

RESTART & RECOVERY: CONSIDERATIONS FOR TEACHING & LEARNING OVERVIEW

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PURPOSE

Extended school closures shined a spotlight on the persistent inequities students—particularly those most vulnerable—experience each day. Recent racial injustices and unrest have made the experiences of students and communities of color even more salient. While this moment brings challenges, it also offers the potential to rebuild education systems and schools that actively redress racial and other inequities. Returning to business as usual is not an option.

This project is designed to support states and school systems in addressing the critical set of challenges they will face as they plan for—and restart—teaching and learning in the 2020-2021 school year (SY21) amid the COVID-19 pandemic. It consists of customizable guidance and vetted resources designed to:

- Support school systems as they thoughtfully plan for a strong launch and school year in a rapidly shifting environment and prioritize equity for all learners—especially the most vulnerable; and
- Help states jump-start the process of providing teaching and learning guidance to their school systems.

This series of supports has been assembled in consultation with state leaders, school system leaders, and other educators and experts. It is free and may be repurposed to meet various needs.

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GUIDANCE GOALS

State and school system leaders are faced with a host of daunting new questions to answer and decisions to be made before schools can reopen. The goal of this guidance is, therefore, to be clear and straightforward. Returning to school will be a time to focus on:

- Supporting the wellbeing, including the mental health, of students and staff and encouraging meaningful connections;
- Keeping learning coherent, focusing on the highest priorities for each grade level and content area, and moving forward apace—whether learning is occurring in person, remotely, or is a hybrid of the two;
- Meeting the needs of each student, including those most vulnerable, and recovering lost learning across remote and in-person contexts;
- Aligning teaching roles, responsibilities, and structures to the new reality of teaching and learning; and
- Designing schedules that accommodate this new reality, including new protocols consistent with public health guidance, and that prioritize vulnerable student populations, including structures for continuing learning and ensuring equity in remote environments.

This guidance, which is considered a starting point, is to provide:

- Clear questions to guide local decision-making;
- Actionable plans informed by leading practitioners and experts;
- Curated and vetted tools and resources; and
- Easily customizable, adaptable documents.

EXTERNAL REALITIES

Several assumptions about the SY21 drive this work and are important to understand. Together, they paint a picture of a fluid situation that will remain manageable only with clear-sighted planning.

- The COVID-19 pandemic and extended school closures have had a disproportionate impact on students and communities of color. Responses to COVID-19 have exacerbated inequities that were already present in the system and created additional challenges for families. Schools will have to explicitly prioritize equity for all learners—particularly those most vulnerable, including students from low-income families, students of color, students with special needs, homeless youth, and students learning English—to help mitigate the impact of school closures on students who were already struggling to learn.
- Schools will have to plan for constant change throughout SY21. The reopening of states' economies is unlikely to follow a trajectory of slow and steady progress. Rather, recovery is more likely to look like a wave, where communities take two steps forward then hold for several weeks, before taking another three steps forward, then holding again. When virus transmission rates rise, communities may go back into lockdown for several weeks, restarting the process. In compliance with the guidance issued for their communities, school systems must be prepared to shift between in-person and remote learning throughout the school year.
- New health and safety protocols will impact many aspects of school operations, including teaching and learning. Health and safety rules are likely to change frequently and to differ among communities. Schools will have to monitor and follow guidance from national, state, and county health officials in a variety of new domains—physical distancing, temperature screenings, and disinfecting—that could impact decisions related to teaching and learning. In particular, physical distancing requirements may lead to class size constraints that cause students to attend school in staggered groups, in shifts, or in small static groupings.
- To address new health and safety requirements, school schedules may continue to put strain on working families and childcare systems. Schools are critical organizations in any community, providing not only educational and social interactions, but also performing childcare functions that enable working parents to return to their jobs. If, to promote physical distancing, schools are forced to put students on staggered schedules or educate in shifts, parents and communities may struggle with childcare. Deeper partnerships with community and faith-based organizations may be needed to ensure every student is supported when learning outside of school facilities.
- At-risk staff and students may need to work and study from home indefinitely. All of this will be further influenced by the presence of many medically at-risk individuals within school communities who may not feel comfortable coming into school buildings. Older staff and those with underlying health conditions that put them at high risk for infection may choose to work from home. Children with underlying health conditions or who live with family members who are at high risk may also be kept at home. These staff members can still work, and these children can still learn.
- Reaching relevant, flexible solutions will require educators to be designers. In order to maximize safety and ensure high-quality learning experiences, especially for the most vulnerable students, it will be essential to expand professional identities to include the design and iteration of new approaches.
- Budget challenges are likely to severely constrain decision-making in SY21 and beyond. Finally, all of this change is occurring against a backdrop of epic economic uncertainty. There will be significant variation in the budget cuts experienced by different states and school systems, and numerous questions remain about the gaps federal stimulus funding might address. This guidance aims to support educators in making decisions, within whatever constraints exist, that best connect the dots among social-emotional learning, instruction, and operations.

