

New Jersey Education Association

Education Recovery Plan

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Overview & Background

Teaching and learning under COVID-19 was a strong reaction to an international crisis. Our school system, and the educators who drive our school systems, had to respond immediately to keep our students, communities, and one another physically and emotionally healthy, safe, and academically engaged. The education community heroically met both student and community needs to close out the 2019-20 school year with grace, care, and hope.

Teaching and learning under COVID-19 as crisis response, cannot however, continue to be the guide for our work moving forward. As we consider next steps, the learnings from our collective pandemic response must play a role in the critical decisions necessary for recovery, rebuilding, and establishing a future grounded in equity, access, and opportunity for all of the communities across our beautifully diverse state.

Educators have long understood and embraced the profound role schools play as essential community hubs. As COVID-19 forced shutdowns, quarantines, and closures, those outside the education field have deepened their understanding and recognition of just how necessary schools are to the well-being of everyone in the community. Schools do so much more than teach children. They provide daily, vigilant care to keep

students healthy and safe. They provide food to keep students fed. They provide resources to address, and ultimately reverse, issues of inequity. They provide information, guidance, and advocacy for the community at large. Schools keep communities connected, resilient, and healthy.

Educators have long been battling inequities that have persisted in our system. With the intense spotlight of COVID-19, the community at large is now fully aware of, and ready to join, the fight for equity.

As we end the 2019-20 school year, we find the health and well-being of our communities are in jeopardy. Unemployment is increasing, health needs are more critical, and we are now seeing signs of the impact of trauma on our communities' collective health. Successful recovery will necessitate innovative processes that reestablish our communal priorities. Intensive and focused collaboration among stakeholders will be essential, as will the necessary resources from our elected officials. The stakes couldn't be higher: without our combined perseverance and dedication we risk additional trauma, illness, and further loss of life. We must not reopen schools without exceptional solutions to the challenges posed by COVID-19.

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Recommendations

The recommendations within the solutions column are based on guidance from the following organizations:

- ▶ *American Academy of Pediatrics*
- ▶ *American Immigration Council*
- ▶ *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*
- ▶ *Children’s Internet Protection Act*
- ▶ *Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency*
- ▶ *Education Law Center*
- ▶ *Education Week*
- ▶ *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act*
- ▶ *Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act*
- ▶ *Human Rights Campaign*
- ▶ *Learning Policy Institute*
- ▶ *National Association of School Psychologists*
- ▶ *National Child Traumatic Stress Network*
- ▶ *National Education Association*
- ▶ *National Education Policy Center*
- ▶ *National Employment Law Project*
- ▶ *National School Climate Center*
- ▶ *NJ Policy Perspective*
- ▶ *School Social Work Association of America*
- ▶ *United Nations*
- ▶ *United States Department of Education*
(Archived Information from Previous Administrations)
- ▶ *World Health Organization*

Technology & Overcoming the Digital Divide

Technology access and the digital divide is a significant concern not merely throughout the country, but within the state of New Jersey. We have sizable access gaps among our suburban, urban, and rural corners of the state. Increased emphasis must be dedicated to addressing and remedying the digital divide in order to ensure equity for our students, educators, and communities.

“As it’s done with the country’s health care system, economy, and social safety net, the pandemic is exposing and exacerbating the deep inequities that have long shaped American public education. Two of the biggest hurdles to moving America’s schools online have been an inadequate number of digital devices for students and millions of families’ lack of high-speed internet at home. These gaps in basic technology access are particularly stark along socioeconomic lines: In districts with the lowest percentages of students from low-income families, just 1 in 5 leaders reported in late March that a lack of basic technology is a “major” problem, compared with nearly two-thirds of leaders in districts where the highest percentages of students are from low-income families. The resulting scramble led to often-messy efforts to distribute schools’ existing stockpiles of classroom laptops and tablets and created a supply backlog that continues to hamper schools’ ability to order new devices ...” (*Edweek*)

ISSUE: Access to appropriate technological devices for students and educators, including educational support professionals (ESPs)

Challenge:

A large proportion of New Jersey’s students do not have access to technology in the home: “A month into the closure of New Jersey’s schools, roughly 100,000 students – nearly 10% of the state’s enrollment – still don’t have the technology at home to participate in the distance learning that most districts and community colleges are relying on, according to the latest tally by the state Department of Education.” (*NJ Spotlight*)

Even when students have access to devices, they may not have access to appropriate technology for remote learning. Smartphones have significant limitations when compared to tablets, cloud-based devices (i.e., Chromebooks), and laptops. Many school apps and software require specific, up-to-date devices and operating systems. In addition, unmanageable challenges are created when multiple children in one household need to share devices.

Many local education agencies (LEAs) and institutions of higher education (IHEs) in New Jersey do not have 1:1 technology initiatives. This limits device access for students and educators; more importantly, students and educators who have not learned and taught in 1:1 environments have not had exposure to appropriate digital pedagogy that creates familiarity with tools and a clear connection to learning. Further, some LEAs with 1:1 technology will not permit devices to leave the building, resulting in packet-based remote learning for students.

Educators, including ESPs, are not universally supplied with devices. It should not be assumed every educator and ESP member has the proper technology to work remotely. LEAs and community colleges that assign educators to complete tasks requiring technology/appropriate internet access must provide the necessary technology to successfully work remotely.

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs must consider how to supply appropriate technological devices to students and educators so they can be successful in learning and working remotely. Supplying devices must be accompanied by:

- Sustainable solutions for maintenance, sanitization, and replacement (A comprehensive state system that provides funding for maintenance, sanitization, and replacement of technology may offset costs in funding-deprived districts)
- Training for effective use, including staff and adjuncts at the IHE level

- Modifications and/or accommodations for students with disabilities, 504 plans, and English language learners.

LEAs and IHEs must ensure remote learning does not require home access to a printer.

LEAs and IHEs must implement 1:1 programs in order to be more prepared for the possible need to return to remote learning due to virus-related closures in the future.

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) must continually monitor LEA technology access and student population numbers to eliminate the digital divide throughout the state. ([NJDOE March 12th Survey](#))

ISSUE: Access to reliable Wi-Fi and appropriate broadband speeds* for remote learning.

“A download and upload speed of 2 megabytes per second (Mbps) is sufficient for those who only use email, social media and audio conference calls on one device at a time. For remote work and learning that requires video conferencing or uploading and downloading large documents such as videos, average download speeds of 10 Mbps would be preferable. A download speed of 25 Mbps or higher is desirable for those who have multiple people working from home or people using streaming services at the same time.” ([Speedtest](#))

Challenge:

A large proportion of New Jersey’s students do not have universal access (due to lack of availability or high cost) to reliable Wi-Fi and appropriate broadband speeds for remote learning.

- According to a New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) survey on April 8, “98,000 (students) also lack reliable internet access at home.” ([NJ Spotlight](#))
- “1 in 4 [New Jersey] households with incomes under \$50,000 and school-age children lack high-speed internet at home, placing major barriers to these children’s educational attainment. ([NJ Policy Perspective](#))
- Undocumented families without Social Security numbers cannot access free internet from major providers. ([Verizon](#))

Educators, including ESPs, do not have universal access (due to lack of availability or high cost) to reliable Wi-Fi and appropriate broadband speeds for remote learning.

“Students and educators in rural areas throughout the state suffer from lack of access to Wi-Fi and cellular data, rendering online remote learning impossible from inside their homes” ([Politico](#)). Some students and educators without access to Wi-Fi, are using costly and often ineffective workaround solutions that place additional hurdles on students and educators, such as:

- Expensive disposable mobile phones as Wi-Fi hotspots for uploading school work
- Seeking Wi-Fi hotspots by parking or sitting outside school buildings to access Wi-Fi.

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs must provide at no-cost hotspots and high-quality broadband access to students and communities without access.

LEAs, IHEs and/or local municipalities have the opportunity to effectively address this need by pursuing public/private partnerships. The telecommunications industry has a social responsibility to offer high-quality broadband access to students and communities in need. This is inclusive of undocumented students and families, requiring telecommunications providers to waive current requirements for families to provide a Social Security number in order to gain free access.

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) must continually work with telecommunication providers to monitor community internet accessibility and extend coverage in order to eliminate the digital divide throughout the state.

ISSUE: Funding for technology

Challenge:

LEAs and IHEs will need funds in order to not merely purchase, but also collect, update, sanitize, repair, and replace technology (devices and reliable Wi-Fi and appropriate broadband speeds for remote learning).

Solutions:

The state must provide clear guidance and support on equitable access and distribution of federal funding to LEAs across the state.

LEAs and IHEs must be able to appropriately fund technology, including purchasing, maintenance, and replacement of devices. [CARES Act Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief \(ESSER\) Funds](#) may supplement and support LEA budgets for increased technology needs.

