

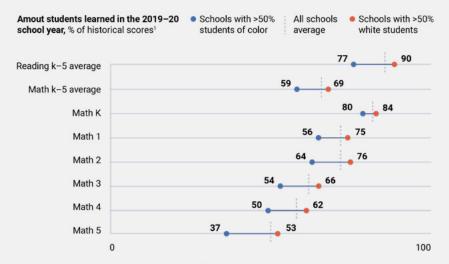
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COVID-19 shuttered school buildings and the impact on students will potentially be significant for years to come. Experts predict that school closures last spring could leave students a full year behind in math — with even greater impact as disruptions in instruction continue through the 2020–2021 school year.¹ While instructional loss will affect most students, it could have a disproportionate impact on students with disabilities and other historically marginalized populations, including students of color, students impacted by poverty, and English language learners. For example, one study looked at the amount of grade-level content students had learned in math and reading during the fall semester. The researchers found that in schools that predominantly served students of color, scores were 59 percent of the historical average in math compared to 67 percent for all students. For reading, students of color had learned 77 percent of the content in reading compared to 87 percent for all students.²

Most students are falling behind, but students of color are faring worse.



¹ Percent of an "average" year of learning gained by students in 2019–20 school year, where 100% is equivalent to historical matched scores over previous 3 years. Source: Curriculum Associates.

McKinsey & Company Even before COVID-19, these students with disabilities, students of color, English language learners (ELLs), and students impacted by poverty experienced persistent opportunity gaps and lower achievement compared to their nondisabled, native English speaking, and affluent peers. For instance, proficiency³ and graduation rates⁴ of students with disabilities continue to trail those of their peers, even though research⁵ demonstrates that they can meet the same academic standards when provided high-quality instruction and needed services and supports.

Generally, remedial instruction that simply reteaches content has been the default approach to bringing struggling students up to grade level. The major shortcoming of this approach is that students are pulled out of class to work on skill development in the target academic area, and the time spent away from their general classroom results in less engagement in grade-level curriculum. In other words, while remediation may help students improve isolated skills, the gap in these students' subject-specific knowledge continues to widen. Additionally, while the remediation may prevent a widening gap in certain skills, it may not be sufficient to close the gap or to help students catch up as their peers forge ahead.

COVID-19 continues to exacerbate opportunity gaps. Students are struggling to access online resources, participate in virtual classrooms, and connect meaningfully with teachers and peers. Students with disabilities and ELLs carry the additional burden of accessing needed specialized instruction and related services and supports that were provided in person before the pandemic. In many cases, these services and supports have been disrupted or denied due to the pandemic. Students of color who have disabilities or who are ELLs face even more compounding challenges due to inequitable distribution of educational resources. What's more, these students may lack accessible devices or reliable broadband and, as a result, will have more difficulty benefiting from distance or blended learning.⁶

It is critical that schools take immediate steps to address the issue of instructional loss and prevent students from falling further behind. NCLD released a guide that outlines key principles to help shape inclusive and equitable learning opportunities for all students in the 2020–2021 school year.⁷ One of those principles is "reimagine learning" — an ambitious and critical goal to mitigate instructional loss from the pandemic (see text below). Until now, our nation's schools have struggled to find effective ways to accelerate learning, or, as defined in a report by TNTP, "putting every student on a fast track to grade-level [proficiency]."⁸

Planning for Equity and Inclusion: A Guide to Reopening Schools

Principle 4: Reimagine Learning

States and districts must prioritize high-quality instruction and educational experiences, whether in-person, fully distanced, or through blended learning, and provide opportunities not just to remediate student learning but to accelerate progress.

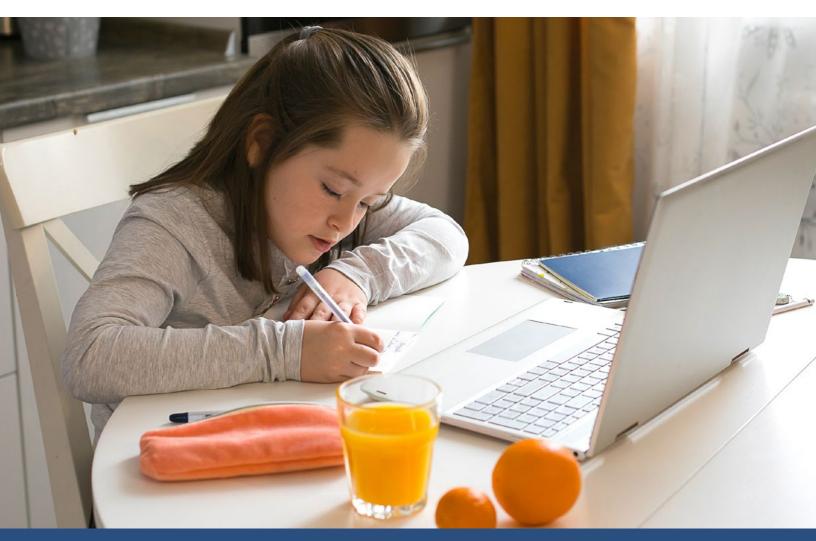
Considerations:

