Uncertain Times, Unanswered Questions

Educational Equity and School District Reopening Plans

August 2020

The Education Trust–New York

About this report

The Education Trust–New York analyzed school district reopening plans submitted to the New York State Education Department by the 50 school districts serving the greatest number of students from low-income backgrounds across the state.

These school districts together enroll 1.4 million students, representing 56% of all students statewide, 72% of students from low-income backgrounds, 85% of Black students, 80% of Latinx students, and 86% of Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners.[1]

Ed Trust–NY's review of the school district reopening plans was based on equity criteria drawn from the requirements and recommendations in state guidelines[2] and broken into categories including:
- Providing equitable instruction and engaging all students;
- Meeting social-emotional needs;
- Supporting students with unique learning needs;
- Providing access to strong educators;
- Addressing the digital divide for families and educators;
- Adopting anti-racist policies and practices; and
- Improving family engagement and communication.

Every plan received a rating of "strong evidence," "some evidence," or "no evidence" on each criterion. We provided all school districts with an advance copy of our analysis and gave them the opportunity to offer additional information or clarification. Examples in this report are drawn from the reopening plan documents.

This report also draws on the results of Ed Trust–NY's recent poll of K-12 public school parents, which was conducted by Global Strategy Group from August 8-19, 2020.[3]

"Uncertain times, unanswered questions"

The decision by many school districts across the state to start the school year entirely online, combined with the results of Ed Trust–NY's recent parent survey, make it clear that many students – especially Black and Latinx students and students from low-income backgrounds – are not going to be in traditional classrooms this fall and underscores the need for the state to ensure that all students have the opportunity to experience rigorous, high-quality instruction whether school is in-person, remote, or blended.

While teachers, administrators, and other school personnel continue to work incredibly hard in extraordinarily difficult circumstances to prepare for the coming school year, our analysis raises major questions about district readiness to support all students equitably in a remote learning environment. In many cases, district plans do not respond to the concerns raised by parents after last spring's school closures, they do not fulfill the requirements or recommendations in the state's reopening framework, and they do not ensure intensive, evidence-based support for students.

Across 25 criteria that can apply to remote learning (both fully remote and blended models):
- None of the 50 school districts show strong evidence on at least half of the criteria;
- 11 districts show strong evidence on 10 to 12 of the criteria;
- 31 districts show strong evidence on 5 to 10 of the criteria; and
- 8 districts showed strong evidence on fewer than 5 of the criteria.

In addition, 20 of the 50 school districts show no evidence on at least a quarter of the criteria. The criteria where districts most frequently show no evidence in their plans focus on adopting anti-racist policies and practices, providing equitable instruction and engaging all students, and supporting students with unique learning needs.

Our findings: The bright spots

- **Districts are taking steps to address students' technology needs.** All 50 district plans include some evidence or strong evidence of how the district will know which students need devices and internet access for remote learning and include strategies to provide them to at least some students.

- **Districts recognize the importance of addressing students' social-emotional needs.** 92% of the 50 districts have plans that show at least some evidence of how they will identify and support the social-emotional needs of returning students.

- **Districts are prioritizing family engagement.** All 50 district plans include some evidence or strong evidence of a clear communication plan that incorporates multiple languages, dissemination of information through multiple means, and/or ways families can contact the school with questions.

- **Districts are working to address the needs of students with disabilities.** 76% of the 50 districts show strong evidence and an additional 16% of the districts show some evidence of how the unique needs of students with disabilities will be met.

Our findings: Equity concerns

- **The quality of remote instruction remains a major uncertainty.** Only 10% of the 50 districts have plans that include strong evidence of live daily instruction aligned with grade-level learning standards, while 34 of the 50 districts do not provide specific details about the frequency or duration of live remote instruction for all students during fully remote learning. In addition, only 8% of the districts include strong evidence of multiple ways for students to participate in learning, with routine feedback on student assignments and support from teachers.

- **Ambiguous curriculum can perpetuate longstanding inequities.** Only 6% of the districts show strong evidence of instructional experiences that are inclusive, culturally responsive, consider the needs of all students, and adhere to established state regulations and guidelines.

- **Daily teacher-student interaction may be rare.** Although nearly all of the school districts (98%) include some evidence of *regular* substantive interaction between teachers and students in their plans, only 26% of the 50 districts describe how teachers and students will interact *daily*.

- **Not all districts have plans to track and act on student engagement data.** While nearly all of the school districts (94%) include some evidence of a plan to collect and report daily *attendance*, only 28% of the 50 districts describe how the district will track *engagement*, not just attendance, and *use* the data.

- **Students may not receive daily check-ins from an adult in the school.** 82% of the district plans show no evidence of how the district will assign each student an "ally" – such as a counselor, coach, social worker, psychologist, or other school staff in addition to teaching staff – who is responsible to check in on every student every day whether instruction is in-person, remote, or blended.

- **Schools and districts may not know exactly what students need academically.** Only 20% of the districts describe a locally determined formative or diagnostic assessment to identify individual student needs and how the information will be used to inform instruction.

Issue 1: Providing equitable instruction and engaging all students | Highlights

Why it matters: All students need high-quality instruction from their teachers, whether remote or in-person. The disruption of traditional in-person instruction increases the risk that students will disengage from their formal education.

What parents are saying: Just 40% of parents say remote learning was successful in the spring. Parents have clear priorities for remote learning, with more live instruction topping the list of priorities across grade levels. In addition, 63% of parents of high school students are very concerned about ensuring their child is on track to graduate.

Our findings: The district reopening plans that we reviewed generally do not provide strong evidence of a comprehensive approach to remote learning that is responsive to students' needs and parents' concerns. Of particular importance are insufficient live instruction, inadequate plans to provide meaningful feedback on student assignments and assessment of student learning and academic needs, and limited commitment to tracking and improving student engagement – especially for students who were not able to successfully participate in remote learning in the spring.

Issue 1: Providing equitable instruction and engaging all students | Review of district plans

EQUITY PRIORITY:

The district reopening plan provides **live daily instruction aligned with grade-level learning standards to all students** in all grade levels during blended or distance learning.