Where possible the state should assign any additional federal funding in unrestricted block grants, allowing districts and colleges the greatest flexibility to meet the safety requirements of reopening schools.

LEAs and IHEs seeking assistance in providing technological devices and internet access might explore support from local providers (Comcast, Verizon, etc.) and outside groups such as [EveryoneOn.org](#).

*See budgeting section for additional solutions.

ISSUE: Safety and security in the remote learning environment (including issues of confidentiality and privacy)

Challenge:

Many video conferencing, communication, and file sharing softwares have inadequate safety features, that may result in compromising student and educator safety, privacy, and security.

Some LEAs and IHEs may ask educators to use platforms, software, accounts, or practices, etc. that may not be in full compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), and the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA).

In all instances, LEAs and IHEs must ensure that the necessary safety, privacy, and security training and support is provided to both educators (including adjuncts, at the IHE level) AND families to ensure success in the remote learning environment.

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs must consider sensitivity of data before requiring remote learning that exposes it via screen share or uploading it during video conferences. ([CISA](#))

LEAs and IHEs must take the lead in selecting the online platforms and practices used for remote learning and communication and take the responsibility for ensuring legal compliance - [FERPA](#), [COPPA](#), [HIPAA](#), [CIPA](#).

LEA- or IHE-provided, board-approved enterprise level accounts are the only way to ensure end-to-end encryption to keep children safe. LEAs and IHEs must ensure all video conferencing tools are updated to the latest version. ([CISA](#))

LEAs and IHEs must engage in an ongoing cycle of review and revision of acceptable use policies (AUPs) that reflect the changing context and conditions of remote learning. LEAs must recognize that some families might be uncomfortable permitting video access and/or recording of their child during remote learning and provide equitable alternatives.

Tools for Mitigating Learning Loss Experienced by our Students

“If the summer slump affects students in just two months, what impact might the COVID-19 slump have on children who are missing as much as six or more months of schooling? ... [A]dd job insecurity, dwindling reserves, cramped homes, and homework that can make parents feel insecure about their ability to help – when they can get their children to do it. Further, though educators and schools are engaged in a herculean effort to bring the “normal” class schedules into the living room, these same educators were literally thrust into online teaching without preparation. ... [T]he COVID-19 slump might have even more impact on children from under-resourced homes than does the summer slump. What can we do to offset the loss?” ([Brookings](#))

It is imperative that LEAs and IHEs vigorously address mitigating student learning loss by analyzing and modifying curricula and instructional guidance to address student social/emotional and mental health needs, develop meaningful, local systems of diagnostic and formative assessment, and enable small group instruction. In addition, LEAs and IHEs must intentionally integrate the application of digital tools to prepare both students and educators for possible intermittent health-related closures during the 2020-21 school year.

ISSUE: Academic efforts cannot proceed without first addressing student mental health and trauma

To mitigate learning loss, academic efforts to reteach and introduce new content must be integrated with student social and emotional learning as well as addressing trauma.

Challenge:

When students do not feel safe and secure, academic endeavors are significantly deterred and, at times, impossible.

“A first priority for schools should always be fulfilling their roles as democratic institutions that support a

flourishing human community. Right now, our flourishing demands we place an emphasis on protecting health, and that encompasses mental health” ([National Education Policy Center, 2020](#)).

Students and staff returning to schools and campuses will require a great deal of mental health support and trauma response. This will require redesigning instructional time to integrate social and emotional learning and time to respond to trauma issues.

Solutions:

The NJDOE should consider how to support LEAs and IHEs in implementing structured emotional/mental health needs assessments and subsequently designing supports to meet those needs.

LEAs and IHEs must significantly increase resources, funding for, and training on integrating social and emotional learning and trauma-responsive instruction mapped to a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS). The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) [PREPaRE Curriculum](#), provides “relevant school personnel with comprehensive training on how to establish and serve on school safety and crisis response teams.” The curriculum focuses upon the integration of “the roles of existing school staff and community providers in terms of the five crisis preparedness mission areas (prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery) and grounds them in ongoing school safety efforts.” ([NASP](#))

LEAs and IHEs must ensure that mental/emotional/behavioral health professionals are accessible to students/families on a daily basis by:

- Ensuring a manageable caseload of students
- Dedicating time in their schedules to work directly with students, families, and staff
- Providing time and resources required to monitor shifts in school community needs
- Providing time and resources to appropriately respond to trauma and crises throughout the school year.

ISSUE: Analyzing and modifying existing curricula (including scope and sequence and, where applicable, pacing guides) for priority areas of reteaching to mitigate learning loss and introduce new content.

Challenge:

Due to lost in-person learning opportunities and disrupted instruction, students have not been able to access the curricula as is traditionally possible in the brick-and-mortar school setting.

With the possibility of disrupted teaching and learning, hybrid models, intermittent shelter in place orders, and abbreviated schedules/calendars for the 2020-21 school year, the curriculum will need significant analysis and modification.

Solutions:

Prior to reopening school buildings, LEAs and IHEs will need to:

- Analyze and modify existing curricula to create supporting resources to identify priority standards for reteaching and introduction of new content, focused on essential content, skills, and understandings
- Integrate digital literacy instruction that includes informational resources on how to use online programs and school software systems
- Ensure that classroom educator teams are heavily involved in, and leading, this work. A top-down approach to curriculum review and revision will neither effectively solve this problem nor prepare the educators to implement the revised curricula.

Prior to reopening school buildings, LEAs and IHEs will also need to:

- Analyze and modify existing curricula to integrate social and emotional learning and self-regulation skills
- Prioritize that classroom educator teams are heavily involved in, and leading, this SEL work. A top-down approach to curriculum modification will neither effectively solve this problem nor prepare the educators to implement the revised curricula.

LEAs and IHEs must engage in a rigorous review and revision process that:

- Identifies long-range goals of each content area including essential knowledge, skills, and understandings

- Prioritizes expectations by identifying transferable abilities that are not tied to one particular content area.

LEAs and IHEs must pay particular attention to ensuring consistency, coherence, and articulation through the development of high-level overarching frameworks.

ISSUE: Designing physical classroom spaces and learning structures to mitigate learning loss

Challenge:

Remote learning structures under COVID-19 are not equivalent to teaching and learning in the brick-and-mortar environment. District health-related school closure plans for Spring 2020 were as diverse as New Jersey's population, resulting in inconsistent student progress and significant participation gaps.

Districts can proactively design physical classroom spaces and learning structures to initiate mitigation efforts while also maintaining distancing recommendations.

Upon school building re-entry, class sizes will need to be significantly reduced, to address health and safety in addition to mitigating lost learning. By instructing in small groups, educators have a greater ability to effectively assess student starting points (through educator-created, curriculum embedded diagnostic and ongoing formative assessment), differentiate instruction, tailor lessons, and provide on-demand and responsive feedback to the specific needs of the small group of students in front of them.

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs must secure adequate resources to create physical classroom spaces that maintain distancing recommendations.

LEAs must design learning structures that use evidence-based practices to mitigate lost learning and reduce widening gaps among students by:

- Significantly fine-tuning curricula to focus on priorities (above)
- Considerably reducing class size in conjunction with the learning structure outlined (below).

Small groups of five to six students will allow for more targeted and responsive instruction. However, reality is that class sizes in New Jersey are commonly

25 to 30 or more students. This presents a seemingly insurmountable challenge for scheduling, staffing, and budget needs. LEAs and IHEs must invite local union leadership to have a seat at the table when discussing the potential reopening plans and to bargain the negotiable topics. Imposing new terms and conditions of employment has the potential to create animosity and unnecessary legal expenses if the changes do not comport with the current collective bargaining agreement.

Various Title funding streams can be used, and must be bolstered, to support the mechanisms that will address and remediate learning loss for economically disadvantaged students (Title I) and English language learners (Title III). It is likely that the number of families qualifying as economically disadvantaged will drastically increase in the 2020-21 school year as well.

ISSUE: Supportive strategies to mitigate lost learning from the 2019-20 school year.

Challenge:

Remote learning structures under COVID-19 are not equivalent to teaching and learning in the brick-and-mortar environment. District health-related school closure plans for Spring 2020 were as diverse as New Jersey's population, resulting in inconsistent student progress and significant participation gaps.

Significant and prioritized strategies to both remediate, extend, and enrich learning time for students are required to effectively address academic gaps and lost learning.

Solutions:

The NJDOE and the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) must provide resources and guidance for significant strategies/initiatives statewide to remediate, extend, and enrich learning for students.

LEAs and IHEs must develop and implement voluntary and ongoing supportive strategies/initiatives that students and families can both virtually access during the pandemic shutdown and access in-person once shelter in place orders are lifted.

