



—Ahn Young-joon/AP

Teacher Lee Gang-in gives an online class to her high school students amid the coronavirus outbreak in Seoul, South Korea.

Remote Instruction and Interventions for Learning Loss

EDITORS NOTE

Teachers must continue instruction and intervene with learning loss remotely. In this Spotlight, learn how educators are adjusting virtual class routines, implementing tutoring systems, and pin-pointing which students are most at risk of academic struggles in the coming year

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What Should We Teach? 5 Steps for Keeping Kids on Track This Fall

By Sarah Schwartz

Prepping curriculum during a pandemic doesn't require the logistical gymnastics of organizing socially distanced school buildings or designing hybrid schedules. Still, instruction this fall will have to look different, experts say.

And though adjustments to a scope and sequence may feel less dramatic than some of the other changes to school this year, they're no less urgent.

Less time in the classroom means instructional leaders will have to streamline curricula, focusing on just the essential standards. And then there's the big question of unfinished learning. Some researchers have predicted that learning loss from spring's school closures will be much greater than what usually occurs after a normal summer. How can districts make sure students stay on track?

Even if students had little access to instruction in the spring, experts say schools should fight the impulse to go back and reteach whole units from last year.

"There's an opportunity cost to time that is not spent moving students forward," said Emily Freitag, the co-founder and CEO of Instruction Partners, a nonprofit consulting organization

that works with districts on teaching and learning. If students who are already struggling start the year in remediation, while students who thrived during the closures are given grade-level work, that widens equity gaps, she said.

"We don't want people to go back and say, 'I have to teach quarter four from last year,' because then those students are going to be farther behind," said Danielle Neves, the deputy chief of academics for the Tulsa district in Oklahoma.

Now more than ever, schools need to give all students access to grade-level work, experts say. At the same time, they need to create a range of entry points into the curriculum—scaffolds for students, and places where teachers can refresh or reteach concepts from last spring that students need in order to succeed this fall.

How to do this? Education Week distilled advice from curriculum experts, district leaders, and teachers into this five-step process for getting started:

1. Focus on the most important work of the grade.

Faced with the possibility of rolling school closures or hybrid schedules, students and

teachers may have less time together this year than in the past. Daviess County Schools, in Kentucky, is starting the year later than usual, and will have fewer instructional days as a result, said Jana Beth Francis, the assistant superintendent of teaching and learning for the district.

"It's going to change the flow of instruction quite a bit, because any curriculum map that we had that says 'Spend seven days on this unit, 15 days on that unit' has to be revisited and really examined. We're going to have to really think about how to be tight with what we're teaching," she said.

To make the best use of limited time, experts suggest streamlining the curriculum to cover only the essential standards. Some state departments have put out lists of these priority standards, while organizations including Student Achievement Partners, the Council of the Great City Schools, and TNTP have released guides designed to help schools and districts adjust their curricular maps.

These guidelines advise focusing on skills and understandings that are going to be most important to students' future success—and prioritizing depth rather than breadth.

For example, the Common Core State Standards say that 1st graders should learn how to tell time to the hour and the half-hour in math lessons. "We're probably not going to do that this year," said Bailey Cato Czupryk, a partner for practices and impact at TNTP.

Getting rid of lessons on analog clocks frees up time to make sure that students have a deep understanding of foundational concepts—like adding and subtracting within 20, another 1st grade math standard, Czupryk said.

In English/language arts, this prioritizing looks slightly different, as the standards spiral more. Students develop many of the same reading, writing, and speaking skills in greater complexity and sophistication as they progress through grade levels. It's important that students get lots of time to work with complex text, practicing these skills in context rather than in isolated activities or worksheets. This might look like choosing fewer texts for close reading and analysis, so that students can spend more time thinking about, writing about, and discussing the ones that are selected.

There's one area where the traditional scope and sequence shouldn't be pared down, though: foundational reading skills in the early grades. Research has shown that explicitly teaching students which sounds match up with which letters, in a systematic sequence, is the most effective way to teach them how to decode words. Skipping sounds or skills in the sequence can lead to gaps in students' knowledge that hinder fluent reading.

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2. Figure out what students will need to know and be able to do in order to successfully complete grade-level work. Then, identify places where teachers might need guidance on how to revisit these prerequisite skills and content from last spring.

The goal is to deliver “just-in-time” support, equipping students to tackle grade-level content while avoiding re-teaching whole units from the spring.

What might this look like? An example from the Student Achievement Partners guidance demonstrates:

In 7th grade math, students are supposed to learn how to find the area, volume, and surface area of two- and three-dimensional objects. This work builds on concepts that are in the 6th grade standards—understanding how to find the area of polygons and the volume of right rectangular prisms.

A 7th grade teacher would first need to assess whether her students know how to find the area of polygons. If they don’t, she might have to revisit this 6th grade skill as part of her lesson. But that doesn’t mean that she has to review every single 6th grade math skill before she can start with 7th grade content—she’s paying attention to the connections between grades as she goes, so she only has to review when necessary.

In English/language arts, students may need scaffolds to engage with grade-level text. For example, if a 6th grader is having trouble following the main points in a reading, her teacher may need to pre-teach relevant vocabulary or concepts, so students can build background knowledge about an unfamiliar topic.

It’s easier to plan where students might need just-in-time support if all teachers within a school or a district are using the same, high-quality materials, said Mike Magee, the CEO of Chiefs for Change, a national network of district leaders and state education chiefs. In the spring, he said, these districts were at an advantage. “At a minimum, their teachers, their students, and their parents were speaking one language when it came to content,” Magee said.

Some curriculum providers, too, have outlined where teachers should check for students’ understanding of previous content, and embed review if necessary.

3. Have teachers play a major role in curriculum mapping for the fall.

Even if schools are using districtwide curricula, teachers are still the people in the school system who are most likely to know what students

Identifying Priority Standards

To make the best use of limited time, experts suggest streamlining the curriculum to cover only the essential standards. Here’s what that might look like in a 1st grade math class:



Eliminate lessons devoted to telling and writing time



Keep adding and subtracting within 20



Reduce time spent on adding three whole numbers



Keep lessons about measuring lengths



Eliminate lessons on representing and interpreting data



Emphasize the understanding of multi-digit addition and subtraction

SOURCE: Student Achievement Partners

“

We don't want people to go back and say, 'I have to teach quarter four from last year,' because then those students are going to be farther behind.”

DANIELLE NEVES

DEPUTY CHIEF OF ACADEMICS FOR THE TULSA DISTRICT IN OKLAHOMA

did or didn't get to this past spring, said Robin McClellan, the supervisor of curriculum and instruction for elementary schools in Sullivan County public schools in Blountville, Tenn.

In her district, teachers were paid a stipend to be part of the team streamlining the districtwide curriculum this summer, she said.

Teachers in consecutive grade levels should be having conversations about how content builds, said Dale Winkler, the vice president for school improvement at the Southern Regional Education Board.

That's what teachers did in Daviess County, said Francis. At the end of the school year, the district used the remaining teacher contract days to conduct a “gap analysis.” Sixth grade teachers, for example, could meet with 7th grade teachers and outline what they didn't cover. The 7th grade teachers could then evaluate what of that content would be a necessary “building block” for the coming year, she said.

In Holmen, Wis., 5th grade teacher Cathy Burge participated in a similar session with the 4th and 6th grade teams at her school, going over the multi-grade map her district's instructional leadership created.

Last year's 4th graders missed their geometry unit, so the teachers talked about setting up a station in the 5th grade classroom

this year where students could learn how to use compasses and protractors to measure angles. The skills come up again in middle school, Burge said, “so they need to get it.”

4. Understand that just-in-time support should be determined by students' needs.

Even with all this planning ahead, teachers won't know exactly which students will need what support until they're in the (physical or virtual) classroom.

5. Curriculum and instruction must support students' social-emotional health.

“I don't think we're going to be able to accelerate learning if we don't engage kids,” said Cato Czupryk of TNTF. Even “the most beautiful scope and sequence” falls short if students don't feel safe and supported, she said.

Creating this kind of environment presents special challenges this year, as teachers may have to build relationships and create classroom culture virtually—or in a socially distanced classroom that doesn't allow for the same kind of student collaboration as years past.

Schools should think about developing these relationships as deeply connected to teaching and learning, not as a separate goal, said Freitag of Instruction Partners. In practice, that might mean starting the first day with an exciting, tricky problem that teachers and students can dive into together, rather than a formal diagnostic test, she said.

It also means making space to talk about the realities of students' lives right now, shaped both by the pandemic and the movement for racial justice. “There's no way to engage students authentically right now that doesn't include both of those topics,” Freitag said.

Making time for students to have authentic conversations with each other—whether that's through synchronous classes, message boards, or even phone calls with classmates and teachers—is more important than ever.

