



Research Brief July 2020

This brief summarizes recommendations, included in six key publications, for states and school districts to consider when re-opening public schools within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Each publication has a particular orientation to school re-opening. However, 12 key recommendations emerged for states and school districts to consider as they plan for the 2020-2021 academic year and beyond. These publications include:

- Bailey, J.P & Hess, F.M. (2020). *A Blueprint for Back to School*. American Enterprise Institute. <AEI in Table>
- Centers for Disease Control: *School During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. <CDC in Tables.>
- Chiefs for Change & Johns Hopkins University Institute for Education Policy. (2020). *How Should Education Leaders Prepare for Re-Entry and Beyond*. <CFC in Tables.>
- Lake, R. & Olson, L. (2020). *Learning as We Go: Principles for Effective Assessment During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. The Evidence Project at CPRE. <CPRE in Tables.>
- Olsen, L. (2020). *Blueprint for Testing: How Schools Should Assess Students During the COVID Crisis*. FutureED, Georgetown University. <FED in Tables.>
- TNTP. (2020). *Restarting School: Planning for Acceleration in the 2020-2021 School Year*. <TNTP in Tables.>

This brief first summarizes the 12 key recommendations. A series of tables follow, describing the recommendations in more detail.

Recommendations for Reopening and Operating Public Schools

- I. Reopen and operate schools based on national, state and local health orders** such as health and safety guidelines related to the physical space, adapting operations to changing health conditions in the community, and contact tracing protocols.
- II. Adhere to specific health and safety guidelines** such as personal hygiene, social distancing, school cleaning and disinfecting, extra-curricular activities, student meals, and student transportation.
- III. Offer flexibility in school scheduling** such as part-day schedules, longer school years, and consider the traditional relationship between attendance and student assessments.
- IV. Engage in community collaboration and communication** with public health organizations, teachers, families, community members, social service and other resource providers, health care providers, and mental health providers.
- V. Provide flexibility in school governance** including staffing, scheduling, daily operations, labor agreements, and student and employee absences.
- VI. Consider other governance and budgetary issues** such as student privacy related to health and on-line learning, protocols for responding to changing community health

conditions, and budgeting for the new financial resource needed to meet the pandemic guidelines.

- VII. Ensure student well-being** by considering the needs of the whole child and paying special attention to the needs of low-income children, children with disabilities, and English language learners. Collaborate with community resources and mental health providers to provide student services.
- VIII. Ensure staff well-being** by focusing on the health needs of educators who are vulnerable to COVID-19 and the supports they need to succeed in the new educational landscape of distance learning, variable schedules, and new classroom procedures.
- IX. Implement comprehensive student assessments** to understand the academic and social/emotional status and needs of students. Different types of assessments, with specific goals, should be scheduled throughout the school year. It is important to include parents in the assessment process.
- X. Promote high-quality distance learning** by ensuring that all students and families have access to technology and are familiar with online learning practices. Foster the social-emotional learning skills students need for success in online learning, such as self-regulation and agency.
- XI. Consider other academic issues** including access to high-quality, sequenced, and knowledge-rich materials in every subject and moving beyond remediation to accelerated learning for those students who have lost ground during school closures.
- XII. Provide professional development to teachers** focused on managing and delivering on-line learning and assessments.