Supportive strategies/initiatives should balance both mentoring, academic support, and relationship building, while homing in on prioritized standards, essential content, skills, and understandings in major content areas.

All programming may be within or in addition to the contracted school day and bargained, as appropriate.

These strategies/initiatives should continue throughout the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years as well to continue addressing lost learning.

LEAs can consider various Title funding streams. These funding streams must be bolstered to support the mechanisms that will address and remediate learning loss for economically disadvantaged students (Title I) and English language learners (Title III). It is likely that the number of families qualifying as economically disadvantaged will drastically increase in the 2020-21 school year as well.

ISSUE: Systemic designs required to mitigate disrupted and lost learning throughout the 2020-21 school year, due to the possibility of:

- Intermittent and isolated educator and student absences due to quarantine and/or illness in the home
- Localized rolling closures triggered by new outbreaks.

Challenge:

It is highly likely that students and educators will experience learning disruptions throughout the 2020-21 school year due to probable COVID-19 resurgences.

LEAs and IHEs must make contingency plans for:

- Continued remote learning for individuals
- Mitigating lost learning when individuals return to buildings
- Mitigating lost learning in the event of localized building closures triggered by new outbreaks.

Specific attention must be paid to:

- Equitable access to technology
- Maintaining IEP requirements in the remote and face-to-face environment
- Equitable grading provisions/practices
- Suspension of any high-stakes assessments.

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs must ensure that they have detailed, yet flexible, contingency plans for the scenarios noted, focusing upon:

- How learning will continue in the event of an extended student absence, providing remote and virtual learning options for individuals once buildings reopen
- Supporting individual students to mitigate lost learning after returning from isolated, COVID-19 related absences
- Provisions for continuing learning in the event of an extended educator absence
- Arranging for substitutes to be available throughout the school year to seamlessly fill extended absences
- Defining the circumstances for quarantined but otherwise healthy educators to be able to instruct remotely
- Swiftly implementing equitable and appropriate remote learning for buildings as a whole when triggered by new outbreaks.

In order for the above to be successful, LEAs and IHEs must ensure all students and staff have equitable access to technology for virtual instruction by providing one-to-one devices (cloud-based devices, tablets, etc.), assist all students and staff with gaining access to or compensation to offset out-of-pocket costs for high-quality internet and providing resources to students and staff to teach and learn virtually (i.e. whiteboards, large chart packs, etc. and other school supplies.)

LEAs and IHEs must consider systemic approaches that allow for a combination of asynchronous and synchronous aspects of learning to meet academic and social/emotional needs so that they are able to toggle back and forth between face-to-face and remote learning as may be required by intermittent health-related closures.

Remote learning **MUST** be flexible and have realistic demands for both students, staff, and families. Structures that allow for a combination of asynchronous and synchronous aspects allow for meeting both academic and social/emotional needs of students.

ISSUE: Diagnostic and formative assessments needed for mitigating learning loss and determining student academic needs

Challenge:

The purpose of standardized testing is to “allow the comparison of test takers from different areas of the state” (*ETS*). To mitigate learning loss and determine student academic needs, standardized testing for

the purposes of comparison will drain LEA and IHE resources from meaningful assessment to diagnose and formatively assess students.

Standardized testing during remote learning under COVID-19, as well as during recovery learning post-COVID-19, cannot account for confounding variables that will render the data useless for guiding instruction “Commonly used placement tests are measures of achievement rather than aptitude.” (*Saxon & Morante*). This is particularly important after New Jersey students experienced such varied approaches to remote learning. To mitigate learning loss and determine student academic needs, LEAs and IHEs will need resources to provide professional development and support for educators to develop meaningful local diagnostic and formative assessments.

Standardized testing during remote learning under COVID-19 as well as during recovery learning post-COVID-19 does not provide timely and actionable data to educators. (*USDOE*) LEAs and IHEs will need resources to provide professional development and support for educators to develop meaningful local diagnostic and formative assessments that can be administered in a timely manner such that the data can be used to inform efforts to mitigate learning loss and provide appropriate academic support for students.

Other challenges to standardized testing administration during remote learning include issues of student privacy, confidentiality of data, and the security of the test-taking environment.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE), high-quality assessment results in actionable, objective information about student knowledge and skills. The USDOE recommends that assessment systems should measure student knowledge and skills against state-developed college- and career-ready standards in a way that, as appropriate:

- Covers the full range of the relevant state standards to ensure a full picture of what students know and can do
- Elicits complex student demonstrations or applications of knowledge and skills so that educators and parents know that students are prepared for the real world
- Provides an accurate measure of student achievement for all students, including for high- and low-achieving students, so that all educators have the information they need to provide differentiated supports to students

- Provides an accurate measure of student growth over time to recognize the progress that schools and educators are making to help students succeed. (USDOE)

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs will need to analyze and modify existing diagnostic/formative assessments or create new assessments that:

- Identify individual student needs in an effort to mitigate learning loss
- Present useful information and questions that push student thinking so that assessments are, themselves, valuable experiences
- Provide timely, actionable feedback to students, educators, and their families.

LEAs and IHEs must prioritize that classroom educator teams are heavily involved in, and leading, this work. A top-down approach to assessment development will neither support effectively mitigating student learning loss nor prepare educators to assess and address student needs.

ISSUE: Welcoming, acclimating, and supporting new students (early childhood, new entrants, and building movement)

Challenge:

While districts have been acutely focused on supporting and educating their existing student population, it will be imperative to have plans in place for welcoming, acclimating, and supporting new entrants at all levels, whether those entering school for the first time in the early childhood grade levels, students new to a school district, or current students transitioning within a district or transferring to new buildings.

Solutions:

The state must provide emergency funding to further increase and support early childhood learning. Early childhood programming and curricula will need significant attention as social distancing and health and safety related aspects will drastically impact material, resource, maintenance, and staffing needs.

For students transferring to new buildings (including students transitioning to new buildings within a district), LEAs must:

- Develop plans for remotely completing new entrant registration materials
- Connect new entrants with mentors – both student and staff – to assist with transitions and integration into the school community
- Secure student access to appropriate technology devices and broadband access as required for both in-person and remote learning
- Offer training and support for school-specific software and virtual platforms required for both in-person and remote learning
- Provide counselor support to proactively address social and emotional issues related to moving and transition in the current environment
- Providing parent support and ongoing communication to new entrant families, in their home-based language.

Supports for Social Emotional Learning & Mental Health Care

“Schools across the country are scrambling to prop up students emotionally and mentally during frightening, uncertain times when their ability to respond is greatly diminished. For educators, school psychologists, and school counselors, who have traditionally relied heavily on in-person interactions to gauge and boost their students’ well-being, this period poses unique challenges and high stakes.” ([Edweek](#))

Prior to COVID-19, schools were already challenged in their efforts to provide sufficient support for students. This strain has become more evident and urgent with teaching under COVID-19, requiring additional resources to address the increasing needs for physical and mental health services as well as social and emotional support.

ISSUE: Crisis-management team

Challenge:

LEAs and IHEs will have to create crisis-management teams, train team members, and provide ongoing support to the team to continue working across the system. (NASP)

Solutions:

- LEAs and IHEs activate their current crisis management team or create the team if it does not currently exist
- LEAs and IHEs provide training for all team members, including retraining for specific knowledge around COVID-19 response
- LEAs and IHEs provide ongoing support for crisis team to:
 - Review or establish crisis response policies and procedures
 - Address psychological and emotional concerns of the learning community (including all staff, students, and families)
 - Develop partnerships with organizations that can support members of the community.

ISSUE: Mental health providers

Challenge:

The need for comprehensive, holistic wraparound mental and behavioral health services will increase due to:

- Decreased availability of current providers due to high demand
- Limited availability due to high caseloads (at some schools, 600:1)
- Increased need for services due to an increase in mental and behavioral health issues. ([Edweek](#))

Solutions:

- LEAs and IHEs identify qualified mental- and behavioral-health service providers (including school psychologists, school counselors, school social workers) currently available.
- LEAs and IHEs identify gaps in needed services and fill those with additional staff, and when appropriate, by seeking community partnerships and professional associations.
- LEAs and IHEs consider structuring schedules to accommodate timely and meaningful delivery of services.
- LEAs and IHEs establish local health and wellness teams composed of multiple stakeholders to focus on student and staff well-being issues and supports.
- LEAs and IHEs encouraged to adopt a [universal services](#) approach for student and staff mental health support.

ISSUE: School climate

Challenge:

“The National School Climate Center (NSCC) defines school climate as the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students’, parents’, and school personnel’s experience of

school life; it also reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributory, and satisfying life in a democratic society.”