“Learning should be fun, and it should be a challenge,” said Francis, of Daviess County. “And if we take away all that time for inquiry, and how you think about something, and how you're creating something, and we take away the experiments in science, then we are taking a group of students who have experienced a major trauma, and not reviving their joy of learning.” ■

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Classroom Routines Must Change. Here's What Teaching Looks Like Under COVID-19

By Sarah Schwartz

With less than a month before most schools in the country are scheduled to start, many teachers still don't know how they will be conducting classes this fall.

Each model brings its own challenges. Remote teachers will have to build class culture and routines with students they may never have met in person; teachers in school buildings will need to figure out how to adapt their instruction, shaped and constrained by the physical environment.

In school buildings, almost every operational concern, from social-distancing-friendly class schedules to cleaning times, has implications for instruction. Some teachers may have to adapt courses from daily 45-minute periods to 90-minute blocks every other day; others will need to figure out how to plan small-group work so that it lines up with staggered bus arrivals.

Class cultures built on collaboration or group project work will change.

“This will be taking me back to my own childhood, when [students are] all sitting in their desks with their own notebooks, and the teacher is calling on them,” said Cathy Burge, a 5th grade teacher in Holmen, Wis., whose students usually sit in groups at trapezoid tables.

“I think we want to be really honest with parents ... [in-person school is] not going to be what they remember from last year. I think that open dialogue is going to be really important,” she said.

For teachers, uncertainty can make it hard to prepare. “Until I know what's happening, I don't want to do all this planning and then not use it,” said Laura Haddad, a high school English teacher and technology coach in Glastonbury, Conn.

Still, experts say there are some priorities for instruction this year that cut across environments. Frequent communication between students, teachers, and parents is essential to re-engaging

students in school, especially if class is online in the fall. Challenging students with cognitively demanding work, and providing them supports where needed, is more important than ever as schools anticipate significant learning loss.

We discuss these priorities and present ideas for adapting common classroom routines for remote or socially distanced settings. (Previous installments of this series cover best practices for online learning and building remote relationships, specifically.)

The priority: Frequent, meaningful engagement

It's recommended that each student has meaningful interaction with at least one educator every day. In a virtual setting, this could look like a synchronous advisory or morning meeting. This doesn't have to rely on internet access, though—teachers could also call individual students on the phone.

Regardless of method, communication shouldn't overburden teachers. Grade-level teams can split up student rosters, and other educators—such as counselors, teachers' assistants, or reading specialists—can share some of the responsibility. Posting video lessons and check-ins for students to access asynchronously is encouraged as well, but it doesn't replace a one-on-one conversation.

The priority: Cognitively demanding work

Jana Beth Francis, the assistant superintendent of teaching and learning in Daviess County schools in Owensboro, Ky., said deep intellectual engagement was missing from a lot of work during the spring closures.

"There was a lot of, watch this video, fill in this worksheet. Kids weren't thinking about their work. So that's the first step we're taking" in planning for the fall, she said.

Even in a fully remote environment, students should have the opportunity for synchronous or asynchronous discussion, personalized feedback from teachers, and coaching. They should be analyzing text, working through complicated math problems, and testing hypotheses, independently and together with other students. Centering this cognitively demanding work can accelerate students academically, but it's also a way to keep them emotionally invested in remote learning.

The priority: Responding to formative assessment

Teachers have always embedded checks for understanding into their lessons. But this year, as students may be starting school with unfinished learning from the spring, figuring out where gaps might prevent students from understanding grade-level content is especially important. Ex-



—Ahn Young-joon/AP

perts recommend against starting the year with a formal or standardized test, instead advising teachers to use formative assessment to figure out where students might need extra support to engage with the work. Responding to this instructional need is the next step.

Teachers can give feedback in the context of the lesson, if students only need a quick reminder or refresh of concepts. Moderating asynchronous student collaboration—on chat boards, for example—gives teachers an opportunity to provide feedback that clarifies misconceptions or deepens understandings. Teachers can also prepare virtual scaffolds ahead of time, providing digital anchor charts or recordings of themselves analyzing an exemplar of student work.

School schedules—whether in-person or online—should be designed so that there is ample time for teachers and specialists to work with students who need additional support, beyond what they can receive within the context of whole-group instruction.

Adapting Common Classroom Routines in an Online (or Socially Distanced) Environment

How to: Introduce yourself to students at the beginning of the year

Teachers can record an introduction video that welcomes students to the class and helps students get to know them. In the first online class session, teachers could give students a tour of the online environment, explaining where they will find assignments, how they can participate, and any class norms. This virtual tour can also be recorded, or key instructions written up and posted, so that students can go back and review later if needed.

“

I think we want to be really honest with parents ... [in-person school is] not going to be what they remember from last year. I think that open dialogue is going to be really important.”

CATHY BURGE

5TH GRADE TEACHER,
HOLMEN, WISCONSIN

Alice Chen, an 8th grade English teacher and technology coach in Walnut, Calif., who will be teaching remotely, plans to have her students do introduction videos, too. She'll ask her class to take photos of themselves and each record a short bio, which includes them saying their names. "Instead of asking the student over and over how to pronounce their name, I like to record it, so I can listen to it at home and learn to pronounce it the right way," she said.

Even though video can be a good way to connect at the beginning of the year, teachers don't need to require that every student have their video feed on for every synchronous lesson. There are equity concerns here—students may be connecting through an app on their phone, dialing in, or not have the bandwidth for video.

And just as teachers might in a traditional classroom, they should also use time at the beginning of the year to explain schedules and routines in an online space: What time windows will teachers be available, and how should students contact them? What time is class each week, and when will assignments be due?

How to: Hold a remote discussion

Class discussions will look different online than in-person. "Freewheeling, seminar-style debates" are hard to pull off in a Zoom class with 20-30 students, said Justin Reich, the executive director of the MIT Teaching Systems Lab.

In interviews with 40 teachers about their experiences teaching remotely this past spring, the Teaching Systems Lab found that some teachers said students were self-conscious about turning on their video in whole-class settings. Other teachers had more success in smaller groups—either splitting the class into smaller synchronous meeting times or circulating between simultane-

ous breakout sessions.

Discussions can also take place in an asynchronous environment, with message boards that allow students to respond to each other.

In a math class, for example, a teacher could share (with permission) two examples of student work that demonstrate solving the same problem in different ways. She could post these examples, along with a few discussion prompts, to a discussion forum and ask for student reaction. As the students respond, she should moderate the conversation, prompting students to expand on their thinking or clarifying misunderstandings.

Even with no internet access, teachers can still use the phone—calling students to talk through problems or convening two or three students on a group call to have academic discussions.

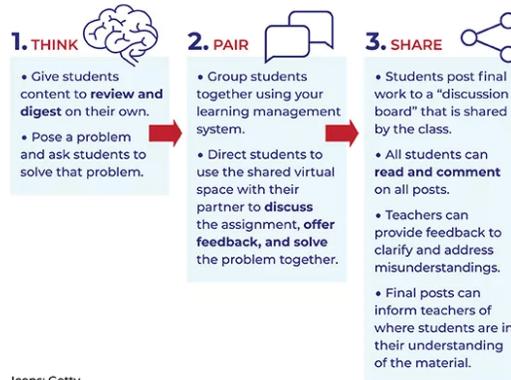
Regardless of how teachers structure conversations, it can be helpful to provide a rubric that clearly lays out what full, thoughtful participation looks like in each environment.

Less formalized opportunities for discussion can also help build relationships. Chen, the teacher in California, invited students to schedule virtual book talks with her in the spring. Students didn't have to be in the same class section to sign up for the same time slot, so groups of friends could come together.

How to: Have students think-pair-share

How Can We Take Common Teaching Strategies Online?

In hybrid-learning environments or even socially distanced classrooms, teachers will have to find new ways to carry out familiar routines. As an example, here's how a think-pair-share might look in an asynchronous online environment.



Icons: Getty
SOURCE: Association of College and University Educators

How to: Plan a socially distanced art, music, or physical education lesson

In art, one group of students shouldn't be using the same set of materials as the next. It may be necessary for art teachers to rotate lessons: using paper and colored pencils for the first

block of the day, and then watercolors for the second, for example.

For music class, the National Federation of State High School Associations and the National Association for Music Education recommend against indoor group or ensemble singing. Instead, focus on instruments that don't require breath—like xylophones, tambourines, or bells—and music theory work, like ear training or chord building (no equipment or instruments should be shared without disinfecting between uses). Performances and concerts can be recorded or streamed online.