10%
STRONG EVIDENCE

86% SOME EVIDENCE

4% NO EVIDENCE

- **While live instruction is not the only way to provide students with high-quality learning experiences remotely, access to live daily instruction is an important equity issue because it offers greater opportunities for student collaboration, interactive activities, accurate assessment of student need, and implementation of supports and related services.**

- **Only 9 of the 50 school districts specify the amount of live daily instruction that students will receive during fully remote learning.** Three districts indicate that schedules are left up to each individual school, and four additional districts provide other limited information about their plans. Overall, 34 of the 50 districts do not provide specific details about the frequency or duration of live remote instruction for all students.

- **Even among districts that provide specific details, there is considerable variation – especially in the early grades.** Elementary school schedules range from an average of one hour per day to an average of five hours per day of live daily instruction. Middle school and high school schedules range from an average of four hours per day to an average of five hours per day in the amount of live daily instruction. District schedules also vary between four days per week and five days per week of live remote instruction.

Issue 1: Providing equitable instruction and engaging all students | Review of district plans

EQUITY PRIORITY:

The district reopening plan demonstrates use of a **locally determined formative or diagnostic assessment** to determine individual student needs and target extra help to ensure academic needs are addressed.

20% STRONG EVIDENCE

56% SOME EVIDENCE

24% NO EVIDENCE

EQUITY PRIORITY:

The district reopening plan describes how school districts will use a variety of creative methods to **reach out to students and their families who did not engage in distance learning.** School policies and procedures must focus on the academic consequences of lost instructional time and address absences before students fall behind in their learning.

10% STRONG EVIDENCE

14% SOME EVIDENCE

76% NO EVIDENCE

Issue 1: Providing equitable instruction and engaging all students | Review of district plans

EQUITY PRIORITY:

The district reopening plan describes how districts will **assign each student an "ally"** — such as counselors, coaches, social workers, psychologists, and other school staff in addition to teaching staff — who is responsible to check in on the student every day, whether instruction is in-person, remote, or through a hybrid model.

2% STRONG EVIDENCE

16% SOME EVIDENCE

82% NO EVIDENCE

EQUITY PRIORITY:

The district reopening plan includes information on how the district will provide **multiple ways for students to participate in learning, which includes routine meaningful feedback on student assignments and support from an appropriately certified teacher** whether instruction is delivered in-person, remotely, or through a hybrid model.

8% STRONG EVIDENCE

90% SOME EVIDENCE

2% NO EVIDENCE

Issue 1: Providing equitable instruction and engaging all students | Review of district plans

EQUITY PRIORITY:

The district reopening plan describes a mechanism to **collect and report daily teacher-student engagement** or attendance while in a remote or hybrid schedule.
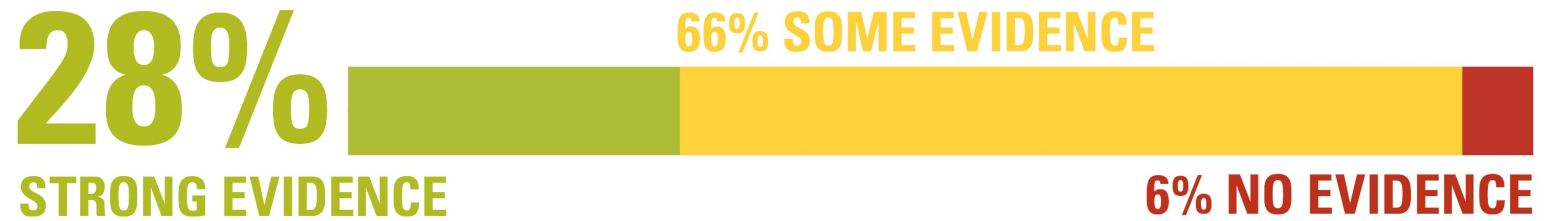
28%
STRONG EVIDENCE

66% SOME EVIDENCE

6% NO EVIDENCE

Issue 1: Providing equitable instruction and engaging all students | District example bright spots

Proposed Breakdown of Synchronous Instruction in a 100% E-Learning Model:

Teachers will present lessons and facilitate independent practice and activities through Google Meets. Students will be expected to have their cameras on and participate throughout the live teaching periods.

- At the K-6 level teachers will provide 3 hours of live synchronous instruction per day (Monday-Thursday)
- At the 7-12 level students will follow their regular bell schedule to attend all classes through Google Meets

Responsibilities of the Online Teacher during Synchronous Learning:

- To create an environment that promotes meaningful learning and social connection between teachers and students and amongst students with one another.
- To engage students in meaningful learning opportunities in the real time format. To set a respectful tone that promotes positive speech in the class.
- To promote social emotional learning and mental health practices
- To speak to students individually and maintain confidentiality, while respecting one's role as mandated reporter.
- Google Meets is the platform that will be used for Synchronous Learning - "Present mode" can be utilized, so students can see whatever is on your chromebook (ex: websites, applications, google slides, pdf's, worksheets). You can also use a stylus pen to write on your chromebook as well.

Issue 1: Providing equitable instruction and engaging all students | District example bright spots

Plans have been developed and will continue to be developed to support students who, due to the 2019-2020 school closure have learning loss:

- Ample time for socialization and creating a climate of safety, comfort, and routine will be provided at the beginning of the school year.
- Students K-9 will be administered the NWEA in both ELA and Math within the first 6 weeks of the school year.
- All students K-6 will be administered the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment to identify each student's Instructional Reading Level.
- In grades 5-9 students will be administered the Reading Inventory to obtain a current lexile level to guide instruction.
- Local assessments will be administered for all content areas 9-12.
- Assessment data will be used to determine students requiring extra support from Math and Reading specialists during the school day, in the extended day programs from classroom teachers, or the use of intervention software.
- These programs will be designed based on student need.
- The following are intervention programs to be used: LLI, Wilson, Read 180, System 44, Achieve 3000, ST Math, iReady, IExcel...