- 1. Educate students with disabilities alongside their peers
- 2. Redesign and accelerate curriculum
- 3. Use continuous formative assessments
- 4. Prioritize inclusion of students with disabilities.

The report highlights that children who have faced barriers academically, whether due to a disability, lack of English language proficiency, or other factors, rarely "catch up," regardless of whether they receive additional support and services. Too often, these students are on a parallel but different trajectory from their peers who are performing at grade level.

Given that so many students have missed critical instruction since the start of the pandemic, there is an urgent need to identify what works — and to scale effective, research-based models that accelerate learning and improve outcomes for students, now and in the years to come. While states, districts, and schools pilot new approaches, policymakers, school leaders, educators, and parents should be vigilant in measuring the efficacy of these models and hold themselves to high standards of accountability, ensuring that sufficient guardrails are in place. This brief explores some of those models and highlights important considerations for historically marginalized student populations, especially students with disabilities.

Importantly, COVID-19 will have far-reaching consequences on students, teachers, schools, and education systems overall. For instance, it has exacerbated teacher shortages and has added additional stress and work to teachers' already full plates. Implementing effective models to accelerate instruction and mitigate instructional loss must be only one piece of the overall strategy to support all students, families, teachers, and schools to maximize student outcomes during and after the pandemic. Indeed, focusing on acceleration or learning recovery without simultaneously addressing teacher shortages, funding scarcity, and other pressing challenges cannot be successful.





Research-Based Approaches to Accelerate Learning

Due to school closures and lost instructional time, the vast majority of students are entering the 2020–2021 school year behind grade level. Many schools will aim to design a learning progression that remediates instruction, meets students where they are, and picks up the curriculum where students left off. This approach will, at best, keep students from falling behind further but will not accelerate instruction. Research shows that these approaches to remediate instruction are largely ineffective to help students "catch up." 9

Remediation as the primary way to support students performing below grade level is especially concerning for students with disabilities. It can result in lowered expectations for these students and relegate them to lower "tracks" than their nondisabled peers. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) released guidance to clarify that, as part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act's (IDEA) requirement to provide each child with a free appropriate public education, IEPs should be written in ways that create a pathway and roadmap for students to strive for and meet grade-level standards.¹⁰

Students With the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities

Any discussion of reimagined learning or accelerated learning must take into account students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The Supreme Court's decision in the *Endrew F*. case recognized the right of all students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) to have ambitious academic goals. Further, the Court stated "while the goals may differ, every student should have the chance to meet challenging objectives." The Supreme Court also recognized that if a student is not making expected progress toward his or her annual goals, the IEP team must revise, as appropriate, the IEP to address the lack of progress. If a school or district decides to implement an instructional model that attempts to "accelerate" learning or get students to meet grade-level standards more quickly, it must consider the needs of all students. Students with significant cognitive disabilities should be able to participate in and engage with content alongside their peers.

For more information on inclusive practices for students with significant cognitive disabilities, visit the TIES Center at www.tiescenter.org, the national technical assistance center on inclusive practices and policies that works with states, districts, and schools to support the movement of students with disabilities from less inclusive to more inclusive environments.

Promising approaches to accelerating learning share common characteristics. These models do the following:

Streamline curriculum while focusing on grade-level standards.

Research shows that, in lieu of remediation, effective acceleration programs streamline content, reducing redundancies¹¹ in curriculum in order to focus on rigorous, grade-level content while familiarizing students with prerequisite skills at critical junctures.¹² This careful focus allows students to make up for lost instruction while keeping up with grade-level instruction.

Allow for additional time to integrate necessary prerequisite skills.

While streamlining curriculum is important, students may still require more time to acquire prerequisite skills or engage with and master new content.¹³ Allowing for additional time at the school or district level necessitates collaborative conversations about schedules that include representation from special educators, service providers, language or reading specialists, electives teachers, and families. Allowing for additional time at the classroom level should be determined in a collaboration between general and special educators.

