



# Strategies for Using American Rescue Plan Funding to Address the Impact of Lost Instructional Time



**U.S. Department of Education**

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## Contents

I. Introduction .....	4
II. Reengaging students by meeting their social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs .....	6
a. Building trust with families to support in-person learning .....	6
b. Supporting students during key transitions.....	9
c. Using community partnerships to support reengagement.....	10
d. Addressing student social, emotional, and mental health needs.....	10
e. Reengaging and supporting students in their learning.....	12
f. Supporting students with disabilities .....	13
g. Elements of high-quality and effective tutoring .....	14
h. The role of school leaders.....	15
i. Creative approaches to staffing .....	16
III. Supporting parents and caregivers in their child’s success .....	19
a. Engaging and communicating with parents and caregivers .....	19
b. Expanding home visits .....	20
c. Sharing data and resources with families to support student learning.....	20
IV. Using high-quality assessments to support student learning.....	22
a. The role of diagnostic and formative assessments.....	22
b. The role of summative assessments.....	23
c. Performance-based assessments.....	24
d. Using assessments as part of understanding students’ social and emotional needs.....	25
e. Supporting educator assessment literacy and development .....	25
f. Department resources .....	26

## I. Introduction

With the passage of the [American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 \(ARP Act\)](#), local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools have significant federal resources available which should be used to implement evidence-based<sup>1</sup> and practitioner-informed strategies to meet the needs of students related to COVID-19. While the pandemic has impacted all communities, it has deepened pre-pandemic disparities in access and opportunities facing students of color, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) students, with significant impacts on their learning as described in the U.S. Department of Education’s (Department’s) Office for Civil Rights report [Education in a Pandemic: The Disparate Impacts of COVID-19 on America’s Students](#). Further, parents whose children received virtual only or combined instruction were [more likely to report](#) higher prevalence of risk on 11 of 17 indicators of child and parental well-being than were parents whose children received in-person instruction.<sup>1</sup> ARP Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) funds provide an opportunity to make investments that respond to the urgent needs of students in ways that address gaps in educational opportunity and build local capacity to sustain meaningful and effective teaching and learning. ARP ESSER funds can be used to support the design, implementation, evaluation, and use of data to inform continuous improvement of proven and promising strategies and practices to address the impact of lost instructional time.

Section 2001(e)(1) of the ARP Act requires LEAs to reserve at least 20 percent of their ARP ESSER funds, and section 2001(f)(1) requires that states likewise reserve at least 5 percent of their ARP ESSER funds to (1) address the academic impact of lost instructional time<sup>2</sup> through the implementation of evidence-based interventions; (2) ensure that the interventions implemented respond to students’ social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs; and (3) address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, students with disabilities, multilingual learners, migratory students, students experiencing homelessness, and children and youth in foster care. While ESSER funds under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (ESSER I) and the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (ESSER II) may also be used for all of the purposes for which ARP ESSER funds may be used, LEAs and SEAS are not required to set aside a specific amount of ESSER I or ESSER II funds to address the academic impact of lost instructional time.

The Department’s COVID-19 Handbook, [Volume 2: Roadmap to Reopening Safely and Meeting All Students’ Needs](#) (Volume 2) includes strategies for addressing the impact of COVID-19 on students, educators, staff, and families—such as meeting students’ basic needs (including food security), creating safe and inclusive learning environments, accelerating students learning through instructional approaches, tutoring, and expanded learning time, increasing educational opportunity, and stabilizing

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<sup>1</sup> The ARP Act defines “evidence-based” as having the meaning in section 8101(21) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) ([20 U.S.C. 6311\(b\)\(2\)\(B\)\(xi\)](#)) and includes several tiers of evidence. “Evidence-based,” when used with respect to a state, LEA, or school activity, means an activity, strategy, or intervention that (1) demonstrates a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes based on strong evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented experimental study (“tier 1”); moderate evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented quasi experimental study (“tier 2”); or promising evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias (“tier 3”); or (2) demonstrates a rationale based on high-quality research findings or positive evaluation that such activity, strategy, or intervention is likely to improve student outcomes or other relevant outcomes and includes ongoing efforts to examine the effects of such activity, strategy, or intervention (“tier 4”).

