

# RESTORING HOPE AND SEIZING OPPORTUNITY IN THE FACE OF CRISIS

## State Guidance for Building Resilient and Equitable Education Systems

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the education system and the economy, revealing weaknesses in our education infrastructure and jeopardizing the financial security of state governments, school systems and families. The long-term effects of this pandemic will be pronounced, calling into question the future of traditional education systems.

Communities are witnessing growing academic and social inequities; millions of students have become disconnected from their social safety nets; and educators and leaders are scrambling to provide services and supports for their students in the midst of this crisis. These challenges will only compound as policymakers face the stark reality that policy waivers and stimulus funds are only temporary solutions. Policymakers and stakeholders need to consider how to build on these immediate interventions with longer-term measures that will help the education system weather future disruptions. This may include revisiting what high-quality instruction, assessment and learning look like, including how we deliver it, how much time it takes, how credit is awarded and how we evaluate district and school performance.

While this moment is fraught with uncertainty and complexity, it also presents a historic opportunity for visionary leadership. States can seize this moment to undo systems not designed to support the needs of all learners and replace them with resilient and equitable education systems that provide each student with a personalized pathway to success regardless of future uncertainties, ability, income, language, race, ethnicity or location. The guidance provides education stakeholders with important considerations for this calendar year and beyond on how to advance personalized, competency-based systems that empower students to master rigorous learning pathways regardless of time or place. Together we can ensure that the return to school is not about what was lost, but instead about the insights leveraged to create the systems and structures needed for the future success of every student.

# STUDENT SUPPORTS

Students have experienced significant upheaval with indefinite school closures. They have lost their sense of community and routine; they are trying to navigate unfamiliar virtual learning environments; many have lost a secure source of food and other social supports; and they struggle with the anxiety of what this change will mean for their future. A resilient and equitable learning system will demand extensive student supports to ensure that each student's academic, social, emotional, health and physical safety needs are met. States will need to establish new partnerships and mechanisms to better coordinate programs and services to meet the needs of the whole child.

## 2020 ACTIONS

- » Create or reinvigorate a cross-agency state taskforce that covers K-12, higher education, workforce, health, social services, juvenile justice and early childhood to explore how to support the whole child and address challenges that arise as a result of COVID-19 and its ongoing impact.
- » Partner with districts to explore options for remediation due to lost time in school, including summer enrichment programs, additional instructional days, voluntary holiday intervention weeks, year-round school models and flexible classroom schedules to provide students time to master material that was missed and ensure they are ready for the next school year. Encourage districts to leverage community partners to provide additional learning opportunities, internships, mentorships and enrichment services.
- » Build educator capacity to create and implement personalized learning plans and deliver instruction virtually, with a strong emphasis on meeting the needs of historically underserved students. States have an increased responsibility to help educators deliver consistent high-quality supports across educational settings.
- » Issue guidance to schools and families on data protections, data ownership and privacy.

## LONG-TERM ACTIONS

- » Invest in whole-child models to improve coordination of community services, including community schools, Promise Neighborhoods, after-school programs and Children's Councils.
- » Modernize pre-service and in-service programs to improve support for educators and leaders to meet the needs of the whole child. Emphasize social-emotional development, integration of high-quality external learning partnerships, cultural competency and trauma-informed teaching practices.
- » Ensure that every student has a personalized learning plan that educators, parents and caregivers can easily access to identify learning gaps and better understand competency progressions. These plans should also provide learners with autonomy to select pathways aligned to their interests and aspirations.
- » Integrate social-emotional learning competencies into academic instruction to ensure students develop critical skills for resiliency, creativity and innovation.
- » Support digital literacy and privacy education among educators, parents and students.

# HUMAN CAPITAL AND INFRASTRUCTURE

With schools shuttered and educators scrambling to create a new way to deliver instruction, this pandemic has exposed systemic weaknesses and inequities in the traditional education infrastructure and opened eyes to things that could be done better. States, districts and schools will need to think differently about how and where learning happens and how to ensure every student has the ability to access new and innovative learning experiences regardless of present or future circumstances. States will need to incentivize learning communities that are committed to meeting the needs of its students anytime and anyplace.