The military coined a term during the Cold War for such moments in time. They called them VUCA, or Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous. And the way to plan for such moments in time is through scenarios.

TEACHING & LEARNING SCENARIOS

Schools have a responsibility to serve all students, even during times of disruption. This makes thoughtful, front-end scenario planning crucial. Based on the above assumptions, this guidance proposes planning around three distinct teaching and learning scenarios: in-person learning, remote learning, and hybrid learning, where some students are in school and others are at home. It is likely that schools will experience all of these scenarios in SY21 and may move among them with little advance warning.

TEACHING & LEARNING SCENARIOS		
SCENARIO 1 IN-PERSON LEARNING	SCENARIO 2 REMOTE LEARNING	SCENARIO 3 HYBRID LEARNING
Majority of students attend in-person (with some participating remotely)	All students attend remotely	To enable physical distancing, in-person attendance is staged so students move in a predetermined schedule between in-person and remote attendance
<p>THE CHALLENGES</p> <p>Building a welcoming, safe, and supportive community for students and teachers who have been disconnected;</p> <p>Identifying where students are entering school academically after six months at home;</p> <p>Aligning assessments, curriculum and instruction to help each student progress; and</p> <p>Developing teachers to support all students, particularly those most vulnerable, in the new reality they're facing.</p>	<p>THE CHALLENGES EVERYTHING IN SCENARIO 1 PLUS:</p> <p>Building relationships with students and families remotely;</p> <p>Maintaining instructional coherence and managing progress in a remote setting — with and without technology;</p> <p>Meeting the needs of each student learning remotely, including students living in poverty, students of color, students with disabilities, homeless youth, and English learners; and</p> <p>Developing teachers' capacity to effectively teach all students remotely and prioritize equity for the most vulnerable.</p>	<p>THE CHALLENGES EVERYTHING IN SCENARIOS 1 & 2 PLUS:</p> <p>Monitoring and tracking students as they are entering and exiting class;</p> <p>Ensuring the most vulnerable students are prioritized in scheduling; and</p> <p>Maintaining curricular coherence between remote and in-person learning.</p>
— SYSTEM CONDITIONS —		
New approaches to scheduling · Flexible structures for teacher roles & responsibilities · Strong technology systems, capacity & policies		

TEACHING & LEARNING SCENARIOS (CONT.)

Let's look at this in practice using one hypothetical case.

After reviewing local health and physical distancing guidance, staffing, budget, and the needs of their students, ABC School System is adopting teaching and learning scenarios for various grade spans and groups of students. Students with special needs, including those with significant cognitive disabilities, are coming back in-person, full-time, along with students in kindergarten through grade two. The students in grades three through eight are on a hybrid schedule, with half the students in-person on Monday and Tuesday and half in-person on Thursday and Friday. Wednesday afternoons are reserved for teacher team planning time, and the students work remotely on the days they are not in-person. The students in grade nine, who are transitioning into high school, will come in-person four days a week. To make space for this, students in grades 10-12 are largely learning remotely. At the same time, ABC is also developing remote learning schedules for every grade span so teachers can prepare, at the front-end, for the possibility of school closures.

In this example, any one group of students experiences just one scenario when school resumes. However any one school may be managing different scenarios simultaneously, and the specific scenarios for each group of students may change throughout the year as the current public health crisis evolves. As such, teacher teaming structures and roles must be more flexible than usual to allow students, especially those in remote and hybrid scenarios, to be well supported. This guidance supports states and school systems in thinking through their responses to all of these scenarios and conditions.