Customize instruction based on strengths and areas of growth for each student.

Effective approaches to accelerating learning demand that curricula be tailored to deliberately and intentionally meet individual learners' specific needs over a prescribed period. Rather than approaching instruction from a deficit model, efforts should focus on student strengths, 14 simultaneously providing compensatory strategies and additional instruction to address gaps in learning and needed areas of growth. 15 Special educators should be an integral part of this process as they have nuanced understanding of student strengths and progress with specific skills. Effective models also ensure that needed accommodations are provided. 16



Leverage student interests that lead to deep, engaging learning.

When content is aligned to student interests, the result is an increase in engagement and learning outcomes.¹⁷ Culturally responsive education that recognizes and affirms students' cultural and racial identity also leads to better academic outcomes.¹⁸

Use Universal Design for Learning (UDL), multiple modalities, and small group instruction.

UDL and multiple modalities for instruction can support accelerated approaches.¹⁹ Teachers should use UDL to design flexible learning environments that anticipate learner variability and provide alternative pathways into the curriculum. Teachers should also adapt approaches to accelerated learning to reflect the strengths and areas of growth for each student. Small teacher-to-student ratios and small group instruction can also build ownership of learning for students and reinforce social ties that improve learning and behavioral outcomes.^{20,21} Furthermore, small group tutoring has been shown to be one of the most effective strategies to improve student outcomes.²²

Some districts and programs already have approaches that embody these key components for successful acceleration. The following examples incorporate many of the evidence-based practices that can lead to acceleration of learning. It is important to note that while these approaches show promise, not all students with disabilities would be served well in them. Decision makers should recognize the need for balancing student-responsive instruction with accelerated models.

Importance of Accountability and Guardrails in All Instructional Models

Regardless of the instructional approach used, it is critical to preserve and adhere to the statewide assessment and accountability system laid out in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The federal accountability system measures student proficiency by grade level and uses time as a means to determine if students are making progress similar to that of their peers within and across subgroups — like students with disabilities, students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, ELLs, and students of various races/ethnicities. For instance, ESSA maintains the federal requirement (which began with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act) to administer statewide standardized assessments to all students in grades 3–8 and once in high school to measure students' proficiency against grade-level standards. Schools must report the results, must disaggregate data by student subgroup, and are held accountable for student performance on these assessments, among other indicators. The disability and civil rights community has fought for such a system where comparable, annual statewide assessments are administered and publicly reported on so that all students are counted and communities can understand where there are inequities in public education.

By design, some of the accelerated approaches to instruction presented here take a more fluid approach to the pace of learning progressions. In these situations, it is critical that school leaders and policymakers effectively monitor student progress and proficiency using valid and reliable measures. This will ensure that no student groups are held to lower standards or set on trajectories that will prevent them from reaching the same levels of achievement as their peers. If accelerated models of instruction use growth models, grade spans, or other ways to group students and track progress, adhering to federal assessment and accountability requirements is still paramount. Without these guardrails, students at the margins — like students with disabilities — may be held to lower standards or left behind.

Refer to Part 3: Policy Recommendations for more information.

APPROACH A

Power Standards: Educators focus on delivering a subset of standards or prioritized grade-specific indicators that any state or district determines are critical for student success.²³

Power Standards: Milwaukee Public Schools

As part of Milwaukee Public School System's reopening plan, the district articulated instructional expectations for teachers, students, and families. The district designated "power standards" — the most important grade-level goals — as priorities for the first six weeks of school, and provided sample lessons for educators to use when teaching those standards. In other words, the district expected teachers to condense and focus on critical grade-level content with time carved out to address prerequisite skills. This type of district- or state-level guidance is helpful as it paves the way for the redesign of curriculum and instruction to accelerate learning. Organizations such as Achieve the Core have created guidelines on the best ways for districts and schools to maintain high expectations for mastery of grade-level content during and after COVID-19, despite instructional loss.²⁴

Example of Power Standards for Grade 2 Mathematics

Combine lessons in order to reduce the amount of time spent on time and money. Emphasize denominations that support place value understanding such as penny-dime-dollar. Limit the amount of required student practice.