LEAs and IHEs must attend to school climate to address needs at the following times:

- End of school year
- Summer support
- Summer session classes
- Re-entry/reopening
- Re-entry following rolling closures through 2020-21 ([NSCC](#))

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs shape the messages to students and families about school ending, summer activities, and reopening; those messages must be carefully delivered to address and reduce anxiety, foster social acclimation, and stabilize the community.

- Lack of traditional school “closure” suggests a need to provide opportunities to recognize, celebrate, grieve, and officially end the current school year.
- Many students will need support during the summer to continue learning, remediate learning loss, and access critical services.
- School reopening will be challenging no matter the format; schools will need to plan re-engaging the community (including staff, students, and families) to address anxiety, establish/reestablish routines and support services, and provide recognition and counseling for grieving.
- Schools must establish, embed, and normalize clear, uniform, and enforceable policies and expectations for students, staff, and visitors related to health and safety protocols (i.e. PPE use, social distancing in shared spaces, use of resources, etc.).
- School reopening will need to consider the importance of co-curricular activities on school climate. Co-curriculars must be maintained, with provisions for health and safety.

LEAs and IHEs can begin the healing process by establishing calm and trust when providing guidance on plans for different formats necessitated by potential closures.

LEAs and IHEs must consider a multitiered systems of support (MTSS) approach to address emotional and behavioral health within each school building.

LEA and IHEs communications to students and families must be evaluated with a trauma-informed and healing lens.

ISSUE: Mental health professional development

Challenge:

School staff will require significant professional development related to:

- Anxiety and depression
- Trauma and grief counseling
- Crisis response

([NCTSN](#))

Solutions:

- Educators and school community staff face the enormous responsibility of recognizing and addressing signs of anxiety, depression, and trauma in their students.
- Educators and staff require professional development on how to talk to and support students during and after a pandemic.
- Educators and staff will require professional development on how to apply the principles of psychological first aid and referral to mental health professionals.
- Educators and staff will require professional development on how to do the work of supporting trauma remotely and in a digital environment.

LEA and IHE educators, including adjuncts, will need professional learning around:

- COVID-19 impacts
- Trauma response
- Issues of equity
- Restorative Practices
- Culturally responsive instruction
- How to address these needs in digital or remote environment

ISSUE: Identifying and meeting student physical, mental, and behavioral health needs

Challenge:

In coordination with crisis management teams, wraparound services teams/providers, mental health professionals, and educators will need to identify and support students as they cope with COVID-19 stresses related to shutdown and reentry to school.

(NCTSN)

(NEA Guidance)

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs must put systems in place to create clear and ongoing communication between educators and health professionals to:

- Ensure student well-being
- Stabilize the learning community
- Be proactive to student needs
- Respond as needed.

LEAs and IHEs must be sensitive to altered economic conditions for many families that may impact their ability to access:

- School supply resources
- Food resources
- Health care resources

LEAs and IHEs must consider supporting the unique needs of disproportionately impacted students such as:

- African American and Latinx students whose communities have experienced higher rates of infection and death *(CDC)*
- Asian American and Pacific Islander students who have experienced COVID-19-related xenophobia *(United Nations)*
- LGBTQ+ students who may not feel emotionally safe at home; isolation can be particularly damaging *(Human Rights Campaign)*
- Undocumented children and youth who are blocked from CARES Act funding *(American Immigration Council)*

- Homeless children and youth as well as students who lack access to resources have increased challenges to remain healthy, safe, and connected to their learning communities *(CDC)*
- Students with limited opportunities who may be stigmatized due to lack of access to resources *(United Nations)*
- Other students feeling marginalized or apprehensive about returning to school.

LEAs and IHEs must consider engaging diverse student perspectives and experiences in developing and influencing the design of support systems.

ISSUE: Educators' physical and mental well-being

Challenge:

Educators have experienced first- and second-hand trauma related to COVID-19 and will require social/emotional support and mental health support in order to meet student needs.

(NCTSN)

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs will need to consider how to balance schedules and work demands so that educators will be able to remain healthy so that they can support their students. Of particular concern are:

- Educators balancing teaching challenges with their own family and community needs
- Educators' ability to access physical and mental health resources
- Opportunities for communal grieving, healing, and reconnection.

LEAs and IHEs will need to consider how to structure opportunities for educators to have the time and space to share experiences, concerns, and collaboratively develop solutions appropriate to the local context.

Professional Development on Learning Supports & Emotional Supports for Their Students

While there are some areas of obvious need – health and safety, technology training – it is important to recognize that teaching during a pandemic is a new frontier. There are no individuals with experience or expertise in teaching and learning during a world-wide pandemic. Therefore, most of the professional development around collaboration, pedagogy, social-emotional learning, etc. should be approached from an exploratory learning perspective, recognizing that the people engaged in the work have the most contextual understanding. This contributes to building collective efficacy, while top-down mandates risk imposing unsupported bias and sowing confusion. To that end, all professional development should be led by collaborative communities consisting of representatives from all stakeholder groups with educators being the lead voice.

ISSUE: Professional development on pedagogy related to remote instruction and blended learning environments.

Challenge:

Teaching students in a fully remote or blended learning environment requires different approaches for which many educators have not been prepared.

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs must:

- Train all educators, including adjuncts, in the basics of teaching in remote and blended learning environments
- Build professional learning communities that support the development of emergent practice
- Embed reflective practices to identify bright spots (what is working) in such a way that it elevates “humble experts” (practitioners doing effective work).

LEAs and IHEs must design professional development opportunities in a differentiated manner by:

- Offering assistance and support to educators who might be struggling with the rapid transition to remote and blended learning environments
- Providing educators opportunities to share with colleagues and mentor each other according to skill set
- Reconsidering educator professional learning goals in the context of meeting the demands of transitioning to remote and blended learning environments. ([NEA](#))

ISSUE: Professional development on lesson design related to remote instruction and blended learning environments

Challenge:

Designing effective instruction in a fully remote or blended learning environment requires educators, including adjuncts, to consider instruction that goes

deeper than a virtual check-in and emphasizes creating interactive lessons.

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs must:

- Provide training for all educators on remote learning
- Provide resources and opportunities for educators to pursue professional development during the summer in order to be prepared for reopening schools
- Incorporate collegial support into the existing work of teacher leaders.

ISSUE: Professional development around revising and creating content appropriate to remote instruction and blended learning environments

Challenge:

Existing instructional content must be significantly revised and redeveloped for optimal delivery in remote and blended environments. Most educators do not have established resources for these purposes and will have to develop many resources from scratch.

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs must:

- Provide time for educators to collaboratively develop lesson content for their students
- Prioritize collaborative development across grade levels and departments
- Consider funding virtual programs, curricula, and app subscriptions as needed.

ISSUE: Professional development around technology use and appropriate integration

Challenge:

Educators need the skills to use technology so it best aligns with meeting the needs of students. Educators need to understand how to leverage technology equipment and applications to support equity by being “device agnostic.” In this way, educators can support students no matter the devices available (smart phone, cloud-based device, laptop, tablet). Families require technology skills so they can support their children during remote instruction and with blended learning.

Moving to the remote environment requires the redefinition of how nearly every aspect of school is conducted. Schools must clearly articulate how work will be accomplished and provide sufficient professional development, information, and resources for educators to understand how new instructional delivery methods are impacted by [FERPA](#), [COPPA](#), [HIPAA](#), [CIPA](#), [IDEA](#), [ADA](#).

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs will need to form technology committees with diverse community representation to ensure that information technology decisions align with evidence-based pedagogical practices as well as LEA and IHE expectations. Technology teacher leaders should be identified and provided resources (time and access to tools) to work with faculty and families.

LEAs and IHEs will need to:

- Provide educators with training to use all district approved technology
- Provide educators with opportunities to develop greater technology literacy
- Provide educators with training to troubleshoot common technology issues
- Provide educators with professional development, information, and resources on how instructional delivery is impacted by [FERPA](#), [COPPA](#), [HIPAA](#), [CIPA](#), [IDEA](#), [ADA](#)
- Ensure that the “help desk” is available and responsive.

ISSUE: Professional development related to both student and colleague social and emotional learning needs

Challenge:

Educators and students alike will have experienced some trauma and loss during this quarantine. Educators will need to be aware of how traumatic experiences may have affected their students and families and themselves. Educators will need to know how to create spaces in both remote instruction and blended learning environments in order to mitigate the impact of trauma and identify student social emotional and trauma related needs.

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs must provide time and resources for all educators to engage in professional learning opportunities around:

- Trauma-responsive and healing practices
- Community building practices
- Relational pedagogy
- Restorative practices

ISSUE: Professional development related to health and safety

Challenge:

With a highly infectious disease present in New Jersey, new health and safety practices are required. All staff need to understand the mechanics of infection and the recommended practices that ensure the safety of all school community members.