<sup>2</sup> The term “academic impact of lost instructional time” is used to refer to “learning loss” as that term is used in section 2001 of the ARP Act. This document uses the term “impact of lost instructional time” to characterize the impact of COVID-19 on educational opportunity and to be mindful that students are not viewed from a deficit-perspective. Strategies selected should build on the many strengths that students bring to their learning every day.

and supporting the educator and staff workforce. This document is intended to complement Volume 2 by focusing on strategies to support state and local efforts in effectively using ARP ESSER funds to address the impact of lost instructional time on underserved and disproportionately impacted students including:

1. Reengaging students in their learning including by meeting the social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs of students and through such approaches as tutoring and creative staffing;
2. Providing information and assistance to families as they support students, including through home visits and information sharing; and
3. Using high-quality assessments to inform teaching and learning, including acceleration, and target resources and supports.

Additional details on allowable uses of ESSER I, II, and ARP ESSER funds can be found in the Department's [Use of Funds Frequently Asked Questions](#) document.

### Engaging the learning community

As schools, programs, and districts work to develop, refine, and implement strategies, including those in this guidance, engagement with educators and staff (including their unions and professional organizations), students, families, and the learning community is key. Community representatives should include, at a minimum, administrators, teachers, specialized instructional support personnel (e.g., paraprofessionals), related service providers, early childhood education providers, school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, and nurses, as well as custodial personnel, transportation personnel, food personnel, and family services representatives. This engagement can also include community partners such as local health departments, community-based mental health providers, family-serving community-based organizations, and college and university partners to help enhance and expand the school support network to promote student well-being and access to services.

Strategic planning to meet students' needs should include students, parents, and guardians, and individuals and organizations that represent the interests of students, staff, and parents and guardians, including students with disabilities, and multilingual learners. To that end, schools and school districts should also conduct active and specific engagement with historically underserved students and families—including parents and students of color; multilingual learners; students with disabilities; American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students; students in foster care; students in correctional facilities; students experiencing homelessness; and migratory students.

This engagement should begin early in the decision-making process and should be ongoing, meaningful, collaborative, and accessible to individuals with disabilities and limited English proficiency. This will help schools, programs, and districts develop trust and build capacity as they select and implement strategies designed for systemic change at the local and school level. Additional strategies for engaging families are included in this guidance.

## II. Reengaging students by meeting their social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs

### a. Building trust with families to support in-person learning

Addressing lost instructional time starts with the goal of providing all students equal access to safe, high-quality, in-person learning. To achieve this goal, school, health, and community partnerships will help to ensure the physical health and safety of families and students so that they feel safe and supported returning to in-person learning. According to the [most recent](#) National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2021 School Survey conducted at the end of the last school year, Black, Asian, and Latino public school students continued to return to in-person instruction at a far slower rate than their white peers.<sup>ii</sup> Even as schools increasingly offered in-person learning options between January and May of 2021, students of color only showed less growth over the months in enrolling in full-time in-person instruction in comparison with white students, with Asian 8th grade students returning at the lowest rates, at 23 percent compared to their white peers at 62 percent. Making up for the impact of lost instructional time in the last two school years for students, particularly for students of color who have been more likely to receive low-quality remote instruction,<sup>iii</sup> will only go so far if schools do not address the reasons why families are hesitant for their children to return to in-person learning.

As we continue to resume in-person learning and increase parent and caregiver confidence in sending their children back to school, working to ensure the health and safety of school communities must be the top priority. Districts and schools can take the following steps to prioritize the health and safety of the school community this academic year:

- Communicate frequently with families – in their home language – and work to build their confidence that children will be safe in-person;
- Encourage and provide access to vaccinations for eligible students and staff;
- Implement COVID-19 testing in schools;
- Address ventilation needs where applicable;
- Implement universal indoor masking;
- Maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students within classrooms to reduce transmission risk. Because of the importance of in-person learning, schools should implement physical distancing to the extent possible within their structures, but should not exclude students from in-person learning to keep a minimum distance requirement. When it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of at least 3 feet, such as when schools cannot fully re-open while maintaining these distances, it is especially important to layer multiple other prevention strategies, such as screening testing;
- Provide safe transportation;
- Provide affordable child care; and
- Ensure access to healthy meals and other basic needs.