Schools should consider holding outdoor physical education classes when possible, SHAPE America suggests, with limited or no use of equipment. Some educators have started planning for no-contact games for P.E. or break times. Andrew Jones, a kindergarten instructional assistant in Trinidad, Calif., compiled a list of "pandemic-friendly" games for young students to play during indoor and outdoor recess.

"In all of the teacher forums I've been reading, everyone's focused on desk configurations and facemasks. For me, those are the easy things to do, because you're going to get instructions from the administration on what you have to do," he said. "They're not going to tell you how to have fun with the kids." ■

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High-Dosage Tutoring Is Effective, But Expensive. Ideas for Making It Work

By Stephen Sawchuk

One-on-one tutoring is the original "personalized learning," dating back centuries. Along with the Socratic seminar, it may be among the oldest pedagogies still in existence. And as it turns out, it is probably the single most powerful strategy for responding to learning loss.

Increasingly, top education researchers agree that tutoring programs for students who lost ground over the last six months should be a top priority for federal investment. There is potential, they say, for such a program to help ease unemployment. After all, the economic downturn



means there's a glut of talented college graduates and other degree holders who might be interested in tutoring part or full-time in exchange for a stipend or salary.

These advocates stress the realities of basic

equity for the nation's most underserved children. Tutoring, after all, is what advantaged parents routinely seek out for their children—and will continue to do as the pandemic continues. (In fact, some well-heeled parents are already putting together "learning pods"—essentially small tutoring groups—with other families.) Why should it be any different for other children?

Why is tutoring so effective?

The research on high-dosage tutoring—generally defined as one-on-one tutoring or tutoring in very small groups at least three times a week, or for about 50 hours over a semester—is robust, and it is convincing. On average, the effect sizes are among the largest of all interventions seen in education.

And tutoring seems to work for a range of subjects. Two recent meta-analyses looking specifically at tutoring within the context of struggling readers in the elementary grades and elementary math programs found evidence of success for both content areas.

Which is why any district that can afford to

begin robust tutoring programs should, researchers say.

“For the level of problems districts are likely to be seeing coming into their doors with the minimum of six months of learning at home, I think it would be malpractice to do anything less than tutoring,” said Robert Slavin, a professor at Johns Hopkins University and director of the Center for Research and Reform in Education, who has studied the topic extensively.

Just why tutoring seems to be so effective is harder to pinpoint empirically. But the theory of action is clear: In such small groups, teachers can better customize teaching to the specific content gaps a student has missed or the prerequisite skills they need to practice. And it’s easier for a student to develop a relationship with a tutor they see at dedicated hours several times a week

“The magic of tutoring of course seems to be this individualized ability to both diagnose, and hover, in ways that just lead to real progress,” noted Emily Freitag, the CEO of Instruction Partners, a nonprofit working with districts in several states to develop COVID-19 instructional plans.

Plus, it boosts students’ confidence as they begin to make progress. “The lowest-performing kids tend to sit quietly in school and hope no one will notice them. With tutoring, there’s an adult who gets to know them and cares about them deeply and gives them loads of opportunity to let them show that they can succeed,” noted Slavin.

How much does tutoring cost?

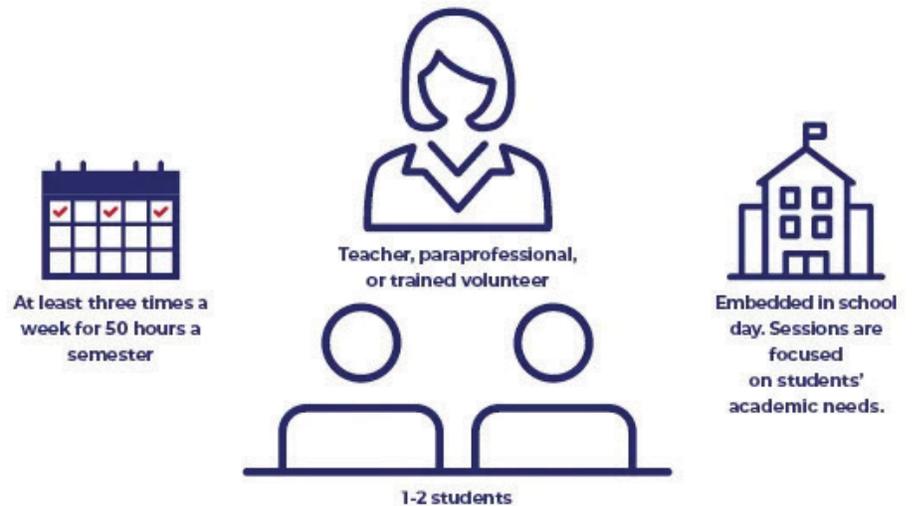
The wrinkle is that tutoring comes with a high price tag, primarily in the form of hiring and training tutors, especially in a one-on-one setting. One study of a Chicago high-dosage math tutoring program found that it cost on the order of \$3,800 a student over a school year, though economies of scale could potentially bring that figure down if it’s expanded.

Such is the strength of the research on tutoring that other countries are underwriting tutoring as a core strategy to put kids back on track.

In Britain, the Parliament has set aside 1 billion pounds (about \$1.27 billion) for extra pupil services, of which 350 (about \$442 million) will be specifically reserved for tutoring programs in primary and secondary schools. The funding will help schools procure tutoring at a reduced price, with the government giving a stamp of approval to those providers with evidence that their approach works. (A secondary tier will identify programs that lack effectiveness data but use features associated with better learning outcomes, said Robbie Coleman, the acting director of the National Tutoring Programme.)

The Netherlands also approved new funding for interventions, though it will be up to schools

High-Dosage Tutoring



Icons: Getty
SOURCE: Education Week reporting

to decide whether to use the funding for tutoring or other pupil services.

Many U.S. researchers are pressing Congress to follow suit. So far, it has not approved funding beyond the CARES Act for specific interventions.

The AmeriCorps program, for example, has long supported tutoring among other types of community service, staffed by young volunteers who are paid a stipend. But its reach is limited by the annual federal budgeting process, and while there have been proposals to expand it as part of a national pandemic response, so far none of them have advanced.

Among states, Maryland appears to be the only one to earmark some of its CARES funding for tutoring; officials there said \$100 million would be allocated, but the state has not made available any additional details. A Tennessee summer tutoring program, privately funded by former Gov. Bill Haslam and his wife, was administered through the Boys and Girls Clubs using college students. Theoretically, districts could use some Title I funding for tutoring, though districts often have already allocated that money

into other continuing costs like salaries for classroom aides.

Still, there are some ways to lower the price tag of tutoring. Paraprofessionals and paid volunteers appear to be generally as good as certified classroom teachers in providing tutoring, and they are much less costly to hire, according to several studies.

(One way to think about this apparent contradiction: It can take years to learn how to effectively teach a class of 25 or more students. But many people can be trained in a relatively short time to be a good one-on-one tutor.)

There is one catch in the research, though: Unpaid volunteers are generally much less effective tutors than paid ones.

How would tutoring work in a remote environment?

Far less is known, researchers acknowledge, about the best way to make tutoring translate into a remote-learning session.

Engagement is among the core challenges, both in terms of building a relationship with

each student and keeping the tutoring interactive in the absence of traditional materials like white boards, or when circumstances dictate telephone tutoring rather than a video format, said Christine SySantos Levy, special projects coordinator for Johns Hopkins School of Education's Center for Research and Reform. (She helped administer a pilot online tutoring program in eight Baltimore schools over the summer.)

City Year, a nonprofit organization that provides tutoring to approximately 38,000 students in 29 cities, is already planning to offer updated training to its corps of tutors. Those will include both core community engagement skills and pedagogical ones, like how to “check for understanding” in an on-line setting, rather than in a classroom.

“We want [tutors] to see themselves as a practitioner in both spaces,” said Stephanie Wu, the organization's chief impact officer. “The skills are really different, and the content needs to be prepared differently.”

Putting It All Together

Consider cost-effectiveness.

One-on-one tutoring has the strongest evidence of effectiveness, but costs the most and reaches the fewest students. Some studies show that larger tutoring groups of two to four students, while less effective than one-to-one arrangements, still pay dividends for learning. At least one study on one-to-four afterschool tutoring found learning benefits for only Black students who participated, however.

Thus, this is a significant gray area in the literature. Districts will need to weigh their priorities and, potentially, test and modify their approaches. One idea is to begin tutoring with larger groups of students needing extra help—perhaps four at a time—and monitor carefully to see if their learning responds. If they don't appear to be making progress, then it may be time to move them into one-on-one settings, suggested Slavin of Johns Hopkins University.

“I would keep careful track of how students are progressing,” he said. “A lot of kids will be successful at one-to-four [groups] but there may be kids who are not, and I would reverse one-to-one for those who are not.”