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs must provide training for all staff on:

- Mechanics of infection
- Specific practices to minimize probability of infection among adults and students
- School-specific health and safety protocols.

LEAs and IHEs must provide specifically designed training for custodial/maintenance staff on:

- Environmental hygiene
- HVAC inspection and remediation (This is cited as a top driver of infection in enclosed spaces.)
- PPE usage
- Safe practices while cleaning/working in high-risk spaces.

ISSUE: Professional training for all educators on technology-based applications that support the operation of schools and learning

Challenge:

All educators require sufficient training to successfully use technology applications as they perform their work, whether in physical buildings, remote instruction, or blended learning environments.

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs will need to develop training and practice opportunities for relevant programs and applications related to school functionality during the COVID-19 pandemic. These include, but are not limited to, the following areas:

- Educator evaluation
- IEP writing
- Attendance (faculty and student)
- Guidance procedures
- Child abuse, neglect, and missing children
- Discipline
- PLCs and other adult collaborative work
- Transportation services
- Health services
- Meal services
- Technical services

ISSUE: Professional development for educational support professionals (ESPs)

Challenge:

ESP staff should be provided with high-level, job-specific professional development opportunities.

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs (where relevant) will need to provide high-level professional development opportunities specific to ESP job categories:

- Clerical services
- Custodial and maintenance services
- Food services
- Health and student services
- Paraeducators
- Security services
- Skilled trades
- Technical services
- Transportation services

ISSUE: Professional development for substitute teachers

Challenge:

Due to the high probability of illness related to health issues during the 2020-21 school year, there will be a substantial need for building-based substitute teachers. These teachers will need professional development in order to be prepared to step into various teaching roles in both brick-and-mortar, remote instruction, and blended learning environments. Substitute teachers will need minimal training in all categories noted within this section.

In order to effectively deliver instruction in remote and blended environments, substitute teachers will need access to technology devices, appropriate broadband access, and user accounts for school-based software and program applications.

Solutions:

LEAs should develop a policy and procedure that clearly outlines onboarding for substitute teachers.

LEAs should provide training support and resources to substitute teachers so they can meet all health and safety expectations as well as fulfilling remote and blended learning instruction.

Health & Safety Before & After School Returns to the Classroom

Public schools and IHEs are critical community resources, particularly during the COVID-19 crisis. In order to remain effective, the health and safety of students, staff, and families must be an absolute priority. Guidance for reopening must be grounded in evidence-based scientific understanding and then considered against the unique contexts represented by the diverse communities across the state. Any decisions for reopening schools must be clear and comprehensive with specific procedures designed to minimize risk. Health and safety priorities require critical decisions around attendance, cleaning and disinfection, providing necessary PPE and resources, and developing structures and practices designed to keep all community members safe. LEAs and local boards of education have the responsibility to provide a safe and healthy environment for all students, staff, and community members who enter the buildings. Students and staff must not be required to work and learn in unsafe or hazardous conditions or be required to perform tasks that could endanger their health or well-being.

ISSUE: Safe and ethical reopening and ongoing operations of school buildings

Challenge:

Educators, staff members, parents, and students alike are concerned about health and safety for themselves, their students, their families, and their communities. Reopening decisions should be rooted in science rather than based on arbitrary start dates.

All staff members and students, and most significantly those with underlying conditions or risk factors identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), should be provided with opportunities to continue learning without jeopardizing their health and safety first. ([NEA](#))

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs must be bound by all applicable local, state, and federal statutes and regulations and shall make available personal protective equipment

(PPE) as required by such laws. Prevailing occupational health and safety standards shall be used in determining the presence of health hazards or unsafe conditions in the workplace.

IHEs will need to review, analyze, and implement solutions aligned with the Higher Education Restart Advisory Group, in their report on restart operations to the Governor.

LEAs and IHEs must immediately inform staff, families, and the school community when they have been or may have been exposed to contagious diseases, illnesses, or hazards.

LEAs and IHEs must create joint health and safety committees with representation from the local association(s), including certified school nurses, and the board of education or board of trustees.

The joint health and safety committee should be responsible for developing and communicating policies and procedures in the areas outlined below. These must include clear guidelines on all training necessary for students and staff (including adjuncts at the IHE level) related to health and safety. Training must be provided by those with health and safety expertise.

LEAs and IHEs will need to recognize that instituting policies and procedures will increase workload demands and may require additional personnel in order to comply fully with CDC guidelines. ([CDC](#))

ISSUE: Attendance and health screening

Challenge:

With respect to individuals with heightened risk health conditions, provisions must be made for both educators and students to attend school on a voluntary basis during the first wave of reopening.

Health safety screenings should be held daily for schools that reopen. Health and safety guidelines include temperature checks and daily symptom reporting for all students and staff, prior to their point of entry. For students and transportation staff, these

screenings must occur prior to boarding any buses. Throughout this process, and as permitted and delineated through [New Jersey Statute 18A:40-7](#), certificated school nurses must recommend the exclusion of students from the school building.

Students and educators must immediately quarantine at the first sign of virus symptoms or when coming into contact with someone who is infected. The recommendation for quarantine is a minimum of 14 days ([CDC](#)). Medical offices in many schools are not currently outfitted for quarantine areas and must be modified to temporarily quarantine any student or staff member suspected of having contracted COVID-19.

There must be clearly defined plans to close schools in the event that students and staff contract COVID-19.

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs must clearly define and communicate attendance and screening policies as they impact:

- Individuals who might have heightened risk conditions
- Conducting daily screenings and subsequent procedures should an individual demonstrate symptoms
- Individual educators and students required to quarantine due to becoming symptomatic or in contact with someone who is infected
- Emergency school closures due to student and staff illness

LEAs and IHEs will need to consider contact tracing as an additional preventative measure should students or staff become symptomatic. Certificated school nurses and medical professionals must have open, ongoing two-way communication with the local municipal and/or county health officials in regard to contact tracing, while maintaining HIPAA compliance.

LEAs and IHEs must reconsider high-stakes and punitive attendance policies for students and staff alike. As these policies unintentionally encourage those ill to enter the building.

LEAs and IHEs must provide additional staffing for all busing, shuttles, and transportation services. These individuals will conduct temperature screenings and, where appropriate, will assist with social distancing onboard buses, shuttles, etc.

LEAs and IHEs must consider hiring floating substitute teachers in order to limit frequent contact with outside individuals, as they can be responsible for spreading disease across school buildings. Substitute

services should be required to test their staff before every assignment no more than 24 hours prior to arrival.

ISSUE: Social distancing

Challenge:

Schools can safely prevent disease spread in some contexts if strict social distancing measures are implemented. The CDC recommends keeping individuals a minimum of six feet apart and reducing the number of face-to-face interactions. ([CDC](#)) ([John Hopkins Medicine](#)) ([Health.gov](#))

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs must develop physical space guidelines for transportation services, school classrooms, and common areas to meet scientific guidelines. This will require a reduction in the number of students within buses and individual classrooms as well as the number of students in common areas such as hallways, bathrooms, and cafeterias. This will require increasing transportation services and rethinking class schedules in order to limit the number of students and staff within district spaces at any given time and creating “outdoor classroom” spaces, as weather allows.

LEAs and IHEs must also consider how to maintain safe distances for students, families, and staff during high traffic events such as arrival, dismissal, meal times, and recess.

LEAs and IHEs must consider how to maintain safe distances when transporting students to and from school and will most likely have to consider reducing the number of riders in each vehicle. Aides and other educational support professionals will need to be added to all transportation routes in order to assist with health screenings and social distancing requirements. Transportation personnel will require PPE as well as specific training on physical distancing guidelines, working with students on maintaining distance, and cleaning requirements in between vehicle uses.

ISSUE: Hygiene and cleaning

“Cleaning refers to the removal of dirt and impurities, including germs, from surfaces. Cleaning alone does not kill germs. But by removing the germs, it decreases their number and therefore any risk of spreading infection. Disinfecting works by using chemicals, for example EPA-registered disinfectants, to

kill germs on surfaces. This process does not necessarily clean dirty surfaces or remove germs. But killing germs remaining on a surface after cleaning further reduces any risk of spreading infection.” ([CDC](#))

Challenge:

All schools will have to institute vigorous approaches to individual hygiene and cleaning of common areas.

All schools should certify properly functioning and adequate ventilation/filtration before allowing buildings to reopen.

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs must consider universal requirements for mask wearing, a CDC recommended approach to limiting virus spread.

