Equity Lessons Learned from Schools in the Time of COVID-19:
Education Resources for State Leaders

THE 2021-22 SCHOOL YEAR HAS BEEN A ROCKY ONE SO FAR. Across the country, many students have returned to school buildings for the first time in a year and half. State and district leaders are tasked with figuring out, once again, how to keep students safe in classrooms and learning. It has become painfully clear that remote learning due to quarantines, school building closures, and expanded virtual options will be a necessary part of the school year in many places. This is on top of the disrupted education that many students experienced last year, which hit students from systematically neglected populations — students living in poverty, students with disabilities, students learning English, students experiencing homelessness, students in the foster care system, students who are incarcerated, undocumented students, Black and Brown students, Native students, and students who identify as LGBTQ — the hardest.

As state leaders continue to help their districts and schools respond to the COVID-19 crisis, they must not forget the lessons learned during the last 18 months. The $125 billion allocated through the American Rescue Plan is an opportunity for state leaders to support districts and schools in meeting students' most immediate academic, social, and emotional needs during these unprecedented times — and to reimagine what is possible for public schools so that we emerge from this crisis a more equitable and just education system — and society.

As a collaboration of 12 organizations seeking to advance educational equity, we share these resources with state leaders about how to transform systems to better serve and support improved outcomes for our most underserved students and ensure that existing and new resources are used to drive significant change in our education system.

Reopening Schools

THIS YEAR, STATE LEADERS FACE MANY OF THE SAME CHALLENGES as they did at the start of the pandemic. These resources highlight recommendations for sustaining safe in-person learning, drawing on lessons learned over the course of more than a year of pandemic schooling.

Back to School: Lessons learned about safe school reopening (Learning Policy Institute)

Ending the Masking Wars: The path to ensuring our children are safe and well-educated this year (Learning Policy Institute)

Remote Learning and School Reopenings: What Worked and What Didn't (Center for American Progress)

Reopening with Intentionality: A cohesive mindset that will guide us forward (Alliance for Excellent Education: Future Ready Schools)

Resources for Reopening Schools (Learning Policy Institute)

Continuing Learning During Remote Instruction

DISTANCE LEARNING DUE TO QUARANTINES, SCHOOL BUILDING CLOSURES, AND EXPANDED VIRTUAL OPTIONS is likely this year. These resources feature recommendations for ensuring that all students have access to high-quality remote instruction and can continue learning if they are not able to attend school in person.

COVID-19 Education Equity Guide: Digital Access (Alliance for Excellence Education, Education Reform Now, The Education Trust, Migration Policy Institute, National Center for Learning Disabilities, and SchoolHouse Connection)

Planning for High-Quality Remote Learning (Alliance for Excellent Education: Future Ready Schools)

Students of Color Caught in the Homework Gap (Alliance for Excellent Education: Future Ready Schools)

Creating Safe and Equitable Learning Environments and Providing Whole Child Supports, Particularly for Systematically Neglected Students

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS DISRUPTED LEARNING and exacerbated many of the existing stressors and challenges facing students and families, especially for systematically underserved students. These resources include recommendations for ensuring that all students return to schools where they feel they belong, have their identity affirmed, are engaged, and have agency in their learning, and receive the social, emotional, mental, and physical supports they need to learn, develop, and thrive.

COVID-19 Education Equity Guide: Supportive school climates that foster students' social, emotional, and academic development (Alliance for Excellence Education, Education Reform Now, The Education Trust, Migration Policy Institute, National Center for Learning Disabilities, and SchoolHouse Connection)

Investing in Community Schools: How states and districts can use federal recovery funds strategically (Learning Policy Institute)

Leveraging ARP Funds to Build Equitable Learning Environments (BELE Network)

Mental Health Support for Students of Color During and After the Coronavirus Pandemic (Center for American Progress)

Restarting and Reinventing School: Learning in the time of COVID-19 and beyond (Learning Policy Institute)

Prioritizing People: Purposeful investments to better support student and teacher mental health (Teach Plus and Fuel Ed)

Tulsa Public Schools: Prioritizing physical, social, and emotional safety to support reopening and recovery (Learning Policy Institute)

Using ARP Funds to Redesign Schools for Whole Child Equity (SoLD Alliance)

Accelerating Learning and Meeting Students' Social, Emotional, and Academic Needs

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS RESULTED IN UNFINISHED LEARNING that will affect most students, but will have a disproportionate impact on students from marginalized populations. The resources below are designed to help state leaders support districts and schools in accelerating student learning and meeting students' academic, social, and emotional needs, so that the billions of federal dollars designated for this purpose have their intended impact.

