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SCHOOL LEADERSHIP**The 2020-21 School Year Is Coming Into View
(and It Doesn't Look Great)**

Education leaders are laying out plans to reopen schools in the fall, but without the safety net of a vaccine, the school year looks unpredictable at best.

By Sarah Gonser

April 22, 2020



Maria Symchych / TWENTY20

It's suddenly clear to everyone—although teachers have been aware the whole time—that schools are a crucial piece in an ecosystem that keeps America afloat. They aren't just where kids are educated—though that remains their indispensable objective and cultural

contribution—they're also where millions of parents start their own days, dropping off their kids before heading out to jobs that pay the bills.

With the emergence of Covid-19, that critical dependency has been thrown into sharp relief. Parents are getting a firsthand glimpse of the work involved in overseeing a child's education, all while simultaneously juggling their professional responsibilities—or worse, the very real prospect of unemployment. Understandably, there's enormous demand for schools to reopen so that teachers, parents, and school-aged kids can return to some semblance of productive normalcy.

“We need to get our kids back to school. I need to get my kids back to school,” said California Governor Gavin Newsom in the *Los Angeles Times* (<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-04-14/la-schools-coronavirus-reopening-changes-social-distancing>), sounding a little desperate. “We need to get our kids educated.”

That's not going to be easy. Early reports suggest that behind closed doors school leaders are debating whether it's safe to reopen schools at all this fall. And even if schools do open on time, the schedules they may be forced to adopt could keep both parents and students home, at least for part of the day. If there's any relief on the horizon, it's hard to see it clearly.

Across the country, meanwhile, states are starting to prepare contingency plans for a highly unpredictable school year. According to multiple news reports, there will be nothing routine about it. These are some of the big insights and ideas driving the conversation:

EXTENDING ONLINE LEARNING

Online learning is likely to be a big part of the mix—either full-time or as a complement to in-person schooling—well into the school year, say school leaders. For districts seeing strong results from their approach to blended learning, there will be demand to make it a more integrated part of the curriculum year-round.

Maryland State Superintendent of Schools Karen Salmon is focusing on strengthening the state's remote learning capabilities. “We're not sure that [school building closures] is not

something that we're going to revisit in the fall or the winter," Salmon told state lawmakers, according to *The Baltimore Sun*

(<https://www.baltimoresun.com/coronavirus/bs-md-pol-coronavirus-task-force-20200408-hkudrtszoreyjmu3tgznx3pjt4-story.html>)

. "I'm really focusing much of our resources on the expansion and accountability wrapped around online learning and distance learning."

Chris Reykdal, superintendent of public instruction for the state of Washington, is also ramping up online learning capabilities. "Short of a vaccine, which people continue to tell us is 12 to 18 months away, we have to figure out if it's safe to come back even in the fall," says Reykdal, according to *MyNorthwest*

(<https://mynorthwest.com/1806289/reykdal-close-schools-coronavirus/>). "We have a lot of science working hard to figure it out, but I already have to start thinking about how to continue to strengthen our online model, which has gotten exponentially better over the last two weeks, but there's a lot of work to go."

STAGGERED START TIMES AND CONTINUED SOCIAL DISTANCING

Physical distancing, staggered schedules, and other precautions aimed at preventing the transmission of the virus might be the new normal once stay-at-home restrictions are removed and kids and educators return to school.

"Can you stagger the times that our students come in so you can appropriate yourself differently within the existing physical environment—by reducing physical contact if possible, reducing the congregated meal, addressing issues related to PE and recess?" asked California's Newsom, who has been an early leader in the state-level response to the pandemic. "Those are the kinds of conversations we're all going to be having over the course of the next number of weeks and the next number of months."

Because schools aren't generally designed for social distancing, writes Frederick Hess, director of education policy studies for the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) in *Forbes* (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/frederickhess/2020/04/01/what-will-it-take-for-schools-to-reopen/#6b6966ab37ea>), safely reopening schools "may well require reducing the number of students in a school on a given day, either by having students attend on alternate days or by adopting a half-day

model in which half the students attend in the morning and half in the afternoon. It would likely require closing gyms and having students eat lunch at their desks.” Crowded hallways wouldn't do, so students in middle and high school might be required to follow the elementary school model and stay in one classroom for the entire school day.

MEDICAL INTERVENTIONS AND SURVEILLANCE

As schools around the world—many of which closed earlier than U.S. schools—slowly begin to reopen, students must comply with new rules, as per a report by *The Wall Street Journal*

(<https://www.wsj.com/articles/where-schools-reopen-distancing-and-disinfectant-are-the-new-coronavirus-routine-11586971911>)

, including the possibility of wearing masks, being screened by thermal cameras, and receiving temperature scans before being allowed to enter the school building.