Matthew Kraft, an associate professor of education and economics at Brown University, favors a different approach: Keeping the group size down to two students per tutor, but holding costs down by employing college students or paid volunteers and keeping the focus on strong program leadership, design, and curriculum.

The details matter.

Quality matters. The research on tutoring indicates that it needs to be sustained, regular, and woven into the fabric of the school day, rather than once a week or exclusively after school. Repeated contact of at least three times a week, or 50 hours over four months, should be the baseline.

Many districts have attempted to do tutoring on their own, in afterschool programs and homework tables, or as part of federally required interventions under the former No Child Left Behind Act. But these low-dosage tutoring efforts generally don't have the same impact as high-dosage tutoring. Typically, they have fewer quality-control parameters in place, are not sustained, or have variable attendance rates.

Districts can be flexible about the source of tutors—using a mix of classroom teachers, teaching assistants, and paid volunteers—but they should hold their tutors to regular attendance and give them some training on foundations in their subject, the curriculum they'll be expected to use, and engagement strategies.

Coordinate teaching and tutoring to the extent possible.

Reading and Math, Inc., a nonprofit that deploys about 1,500 tutors nationally through AmeriCorps in more than a dozen states, includes a robust support system for tutors. They're paired with an internal coach at the school site, usually a content expert, as well as a master coach from the organization.

“They get really high-quality initial and follow-up training to help them be the best that they can be. We know that training one time does not help educators implement evidence-based practices,” said Anne Sinclair, the chief learning officer for the organization.

Together, the internal coach and master coach participate in monthly meetings to examine data and share results with classroom teachers, so teachers know which content and skill gaps kids are working on. It is also a way to ensure that what's happening in core instruction and in tutoring dovetail rather than conflict.

Britain's National Tutoring Programme is taking a similar approach.

“Something that's really important to us is that the tutoring is well-coordinated with the classroom teaching,” Coleman said. “The worst thing that can happen from a teacher's perspective, and an impact perspective, is when you have teaching and tutoring that collides.” ■

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The Pivot Back to Remote Learning: Checklists for Teachers, Principals, and Ed-Tech Leaders

By Mark Lieberman

Here's the painful reality: It is likely that during the 2020-21 academic year, many school districts will have to shift back to full-time remote learning, some just for short periods and others for much longer stretches of time.

A growing number of school districts have already decided they'll be starting the year with full-time remote learning, acknowledging it's widely regarded as the safest approach despite stern warnings from federal officials to reopen school buildings.

Schools and society at large have an advantage this time around, though: Nearly everyone experienced it in the spring, and the memories are still fresh. Efforts to bridge tech equity gaps that became evident in the spring are already underway, and more time to prepare reduces the risk of being caught off guard.

But that does not mean there still isn't a lot of work to be done. Experts are imploring schools to take steps now to account for the possibility that another rapid transition back to full-time remote learning will take place if the coronavirus continues to spread in most parts of the United States.

Here's how to get ready for that rapid transition:

Teachers

Continue to learn remote teaching skills even while schools are open

Some professional development programs will be mandatory, while others will be optional. They'll cover basics like how to use the learning management system and steps for communicating more effectively with students. Teachers will also need training on establishing a remote learning “cadence,” balancing synchronous (live lessons) and asynchronous (assignments and

projects completed anytime) teaching, finding supplementary online curriculum materials, and reconfiguring time management to remote teaching environments.

Share virtual teaching tips and online curriculum ideas—now!

At a time when everyone is stretched thin, teachers can help each other by sharing lesson plans and curriculum materials, and by sharing expertise and tips on online tools with each other. They can also team up to reshape the curriculum with virtual learning in mind, by cutting out excess material and leaving more room for the fundamentals. Teachers who are comfortable working with students remotely might be assigned populations of students who most benefit from carefully designed, personalized remote instruction.

“This idea that a teacher walks into the room, closes the door, and she’s the queen of her castle, that often doesn’t produce as good of results as when you have folks that are team teaching in a way where folks can do things to their strengths,” said Michael Barbour, an associate professor of instructional design at Touro University California.



—Henrietta Wildsmith/The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate

Cathlean Snyder, top right, a teacher in the Caddo Parish schools in Louisiana, was juggling a full-time online teaching load, and helping her five children with their school assignments, during the coronavirus school closures. When the 2020-21 school year begins, many teachers across the country will be juggling remote teaching and child care responsibilities again.

Require that students use the learning management system

Lack of experience using learning management systems was a problem in many places last spring when schools pivoted to remote learning. Even if most students are in school buildings, educators can prepare them for a potential shift to full-time virtual learning by requiring that at least one assignment per week is done online, and by using the learning management system as the primary hub for course materials.

Teachers can also get the school year off on the right foot by working with students and parents to turn off unnecessary email and text notifications that the district automatically sends to parents and students.

Principals

Anticipate more emails and online feedback from parents

At-home learning gives parents a daily window into the classroom that they don’t have when students are in school buildings. That means some will gain a new appreciation for the hard work teachers do, while others will find more opportunities to be critical of their kids’ teachers and schools.

In almost all cases, parents will need more help than they usually do, whether they’re seeking information about technology tools or guidance on how to help their child learn within the limited windows of time they have. Some districts are creating online “parent academies” that

How to Prepare for a Pivot Back To Remote Learning

Checklists for Teachers, Principals, and Tech Leaders



TEACHERS

- ✓ Continue to learn remote teaching skills even while schools are open
- ✓ Share virtual teaching tips and online curriculum ideas—now!
- ✓ Require that students use the learning management system



PRINCIPALS

- ✓ Anticipate more emails and online feedback from parents
- ✓ Construct and distribute a readiness assessment
- ✓ Explore external partnerships



TECH LEADERS

- ✓ Get ‘everything’ uploaded online
- ✓ Advocate for low-cost Internet access
- ✓ Carefully vet tech products and scrap those that didn’t work

Icons: Getty
SOURCE: Education Week reporting

anticipate as many questions parents might have as possible. Preparing those materials ahead of time also reduces the burden on staff to answer emails and phone calls once the school year starts.

Construct and distribute a readiness assessment

The school needs to know whether parents want or need to send their children to the physical building; what kind of digital device and broadband access students will have if they stay home; and whether students' living situations and learning habits are conducive to virtual education. Teachers will also need to have a plan for how to gauge students' progress through the learning material given the disruptions this spring.

It's particularly important to understand the additional support students feel they would need to learn more effectively at home. Children of essential workers should be prioritized in this data-gathering operation, as they're most likely to need additional support while their families are not at home during the school day.

Those plans will help guide the district's next steps, which could include:

- purchasing and distributing mobile hotspots
- dispatching Wi-Fi-equipped buses to communities underserved by internet service providers
- establishing an emergency IT repair desk to handle quick fixes on students' essential equipment
- developing a list of students who will most need in-person support this fall

Explore external partnerships

State-run online schools as well as local virtual charters and online education support organizations have spent years developing resources that could be useful for districts getting up to speed with remote learning. Priorities should include:

- Borrowing or adapting digital content that's already proved effective in virtual classrooms
- Gaining insights and best practices from virtual teachers' experiences
- Establishing partnerships to share online courses and minimize duplication of resources

Tech Leaders

Get 'everything' uploaded online

Don't assume teachers and students know how to productively use even the most familiar or basic technology programs. Offer frameworks and structures that teachers can mimic for structuring content in the online platforms they use to deliver content to students. A primary goal should be getting as many learning materials as possible into a digital environment, in time for the start of the school year regardless of the reopening strategy. Similarly, schools should prioritize developing a consistent standard for measuring attendance/engagement and, where necessary, adopting a technology platform that can help teachers easily track those metrics for students.

Professional development opportunities will be most valuable to teachers if they mimic the delivery method of a course their students will experience this fall. For instance, if students will be learning at home using digital tools, professional development for teachers should be offered using those same digital tools, so teachers can see how students will experience them.

Advocate for low-cost internet access

Many internet service providers have been offering discounts on broadband service to households that need it during the pandemic. Some of those offers expired this summer, and new ones are cropping up as the new school year approaches. Keep track of the available offerings in your area, and if they aren't sufficient to address access gaps in your district, contact those providers and advocate for increased access. Be mindful of specific areas within your district that might need special attention, such as Native or rural communities.

Ed-tech groups are also calling on Congress to provide billions of dollars to improve broadband infrastructure nationwide.

Carefully vet tech products and scrap those that didn't work

Decisions to sign contracts with technology providers should be driven by schools' demonstrated needs, and governed by principles including keeping students' data safe and secure, and avoiding or minimizing bias perpetuated by algorithms. Whenever possible, schools should consult usage data from the spring, combined with qualitative insights from students and teachers, to get a clear picture of the technology needs and to identify products that might not be worth another investment. ■

Published on August 19, 2020, in Education Week

Remote Learning Is Tough for Many Students. How 'Early-Warning' Data Can Help Schools Support Them

By Stephen Sawchuk

Understanding how and why students disengage or are starting to slide academically is especially important, given emerging findings from last spring's national experiment with remote learning. In surveys, educators reported falling levels of engagement last spring the longer remote learning went on.

