—E+/Getty

Safe Reopening

EDITOR'S NOTE

Student safety involves significant complexities and personnel. In this Spotlight, review how your district can strategically apply its funding; review ways schools can help students safely bounce back; evaluate partnerships you can establish with community members; and dig into what educators should anticipate and consider next school year. **

Publishing on July 22, 2020

Cyberbullying, Mental Health, and Other School-Safety Takeaways for School Reopening

By Sarah Sparks

In Fall 2020, many schools will not be opening their door to full-time, in-person instruction, as COVID-19 continues to spread. But student safety and wellness will still be an issue for school and district leaders, as federal data show.

A new annual joint report by the federal Education and Justice departments on school crime and safety finds that while the rates of students ages 12 to 18 who are victims of crime have continued to decline nationwide since 1992, students are more than twice as likely to be victims in-school—about 33 out of every 1,000 students—than out, at about 16 victims out of every 1,000.

Those rates will almost certainly drop in the next school year, as districts opt to have students learn from home full- or part-time. Yet remote-learning environments could present their own safety concerns, as schools grapple with how to combat cyberbullying, help students cope with neighborhood tensions and violence, and identify which students are suffering from mental and emotional problems related to the pandemic and school closures.

The federal data give a picture of the state of crime and safety in U.S. schools before the pandemic:

Younger grades that do not allow students private messaging or email may have fewer problems with bullying during online classroom settings, but it may also be more difficult for adults to catch wind of problems among students in social media. Moreover, experts have suggested the combination of increased physical isolation from peers and rising dependence on social media could worsen the rising rates of suicide among older students and teenagers.

School leaders have already voiced concern about the difficulty in identifying mental health problems and providing supports for students who are struggling during remote learning. As the data show, schools often serve as the only mental health supports for significant portions of their students.

The National Center for Education Statistics and the Bureau of Justice Statistics, which jointly produce the annual school crime and safety study, highlighted concerns around how problems in students' neighborhoods can affect their learning. For example, as communities across the country continue to be rocked by protests calling for racial justice, the study finds racial tensions in a child's neighborhood can be nearly as academically damaging as crime.

In 2017-18, the study also found 80 percent of schools had at least one incident of violence, theft, or other crimes, but less than half reported an incident to police. That rate has been flat since 2015-16, but lower than in any year from 2000 to 2010. Only 15 percent of schools reported any serious violent crimes to the police, though there was no information available about where or what kind of schools they were. ■

Published on May 26, 2021

Schools Can Use COVID-19 Relief Money for Vaccinations and Teacher Bonuses, Feds Say

By Andrew Ujifusa

School districts can use money from the American Rescue Plan and other COVID-19 aid packages to provide "premium pay" to educators—provided that it's "reasonable" and consistent with federal and other requirements—as well as to prevent layoffs, new guidance from the U.S. Department of Education states.

The aid can also be used to pay for vaccinations, as well as outreach efforts related to the COVID-19 vaccines, the guidance document says.

The fact sheet released by the department on May 26, 2021 also says that state lawmakers cannot limit how districts use the biggest pot of money under those relief laws. But it does say that state education departments can restrict how much money districts can use on administration, as part of their oversight of specific portions of COVID-19 aid.

The department also says that relief money for school districts in three federal relief bills can be used to improve heating, ventilation, and other projects that would help schools' air quality. "Renovation or remodeling activities that are necessary for an LEA to prevent, prepare for, and respond to COVID-19 would be permissible," the department says.

The document, which is designed to address frequently asked questions about coronavirus relief, comes as states and school districts make plans for how to use coronavirus relief money. Under three relief packages,

—Jessica Hill/AP

High school senior Sudeen Pryce, center, receives the first dose of the Pfizer vaccine at a mass vaccination site in East Hartford, Conn.

> "
> Renovation or remodeling activities that are necessary for an LEA to prevent, prepare for, and respond to COVID-19 would be permissible.
>
> **U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**
> GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

K-12 schools have received close to $200 billion in direct aid, or nearly double what they received under the 2009 stimulus that Congress passed in response to the Great Recession.

The new Biden administration guidance, which is nonbinding, applies to the three relief bills signed into law in March 2020, December 2020, and March of 2021. The guidance covers Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds for use by state and local education agencies, as well as Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funds.

The speed at which states have moved federal relief money along to districts has varied. Schools are dealing with significant turmoil and uncertainty when it comes to planning how to use coronavirus relief and planning their budgets in general. The pandemic has also had a notable impact on special education and infrastructure, among other big-ticket budget issues for school leaders.

Vaccinations, masks, coronavirus testing and more

The guidance says that the relief packages' ESSER and GEER money can be used to provide COVID-19 vaccinations for eligible students and staff, as well as pay for coronavirus testing, personal protective equipment, and things like hand sanitizer and masks.

"Allowable vaccination outreach efforts in general could include activities to create awareness and build confidence, facilitate clinics, and provide incentives such as paid time off for staff to get vaccinated," the guidance goes on to say.

The extent to which families will have their children in K-12 schools vaccinated against the coronavirus remains a major concern for educators. Although the vaccine is becoming increasingly available to school-age children, it's unlikely states will require them to get the vaccine, experts have told Education Week.

Masking policies, meanwhile, have continued to be a knotty problem for education officials.

Governor's relief funds can also be used for preschool services, according to the guidance, but governors aren't required to spread the money around to all the entities, like districts and colleges and universities, that are eligible for the money.

When it comes to "premium pay" (such as teacher bonuses), the guidance says that relief funds can be used for that purpose "pursuant to an established plan." It must also be "consistent with applicable collective bargaining agreements." There's debate about the effectiveness of offering bonuses to educators who might be ground down by the pandemic.

Lawmakers in at least one state, Florida, have agreed to provide one-time $1,000 bonuses to teachers and principals using federal coronavirus relief money for education.

The guidance also says that federal relief money can be used to provide job training, postsecondary counseling, and other services to students who graduated in 2020 or were due to graduate in 2021 but who "have not yet successfully transitioned to college or careers."

That interpretation of the aid packages could be especially helpful to students in special education programs whose access to services was disrupted by the pandemic and who are close to aging out of them. ■

Helping Students Bounce Back From a Disrupted Year: Strategies for Schools

By Sarah Sparks

The pandemic has caused widespread disruptions in many students' school experiences, repeatedly changed their formats for learning, and isolated them physically from teachers and classmates. As educators work to return students to full-time, in-person learning, they will need more than just academic interventions. They will also need to help students reconnect and get back into the schooling mindset.

In doing so, newcomer programs—intended to provide intensive support for immigrant and often English-learner students who may come to U.S. schools with interrupted formal education and stress or trauma—may prove an important model.

