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 Intercultural  
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**IDRA**
**Learning  
Goes On**
**A COVID-19 Resource for Education**

April 16, 2021 Edition



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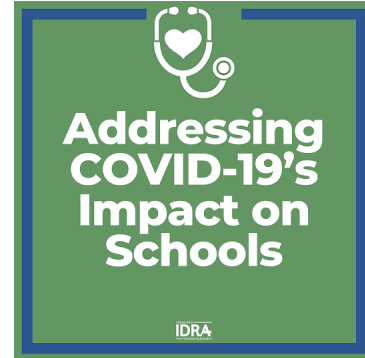
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More resources and training for teachers, school administrators, families and communities are on our [Learning Goes On website](#). See [Spanish-language version](#) of this edition.

**Federal Policy News**

# U.S. Dept of Education Releases New COVID-19 School Guidance

This month, the U.S. Department of Education released its second handbook of recommendations for how schools across the country can safely re-open for in-person learning and meet students' needs. The [first handbook](#), released in March 2021, focused on the school health-related safety protocols issued by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).



The second handbook, [ED COVID-19 Handbook – Roadmap to Reopening Safely and Meeting All Students' Needs](#), includes recommendations on creating safe and healthy learning environments, addressing lost instructional time, and supporting educator and staff stability and well-being.

## Creating Safe and Healthy Learning Environments

In addition to following physical safety protocols, the U.S. Department of Education recommends schools work to do the following to create safe and healthy learning environments.

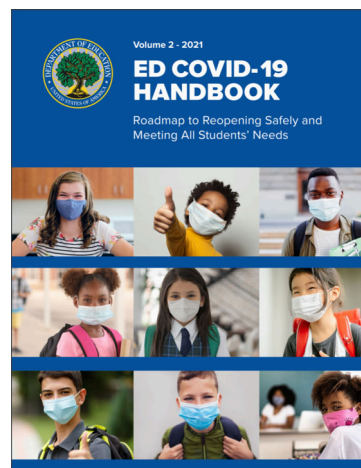
- Meet the basic needs of students, including by providing meals to students in all educational settings during the school year and the summer. This requires understanding community needs through surveys and other family engagement processes and responding appropriately with distribution sites and plans.
- Meet the social, emotional and mental health needs of students, including those from historically-marginalized student populations who may be experiencing the unique trauma of homelessness or involvement in the foster care or juvenile legal systems. The guidance urges schools to ensure access to professionals like counselors, social workers and psychologists and to use research-based practices that focus on building relationships, strengthening family and student engagement, and creating culturally-sustaining learning environments.
- Provide all students with safe and inclusive schools that focus on developing response plans and building strong relationships, especially with chronically absent and “disengaged” students.

## Addressing Lost Instructional Time

Without immediate interventions, lost instructional time could have a profound impact on many students. The handbook recommends that schools implement programs focused on accelerated instruction, tutoring and expanded learning time including out-of-school programs and summer learning.

These approaches, which can be used in combination, require teacher training in new teaching strategies, the use of data and diagnostic and formative assessments that enable teachers to respond to learning needs over time, and robust student engagement strategies. The handbook lists the characteristics of evidence-based and effective programs so that schools can evaluate and create options in their own communities.

Recommendations across programs include ensuring strong relationship-building between students and adults, creating opportunities for shared decision-making for using resources, using data that shed light on diverse measures of student access to their schools, and incorporating effective technology strategies that account for differences in access to reliable Internet connection, devices and user knowledge. The handbook also focuses on the importance of addressing long-standing educational inequities, including in school funding and the distribution of well-qualified teachers.



## Supporting Educator and Staff Stability and Well-being

The handbook urges states to address the major issues related to the educator workforce that have been exacerbated by COVID-19. It notes that teacher morale has dropped during the pandemic, leading to fewer well-qualified teachers, particularly for student populations that already experienced teacher shortages or less-experienced educators including emergent bilingual students, students of color and those from families with limited incomes.

The handbook recommends strategies to recruit and retain effective teachers, including through:

- Identifying more professional development opportunities,
- Creating teacher partnership programs,
- Building a group of high-quality substitute teachers, and
- Implementing flexible teaching schedules to allow for teacher planning and collaboration time.