Unlike the other interventions in this series, an early-warning system doesn't on its own help to re-engage students or fill in learning gaps. Like the lights on a dashboard telling you something's wrong, an early-warning system uses indicators—missed days, falling grades, or a sudden rash of disciplinary actions—to identify which students need more help. And it provides a consistent framework district and school leaders can use to respond.

"It's a nicely oiled machine, but it's the seamless transitions from grade to grade and relationship building that really makes all of this work, so when you're hit with a crisis, you can move and adjust," said Jawana Akuffo, a middle school counselor in the White River school district in Washington state, about her school system's robust early-warning system that spans both academic and social-emotional learning outcomes. "And by having that transition we can catch those kids who have fallen through the cracks."

What indicators make up an early-warning system?

The purpose of an early-warning system is identification. The district selects a series of indicators—preferably ones that move in real time—that are statistically linked to dropping out, failing to complete major milestones in schooling, and other adverse effects. Generally, the indicators rely

The Right Tools and Instructional Planning Get the Year Off to a Great Start

All through the summer, the question of what school would look like when summer ends and the new school year begins was hanging in the air. Still, even as the pandemic continues to challenge the ways campuses go about conducting school, there's just something exciting, for teachers and students alike, when back-to-school comes around. New faces, new ideas to share, practically everything feels new, and that newness signals that school is back in session.

And what does a new year mean for teachers? Starting a new year brings with it the task of thinking long-term about effective instructional planning. In the usual circumstances, teachers must plan their instruction to account for summer slide. Now, teachers have the additional factor of considering how the COVID slide will affect the year to come.

At Mentoring Minds, our goal is to provide teachers with the learning resources and data that are critically important to ensuring academic success.

Here are just a few of the resources in ThinkUp! Standards Mastery System that work together to get back-to-school off to a great start:

- Diagnostic Assessments to capture specific information about learning loss and Pre-Assessments to gauge readiness for new learning
- Intervention activities to bridge learning gaps
- The 9 Traits of Critical Thinking™ that help reveal students' understandings of content

Among many useful tools for getting back-to-school are online diagnostic assessments that identify gaps in students' understandings of the previous grade level's skills.

Utilizing Assessment Tools

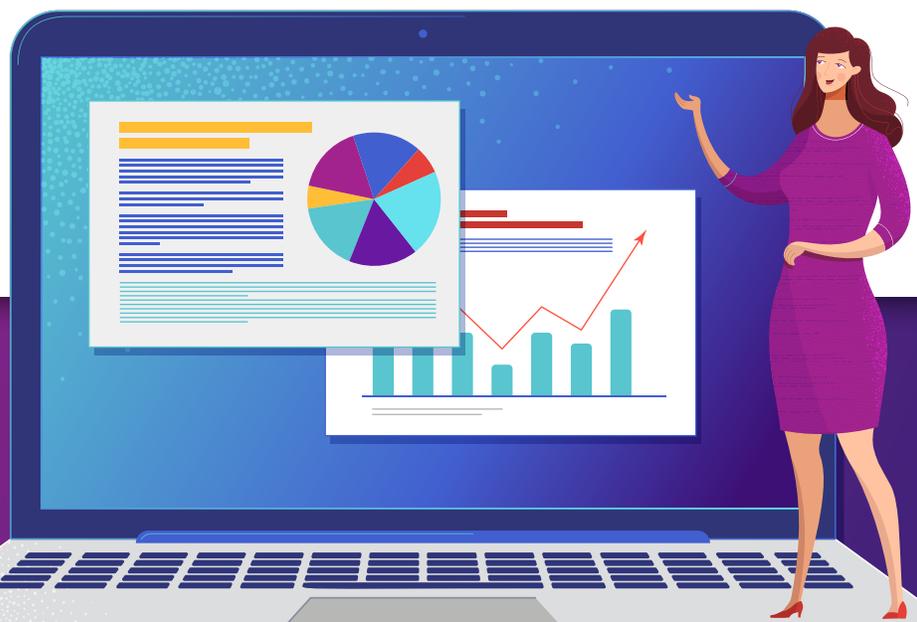
Among our many useful tools for getting back-to-school are our online diagnostic assessments. These assessments aim to identify gaps in students' understandings of the previous grade level's skills and concepts with items aligned to the prior grade's standards. They are available in ELA/R Levels 1–8, Math Levels 1–8, and Science Levels 3–8. The assessments allow teachers the flexibility to administer them in one or more than one sitting, providing portraiture of each student's readiness to engage in learning at the current grade level.

Score reports, which reflect student performance on a range of standards, are immediately available to help teachers understand where any gaps in learning may exist for each student. These easily accessible reports not only offer information about skill mastery, but they also recommend specific Intervention activities to assist students in recovering learning loss.

Another useful tool is our Pre-Assessments, available in our print and online products. Prior to beginning on-grade-level instruction, teachers can administer these brief pre-assessments to determine students' pre-requisite skills and initial understandings of a specified standard.

These Pre-Assessments are provided for every unit of our products in ELA/R Levels 2–8, Math Levels 2–8, and Science Levels 3–8. Items are presented in a variety of formats, including multiple choice and constructed response in ELA/R and multiple choice, fill in the blank, matching, and other types in Math and Science.

Because Pre-Assessments present a picture of students' preparedness to tackle new learning, teachers can use these data to inform and guide instructional planning for specific standards.



The Right Tools and Instructional Planning Get the Year Off to a Great Start

Using Interventions to Bridge Gaps in Learning

Once learning loss has been identified, teachers are interested in bridging those gaps in meaningful ways. That's where the interventions that are woven throughout ThinkUp! Standards Mastery System come into play.

The ThinkUp! Interventions have been written to offer focused learning experiences that bridge learning gaps, whether those are teacher-identified or identified through means of data-gathering.

The intervention activities in ThinkUp! are intentionally flexible and can be used for individual, small group, or whole class instruction. The activities feature a wide range of instructional approaches, and students are presented content through authentic contexts, hands-on experiences, concrete objects and visual representations, and application to new contexts. Students can't guess—they engage with meaningful content in order to reveal gaps, to fill gaps, and to build on and expand their understandings of concepts and skills.

By accessing students' understandings and misunderstandings as they relate to specific standards, teachers can provide just-right help in the moment to shift student thinking toward mastery.

A focus on critical thinking can shift roles from teacher-directed learning to student-directed learning as students begin to accept responsibility, take more initiative, and chart for themselves new courses of inquiry rather than looking to the teacher for next steps.

Building a Culture of Critical Thinking

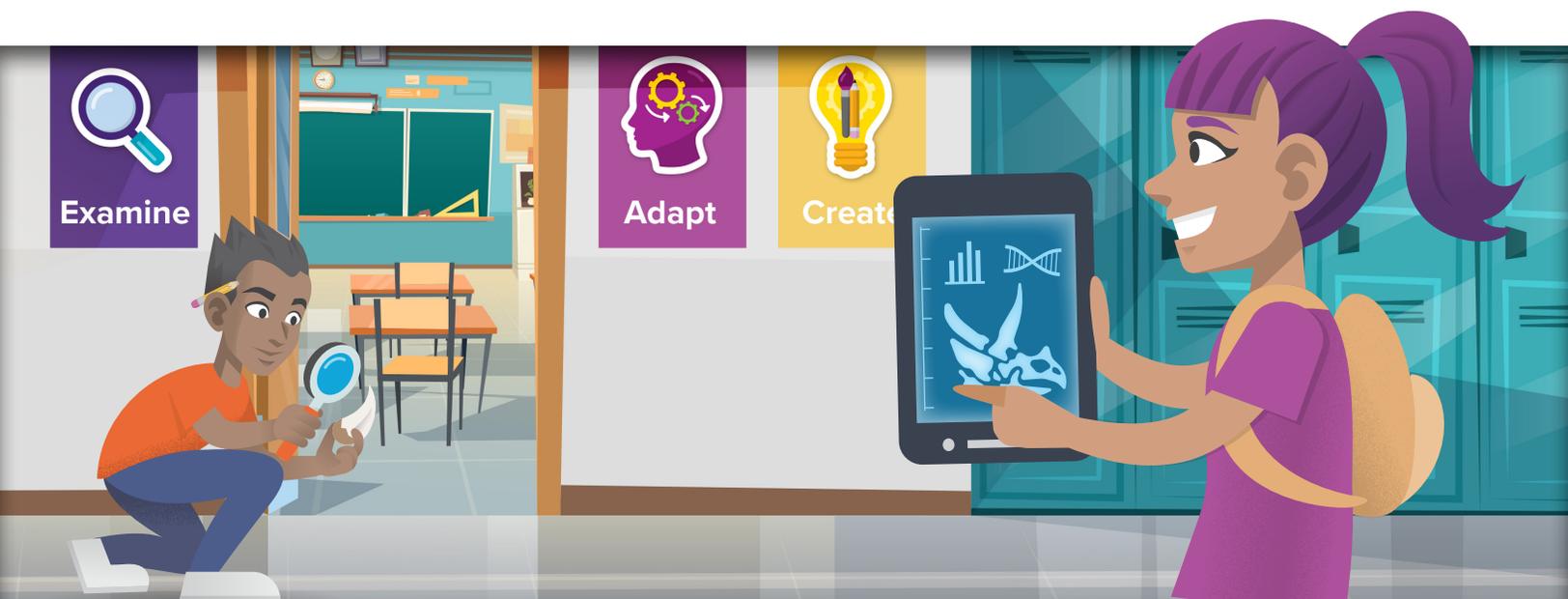
One essential aspect of determining and accounting for summer slide and COVID slide involves gaining access to student thinking in order to gauge understandings that can be built upon. But this proposition can be fraught with challenges especially since many students may not want to share with peers and teachers, may not know how to start, may not know how to articulate or elaborate on their understandings, and may not have had previous opportunities for reflecting on and building awareness of their understandings.