Issue 1: Providing equitable instruction and engaging all students | District example bright spots

Although flexibility is recommended when monitoring attendance in a remote instructional model, for students who have not engaged in remote learning and school staff outreach to parents/guardians has been unsuccessful, districts and other schools should explore a variety of methods for reaching out such as:

- phone calls to families are often the simplest solution and provide an immediate opportunity to offer resources and assess student and family needs
- where families do not respond to phone calls, texting may offer a lower-stress alternative and a subsequent phone call can be arranged
- seeking out adults in the school who have established a connection with the student and/or family may yield improved results. Counselors, coaches, social workers, and psychologists are often logical choices, in addition to teaching staff. Social media contact or using friends to reach out can also be effective strategies. Assign each student an "ally" – an adult who is responsible to check in on the student every day, whether instruction is in-person, remote, or online

Teachers will record daily attendance in our student management system based on the required daily scheduled student contact and engagement. Daily reports will be generated to identify students who are absent and/or chronically absent. Contact with the families will be made daily to determine reasons for absence and needs or barriers the student may have to participate in daily lessons. This year, more than ever we will support our students and families with being present, staying engaged and feeling supported. We will emphasize a strong, trusting relationship between students, families, teachers, and critical school staff will have a significant impact on the ability of students to achieve success....

Issue 2: Meeting social-emotional needs
Highlights

Why it matters: Academic and social-emotional development go hand-in-hand and are both essential to student success and well-being. The social effects of the coronavirus pandemic and civil unrest against systemic racism throughout the nation have impacted students and their families, and many students have experienced trauma. The social-emotional needs of students and their families must be recognized and addressed.

What parents are saying: Parents are increasingly concerned with ensuring that their child feels safe and emotionally at ease during this time. Seventy percent of parents statewide say this is very concerning to them, including 82% of Black parents and 77% of Latinx parents.

Our findings: Nearly all of the district reopening plans that we reviewed recognize the importance of social-emotional support for students. While this is good news, only 10% of the plans specifically include strong evidence of a strategy or mechanism for providing social-emotional assistance or referrals to students and families.

Issue 2: Meeting social-emotional needs
Review of district plans

EQUITY PRIORITY:

The district reopening plan proactively and regularly **identifies the social-emotional needs of returning students,** including by engaging parents and families.

26%
STRONG EVIDENCE

66% SOME EVIDENCE

8% NO EVIDENCE
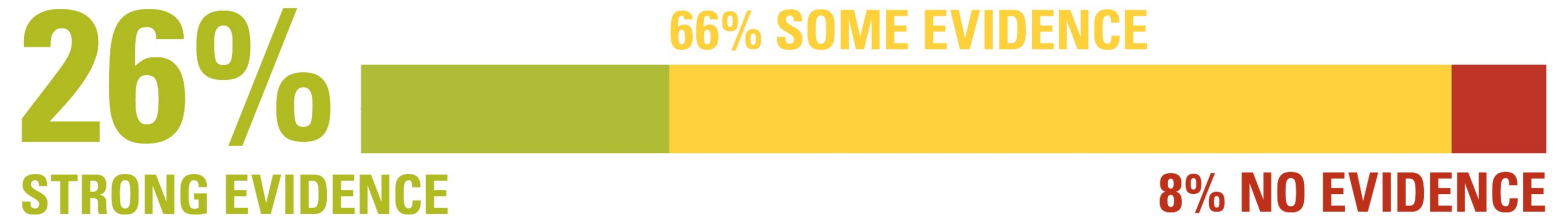
EQUITY PRIORITY:

The district reopening plan includes a strategy for **providing social-emotional assistance or referrals** to students and families.

10%
STRONG EVIDENCE

82% SOME EVIDENCE

8% NO EVIDENCE

Issue 2: Meeting social-emotional needs
District example bright spots

We are beginning a school year that will require innovation, responsiveness and a commitment to continuous improvement. In order to achieve this, we will collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data to address students' and adults' ongoing needs and strengths. Data will be collected from students, families, community members and staff regarding academics, student and adult social and emotional competence, well-being, perceptions of climate, prosocial behaviors and attendance. This practice will help establish equitable continuous improvement processes to identify and address challenges, build upon successes, innovate, and collectively problem solve. We will use the data as an opportunity to share power, deepen relationships, and continuously improve support for students, families, and staff.

- Reflect and act on data around student learning and engagement by elevating student voice....

- Support educators in reflecting on data around their own instructional practices and learning environment....

- Partner with families and community members to continuously improve experiences and outcome....

Issue 2: Meeting social-emotional needs
District example bright spots

The Transformational Social-Emotional Reopening Support Plan includes:

Resources to empower adults to support their own health and well-being, including mediation apps, articles, and strategies.

- Mechanisms and programming efforts around health and well-being support at the building level for faculty/staff (i.e., community circles, affinity groups, yoga, meditation).
- Mechanisms of health and well-being supports at the district level for parents (i.e., community circles).
- Coordination of programming efforts with community school liaison to expand programming for staff and families around mental health and behavioral outcomes, focusing on professional development and personal needs.
- Coordination of programming efforts with community school liaison to expand programming for families around mental health and behavioral outcomes, procuring existing community partnerships and the investigation of potential expansion (i.e., resource mapping).
- Coordination of existing systems and structures for the creation of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework to support students' mental health, behavior and social-emotional needs, including the investigation of various screening and other resources aimed to measure equitable outcomes.
- A bank of resources for teacher and parents to support students' social-emotional-behavioral needs at home and at school (i.e., restorative justice scripts, community building) that can be easily implemented and/or adapted for virtual programming.

We will be administering a social-emotional support survey to staff, students, and parents that will help identify specific individuals who are in need of targeted support based on survey results. A clinician will be able to establish an informal check-in either in the hybrid and/or virtual model. It will be determined by the clinician if additional supports are needed for those at higher risk for significant stress or trauma. If needed, referrals will be made to community partnerships.

Also, the district will use surveys to identify staff, students, and families who are in need of mental health, behavioral, and emotional support services. Clinicians will be assigned to follow up and provide necessary supports. If needed, referrals will be made to community agencies to provide additional support to meet individual needs.

# Issue 3: Support students with unique learning needs | Highlights

Why it matters: Prior to the pandemic, there were significant opportunity gaps for students of color, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students from low-income backgrounds. The pandemic has exacerbated many of the pre-existing inequities, including extensive unfinished instruction from school closures in the spring. Looking to the upcoming school year, remote learning environments pose particular risks to students being serviced equitably. In the current context, districts should provide even greater support to student groups who have been historically underserved.

