

SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN LEARNING

How States Are Rethinking Student Supports in the COVID-19 Era

In April 2020, KnowledgeWorks published policy guidance in response to the school closures brought on by COVID-19, [Restoring Hope and Seizing Opportunity in the Face of Crisis](#). The report highlighted both short- and long-term strategies for states to consider as they grappled with the challenges of the pandemic. A year later, we are revisiting the guidance to highlight areas where the U.S. has begun building the momentum needed to both respond to the challenges of the pandemic and chart a path towards creating a more personalized K-12 education system.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS

Prior to the pandemic, many states and districts had [already begun](#) enacting policies to support school districts in providing the programs and services required to meet the academic, mental, physical and emotional needs of every child. The pandemic, and in particular the abrupt shift to distance learning, elevated the importance of this work by amplifying the long-standing unmet [mental](#) and [physical](#) needs of students. This has been especially true for groups of students who have been historically and systematically underserved and have been [disproportionately](#) impacted over the past year.

The pandemic has also created wide disparities in academic instruction, requiring states to think creatively about how to equitably meet the academic needs of all students. While states have enacted a range of policies to address the short-term impacts of the pandemic in each of these areas, they must continue to create policies offsetting the pandemic's longer-term impacts on student health and wellbeing.

CONNECTING WHOLE CHILD EDUCATION AND PERSONALIZED, COMPETENCY-BASED LEARNING

The need to provide a wide range of student supports within schools that embrace personalized and competency-based learning has its roots in a whole child approach to education. Whole child education encompasses practices and approaches that are commonly [framed](#) around five core tenants as outlined by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). These are to ensure that students in school are:

- » Learning about practicing a healthy lifestyle
- » Learning in physically and emotionally safe environments
- » Actively engaged in learning and connected to the school and broader community
- » Supported by qualified, caring adults and have access to personalized learning
- » Challenged academically and prepared for success in college or further study

Similarly, personalized, competency-based learning [embraces](#) the importance of developing the whole child by prioritizing social, emotional, mental and physical needs alongside academic growth. For example, state-level competencies such as [Utah's](#), which form the basis of a state-level approach to personalized, competency-based learning, frequently include elements targeted toward developing students mentally, emotionally and physically as well as academically to ensure that they are prepared for college and careers.

With the potential of COVID-19 variants continuing to disrupt the traditional K-12 education system in 2021-22 and beyond, schools and districts must continue thinking creatively about ways to support students as they grapple with challenges related to health and wellbeing. To truly meet the individual needs of all students and prepare them for success in college, careers and life, states must work to ensure that their education systems and policies provide the supports and resources to ensure that the academic, mental, physical and emotional needs of all students are met.

STATE HIGHLIGHTS

ARKANSAS: Community schools and statewide tutoring corps

Arkansas' legislature passed two legislative measures this year that empower schools to provide more comprehensive supports to students. First, the Arkansas State Legislature passed [S.291](#), which created a new subchapter in state code called the Community Schools Act. The subchapter supports public schools and districts in implementing a [community schools](#) approach, which leverages local partnerships to empower schools to address the health, wellness and social needs of all students. The law defines the term "community school," articulates the strategies a community school must embrace and gives the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education the authority to provide professional development to teach the competencies for managing and implementing such a school as well as allow for effective school oversight. The law also allows charter schools to be designated as community

schools and allows the state board of education to require that schools that are classified as requiring intensive supports create a structured system of whole child supports through a community schools plan, which the law also defines.

The Arkansas state legislature also passed [S.564](#), titled the Arkansas Tutoring Corps Act. This law allows the State Department of Education to create a tutoring program to identify qualified tutors to support elementary students in reading and math. The act specifies that this program is both intended to support short-term learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic as well as “lay the groundwork for a long-term, sustainable strategy to improve educational outcomes for all students.” The statewide tutoring program must also offer coverage and increase opportunities, especially for students in rural areas.