"A lot of the techniques and the strategies, the pedagogies that are used with newcomer schools, we can be using with every kid now that they're coming back to school," said Audrey Cohan, senior dean for research and scholarship at Molloy College in New York, who studies newcomer programs. This includes a focus on accelerating students rather than remediating them; providing social-emotional and mental health supports; and reestablishing school habits and norms that help students reconnect with their school community.

"It's not what we lost during the pandemic, but it's, what did we learn from the pandemic?" Cohan said. "What positive experiences did the kids find; how did the everyday chores and the everyday responsibilities turn into new learning that maybe we didn't consider as important before?

"I think all kids came away with new skills and new understanding and teachers have to have a chance to help them process it," she said.

Studies tally up educational losses

UNESCO estimates that among students who should be in 3rd grade worldwide, the ed-

ucational disruptions caused by the pandemic have reduced the share of students who read proficiently on grade level by 10 percentage points, or 14 million, to 49 percent of children that age.

In terms of time, the UNESCO researchers calculated that U.S. schools lost less than 10 percent of their total 2020 instructional time (through to November 2020) to full school closures caused by the pandemic—significantly less than in neighboring Mexico, where schools were fully closed for more than half of instructional time. But once researchers accounted for time lost to partial closures, including schools forced to move to half-days or -weeks, or those only able to serve certain grade levels, the share of lost school days with synchronous instruction grew to 35 percent to 54 percent.

While the pandemic has been unique in both the scale and ongoing nature of its educational disruption, it does show similarities to the effects of other major natural disasters.

"While [Hurricane] Katrina was a different kind of disaster, there are parallels in the effect on students' lives," said Douglas Harris, an economics professor and chair in public education at Tulane University, as well as director at the Education Research Alliance for New Orleans, which has studied schooling in the region in the more than 15 years since that hurricane. In both the pandemic and widescale natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina, Harris said, "Students were thrown out of school ... and schools tried to grapple with how to serve students remotely."

Students were isolated from friends. Some had parents who lost jobs, got sick, or died, he added.

"And while in Katrina, students were in-person," Harris said, "in both [the hurricane and the pandemic], they were forced into different environments where they didn't necessarily have relationships."

And research from disaster recovery suggests children bounce back faster educationally when they have both academic and mental health supports and community connections in the months and years following the disaster. Harris and his colleagues found that by about two years after the disaster, students who had lived through school displacement during Hurricane Katrina had returned to their expected academic trajectory before the storm. But he noted that students continued to show signs of trauma and mental health issues for years after that.

It's hard to separate the effects of just covering less content from the psychological effects of falling out of the routines and habits that put students in an academic mindset for learning, Harris noted.

—Ross D. Franklin/AP

Lynette Faulkner, right, director at the Valencia Newcomer School in Phoenix, Ariz., helps a new student connect with classmates for a remote lesson. Research on "newcomer schools" like this one can inform post-pandemic schooling practices now as students return to full-time learning, with many having experienced educational disruption, stress, and trauma not unlike that of many newly arrived immigrant students.

Schools can help students recover more quickly if they build on skills that students have learned during this year, be it their experiences of helping at home or their virtual skills developed in remote classes, to improve the way they learn next year, Cohan said.

"Students during this time didn't have time to submit everything or do everything in the traditional way that we might have expected before as teachers," Cohan said, "but we've had to think of new ways to figure out if the kids mastered what they needed to master and they move on. So when we start to think about the reestablishment, what can we get rid of that was very traditional and not helpful? And what did we learn from the pandemic that we can keep?"

Summer newcomer program yields best practices

Dalton public schools, in northwest Georgia, developed a program for students who are newcomers to the United States about six years ago, in response to an influx of unaccompanied immigrant children from Central America. The district typically gets 75 to 100 newcomer students each year.

"The first thing that is most important for someone who comes in with interrupted schooling is that we start building their relationships,"

> "While [Hurricane] Katrina was a different kind of disaster, there are parallels in the effect on students' lives. Students were thrown out of school ... and schools tried to grapple with how to serve students remotely."
>
> **DOUGLAS HARRIS**
> ECONOMICS PROFESSOR AND CHAIR IN PUBLIC EDUCATION, TULANE UNIVERSITY

said Caroline Woodason, the director of school support for the 8,000-student school system. "That is the first and foremost foundation of our program, and I think that's the same with COVID during the pandemic. You heard so much about students who had relatives passing away, who were feeling unsafe, and this year we've been so isolated. So we made it a priority to be back face-to-face as much as possible and rebuilding relationships."

Last summer (2020), just out of the first wave of the pandemic, the district was one of the few in Georgia to keep an in-person, districtwide summer program for newcomer students. For five weeks, secondary students in the program worked on recovering course credits, while students as young as preschool received enrichment designed to accelerate them academically and relieve their feelings of isolation.

To avoid contagion, the program had universal masking, symptoms checks, and cleaning regimens. The 300 students in the program were kept in groups of eight to 10 that saw only their teacher and other cohort members, but who were able to use playground equipment, receive visits from mobile zoo and museum programs, and do enrichment activities meant to help them bond with their cohort. At the secondary level, students' cohorts were developed around the subjects they needed to focus on, such as algebra or U.S. government, to allow for more intensive tutoring.

The summer program last year both allowed the district to provide extra academic and emotional support for some of its most vulnerable students and to pilot best practices to use with all students through in-person cohorts and virtual remote platforms during the school year. There were no cases of COVID-19 or quarantines required during the summer program, Woodason said.

"Doing the summer program for 300 children gave us good guidance for how we were going to do it in the fall with 8,000," Woodason said. "We already had some things in place that made it easier to do virtual, but we've been committed to face-to-face because we feel that's best for the kids."

This summer, the Dalton district will expand its program for newcomers and other students who have struggled this year to provide ways for students to get health care that may have been harder to access if they were in isolation, such as dentists, as well as more accelerated courses and enrichment.

"We have to work around who's open and who's not, but we're going out to parks and museums so that students get a broader foundation to enrich their learning," Woodason said.

Guide to Reacclimating Students After An Interrupted Year

Studies of immigrant children enrolled in newcomer schools and students whose schooling was disrupted by natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina have yielded key strategies that can be useful now as students return to in-person classes.

PANDEMIC YEAR — Disrupted Learning

2021-22 SCHOOL YEAR — Reconnect, Support, & Accelerate
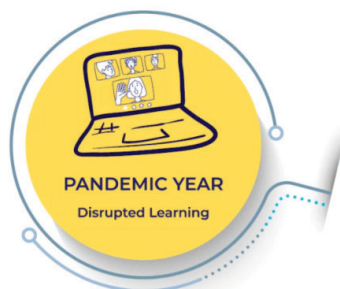
ACADEMIC BOOST: Focusing on acceleration over remediation helps students perform better. Studies show that dialing heavily into remediation may result in boredom and academic decline.