Our findings: While nearly all of the district plans that we reviewed include at least some evidence of support for students with disabilities, the plans are far less likely to specifically address the needs of English learners, students experiencing homelessness, and other underserved groups of students.

Issue 3: Support students with unique learning needs | Review of district plans

EQUITY PRIORITY:

The district reopening plan specifies how it will address the learning loss experienced by many **English language learners** (ELLs), in both their English language development and mastery of content area knowledge.

26%
STRONG EVIDENCE

34% SOME EVIDENCE

40% NO EVIDENCE
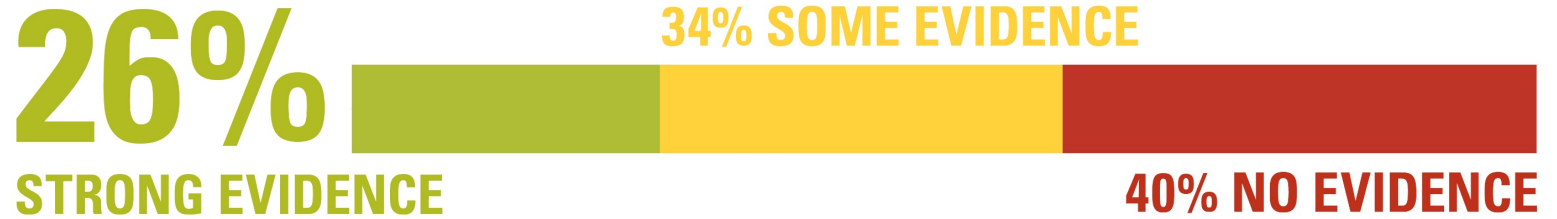
EQUITY PRIORITY:

The district reopening plan describes how the district will ensure access to the necessary accommodations; modifications; supplementary aids, evaluations, and related services; and technology (including assistive technology) to meet the **unique disability-related needs of students.**

76%
STRONG EVIDENCE

16% SOME EVIDENCE

8% NO EVIDENCE

Issue 3: Support students with unique learning needs | Review of district plans

EQUITY PRIORITY:

The district reopening plan prioritizes equity and access for all students, including **students experiencing homelessness,** regardless of the instructional model implemented.

0%
STRONG EVIDENCE

26% SOME EVIDENCE

74% NO EVIDENCE

Issue 3: Support students with unique learning needs | District example bright spots

Services for English Language Learners (ELL)

Instructional Considerations:

- Ensure that all teachers and administrators receive professional development on topics related to use of technology, hybrid or remote learning strategies in topics related to ELLs in order promote student independence and engagement, providing effective and meaningful feedback, and promoting peer to peer interaction (See Training).

- Adherence to CR Part 154.2 mandates regarding ELLs Units of Study when scheduling ELLs during in-person, hybrid/remote learning models, and/or synchronous and asynchronous learning will be upheld. Special consideration is being given to our most vulnerable students, i.e. Entering, Emerging, SIFE, and ELLs with IEPs. These students will be scheduled for 4 days attendance during our hybrid or distance learning model as research and students' surveys have shown, students engaged more when they have face to face interaction with their teacher.

- Provide continuous ELL support for students at Commanding Years. 1, 2 as well as those whose 2-year extended support would have ended at the close of the 2019-2020 school year.

- Implementing collaborative models of instruction: co-planning, sharing best practices to support standards-based curriculum accessibility for ELLs will be utilized.

- Implementing progress monitoring tools to analyze and interpret data to inform instructional decisions; differentiating instruction; designing lessons that accelerate learning; and addressing instructional gaps will be utilized.

- Utilize the Resource Collection for ELLs and World Language Students created by OBEWL to support educators in adapting and developing lessons and units of study to meet the needs of ELLs at all levels of proficiency and develop appropriate scaffolds for use in the virtual classroom.

- Collaborate and support participating schools to ensure completion of students' projects for the Seal of Biliteracy.

Issue 3: Support students with unique learning needs | District example bright spots

…The district is supporting further collaboration by compensating teachers to create and compile a repository of virtual lessons in Spanish and in English for all grade levels. Our virtual and hybrid learning plans address the need for predictable routines that is key for ELLs with the flexibility that our ELL/MLL families will need in this scenario. The proposed elementary schedule allows for student access to core instruction in small, manageable, mixed-linguistic groups where ELLs interact with English proficient peers and core content, and for time devoted to virtual tutorials and individualized support. The secondary schedule allows for learning continuity in each course of enrollment.

Through extensive PD provided by the learning continuity team, our teachers have learned to utilize virtual tools to provide opportunities for language development targeting listening, reading, speaking and writing through interactive activities, video recording, writing, and feedback, using flipped learning and a "preview and review" structure. Our district has purchased a number of tools that have proven effective for ELL/MLLs, such as Screencastify, Raz-Kids (English and Spanish), Brain-Pop Spanish and ELL, Ed puzzle, Kami, PearDeck, Amplify Science, iReady (instruction and assessment), Discovery Science, etc….

Throughout the summer, our parents of ELL/MLLs continue to receive assistance with technology and replacement of devices; we have identified families with limited access to the internet and are able to provide alternative means of access. Our district will address the possible learning loss occurred during school closures for our ELL/MLL through a variety of strategies and supports. Summer 2020 virtual programs are in place for English Language Learners at all grade levels to begin addressing possible learning loss and to prepare students for a more successful school year. A parent-engagement component is implemented through the "Juntos Podemos" meetings described below. Adaptive platforms for individualized learning continue to be available to our students throughout the summer, while bilingual Teacher Assistants provide individual assistance and tutorials for identified ELL/MLLs, with a specific focus on families of Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE). We will continue to provide Extended Day support virtually.

Issue 3: Support students with unique learning needs | District example bright spots

Accommodations, technology, modifications and supplementary aids and services will continue to be implemented in accordance with students' individual educational plans. Special education teachers and related service providers will ensure the implementation and monitoring of these supports and will seek out parent/guardian input to the implementation success. If changes to these areas need to be considered due to the instructional models being considered and used, the CPSE or CSE will convene to conduct a program review.