COVID-19 Education Equity Guide: Expanding Learning Time (Alliance for Excellence Education, Education Reform Now, The Education Trust, Migration Policy Institute, National Center for Learning Disabilities, and SchoolHouse Connection)

COVID-19 Education Equity Guide: Graduation and College and Career Readiness (Alliance for Excellence Education, Education Reform Now, The Education Trust, Migration Policy Institute, National Center for Learning Disabilities, and SchoolHouse Connection)

Expanded Learning Time: How states and districts can use federal recovery funds strategically (Learning Policy Institute)

Family Engagement is Key for Student Success During COVID-19 Recovery and Beyond (The Education Trust)

The Opportunity and Counseling Corps: Helping K-12 Students and Young Adults Recover From the Coronavirus Crisis (Center for American Progress)

Recommended Uses of K12 Learning Loss Funds (Education Reform Now)

State Guidance for High-Impact Tutoring (Education Reform Now, The Education Trust, and FutureEd)

Strategies to Solve Unfinished Learning (The Education Trust)

Using Federal COVID-19 Relief Funds to Support Student Transitions from High School to Higher Education (Alliance for Excellent Education, College in High School Alliance, Everyone Graduates Center, Linked Learning Alliance, and National College Attainment Network)

Advancing Teacher Leadership, Equity, and Diversity

TEACHERS ARE CRITICAL TO ADDRESSING THE UNFINISHED LEARNING that occurred during the pandemic and ensuring that all students return to safe and supportive school environments. These resources contain recommendations for providing all students with skilled, well-supported teachers who reflect students' racial and linguistic diversity, can meet their students' distinct needs, and provide engaging, culturally responsive, and standards-aligned instruction.

COVID-19 Education Equity Guide: Teacher equity and diversity (Alliance for Excellence Education, Education Reform Now, The Education Trust, National Center for Learning Disabilities, and SchoolHouse Connection)

Invest Today, Thrive Tomorrow: Teacher-driven strategies for supporting students with ARP funds (Teach Plus)

Supporting the Educator Pipeline: How States and Districts Can Use Federal Recovery Funds Strategically (Learning Policy Institute)

#WeBuildEDU - National Polling Results of Educators of Color Experiences During COVID 19 and Intensified Calls for Racial Justice (Center for American Progress)

Supporting Students with Disabilities Through Inclusion, Access, and Early Intervention

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC DISRUPTED LEARNING for nearly all students but is likely to have a disproportionate impact on students with learning or attention challenges. These resources highlight important considerations for meeting the needs of marginalized student populations, especially students with disabilities.

An Urgent Imperative for States: Developing whole child policies to support an equitable education for students with disabilities (National Center for Learning Disabilities)

Forward Together: Pandemic lessons for effective teaching practices (National Center for Learning Disabilities)

Promising Practices to Accelerate Learning for Students with Disabilities During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond (National Center for Learning Disabilities)

Our Youngest Learners: Increasing Equity in Early Intervention (The Education Trust, National Center for Learning Disabilities, and Zero to Three)

Supporting English Learners

CONSIDERING THE DISPROPORTIONATE BURDEN OF THE PANDEMIC ON IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES, migrant farm worker communities, essential workers, refugees, and linguistically diverse families, this resource features recommendations for engaging with and supporting English learners and their families.

Educating English Learners during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Policy Ideas for States and School Districts (Migration Policy Institute)

Equity and English Learners Post-Pandemic (Migration Policy Institute, published by National Association of State Boards of Education)

Let's Not Forget about English Learners: Targeted resources from the American Rescue Plan for their needs (The Education Trust, Next100, and UnidosUS)

Rebuilding the U.S. Education System for the Nation's English Learners (Migration Policy Institute)

Identifying and Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness

STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS HAVE NEW AND DIRE NEEDS: many are suffering from unfinished learning and mental health challenges due to months of distance education, social isolation, and separation from the supports that schools can provide. Others simply have disappeared from school. These resources include considerations for identifying and supporting children and youth experiencing homelessness as schools reopen and continue to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

How to Use American Rescue Plan Act K-12 Education Funds to Identify and Supporting Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (SchoolHouse Connection)

School Reopening and Recovery: Considerations for serving children and youth experiencing homelessness (SchoolHouse Connection)

Ensuring Equity in Fiscal Policies

EQUITABLE AND ADEQUATE FUNDING PLAYS A KEY ROLE IN HELPING SCHOOLS SERVE, support, and educate students who are from vulnerable and systematically neglected populations. These resources contain recommendations for ensuring that low-wealth districts that disproportionately serve students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and vulnerable populations have the resources they need to meet students' immediate needs and to provide the opportunities they need to thrive.

Budget Reconciliation Must Support a Quality Education for All Students (Center for American Progress)

How Temporary 'Hold Harmless' Policies Could Save Schools and Districts (The Education Trust)

Protecting High-Poverty Districts From State Funding Cuts (The Education Trust)

Measuring Student Learning

DISTANCE LEARNING HAS EXACERBATED PRE-EXISTING INEQUITIES IN OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM. This resource features recommendations for collecting accurate, objective, and comparable data that speaks to the quality of education in this moment and gives education leaders the information they need to target additional support to the schools and students that need it most.

COVID-19 Education Equity Guide: Equity-driven approaches to measure student learning (Alliance for Excellence Education, Education Reform Now, The Education Trust, Migration Policy Institute, National Center for Learning Disabilities, and SchoolHouse Connection)

COVID-19 Response: Diagnostic Assessments (Education Reform Now)

High-Quality Early Childhood Assessment: Learning from states' use of kindergarten entry assessments (Learning Policy Institute)

Restarting and Reinventing Schools: Assess What Students Need (Learning Policy Institute)