HOW THIS GUIDANCE IS ORGANIZED

This project offers guidance and resources for states and school systems to use as they plan for teaching and learning—the academic core—in SY21. It includes three interrelated components: 1) conditions for learning (e.g., school culture, climate, wellbeing, and connection), 2) academics (e.g., curriculum and instruction, assessment, professional learning), and 3) system conditions (e.g., engaging families and communities, organizing talent, designing schedules, planning for technology). While the guidance is organized into these sections, the sections are part of a coherent and holistic teaching and learning system designed to meet students' academic and social-emotional learning needs. It also includes state policies and actions for state education agencies to consider as they support school systems in implementing the rest of the guidance.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Health and safety are, of course, the top priority for schools reopening this fall. We therefore assume that protocols are in place to address these critical needs, and this teaching and learning guidance picks up from there. The following principles, then, undergird this guidance.

PEOPLE FIRST

Resources are most impactful if they address the needs of the people who are directly affected—students, families and educators—and incorporate their input. In developing, refining, and implementing school restart models, leaders have an opportunity to:

1. **Start with students.** Organize people, time, and technology to include increased support in the areas of learning recovery, relationships, and social-emotional support.

2. **Design for equity.** Address the learning needs of the vulnerable populations most impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, including students from low-income families, students of color, students with disabilities, students learning English, homeless youth, and those who have experienced economic, social, physical, or psychological trauma.
3. **Solve for the needs of school staff.** The pandemic has created new logistical, technological, professional, and social-emotional needs for educators and other school staff.
4. **Consider family employment and logistical needs.** The childcare function of school enables families to return to work and to resume routines that fit with work schedules. For hybrid and remote learning scenarios to be successful, community-based organizations and schools may need to partner more closely.

HOW THIS GUIDANCE IS ORGANIZED (CONT.)

GUIDING PRINCIPLES (CONT.)

DESIGN FOR FEASIBILITY

Re-entry and recovery are massive challenges without trying to reinvent the wheel. Therefore, in developing and refining school restart models, leaders have an opportunity to:

1. **Leverage what works.** Design to incorporate research-based strategies. Actively leverage emerging lessons from pandemic-driven remote learning efforts.
2. **Keep it simple.** Speed of implementation and many actors involved requires practical, easily communicated solutions.
3. **Build for long-term, sustainable change in school operations to better serve students.** Consider who does what, where and when learning happens, how schools partner with families and communities, and how education leaders and practitioners share and learn together.

PLAN FOR CHANGE

The pandemic has shown healthcare guidance and community needs change. It has also impacted K-12 budgets. Therefore, leaders have an opportunity to:

1. **Be budget-aware.** Models must work with limited and likely declining resources.
2. **Assume customization and evolution.** Models will require tailoring based on local context, feedback from students, staff, and families, and evolving understanding of what is working.
3. **Design for adaptability.** Students will need to move among remote, hybrid and in-person models with minimal disruption.

SYSTEM CONDITIONS

School systems have a number of critical decisions to make and stakeholders to engage at the start of the planning process. These decisions will frame the school systems' approach to student support and learning and will remove some of the ambiguity staff will encounter as they plan for SY21. It will be critical for school systems to answer the following questions:

ENGAGEMENT

How will the needs of students and families, especially those most vulnerable, and the voices of teachers, school leaders, and staff be incorporated into the structures and decisions school systems make for SY21?

CURRICULUM SELECTION

How will each student consistently access high-quality instructional materials to support their learning?

TECHNOLOGY

How will each student access learning every day, whether in-person or remote?

STAFFING

How will each student be supported by teachers so they experience strong and integrated teaching, whether in-person or remote?

SCHEDULING

How will each student attend school, whether in-person, remote, or hybrid, in a manageable and safe way that supports learning coherence?

MANAGING & IMPROVING

How will schools assess what's working well and what needs to be adjusted?

HOW THIS GUIDANCE IS ORGANIZED (CONT.)

WELLBEING & CONNECTION

Social-emotional supports have always been critical attributes of healthy school environments, but students and staff will be returning to school in the fall of 2020 having experienced varying levels of social isolation, stress, anxiety, and trauma. A deeper focus on wellbeing, connection, and other top tier supports will thus be needed for each student, along with deeper mental health supports for some students and adults. It will be critical for school systems to answer these questions:

STAFF WELLBEING & CONNECTION

How can we create a culture of care in which staff growth and wellbeing are prioritized, and all feel safe, connected, supported, engaged, and valued, both individually and collectively?