Recommendations for Reopening and Operating Public Schools – Detailed Tables

I. Reopen and operate schools based on national, state and local health orders:

Publication	Recommendations:
CDC	Reopening considerations: Will reopening be consistent with applicable state and local orders?
AEI	Reopened schools will need modifications based on guidance from national, state, and local health officials, which could include physical distancing, temperature screenings, and frequent disinfecting of classrooms.
AEI	State and school leaders must develop education plans that are closely tied to their state’s public health frameworks, which guide both the gradual relaxation of social distancing measures and the conditions under which those measures should be reactivated. These public health frameworks also outline the important public health accommodations that affect school operations.
CDC	School districts should be ready to consult with the local health authorities if there are cases in the facility or an increase in cases in the local area.
CDC	Regularly communicate and monitor development with local authorities, employees and families regarding cases, exposures, and updates to policies and procedures
AEI	Schools must develop protocols and partnerships with public health authorities to effectuate “contact tracing” strategies—with the aim of knowing at any given point which students or teachers warrant special distancing protections or testing. Schools should also prepare for possible reporting of other health indicators, such as student absenteeism, students who present a fever, or students whose parents or guardians have been diagnosed with COVID-19.
CFC	The physical school environments should embody public health guidelines to prevent a COVID-19 outbreak and additional closures. Such planning will likely include not only significant changes to physical spaces, transportation plans, and calendar schedules, but also testing and contact-tracing capabilities, in partnership with and under the guidelines of health agencies.

II. Adhere to specific health and safety guidelines:

Publication	Recommendations
<p>CDC</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote healthy hygiene practices such as hand washing and employees wearing a cloth face covering. • Intensify cleaning, disinfection and ventilation. • Encourage social distancing through increased spacing, small groups and limited mixing between groups. • Train all employees on health and safety protocols. • Develop and implement procedures to check for signs and symptoms of students and employees daily upon arrival. • Encourage anyone who is sick stay home. • Plan for if students or employees get sick.
<p>AEI</p>	<p><u>School sites</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider closing playgrounds, suspending nonessential activities, moving meetings online, limiting on-campus visitors, administering COVID-19 tests, and requiring temperature checks for students and faculty entering buildings. • Classrooms, hallways, school buses, and other areas will need to undergo regular deep cleanings to minimize the spread of COVID-19. • Schools should identify and procure personal protective equipment public health officials recommend, including gloves, face masks, hand soap, hand sanitizer, and disinfectant. <p><u>Meals:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools will need to determine their role in broader, community meal distribution. • Schools will need to assess, based on CDC guidance, whether to serve meals in the classroom or in smaller cohorts in the cafeteria or offer grab-and-go boxed meals. <p><u>Transportation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop contingency plans that anticipate the required numbers of buses and drivers and the budgetary implications. • Coordinate with city transportation officials to maximize the use and safety of existing public resources.

III. Offer flexibility in school scheduling:

Publication	Recommendation
AEI	Schools may need to consider having students attend on alternate days or adopting a half-day model in which half the students attend in the morning and half in the afternoon.
AEI	Schools may need to extend the school day or school year to give students more instructional time.
AEI	States should determine what constitutes attendance and a statutory school day in the context of remote learning and begin to assess how possibly reducing the total number of in-person class days or instructional hours might change how assessments are used in the schoolhouse. As accountability in many states and districts now includes attendance, state and district leaders will need to determine if adjustments in attendance policies should be made during the period transitioning back to school.
CFC	It is time to make the academic calendar far more flexible in order to expand the amount of time American kids spend in the classroom—not only as part of a multi-year acceleration effort following the pandemic, but as a permanent feature of America’s schools. Year-round school has the potential to produce not only academic benefits for students, but logistical and financial benefits for families.

IV. Engage in community collaboration and communication:

Publication	Recommendation
AEI	Reopening will require schools to work far more closely with public health authorities and other agencies than is the norm. This will require new routines and partnerships to allow schools to focus on their core competencies.
AEI	Effective school reopening will require diligent efforts to communicate with parents, educators, and community members. Careful reopening plans will be for naught if parents or educators are not confident about the measures in place. Where schools open with significant modifications to schedules, classes, or logistics, minimizing chaos and confusion will depend on clear and consistent communication.
CFC	The (re-opening) plan must produce enough confidence that families, students, and educators feel ready for face-to-face teaching in school. Communication with all stakeholders will be key.
CDC	Regularly communicate and monitor development with local authorities, employees and families regarding cases, exposures, and updates to policies and procedures.
AEI	Schools should consider a needs assessment to understand the full range of student and faculty needs. Meeting those needs is not the schools’ sole responsibility, but rather a shared responsibility among community partners including community health providers, food banks, counseling, and other resource providers.