RECONNECT: Rebuilding community connections and relationships after a year of isolation is key to students feeling supported and ready to engage.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SUPPORT: Studies show that social-emotional support must be incorporated in plans to catch up academically.

ESTABLISH ROUTINE: Routines help students regain an academic mindset.

BUILD ON NEW SKILLS: Students and teachers will feel comfortable and confident carrying forward new digital skills and processes learned over this past school year.

SOURCE: Education Week reporting.

Images: Getty

"These are opportunities that our children in poverty don't get as often, and especially during the pandemic, you know many have stayed in their houses for so long. And so we are expanding their knowledge base so that they can have a richer foundation."

In the long term, practices developed to support students with interrupted education during the pandemic could be used to help students with an even wider array of classroom disruptions, from migrant and homeless students to those who experience a school closure, according to Chris Chang-Bacon, an assistant education professor at the University of Virginia school of education and human development.

Woodason agreed. "There are some gaps, but I have seen that children are very resilient and that when we set high expectations, they can learn at a faster pace than we oftentimes look for," she said.

"And so, instead of wringing our hands and saying, 'Oh, my, they lost a year,' Our school district has said, OK, let's hit the ground running and let's let look at what they need and just keep going." ■

> "You heard so much about students who had relatives passing away, who were feeling unsafe, and this year we've been so isolated. So we made it a priority to be back face-to-face as much as possible and rebuilding relationships."
>
> **CAROLINE WOODASON**
> DIRECTOR OF SCHOOL SUPPORT, DALTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, GEORGIA

Best Practices to Safely Reopen and Stay Open

RAPTOR®
TECHNOLOGIES

The best way to have both a safe and healthy reopening is to follow the guidelines provided by your local health department and national agencies like the CDC and the U.S. Department of Education (ED). These agencies recommend schools have a layered approach that includes:

Keeping those with exposure risk off campus through health screenings and prompt contact tracing.

In a Raptor survey, over 80% of K-12 respondents stated health screenings are a top safety priority. Facilitating the screenings, recording the results, and determining the action to come into the school or not can be cumbersome without a streamlined process. Contact tracing is another top mitigation strategy that can be much more challenging than it needs to be, especially for schools that rely on handwritten visitor logs. Contact tracing requires schools to track everyone who enters their buildings and record their information, including when and where they were on campus and their contact information at a minimum.

Addressing unfinished learning with additional resources to help students return to grade level.

Remote learning has resulted in unfinished learning/learning loss for a countless number of students. Volunteers, tutors, mentors, and other education professionals can help bring students back to grade level and assist with summer learning and enrichment programs. Virtual volunteers can build relationships with students and give them personalized attention to ensure they not only succeed in class, but also stay well outside of school hours. These programs require schools have an efficient method to recruit and track each volunteer and confirm they are safe to work with students.

Responding to and being prepared for student mental health crises.

Experts warn that we will see an increase in violent behavior as schools reopen. Students experiencing long-term emotional, behavioral, and psychological effects from the pandemic may be defiant and aggressive. Schools need a comprehensive emergency management system with a mobile, discreet panic button that empowers teachers and staff to summon the right support and have access to protocols for any situation, including a positive COVID-19 case or a fight in the hallway. The most powerful emergency management systems link directly to law enforcement and first responder agencies so schools can get the right help—as quickly as possible—if a situation escalates.

Must-Haves to Include in Your Reopening Plan

RAPTOR®
TECHNOLOGIES

Your reopening plan must detail specifics about how you will prevent COVID-19 transmission to keep your students, staff, and communities safe, including how you will follow the recommended guidance from the CDC. The following items should be part of your comprehensive reopening plan.

Framework that addresses staff and students' social, emotional, and mental health needs.

This includes building strong relationships with students; establishing a safe, positive learning environment; and giving students access to support from trusted staff members, school counselors, and psychologists. Schools should help remove the stigma around mental health programs by giving students the opportunity to speak openly about their challenges; sharing educational resources with staff and students; and letting students know they are not alone in their struggles. Staff also need to be supported, as they have suffered different challenges and stressors. Schools should consider educator and peer-to-peer support programs.

Health screening policies and procedures.

Follow recommendations from the ED and require students and staff to complete a health screening before they leave their homes each school day. Screen visitors, guardians, volunteers, and contractors—as well as students and staff who did not complete remote screening—on site before giving them access to the building. Communicate these protocols in advance and follow guidelines when establishing which questions to ask. Require visitors, contractors, volunteers, guardians, etc. to wear a badge that shows they have passed the health screening.

Visitor management and contact tracing policy.

Use an automated visitor management system to automatically track—and record details of—each person who comes into and leaves your buildings. Be prepared for contact tracing needs; it's a matter of when, not if. Retain personal and specific details for everyone who enters to aid possible in-depth contact tracing efforts of local health officials and be sure to retain these details in a secure, password-protected location for at least 28 days.

Emergency response protocols.

With the growing concern of increased violence as schools reopen, staff need a reliable way to request the right level of response for any incident. Schools need a comprehensive emergency management plan to be prepared for any emergency.

Transportation plan and policies.

Consider how many students should be on each bus and how you will ensure they will follow the recommended physical distancing protocols. Place hand hygiene and sanitizer stations near the door of each bus and require all entrants to use. Speak with students and guardians about maintaining social distancing at bus stops.
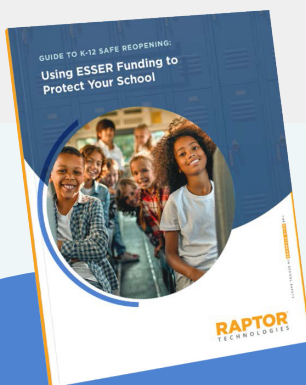
Volunteer process and procedures.

Leverage volunteers and tutors to help students with learning gaps. Require each volunteer/tutor to have a complete criminal background check as part of the application process to confirm they are safe. Make sure to track hours of each volunteer/tutor for reporting purposes.

How to Maximize ESSER Funding for a Safer School

RAPTOR®
T E C H N O L O G I E S

The CARES Act, CRRSA Act, and ARP Act are giving districts an unprecedented amount of funding to address the impacts of COVID-19. When used strategically, you can use this funding to respond to COVID-19 and implement solutions that will help build and maintain a safe learning environment well beyond the pandemic.

