STATE ACTION GUIDE:
EDUCATIONAL EQUITY IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

SEPTEMBER 2020

The pandemic is exacerbating educational inequities in our education system, so it is essential that state leaders respond in ways that prioritize our most vulnerable students.
This guide can help.

EXPANDING LEARNING TIME

Increasing time and attention for students based on their needs can significantly boost learning for students who are behind. The COVID-19 pandemic forced nearly all of our nation's public schools to close for the last few months of the 2019-2020 school year. Districts and schools found ways to continue student learning in spite of these closures, but by some estimates, students missed 30% to a full year of learning while schools were closed. Families, especially in communities with more students from low-income backgrounds, more English learners, and more students of color, face many barriers to participating in distance learning opportunities, for reasons ranging from inadequate access to technology to competing responsibilities such as jobs or child care that limit the time available to focus on learning. In addition, most students with disabilities missed out on many of the services that they would have received in school, per their federally mandated individualized education program. It is clear that there will be a need to help students, especially our most vulnerable students, catch up for weeks, months, and even years to come. Advocates must prompt their state leaders to support districts and schools in expanding learning time, especially for underserved students, and to make necessary changes to state laws or regulations to allow districts to extend the school year or day. Even if distance learning continues into part or all of the next school year, advocates can urge their state leaders to prioritize the needs of historically underserved students as they make decisions about structuring school time and virtual learning environments.
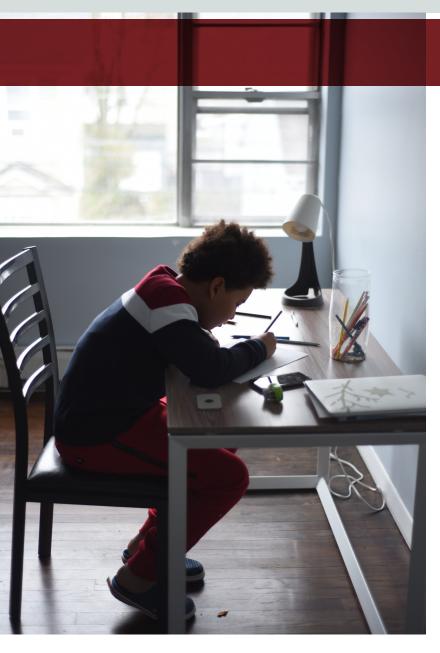
EQUITY PRINCIPLE: Every student — especially students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, English learners, students with disabilities, and students experiencing homelessness — gets the high-quality instructional time and teacher attention they need through evidence-based approaches that have been shown to combat instructional loss and/or accelerate their learning.

EQUITY ACTIONS:

- **Prioritize allocating federal stimulus funds** to programs that aim to accelerate learning and address unfinished learning (e.g., summer programs, extended learning days, high dosage tutoring, or a longer school year) in high-need districts and schools.

Fourteen states place parameters around school start and/or end dates, which could hinder districts from extending the school year. Check out this 50-state comparison from Education Commission of the States to find out more about your state's instructional time policies.

- Based on feedback from diverse districts across the state, **make necessary changes to state laws or regulations, including collective bargaining laws,** to allow districts to extend the school year or day (e.g., laws that require schools to start or end on a certain date), as well as provide flexibility around uniform class sizes and seat time requirements.

- Provide guidance to districts about **how to prepare for, implement, and continuously improve distance learning**, including how districts can structure instructional times using different online and distance learning methods, determine the circumstances in which particular methods are most appropriate, and provide specialized instruction and related services to students with disabilities.

- Provide guidance about the **best ways to expand learning time for students**, especially historically underserved students, including how to **utilize non-teacher support staff** to provide additional support for students with the greatest needs (e.g., using reading specialists or paraeducators to provide 1:1 support to students).

- Provide guidance on which **standards to prioritize** in the coming school year.

Digital Promise Provides Distance Learning Guidance to Wisconsin Educators

Digital Promise developed this guide for educators in Wisconsin on preparing for and implementing distance learning, specifically when and how to use different instructional formats. The guide details different online and distance learning formats, as well as the pros and cons of each. For example, the resource notes that synchronous learning most closely resembles live classrooms, but requires students to have reliable internet access, which many students – particularly students of color and students from low-income backgrounds – may not have at all or at certain times of day, depending on their home situation or context.

ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENT EDUCATION

National Center for Learning Disabilities

The Education Trust

ERN

MPI MIGRATION POLICY INSTITUTE

SchoolHouse Connection