V. Provide flexibility in school governance:

Publication	Recommendations
AEI	The events of this spring showed that many familiar rules and regulations such as those governing attendance, seat time, instructional delivery, testing, procurement, and graduation requirements—were ill-suited for the challenges schools currently face. Given the likelihood that reopened schools will have to incorporate many novel decisions regarding staffing, scheduling, and operations, there will inevitably be any number of incidents in which the usual regulations do not make sense.
AEI	Districts and teachers’ unions should work together to revisit aspects of their labor agreements to help schools adapt to social distancing and to ensure that vulnerable teachers can work safely and productively. As school budgets, responsibilities, and models evolve, schools and districts must be prepared to evaluate their staffing needs.
AEI	If vulnerable teachers cannot come to school to teach, schools will need to find other teachers who can quickly step in. Two workable strategies are to relax interstate licensure requirements and expedite certification for teachers whose training was interrupted this spring.
CDC	Monitor student and employee absences and have flexible leave policies and practices.

VI. Consider other governance and budgetary issues:

Publication	Recommendations
AEI	Decision making: States, districts, and schools need to develop clear protocols regarding potential rolling closures if trigger points are breached. It must be clear who will make such a determination and how the decision-making process will work.
AEI	Privacy: Schools will also confront new tensions around student privacy that will need clear guidance from federal and state policymakers. Privacy issues may emerge from increased information sharing among schools, local and state health officials, and health care providers. Schools should also review the privacy policies of their online learning providers.
AEI	Budgeting: Given that school systems cannot reasonably have been expected to plan for the current situation, state and federal officials must help provide the resources schools need to help weather the crisis.
CFC	Budgeting: We also acknowledge that any plan to make school facilities safe for reopening—even one that involves a substantial amount of continued distance learning—will come with costs. To accommodate small group settings, schools will need to change food service, transportation, custodial services, and staffing. Many contracts, including collective bargaining agreements, will have to be renegotiated. In an environment in which budgets will surely go down, federal stimulus will have to play a critical role in the implementation of plans.

VII. Ensure student well-being

Publication	Recommendations
AEI	Schools are responsible for meeting the needs of all students, including the distinctive needs of students from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, and English language learners.
AEI	All students need supportive relationships and nurturing learning environments, particularly students facing additional stress. Educating the “whole child” is not a single set of courses, policies, or activities, but rather a mindset that should inform both school reopening plans and the support students receive.
AEI	Schools should consider a needs assessment to understand the full range of student and faculty needs. Meeting those needs is not the school’s sole responsibility, but rather a shared responsibility among community partners including community health providers, food banks, counseling, and other resource providers.
AEI	Policymakers and school leaders should assess the need for additional counselors, social workers, school psychologists, and nurses. The isolation brought about by social distancing can exacerbate children’s depression and anxiety.
CFC	This pandemic has illuminated the urgent need to help students foster their own growth and development.

VIII. Ensure staff well-being

Publication	Recommendations
AEI	Schools should consider a needs assessment to understand the full range of student and faculty needs. Meeting those needs is not the schools’ sole responsibility, but rather a shared responsibility among community partners including community health providers, food banks, counseling, and other resource providers.
AEI	Many educators may be vulnerable to COVID-19, raising questions about how to protect them, whether they will be able to work in schools next year, and how to respond to any resultant personnel shortages. Meanwhile, districts and teachers unions should work together to revisit aspects of their labor agreements to help schools adapt to social distancing and to ensure that vulnerable teachers can work safely and productively.
AEI	Because of COVID-19, schools may once again be closed and have to return to remote learning. Schools will need to support teachers with managing class assignments, content, and assessments delivered remotely. This will include providing backup support for teachers who are themselves caring for kids or elderly parents or who are sick themselves and cannot be as attentive to their jobs as others can.
AEI	With vulnerable personnel, those over age 55 are the most at risk from COVID-19. 25 This would suggest that an estimated 18 percent of teachers and 27 percent of principals are considered vulnerable. States should explore possibilities to offer early retirement or reassign at-risk staff.