STUDENT WELLBEING & CONNECTION

How can the school community create a culture of care in which students' growth and wellbeing are prioritized, and each student feels safe, connected, supported, engaged, and valued, both individually and collectively?

TAILORED STUDENT SUPPORTS

How can the school community identify the range of health and wellbeing needs in students, and provide them with or connect them to effective, culturally relevant supports?

ACADEMICS

In most communities, teaching and learning during SY21 will occur against a backdrop of constant change, with students learning in school buildings then out of school buildings, or some in school buildings while others are kept home. It will be critical to have strong plans that reinforce instructional coherence and enable relatively seamless transitions between in-person and remote learning. In the face of such change, it will be critical for school systems to address instructional questions, such as:

PRIORITY INSTRUCTIONAL CONTENT

What must students learn?

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

How will each student learn this content, whether in-person or remote?

ASSESSMENT

How prepared is each student to learn this content?

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

How will teachers be prepared to teach this content effectively, whether in-person or remote, and meet the needs of each student?

HOW THIS GUIDANCE IS ORGANIZED (CONT.)

ORGANIZING THE GUIDANCE ACROSS 3 AREAS

Because the three sections of this guidance are not intended to be viewed as discrete workstreams, but rather as pieces of an integrated whole, this guidance is also structured around cross-cutting phases of work. To support states and school systems in making integrated decisions, the guidance is organized into these chronological phases:

PHASE 1: PLANNING

This includes the preparatory work and decision-making that must happen across the system. This generally takes place during the prior spring and summer.

PHASE 2: LAUNCHING

This includes the work that must be done to get schools and staff ready for back-to-school. This generally takes place two to three weeks prior to re-opening and throughout the first weeks of the new school year.

PHASE 3: SUSTAINING

This includes the work of monitoring progress and adjusting practices that occurs in an ongoing way across the remainder of the school year. What are the impacts of the changes? What assumptions have been challenged? What needs further iteration?

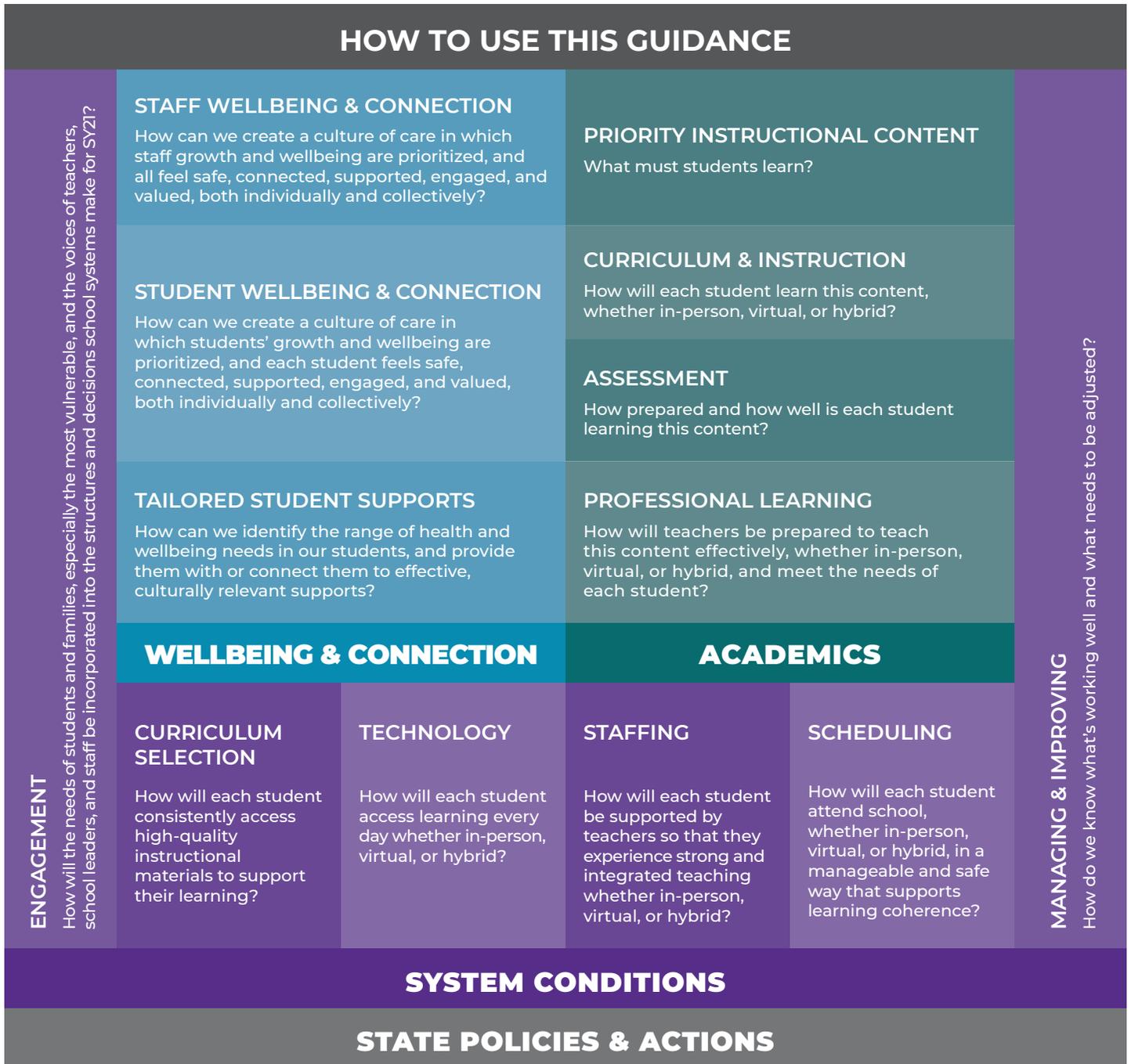
Decisions in each section will impact decisions in the other. As such, states and school systems should consider each phase across all three areas (i.e., planning for operations, social-emotional learning, and instruction) simultaneously in order to identify areas of intersection.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