-Achieve the Core, 2020–2021 Priority Instructional Content in ELA/Literacy and Mathematics, page 25

Impact

While there is no data about the efficacy of this specific district-level practice and policy, similar efforts in postsecondary education have demonstrated promising outcomes. For instance, the California Acceleration Project (CAP) worked with community colleges to redesign remedial courses for students who have not fully satisfied college-entry benchmarks and are required to pass remedial classes before qualifying for college credit. The CAP created streamlined courses that incorporate prerequisite skills and simultaneously allow students to earn credit. This approach has been shown effective in increasing course completion. For example, course completion rates increased by 2.3 times for required English classes and by 4.5 times for classes in statistics.²⁵

Key features of this approach:

- Streamlines curriculum while focusing on grade-level standards
- Frees up time from grade-level curriculum to integrate necessary prerequisite skills

APPROACH B

Competency-Based Education: Competency-based learning is "an educational system in which each student gets what they need to reach their fullest potential and master high standards through flexible pathways, differentiated support, individual and collective tasks, and multiple means and opportunities to demonstrate skill development. Students have individual agency as well as collaborate in co-constructing pathways and measures of learning. Standards, competencies, and measures of mastery incorporate community input and voice to ensure pathways reflect Universal Design for Learning and are culturally responsive, nonbiased, and anti-racist."²⁶

Competency-Based Education: Purdue Polytechnic High School in Indianapolis

Established in 2017, Purdue Polytechnic High School (PPHS) is a collaboration among Purdue University, the City of Indianapolis, and industry partners who seek to prepare students for rigorous postsecondary coursework in STEM fields.

PPHS has three high school campuses serving a total of over 700 students in grades 9–12. Fifty-five percent of PPHS students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and 15 percent receive special education services. The student population is racially and ethnically diverse — 34 percent Black, 22 percent Hispanic/Latinx, 36 percent White/Caucasian, and 6.1 percent Multiracial.²⁷ PPHS takes a competency-based education approach, providing students credit for demonstrated learning mastery as opposed to time spent in school. Every student has a personalized learning coach and is assigned to an advisory group of 15 to 17 students. Students work with their coaches and with peers, setting goals, reviewing progress, discussing current events, and creating plans and schedules for the coming week. Students work on "challenges," which are projects with industry partners that could include, for example, creating product prototypes or drafting business plans. Each challenge lasts for six weeks, after which a new "project cycle" begins. A key feature of this approach is "personalized learning time," during which students progress through required course content (e.g., U.S. history) at their own pace. Coaches are available to assist students either individually or in small groups if they have questions or are struggling with academics or their industry-supported STEM projects.

Impact

Evidence suggests that this approach holds promise. During the school's second year (SY 2018–2019), PPHS students passed the PSAT 8/9 (an assessment given to students in grades 8 and 9 to gauge college and career readiness) at a rate similar to the national average and five percentage points above the state average. In addition, PPHS students outperformed all but one local township/school district on the 2018–2019 state assessments.

Key features of this approach:

- Streamlines curriculum while focusing on grade-level standards
- Leverages students' interests and capitalizes on opportunities for deep engagement in learning
- Uses multiple modalities and takes advantage of benefits inherent to small group instruction and peer engagement
- Frees up time to integrate necessary prerequisite skills
- Customizes instruction to students' strengths and areas identified as targets for growth

APPROACH C

Tailored Acceleration: In this model, educators regularly conduct short, formative assessments and develop individualized learning progressions for each student. Students engage in flexible groupings and in different modalities — independent practice, small group teacher instruction, computer instruction, small group practice — based on their mastery of various skills.

Tailored Acceleration: Teach to One 360

Teach to One 360 is a holistic math instructional model that leverages analytics from historical learner patterns and individual learner attributes to create a custom math curriculum. Learning is tailored to meet the strengths and needs of each student. Teach to One's adaptive technology develops individualized learning progressions that are updated regularly as teachers conduct short, formative assessments. Students engage in flexible groupings and in different teacher-led, student collaboration, and independent modalities based on their mastery of various math skills. Students get more time to develop prerequisite skills while still being exposed to grade-level content.

Various schools have adapted the Teach to One approach to address restrictions related to COVID, and have demonstrated how to implement the model in blended or distance learning environments.

Impact

A 2019 report by MarGrady Research, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, found that schools whose students enrolled in Teach to One over a three-year period saw an average of 23 percent more growth than a national reference sample.²⁹ However, a second study on a smaller set of schools, by the Consortium of Policy Research in Education at Teachers College, was unable to draw any generalizable conclusion.³⁰ The report suggested that the inconclusive impact of the program might be due to a lack of fidelity in implementation and to the school district continually reconfiguring the program to align the teaching to the specific grade-level standards on which schools are assessed.