COLORADO: Supporting learning recovery with resources and online courses

This year the Colorado legislature released a document called the [Colorado Stimulus plan](#), which included supporting Colorado families as one of its five big goals. The plan specifically proposed increasing state financial investments in school tutoring and summer school as well as school-based mental health screenings, among other priorities. Later in the session, the legislature enacted [SB 21-013](#). This law strongly encourages the State Department of Education to invest federal dollars in learning recovery programs and directs the Department to identify products, strategies and services that have demonstrated effectiveness in mitigating learning loss starting in fall 2021. The Department is also directed to maintain a publicly available resource bank with examples as well as instructions for implementing these strategies and services. The resource bank will also include information on public and private nonprofit entities that districts can partner with to support strategies to overcome learning loss. Local districts, boards and charter schools can submit strategies that they have found effective to the Department for inclusion in this bank. A separate provision of the law also directs state [Boards of Cooperative Educational Services](#) to enter into partnerships with local public education agencies to deliver supplemental online learning recovery courses for K-12 students.

Separately, the legislature enacted [HB 21-1259](#), which directs the State Department of Education to streamline grant processes to create a single, combined application for awarding funds targeted at extended learning opportunities to local education providers. This combined application would allow for the Department to match an applicant to the appropriate funding sources across multiple programs to support their specific needs. The Department is also authorized to streamline data collection and reporting requirements to reduce the bureaucratic burden on local providers.

ILLINOIS: Resources to support whole child needs

Throughout the pandemic, several different policy making bodies in Illinois took action to support the needs of the whole child. The state’s P-20 council released an extensive [learning renewal resource](#) in March of 2021 to help local leaders make informed decisions to address the academic, social-emotional and mental health needs of students and educators. The guide identifies 12 priority areas, including several that address the need for student supports such as providing out of classroom learning experiences, connecting districts with community organizations to provide students with comprehensive supports, enhancing accessibility of academic and behavioral counseling resources and prioritizing mental wellness and trauma-informed, culturally responsive schools. In creating the guide, the state included the voices of government entities, businesses, nonprofits and schools, as well as the perspectives from over 300 educators, students and administrators from across the state.

Separately, in summer 2021 Governor Pritzker [announced](#) that he would invest \$10 million of federal Governors Education Emergency Relief (GEER) funding to address the holistic needs of students. This included \$7.5 million for training educators and families to support student needs and \$2.5 million to create the Student Care Department at the State Board of Education to lead a student health and safety team, promote best practices for social-emotional learning, respond to concerns about student safety and well-being and provide assistance to schools.

MICHIGAN: Meeting whole child and social-emotional needs statewide

Pre-pandemic, Michigan released its [Top 10 in 10 Years plan](#), a collection of goals and strategies to help Michigan become a top 10 education state. This plan includes the goal of reducing the impact of high-risk factors, as well as providing equitable resources to meet the needs of all students. It also outlines several evidence-based and results-driven integrated student supports such as, but not limited to, implementing all the requirements of the National School Lunch program, ensuring access to school health services, and developing coordinated P-20 partnerships with the goal of “expanding access to coordinated service programs and family advocacy supports.”

In December 2020, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) announced the establishment of a [social-emotional learning \(SEL\) network](#) of state stakeholders in alignment with the state’s strategic education plan to promote the health, safety and wellness of children. A \$500K grant from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund to MDE will help build a community of practice to support district-wide adoption of SEL by working with 20 districts selected through a competitive application. The state also includes a [repository](#) of SEL resources for children and adults within the state’s COVID-19 information and resources page. This includes written resources, videos, books, websites and assessments.

Separately, in [May of 2021](#), Governor Whitmer released the state’s Blueprint for a Comprehensive Student Recovery to help districts and schools create recovery plans that provide all students with the resources to succeed. The [blueprint](#) includes an entire section on wellness and details a number of strategies focused on leveraging data and services to ensure that students’ mental, emotional and physical health needs are being met. The blueprint also details a similar set of strategies for addressing the individual academic needs of each student.