In stark terms, *The Washington Post*

(<https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/04/13/schools-reopen-coronavirus/>) reports that timing and conditions for schools reopening depends on “where you live, who is in charge, and how much the decision-makers respect the opinion of infectious-disease specialist Anthony S. Fauci and the other scientists leading the fight to stem the spread of coronavirus.” The bottom line, according to Aaron E. Carroll, professor of pediatrics and associate dean for research mentoring at Indiana University School of Medicine, is that U.S. schools cannot *safely* reopen until public health officials find ways to identify and treat people infected with Covid-19.

Notes AEI's Hess, “if schools could procure digital thermometers and implement ubiquitous testing—especially if the tests are cheap and quick—they might be able to proceed with something like normal operations.” But with widespread testing still limited in the U.S., that scenario looks unlikely in the near future.

PREPARE FOR LEARNING LOSS

With 9 out of 10 students out of school worldwide—a global school shutdown on an unprecedented scale—it's clear there will be deep and lasting impacts on kids, writes *Anya Kamenetz for NPR*

(<https://www.npr.org/2020/04/02/824964864/nine-out-of-10-of-the-world-s-children-are-out-of-school-what-now>).

These will show up both in long-term academic metrics as well as other places, such as mental health. Once schools do reopen, educators will be confronted not just with this slide in learning, but also the “enormous range of experiences and readiness students will bring,” says Julia Rafal-Baer, COO of Chiefs for Change, in a *Q&A with Education Next*

(<https://www.educationnext.org/chiefs-for-change-coo-weighs-in-challenges-coronavirus-covid-19-rafal-baer/>).

One way teachers may begin addressing some of these challenges, says Rafal-Baer: creating individual learning plans to assess each student and lay out how to meet students' learning needs and social and emotional supports. “Many students will be entering schools in the fall five to six months after they were last in the buildings.... Leaders will have to grapple with what is ambitious versus feasible.”

In Miami-Dade County Public Schools, the fourth largest district in the country, Superintendent Alberto Carvalho is preparing his city for “historic academic regression, the likes of which this country’s never seen,” he told Edutopia. This summer and through next school year, the district will roll out a massive effort that includes virtual tutors and mentors, an earlier school-year start date for its most fragile students, and the continuation of its blended learning program. “It’s not going to be perfect, but we’re going to leave no stone unturned in terms of providing additional, targeted high-end support for students who, if nothing is done for them, will regress to a level that, quite frankly, will be an embarrassment to this country and debilitating to the individual students.”

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SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

4 Guiding Questions for Effective Remote Collaboration

Working remotely is changing teaching, and it affects how school teams work together as well. Addressing these questions will help teams ensure that they're doing their best work.

By *Zachary Herrmann*

April 17, 2020



Shelter-in-place, self-quarantine, and stay-at-home orders have created a new reality for educators, students, and families.

While the context of our work has changed, our mission to serve our communities remains. But working in this new reality is a significant challenge, particularly given the uncertainty, ambiguity, and isolation experienced by so many members of our communities. So how do we respond to these challenges?

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SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Getting an Accurate Assessment of Student Learning

Administrators seeking to get a clear picture of what students are learning can start by forging good relationships with students and teachers.

By Andrew J. Canlé

February 26, 2020



Administrators are typically reactionary assessors by nature, waiting for assessment results and then convening with staff to discuss next steps. We should strive instead to be proactive, assessing student growth through formative checks for understanding in real time in the classroom to aid the learning process and improve student performance. But there's a hitch.

Picture this: A lesson is off to a great start. Everything is clicking when suddenly the classroom door swings open to reveal the building administrator. The air is sucked out of the room, instruction is interrupted, and all momentum is lost. Sound familiar?

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SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

7 Ways to Maintain Relationships During Your School Closure

Suddenly, you're not in the same physical space as your students. We asked teachers to share strategies for maintaining relationships—both peer-to-peer and student-teacher—when everything's gone remote.

By Sarah Gonser

March 25, 2020

On any given day in schools across America, many students exchange warm greetings with a smiling teacher, then perhaps move on to a morning check-in, followed by a quick mindfulness exercise to start the day grounded and mentally focused. Surrounded by peers they've known for months, or perhaps even years—and a teacher they see daily—kids feel connected.

In spite of some critics who downplay the importance of social and emotional learning and the value of belonging—the number of such skeptics is falling, to be sure—the *research* ([/article/bringing-science-learning-classrooms](#)) is clear and has been for some time: When kids spend their daytime hours in safe, supportive schools where adults work every day to build strong relationships with every student, they are simply better, more engaged learners.

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SPECIAL EDUCATION

New Strategies in Special Education as Kids Learn From Home

In special education, teachers say that schedules, sensory supports, and close collaboration with families can help smooth the transition to remote learning during coronavirus.