Key features of this approach:

- Uses multiple modalities and small group instruction
- Frees up time to integrate necessary prerequisite skills
- Customizes instruction to fit each student's strengths, areas of growth, and interests

APPROACH D

Small Group, High-Impact Tutoring: Schoolwide, one-on-one tutoring or tutoring in very small groups takes place at least three times a week, or for about 50 hours over a semester with the same group of students.³¹

Small Group, High-Impact Tutoring: Saga Education

Saga Education is a tutoring program in Chicago, New York City, Florida, and Washington, DC.³² Saga pairs students with a tutor who is interested in public service — often a recent college graduate who is an AmeriCorps member. Tutors work in the program for one year and receive a stipend and pre-service training. Tutors are paired with two to four students who are behind grade level in math for one 50-minute class period per school day. The daily tutoring sessions count as a credit-bearing elective course toward high school graduation for the students who are being tutored. Importantly, tutoring sessions do not replace participation in full-class grade-level instruction with teachers who have content expertise. Instead, the tutoring sessions provide a double dose of instruction to support and accelerate learning.

Impact

The impact of this approach has been shown to be positive. Students who received Saga tutoring achieved 2.5 years of growth in math in one year.³³ Among participating students, there was a 50 percent decrease in math course failures.³⁴ The impact also spilled over into content areas outside of those targeted by tutoring, with a 28 percent decrease in non-math course failures.³⁵

Key features of this approach:

- Uses multiple modalities and small group instruction
- · Creates additional time to integrate necessary prerequisite skills
- · Customizes instruction to strengths and areas of growth for each student





Implementing Acceleration Approaches With Success

Implementing any of these approaches to accelerated learning can be complicated, and fidelity of implementation is critical to success. Regardless of the approach, states, districts, and educators should build an inclusive learning environment, provide meaningful support to educators, and create systems to facilitate family engagement.

Inclusive Learning Environment

No matter the instructional model or curriculum, an inclusive learning environment helps all students thrive. This is increasingly challenging, given that health and safety concerns mean that schools are likely to shift between virtual, blended, and in-person instruction throughout the 2020–2021 school year.

Inclusion is especially important for students with disabilities. The majority of students with disabilities spend most of their school day in general education classrooms, alongside students without disabilities. This trend reflects the mandate in IDEA requiring that students be educated in the least restrictive environment (which more often than not means a general education setting) to the greatest extent possible. The following elements are key to building an environment that is inclusive of, and accessible to, students with disabilities and other learners:

Embracing Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

UDL is a framework to improve teaching and learning for all based on how individuals learn best. It requires creating multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement to set up all students for success. As changes to learning environments are made in response to the pandemic, most school districts will rely heavily on technology. Schools will need to acquire and use assistive technologies that offer features such as text-to-speech and speech-to-text. They will need to use instructional platforms that offer scaffolding for assignments. These features can be lifelines to learning for students with disabilities, ELLs, and other struggling students.

Designing instruction for students on the margins is beneficial for all students, but it is particularly important for students with disabilities. Embedding flexibility and multiple means for educators to share content and for students to demonstrate their knowledge will help students with disabilities access the general education curriculum alongside their peers.

Implementing Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS)

MTSS is a data-based problem-solving approach to delivering core instruction, in which teachers monitor student behavior and performance and change the course or intensity of interventions to accelerate learning or provide targeted instruction to address gaps in learning. Ongoing progress monitoring helps educators identify students who need individualized services and supports, guiding decisions about the allocation of time and resources. Progress monitoring can also ensure that students who fail to keep pace with an accelerated curriculum are quickly identified so they can receive additional interventions based on their real-time needs. Student data gathered during the course of MTSS can also be helpful to guide decision making during a special education evaluation process.

Prioritizing student development and growth of executive function skills

Executive function is a set of mental skills that include working memory, cognitive flexibility, and self-control. Many students, but especially those with attention-related disabilities, struggle with obtaining and mastering these skills. This can result in challenges with starting, completing, or prioritizing tasks. While strength-based approaches that allow students to advance at their own pace can accelerate learning, these models must embed supports to build executive skills. Until students are able to manage a self-paced structure, educators should provide additional scaffolds and guidance to ensure that all students progress meaningfully.



Intensive Educator Supports

Accelerating instruction is challenging and — for most educators — new. Teachers and specialized instructional support personnel will need targeted support to help them identify student needs and implement strategies to accelerate learning. And, when necessary, educators will need support in adapting to new and changing learning environments.

