



June 15, 2020

The Honorable Patrick O'Donnell
Chairman, Assembly Education Committee
State Capitol, Room 4001
Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

RE: Recommendations for Reopening Schools

Dear Assemblymember O'Donnell:

Thank you for convening an informational hearing on reopening California's public schools on June 16th. I am writing on behalf of The Education Trust—West to provide our recommendations for reopening schools in a way that promotes education equity and avoids widening opportunity and achievement gaps. We have reviewed the recent guidance for reopening from the California Department of Education (CDE). While this guidance is useful in areas, we would like to see additional actions as explained below. Here are our recommendations.

Social Emotional Wellness

Prior to the pandemic, communities of color already had fewer economic opportunities, experienced racist housing practices, and faced discriminatory environments that threaten their safety and contribute to [greater stress and anxiety](#). [Research](#) shows that students fare better academically when their social, emotional, and mental wellness needs are met. State and education leaders must continue to work swiftly to ensure social emotional learning (SEL) is prioritized as they plan for the forthcoming academic year.

1. **The Governor should institute a statewide [day of healing](#).** As [Shawn Ginwright](#) proposes, it is important to memorialize loss as a result of the pandemic and civil unrest and to restore a sense of well-being for the state.
2. **The California Department of Education should create a distance learning plan template** for districts and schools that includes a section on [meeting students and educators' social-emotional wellness](#). Direct school districts to make [distance learning plans publicly available](#) via an easily accessible, user-friendly, multilingual platform that does not solely rely on access to technology.

Digital Equity

The effects of the digital divide on public education have been brought into sharper focus in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. Educators and policymakers across the state must quickly re-envision education given the likely continuation of distance – and increasingly online – learning as school returns in the fall.

1. **Provide every student access to adequate technology and connectivity to engage with learning from a distance.**
 - a. Pass Senate Bill 1130 (Gonzalez) and push the California Public Utilities Commission to implement and expand the California Advanced Services Fund program to encourage deployment of 21st century-ready communications.



- b. Require the CDE to administer a survey to local educational agencies (LEAs) to map regions with persistent “gaps” and redistribute available devices to regions with continued need. Map that access to get a full picture of student need, similar to [mapping tools](#) created during the power shutoffs.
 - c. Require LEAs to ensure that devices have the proper software installed to support videoconferencing and English Learner-specific tools/resources and provide instructions for how English Learners and their families can access and use support resources at home.
 - d. Require LEAs to provide technical support for students and families that is multilingual and accessible.
 - e. Require that LEAs report data disaggregated by student group on the scope of their digital divide (i.e. the percent of hot spots and computers given out, percent of students who were chronically absent during the initial closures, number of instructional minutes per school, access to the full curriculum) and steps leaders have taken to bridge the digital divide for all students in the return to school.
 - f. Require that the delayed 2020-21 LCAP include distance learning/digital divide outcomes and add metrics to the Local Control Funding Formula conditions of learning priorities that evaluate access to technology and implementation of distance learning.
 - g. Require LEAs to outline how they will offer accommodations, access to instructional materials and services, and supports for students with disabilities, English Learners, and student experiencing homelessness.
2. **Whenever possible, ensure that students have access to synchronous learning opportunities that prioritize social emotional learning. If students are unable to access synchronous learning provide equitable access to asynchronous learning opportunities.**
- a. Set minimum distance learning standards and require every LEA to develop and communicate a detailed plan for distance learning (such as the [West Contra Costa Unified School District has done](#)).
 - b. Ensure that minimum distance learning standards include provisions on how to effectively implement English Language Development (ELD) standards remotely.
 - c. Require the CDE to evaluate those distance learning plans to better understand and track implementation (such as the [Minnesota distance learning plan review](#)). Distance learning plans should be evaluated on measures like:
 - Student access to adequate devices and connectivity
 - Daily attendance, access to the full curriculum, and instructional minutes per student
 - Rigor of course offerings and balance of synchronous to asynchronous learning
 - Learning supports for English Learners and students with disabilities

Family and Educator Engagement

In a [needs assessment](#) conducted by the [Partnership for the Future of Learning](#) in which they collected input from 600 students and families in partnership with 20 community-based organizations, students and parents reported that they have not been a part of school and district decision making. Students and parents expressed that they have experienced a significant lack of access to resources necessary to engage, like information, training opportunities, and language translation and interpretation.