COVID-19 Issue	Short-term Benefit	Long-Term Benefit
Keeping those with exposure risk off campus through health screenings and prompt contact tracing	An automated visitor management system can streamline health screening with remote and on-site screening options that intelligently know what action should be taken. A best-in-class system can also track every individual who signs in, recording details such as their contact information and when and where they were authorized to be in the school. Schools then have instant access to the information needed to effectively and promptly contact trace should a person who visited their school subsequently test positive.	Every school needs a trusted visitor management system to eliminate uncertainty. Powerful systems will screen for sex offenders, alert staff of custody issues, provide district-wide reporting, and integrate with an emergency management system so you can account for everyone in an emergency. The system should also sync with your SIS so you can track student tardies and early dismissals as well as confirm you're releasing students to only approved guardians.
Addressing unfinished learning with additional resources to help students return to grade level	A volunteer management system can streamline the application process, track hours, and confirm each volunteer and tutor is safe to work with students through robust background checks. As schools reopen, more and more volunteers will be needed for various functions throughout the school.	An automated volunteer management system can provide an integrated online volunteer application, full criminal background checks, volunteer hour tracking, event management, and robust reporting.
Responding to and being prepared for student mental health crises	Whether schools must react to a positive COVID-19 case, a fight in the hallway, or a full-scale campus emergency with multiple first responder agencies, a comprehensive emergency management system with mobile, discreet alert functionality allows teachers to request assistance from a tailored list of individuals from wherever they are on campus and allows you to keep track of all incidents for robust reporting. The most powerful emergency management systems also have a panic alert system that links directly to law enforcement and first responder agencies so you can get the right help—as quickly as possible—if a situation escalates.	The right emergency management system can give districts the tools to prepare for, respond to, and recover from any incident. The system should serve as a platform for schools to implement safety protocols and best practices to help staff deliver the right level of response to both small-scale and large-scale events as well as comply with current and emerging legislation like Alyssa's Law.

GUIDE TO K-12 SAFE REOPENING:
Using ESSER Funding to Protect Your School

RAPTOR TECHNOLOGIES

Investing in the Right Software

To address COVID-19's impact on student and staff wellbeing and overall school safety, schools should consider an integrated software provider that incorporates visitor management, volunteer management, and emergency management into one user-friendly system.

Raptor software helps over 35,000 K-12 schools across the country address COVID-19's impact so that they can focus on reopening and keeping their students, staff, and communities safe during—and well beyond—the pandemic. Raptor is considered an allowable expense for all ESSER funds.

Download our comprehensive guide to learn more about how to use ESSER funds to safely reopen and stay open.

RAPTORTECH.COM/SAFE-SCHOOL-REOPENING

Published on March 11, 2021

What's the Least Risky Hybrid Model To Bring Students Back to School?

By Sarah Sparks

There's more than one way to bring students back to class, but it's not yet clear which models for in-person instruction can keep students and staff safest.

As of February 2021, 43 percent of students had returned to full-time in-person learning and another 26 percent were using a hybrid remote schedule, according to a new analysis by a coalition including the COVID Collaborative and the Evidence Project at the Center on Reinventing Public Education. The report echoes evidence in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines that suggests schools can operate safely with at least partial in-person instruction during the pandemic, provided they use mitigation measures such as sanitation, mask-wearing, and quarantining of students and staff who become infected with the coronavirus, which causes the potentially deadly respiratory illness COVID-19.

For in-person instruction, the CDC, World Health Organization, and others consider the lowest-risk models to use small cohorts of students (generally 10 or fewer) taught in small, physically distanced classes and kept in alternating or staggered schedules to avoid groups of students or teachers mixing during the day. Students and teachers do not share any materials, and any frequently touched surfaces are cleaned daily or between uses. School-based COVID-19 outbreaks often have occurred during schedule overlaps, such as when groups of children come together at lunch.
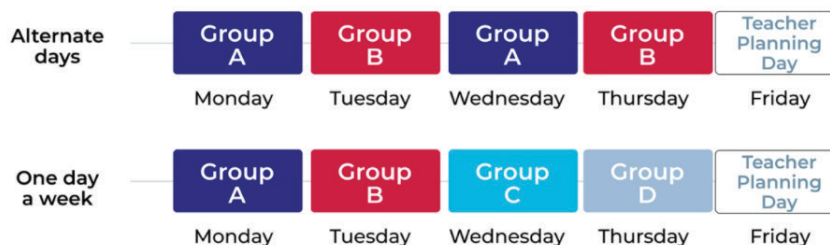
While this is the gold standard, most schools have neither the staff nor the space to maintain the lowest level of risk for in-person learning. In general, districts have opted for one of a handful of different models for hybrid in-person schedules, including:

- *Split days*, in which half of students attend in-person classes in the morning while the other half learn remotely. The groups switch during the lunch period, when classes are cleaned and disinfected.


Hybrid Scheduling Options

HALF DAYS — A.M. Group | Lunch Break | P.M. Group

SHIFT SCHEDULING

Alternate days:
| Group A | Group B | Group A | Group B | Teacher Planning Day |
| Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |

One day a week:
| Group A | Group B | Group C | Group D | Teacher Planning Day |
| Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |

CORE SUBJECTS ARE FOCUS FOR IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION

Students remain in one room for the day, as core teachers shift rooms. Electives are left for remote learning.

Science Teacher | Math | English/Language Arts | Social Studies
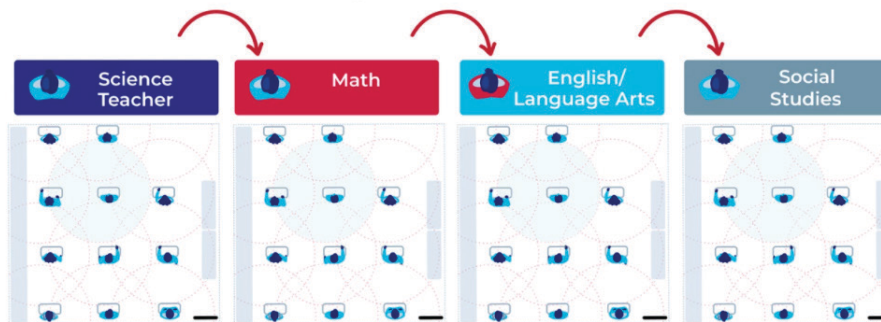
Note: Foreign languages may be considered core subjects in some states.
SOURCE: Education Week reporting

- *Shift schedules*, in which cohorts of students are assigned to attend in-person classes on certain days of the week or alternating weeks, while other cohorts learn remotely.

- *Teacher shifting*, particularly in secondary schools where students previously would have switched classes, in which cohorts of students remain in a single class while teachers switch classrooms to provide instruction in core subject areas like math or reading. In these models, any electives become remote-only.

So far, U.S. and international studies have mostly lumped all kinds of hybrid schedules for remote and in-person instruction together under one category of hybrid instruction,

making it difficult to tease out whether specific schedules are safer for particular communities or groups of students.

One study of school districts in Michigan and Washington released in February 2021 found that offering in-person or hybrid instruction didn't significantly boost outbreaks when community infection rates were low or moderate. But the states defined those categories of instructional models broadly. In Michigan, for example, hybrid districts included mostly those that provided general education students with in-person instruction two to three days a week, or those that phased in in-person schooling for students with high-needs—including English-language learners and those receiving special education services. In-person districts had to offer general education students full-time, in-person class, but typically also had a portion of students who opted to use hybrid or remote instruction during the pandemic. Study co-author Dan Goldhaber of the University of Washington noted that the states did not record enough information on individual district reopening models to allow researchers to compare transmission rates by model.