LEAs and IHEs must consider precautions such as personal protective equipment (PPE) for those in high exposure positions (such as custodial, maintenance, and security personnel) and barriers or other protections for those who work in high traffic areas (such as office and food service staff). All staff will need training on proper PPE use.

LEAs and IHEs must encourage and provide access to clean water and soap so that all students and staff engage in frequent handwashing. Alternatively, students and staff should be provided with adequate hand sanitizers and wipes.

LEAs and IHEs must institute aggressive cleaning and disinfection policies in order to increase the frequency and quality of disinfecting common spaces. This includes every physical area in a school and any related area used for instruction or transportation. Cleaning supplies should be safe and meet standards for adequate disinfection. Custodial staff will need training on how best practices using cleaners and disinfectants and must work collaboratively with health officials and district administration to ensure cleaners and disinfectants used are safe for students and staff, including modifications for those with allergies/sensitivities.

LEAs and IHEs must institute thorough cleaning, disinfection, and social distancing policies related to food distribution and consumption which will require heightened cleaning efforts and PPE for food service staff.

LEAs and IHEs must require certification that each school building has adequate and functioning ventilation and filtration systems in place.

LEAs and IHEs will need to discourage the use of common materials. When they are necessary, they must be cleaned and disinfected in between each use. This includes books, computers, manipulatives, and other resources that might be used by more than one individual.

ISSUE: Essential personnel designations and school operations

Challenge:

If locally determined, these essential personnel determinations can extend well beyond essential duties, focusing instead on nonessential tasks. This ignores the purpose and safety measures surrounding the essential personnel designation, putting learning communities at risk.

Solutions:

Essential personnel designations must be in alignment with the governor’s executive orders and NJDOE guidance. Greater clarity is needed on the classes of employee that may be deemed essential and the functions of their role that may be deemed essential.

LEAs and IHEs must collaborate with the representatives from the local association, including certified school nurses, to update and maintain a [Health Related Closure Plan](#) that requires:

- Submission to the county superintendent
- Board of education approval
- Board of trustee approval
- Listing of essential employees by job title and identification number
- Posting to the district website

Ensuring Students Have Access to Healthy Meals

“According to a recent Monmouth University poll, *the coronavirus outbreak has made a major impact on the lives of 7 in 10 New Jerseyans (71%)* ... Feeding America projects a shortfall of \$1.4 billion in additional resources needed over six months (beginning in March) to meet the rise in need caused by COVID-19. In New Jersey, specifically, the shortfall is about \$20 million. (*Community FoodBank of NJ*)

Ensuring student access to healthy meals will need to be addressed in different ways. Schools will need to continue food service support during the summer months when school is not in session. Once the 2020-21 school year begins, schools should anticipate a higher level of need in their student population. In addition, schools will need to develop flexible food delivery systems should intermittent closures become an issue due to COVID-19 recurrence.

ISSUE: Free- and reduced-price lunches during summer 2020

Challenge:

With over 500,000 students across New Jersey eligible for free- and reduced-price lunches (*NCES*), it is imperative that meals continue to be available to families while school is not in session during the summer.

Due to an increase in unemployment as a result of COVID-19 mandated shutdowns, LEAs must anticipate an increase in students needing supplemental food sources.

Solutions:

- LEAs must continue to supply meals for students and families throughout summer 2020.
- LEAs will need to plan for an increase in the number of families qualifying for free- and reduced-price lunches. This will impact both budget and personnel requirements.
- LEAs must provide training and increased safety measures for staff involved in the preparation and distribution of food during summer 2020. When

food services are privatized, the food service provider must not only assume responsibility for increased training and safety measures, but must certify this with the LEA.

- School food authorities (SFAs) participating in the National School Lunch (*NSLP*) or School Breakfast Programs (*SBP*) should explore supports available through the *Seamless Summer Option* as an alternative to the traditional *Summer Food Service Program*. (*NJ Department of Agriculture, NJDA*)
- NJDA should continue to waive requirements typically associated with the *Summer Food Service Program* in light of increased need within our communities.
- LEAs should explore community partnerships in order to support and enhance their ability to address food insecurity issues.

ISSUE: Anticipated increase in the number of students eligible for free- and reduced-price lunches during the 2020-21 school year

Challenge:

Due to an increase in unemployment as a result of COVID-19 mandated shutdowns, LEAs must anticipate an increase in the number of students eligible for free- and reduced-lunches.

Meal provision will need to be flexible in the event of intermittent shutdowns that may occur from recurrence of COVID-19 outbreaks during the 2020-21 school year.

Solutions:

- LEAs will need to anticipate an increase in the number of families qualifying for free- and reduced-price lunches. This will impact both budget and food distribution personnel requirements.
- LEAs must provide training and increased safety measures for staff involved in the preparation and distribution of food during the 2020-21 school year.

- LEAs must develop and continuously update a flexible food distribution plan, as connected to the Health Related Closure Plan, so they are able to nimbly shift from school-based food delivery to community-based food provision options in case of intermittent shutdowns that may occur from recurrence of COVID-19 outbreaks during the 2020-21 school year. Plans must be made to ensure students have access to healthy meals in the remote, blended, and brick-and-mortar environment and the ability to seamlessly toggle back-and-forth between different forms of delivery.
- LEAs should explore community partnerships in order to support and enhance their ability to address food insecurity issues.

ISSUE: Distancing and meals in the school environment

Challenge:

School cafeterias and mealtimes will present significant challenges for social distancing and limiting the spread of COVID-19.

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs must restructure dining spaces and protocols to ensure appropriate health, hygiene, and safety, including:

- Moving all dining spaces to the classroom setting
- Avoiding communal stacks, bins, trays, and utensils that may be accessed by many hands.
- Suspending self-service areas such as salad bars, “grab and go,” etc.
- Provide and deliver plated meals for students to their classroom environment (NEA)

Food services staff members must follow all health and safety protocols and be outfitted with the appropriate PPE, as specified in the health and safety section of this document.

Assistance for Students with Disabilities & English Language Learners

Within the context of providing assistance for students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs) in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are significant concerns that arise. Over the current period of school building closures, educators have been attempting to cope with the many challenges of the remote learning environment in order to finish out the school year successfully. With the emphasis shifting to planning for multiple uncertain futures, educators serving students with special needs and ELLs have additional considerations at hand: most immediately, the question of extended school year (ESY) programs.

Special education is a varied and diverse world unto itself. Because each student receiving special education services has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) tailored to their own needs, a variety of configurations for instruction and support exist within districts in order to comply with the mandate that each student be placed in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Students can receive modified work within regular education classrooms; supplemental one-on-one help within classrooms from an inclusion teacher (known as “push-in”); small group instruction (known as “pull-out”); resource room placement for entire content areas; self-contained instruction; and even out of district placement if a district is unable to provide the appropriate services for that child. The world of special education, unlike general education, serves students from ages three to 21. Many of these students have limitations that require districts to provide them with transportation to and from school, as well, which is a significant cost.

The most significant need that arises from our assessment of concerns (both regarding remote instruction and re-entry to buildings) is for increased staffing. LEAs will need funding and flexibility to facilitate creative solutions. Personnel will be needed to accommodate for increased student needs and additional time-burdens associated with maintaining higher standards of cleanliness. If schools adopt hybrid models where there is remote and in-building instruction happening

simultaneously, additional instructors will be required in buildings and in a remote setting.

With the fulfillment of needs for additional staff, school leaders can deploy personnel according to their needs. There will be opportunities for increased collaboration in professional learning communities (PLCs), creative scheduling that can meet the needs of all families and educators, creating opportunities for remediation, enrichment, social-emotional learning (SEL) activities, and other professional development as situations evolve.

REMOTE LEARNING

ISSUE: Accommodations and modifications in the remote learning environment

Challenge:

Special education settings are challenging to replicate during remote learning. Every student’s individualized education program (IEP) is a uniquely tailored, legally binding document; a one-size-fits-all approach will not be appropriate.

Many students participate in general education classrooms while receiving specialized instruction, accommodations, and modifications.

Because of COVID-19, there may be an increased demand for extended school year (ESY) services.

Solutions:

- Planning and collaboration is always important in special education, but it is even more necessary and challenging to accomplish in these circumstances. LEAs must develop structures and strategies to ensure planning and collaboration time is available to all educators.
- LEAs must provide support and training for educators to provide related services in remote and blended learning environments.

- LEAs must increase funding and services to address the increased need for ESY services.

ISSUE: Student confidentiality in remote-learning settings

Challenge:

Student and family confidentiality issues are amplified in the virtual environment.

Children and their families have the right to keep their special education status confidential. Educators are adept at maintaining confidentiality in the traditional brick-and-mortar classroom, but confidentiality may be jeopardized in a virtual environment.

