



GOALS FOR A 2020 CT EDUCATION RECOVERY PLAN

Connecticut requires a back-to-school strategy to meet the needs of all students. Planning now is the best way to give districts and schools time to prepare for classrooms to open.

Students that were already vulnerable prior to this pandemic are most likely to be adversely impacted by the prolonged school closures, particularly students from high poverty districts, those with special needs, ELL students, and those that have experienced trauma. Therefore, it's critical that a statewide education recovery plan will prioritize these students' needs.

Another priority for a statewide education recovery plan must be to establish appropriate guidelines for the use of recovery funds and any additional state resources by districts and schools to be directed towards the new and changed needs of students—rather than supplanting pre-crisis budgets. Under the “Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act,” the federal government will be distributing nationally \$13.2B through an Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (“Emergency Funds”), and \$3B through a Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund (“Governor’s Emergency Funds”). Connecticut is anticipated to receive roughly \$38M from these two funding streams for K-12 recovery but will likely need to provide additional funding to cover the costs of supporting students and teachers and reversing learning loss after the pandemic.

Connecticut can turn this into an opportunity to do better by students and educators. Accordingly, we urge the State to consider the following four goals for an education recovery plan.

1. Provide Ongoing Professional Development for Online and Remote Learning for Educators.

Statewide, we should learn from this crisis that teachers need and want additional professional development on effective pedagogy for online learning. In the short term, we need to ramp up this training so that we can meet students’ academic needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the long-term, however, we should maintain and update this training for teachers—both to prepare for the possibility of future extended closures, and to leverage this crisis as an ongoing academic opportunity.

Building off of what they have learned during this period of remote learning, along with the newly distributed resources we will offer to students and educators, educators will be able to expand strategies like blended learning, flipped classrooms, and project-based learning activities—ideally leading to more effective learning environments and higher rates of student engagement.

2. Use Funds to Help Students Recover from Learning Loss with Extra Instructional Time.

Students returning to school will suffer from significant learning loss after months away. The Northwest Evaluation Association estimates that the “COVID-19 Slide” will result in some students returning to school with only 70% of typical learning gains in reading, 50% in math. The state should therefore direct districts to use new funding on extra learning time for make-up instruction through summer learning, weekend academies, extended school days, or extended school year schedules.

3. Address Students’ Social and Emotional Well-Being from the Start.

From lost relatives, to lost jobs for parents, to food scarcity, to disrupted routines and social isolation—school counselors are saying that this pandemic has had a traumatic impact on students. Many students that had been monitored for their health and safety within schools have lost regular touch due to closures, and reports to the CT Dept. of Children and Families Hotline have plummeted in the last few weeks.

As part of its recovery strategy, the state should ask districts to prioritize expanding student access to school counselors, or—at a minimum—protecting existing school counselor jobs. Access to these professionals will give students a school-based support system and help schools to intervene when students exhibit signs of trauma.

4. Use Diagnostics to Understand Where Student Learning Starts When Classes Reconvene.

Given the inevitability of a “COVID-19 slide”—which will impact vulnerable student populations, but also the general population at large—the state should provide districts with a state-directed diagnostic tool that will assess where students are.

Although we anticipate that the federal government will give Connecticut a waiver from administering the spring 2020 Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) test, educators will still need academic data to gauge students’ readiness for the fall curriculum and to target remediation. Rather than asking districts to spend precious resources on producing local diagnostic tools that won’t provide comparable data between districts—the Connecticut State Department of Education should repurpose funds that would have been spent on the 2020 SBAC and identify a formative assessment that will produce quick results. This data should not be used for accountability or evaluation, but to inform educators, parents, and policymakers about student achievement after the pandemic.