It is important to recognize that educators and schools are already bearing a heavy burden. Policymakers must first address many other factors that impact teachers' capacity, including teacher shortages, class size, instructional leadership, educator health and well-being, and school funding. Once these basic needs of schools and educators are met, equipping educators with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to implement instructional approaches to accelerate learning includes the following:

Investing in extensive professional development and ongoing coaching and support

This might include adding capacity in the form of expert educators and leaders who can serve as mentors or coaches. Coaches should help implement systems of supports for educators, equipping them to address students' unfinished learning; to develop and instruct students based on personalized, rigorous learning progressions that blend grade-level instruction with prerequisite skills; and to shape learning environments that feature multiple modalities in virtual, blended, and in-person contexts.

A recent pre-COVID-19 report by NCLD found that many general educators do not feel well-prepared to teach students with disabilities.³⁶ It is more than likely that educators are experiencing even greater challenges now that they are required to teach in virtual and hybrid instructional environments. Given that the majority of students have missed extended periods of valuable instructional time and have experienced instructional loss, most educators are faced with unprecedented challenges. In addition, professional development is needed to ensure that educators are prepared to provide accommodations and support to students with disabilities and other historically marginalized student groups, including ELLs.

Leveraging the expertise of educators to maximize the impact of instructional models

States should provide guidance to districts about the development of innovative staffing plans that match educators to student groups and delegate responsibilities based on their expertise. Educators who have previous experience with accelerated programming and those who have demonstrated expertise with high-need student populations should be assigned to work closely with the students who are furthest behind. Special educators can help their colleagues identify and implement accommodations and interventions that will improve learning for all students. However, school systems should embrace an inclusive environment that recognizes the collective responsibility of educating students. This environment should provide the structures, time, and skills for effective collaboration between special and general educators. Educators who need ongoing support should be provided regular coaching and feedback so they are able to implement an accelerated program of instruction that maps onto the general curriculum.

Family Engagement

Families are essential partners in supporting students and improving outcomes.³⁷ They are also advocates and key decision makers for their children. Just as acceleration is new for teachers, revised curricula and restructured instructional models will be unfamiliar to families. To help students and support learning at home, families should be engaged to inform the development and design of acceleration programs.

Given the likelihood that instruction will be virtual or blended for the majority of the 2020–2021 school year, it is critical to equip families and caregivers with information and knowledge to maximize the effectiveness of their participation. Families should be informed about how schools are adapting curriculum and instructional strategies to accelerate learning while ensuring the health and safety of all children and school personnel. Meaningful family engagement includes:

Establishing flexible and regular communication with families

Regardless of the curriculum or instructional approach, students perform better when families are engaged with the school and their learning.³⁸ While clear lines of communication — in their native language and in an accessible way — are always important, regular communication during COVID-19 school disruptions is especially critical to help families manage uncertainty and support children navigate changing instructional environments. The onus should not be solely on teachers; there should be a coordinated schoolwide effort led by school leaders to set the precedent for frequent and effective communication.

A recent report found that families use a wide range of communication systems to connect with schools and teachers.³⁹ Generally, families prefer personalized outreach, like emails or calls, but some value social media (that bypasses the need to learn a new system or remember passwords) or web-based platforms made available by the school. It's critical that school leaders provide communications in a variety of formats to best meet the needs of all families.

Describing how and why schools are adapting curriculum and designing learning plans

More than ever, parents and caregivers are supporting students' daily instruction. They need clear and concise information about the school's expectations so they can allocate the time and attention required to help children reach their learning goals. Parents of students with disabilities need specific information about how redesigned curricula and individualized learning plans will ensure that instruction is accessible to their child.⁴⁰





State-Level Policy Recommendations and Actions

While educators and schools will be at the heart of efforts to reimagine instruction and accelerate learning, states also have an important role to play. The following state-level policy recommendations can guide school districts in decisions about reimagining learning while also implementing effective guardrails to ensure that acceleration efforts do not compromise the commitment to guaranteeing all students a high-quality, rigorous education.

These recommendations focus on accelerating instruction, but this is only one piece of a necessary, comprehensive approach to support students, families, educators, and schools during and after the COVID-19 crisis.

Allocate resources to design and implement acceleration approaches with fidelity. States can:

- Establish tutoring programs and prioritize serving students with disabilities and students most in need. States can encourage school districts to blend funding from Title I, IDEA, and the CARES Act to establish robust tutoring programs. Tutoring services should supplement whole group grade-level instruction taught by a content expert, essentially acting as a double dose of instruction rather than as a replacement for whole group instruction.
- Invest in hardware, software, and infrastructure that allow all students to access and engage with virtual or blended instruction. States should provide additional funding to increase the device-per-pupil ratio and create solutions to ensure that all students have access to the internet. Without this investment, the reliance on distance or blended learning could have a disproportionate negative impact on students experiencing poverty, students of color, and students with disabilities who, generally, have less access to devices, assistive technology, and adequate instruction.

