning suggests that students prefer synchronous learning for greater understanding, comprehension, and social and collaborative reasons.¹¹² Schools may choose to deliver online learning through synchronous instruction and facilitated discussion with students by their classroom teachers combined with asynchronous lessons and resources aligned with the local school curriculum that students can review at a time most convenient for them.



Schools should ensure that every student in every grade level has access to a personal computer and high-speed internet.

Summary of Recommended Practices

We affirm the superior benefit of in-person schooling¹¹³ and would like every child to have access to this resource as soon as it is safe to do so. Students will return to the classroom, whether online or in-person, with more significant needs than when schools closed in the spring of 2020. To effectively address the needs of all students and provide them with the high-quality education they deserve, schools must ensure that their reopening plans address issues of safety, trauma, and equity.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to reopening schools. The rate and intensity of COVID-19 infection is affecting various regions of the country differently. States and cities have taken different approaches to closures, testing, mask-wearing requirements, and quarantines. Thus, any plans to reopen schools must consider the particular dangers to children and school personnel in regions where the infection rates are significant and/or on the rise. School administrators should consider the health and developmental needs of students and teachers as well as their social context and the needs of their families and caregivers in deciding how to reopen schools safely in person. Such an approach will require thoughtful, collaborative planning, and additional resources for school districts. Overall, such decisions must be made based on the input and wisdom of families, teachers, and community partners. Communities should create listening spaces where there is open communication between educators and the communities they serve about how students can best be served.

Because of the vast inequalities that still plague our educational system, plans to reopen schools must also give due regard to existing

racial and socioeconomic disparities in school districts across states. We must ensure that under-resourced school districts are provided with the tools and funding needed to meet the challenges of educating children safely in school, and to provide quality, meaningful online instruction as needed. Schools must develop the capacity to seamlessly transfer individual students, classes, or the entire student body between in-person and online schooling without significant disruption in their education. Thus, we recommend that all schools prepare for blended learning in the upcoming school year. Given the high rates of community spread across the nation and roving waves of infection, blended learning may include a subset of students attending school in person while others learn online, as well as some portion of the year that is entirely virtual and some segment that is fully in-person.

“ There is no one-size-fits-all approach to reopening schools. The rate and intensity of COVID-19 infection is affecting various regions of the country differently. ”

The following is a summary of the steps necessary to ensure that virtual and in-person teaching is high-quality, equitable, and responsive to the social and emotional needs of students.

1 **Increase Federal Funding for Public Schools** (see discussion on pages 6–8).

Schools will need significant resources to address the needs of students returning to the classroom. It is essential that the federal government provide additional educational funding, ensure that the funds are distributed to support students with the highest needs, and institute robust oversight measures to encourage transparency and accountability.

2 **Protect Public Health** (see discussion on pages 8–10). When the coronavirus is sufficiently contained to allow for full or partial school reopening of in-person schooling, schools must ensure the physical safety of all students, staff, and communities. **The experience of school reopening in Israel and in some counties in the South where the community spread is high has demonstrated that reopening schools too soon may lead to dangerous school-based outbreaks of the coronavirus.**¹⁴ The decision about how to reopen school buildings and the necessary safety protocols to do so must draw upon public health guidance and local data about the spread of COVID-19.

3 **Address Student Trauma and Social and Emotional Learning** (see discussion on pages 10–13).

For students to succeed academically, schools must have the necessary resources to mitigate the stress and trauma stemming from the pandemic. Distance and in-person learning must promote positive school climates that meet the social and emotional needs of students. School staff must respond to behavioral problems with student supports instead of exclusionary discipline practices. Trauma-informed care should be integrated into both online and in-person schooling to meet the mental health needs of students and to create a positive and healthy school culture. School districts should institute a moratorium on all suspensions and modify school discipline policies to be trauma-informed and supportive. Schools should divert staff resources from school resource officers (police) to nurses, counselors, social workers, and school psychologists.

4 Use an Equity-based Approach to Instruction and Assessment (see discussion on pages 13–15). Schools must redesign instruction and assessment to engage culturally relevant pedagogy and address learning loss. Assessments must rely less on high stakes testing, and instead emphasize culturally relevant diagnostic tools to identify areas of need and performance-based assessments that engage students and allow them to demonstrate their learning. Schools should have specific strategies and additional resources to address the expected COVID-19 learning loss for the most vulnerable students, including teacher looping and high-dosage tutoring.¹¹⁵ Online instruction should involve synchronous instruction so that students can interact with teachers, as well as small groups and group projects that foster intergroup interaction.

5 Ensure Equitable Access to School Resources During COVID-19 School Closures (see discussion on pages 12–15). When in-person instruction is not safe, all students must have access to: 1) essential school-based services including meals, 2) high-quality distance learning, including high-speed broadband internet, appropriate equipment, technology support, and 3) culturally-responsive instruction. States should regularly track and report on student access to high-speed broadband internet and equipment necessary for distance learning, disaggregated by race, gender, household income, and disability status. Teachers should receive additional professional development and continued support required to deliver high-quality distance learning instruction. Schools should address absenteeism in ways that do not punish students but rather reconnect them to schools by identifying barriers and providing necessary supports to students and their families.¹¹⁶

6 Safeguard Workplace Protections in Schools (see discussion on page 6). Educator safety, retention, and training must be a priority for all school districts. Educators, especially those in under-resourced, high-poverty schools and with experience working with students of color, should be protected from layoffs and forced retirement in order to lower the likelihood that vulnerable students will lose access to high-quality teachers. The prevention of teacher shortages is essential to implement potentially life-saving measures, such as smaller class sizes, and to avoid further widening of the opportunity gap.

“Educators, especially those in under-resourced, high-poverty schools and with experience working with students of color, should be protected from layoffs and forced retirement to lower the likelihood that vulnerable students will lose access to high-quality teachers.”

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