NEVADA: Meeting student needs through educator social-emotional training

In 2019 Nevada began leveraging Federal Title II dollars to support its Social, Emotional and Academic Development (SEAD) work, which included developing modules to support educator professional development in this area, holding an annual leadership summit and establishing a coaching initiative for educators. In March of 2020, Nevada’s Department of Education created the [SEAD Center](#) to support the SEL needs of both students and educators virtually. The Center serves as a free all-virtual support system that provides free professional development, training and coaching, guest speakers and more. Though the work was originally targeted towards school leaders, all educators and teachers are now eligible to [enroll](#) in the center’s activities where they can earn an [endorsement](#) as a specialist in SEL. The center estimates that it has held over 60 virtual training sessions for more than 340 Nevada educators.

NORTH CAROLINA: Addressing learning recovery through legislation

The North Carolina State legislature passed [HB 82](#) in spring 2021, which required schools to offer a school extension learning recovery and enrichment program after the end of the 2020-21 school year that addresses the negative impacts students experienced during the previous year. The law

required local school administrative units to submit plans for their programs, which must include either 150 hours or 30 days of instruction over the course, among other requirements. The State Board of Education was also required to make a single competency-based assessment for all grades and subjects K-8 to be taken at the beginning and end of these programs, the results of which are reported to both that student's teacher for the 2021-22 school year as well as the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). DPI is then required to submit a report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee on the outcomes of these programs statewide.

The state legislature also passed [HB 196](#), which gave specific directions to DPI as to how to spend federal COVID-19 relief funds. The legislation specifically directed DPI to allocate \$10 million to provide additional physical and mental health support services for students in response to the pandemic, as well as a separate \$10 million to be allocated by need to schools participating in the federal school nutrition program. A state appropriations bill ([SB 105](#)) would allocate \$10 million in federal relief funds for the deployment of a competency-based education platform enabling the development of credit by demonstrated mastery either for credit recovery or acceleration, as well as to address different education delivery methods during the pandemic. This would be for students in second through twelfth grade. The platform would also be used for teacher and principal professional development. The bill, if passed, would also direct DPI to submit various reports over time on the deployment of this platform.

OHIO: Whole child framework

In fall 2020, Ohio took a significant step to address the needs of whole child through the [launch](#) of its new [Whole Child Framework](#). This framework connects to Ohio's broader strategic vision for education and serves as a blueprint to schools and districts for meeting students' social-emotional, physical and safety needs. The framework document includes extensive recommendations of systemic practices necessary for learning and health for students. The framework was developed by the state's [Whole Child Advisory Group](#), which included representatives from a range of state agencies, community partners, school based partners, the governors' office, nonprofits and student organizations. The Ohio Department of Education also includes a set of [resources](#) on its website that schools can use to provide whole child supports and has produced a video [series](#) that spotlights how districts in the state are working to meet the needs of the whole child.

RHODE ISLAND: Aligning resources to support student needs

In response to the disruption created by the pandemic, Rhode Island's Commissioner of Education convened a [taskforce](#) called Learning, Equity & Accelerated Pathways (LEAP) in February 2021. The [goals](#) of the LEAP taskforce were to assess how learning loss had impacted students by analyzing academic and non-academic data, identify areas of focus, identify research-based, high impact strategies for addressing the root cause of learning loss, and provide guidance to help the state respond to its findings. The taskforce membership included educators, school board members, labor unions, parents, community stakeholders, advocacy and non-profit organizations, elected officials, postsecondary education and local and national subject matter experts.

The taskforce concluded its work in March 2021 and released a [final report](#) that analyzed each of the issues raised in its original goals. The report identified five absolute priorities to accelerate student learning, which include the launching of a back-to-school campaign, ensuring all students have access to high quality instruction and personalized supports, universally screening all students to ensure that they have the resources they need, improving and supporting student transitions across grades

and systems and closing the digital divide. The report also included considerations for serving the needs of diverse populations, specifically multilingual learners and students with disabilities. The Rhode Island Department of Education also included its next steps in response to the taskforce recommendations.

