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Intercultural Development Research Association IDRA

Learning Goes On

A COVID-19 Resource for Education

June 19, 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 version **in Spanish.**

Policy Update

Schools Face Challenges to Reopening - Community Input and Supplemental Funds Are Critical

As states and school districts make plans to reopen schools, they must do so with sufficient resources and meaningful community input. In addition to resources schools need every year, schools must be able to address educational inequities that were deepened by COVID-19. It is crucial that school reopening guidelines include students and their families in the planning and implementation process.

School Reopening Guidelines and Proposals Vary

Many state education agencies and school districts have begun to issue school reopening plans. For example, Texas Governor Greg Abbott announced Thursday that schools across the state will reopen in the fall. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) has a **set of guidelines** that advise school districts on how to begin in-person instruction, plan for likely outbreaks and offer necessary virtual options when applicable for summer instruction. **TEA plans to release** additional reopening guidance next week and noted the guidance will not require students to wear masks or be tested for COVID-19 symptoms.

Even with direction from state agencies, school district and campus leaders will make many of the decisions about how schools reopen. Some districts propose moving to intersessional calendars to help plan for later in the year if COVID-19 infection rates increase and schools are forced to close again. These calendars could include an earlier start date, longer winter or other breaks and a later end of school year date. A wide range of scenarios may take place from fully in-person to fully virtual, adding to the uncertainty and unpredictability this pandemic is causing.

The Challenges of Reopening Schools

There are several challenges to reopening schools, including safety concerns. As many states report recent record highs of new infections, families question their school's ability to safely bring faculty, teachers and students back into the classroom. A recent **ABC News/Ipsos poll** found 45% of parents with school-aged children are not comfortable sending their children back to school. Parents fear schools will not be prepared and worry students and staff will not follow rules.

Some state decisions about distribution of federal relief funds complicate district decisions to reopen. In Texas, TEA chose to use the federal CARES Act education relief funds (ESSER funds) to back-fill its 2019-20 budget, leaving little supplemental funds for school districts to use in the 2020-21 school year. In other words, TEA supplanted the originally allocated state public school money for the last 12 weeks of the spring semester with school districts' federal relief funds instead of truly supplementing the additional district expenses for COVID-19. Alabama and Georgia are using CARES Act funds similarly to Texas.

Such decisions leave school districts with little to no supplemental funding to plan for what will surely be additional challenges for students' academic, physical, and social-emotional health and safety.

Communities Must be Involved in School Reopening Plans

To help build confidence in school reopening decisions, it is crucial to include students, teachers and families in the school reopening decision-making process. Schools should seek to learn more about challenges pertaining to distance learning, academic instruction, special populations, grade promotion and new classroom safety guidelines, to name a few.

Some school districts have distributed surveys and other sentiment-gathering tools, which is a best practice in any district's decision making but even more so during times of uncertainty. But surveys are not sufficient.

After working with student, parent and teacher groups, IDRA recommends school districts take into consideration the following issues when determining reopening strategies. (These recommendations were informed in part by students during our recent IDRA webinar,

"Student Perspectives on a Changing School Climate," that is available for viewing on-demand.)

- Connect with community members - including students, parents and teachers - and with education and public health experts to inform reopening decisions and to build confidence in any implemented strategies.
- Prepare physical school spaces to meet CDC and healthcare experts' recommendations, including sanitation and use of personal protective equipment for students, teachers, maintenance personnel and faculty.
- Re-organize daily activities to promote social distancing and protocols to deal with emerging COVID-19 cases within schools.
- Prioritize resources to support the mental healthcare and well-being of students who are faced with the challenges of distance learning and the added stress of social isolation from peers.
- Focus on the evolving instructional needs of students and be prepared for continued distance learning and some type of transition back to in-person schooling.
- Ensure virtual learning opportunities are available to all students and families when needed, but do not replace in-person learning permanently and enable students to return to their local schools when ready.

Overall, school districts should continue to prioritize connecting with the people who are directly impacted by their decisions. If students and families are not central to reopening decisions, schools risk losing the confidence of the community and making affected populations disengaged.

This is an opportunity to incorporate our community into how the education system responds when challenged. Reopening is just the first of many steps schools will need to address how students are educated. Going forward, students and families must guide how learning goes on.

SIGN UP FOR EMAILS

Free Educator Webinars

IDRA launched a special webinar series on preparing schools to reopen this fall. The second webinar takes place this Tuesday.

Get details on other COVID-19 educator webinars.

Student Perspectives on a Changing School Climate

- School Reopening Webinar Series

Took place June 16, 2020. Recording is available.

W hat does the future hold for school re-openings, mental health and student emotional well-being in the wake of a myriad of issues facing today ' s youth ? Our student panelist s will help us understand the needs of their peers on issues , such as C OVID -19, s chool s afety , i mmigration , and the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements.

Featuring student advocates for equity in public education:

- Juliana Cruz, senior, Dallas ISD
- Taylor Ellingberb-McCloud, senior, Dallas ISD
- Melanie Harrell, recent graduate, San Antonio ISD
- Gracie Hernandez, recent graduate, Northside ISD
- Kennedy Kearns, senior, Schertz-Cibolo-Universal City ISD
- Dejia Nunn, sophomore, Judson ISD
- Lena Ramos, freshman, Northside ISD
- Gisselle Reyes, senior, Dallas ISD
- Lola Sánchez, recent graduate, San Antonio ISD
- Clarissa Tavera, junior, San Antonio ISD

Moderator: Ana Ramón, IDRA Deputy Director of Advocacy

GET INFO & WATCH RECORDING

Nurturing Students' Hearts and Minds

- School Reopening Webinar Series

June 23, 2020, at 2:00 to 3:30 cdt

Our panel of advocates and practitioners will discuss the needs of students on issues such as COVID-19, school safety, immigration, and the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements that schools will need to prepare for as they reopen.

Featuring:

- *Dr. Cherise Rohr-Allegrini, Licensed Epidemiologist*
- *Hon. Aicha Davis, State Board of Education*
- *Hon. Marisa Pérez-Díaz, State Board of Education*
- *Lisa Marie Gomez, San Antonio Chamber of Commerce and My Brother's Keeper - San Antonio*
- *Gylon Jackson, Black Lives Matter - San Antonio*
- *La Juana Chambers Lawson, San Antonio African American Community Archive and Museum*

Moderator: Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes, Deputy Director of Policy

REGISTER NOW

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

- School Reopening Webinar Series

June 30, 2020, at 2:00 to 3:30 cdt

Moderated by Dr. Paula Johnson, Director, IDRA EAC-*South*, o ur panel of student advocates and educational leaders will provide policy recommendations to district decision-makers on reopening schools in response to these uncertain times.

REGISTER NOW

More 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

SEE WEBINAR HUB

As Schools Plan to Reopen Safely, IDRA Valued Youth Partnership Tutors Will Lead in New Ways

Now more than ever, reconnecting with students is critical. IDRA can help!

When students return to school after this extended time away, it will be more important than ever to strengthen the school-family-community dynamic in order to reconnect with students, especially those that have been harder to reach during this time of distance learning.

See this powerful dropout prevention & youth leadership program in action!

Learn more about the Valued Youth Partnership program:

See our latest announcement for the upcoming school year

See the VYP website

Get the brochure

Contact IDRA for pricing and COVID-19 modifications: email

IDRA Valued Youth Partnersh...

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.