IX. Implement comprehensive student assessments:

Publication	Recommendations
AEI	Districts and schools need to consider the variety of diagnostics assessments that can be used for understanding where each student is academically and each child’s SEL needs. They will need to identify the most vulnerable students (homeless students, students with disabilities, English language learners, and students directly affected by COVID-19 through a family death or hospitalization) to prioritize their needs.
FED	Given the months of remote learning this past school year, and the various ways the pandemic affected individual students’ health and development, it’s more important than ever for teachers, schools, and school systems to have accurate, easy to understand, and timely information about students’ learning. Without such data, it’s hard to plan instruction, design appropriate interventions and supports, reallocate resources, and make policy decisions going forward.
FED	Do not conduct academic assessments when the students first come back to school. Use that time to let the students acclimate to the classroom and to assess wellness and social issues.
CPRE	Take the first two or three weeks to focus on students’ physical and emotional well-being and to strengthen relationships as foundational to learning.
FED	Given how chaotic learning was this spring, districts and schools should gather as much information as possible about which students had access to remote instruction and who logged on, attended, participated regularly, and completed assignments.
CPRE	Engage parents as partners. As part of the school re-entry process, solicit parents’ observations about their children’s strengths, areas for growth, and interests based on what they’ve observed over the past six months.
FED	Given the likelihood of periodic school closures and some combination of in-person and online instruction this fall, it’s more important than ever to engage parents as partners in their children’s learning. That means giving parents access to whatever assessment results schools are using as they reopen, in parent-friendly formats that are easy to understand.
FED	Assessments should focus on what students need to know to engage in the first major unit or two of instruction in their fall grade level. That way, teachers can provide just-in- time support within that unit, rather than trying to reteach all of the knowledge and skills missed in the prior grade.
CPRE	Focus on what’s most important for a student to know to engage in the first major unit or two of instruction in their fall grade level. If teachers focus on the knowledge and skills students need “just in time” for the upcoming unit, they can start to fill in gaps and build scaffolding for students into the unit versus trying to teach all the knowledge and skills a student may have missed in the previous grade.

Publication	Recommendations
FED	Schools and teachers should use the results from these classroom assessments in the coming months to accelerate student learning, with a focus on grade-level content, rather than reteaching or remediating every gap in learning from prior years.
FED	Interim assessments, given periodically throughout the year, measure student progress against standards and can predict performance on state end-of-year tests. They also enable reliable comparisons across schools and classrooms to decide where to allocate resources, adjust organizational strategies such as staffing and scheduling, and target students who need more support.
CPRE	Use more formal, interim assessments for school and district decision-making. Any fall assessment should be linked with your school’s or district’s organizational strategy. Testing will not help without a clear schoolwide or districtwide commitment and plan to address any needs revealed. Such plans may involve innovative staffing structures or tutoring support. Assessments should be used to inform such interventions, as well as resource allocations.
CFC	School systems need assessments that help mitigate the kind of confirmation bias that often leads to lowering expectations for what historically disadvantaged students can achieve. We recommend formative and summative assessments tied to specific curricula that can be implemented under various circumstances. Teachers would thus receive interim, actionable data on not only skills but also conceptual and specific knowledge that reflected classroom content. As we wait for the development of new formative assessments, we should rely on the interim assessments created by high-quality curriculum providers.
FED	If at all possible, states should plan to administer statewide summative tests in the spring of 2021 on schedule. A clear picture of statewide performance will encourage state policymakers and appropriators to help schools through what is likely to be a very difficult period. States need the information to drive planning and resource allocations. Comparable data, disaggregated by race, income, geographical region and other student subgroups, is more important than ever given the disparate impact of school closures on students. And parents and the public deserve to know where student learning stands.
AEI	School leaders should engage their curriculum providers to identify the best way to use the publisher’s material to identify student learning gaps, how their materials can be used in different ways (e.g., in-classroom instruction, remote learning, and hybrid learning), and how the provider can help give professional development for teachers in each modality