For the 2020-2021 school year, the [school district] realizes that the transition to online learning and social distancing practices can be challenging for students with disabilities. Therefore, three reopening plans that account for the provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education consistent with the need to protect the health and safety of students with disabilities and those providing special education and services while taking into consideration in-person services a priority for high-needs students and preschool students with disabilities whenever possible. Regular communication with parents/guardians will be made in the parent's/guardian's preferred language and communication mode.

[The school district] employs the following strategies to support to our students with disabilities and their families as well as our staff in the following ways:

- special education teachers, behavior specialists, speech therapist, occupational therapists, physical therapist, teachers of the deaf, vision teachers, mental health providers, autism specialists, transition coordinators, school counselors, school social workers and school psychologists connect with families regularly and as indicated on student's IEP's via phone calls, virtual meetings (i.e. Google Meet), emails and texts. Students' progress toward meeting goals and objectives on IEPs will be monitored as indicated on individual students' IEPs, data will be collected and communication to parents will be facilitated by special education teachers and related service providers.

- teachers and staff will utilize resources to address needs that are detailed on IEPs from the following resources that are shared weekly from the following sources: IRIS Center; NYSED websites including local resources of support; Mental Health Consultant, [BOCES]; Autism Consultant; Parent Training and Counseling, The Summit Center; Behavior Specialist, [BOCES]; Special Education and adapted general education lessons reflective of the NYS learning standards and alternative assessment requirements; Technological devices with support from technology integration specialists

Issue 4: Providing access to strong educators
Highlights

Why it matters: Access to effective teaching is the most important in-school determinant of student success. The relationship between teachers and students is central to learning.

What parents are saying: Elementary and middle school parents say they want much more regular contact with or access to their child's teacher.

Our findings: Few district reopening plans that we reviewed provide for meaningful daily contact between students and teachers, and even fewer include strong evidence that districts are supporting teachers' professional learning needs during the transition to remote learning.

Issue 4: Providing access to strong educators
Review of district plans

EQUITY PRIORITY:

The district reopening plan includes **regular substantive interaction between teachers and students.**

26%
STRONG EVIDENCE

72% SOME EVIDENCE

2% NO EVIDENCE
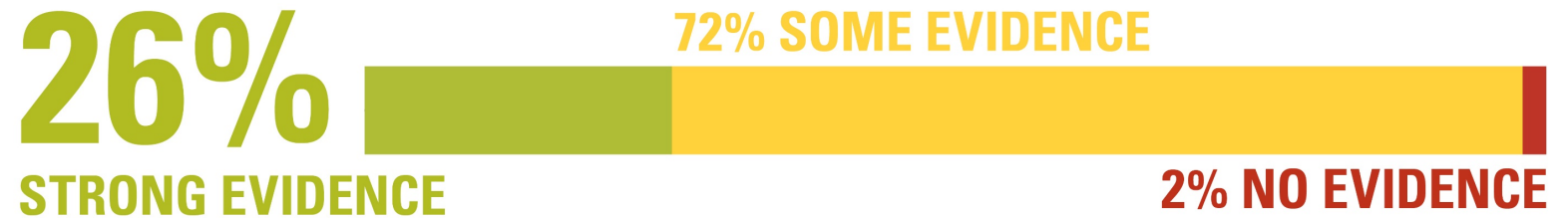
EQUITY PRIORITY:

The district reopening plan includes **professional learning that addresses staff's understanding of mental health, well-being, trauma-responsive and restorative practices,** and social-emotional learning to support students.
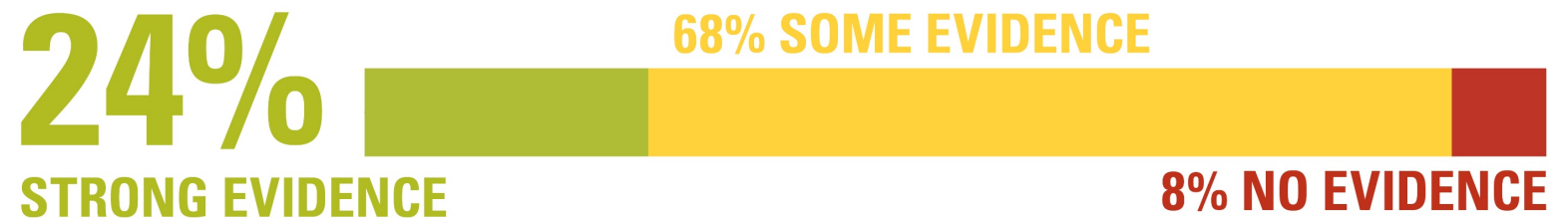
24%
STRONG EVIDENCE

68% SOME EVIDENCE

8% NO EVIDENCE

Issue 4: Providing access to strong educators
Review of district plans

EQUITY PRIORITY:

The district reopening plan identifies and addresses any additional professional development needs for administrators, teachers, and teaching assistants for the upcoming school year, and particularly those needs related to **designing effective remote/ online learning experiences and best practices for instruction in remote/online settings.**

18%
STRONG EVIDENCE

68% SOME EVIDENCE

14% NO EVIDENCE

Issue 4: Providing access to strong educators
District example bright spots

Teachers at all grade levels and in all disciplines will establish a schedule to provide instruction to students they are assigned. Regardless of the model of instruction, it is expected that each schedule is closely adhered to even if time is altered during remote instruction. Teachers are expected to be in communication with all students on a daily basis in some form. Communications with students and parents/guardians will be logged. Students will receive daily schedules at all grade levels. Whether in the classroom or at home, students will know when to attend their class for instruction. Standards-based lessons will be provided and formal and informal assessments of student performances will take place. Teachers will be provided feedback on student performance and support will be provided as needed. Students should have regular, daily, interactions with their teachers.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR STAFF

In consultation with staff, the District will continue to design professional development opportunities that will address such topics related to personal, student and community well-being as trauma responsive practices, social emotional learning, remote learning best practices, restorative practices, mental health education, culturally and linguistically responsive practices, and implicit bias and structural racism.