"While it may be natural to assume that removing students from contexts in which they are in close quarters in school buildings will allow for greater social distancing and COVID mitigation practices, the counterfactual for students and school personnel who are not in public school buildings is not necessarily a safer environment," Goldhaber and his colleagues noted. They pointed to parents' use of so-called "learning pods" to support remote instruction in hybrid schedules, noting, "these pods may be in private homes or other contexts that do not require or allow for social distancing and mitigation strategies. Moreover, it is likely that individuals mix across and beyond their pods, as students in a pod then socialize with other children or family members outside of school hours."

Similarly, Ibukun Akinboyo, the medical director for pediatric infection prevention at Duke University Hospital and co-author of a study of COVID-19 transmission in North Carolina schools, found that, among the districts that had in-person instruction, some used four-day schedules of in-person classes for all children, while others used cohorts of students that traded off each week. Akinboyo and her colleagues did not compare infection rates or outbreaks across different types of plans, only between dis-

tricts that had some in-person instruction and those that had none, she said, "however, despite the variety in plans, transmission has been minimal in schools."

"The overwhelming evidence suggests that schools can provide in-person education safely even in communities with high transmission rates," Akinboyo said.

The newly released CRPE report found similar evidence from a series of studies of German schools, which found that when schools moved to full-time in-person instruction, community infection rates declined. Researchers say that's in part because students were in a more contained and controlled setting.

However, epidemiologists such as William Hanage of Harvard's T.H. Chan School of Public Health have voiced concern that alternating schedules expand the networks of people and places that students and teachers are exposed to, boosting the risks of exposure. For example, a full-day, in-person schedule could have more students in the same building, but students attending two days a week may also attend a child-care center or stay with other family during other days. If students in the full-time schedule are kept in small cohorts, they may be exposed to fewer new people overall over the course of a week than students attending more than one location.

Even districts that ask teachers to shift classes rather than students to limit contact can risk virus exposure if they do not properly train staff to implement the schedules safely. One CDC study released last month of coronavirus clusters in Georgia elementary schools found that adults were more likely to infect each other or children than children were to infect adults.

Bottom line, the study noted, districts must provide significantly more training and support for staff to implement social distancing and other protocols needed for new schedules and hybrid models.

As more districts return to in-person instruction, states and the federal government have started to take a closer look at how different kinds of hybrid scheduling models could safeguard against transmission and improve learning. In response to an executive order from President Joe Biden in January, the Education Department's research arm, the Institute of Education Sciences is launching a detailed nationwide survey on the use and frequency of different in-person, hybrid, and remote instructional models across different schools and students. ■

Mental Health Problems Loom for the COVID Generation. Here's What Schools Can Do

By Arianna Prothero

The nation's schools were already struggling to meet students' mental health needs when the pandemic hit. How can schools rise to meet students' ballooning needs in that area as a massive school reopening gets underway?

To be sure, it will be difficult to balance mental health support with an equally massive academic recovery. But child development experts say it's a balance schools must attempt to strike if they want students to regain their academic footing after unprecedented disruptions, stress, and trauma.

An infusion of federal COVID-19 relief money will help, but how those funds are used will be pivotal. And experts say that schools cannot just focus on the students they know are in crisis; they must bolster supports for all students as well as staff members.

Even before the pandemic, mental health disorders, such as anxiety and depression, were on the rise among children and adolescents and many schools were struggling to keep pace with that demand. Suicide rates among children 10 and older had also climbed significantly since 2007, making suicide the second leading cause of death among adolescents before the pandemic.

And the pandemic certainly hasn't made things easier for kids.

Felecia Evans, a principal at Lander Elementary in Mayfield Heights, Ohio, just outside Cleveland, said her students are struggling with family housing loss, job loss, food insecurity, and just general anxiety about what may come next. Thirty percent of Evans' students come from low-income households.

"My student support team, myself, my school psychologist, the school counselor, my assistant principal, we meet every week with our 'high watch list' of kids," she said. "And

it's kind of changed the nature of my work. We used to spend a lot more time being able to talk about teaching and learning and now it's really trying to problem solve and help people get access to resources."

Nationally, the number of young children and adolescents going to the emergency room because of a mental-health crisis has shot up during the pandemic, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

More students are asking for services through their schools, a recent EdWeek Research Center survey of teenagers found. Twenty-one percent of high schoolers said that during the pandemic they felt for the first time they would benefit from school-based mental health services.

But professional organizations such as the National Association of School Psychologists, the American School Counselor Association, and the National Association of School Nurses say that there are not enough support staffs in schools—at least not now.

NASP recommends a ratio of 500 students per school psychologist, but the national average is actually closer to 1,500 to one. The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of 250 students to one school counselor, but the national average in the 2018-19 school year, the most recent year for which data was available, was 430 students per school counselor. Only about half of the nation's schools have a dedicated full-time nurse, while the National Association of School Nurses advocates for one full-time nurse in each school building.

How federal relief money can help

Some states and districts have already committed to using their share of the $129 billions of dollars in federal COVID-19 relief aid to hire more school psychologists and counselors.

While some districts may be reluctant to hire new staff, whether it be school psychologists, counselors, social workers, or nurses, with funds that will run out in a few years, it may be a bet worth making, said Rob Coad, a school psychologist and a member of the National Association of School Psychologists' School Safety and Crisis Response Committee.

Once schools, students, and parents get something they find valuable, he figures, it can be hard to take away.

"Our hope is that as you use this stimulus money to build support in schools, [these services] become normalized, and then the sites and ultimately the district see the value in it, and they reallocate and protect money to continue that over the long haul," he said.

There are many other ways schools can ex-
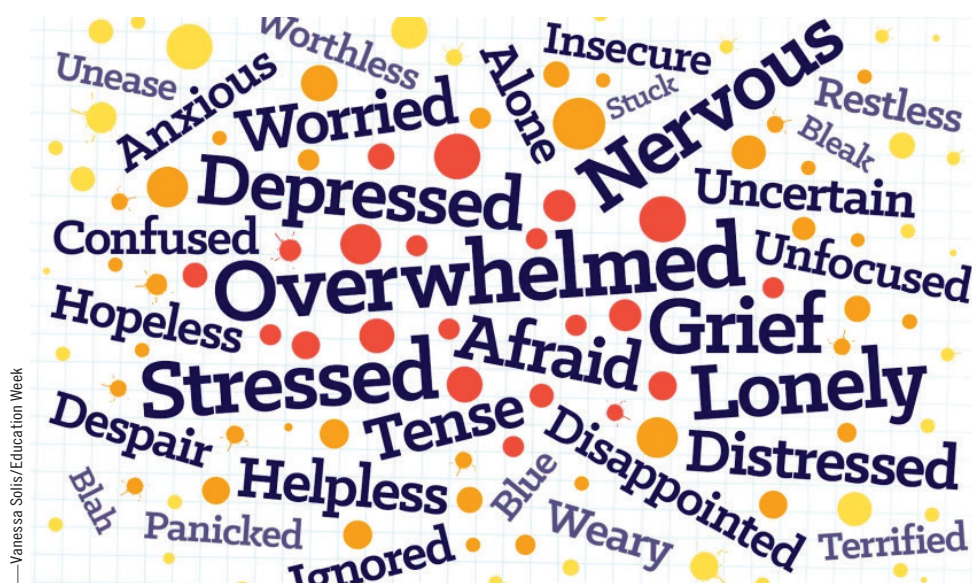
—Vanessa Solis/Education Week