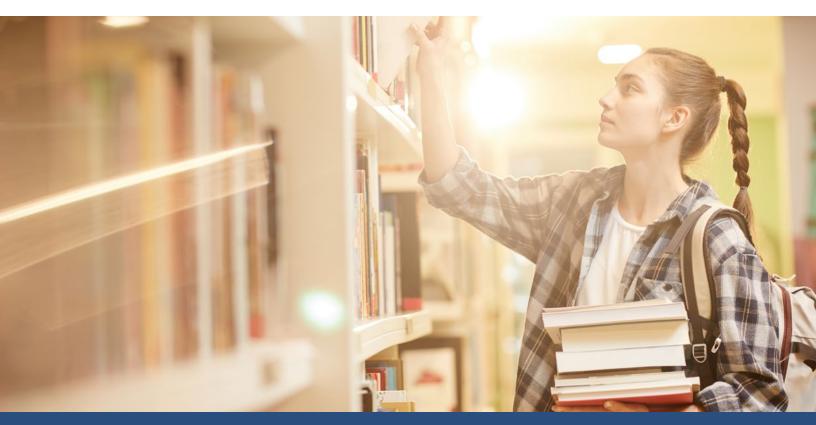
- Protect and expand funding for specialized instructional support personnel. States should allocate sufficient funding to districts to pay for school psychologists, school counselors, social workers, and other specialized instructional support personnel. COVID-19 will have a lasting impact on the mental health and social-emotional well-being of children. Due to the pandemic, many children will experience greater levels of stress as more families face economic hardship, and caregivers balance work, caring for friends and family, and schooling. Schools will need the same, if not more, support from specialized staff to meet the needs of children during uncertain COVID-19 times and beyond.
- Support and encourage districts to administer formative assessments regularly to assess progress of individual students and adapt instructional approaches for students who are not making sufficient progress. During the coming months, it will be more important to focus on instruction than on standardized assessments that are used to measure student proficiency for high-stakes decisions such as grade promotion and graduation. In the short term, states should encourage districts to support the frequent administration of formative assessments as a way to determine the impact of new instructional models on student learning. While data from these assessments are essential to guide educators in planning and delivering well-targeted instruction, they are not intended to serve as a measure of student learning for school and district accountability purposes.

Cultivate the knowledge and skills to reimagine learning. States can:

- Streamline and focus learning by identifying "power" standards. States can help districts streamline and focus learning by identifying critical standards needed for academic success. Content experts working with state leaders should review state standards and reduce redundancies in learning while also emphasizing the integration of prerequisite skills with grade-level content. States should reinforce that all students should be held to these standards, rather than modifying expectations for certain subgroups of students that were disproportionately impacted by the school disruptions caused by COVID-19.
- Allocate resources to build expertise around accelerated curriculum. States should allocate additional resources from federal relief packages or other sources to allow districts to develop and provide personalized professional development. Funds should be made available to hire additional personnel to ensure manageable class sizes, to address challenges posed by online and hybrid learning, and for ongoing coaching to educators as they implement accelerated curricula.
- Create professional development and guidance on how to use ongoing, formative assessments to identify students' unique learning needs. States should issue guidance and provide additional resources to increase the amount of professional development available to help educators effectively administer and use data from these assessments.
- Create partnerships with education organizations to help districts and schools execute accelerated models in different instructional contexts (asynchronously, synchronously, virtual, blended, in-person). States can help establish partnerships with education organizations (e.g., community-based programs, national and state nonprofits, colleges, technology businesses, independent researcher entities) to develop guidance, materials, and professional development protocols to assist in the implementation of evidence-based, culturally competent, accelerated approaches in fully virtual and blended learning models.