Issue 4: Providing access to strong educators
District example bright spots

Social-Emotional Well-Being Supports

In support of social-emotional well-being:

- Provide professional development to teachers and support staff K-12 to utilize, with fidelity social emotional learning resources (SEL) focused on social-emotional competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making):

  - Second Step Curriculum K-8
  - Research, review and select a grade 9-12 social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum.
  - Implement a training protocol for SEL curriculum for all grades to enhance existing practices in grades K-5 and introduce practices in grades 6-12.

- Provide professional development in:

  - How to recognize and support students dealing with anxiety, grief, and trauma
  - Understanding implicit bias and structural racism and how to navigate challenging conversations about race and racism

Issue 5: Addressing the digital divide for families and educators | Highlights

Why it matters: Students who do not have access to their own technology device, high-speed internet access, and technical support in their home language are not able to fully participate in remote learning.

What parents are saying: Nearly half of parents are concerned about being able to afford internet access or losing their internet access, and Black and Latinx parents are disproportionately likely to say they would like much more assistance ensuring their child has access to reliable, high-speed internet to use for remote learning. Parents of color are also more likely to say they would like much more assistance ensuring their child has access to laptops, tablets, or other technology devices.

Our findings: The district plans that we reviewed generally include strategies to support more students with devices and internet access. However, successful remote instruction requires devices and internet access for both students and educators, and districts are far less likely to describe how they will ensure that all educators have access to devices and high-speed internet for remote instruction.

Issue 5: Addressing the digital divide for families and educators | Review of district plans

EQUITY PRIORITY:

The district reopening plan includes information on how the district will have knowledge of the level of **access to devices and high-speed internet all students have** in their places of residence.

74%
STRONG EVIDENCE

26% SOME EVIDENCE

0% NO EVIDENCE

EQUITY PRIORITY:

The district reopening plan includes information on how the district, to the extent practicable, will address the need to **provide a device for exclusive use to students** who currently do not have access regardless of whether in-person, remote, or hybrid model is utilized.

78%
STRONG EVIDENCE

22% SOME EVIDENCE

0% NO EVIDENCE

Issue 5: Addressing the digital divide for families and educators | Review of district plans

The district reopening plan includes information on how the district, to the extent practicable, will address the need to provide **consistent, reliable access to high-speed internet at a sufficient level to fully participate in remote/online learning (e.g., a hotspot) to students** who currently do not have sufficient access regardless of whether in-person, remote, or hybrid model is utilized.

74%
STRONG EVIDENCE

26% SOME EVIDENCE

0% NO EVIDENCE

The district reopening plan includes information on how the district, to the extent practicable, will address the need to **provide a device for exclusive use to teachers** who currently do not have access regardless of whether in-person, remote, or hybrid model is utilized.

58%
STRONG EVIDENCE

22% SOME EVIDENCE

20% NO EVIDENCE

Issue 5: Addressing the digital divide for families and educators | Review of district plans

EQUITY PRIORITY:

The district reopening plan includes information on how the district, to the extent practicable, will address the need to provide **consistent, reliable access to high-speed internet at a sufficient level to fully participate in remote/online teaching (e.g., a hotspot) to teachers** who currently do not have sufficient access regardless of whether in-person, remote, or hybrid model is utilized.

42%
STRONG EVIDENCE

36% SOME EVIDENCE

22% NO EVIDENCE
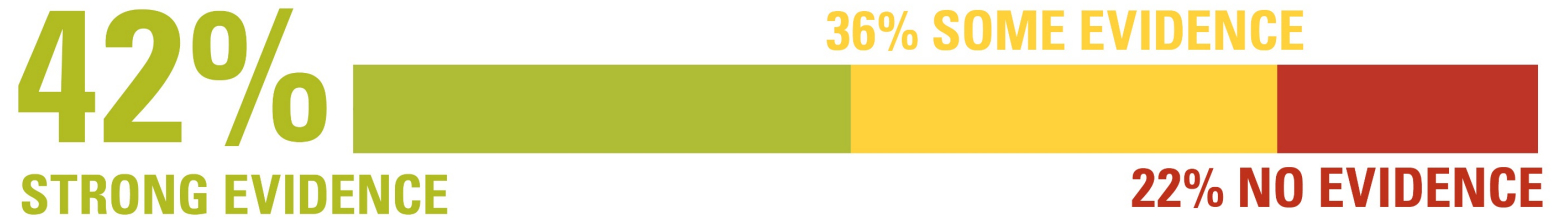
Issue 5: Addressing the digital divide for families and educators | District example bright spots

Access to technology is essential for the successful roll-out of this plan. We are committed to ongoing planning and implementation of district technologies to ensure equitable access for staff and students. The team has initiated plans that are mindful of student home access to reliable internet and computers.

- [The school district] recently gathered data and asked teachers and families to identify their level of access to devices and high-speed broadband from their residence. Respondents indicated that 98% have access to high-speed broadband. The district provides devices for all educators and students.

- The district will continue to assess the ongoing needs of our families for technology and connectivity (survey, interviews, school outreach, etc.). In the event students and/or teachers do not have access, the district will take the necessary steps to meet their needs where plausible.

- Conduct and/or maintain an inventory of equipment and other assets.

- Identify which students, families, and staff have district assets in their possession.

- Procure, manage and/or maintain hardware, software, licenses, learning management systems, etc. To support and improve virtual instruction and student engagement.

- Identify professional learning needs for teachers and continue to support their development of skills and pedagogy in a remote learning environment.

- Arrange a "Helpdesk" system for parents/students/teachers to report technical issues that might be experienced during remote learning. Communicate protocols to these stakeholders to inform them in advance of how to gain assistance in such cases and what they can expect in terms of a return service call/virtual appointment.

Issue 5: Addressing the digital divide for families and educators | District example bright spots

In March 2020, prior to the emergency closure, the district surveyed all students in grades 3-12 to determine who had high-speed, reliable internet access at home. Approximately 91% of the students responded that they did have internet access. As schools shut down in an emergency closure in March 2020, [the school district] recognized the need to accelerate its 1:1 initiative designed to provide every student with a device to support the technologically-based world we are preparing them to enter. By May, the district had provided every student K-12 with a device, and offered hotspots to any family and/or staff member in need. Many families and staff live in areas where the internet is still not available, so this was critical to the implementation of online learning. Any family or staff member who has a need for internet access can contact their building's principal any time throughout the school year. The district will add a question about home connectivity to its enrollment form for new students.