The Department's [Return to School Roadmap](#) provides resources and local examples to support states, districts, and schools in these efforts.

Additional steps may need to be taken by districts and schools to support families of color in returning to in-person learning. [Volume 2](#) discusses some of the reasons families of color have cited for not

returning to in-person learning, including for example health and safety concerns, fears of xenophobic and racist harassment against Asian American students in particular, physical safety concerns due to under-resourced school facilities, and school discipline policies.

For schools struggling to re-enroll students in in-person learning, educators should prepare to have conversations, which may at times be uncomfortable, with their students and families about their needs that may not currently be met or the needs that students and families did not feel were adequately met before the pandemic. Educators should evaluate and reflect on their school culture, climate, and policies and can use well-designed survey tools to learn what practices may be keeping all students from feeling safe, included, and academically challenged and supported. Based on this information, they should commit to making improvements to achieve the goal of [safe](#), inclusive, and supportive learning environments. Schools and programs should actively and consistently reach out to families to hear their concerns and work to build trusting relationships. For example, [Connecticut's Welcoming Schools Initiative](#) provides school districts with a set of principles of family engagement and accompanying training in the areas of (1) physical environment; (2) school-wide practices and policies; (3) welcoming school staff; and (4) written materials. Schools can use different staffing structures to implement these strategies.

[Volume 2](#) provides resources for school climate surveys for families and students and how to use that data to drive equitable in-person reopening decisions. One resource provided by [Communities in Schools](#) offers a toolkit of surveys for different student age groups and family surveys in English and Spanish. Another set of resources is provided by [Colorín Colorado](#) including [strategies for supporting multilingual learners](#) during COVID-19. [Climate surveys](#) can include questions tailored to the school community context and can be administered in a number of ways, including during a home visit so as to be inclusive of families who might not otherwise fill out surveys. Funding under the ARP can be used to support these strategies, as well as personal outreach.

Personal outreach to families goes a long way in establishing connections and building or rebuilding trust. This can begin with school and program leaders making themselves available to families by providing flexible meeting times or holding one-on-one conversations or town-hall style meetings either virtually or in-person to accommodate parents who are essential workers or those who work multiple jobs. Outreach can also include phone calls home and sharing resources when meeting in person, over email, or on a school or district website. Further, school communications must be accessible to families with disabilities and shared with limited-English-proficient families in a language that they can understand.<sup>iv</sup> Supporting parents in understanding the operations and practices of their child's school or program can help them to feel more included and better equipped to help their child advance academically. Cultivating clear, open, and honest communication pathways from all educators and staff invites greater opportunity for dialogue about what families and students need.

An equitable return to school and learning programs includes meeting students and families where they are. Some school communities have done so by hosting outdoor school barbecues or picnics in the communities where their students live rather than at school or partnering with community-based organizations that families may already be familiar with or from which they receive other services.

[Volume 2](#) provides strategies for reaching specific subgroups of students such as students experiencing homelessness and migratory students. Door-to-door campaigns that were designed to locate absent and disconnected youth during the pandemic have shone a light on the effectiveness of home visits in school communities that did not already employ such an engagement strategy. Prearranged, regular visits

between a student's family and their educators that are not targeted to be specifically about academics or discipline can demonstrate school staff's respect for a student's home and family life and [can improve](#) student academic success. Instead, these visits should be focused on supporting student social and emotional well-being and building relationships with families. District and school officials should invest in professional development so that educators and staff can conduct meaningful and respectful home visits to establish greater rapport and build trust. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended safety measures, including masking and distancing, should also be implemented when conducting home visits.