1. The **legislature** should implement clear engagement requirements for school districts as they develop their budgets for next year and decide how to spend state and federal COVID-19 emergency funding.
2. The **California Department of Education** and the **California Collaborative for Educational Excellence** should provide workshops, training, and coaching on how district and school leaders can best engage stakeholders while adhering to social distancing requirements, including how to engage remotely and online.

Supporting Families with Distance Learning

Distance learning clearly presents a challenge for many families, but it also presents an opportunity for schools and families to be more mutually supportive of each other and of student learning and wellness. As schools plan for the 2020-21 school year, engaging and supporting families in distance learning must be a priority for state and school leaders.

1. **Governor Newsom has proposed that LEAs complete Continuity of Learning Plans for the receipt of federal funds to mitigate learning loss. LEAs should be required to disseminate their plans in a way that helps families to understand the expectations of students, families, teachers, and school/district leaders and be publicly accessible.** The CDE should provide a plan template that includes:
 - a. Modes and frequency of teacher-led instruction and communication from schools
 - b. Engagement with stakeholders for planning and decision-making
 - c. If distance learning is utilized, the extent to which the district is adhering to the CDE’s standards for quality distance learning
 - d. Grading/feedback policies and the approach to assessing students’ academic, social, and emotional needs upon return to school, including a description of how instruction and related supports subsequently need to shift to meet individual students’ needs
 - e. Universal access to instructional materials and equipment, including devices and internet access if online learning is to be utilized
 - f. Universal access to student and parent supports, such as virtual office hours by telephone or by video meetings, technology support, and instructional resources for home use
 - g. Resources and services aimed to support students’ social-emotional wellness
 - h. Targeted supports for English Learners and students with disabilities that are aligned to their education plans. [Michigan](#) and [Maryland](#) provide some helpful models
2. **The Governor should direct federal stimulus funding to school districts and community-based organizations to provide outside-of-school enrichment and homework support** for students who do not have an adult at home to supervise and support distance learning. To bolster the workforce of support providers, California’s leaders can create a [tutoring corps of college students as the Governor of Tennessee did](#) and leaders can [urge Congress to expand AmeriCorps](#), with a focus on serving California’s communities hardest hit by the COVID-19 crisis.

Assessment of Student Learning

State and local education leaders should begin developing plans now to provide educators and families with accurate information at the beginning of the school year about academic performance in



order to address students’ needs. However, the stress and anxiety students face as a result of COVID-19 requires leaders to prioritize the social-emotional wellbeing of students when they return to school this fall. Therefore, regardless of the method for understanding students’ academic needs, this information should be gathered in low-stakes ways that minimize disruptions to learning and that are done solely for the purpose of identifying how to best serve students going forward – with considerations for a range of possible virtual and in-person learning scenarios at the start of the 2020-21 school year.

- 1. Provide guidance to LEAs around best practices for assessment, that are responsive to the COVID-19 recovery period, including considerations for:**
 - a. How assessment results should be used to equitably allocate district- and school-level resources that provide tailored supports to meet students’ needs
 - b. Assessing in different learning environments (virtual, in-person, and hybrid models), including considerations for setting up physical testing environments that reflect potential physical distancing needs
 - c. Families supporting students with online assessments, including language translation supports
 - d. English Learners and students with disabilities, who may have unique assessment needs; for English Learners, this includes assessing in the language most likely to produce valid results
 - e. Academic assessments in languages that match the language of instruction, for students in dual language programs
- 2. Create a Fall 2020 assessment window for administration of the English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) for students who did not have the opportunity to take the assessment in Spring 2020, particularly for English Learners who need to demonstrate English proficiency (level 4) in order to be reclassified.**
- 3. Recover assessment funds** allocated to testing vendors in order to redirect funds to immediate teaching and learning needs, as [Tennessee’s Commissioner of Education](#) did.

Reopening schools is going to be a huge challenge. ETW would be pleased to help in any way we can. Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

Dr. Elisha Smith Arrillaga
Executive Director

cc: Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond
Members of the Assembly Education Committee
President Linda Darling-Hammond, State Board of Education
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