The handbook also stresses the importance of creating a diverse educator pipeline through grant and scholarship opportunities, teacher residency programs, and “Grow Your Own” programs that support individuals to become teachers and support students in their own communities.

Finally, the handbook stresses that teachers and other staff need the same mental health supports as others who may be experiencing trauma during COVID-19 and urges schools to create support systems that can identify and respond to teacher social, emotional and mental health needs just as they should for students.

IDRA has resources and programs to support schools with many of the recommendations described in the handbook. The [IDRA EAC-South](#) provides training and technical supports to schools and education agencies across the U.S. South, usually at no cost, and the [IDRA Valued Youth Partnership](#) is a proven cross-age tutoring program that increase attendance and student engagement. Please contact us to learn more about these programs!



Follow us on Twitter, [@IDRAedu](#), and follow IDRA's Education Policy Fellows, [@IDRAeduFellows](#).



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If you would like to be more involved in the education advocacy work IDRA is doing with students, families, teachers and others with lived expertise, [join Texas Education CAFE Advocacy Network](#).



## Digital Equity and Inclusion Video Campaign

### Join the "Digitally Divided, Community United" Campaign

**Students, Parents, Educators:  
How has the digital divide impacted you?**

**We need your voice!**

In collaboration with Lit Communities, the Digital Inclusion Alliance of San Antonio (DIASA), and the Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC), IDRA presents "Digitally Divided, Community United," a video campaign to raise awareness about how the digital divide has impacted Texas students, families and community members.

We have set up a virtual platform for you to record a 15-second video in English or Spanish about how the digital divide has impacted you and what digital equity means to you.

The Texas Legislature is considering measures to support broadband access. Using a virtual platform, we are inviting students, families, community members and educators to share their stories about how the digital divide has impacted their learning and their lives. Education equity is a key component of the digital divide.



**It's a fun way to have an impact!**

[Visit our website](#)

## Education Practice

# Elementary Teachers in Tennessee Explore Technology-Infused Project-Based Learning

*Dr. Robin Nelson, IDRA EAC-South Consultant*

The Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) district and the [IDRA EAC-South](#) teamed up this spring to introduce Nashville elementary teachers to technology-infused project-based learning through a virtual book study. The seven-week study asked teachers to attend weekly meetings and read **Reinventing Project-Based Learning: Your Field Guide to Real-World Projects in the Digital Age** by Susie Boss and Jane Krauss. The book introduces the essential elements of technology-infused PBL and maps out how it can expand teacher and student learning beyond the classroom.



Each week, elementary teachers from across the district met via Microsoft Teams to discuss weekly readings, learn from other teachers, and take away technology tools and tips to expand and support project-based learning in their classrooms. Amid a pandemic, the book study encouraged teachers to open their classrooms to the possibilities that technology-infused project-based learning affords.

Today's classrooms are no longer bound by walls but are expanded by the imagination of teachers and students who learn together inside them. As participating teachers explored project-based learning and technology tools, they began to exchange the traditional content expert hat for the role of facilitator. When implementing project-based learning, teachers prepare students to ask questions, find answers, make real-world connections, and share knowledge with others in the community and beyond.

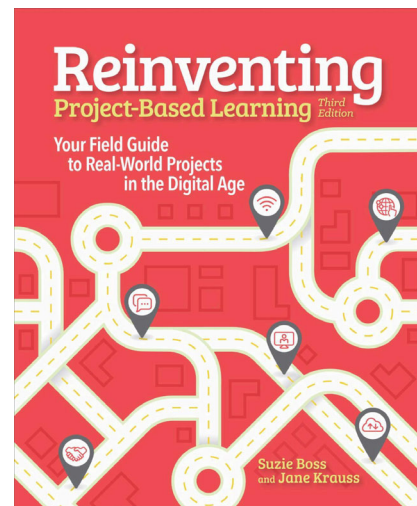
Technology enables teachers to provide access to people and resources otherwise inaccessible. It supports student accommodations through video, audio and voice-to-text features and helps teachers differentiate student instruction. Technology also enables students to express their understanding and ideas creatively inside and outside the classroom. But technology can only do all these beautiful things if implemented correctly and equitably.