States and school systems need to plan for issues beyond the teaching and learning core. Though not addressed in this particular guidance, states and school systems should consider:

- Applying national, state and local public health guidelines to the specifics of local school contexts, which should be addressed by the school system as the first prerequisite;
- Health screening, reporting, social distancing, and other behavioral norms and policies;
- Physical infrastructure changes required to support physical distancing, to enable health and sanitization protocols, or to improve building conditions and airflow;
- Transportation changes required to support physical distancing and sanitization procedures;
- Food service procedures to reduce cross-contamination, such as boxing and packaging of food, utensils, and condiments;
- Student outreach and re-enrollment, especially for students who are at a higher risk of dropping out, who were out of touch during spring closures, and who are undocumented;
- Procurement considerations, including for devices or hotspots, protective equipment, or other such needs; and
- Budgeting and funding implications.

The plans for issues such as those named above will intersect with the academic and system conditions plans addressed in this guidance. Collaborative, cross-team and interagency planning will be the new norm.



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDANCE

There are four major sections to this guidance: State Policies and Actions, System Conditions, Wellbeing & Connection, and Academics. They are interrelated and fit together as shown in the diagram on the previous page.

Working up from the foundation of the graphic, the [State Policies and Actions](#) describe areas for state education agencies to consider as they support school systems in implementing the rest of the guidance.

The remainder of the guidance is designed to support school systems. There are six [System Conditions](#) that wrap around and support the academic and wellbeing work. Engagement of families, communities, and educators is always important, but this year it is more important than ever before, and it is the place school systems should likely begin their work. Similarly, so many new structures will be created this year to support new work that building a light but effective structure for managing and improving the most critical elements of teaching and learning is crucial as well. In addition to these two focus areas, which bookend the work, school systems enable the wellbeing and academic work by selecting strong curricula; organizing and equitably allocating technology; rethinking staffing structures to match this year's academic, and health and safety needs; and developing schedules that best meet the community needs given the local healthcare context.

Once this foundational work is laid, the teaching and learning staff—teachers, leaders, coaches, and others—can begin the work of planning for the teaching, learning, and care of each student. The [Wellbeing & Connection](#) guidance provides in-depth support for attending to the social, emotional, and mental health of students and staff. The [Academics](#) guidance provides in-depth support for structuring coherent, quality learning experiences across in-person and remote settings.