Issue 6: Adopting anti-racist policies and practices | Highlights

Why it matters: Schools are reopening in the context of the "dual pandemics" of COVID-19 and the nation's reckoning with systemic racism. Our education system must do its part to dismantle structural racism by confronting the racist and oppressive practices that impede young minds from thriving.

Our takeaway: The district reopening plans that we reviewed are least likely to include meaningful steps to advance anti-racist policies and practices than any other issue that we examined – even though doing so is vital to the success of New York students and of our nation.

Issue 6: Adopting anti-racist policies and practices | Review of district plans

EQUITY PRIORITY:

The district reopening plan describes **instructional experiences that are inclusive, culturally responsive,** consider the needs of all students, and adhere to all established state regulations and guidelines.

6%
STRONG EVIDENCE

26% SOME EVIDENCE

68% NO EVIDENCE

EQUITY PRIORITY:

The district reopening plan describes how all grade 7-12 students will have **equitable access to high quality rigorous instructional opportunities** [consistent with NYSED guidance on access to advanced courses].

2%
STRONG EVIDENCE

2% SOME EVIDENCE

96% NO EVIDENCE

Issue 6: Adopting anti-racist policies and practices | Review of district plans

EQUITY PRIORITY:

The district reopening plan describes the **implementation of restorative practices** within the learning community.

10%
STRONG EVIDENCE

46% SOME EVIDENCE

44% NO EVIDENCE

Issue 6: Adopting anti-racist policies and practices | District example bright spots

RE-ENVISIONING CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS

As we consider the re-opening of schools during this time of COVID-19 pandemic, we must not only reimagine how schools will operate and provide culturally and linguistically responsive educational practices, but also how students are supported academically whether instruction occurs in person, remotely, or in a hybrid model. Culturally and linguistically responsive social emotional well-being, as well as educational equity and anti-racist educational practices must be centered as a top priority as schools re-open. Before we can adequately address the mandated core curriculum, a curriculum of inclusion, and anti-racist pedagogy, we must ensure students' mental, social well-being, and intellectual safety in order to set the stage and build the platform for students to be able to achieve academically in either of our proposed re-opening models. Moreover, as support systems and required nurturing and caring adults who can adequately support our diverse student population, we must recognize and attend to the needs of parents, families, teachers, administrators, and community members who are also experiencing trauma and anxiety related to the pandemic and a heightened national awareness in regards to systemic racism and implicit bias that has negatively impacted communities of color and the students and families whom we serve.

During this time of heightened awareness related to anti-racist educational practices and dismantling systemic racism that disproportionately impacts communities of color, a curriculum of inclusion which centers the voices of Black and Brown students continues to be of critical importance and will be centered alongside Social Emotional Learning, during the re-opening phase of schools. Instructional resources provided will demonstrate a commitment to the nurturing and positive development of the minds of our students as related to their well-being and the national discussions and topics on race and anti-racism, as well as literature and criticality related to issues of social justice. Moreover, it has become increasingly more important for students of color to see positive images of themselves with narrations about their communities represented in instructional materials and daily classroom discussions. The Office of CLRI has worked to support a curriculum of inclusion which centers the lived experiences of Black and Brown students and provides an intellectual "brave space" in the in-person, virtual, or hybrid model classrooms. Therefore, all instructional resources will be provided on both the District's Schoology virtual learning platform, as well as, via hard copy to address the digital divide and the in-person and hybrid models. Curriculum resources employed include, but are not limited to Black Lives Matter in Schools Curriculum; the 1619 Project Curriculum Resources, Moments in Time Video History Resources, the New Jersey Amistad Web-Based Curriculum, the historically responsive Brownies' Books edited by renowned scholar W.E.B DuBois, and MyOn platform, diverse literature resources. Teachers, students and families can also access the aforementioned resources and many others on the CLRI website on the Districts' main page.

Issue 6: Adopting anti-racist policies and practices | District example bright spots

Review restorative practices with the school community to reflect on school culture, discipline policies, practices and disparities.

Restorative Practice

- restorative practices support CR-SE and culturally responsive teaching practices.
- restorative practices are practices that use various communicative techniques that are focused on affective statements and proactive community building activities (Riley 2017).
- utilize restorative practices in schools including but not limited to
  - fostering trusting relationships among students,
  - creating emotional safe spaces that recognize and nurture students' identities, and
  - giving students a sense of ownership and belonging in the school
- most effective the whole school should be vested in the approach and work together on implementation.
  - If the restorative practice approach is not implemented correctly, it can create more problems than solutions.
  - Acknowledges that relationships are central to building community
    - Builds systems that address misbehavior and harm in a way that strengthens relationships
    - Focuses on the harm done rather than only on rule-breaking
    - Gives voice to the person harmed
    - Engages in collaborative problem solving
    - Empowers change and growth
    - Enhances responsibility
- approach can be successfully implemented as an approach to discipline; differs greatly from a traditional approach to discipline

Issue 7: Improving family engagement and communication | Highlights

Why it matters: Strong family engagement is essential to helping students navigate these difficult times. Engagement means not only sharing information with families, but also soliciting their feedback and meaningfully involving them in decision-making.

What parents are saying: More than one in four parents say they have received little or no information about their school's plans for the fall. Only 35% of parents say they are satisfied with their school's planning and preparation.

Our findings: While the district reopening plans that we reviewed include strong information on how schools will communicate with parents, only 20% of the districts describe clear ways that families can also provide feedback.

Issue 7: Improving family engagement and communication | Review of district plans

EQUITY PRIORITY:

The district reopening plan describes how districts will **engage with school stakeholders and community members** (e.g., students, parents/legal guardians of students, and others) in developing their reopening plan and identify those that participated in the reopening planning.

22%
STRONG EVIDENCE

74% SOME EVIDENCE

4% NO EVIDENCE

EQUITY PRIORITY:

The district reopening plan describes a **clear communication plan available in multiple languages** and disseminated through multiple modalities (e.g., email, online platform, and/or by phone) for how students and their families/caregivers can contact the school and teachers with questions about their instruction and/or technology.

