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August 26, 2020 Edition

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More resources and trainings for teachers, school administrators, families and communities are on our [Learning Goes On website](#). See [Spanish-language version](#) of this edition.

Policy Update

Family Engagement is Key to Student Safety Amidst COVID-19 Reopening

Over the summer, state and local school leaders throughout the U.S. South have wrestled

with decisions about whether to open schools in-person, remotely or some combination. Many emphasized in-person instruction as the way forward.

For example, **Florida's Education Commissioner** issued an **emergency order** requiring all schools to offer the option for learning in person at least five days per week. Similarly, **South Carolina's State School Superintendent** published **guidance** that required schools to offer the option for students to receive in-person instruction while stopping short of mandating five days a week.

State-level education leaders in most other Southern states left the decision to local districts, but have recommended that districts mix remote and in-person instruction (see links at the end of this article). Many of the decisions about how a child will attend school has been left up to students' families. Thus, it is vital for schools to provide families and parents with up-to-date information about how students and school staff are being impacted by the pandemic.

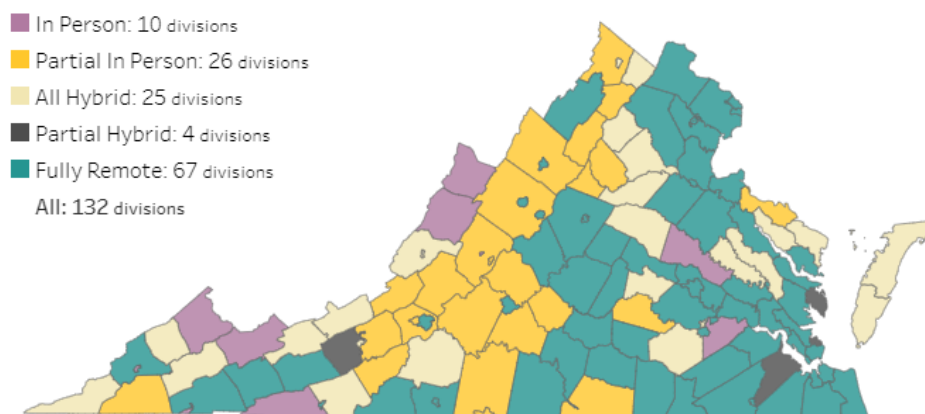
COVID-19 conditions across the South have constantly shifted. Schools that opened for in-person instruction struggle to stay open. Although schools have been open for just a few weeks, at least one school has had to close temporarily due to COVID in **Alabama**, **Georgia**, **Mississippi**, **North Carolina** and **Tennessee**.

Although the full scope of infections in student populations is difficult to determine due to limited testing, the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** reported that infection rate in children 17 and under increased "steadily" from March to July while students were largely out of school. With children coming into closer proximity in school, the number of COVID-19 cases and school closures may rise as more students across the South head back to school.

Understanding the current status of the pandemic is especially important for families of color as the **CDC notes** that "long-standing health and social inequities have put many people from racial and ethnic minority groups at increased risk of getting sick and dying from COVID-19."

State education leaders must communicate up-to-date information about the pandemic to enable families to make the best decisions for their students. Several states in the U.S. South region are reporting data of this type.

Snapshot Map: How Virginia Schools Are Reopening



The **Virginia Department of Education** published an interactive **county level map** that

details the kind of instruction that parents can expect.

The **Tennessee Department of Education** created a [dashboard](#) that provides the instructional model in each school district.

The **North Carolina Department of Public Health** publishes a [bi-weekly report](#) of clusters of outbreaks in child care and school settings.

The **Arkansas Department of Health** similarly [publishes](#) numbers of COVID-19 cases by school district.

Recognizing the need for more transparency, education leaders in [Texas](#) and [Louisiana](#) recently announced plans to create statewide tracking databases for cases that arise in schools. These data tracking systems are a necessary addition to local communication from school districts to families when there is an outbreak in a local school. These systems help identify which safety practices best protect students and staff.

But in order to keep students and families safe during the pandemic, school leaders must do more to equip families with timely information for making the safest decisions possible for their students. We recommend that schools consider the following.