Even when students do return to in-person learning, educators and staff should be sensitive to the challenges that many of them have experienced and how to mitigate their impact on student engagement and learning. The following resources are available to support trauma-sensitive schools:

- The [Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators](#) provides school administrators, teachers, staff, and parents and caregivers with basic information about working with traumatized children in the school system;
- The [Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A System Framework](#) presents a tiered approach to creating a trauma-informed school environment that addresses the needs of students, staff, administrators, and families who might be at risk for experiencing the symptoms of traumatic stress;
- A [Trauma-Informed School Strategies During COVID](#) fact sheet that provides information on the physical and emotional well-being of staff, creating a trauma-informed learning environment, identifying and assessing traumatic stress, addressing and treating traumatic stress, trauma education and awareness, partnerships with students and families, cultural responsiveness, emergency management and crisis response, and school discipline policies and practices; and
- The [National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, Trauma Sensitive Schools Training Package](#) provides school and district administrators and staff a framework and roadmap for adopting a trauma-sensitive approach school- or districtwide.

The CDC provides [resources on preventing and mitigating the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\)](#), which are potentially traumatic childhood events, including but not limited to, experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect, or witnessing violence in the home or community. Research on the [science of learning](#) has established that while adverse experiences, such as experiencing and witnessing violence, can have profound effects on students, learning environments and conditions can be designed in [culturally responsive ways](#) that can help students overcome these effects and thrive. This research also shows that social, emotional, identity, cognitive, and academic development are all interconnected. Improving academic outcomes for students requires nurturing each of these areas of development in ways that are asset-oriented and personalized to meet students where they are as they return to school.

Educators can use this research to transform learning opportunities and practices including strategies for acceleration to address lost instructional time. One resource to support educators in these efforts is the [Design Principles for Schools](#) which guides the transformation of learning settings for children and adolescents using five integrated elements: positive developmental relationships; environments filled with safety and belonging; rich learning experiences and knowledge development; development of skills, habits, and mindsets; and integrated support systems.

Schools and educators can leverage tools that allow teachers to understand and cultivate student's non-academic skills by [measuring school climate, providing social-emotional supports, and reducing school](#)



[exclusions](#). Implementing and improving such measures can help to give weight and prioritize social and emotional outcomes in balance with academic outcomes.

Some questions educators and staff can ask to help increase student engagement include the following:

- To what extent are students free from bullying and harassment?
- To what extent do students see themselves in the curriculum?
- To what extent do students relate to what they are learning?
- To what extent are students' out-of-school identities, cultures, and experiences brought into the classroom?
- Are high expectations communicated to students along with the appropriate supports for them to succeed?
- Are students' mental health or other needs responded to with a positive, inclusive learning environment and support?
- Are questions and any response option provided age-and culturally appropriate?

Depending on responses to these questions, schools may revisit their discipline policies to assess if they contribute to lost instructional time with disproportionate effects on certain student subgroups and examine their curricular and instructional design to determine if they contribute to student disengagement, including among subgroups of students. Rebuilding from COVID-19 is an opportunity to reexamine and strengthen school policies and practices to assure families that school will reopen equitably for all students. Developing trust will not happen overnight – it requires a culture shift over time. With intentional training and professional development for educators and staff and the establishment of equitable practices to include more voices – including the voices of students and families — school leaders can lead their school communities to becoming healthier and more welcoming schools.

## b. Supporting students during key transitions

Many students will be making key transitions, such as [from early childhood programs to elementary school](#), elementary school to middle school, middle school to high school, and high school to postsecondary education and the workforce, after having been in a virtual environment. Other students, such as migratory students, students experiencing homelessness, children and youth in foster care, and children of active-duty military, may have moved during the pandemic and may be enrolling in a new school. These students are returning to in-person learning in schools they may be unfamiliar with and that have new routines and expectations. This can make their return more stressful and increase their need for additional support. To support these transitions, schools can invite new students and their families to visit and take a tour of the school and meet educators and staff in advance of the first day of school. This can also include [summer bridge programs](#), or orientation days or weeks prior to the start of the school year.

States and districts can use ARP ESSER funds to establish early warning indicator (EWI) systems to promote targeted engagement [strategies in response to data from EWIs](#). EWI systems can track attendance, assignment completion, and grades. When viewed at the classroom and student level, these data can strengthen a school's ability to provide specific and timely interventions. States and districts can also collect data on the successful transitions of students from [pre-school to elementary school](#), elementary school to middle school, middle school to high school, and high school to postsecondary

education. For example, schools can use [on-track indicators](#) to assess how well students are making the transition into high school so that the schools can provide additional supports as needed. Schools may want to consider implementing or enhancing multi-tiered systems of support that typically include: (1) [school-wide supports](#); (2) progress monitoring; (3) tiered systems of academic and [behavioral interventions](#); and (4) the use of evidence-based instructional and behavioral interventions. [Additional strategies for keeping students on track](#), including specific strategies for English learners and students with disabilities, are provided by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.