20%
STRONG EVIDENCE

80% SOME EVIDENCE

0% NO EVIDENCE

Issue 7: Improving family engagement and communication | Review of district plans

EQUITY PRIORITY:

The district reopening plan describes **communication with families regarding school meal availability and access** through multiple means in the languages spoken by families.

32%
STRONG EVIDENCE

54% SOME EVIDENCE

14% NO EVIDENCE
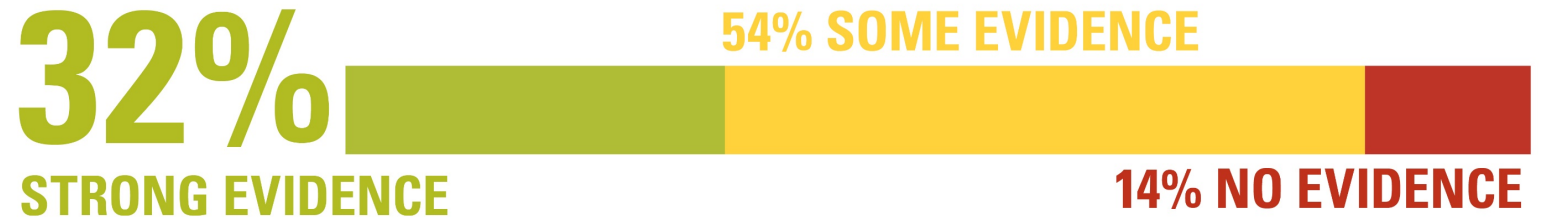
Issue 7: Improving family engagement and communication | District example bright spots

Focus Groups

OVERVIEW

[The school district] conducted a series of Focus Groups for the following stakeholder groups: families, students, non-instructional staff, instructional staff, and district admin. The purpose of these focus groups was:
- To assess the differences in perceptions, desires, and beliefs about reopening in school year 2020-2021 as it relates to current and previous experiences.
- To identify areas of opportunity to tailor the reopening plan to the needs of the Syracuse community.
- To inform next steps and recommendations for the Reopening Committee to consider as they finalize reopening plans.

Our methodology included interviewing more than 500 stakeholders individually or in small focus groups. Participants were encouraged to share honestly. To foster this, the conversations were framed in that trends would be shared externally but that individual statements or identifying details would not be disclosed.

Family Survey

OVERVIEW

[The school district] launched a family survey in June to request feedback on experiences, intentions, and questions on a reopening of schools. The survey asked questions under the following themes:
- Comfort with returning to school
- Reactions to return scenarios
- Remote Learning experience

More than 1,424 parents of current students across all grades completed the survey.

Issue 7: Improving family engagement and communication | District example bright spots

Our teaching and learning plan includes a clear communication plan for how students and their families/caregivers can contact the school and teachers with questions about their instruction and/or technology. This information will be accessible to all, accessible in multiple languages, widely disseminated, and include clear and multiple ways for students and families to contact schools and teachers (e.g., email, online platform, and/or by phone) in an effort to assure learning for all.

Communication with Families

The district will use the following communication methods to ensure families are informed about changes to the food service program and other relevant information: Web site, announcements, emails, and robocalls. The district will ensure communications are translated into the languages spoken by families in the district.

The Food Service office staff will serve as the primary contact for families seeking additional assistance with applications or questions about benefits.

Contact information is available on the District's web site and will be included in all written materials provided by Food Service.

School districts included in this report

County	School District
Albany	Albany City School District
Broome	Binghamton City School District
Chautauqua	Jamestown City School District
Chemung	Elmira City School District
Dutchess	Poughkeepsie City School District
Dutchess	Wappingers Central School District
Erie	Buffalo City School District
Erie	Kenmore-Tonawanda Union Free School District
Jefferson	Watertown City School District
Monroe	Greece Central School District
Monroe	Rochester City School District
Montgomery	Amsterdam City School District
Nassau	Freeport Union Free School District
Nassau	Hempstead Union Free School District
Nassau	Uniondale Union Free School District
Nassau	Westbury Union Free School District
New York City	New York City DOE
Niagara	Lockport City School District
Niagara	Niagara Falls City School District
Oneida	Rome City School District
Oneida	Utica City School District
Onondaga	Liverpool Central School District
Onondaga	North Syracuse Central School District
Onondaga	Syracuse City School District
Orange	Middletown City School District

County	School District
Orange	Newburgh City School District
Rensselaer	Troy City School District
Rockland	East Ramapo Central School District (Spring Valley)
Rockland	Haverstraw-Stony Point CSD (North Rockland)
Schenectady	Schenectady City School District
Suffolk	Bay Shore Union Free School District
Suffolk	Brentwood Union Free School District
Suffolk	Central Islip Union Free School District
Suffolk	Copiague Union Free School District
Suffolk	Huntington Union Free School District
Suffolk	Longwood Central School District
Suffolk	Middle Country Central School District
Suffolk	Patchogue-Medford Union Free School District
Suffolk	Sachem Central School District
Suffolk	South Huntington Union Free School District
Suffolk	William Floyd Union Free School District
Suffolk	Wyandanch Union Free School District
Ulster	Kingston City School District
Westchester	Mount Vernon School District
Westchester	New Rochelle City School District
Westchester	Ossining Union Free School District
Westchester	Peekskill City School District
Westchester	Port Chester-Rye Union Free School District
Westchester	White Plains City School District
Westchester	Yonkers City School District

Endnotes

[1] Number of students from low-income backgrounds is based on "economically disadvantaged" student enrollment. Enrollment data is derived from New York State Education Department, "Preliminary District Level Data by Grade 2019-20," available at http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/statistics/enroll-n-staff/home.html.

[2] For the criteria used in these reviews, see: https://newyork.edtrust.org/re-opening-plan-analysis.

[3] For additional information, see: https://newyork.edtrust.org/press-release/poll-far-fewer-black-latinx-and-low-income-parents-plan-to-send-children-to-school-in-person-this-fall.

For additional resources

EdTrustNY.org/ReopeningStronger

The Education Trust–New York