## 2020 ACTIONS

- » Develop a community-based teaching corps to provide additional learning supports for students, encouraging participation from the recently unemployed, afterschool providers, small businesses and others hit hard by the economic downturn.
- » Provide funding to districts to ensure universal access to broadband services and devices.
- » Catalyze regional and local partnerships that leverage public-private resources to deliver basic services and support continuous and engaging instruction. Partnerships should include food banks, grocery stores and telecommunications providers to address gaps in social services and technology infrastructure.

## LONG-TERM ACTIONS

- » Convene stakeholders to reflect on the future of learning in light of the weaknesses exposed by the pandemic and develop strategies and action plans to create a more resilient and equitable system.
- » Provide customized professional development for educators and leaders focused on student competency development and the use of formative and performance-based assessment practices to increase student engagement and address learning gaps.
- » Incentivize state colleges of education to develop educator preparation programs that emphasize approaches that support high-quality, student-centered digital learning including formative assessments; competency-based practices; remote relationship building; designing enriching learning for digital environments; and ensuring student safety, health and mental well-being.

# EVIDENCE OF LEARNING

Lost instructional time has left many stakeholders questioning how to promote students to the next grade, award credit for courses and certify that high school seniors have satisfied important graduation requirements. These issues are complex and are motivated by a shared desire to close learning gaps for all students and to make sure vulnerable students are not even more adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. While states must respond to these immediate concerns, states will need to explore new ways to credential learning and align policies to ensure students have maximum opportunity to overcome learning gaps created by new and intensified barriers such as device quality, internet speed, home responsibilities, nutrition gaps, illness, stress, depression and more.

## 2020 ACTIONS

- » Encourage districts to incorporate capstones, projects, portfolios, community learning partnerships and other demonstrations of performance for credit. Build the capacity of districts and educators to evaluate performance assessments in a high-quality and reliable manner across the state.
- » Provide guidance that replaces time-based credit requirements with standards-based tools for measuring learning that emphasize communication around progress towards learning goals in the face of new or intensified learning barriers.
- » Provide additional time for students to make up credits and requirements for promotion and graduation, including alternative promotion and graduation dates, and ensure students have the same future opportunities regardless of the amount of time taken to complete these requirements.

## LONG-TERM ACTIONS

- » Develop grade- and subject-level competencies aligned to state standards and permit districts to award course credit when students have mastered all required competencies in a course, regardless of the amount of time spent in the course.
- » Establish competency-based graduation requirements that align to state standards and provide transparent learning expectations students need to meet as they navigate learning pathways aligned to their interests and career aspirations.
- » Evaluate all time-related policies including school calendars, course credit and funding schedules, and explore replacement with mastery-based policies.
- » Support districts to invest in high-quality formative and interim assessments that educators can leverage to identify learning gaps in real-time and better target instruction.

# SYSTEM ACCOUNTABILITY

By suspending annual testing requirements for this school year, states will soon lack critical data on district and school performance. This will impact decisions on targeting funding and supports and will create disruptions in state indicators relying on multiple years of data. Additionally, annual tests provide data about academic gaps, which will be increasingly critical as the system rebounds.

Loss of data creates challenges, but it also provides a rare opportunity to consider improvements for state accountability systems to be authentic drivers of educational equity. To address immediate needs and work towards a holistic vision for accountability, communities should develop new metrics that reflect system performance. New state-level accountability systems should measure success in meeting the needs of every student, provide educators with information to create more equitable systems for learning and empower communities to advocate for necessary improvements.