The use of well-designed student surveys in advance of and during these transitions can also provide important information to educators on how students are feeling about these transitions and where additional support might be needed. Further, for highly mobile students, schools and districts should work quickly to secure a student's records and connect with admissions staff, a counselor, registrar, or teacher from the sending school to ensure the student is quickly enrolled, placed in the correct grade, and awarded credits for work already completed. Schools should remember to utilize surveys in compliance with the [Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment](#) (PPRA).

Additional examples of the work underway across the nation can be found in the Department's [Safer Schools and Campuses Best Practices Clearinghouse](#).

### c. Using community partnerships to support reengagement

As students return to in-person instruction following the COVID-19 pandemic, community partnerships can allow districts to expand learning beyond the classroom and reengage students' learning. A study found that schools with strong ties to families and communities were four times more likely to make significant gains in reading and math.<sup>v</sup> One example is the Austin, Texas Citizen Schools at Bedichek Middle School, which provides an afterschool program that seeks to inspire middle-school students by providing relevant learning experiences and supporting youth with mentors. The model includes apprenticeships with community members, academic support and instruction, and exploration sessions, such as community field trips and service opportunities. One resource for developing partnerships with districts and schools to provide afterschool and summer programs that support student reengagement and learning is the Afterschool Alliance's [Toolkit](#).

Another example is the partnership between [City Year](#), an AmeriCorps program that works with under-resourced schools across the country, and the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University. The non-profit organizations work together to help educators establish practices to strengthen students' connection to school. Their efforts have supported an [Action Community](#) of schools in Colorado, Florida, New York, and South Carolina. This community developed and shared a resource intended to increase a student's sense of school belonging and engagement. City Year AmeriCorps members can also serve as full-time [student success coaches](#), partnering with educators to help students build on their strengths and develop skills to thrive in school and in life.

### d. Addressing student social, emotional, and mental health needs

As students return to learning in an in-person setting, state, district, and school leaders, including Board of Education Chairs and members, and other educators can take specific steps to be prepared to be responsive to student social and emotional needs and the mental health crisis facing students as they cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on a survey from October 2020, 75 percent of educators

strongly agree that social and emotional support for students has never been more important.<sup>vi</sup> Further, during 2020, the proportion of mental health-related emergency department visits among adolescents aged 12–17 years increased 31 percent compared with that during 2019.<sup>vii</sup> There was also [an increase](#) in suspected suicide attempts. These concerns can translate into an increased need for social, emotional, or mental health supports (e.g., counseling services).

An LEA may use ESSER funds to provide mental health services and supports for students and their families, teachers, and LEA staff who are experiencing COVID-19 pandemic-related trauma, including students who were experiencing trauma prior to the pandemic that may have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Funds may also be used to provide professional development and training that increase awareness of mental health literacy for teachers and staff. Many schools already implementing multitiered supports may integrate mental health strategies and interventions into these existing systems. LEAs may also use the funds to hire additional school psychologists and counselors to provide the services or to contract for such services for students, educators, and other district staff. ESSER and GEER funds may also be used to provide student and educator access to online counseling services and other mental health supports. Funds may be used to provide resources and information to students and families to provide a greater understanding of mental health and address any stigma associated with mental health that may be a barrier to accessing services even when available.

As an additional approach to responding to the mental health crisis, for example, schools and districts can use ARP ESSER funds to support or implement multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) frameworks that support school communities and integrate social and emotional learning into the school day. The [Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports'](#) abbreviated district guide describes the use of an MTSS framework, like positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), to design classrooms and schools in a manner that provides effective, efficient, and relevant supports to all students, families, and educators during and after a crisis.