VIRGINIA: Supporting the whole child through legislation and working groups

Immediately prior to the pandemic, Virginia passed [H.753](#), requiring the Department of Education to “establish a uniform definition of social-emotional learning and develop guidance standards for social-emotional learning (SEL) for all public school K-12” by July 2021. This guidance has since been released and is now [publicly](#) available to all schools in the state. In addition to the standards, Virginia has also created a series of implementation [resources](#) to help educators understand the role that SEL plays in advancing educational equity as well as the roles that various stakeholders play in implementing these standards.

Separately, [HB 1355](#), passed in spring 2020, required the State Department of Education to establish an interagency taskforce to develop a program for establishing community schools and recommendations related to the delivery of community services to students and families. The legislation also specified that the program must include a process by which school boards and community partnerships can designate a school as a community school.

Additionally, this spring, the State Superintendent [announced](#) the formulation of a working group to develop recommendations for restarting in-person instruction, as well as to create and identify resources and best practices for addressing the mental health and social-emotional well-being of students, families and school employees. The working group [released](#) its recommendations in April 2021. They included numerous recommendations for addressing the well-being of students and staff as well as the importance of tailoring remediation and recovery efforts to the unique academic needs of each learner.

Additional Examples

Alabama – H.486, Defining Extended Learning Time

https://custom.statenet.com/public/resources.cgi?id=ID%3Abill%3AAL2021000H486&ciq=ncsl5&client_md=5e2d6c325963faddc03694c5668a5f3a&mode=current_text

Georgia – State Department of Education’s Whole Child Tool Kit

<https://www.georgiainsights.com/wholechild.html>

Massachusetts – Established a \$70 million Grant to offer Summer Learning Programs

<https://www.doe.mass.edu/asost/summer-learning.html>

Oregon – Released a Summer Learning Best Practices Guide

<https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/healthsafety/Documents/Summer%20Learning%20Best%20Practice%20Guide%202021.pdf>

Oklahoma – Ready Together Oklahoma Action Plan and Resource for Supporting Students Through the Pandemic and Beyond

<https://readytogether.sde.ok.gov/>

Tennessee – H. 7004, Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act

<https://legiscan.com/TN/bill/HB7004/2021>

Texas – HB 4545 Focused on Learning Acceleration

<https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/87R/billtext/html/HB04545F.htm>

Additional Resources



ASCD – Whole Child Framework

ASCD's website serves as a valuable resource for whole child resources and includes a framework for whole child policy and additional resources.

<http://www.wholechildeducation.org/>



Council of Chief State School Officers – Restart and Recovery: Leveraging Federal COVID Relief Funding & Medicaid to Support Student and Staff Wellbeing & Connection

This publication highlights examples of how state education and local education agencies can use federal relief funds to support student wellbeing.

<https://learning.ccsso.org/restart-recovery-leveraging-federal-covid-relief-funding-medicaid-to-support-student-staff-wellbeing-connection>



National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) – State Plans for Accelerating Student Learning, A Preliminary Analysis

This joint document from NGA and CCSSO highlights key examples of how states planned to support student accelerated learning during summer 2021.

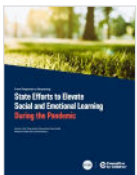
<https://www.nga.org/center/publications/state-plans-for-accelerating-student-learning-a-preliminary-analysis/>



Institute of Education Sciences, Regional Education Laboratory (REL) Program – Strategies to Help Mitigate Learning Loss

This blog post by REL staff highlights various resources to help educators and education leaders accelerate student learning.

<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/central/blog/mitigating-learning-loss.asp>



Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) – State Efforts to Elevate Social and Emotional Learning During the Pandemic

This resource includes recommendations for how states can continue to support social-emotional learning as schools transitioned from the 2020 to 2021 school year.

<https://casel.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/state-efforts-elevate-social-emotional-learning-during-pandemic.pdf>



The Learning Policy Institute – Whole Child Resources

This web page contains a range of resources related to whole child education.

<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/issue/whole-child-education>

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



KnowledgeWorks is a national nonprofit organization advancing a future of learning that ensures each student graduates ready for what's next. For more than 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.