The MNPS teachers understood that technology-infused project-based learning is not about bells and whistles; it is about meeting students where they are and supporting them. One group of MNPS teachers plans to use technology to connect students studying water conservation with the Metro Water System and other community partners. Ultimately, the focus is not the tool but how it connects students to experts and methods that support learning.

With this short-term book study, the teachers showed what it takes to tackle technology-infused project-based learning. Their growth was visible in their understanding and comfort level with project-based learning unit planning and implementation.

Many teachers began the book study feeling uncertain about project-based learning and how to implement it. After the study and creating a mini- project-based learning unit with other teachers from their home campuses, most reported a shift in understanding and level of readiness to use project-based learning in their classrooms.

Implementing project-based learning is challenging, and it takes time for teachers to develop the skills and understanding to facilitate student learning in a new way. While this change does not occur overnight, the teachers from MNPS set fabulous examples of how to tackle project-based learning implementation.



IDRA EAC-South can be a free technical assistance resource to schools in the U.S. South. Visit



## IDRA EAC-South

Helping school districts protect students' civil rights in public schools



[www.idraeacsouth.org](http://www.idraeacsouth.org)



<https://www.idra.org/eac-south>

for more information.



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## Upcoming Webinar



## First Steps in Project-Based Learning

Free Webinar

April 28, 2021 • 2:00 pm - 3:00 pm cst

Featuring Dr. Robin Nelson



Get details & register at <https://idra.news/FSPBL>

## First Steps in Project-Based Learning

**April 28, 2021 • 2:00 pm - 3:00 pm cst**

***Featuring Dr. Robin Nelson***

Are you interested in project-based learning but not sure where to start? Project-based learning is a transformative pedagogical method based on student-centered classrooms, but it requires teachers to adjust how they present information and facilitate learning.

This IDRA webinar will answer some of the most common questions about planning, implementation and best practices for project-based learning. Learn how to transform your teaching to better support your student's learning.

**Register Now!**

## Webinar Recording

# Highlights for Creating a More Bilingual Texas

Before COVID-19, schools in Texas struggled to prepare emergent bilingual students for college. Less than one in three (29%) graduates in the class of 2019 were deemed college-ready. And emergent bilingual students were more likely to experience chronic absenteeism with 24% missing three or more days of school. Already faced with a short teacher supply, emergent bilingual students must now navigate the complexities and hardships posed by campus closures.



In this webinar, Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes outlines six recommendations in our just-released report, [Creating a More Bilingual Texas – A Closer Look at Bilingual Education in the Lone Star State](#), that she co-authored with Chandra Kring Villanueva of Every Texan. The report provides an overview of policies, history and current issues for emergent bilingual students and bilingual/ESL education in Texas. It also shares recommendations to address the ongoing challenges to achieving educational equity for emergent bilingual students.

[Get details and watch now!](#)

**See more free webinar recordings available for viewing at your convenience.**

[See Webinar Hub](#)

**New Podcast Episode**

**IDRA Classnotes Podcast #209****Connecting with  
Students in the Virtual  
Biology Classroom***Featuring***Annabel Saenz Cruz**Biology Teacher  
Palmview High School, La Joya ISD*with***Aurelio Montemayor**

IDRA Family Engagement Coordinator

<https://idra.news/Pod209>[Get details and listen now!](#)

## Employment Opportunities at IDRA

[Education Associate](#) – with experience in emergent bilingual (English learner) education

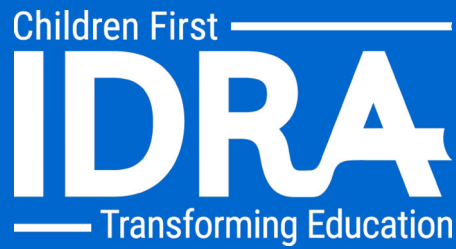
[Policy Communications Strategist](#)

[IDRA EAC-South Consultants](#)

[Grant Writer Consultant](#)

With Amazon Smile, you can shop while raising money for a cause you care about! Visit [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) and select IDRA as your charity. Thank you for helping IDRA support teachers & families to ensure that Learning Goes On during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond!

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San Antonio, Texas 78228



Phone: 210-444-1710

Reach Out To Us



The Intercultural Development Research Association is an independent, non-profit organization. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. 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.