

EDUCATIONAL EQUITY & CORONAVIRUS: FOCUS ON ENGLISH LEARNERS

As state leaders continue to respond to the coronavirus pandemic, public schools across Michigan remain closed for the remainder of the school year. We know that school closures exacerbate the existing inequities in our education system — presenting the most significant challenges to students and families who are underserved in normal circumstances, including English learners.

In the 2018-19 school year, Michigan’s public schools educated 96,500 English learners — representing over 6 percent of students in the state. Schools not only help English learners build language skills and knowledge, but they also help students integrate into their communities and connect to essential supports.

Like all students, English learners need instructional continuity and access to school meals during this period of uncertainty. These are described in greater detail in Ed Trust—Midwest’s policy brief, [Educational Equity & Coronavirus](#). In addition, to ensure that prolonged school closures do not worsen educational inequities directly impacting the academic and social well-being of English learners, we offer 6 specific steps that the state should take.



1

Provide information in students' home languages

School districts should ensure that English learners and their families have access to information on instructional continuity, meal distribution and child care in their native languages.

Individual parent engagement and innovative approaches that do not rely exclusively on internet access must be used to inform and support families.

Schools can rely on the expertise of educators, family/cultural liaisons, community-based organizations, and other community partners who already work closely with students and their communities.



2

Ensure equitable access to learning materials

English learners should have access to instructional materials that are tailored to their specific academic needs beyond language acquisition. This could take the form of video or phone conversations to help with accessing grade-level content in English or students' native languages.

If a school relies on distance learning, it must ensure that all students have access to required materials — such as computers/tablets and internet connections (including through hotspots or internet service providers), and distance learning should be provided using tools specifically designed for English learners.

Schools should also communicate learning expectations to parents and provide instructional resources in multiple languages and not solely rely on online communication. Specific attention should be afforded to children of families whose parents will not have access to personal leave or sick days to work with their children.

3

Work closely with teachers and counselors to provide support

Schools should engage teachers in preparing standards-based, grade-level instructional materials to continue students' learning. This can include providing grade- and instruction-appropriate periodicals, texts, links to instructional videos with subtitles, translation tools and take-home activities.



Schools must also provide clear communication to families about how the needs of English learners with disabilities and of students with interrupted/inconsistent formal education (SIFE) will be met, and work to maintain connections with students and families.

Schools should support teachers in addressing students' well-being and creative learning. In addition, schools should work with school counselors to anticipate and meet the needs of students who may be at risk and could benefit from school counselors and psychologists for socioemotional support, for postsecondary planning, and for students who are newcomers or for whom additional time at home or away from school can itself be emotionally stressful. To ensure communication between parents and teachers, school counselors, and other school employees, schools should provide access to and professional development on the use of virtual translating services.

4

Coordinate with trusted community partners

Schools should work with community-based organizations — including those that serve immigrant communities, faith communities, after-school providers and other trusted partners — to ensure clear and consistent communication to students and families about accurate coronavirus information and the resources and supports available.



To assist with information dissemination, school districts should engage local and ethnic media. Schools should also connect with local organizations that may offer programming or other services for students when schools are closed (including virtually), consistent with guidance from health officials, and make resources available through these partners. All communications and outreach should be in multiple languages and include visuals to meet the community's needs.



5

Connect families to other services they may need

While schools cannot be expected to do everything, they are a vital and trusted hub for students and their families in a time of uncertainty. Schools should work with their local government and community partners so that they are able to point families to health, housing, legal, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, and other resources — recognizing that this is a period of additional economic hardship for many families, particularly for undocumented/mixed-status families. All communications and outreach should be in multiple languages and include visuals to meet the community’s needs.



6

Start planning now for when schools reopen

The state should create templates for school districts to plan now on how they will bolster and accelerate teaching and learning when in-person classes resume. These preparations should specifically address the needs of English learners, including compensatory services focused on addressing language acquisition and learning gaps resulting from the pandemic.

Long-term district plans should outline how they will allocate resources — including staff, time and materials — for extended learning time during the summer (if possible due to the pandemic) and for the 2020-21 school year, based on student need ensuring that the most vulnerable students are prioritized for instructional and socio-emotional support and opportunities to catch up and advance academically.

This should include information on the estimated cost of implementing the Plan. The Plan should be published on the Michigan Department of Education and district websites.

Also, schools should prepare to provide intensive training to teachers and other school personnel and revisit curriculum before the 2020-21 school year in order to address learning gaps resulting from school closures while helping all students meet grade-level academic expectations. This preparation must recognize the trauma that students have experienced and address their socio-emotional needs.