Establish guardrails so that acceleration approaches are implemented in an inclusive and equitable manner. States can:

- Establish guardrails within new acceleration approaches to ensure that struggling students and those with identified disabilities have access to grade-level content and rigorous learning opportunities. It will be challenging to determine if a child is making meaningful yearly progress and staying on "grade level" in new instructional learning environments that allow students to advance at their own pace. To minimize the risk of having students fall behind, states should help districts to develop strong progress monitoring systems that identify when students are not making sufficient progress. See more important guardrails here.
- Articulate pathways for students who are graduating or aging out of high school to earn needed credits and participate in college and career transition services. States should issue guidance to require high schools to ensure that students who are graduating or aging out of high school can access the necessary coursework to receive their diploma or certificate, despite school closures. This may include allowing juniors or seniors to complete coursework or access transition services after their graduation or age-out date.
- Ensure that students with disabilities have access to grade-level instruction in the least restrictive environment. States should monitor data and COVID reentry plans to ensure that all students will have access to accelerated curriculum, especially those who were most negatively impacted by school closures in the spring of 2020 and during the 2020–2021 school year. Specifically, states should clarify that accelerated approaches should not be used to "track" students or put certain student groups on different learning trajectories. For instance, states should monitor and ensure that students with disabilities will benefit from accelerated curriculum approaches alongside their peers without disabilities.





Federal-Level Policy Recommendations and Actions

Federal actions and guardrails to increase the effectiveness of accelerated learning are critical. Accelerated instruction requires a new approach to instruction as well as dedicated resources. In addition, accelerated instructional models can push the bounds of existing accountability systems. Congress and ED can help ensure that there are important, relevant guardrails. Specifically, the federal government can:

Increase resources to implement accelerated learning approaches with fidelity.

- Provide states and districts with additional federal dollars in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

 Congress should prioritize a COVID-19 relief package that provides sufficient funding to states and school districts in order to select and implement accelerated learning approaches with fidelity. This may include hiring curriculum design experts, providing tailored, culturally competent professional development, and hiring additional educators and school support staff.
- Increase funding for IDEA including Part B, Part C, and Part D. Since 2009, the average federal share per child has remained stagnant, while the number of students served and the national average per pupil expenditure (APPE) have continued to rise. The result is a declining federal contribution to the costs of educating students with disabilities. States and districts need Part B and Part C monies to provide the interventions, supports, and services students need. Part D is also essential to provide the infrastructure to implement programs through training and professional development for personnel, technical assistance, and more.

- Increase funding for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) especially Title I, Title II, and Title IV of ESSA. Congress should increase funding for schools to provide additional support and additional instruction to all students following COVID. These funding streams allow states and school districts flexibility to select and implement accelerated learning approaches that fit their particular needs and student population.
- Provide updated guidance on how to braid and leverage funding streams to maximize program impact. Since the pandemic began, new funding streams have been used to provide emergency funds to states and districts. To ensure efficiency in the use of resources, ED can offer updated guidance on braided funding streams to maximize resources that can be allocated to support these approaches, including through COVID-19 emergency funding, professional development funding, and other education funding streams.
- Pass the Cultivating Opportunity and Response to the Pandemic through Service (CORPS) Act to assist in scaling up effective tutoring programs. Congress can provide additional funding to expand the number of available AmeriCorps positions to provide service opportunities such as mentoring and tutoring students who need additional support.
- Increase funding for the competitive State Assessment grants to allow more states greater ability to improve the development and administration of assessments, including virtual assessments. Ensure that the competitive Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority grant programs require states to prioritize equity for students with disabilities, students of color, students impacted by poverty, and ELLs in their innovative approaches to assessment.



Invest in research to better understand the effectiveness of accelerated learning approaches.

- Increase federal funding for the Institute of Education Sciences to evaluate programs and practices that seek to address instructional loss during the pandemic and accelerate learning, such as the new initiative, "Operation Reverse the Loss."
- Create a national mathematics panel that builds upon the 2008 National Mathematics Advisory Panel to explore the fundamental components of math instruction and inform approaches to accelerating student engagement with, interest in, and achievement in math.
- Conduct hearings and/or listening tours to elevate the importance of accelerated learning. Many accelerated learning approaches are new and have yet to be implemented at scale. Congress can hold hearings or listening tours to highlight and better understand successful accelerated approaches.

Maintain guardrails to ensure that all students are held to and perform at high levels.

- Reinforce the importance of grade-level standards for all students. The ED 2015 IDEA guidance clarified that IDEA's requirement to provide each child with a free appropriate public education (FAPE) means that IEPs should be written in ways that create a pathway for students to strive for, and meet, grade-level standards. ⁴¹ ED should reiterate the importance of this guidance and should use indicators that measure how well students are meeting grade-level standards as a part of the Results Driven Accountability and state determinations process under the requirements outlined in IDEA.
- Support the use of statewide assessments that provide transparent data to help inform policy and practice. ED should develop meaningful guidance to help states implement statewide assessments during the pandemic.⁴² Standardized assessment data may not be as reliable as in previous years, but it remains an important indicator of student success and well-being amid the pandemic.

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