pand their mental health services with the help of federal aid, such as using telehealth to connect students to mental health-care providers and training for teachers and staff on how to identify and respond to children who may be struggling with mental health issues, said Phyllis Jordan, the editorial director at FutureEd, a think tank based at Georgetown University.

"Another issue: You're going to have some discipline problems this year," said Jordan. "There are going to be kids who have behavioral outbursts, and you're just going to have kids who are out of practice at being in school who are just not behaving properly. And the worst thing a school can do is flush them all out with suspensions or harsh discipline. There is going to have to be some attention and training on issues like restorative practices and ways of coping with these issues that kids are going to have."

For districts that haven't invested in a social-emotional learning curriculum, now, with this infusion of federal dollars, would be a good time to do so, said Jordan.

Schools can also tap personnel or volunteers from their community or a program such as AmeriCorps to mentor students, said Jordan. Research has shown that positive relationships play an important role in developing students' ability to cope and learn.

Jordan also recommends that schools consider either starting or stepping up teacher home visits, which are a powerful way to develop relationships with families and gain a thorough understanding of what students are facing in their home lives and the supports they have outside of school.

If schools are not in a position to go on a hiring spree or invest in, say, a new social-emotional learning curriculum, there are other steps

they can take to make a difference, said Coad.

"This is a difficult time to try to start over and establish a new curriculum because students and teachers have been asked to pivot yet again." Schools have more capacity to help students than they may realize, he said. "If a school is struggling, it's probably more of a process of reallocating resources rather than not having them. We have to remind our fellow professionals about the skills that they have that help us screen and triage students that are in need."

School partnerships with community mental health providers are another strategy for bolstering the supports students can access through school.

Finally, climate surveys are a low-resource tool schools can use to assess the mental health needs of their students as they return to classes at the end of summer, said Jordan. Even if a school already uses school climate surveys, Jordan recommends passing a survey out at the start of the academic year and adding additional, pandemic-specific questions to it.

On mental health, schools must move from responding to preventing

Whatever route schools go, they should invest in prevention as well as in responding to children who are already in a state of crisis, said Sharon Hoover, a professor of child and adolescent psychiatry at the University of Maryland School of Medicine and co-director of the National Center for School Mental Health.

While students will in most cases benefit greatly from more support staff such as counselors and psychologists, schools also need to have strong systems of universal supports in place, she said. For example, they should be

teaching mental health literacy in all grades.

"This really should be a core part of your curriculum ...teaching kids how to obtain and sustain positive mental health, understand mental illness, and how to seek help if they need it," said Hoover. "Then as you think of moving up that triangle of support, investing in some kind of assessment system. Some people call it well-being check-ins. Some people call it mental health screening, but just a way to identify how your students are doing and if and when they need additional mental health support.

Similar to screening for vision and hearing problems in school, said Hoover, if schools don't have the staff in-house, they can refer students to a provider.

Another important component to prevention and universal supports is social-emotional learning.

While not a replacement for other mental health supports such as therapy, social-emotional learning can help root efforts to improve mental health schoolwide, said Stephanie Andrews, the interim executive director of student and family support services at Tulsa public schools.

"I don't want anyone to think that if we do self-awareness, that we're going to get rid of depression," she said. But social-emotional learning can teach children how to name and express what they are feeling. "I think having emotional literacy is really important, just as important as academic vocabulary."

Identifying emotions is key to tackling the tough ones, said Andrews, something that students—and oftentimes even adults—need help learning how to do.

SEL exercises such as "feelings circles" and "mood meters" can give students the space to examine their emotions and develop the vocabulary they need to express them and ask for help when they need it.

Another crucial piece to providing mental health supports school wide is teacher well-being.

"We can't have healthy students if we don't have a healthy education workforce," said Hoover. "And so that is one thing that schools should be thinking about as they are considering how to support student mental health. They first have to assess and address educator well-being."

One way the Tulsa school system has tackled this was by setting up a hotline specifically for teachers and principals to call when they're stressed or overwhelmed.
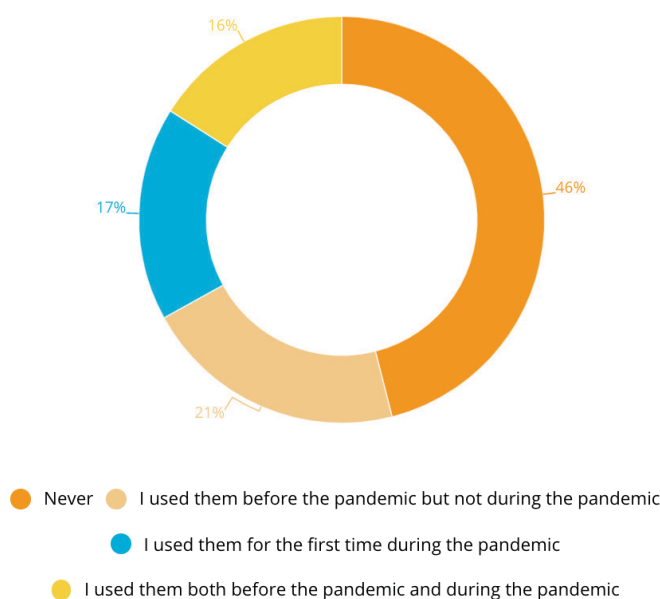
At Lander Elementary School in Ohio, principal Evans believes giving teachers breathing room and time for collaboration is an important part of well-being. She has eked out more time for planning and professional