Publication	Recommendations
AEI	States should determine what constitutes attendance and a statutory school day in the context of remote learning and begin to assess how possibly reducing the total number of in-person class days or instructional hours might change how assessments are used in the schoolhouse. As accountability in many states and districts now includes attendance, state and district leaders will need to determine if adjustments in attendance policies should be made during the period transitioning back to school.

X. Promote high-quality distance learning:

Publication	Recommendations
AEI	Remote learning works only if students can access the content and instruction. A series of measures are necessary to ensure that students can learn remotely if schools employ a “hybrid” (part in-school, part at-home) model or have to transition back to complete distance learning at any point next year.
AEI	By the beginning of the school year, all students should have the device and connectivity they need to access learning at home, particularly among low-income and rural students. Schools will need to have devices and mobile hot spots for students to take home in the event of remote learning. Schools will also need to consider ways of providing technical support in remote learning contexts, including providing just-in-time support for teachers.
CFC	School systems build should build in targeted, online practice during the year so that all stakeholders (including family members) become accustomed to remote learning models. Schools should also make sure that students are developing important skills of responsibility, self-regulation, and ownership over their learning.
CFC	The shift to distance learning has come more easily in systems that already employ an online learning platform and an integrated focus on habits of success, self-direction, and agency, as well as in districts that over the last few years have embedded evidence-based approaches to social and emotional learning into their school cultures and classroom instructional practices.

XI. Consider other academic issues:

Publication	Recommendations
CFC	COVID-19 has brought the message home: students and teachers need access to high-quality, sequenced, and knowledge-rich materials in every subject—and during dramatic disruptions, even more so.
TNTP	The typical approach to remediation—providing work better suited for earlier grades—won’t come close to catching students up and will likely compound the problem. Accelerated learning requires that students consistently receive grade-level materials, tasks, and assignments, along with appropriate scaffolds that make the work accessible. More specifically, instead of sending students backwards to fill in all the potential gaps in their learning, leaders and teachers should focus on filling in only the most critical gaps—and not in isolation, but at the moment they’re needed.
FED	Schools and teachers should use the results from these classroom assessments in the coming months to accelerate student learning, with a focus on grade-level content, rather than reteaching or remediating every gap in learning from prior years.

XII. Provide professional development to teachers:

Publication	Recommendations
AEI	If another wave of COVID-19 sweeps through a community, schools may once again be closed and have to return to remote learning. Schools will need to support teachers with managing class assignments, content, and assessments delivered remotely. This will include providing backup support for teachers who are themselves caring for kids or elderly parents or who are sick themselves and cannot be as attentive to their jobs as others can.
AEI	This spring, millions of teachers who have never taught remotely have been suddenly forced into duty as online educators. States and districts need to devise strategies to dramatically improve the quantity and quality of online teaching if it proves necessary, either as part of a hybrid delivery model or during rolling closures next fall.
AEI	Teacher evaluations and improvement strategies (including observation, feedback, and coaching) should consider the need to deliver online instruction and be modified accordingly.
CFC	The COVID-19 crisis is forcing all of us to revisit how we understand and therefore configure teachers’ roles. System leaders are looking to strategic staffing models that maximize students’ instruction from the teachers who have deep subject-area and instructional expertise, and students’ experiences with teachers who excel at forging real connections. Both roles are critical and require retooling teams for the collective responsibility of students. Models that expand the reach of outstanding instructors, while freeing up other educators to provide much-needed one-on-one academic and relational support to help all kids stay on track, hold extraordinary promise for our students.