Promoting supportive environments also includes [increasing school connectedness and engaging parents](#). Connectedness to family, peers, and important adults in schools and community organizations is key to protecting adolescent health. Students are more likely to thrive if they know they matter and that they have adults, teachers, and friends who care about their safety and success. These protections can last long into adulthood, leading to better mental health, less substance use, and fewer experiences of violence. Making these supportive connections can also be particularly important for LGBTQ+ students who, [based on the most recent CDC data](#), are twice as likely as heterosexual students to have experienced feelings of sadness and hopelessness and more likely to have experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness than heterosexual students. Further, almost half of lesbian, gay, or bisexual students seriously considered suicide in 2019.

Further, to create supportive learning environments, exclusionary disciplinary practices such as suspension or expulsion, which disproportionately impact students of color<sup>viii</sup> (as well as students with disabilities, English learners, and LGBTQ+ students), can be replaced with restorative justice frameworks that provide non-punitive schoolwide frameworks.<sup>ix</sup> Additionally, schools could consider implementation of stand-alone social-emotional schoolwide initiatives, such as the [CASEL School Guide](#) or use of curriculums with a strong evidence base, and PBIS. Schools or districts may also choose to partner with community-based organizations (CBOs) to expand mental health services or to supplement existing school counselor staff. Another resource is the [Turnaround for Children Toolbox](#), which provides evidence-based strategies for creating school systems, structures, and practices that support students' holistic development and learning.

States and districts may use ARP ESSER funds to provide educators with the supports and professional development they need to integrate social and emotional learning into their practice and address trauma and loss resulting from the pandemic and on the most effective evidence-based strategies to reengage and support students in their learning. Additional strategies to support the social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs of students can be found in Volume 2.

#### e. Reengaging and supporting students in their learning

As students continue to return to in-person instruction, educators and staff may face challenges in reengaging students in their learning and supporting students during what may be a difficult transition. Some researchers estimate that 3 million students have either been consistently absent from or have not been actively participating even if logged on in remote learning since the beginning of the pandemic.<sup>x</sup> These students were more likely to be multilingual learners, students with disabilities, students in foster care, students from low-income backgrounds, Native American youth, migratory students, or students experiencing homelessness;<sup>xi</sup> and LGBTQ+ students, especially LGBTQ+ students who are Black or Native American, who are more likely than others to be homeless.<sup>xii</sup> It is particularly important to reengage those students who had the least opportunity to engage in virtual learning, missed the most instruction, and were least engaged by their schools prior to and during the pandemic, and to ensure those students receive the social and emotional supports that they need to succeed academically.

To address this challenge, states, districts, and schools may engage in a variety of evidence-based practices to reengage students and address the varied impacts of lost instructional time. Educators should personalize instruction to meet students' individual needs. It is critical to do so without lowering high expectations for their long-term goals in student achievement or using tracking or traditional remediation. Students benefit from doing work and engaging in curriculum that is challenging, supported, and interesting including accessing content that is above grade-level.<sup>xiii</sup> For example, if students are coached on developing skills rather than engaged in traditional remediation techniques, students can complete 27 percent more grade-level work.<sup>xiv</sup> For this approach to be successful, educators will need to first identify what core or foundational content students need to know to be prepared for the next level. Educators may establish a baseline and use data-based decision making to inform lesson plans and academic progression. School leaders should provide educators with guidance on the scope of what is critically important for students to learn and master, including critical thinking and applied learning skills.

One way to operationalize the principles of personalization and support is through tailored acceleration that combines “high-quality, teacher-led instruction with other instructional approaches so that all students do not need to learn the same thing at the same time...[such that] students can then access the most essential building-block skills from prior grades with the key on-grade skills to create individualized learning pathways that get them back to grade-level and beyond as fast as possible. The goal of tailored acceleration is to ensure that all students attain college and career readiness...regardless of where they may be starting—while adhering to the principles of high expectations, rigorous accountability, and educational equity.”<sup>xv</sup> [Key program design options educators can use for providing tailored acceleration can be found in this resource.](#)

To support learning acceleration, schools are providing teachers with intensive professional development including on how to identify content and skills that need to be prioritized, how to design

and select instructional strategies, and how to use data to inform instruction. Schools can also plan ahead for how they will use upcoming school vacation time to support students with the greatest need. For example, the [Acceleration Academies](#) in the Lawrence Public School system in Massachusetts provided accelerated learning opportunities during school breaks, resulting in significant gains in student performance. As the school year begins and educators gain better insight into where their students are, this model could be implemented during upcoming breaks to support struggling students. The model also provides practices that could be incorporated when school is in session. Another example is the [Complex Instruction approach](#) which enables students to learn and teachers to teach at a high intellectual level in academically, linguistically, racially, ethnically, and socially heterogeneous classrooms.