Survey: Students' mental health needs increase during the pandemic

When — if ever — have you felt like you could benefit from mental health programs or services like counseling to help you when you were feeling upset, stressed, or having problems?
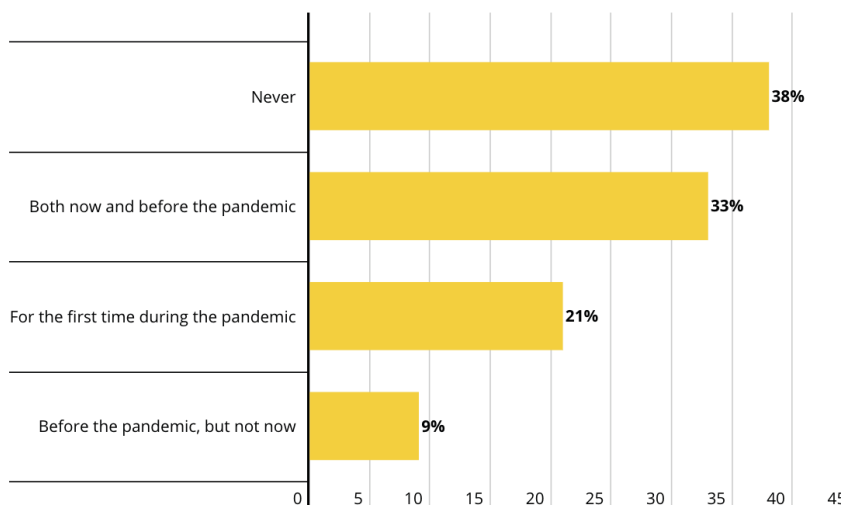
When, if ever, have you used mental health programs or services at your school (like counseling) for people who are upset, stressed, or having problems?

- Never
- I used them before the pandemic but not during the pandemic
- I used them for the first time during the pandemic
- I used them both before the pandemic and during the pandemic

SOURCE: EdWeek Research Center survey, April 2021

EdWeek `
Research Center

the top of her wish list is on-site, five-day-a-week therapy for students and families), this new schedule has gone a long way to provide more support for Lander's teachers.

And it's been popular with teachers, like Nicole Rucci-Macauda, who teaches 3rd grade.

"I think that's helped everbody's mental health because you're not as rushed," she said. "You have time to look deeper into oth-er things—to meet with parents, to meet with a counselor for one of your students and talk about strategies and things like that."

The union was hesitant when she pitched this reordered schedule last summer, Evans said, but the teachers have since embraced it. And Lander Elementary will continue to oper-ate on the same schedule, with minor tweaks, next school year. ◼

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OPINION

Published on April 26, 2021

5 Things to Expect When Schools Return to In-Person Learning

By Matt Flaming

By the time you read this, many American schools will be open with some form of in-person learning. Few schools are truly back to the normal environment we have been missing, of course, but it is impos-sible not to see that the momentum of public opinion has shifted. Already, more than half of all adults in the United States have received at least partial vaccination for COVID-19. Pressure is mounting on all sides for schools to open their doors to students. Every moment, we come clos-er to the day when our classrooms and hallways will once again be crowded and bustling with masses of children.

It won't be what you expect.

The problem may be with our expectations. For while research on what our students are thinking about their return to class remains rare, we do know that reunions tend to be very hard on people. In fact, we see that prolonged separation can lead to conflict when families and friends come together again. We are crea-tures of habit. And it's been a long time since we exercised the routines that will be filling our days again very soon. Here are five things you can expect as we return to traditional, in-person instruction.

You won't have the same rapport right away

I know. You love your students. Deeply. You educated yourself and spent your life prepar-ing to teach them. Most of us can't wait to see "our kids" again. And they will be coming in with as many expectations as you have. Both of you will have your expectations crushed at the door. It is inevitable. But it is also OK.

Remember, everyone will be looking forward to all of their favorite things about school, and so will you. But we won't be able to fit all those wonderful things into the first minute, or the first day, or even the first week or month. Patience in both children and adults will be tried. Relationships will be strained. Even if they are the same kids—you are no longer the same people. They are a year older! You are a year older, too! And you haven't re-ally been together doing the things you are all the best at in a long time. Be gentle with each other. Which brings us to the second thing …

There will be behavior and classroom-management issues

Our youngest scholars have been going absolutely bonkers about seeing each other again. How hard is it going to be to make them stay 3 feet, or 5 feet, or 6 feet apart from each other when their tiny hearts are aching for a hug? And not to hit the point too hard, but our older students have missed each other, too. They will be craving meaningful and rich in-teraction with friends, and perhaps even their teachers. But they will also have become used to independent learning, and the traditional classroom may feel confining.

Oh, yes. Our students' basic human needs will be in immediate conflict with our rules.

Human beings learn best from well-mod-eled behaviors, especially when the person modeling those behaviors expresses genuine caring and warmth that we can feel (Bandura, 1977). All the behavioral patterns and routines that you taught your students (and yourself)

must be remodeled, retaught and relearned.

This is true for everyone. All of the adults in the schoolhouse must understand that when they feel stress, the students probably are as well. If you are feeling "strange" or "out of your element," imagine how your students feel. (Imagine how your teachers and staff feel, principals).

Bandura (1977) says that most behaviors are not fully thought out—they are reactions that have been learned. But the kids have been out of your routine for a year and are not in tune with you yet. Model, involve them in solutions—help them to be mindful of behavior so they can engage mindful control of it. Be gentle with each other.

There will be learning loss

Well, duh. You have probably felt that the media is beating you up about this personally. Our students will have forgotten some of what they knew. Just like they do after summer break.

This is not a time to judge yourself or the students too harshly. Maybe they could have been more present for distance learning. But have you every procrastinated with online learning or turned off your camera in a meeting, though? (I'm talking to myself here.)

This is a time to be patient, to collectively take a breath and focus on the hard climb back. It is not time for blame. There is no use

ignoring the collective trauma of our past year. Let's show our students how to heal and come back strong. And let's not neglect to be kind to each other.

There will be tension1 with adult relationships

This we know from research. Trust me. My fellow veterans can testify that returning from a deployment is often harder on a relationship than leaving for one. Again—it's been a while, and you have all changed. You are different people. It may take time to "fall in love" with our colleagues again after the first rush of our reunion. Don't neglect the fact that some of us have experienced great loss in this pandemic. Spend time getting to know each other again and pause judgment. Yes, there is a theme here. Be gentle and kind.

It will get better

- Things may never be exactly the same. Some of us lost members of the team.

- If COVID-19 had never happened, the changes in our culture would still have happened, but we would have experienced it all together. In normal times, the world changes, and we observe it as

part of a community. The pandemic put us in isolation, and we are not meant to live that way.

- It is 100 years since the last great pandemic in North America. And while the impacts of influenza may be hard to see these days, they are with us still. Give it time.

- Enjoy being back to doing to the work you gave your life and energy to before COVID-19.

- Find your way back to your first loves. All of them. And add to your life the new loves you gained. Bake your best sourdough for your colleagues. Knit someone a scarf. Just remember to be gentle and kind with others ... and yourself. You're worth it.

Welcome back. ∎

Reference: Bandura, A., & McClelland, D. C. (1977). Social learning theory (Vol. 1). Prentice Hall: Englewood cliffs.