By *Nora Fleming*

March 27, 2020

Katie Papaccioli, a special education teacher in New York City, holds up a student's lesson.

Around the nation, K–12 schools are frantically trying to adapt to abrupt closures during the coronavirus. But while all teachers are struggling with the new normal, special education teachers in particular are facing unparalleled challenges transitioning both their teaching—and their students and families—to home-based instruction tailored to each student's needs.

“When you say ‘special education,’ you are talking about an umbrella of ages, interests, abilities, and disabilities, within which are individual needs identified by their Individualized Education Program,” explains Margaret Shafer, a third-grade teacher in Morton, Illinois, echoing questions raised by our readers, who wonder how they can provide sufficient support for each of their students who each have very different requirements to learn.

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FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Why Learning at Home Should Be More Self-Directed—and Less Structured

On March 18, 2020, Simone Kern tweeted that simply “recreating schools at home” passes up a golden opportunity to engage kids in authentic, self-directed learning.

By *Simone Kern*

March 24, 2020

With students at home because of the coronavirus threat, social media feeds filled up with color-coded learning schedules from well-meaning parents. But they've struggled to implement those schedules—partly because the tightly structured, time-in-seat approach of traditional schools often has more to do with crowd control than optimizing learning.

The sudden shift to work-from-home might provide a good kind of disruption, opening up a golden opportunity for students to engage in authentic, deep learning that is more self-directed, more playful, more aligned with young students' development—and much easier for parents to manage than stacks of worksheets.

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FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Formative Assessment in Distance Learning

Schools are closed but schooling goes on, and it remains crucial that teachers find ways to see what students are learning.

By *Andrew Miller*

April 7, 2020

Whether we use synchronous or asynchronous online sessions, whether we call it distance or virtual learning, we're all challenged to provide meaningful education experiences at a distance as the education world grapples with the impact of Covid-19. This type of learning is nothing new, but it is new to many of us and has caused us to quickly shift our practices.

Formative assessment at a distance is challenging but possible, and we still need to check for understanding and provide meaningful feedback. The practices we use will look and sound different than they do in the classroom. Here are some ideas to consider.

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ONLINE LEARNING

4 Key Aspects of Teaching an Online Class

What an educator with experience teaching online has learned about structuring students' online and offline experiences and how to provide feedback to keep the learning going.

By *John McCarthy*

April 24, 2020

Building a successful virtual learning program can help teachers and students grow. Having taught in the virtual space throughout my education career, I've found, like others, that doing so requires a combination of characteristics: expertise in lesson planning and assessment, adaptability in what learning can look like in a virtual space, and a belief in students' ability to rise to a challenge with support.

Ultimately, we want students to take ownership of and lead their learning, and that's even more necessary in a virtual space. Where physical classrooms offer face-to-face activities that the teacher can readily observe and monitor, in virtual classrooms students are physically separated from their peers and teacher, so teachers need to be very intentional about monitoring how students are doing.

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APPS

Using Smartphones to Support Learning in Nature

Technology, used appropriately, can be a tool for thoughtful observation, enhancing students' interactions with the natural world.

By *Todd Kutyla*

April 24, 2020

"Kids need to stop staring at screens and go outside." It's a familiar refrain sung by educators, parents, and adults of all stripes. We fear that young people, hypnotized by smartphones and other devices, are losing meaningful connection with the natural world. That fear is not unreasonable, but most educators also understand that if students are not engaged and competent technologically, they will be left behind.

We have *convincing research* (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3432415/>) that suggests young brains are being restructured by pervasive technology. It's also not hard to find high quality research demonstrating the benefits of *physical activity*

(<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5923842/>) and *exposure to nature*

(<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0169204615000286>), not just in terms of young people's general well-being but in the area that most matters to educators: student performance. Given all this, it's easy to buy into the simple dichotomy: screens bad, trees good.

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BLENDING LEARNING

How to Make Effective Videos for Learning

Instructional videos can help students learn at their own pace and free up time for teachers to support students individually.

April 23, 2020

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LITERACY

Teaching Poetry With Student Exemplars

Poetry can feel inaccessible to teens, but using examples written by former students as mentor texts brings it within reach.

By *Elizabeth Jorgensen*

April 23, 2020

At the beginning of the school year, the junior and senior students in my creative writing classes often struggle and feel intimidated; they don't identify as poets. Nevertheless, my goal is for each student to enjoy the power of poetry, as both a reader and a creator.

I set that goal because I believe that *poetry improves ideas and is therapeutic*

(<https://www.writersdigest.com/whats-new/8-reasons-why-poetry-is-good-for-the-soul>), and that it has

emotional and cognitive benefits (<https://www.kveller.com/seven-reasons-why-kids-should-read-poetry/>): It increases language abilities, helps students pay attention to detail, builds empathy, and improves creativity and analytical skills.

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