Tools used in remote learning, in the context of special education services, need to be FERPA compliant. These tools, depending on the child's needs and services being delivered, may also need to be HIPAA compliant. There may be additional costs associated with these tools, especially when requiring added levels of security.

Solutions:

- LEAs must train educators on best practices to ensure confidentiality in a remote learning setting.
- LEAs must clearly communicate confidentiality policies to all families, regardless of the status of their child(ren).
- LEAs must verify that all tools used in remote delivery of services for children with special needs are HIPAA and FERPA compliant.

ISSUE: Family support in the remote environment

Challenge:

In many cases, families of students with disabilities need additional guidance and direction in effectively supporting their children's academic, behavioral, and developmental needs in the virtual environment. This is increasingly true for students with behavioral challenges and those with significant disabling conditions.

Special educators are providing increased support and guidance to parents/guardians to ensure students are receiving these supports, as best they possibly can, outside of the brick-and-mortar school environment.

Solutions:

- LEAs must provide all educators with time and flexibility to support families during remote learning.
- LEAs must provide increased family support and training opportunities, as required by N.J.A.C. 6A:14-1.2(b)14 – District Eligibility for Assistance under IDEA Part B.

ISSUE: Concerns for English language learners and families – remote learning

Challenge:

Language barriers for students and families are a widespread concern in a remote environment. In many English language learner (ELL) homes, parents may speak limited English as well.

Our undocumented student population represents a significant number of our ELL population. Undocumented students and families have additional concerns over privacy and security in the remote learning environment. This may impact undocumented student participation in synchronous, live-video lessons/meetings, as well as the ability of families to access low-cost internet access.

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs must enhance communication, outreach, and engagement of ELL families during remote learning by:

- Ensuring that all communications are translated and accessible in all languages spoken in district homes.
- Increasing the number of/access to multilingual liaisons to support ELL students and families in the remote environment and upon re-entry to school.
- Ensuring that families have remote access to all support services, including tutoring and other services available through community partnerships
- Ensuring that families have a fundamental understanding of health risks and social distancing practices during this time
- Focusing on privacy, security, and confidentiality for any student/family that may be undocumented. Provide flexibility for students to engage in remote learning in ways that do not publicly put undocumented families at risk (ex: prohibiting virtual sharing of photos, videos, screenshots of synchronous learning sessions, etc.)

Federal, state, and local funding must be dedicated to enhancing services that support our ELL population. Title III funding must be bolstered and dedicated to these identified supports.

SCHOOL RE-ENTRY

(Blended or Full Face-to-Face)

ISSUE: Physical distancing practices in special education inclusion and resource room settings* and ELL programs

**narrative describing these settings is in the introduction to this section*

Challenge:

Providing hands-on support to students will not be possible under current social distancing guidelines.

Students will have difficulty understanding directions and instruction while practitioners are wearing typical cloth masks.

Students often need visual cues from their teachers' and support staff's mouths and full facial expression to interpret and comprehend oral language.

Some students will resist wearing masks/shields due to sensory and behavioral challenges.

Solutions:

Practitioners in the special education and related services environment will need PPE that includes face shields as opposed to masks so that inability of students to see educators' faces does not impact their ability to comprehend oral language.

LEAs will have to structure classrooms to reflect social distancing requirements. This applies especially to special education resource rooms, which are often in smaller spaces within buildings.

Added attention to frequent cleaning and disinfection will need to take place due to significant challenges posed by self-contained classroom environments. Staff will need to be trained on proper handling of cleaning and disinfectant products.

LEAs and IHEs will need to supply amplification or other systems in all learning environments where student understanding may be compromised by the use of masks and/or face shields.

ISSUE: Physical distancing practices in special education self-contained settings*

**narrative describing these settings is in the introduction to this section*

Challenge:

Many students in the self-contained special education setting require significant hands-on support from the educators, paraprofessionals and others. This ranges from assistance with dressing, grasping utensils, etc. to assistance with feeding, toileting, and diapering.

Students may have significant medical needs requiring close proximity and potential exposure to bodily fluids. At times, students may exhibit drooling or engage in behaviors such as biting and/or spitting.

Some students will resist or refuse wearing masks/shields due to sensory and behavioral challenges.

While all students will need to adjust to the new environment school re-entry will require, students with special needs and behavioral challenges may have increased difficulties due to significant changes in routine, potential educator absences and unfamiliar substitutes, physical distancing practices, mask requirements, etc.

Solutions:

LEAs must ensure that practitioners in the self-contained setting have access to appropriate PPE, including face shields, gloves, and gowns*.

LEAs must ensure that self-contained classrooms receive additional attention to sanitation of surfaces and resources. Students may have special equipment that will need to be sanitized such as wheelchairs, adaptive technology, etc. (true for all settings where students may be included). Frequent cleaning will need to take place. Staff will need to be trained on proper handling of cleaning and disinfectant products.

LEAs must purchase barriers, such as study carrels and plexiglass screens, to physically separate students to lessen the spread of germs.

LEAs must supply amplification or other systems in all learning environments where student understanding may be compromised by the use of masks and/or face shields.

*More extensive PPE will be necessary in any environment, whether the self-contained classroom, or settings where students are included in the general education setting.

ISSUE: Related service delivery – speech, physical therapy, occupational therapy, counseling, etc. (pull-out)

Challenge:

Services are often delivered in smaller spaces making physical distancing difficult.

Different students rotate into the spaces throughout the day. Students come from a classroom and then may later return to different classrooms, interacting with a variety of students. Materials and equipment are shared throughout the day.

Students with learning, speech, and language challenges may have difficulty comprehending directions and instruction while practitioners are wearing masks. Conversely, students with learning, speech, and language challenges may have difficulty communicating while wearing masks.

Students rely heavily on visual as well as oral cues to benefit from these services.

Students with anxiety and social/behavioral challenges may have more trouble focusing on tasks if their therapists are wearing traditional masks. Students with impaired hearing will experience additional difficulty when interacting with staff wearing masks. In general, masks, on staff and students, will hamper students' ability to make progress towards their goals in these settings.

Solutions:

- LEAs must plan on rescheduling times and spaces to accommodate individual or small groups in order to maintain physical distancing.
- LEAs must ensure that rooms, materials, and equipment are cleaned and disinfected between groups.
- LEAs must budget for and supply sufficient materials if guidance prohibits sharing.
- LEAs must provide all practitioners with increased PPE, including face shields, gloves, and gowns.
- LEAs must provide all students with appropriate PPE, including face shields, as appropriate.

ISSUE: Related service delivery speech, physical therapy, occupational therapy, behavior specialist, etc. (push-in)

Challenge:

Push-in related services add to the number of people within the classroom and sometimes overlap, resulting in multiple additional adults in the room at a given time.

Push-in related services practitioners move between multiple classrooms throughout the day, interacting with various groups of students.

Solutions:

- LEAs will need to adjust schedules when push-in related services impact physical distancing requirements.
- LEAs must ensure that rooms, materials, and equipment are cleaned and sanitized between push-in sessions.
- LEAs must ensure that additional materials/equipment be purchased to avoid sharing across multiple groups.
- LEAs must provide all practitioners with increased PPE, including face shields, gloves, and gowns.
- LEAs must provide all students with appropriate PPE, including face shields, as appropriate.

ISSUE: Increased staffing needs

Challenge:

There will be increased demand for special education compensatory services to address social-emotional needs as we return to buildings.

Student behavioral challenges are likely to spike as buildings reopen in an increasingly restricted world. This will be particularly difficult for students whose cognitive and intellectual disabilities impact their ability to understand the world around them and adapt to changes.

With increased awareness of pathogens and possibly serving students with lingering aftereffects of a severe respiratory illness, student health needs will be increased. Medical and related services will need to be increased to address these needs.

The increased time to institute protective measures will impact schedules and services.

Solutions:

LEAs must arrange for the increased staffing that will be required in school buildings once they are reopened, particularly if buildings are operating modified schedules to adhere to physical distancing measures.

LEAs must anticipate and plan for increased demand on Child Study Team personnel and in special education settings. It will be necessary to expand the availability of counselors, behavior specialists, school nurses, CST members, speech/O.T./P.T., etc.

LEAs must anticipate and plan for the increased staff needed to maintain health, safety, and effective operations in the special education environment.

ISSUE: Family support upon student re-entry to school buildings

Challenge:

Just as families needed support during remote learning, they will need to continuously partner with educators in order for re-entry to be successful.

Solutions:

LEAs must provide time and resources for planned, intentional collaboration between families and educators prior to schools reopening.

LEAs must provide educators and practitioners time and flexibility to support families during and throughout the transition back to school buildings and/or in future remote or blended learning environments.