Matt Fleming is a public school administrator in California. He splits his time between his family, his work, and completing his Ph.D. in psychology with an emphasis in cognitive psychology and instruction.

OPINION

Published on March 25, 2021

School Reopening Requires More Than Just Following the Science

Educators must also rely on professional expertise and insider knowledge of schools

By Susan Moore Johnson

The maxim "follow the science" has guided education policymakers throughout the duration of COVID-19. Emerging findings about the benefits of masks, the need for regular testing, and the risks of airborne virus transmission have informed and

transformed mandates for local schools. Still, many of the decisions that schools must make as they reopen for in-person learning rest on incomplete or contested science. Think about the questions on which scientific consensus has shifted in the past year: Are 3 feet of distance between desks enough or must there be 6? Do young children wearing masks still put adult staff members at risk? Is daily deep cleaning of

classrooms really worth the cost? Educators can only "follow the science" so far.

Recently, researchers have issued quantitative estimates of "learning loss." Though important for public policy, they offer little guidance to teachers and administrators as they decide what to do next in their school. Similarly, resuming standardized testing is unlikely to tell teachers what they need to know about where their students stand academically and what they will need this spring and next year. If educators are to address their school's challenges effectively, they must begin by understanding them. To do so, they must rely not only on science but on their shared professional expertise and insider's knowledge of their school.

Every school is different. If reopening means more than solving problems of space, ventilation, and safety, then school-based educators will first need to make sense of everything that has happened and then tailor their responses to their students' current academic, social, and mental-health needs. Whatever

their school's goals—a return to normalcy or a vigorous pursuit of a new kind of schooling— teachers and principals must take careful stock of where they've been throughout the pandemic and where they are, before deciding where to go and how to get there.

Worthwhile school-based inquiries are not simply the sum of individual reflections or survey responses. Rather, they require sustained, candid conversations that engage teachers and administrators schoolwide in understanding how they and their students experienced and responded to the challenges of remote or hybrid teaching. If educators are to move forward together and develop a coherent recovery and development plan for their school, they will have to take into account the losses, gains, and lessons of the pandemic.

First, teachers must understand their own experience and that of their colleagues. What did they learn about their strengths, weaknesses, and preferences, as well as those of their peers? How well did their instruction work for them and their students? How did they assess students' learning, give feedback, and provide extra help? Did they discover effective ways to teach online that might be incorporated into future hybrid and in-person instruction?

Second, how have students fared, and what will they need as they return to school? What did online learning reveal about their interests, learning styles, and need for social interaction? Are there patterns of difference in students' experiences by race, ethnicity, gender, or family income? What might teachers do to build (or rebuild) a positive school culture as they and their students return after more than a year of isolation? How can the school approach short-term decisions, such as which students are promoted and longer-term revisions of their curriculum and instruction?

Third, after a year of online or hybrid instruction, what do parents expect of the school, and what role do they hope to play in their children's learning? As one district administrator told me, parents and teachers "have literally been observing each other in their own homes." Have these observations enhanced or frayed relationships between the school and families?

Given these and other pressing questions, what can principals do to support thoughtful review of the past and informed planning for the future? They must ensure that the urgency to comply with mandates and resume normal routines does not shut down efforts to candidly take stock of past practices and reimagine new, better, more equitable ones. Recently, a teacher said that she was grateful for the online team meetings that her school held
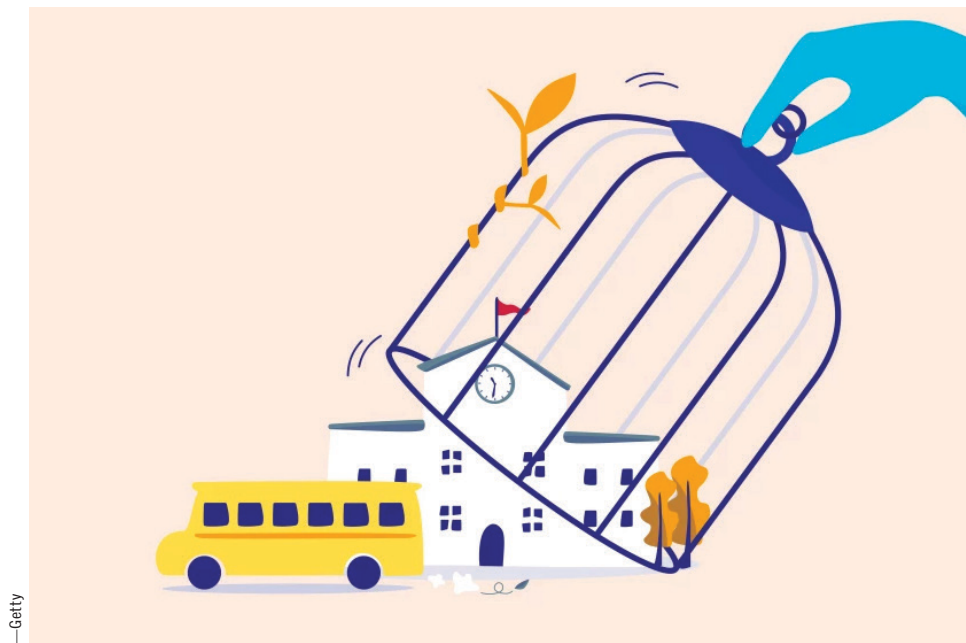
—Getty

throughout the pandemic. But her principal recently cautioned, "Don't get used to them," because when in-person school resumes, there won't be enough time. In addition to protecting time for review and planning, school leaders should regard teachers as partners, soliciting their views and integrating those ideas into schoolwide perspectives and plans.

Teachers, too, must step up. After months of isolation and self-reliance, some will be inclined to retreat back to their classroom rather than invest in their school's process of review and planning. But if a school's collaborative work is to inform and serve staff, students, and parents, all teachers must become engaged. For when teachers contribute their perspectives and explore alternative responses together, they are better prepared to design and refine a successful plan. Because a school's students will move through the school from class to class and grade to grade, schoolwide approaches should be coherent, though not lockstep.

What is at stake? Obviously, the foremost concern is students' well-being and learning. However, schools should also recognize the threat of unexpected disruption caused by teacher and administrative turnover. Many staff members will have weathered more than a year of stress, disappointment, loss, and even public scorn. As the school year ends, they will decide whether or not to return, resign, or retire. Meanwhile, new teachers who have missed an induction process may doubt that their school is the right place for them. If teachers know through experience that they can rely on their colleagues for support and learning, that their views are

valued and their suggestions heard, schools can avoid unnecessary turnover. And, as teachers' joint work pays off, their success with students will enhance their satisfaction and fuel their ongoing commitment. ■

Susan Moore Johnson is the Jerome T. Murphy Research Professor and the director of The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She is the author of Where Teachers Thrive: Organizing Schools for Success *(Harvard Education Press, 2019).*

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