Providing students with a common language for sharing and for deepening their thinking is one of many reasons that Mentoring Minds created the 9 Traits of Critical Thinking™. These nine traits—Examine, Communicate, Inquire, Strive, Reflect, Link, Create, Adapt, and Collaborate—are woven throughout ThinkUp! Standards Mastery System and raise the level of discourse in classrooms, challenging students to purposefully and intentionally engage in critical thinking while providing a window into students' ability to apply and to verbalize their thinking.

A focus on critical thinking can shift roles from teacher-directed learning to student-directed learning as students begin to accept responsibility, take more initiative, and chart for themselves new courses of inquiry rather than looking to the teacher for next steps; and recognize the ways in which deeper thinking has led to greater outcomes.

With a common language to express thinking, teachers can engage in deliberate conversations and make real-time adjustments in planning and engaging students in the kind of opportunities that are needed to help students grow as independent thinkers.

Thinking serves students today, tomorrow, and beyond, and providing the space and place for developing thinking skills equips students with the ability to navigate challenges—those that present themselves in their daily lives in and outside of school.



The Right Tools and Instructional Planning Get the Year Off to a Great Start

Accessing Support at Mentoring Minds

At Mentoring Minds, we strive to continue to provide the types of professional development opportunities and support that our customers expect, including:

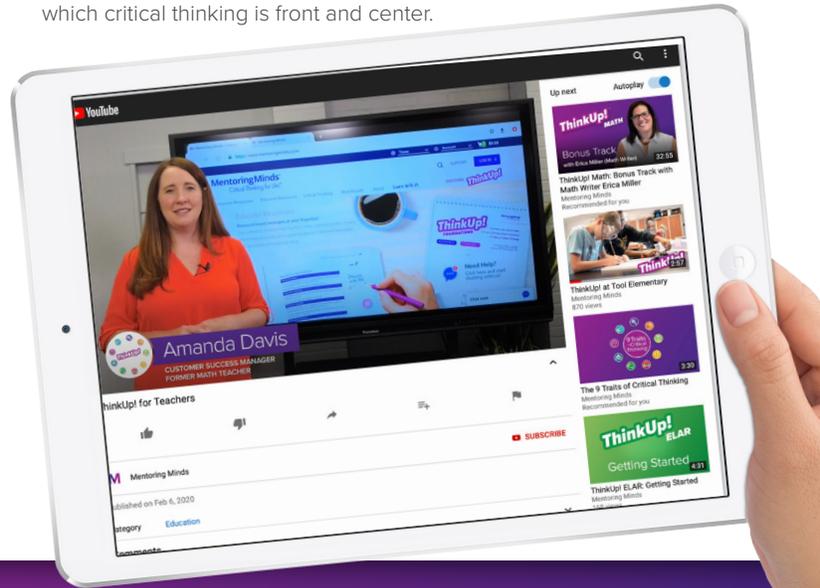
- Blog posts written by in-house experts that tackle topics and issues that are on educators' minds
- Interactive webinars that focus on pedagogy and content-area-specific topics with practical takeaways and resources
- Educator resources that are more accessible than ever with our Mentoring Minds mobile app.

The Mentoring Minds website, mentoringminds.com, is host to a wealth of resources to suit many needs, from new product descriptions and samples, to free resources to guide and support the work of professional learning communities, to white papers that address our product research. New and current customers can also speak with someone from our Customer Engagement team for help and direction to various information sources.

With the newness and excitement of back-to-school, let Mentoring Minds continue to be your partner, working together to create a successful academic environment in which critical thinking is front and center.



Scan to check out our YouTube Channel!



Foster high-quality thinkers with the 9 Traits of Critical Thinking.

Students become more effective critical thinkers and problem solvers when they apply the 9 traits. By modeling and teaching the critical thinking traits across the curriculum, educators can build a thinking culture that supports student growth and achievement.



on data that districts should already be collecting.

Then, districts create thresholds for each indicator that are consistent across all schools. For example, Johns Hopkins University, home to many of the researchers who have written on early-warning systems, recommends these thresholds for absenteeism at the high school level: Nine or more absences in a quarter indicate a student is “off track,” a student with five to eight such absences is “sliding,” and one with four or fewer is on track.

For high school, there’s widespread agreement about what should constitute the indicators: Grade point averages, attendance, course completion, and sometimes behavior data. Tests, it turns out, are not as predictive of dropping out at the high school level as the other combined indicators.

At the middle and elementary levels, attendance, marking period grades, and report card grades are often chosen. Districts have also added indicators they’ve validated on their own. Several districts in Montana, for example, found that mobility was predictive of future academic performance and incorporated that into their indicators, according to Sarah Frazelle, the director of early-warning systems for the Puget Sound Education Service District, in Washington state. Others have chosen 3rd-grade reading ability.

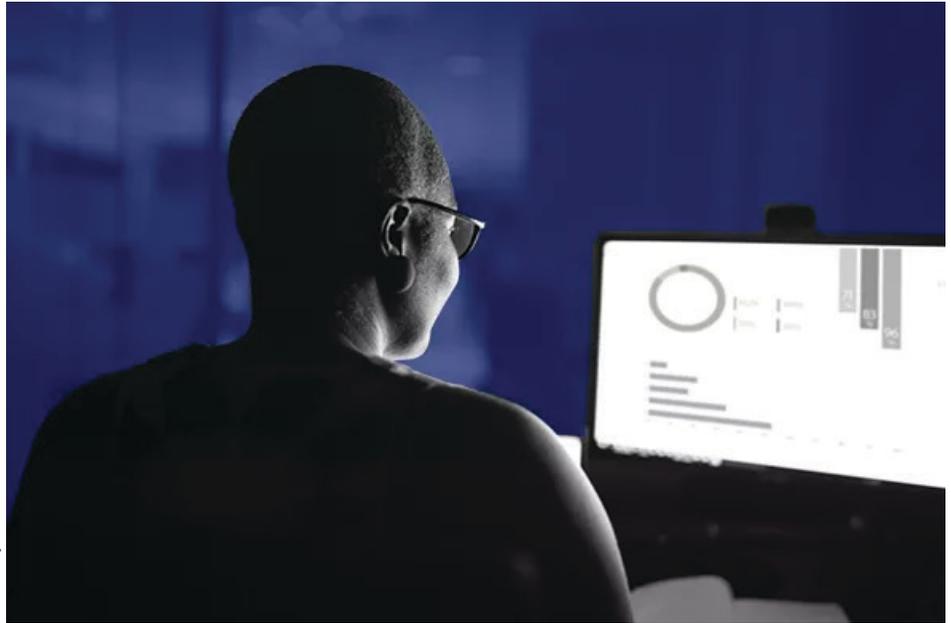
Above all, the system must be simple for educators to use. Indicator data should be compiled in an easy format for educators to review; some districts have hired third-party vendors to do that work, while others cobble together a user-friendly interface on their own.

“It should not be something that’s complicated; it should not be something that’s going to take a lot of extra time. Early-warning systems worked because they were very easy to understand and use so it’s not asking a whole lot in terms of people’s mental bandwidth for learning how to use this new system,” said Elaine Allensworth, the director of the Consortium on School Research at the University of Chicago, which has developed indicators for the Chicago Public Schools and produced many research reports.