- Increase resources for parent support specialists who are tasked with ensuring consistent communication with families. Liaisons should speak the language of families the school serves when possible. For more staff, schools can repurpose school truancy officers (who should be instructed not to enforce punitive consequences when students are absent from virtual or in-person school).
- Provide low-tech options for families to remain engaged with their schools, including phone trees, text alerts and similar outreach strategies.
- Ensure all materials, including remote learning platforms, are available in families' home languages.
- Collect surveys frequently - using multiple distribution and collection modes - to facilitate hearing and addressing emerging needs of families quickly.
- Increase funds for racially and ethnically diverse, high-quality counselors, social workers, and other mental and behavioral health professionals. Resources can be diverted from standardized testing and school policing budgets to hire these personnel.

To learn more about IDRA's family leadership in education model and how to start strong school-family student partnerships, [check out IDRA's family engagement resources](#). For more information about ensuring equity in school reopening processes, [review and share IDRA's equity in reopening infographic](#).

*See reopening plans in [Alabama](#), [Arkansas](#), [Florida](#), [Georgia](#), [Louisiana](#), [Mississippi](#), [North Carolina](#), [South Carolina](#), [Tennessee](#), [Texas](#) and [Virginia](#).



Free Webinar Tonight!



Youth Tech Mentors Bridge Schools and Families

School Reopening Webinar Series
August 26, 2020
6:00 PM to 7:30 PM cdt

Moderator: Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed.
IDRA Family Engagement Coordinator

Children First
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Register today!

<https://idra.news/TechMentors>

Carmen Muñiz Marina Chávez Liliana Reyes Adolfo García Jr. Isaac Bailon-Martínez Monica Cruz Ashley Vásquez Thomas Ray García

Youth Tech Mentors Bridge Schools and Families - Creative Community Responses to COVID-19

Wednesday, August 26, 6:00-7:30 pm (cst)

The shift to virtual learning brought on by the pandemic hits families with limited resources particularly hard. At the same time, students miss out on chances to practice leadership when they are schooling from home.

In this webinar, meet teens and college students who have been helping families and their children navigate technology for school. They will share their ideas for how schools and communities can engage youth while also providing much-needed tech support in their family engagement work this year.

REGISTER NOW



Free Census Webinar Tomorrow

The Power Schools Bring to the Last Days of the 2020 Census - How Schools Can Help their Communities Get Counted

Thursday, August 27, 2:00-3:00 pm (cst)

Featuring:

- Dr. Bricio Vasquez, IDRA Education Data Scientist
- Katie Martin Lightfoot, Every Texan Census Community Engagement Coordinator



This webinar aims to mobilize the education community to complete the census. Due to COVID-19, the U.S. Census Bureau extended operations to October 31, 2020. But the Census Bureau suddenly announced it was rolling back operations to September 30, cutting a month of much-needed time to achieve a complete and accurate census.

In this webinar, we will contextualize the 2020 Census and its timeline, discuss efforts over the past year, review completion data, and provide a toolkit for effective census outreach in the last month of operations.

REGISTER NOW

News Dashboard

IDRA COVID-19 Education News Dashboard

IDRA released a dashboard with news and social media streams related to COVID-19 and education along with key resources.



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Free Webinars on Equitable Practices for Online Learning

These free webinar recordings are available for viewing at your convenience.



Equitable Practices for Teaching Online

Digital Divide: Connectivity, Infrastructure and Devices

Tools & Tips to Alleviate the Homework Gap

Facilitating Online Math Sessions

PBL at Home & Across the Curriculum

ELAR Series:

* Journal Writing About the Present for the Future - ELAR Webinar Part 1

* From Journaling to Personal Narratives - ELAR Webinar Part 2

* From Journaling and Personal Narratives to Letter Writing - ELAR Webinar Part 3

Chief Science Officer Students Determined to Promote STEM Despite School Closures

Teaching Science in Virtual Learning Environments

How a School District Tackled the Digital Divide

Teacher, Parent and Student Perspectives on Using Google Classroom Effectively

Student Perspectives on a Changing School Climate

Nurturing Students' Hearts and Minds

Partnering with Families to Reopen and Reimagine Schools

Getting Schools Ready to Support Students Facing a New World of Challenges

SEE WEBINAR HUB

We welcome donations to support education during this COVID-19 crisis.



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The Intercultural Development Research Association is an independent private non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring educational opportunity for every child. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.

IDRA works hand-in-hand with hundreds of thousands of educators and families each year in communities and classrooms around the country. All our work rests on an unwavering commitment to creating self-renewing schools that value and promote the success of students of all backgrounds.