LEAs must provide increased parental support and training opportunities, as required by N.J.A.C. 6A:14-1.2(b)14 – District Eligibility for Assistance under IDEA Part B.

ISSUE: IEP Meetings and Evaluations upon re-entry to school buildings

Challenge:

IEP team meetings and student evaluations are normally expected to follow IDEA timelines. Families are legally entitled to discuss their child's program and goals when school reopens (in whatever form).

There is a high expectation for new cases due to a need for compensatory services. There is also a backlog of cases from the 2019-20 school year as a result of

COVID-19. Educators will face significant challenges in responding to the increase in requests while also addressing backlogs.

Many aspects of student evaluations cannot be conducted remotely, because they are not normed for remote administration. Assessment tools were developed for in-person administration; we cannot assume they produce reliable and valid results if conducted remotely. Therefore, student evaluations should only be conducted when face-to-face opportunities are deemed safe for students and staff.

Conducting IEP meetings remotely is challenging when families do not have access to appropriate technology.

Solutions:

LEAs must fund and develop systems to address the current backlog of overdue IEP and pending evaluation cases. Funding will be required to:

- Hire additional staff to address increases and backlogs
- Compensate existing staff to meet the demands of increases in workloads
- Provide educators and families with appropriate technology to view documents online and conduct virtual meetings during remote and blended learning situations.
- Create systems for delivery of hard copy documents when technology is not available.

ISSUE: Concerns for English language learners and families – re-entry

Challenge:

ELL students, whether new entrants or those currently in a district ELL program, engage in yearly testing to determine their language fluency and progress. Many aspects of testing cannot be conducted remotely because they are not normed for remote administration; we cannot assume they produce reliable and valid results if conducted remotely. This will impact LEAs ability to support new ELL referrals.

There may be a backlog of cases from the 2019-20 school year as a result of COVID-19. Educators will face significant challenges in responding to address backlogs.

ELL students may have difficulty comprehending directions and instruction while practitioners are wearing masks. Conversely, ELL students may have difficulty communicating while wearing masks.

Solutions:

LEAs must fund and develop systems to address the current backlog of overdue ELL referrals in addition to new referrals. Funding will be required to:

- Hire additional staff to address increases and backlogs

- Compensate existing staff to meet the demands of increases in workloads
- Providing educators and families with appropriate technology to view documents online and conduct virtual meetings during remote and blended learning situations.
- Create systems for delivery of hard copy documents when technology is not available.

LEAs must provide ELL students and practitioners with face shields to enable effective communication.

Budgets & Finances

“As it has with every aspect of society, the COVID-19 pandemic threatens K-12 finances to an unprecedented degree. School administrators and state policymakers face the prospect of devastating budget cuts, layoffs, and programmatic retrenchment even as they wrestle with how to safely reopen their virus-shuttered schools. They can’t make these decisions in a vacuum. School leaders need a clear picture of the resources in hand and what they can learn from those who have confronted past financial downturns – and survived.” (*Edweek*)

“How district leaders go about chiseling away at huge chunks of their budgets in the coming months will have long-term academic implications for the students in their districts. They will have little choice. Governors’ shutdown of the economy in order to prevent the spread of the virus has caused a precipitous drop in sales and income tax revenue, which more than 6,000 school districts rely on heavily. Fiscal analysts expect school districts in the next two years to lose more than \$200 billion in revenue and more than 300,000 educators to lose their jobs.” (*Edweek*)

Many LEAs and IHEs throughout the state of New Jersey are planning for a fiscal crisis, due to significant budget cuts and the impending financial strain the COVID-19 pandemic has placed upon them. Safe reopening of schools will require significant costs for increased staffing needs, personal protective equipment, technology for remote learning, resources to enable social distancing, cleaning and disinfectant supplies, transportation, and more.

It is imperative that substantial support be provided by the federal government to reduce the economic fallout connected to COVID-19. We anticipate state and local tax revenues will be drastically impacted, ravaging funds for general school operations. If the federal government fails to invest in public schools and IHEs, the consequences will be dire and considerably extend the current economic crisis.

ISSUE: State aid amounts

Challenge:

As revised, total K-12 state aid will continue at almost the same level as fiscal year 2020 (only \$3.6 million more), but the Adjustment Aid phase-out of S-2 will still redistribute \$156 million of that state aid from 194 adjustment aid districts to 371 underfunded districts. At the time of this publication, considerable questions remain, including:

- Will additional funding reductions or changes occur for fiscal year 2021?
- Will the amount of state aid for LEAs be allocated and paid in the usual semi monthly installments between July 1, 2020 and Sept. 30, 2020 and between Oct. 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021?
- Will there be an attempt to have new annualized state aid allocations ready by July 1, 2020?

Without understanding the distribution timeline, districts cannot adequately plan for next year.

Funding cuts will have a direct impact on staffing levels at a time when increased staffing and funding will be required to safely meet the challenges presented by COVID-19.

State funding for IHEs was cut by 50% for April, May, and June and by 100% for July, August and September. These cuts, combined with an unprecedented drop in fall enrollment, have led to budget gaps in the millions. Many colleges are looking to furloughs, layoffs, and deferral of salary increases to balance their budgets.

Solutions:

When aid changes are proposed or implemented, the state must issue its new aid numbers as soon as possible.

Difficult times require difficult decisions. How and when those decisions are made can impact a district’s ability to work in cooperation with staff and stakeholders in order to find common solutions. Any successful

plan implementation will require all staff and administration to be on the same page. Understanding how and when the change in funding will take place will help them work together to find common solutions.

LEAs and local association representatives must work collaboratively to ensure not only full disclosure of the financial implications of state aid adjustments, but also to ensure contractual and statutory rights are honored.

ISSUE: Tax levy legislation concerns

**LEAs may not receive their full tax levy payment under recent legislation.*

Challenge:

LEAs may not receive their full tax levy payment under recent legislation., P.L. 2020, c. 34. This will restrict local funds even further.

Solutions:

It is imperative that the Division of Local Government Services address the issue of when municipalities make districts whole. Otherwise, the state should provide funds for districts that are struggling to meet their obligations.

ISSUE: Funding to Ensure Health, Safety, and School Operations

Challenge:

In order for schools and colleges to safely reopen, significant resources will be needed for:

- Personal protective equipment
- Sanitation and disinfectant supplies
- Resources to ensure social distancing
- Staffing – ranging from certificated staff members to educational support professionals
- Increased transportation costs
- Training and professional development
- Curricular adjustments
- Technology

At the time of this publication, significant questions remain:

- What are the funding streams?

- If additional federal money is made available to LEAs and IHEs will funds be unrestricted?
- If additional funding is restricted, how will the restrictions be determined and will they include:
 - Monies for the use of purchasing PPE and sanitization supplies?
 - Monies for costs to provide technology to students and staff as needed?
 - Monies to compensate employees for additional time and/or responsibilities that extend beyond their current job descriptions?

Solutions:

Additional Federal funding must be provided in order to ensure health, safety, and effective school operations.

If funds are restricted, allowances must be made for funds to be grouped into broadly defined categories that allow for as much flexibility within each category as possible.

Where possible, the state should assign any additional Federal funding in unrestricted block grants, allowing districts and colleges the greatest flexibility to meet the safety requirements of reopening schools.

Health and safety mandates must be funded. In addition to federal funds, the state could raise revenue, make structural changes to health care, and pass legislation allowing additional bonding to ensure there are sufficient funds to meet its obligations to LEAs and IHEs.

ISSUE: Inequity of CARES Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund allocations

Challenge:

The CARES Act Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund allocations will result in disproportionate funding to wealthy students because the funding to private schools is based on a school's total enrollment rather than low-income student enrollment . "...distributing funds based on this interpretation will serve only to divert desperately needed funds from our public schools at the expense of vulnerable low-income students and to the benefit of even the most wealthy students in private schools." ([*Education Law Center*](#))

The CARES Act ESSER Fund allocations are also distributed to county colleges. Limitations preclude community colleges from using appropriated funds for non-COVID-19 related expenses. At the time of this publication, county colleges throughout the state of New Jersey are being forced to consider and/or implement furloughs, layoffs, and salary reductions. Ultimately, this will create deepened disparities among IHEs and place significant stress on the system. The community colleges that have experienced historical reductions in student enrollment paired with state and county funding reductions are now suffering under larger budgetary shortfalls.

Solutions:

Funds for private school set asides should be based on low-income student enrollment (not total enrollment) and the fund allocation amounts should be adjusted accordingly.

ESSER Fund allocation limitations must allow for unrestricted flexibility so IHEs may appropriately use these funds to mitigate budgetary shortfalls.

This report was researched and prepared by the members of NJEA's Education Recovery Staff Task Force.

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