What happens to students who are flagged under an early-warning system?

The key to success is what districts actually do when a student is identified. Sometimes intervention means a “light-touch” approach; students who trigger more flags in the system or don’t respond to initial efforts may need more-extensive help.

In the White River district, part of weekly professional learning community meetings is devoted to quickly reviewing the early-warning indicators and planning supports for any students



—E+/Getty

they’ve flagged who need academic help. Support staff, counselors, and mental-health experts participate in weekly meetings too, just as teachers do, to review data on attendance, behavior, and social-emotional learning programming.

For example, at the secondary level, teachers on Monday review the academic indicators and academic targets for the week. If a student is having problems, a teacher goes into the student’s online planner to reserve “Hornet Time” or “Grizzly Time,” periods named after the schools’ mascots. During these 30-minute periods, which are worked into the master schedule on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, students work with the appropriate teacher to master the specific missing skill or content. (They don’t miss out on regular grade-level teaching.)

Other interventions schools can consider, listed in order from lighter-touch to more intensive, include:

- Having a teacher send text messages to a student, if he or she is absent several days in a row or earns low grades on assignments.
- Ramping up parent engagement, for example by notifying them of homework assignments and quizzes.
- Prioritizing certain students for counseling.
- Conducting home visits.
- Assigning a staff person as a “case manager” to check in on a student several times a week.
- Providing mental health services.

“

It’s a nicely oiled machine, but it’s the seamless transitions from grade to grade and relationship building that really makes all of this work, so when you’re hit with a crisis, you can move and adjust.”

JAWANA AKUFFO

MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELOR,
WHITE RIVER SCHOOL DISTRICT,
WASHINGTON STATE

- Providing extended learning time.
- Providing individual or small-group tutoring.

Finally, once the district has intervened with a student, it needs to follow up over time to see if the extra help is making a difference, or whether further assistance is necessary.

Do early-warning systems work for all students?

The research on the systems in high school is solid, concluding that they are better than test scores for identifying which students are at risk of dropping out. High school GPA seems to be an especially powerful indicator.

But the evidence is sparser on other populations. (One study of English-language learners found that early-warning indicators didn't do a good job of identifying newcomer ELLs who would later go on to drop out.)

There's generally less research evidence about how to structure early-warning systems at the elementary level, where grading is less emphasized, though many districts have adapted them for those grades as well.

The COVID-19 pandemic raises new questions and challenges for early-warning systems. Certain indicators like attendance take on new meanings, and the White River educators say they are contemplating how to keep the tenets in place as they transition to remote learning. One idea is reserving some in-class time at school for small group interventions; another is learning how to spot new clues that students may need more help.

"How do you find that right balance of online instruction with students interacting with the teacher and with one another from an engagement level, and how are we going to measure it? Maybe it means tracking who is showing up, and who, when we get on a Zoom meeting, always has their camera turned off. Or who isn't eating well, or isn't very well kept, or who is saying, 'I can't show up to algebra because I have to work,'" said Cody Motherhead, the principal at the district's high school.

Putting It All Together

Districts will need to be creative about the attendance indicator.

Attendance is one of the most basic data points every district collects, and a core element of early-warning systems. But in a remote setting, the notion of attendance has taken on a myriad of new meanings.

Some districts are now looking at whether students are logging into the synchronous portion of instruction or filling in a shared spreadsheet on attendance. The problem with those

What Indicators Make Up An Early-Warning System?

Districts use data to identify a series of indicators linked to student outcomes. If a student reaches an indicator threshold—such as a high number of absences in a quarter—leaders devise personalized interventions.

Typical HIGH SCHOOL Indicators

- Grade Point Averages
- Course Completion
- Attendance
- Behavior Data

Typical MIDDLE and ELEMENTARY SCHOOL Indicators

- Marking Periods
- Report Card Grades
- Attendance

INTERVENTIONS schools can consider:

- Send text messages to students who are repeatedly absent, earn low grades, or post poor assignments.
- Ramp up parent engagement.
- Prioritize certain students for counseling.
- Conduct home visits.
- Assign a staff person as a "case manager" to routinely check in on a student.
- Provide mental health services.
- Provide extended learning time.
- Provide individual or small-group tutoring.

Icons: Getty
SOURCE: Education Week reporting

measures is that they don't say much about engagement. Researchers suggest a more useful gauge could be tracking whether they are completing assigned work.

"I think that what they will have to track is assignment completion. Anything else is going to be really tricky—all the data about whether students are logging in and how long are they on, a lot of times that's not very good data," Allensworth said.

Plus, assignment completion has the advantage of being workable across both remote and in-person contexts.

Involve a broad section of leadership in the development of indicators and deployment of interventions.

Amassing, disseminating, and interfacing

with the data that powers the indicators can be a challenge, noted Frazelle. Information technology directors sometimes know where data live and can help connect disparate data sets; larger districts can bring their research teams to bear on the problem.

Above all, when you plan interventions, don't put the responsibility solely on the counseling staff to respond; it's already overburdened in most districts, she noted. Instead, think about who else could participate and receive training on interventions, including paraeducators, teacher-leaders, or teachers on special assignment.

Similarly, the systems only truly work through a combination of bottom-up and top-down buy-in. Superintendents need to support the data collection and reporting, but it's the teacher teams and cross-sector communication

that makes the interventions happen.

Don't neglect social-emotional learning.

Isolation, lack of face-to-face contact, and other new challenges wrought by COVID-19 mean it's critical to make an early-warning system responsive to SEL needs.

In White River, at the elementary level, the district uses a screener to examine behavior concerns, both externalized (theft, quarreling) and

internalized (withdrawn, being bullied). Teachers fill it out three times a year and schools' teams use the data to plan. And the district provides special SEL programming in the difficult transition years of 7th, 8th, and 9th grade.

The City Year tutoring program, which deploys AmeriCorps volunteers in schools in nearly 30 cities, uses early-warning data to prioritize the students it works with. Part of its intervention relies on involving students in goal setting and rec-

ognizing those students when they've met goals for attendance or behavior.

"There is some agency that I think is magical, when an AmeriCorps member can facilitate the student articulating for themselves what they need and what they believe can help them be successful to improve their academic performance," said James Ellout, the managing director of impact for City Year Jacksonville in Jacksonville, Fla. "And they feel heard, and it's really great to see." ■

OPINION

Published on May 27, 2020, in Education Week

How to Contend with Pandemic Learning Loss

Teachers will need to work together to uncover missed learning

By Heather C. Hill & Susanna Loeb

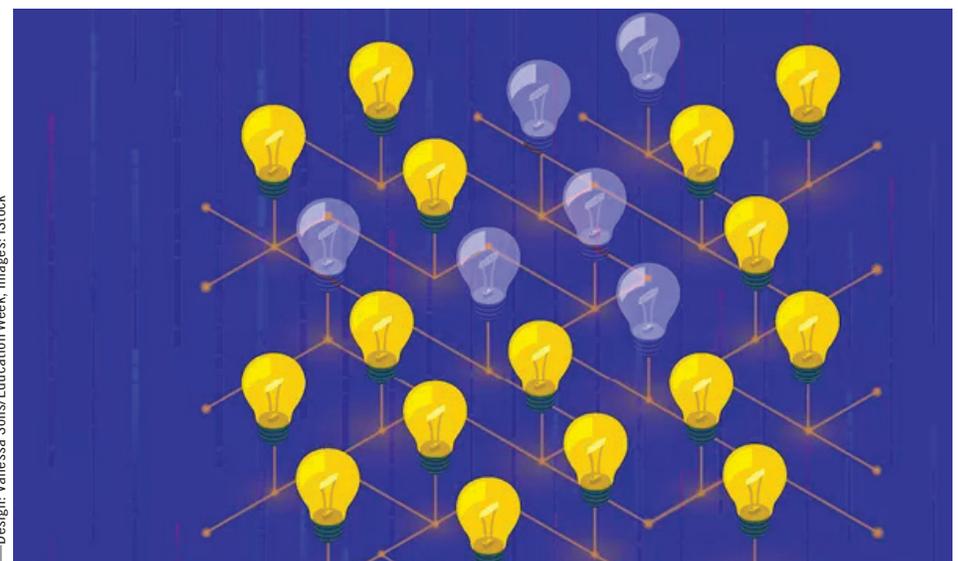
Just about everybody agrees that the school closures resulting from COVID-19 will lead to some student "learning loss" and that the loss will affect students differently depending on their social advantages, the effectiveness of their schools, and their degree of trauma.

Researchers have tried to predict the magnitude of pandemic-related learning loss by making comparisons with what happens when students are out of school in the summer. Recent work by researchers at NWEA, a nonprofit provider of student assessments, estimated that students would end this school year with only about 40 percent to 60 percent of the learning gains they'd see in a typical year.