## 2020 ACTIONS

- » Establish a state-level plan for returning the education system to full operation, and support school districts to create a plan to address student needs that have emerged during the COVID-19 disruption. Support the creation of permanent district-level plans for responding to unforeseen crises. Identify immediate and long-term implications for the most vulnerable learners in these plans to mitigate the consequences of COVID-19.
- » Help school districts implement assessments to determine a new baseline for each student's performance to efficiently address learning gaps due to school closures.
- » Strengthen school improvement efforts by creating state or regional teams to leverage best personalized, competency-based learning practices to support students and address learning gaps. Focus these teams on schools/districts with many historically underserved students and prioritize resources to support district and community partnerships to design personalized teaching and learning systems that are academically engaging and responsive to individual students' circumstances and holistic needs.

## LONG-TERM ACTIONS

- » Support districts and their communities to establish systems that transparently communicate student progress, enabling parents and stakeholders to hold their school district accountable, ensure learning continuity and address learning gaps as a result of the COVID-19 disruption.
- » Enable school districts to pilot new approaches to accountability and reporting that better align to personalized and competency-based education systems and emphasize multiple pathways to mastery of academic and whole-child outcomes.
- » Incentivize equitable teaching and learning models by basing state accountability and reporting systems on mastery of academic outcomes, student access to learning opportunities, student engagement, completion of competency-based pathways, mastery of social-emotional competencies and access to safe and healthy learning environments.
- » Build school districts' capacity to create accountability and reporting systems that reflect their communities' values and to leverage data in community conversations around accountability.

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



## **Knowledgeworks – State Policy Framework for Personalized Learning**

This framework is designed to help states build awareness of what it will take to evolve policy systems to support exploration, replication and ultimately statewide transformation to ensure personalized learning opportunities for all students.

<https://knowledgeworks.org/get-empowered/policy-resources/state-policy-framework-personalized-learning/>



## **KnowledgeWorks – Navigating the Future of Learning: A Strategy Guide**

Based on KnowledgeWorks' 2018 forecast, Navigating the Future of Learning, this strategy guide is designed to help K-12 educators, postsecondary education institutions and community-based learning organizations take action with the future in mind.

<https://knowledgeworks.org/resources/navigating-future-learning-strategy-guide/>



## **Foundation for Excellence in Education – Debunking the Myth of Seat-Time: A National Analysis of Seat-Time Requirements For Credit**

New research by ExcelinEd examines seat-time requirements for awarding credit and graduation, revealing that all 50 states and Washington, D.C., have either fully or partially authorized schools to shift from focusing on seat-time to mastery.

<https://www.excelined.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/ExcelinEd.Innovation.NextGenerationLearning.SeatTimeReport.pdf>



## **The Center for Assessment's COVID-19 Response Resources**

The Center for Assessment provides technical, practical, and policy guidance and advice to address assessment and accountability challenges that state and district leaders will face over the next few weeks and throughout the year related to COVID-19 disruptions.

<https://www.nciea.org/current-initiatives/covid-19-response-resources>



## **Arizona State University – Next Education Workforce Initiative**

ASU is working with schools and other partners to redesign the teaching profession and the workforce to: 1) provide all students with deeper and personalized learning by building teams of educators with distributed expertise and 2) empower educators by developing new opportunities for role-based specialization and advancement.

<https://education.asu.edu/next-education-workforce>



## **Education Commission of the States – COVID-19 Update: State Policy Responses and Other Executive Actions to the Coronavirus in Public Schools**

The Education Commission of the States researches policy change across all 50 states and provides information pertaining to the coronavirus pandemic and its effects on education.

<https://www.ecs.org/covid-19-update/>

Get more resources to help make personalized learning a reality at [KnowledgeWorks.org](https://KnowledgeWorks.org).



KnowledgeWorks is a national nonprofit organization advancing a future of learning that ensures each student graduates ready for what's next. For nearly 20 years, we've been partnering with states, communities and leaders across the country to imagine, build and sustain vibrant learning communities. Through evidence-based practices and a commitment to equitable outcomes, we're creating the future of learning, together.