Data from the federally funded Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, however, suggest a much smaller loss. And estimates that use summer comparisons aren't taking into account the learning that schools have worked hard to provide virtually this spring.

Yet even if the loss is on the larger side—say, the equivalent of three months—this change is small compared with typical existing learning differences among students as they enter a new grade. Most schools are already set up to contend with such variability, and that can work in students' favor as schools return to something closer to normal.

Teachers have always faced students who return in the fall with unfinished learning. Research from teachers' time-use logs show that many spend the first months of mathematics instruc-



Design: Vanessa Solis/Education Week. Images: iStock

tion, for instance, reviewing prior-year content. This fall, that review period would give students a chance to achieve mastery of material missed in the spring.

Teachers also already report spending more instructional time with students who are struggling academically, another compensatory mechanism. And key topics—the American Revolution, identifying themes in a text, fractions—recur repeatedly in the curriculum. Although reformers often object to the repetitiveness of the U.S. curriculum, in this case, it will aid students who have missed material this spring.

The fact that schools are used to responding to students with unfinished learning doesn't

mean we have nothing to worry about. Children who suffered trauma from other natural disasters typically lost ground academically and experienced more behavioral problems in the short term as compared with children who did not. And we know that some communities—mostly low-income communities or those of color—are being hit harder than others by COVID-19 and its economic consequences. Schools must try to marshal resources to address those additional needs.

To learn more about how missed learning may play out in the fall, we contacted several experts in English/language arts and mathematics, including Joanne Carlisle at the Univer-

sity of Michigan, Bill McCallum of Illustrative Mathematics, Jon Star and Catherine Snow at Harvard University, and Denise Walston of the Council for the Great City Schools. We asked each to report their level of alarm about learning loss and what strategies they would suggest schools look to in the summer and the fall.

All experts reported feeling more concern than alarm with regard to general pandemic learning loss. In ELA, said Carlisle and Snow, students are introduced to most content by March, though they observed that with fewer opportunities to practice new skills after the closures, levels of mastery might be lower. The ELA experts were most concerned about beginning readers, who tend to need more continual reinforcement of skills.

Math experts made similar observations—with the caveat that some math content that is primarily taught in the spring, like geometry, may be missed. All experts noted the challenge of supporting the children whose learning has been strongly affected by school closures and the effects of the pandemic.

As of this writing, there is little sense of what school will look like in the fall. However, both experts and research suggest several strategies that districts can profitably work on this summer and as school begins. These include:

- **Providing opportunities for teachers to learn about material never taught to or practiced by their incoming students and to adjust new school year lessons appropriately.** Teachers will need opportunities to communicate across grade-level teams about very specific missing content.
 - **Making sure teachers have information about what students know and can do at the beginning of the new school year.** Formal assessments are unlikely to provide this information in an efficient manner, both because of the time lag in reporting results and because those results are often not granular. Instead, the experts recommend quick, informal assessments done by classroom teachers.
 - **Moving students immediately into grade-level-appropriate content in the new school year, rather than repeating material from the end of the prior grade.** Where new lessons draw on concepts affected by the shutdown, schools can add extra review but in a “just in time” fashion. Curriculum materials may also be helpful in this effort, at least in math, because many already identify key skills and knowledge at the beginning of each lesson.
 - **Finding time and resources for additional high-impact supports for students most in need, such as tutoring or extra time working with a teacher or paraprofessional.** Most experts cautioned, however, against a heavily remediation-focused approach to addressing unfinished student learning, for instance, by pulling students out of the classroom for compensatory instruction, because it interferes with learning new material.
 - **Tracking down students who have disengaged from instruction this spring.** Students are more likely to disengage from instruction when it occurs in digital settings, and there is a worry that more students than in past years will drop out entirely. To the extent possible, identify students at risk (perhaps using administrative data from online learning platforms) and have teachers or other adults in the school reach out.
 - **Identifying opportunities to recover instructional time.** Studies of U.S. classrooms show missed or wasted instructional time due to either interruptions (e.g., field trips, announcements) or to teacher and student absences. Schools can help minimize the impact of student absences by keeping kids connected while at home and of teacher absences through the use of “understudies”—staff who can cover classes and ensure instruction continues when teachers fall ill. Leaders should plan for minimizing such disruptions in the fall to the extent that returns to school buildings could make them possible.
- Finally, schools will need to take steps to address students’ emotional needs and to strengthen the bonds between teachers and students, especially in districts that may see intermittent school closures. ■

Heather C. Hill is a professor of education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and studies teacher quality, teacher professional learning, and instructional improvement. Her broader interests include educational policy and social inequality. Susanna Loeb is a professor of education and of public affairs at Brown University and the director of the university’s Annenberg Institute for School Reform. She studies education policy, and her interests include social inequality.

OPINION

Published on May 4, 2020, in Education Week’s Classroom Q&A Blog with Larry Ferlazzo

Five Ways to Differentiate Instruction in an Online Environment

By Eugenia Mora-Flores and Sandra N. Kaplan

What are the best ways to differentiate online instruction?

Engaging “a diverse group of learners”

Learning online has multiple and relevant opportunities for both the teacher and the learner. The array of teaching/learning options, the readily available preparation and delivery of curriculum and resources, and the relevance to contemporary information and presentation formats capture opportunities for educators and educational needs. However, comments from teachers regarding the lack of consistent attention and enthusiastic participation from students and the inability of students to attain successfully the major outcomes outlined for the online educational outcomes identify a concern about why online learning fails to satisfy all of its objectives.

One of the major reasons for the online educational curriculum and/or presentation to meet its goals may not be in the production of the online material; it may be in the alignment of the online learning expectations to the teacher’s instruction and the student’s participation. The primary reasons for this situation can be defined as the lack of recognition and responses to the differences among the learners. Selection of an online educational site and/or program must take into consideration the individual differences that identify learning needs, interests, and abilities. Teachers are working long hours selecting materials for students, meeting with their classes online, and answering messages via email, texts, phone calls at all hours. These efforts by teachers are commendable as they are learning to engage students in distance learning, for some, for the first time. What we can’t lose sight of is that many of these

assignments are being generated for “the class,” not for individual differences. Without giving teachers more work to do, as they are already taxed, we offer some considerations for how to engage a diverse group of learners through the distance-learning experiences they are already engaged in.

1. What knowledge about interacting with technology do students bring to the online learning experience that potentially inhibit or activate their participation?

Family rules about the use and time allocated to technology and students’ skill sets developed to use a computer are indicators of varying levels of enthusiasm and abilities learners bring to engage purposefully and attentively to online learning. For example, teachers need to consider how to facilitate the transfer of students’ proficient skills at computer gaming to the skills needed for an online history lesson. Teachers should review norms of engagement when using technology for school vs. technology for play.

2. How do teachers accommodate a student who is not physiologically comfortable learning in a stayed position for a long period of time?

Teachers need to integrate physical and intellectual breaks in the online presentation that provide a productive time to “contemplate and jot down” a response to an open-ended relevant question or idea to share with peers, stand up and stretch, or take a thoughtful stroll around the home.

3. How does the teacher accommodate the diversity among learners as a consequence of academic, cultural, or linguistic differences?

Consideration of instructional strategies that introduce and/or reinforce learning from the online program can include “prior viewing” techniques such as identifying key words to “look and listen” for during the program. Use a sentence frame that can be completed during and/or after viewing. Utilize a range of home experiences and contexts for thoughtful learning. For example, survey families about what types of activities the family engages in at home; students can summarize, analyze, problem solve, and think creatively about what they saw or experienced. These are English/language arts standards met through a student-centered context.

“ Teachers need to integrate physical and intellectual breaks in the online presentation...”

- Eugenia Mora-Flores & Sandra N. Kaplan
Education Week Teacher

4. How do teachers plan to engage students in productive and active learning experiences during the online presentation?

Teachers can consider “stop and go” techniques during a presentation for the purposes of creating opportunities to debate an idea or statement derived from the presentation, to initiate a “what happens next” discussion, or to illustrate and share the interpretation of an idea that is presented. For example, the teacher might introduce some information on a topic. After a few minutes, stop and give the group a chance to think and talk about what they heard, think about things that are connected or related, challenge what they heard, engage in critical discussions about the information. This can continue throughout the presentation to build depth of understanding rather than just coverage of material.

5. How do teachers prepare students to attain assistance from peers without involving parents who may not be available to assist in the completion of assignments related to the online presentation?

Identifying “study buddies” based on appropriate criteria to work together during planned “teacher-in-attendance time frames.” Meeting with students in small groups can help teachers target the unique needs of learners across content areas. ■

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