States can use their ARP ESSER funding to issue guidance to districts on how to support student reengagement and learning. One example of a state's effort to support acceleration rather than remediation is [Delaware's Strategy to Accelerate Learning](#), which was designed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to address students' disrupted learning for the past two years, and includes--

- Adopting and using high-quality instructional materials;
- Providing necessary professional learning for teachers and educators;
- Ensuring all students have access to grade-level instruction; and
- Reexamining and creating support structures to accelerate learning.

A number of innovative opportunities are available through the use of emergency relief funds that may not have previously been possible both because of the availability of funds and technological innovation that has taken place. For example the Department [recently clarified](#) that an SEA or LEA may use ESSER and Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funds to develop or implement an innovative approach to providing instruction to accelerate learning and mitigate the effects of lost instructional time for students most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This could include emerging technology-based or technology-enabled approaches, including evidence-based educational technology platforms.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the pandemic, educators have learned ways of leveraging technology to expand their options for instructional approaches. Educators should consider how to translate those approaches to in-person environments. In this way, technology-enabled practices can be used to enhance in-person learning and student performance and create meaningful opportunities to extend learning time.

#### f. Supporting students with disabilities

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were significant gaps between the proficiency and graduation rates of students with disabilities and their peers without disabilities, even though research demonstrates that students with disabilities can meet the same academic standards when provided high-quality evidence-based instruction and needed services and supports.<sup>xvi</sup> The Department's

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<sup>3</sup> If a school or district has adopted an innovative practice in response to the pandemic and wishes to continue these practices, it might not need to obtain additional evidence (e.g., an independent program evaluation) for the program during the pandemic. The Department has clarified that "As part of the 'demonstrates a rationale (tier 4)' level of evidence, grantees may develop and use approaches that are novel, if they are consistent with theoretical and empirical findings from research and the grantee will continue to review the effects of the practice to build the evidence base." Further, any use of technology by students for educational purposes must include consideration of requirements under Section 504 to ensure equal access and effective communication for students with disabilities.

[Frequently Asked Questions on the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Programs and the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Programs](#) describes how funds may be used for accommodations and for the provision of required educational and related aids and services determined necessary to ensure the provision of FAPE to students with disabilities who are not eligible under IDEA but receive services in accordance with a Section 504 plan.

One resource with strategies for accelerating learning for students with disabilities is the National Center for Learning Disabilities’ [“Promising Practices to Accelerate Learning for Students with Disabilities During COVID-19 and Beyond.”](#) This resource describes how schools can implement the following strategies:

- Educating students with disabilities alongside their peers;
- Redesigning and accelerating curriculum;
- Using continuous formative assessments (described in greater detail below); and
- Prioritizing inclusion of students with disabilities.

States can also take important steps to support districts and schools in meeting the needs of students with disabilities, including following service disruption or changing service needs as students return to school. For example, in February 2021, the Minnesota Department of Education released a guide, [Minnesota: Guide to Addressing the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Students with Disabilities](#), which is intended to assist school districts, charter schools, and parents and caregivers in making equitable and individualized determinations of services, including extended school year (ESY) services, general education recovery services, revised individualized education program (IEP) services, and COVID-19 compensatory services. The guide provides information on students’ and families’ rights to education in the time of COVID-19 and encourages collaboration between families and schools to continue to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Other resources include [Washington State’s guidance](#) on determining the need for compensatory services.

#### g. Elements of high-quality and effective tutoring

Accelerating learning builds on what students already know, ensuring that they learn at least at grade level with needed supports. Implementing evidence-based tutoring practices is a key approach to accelerating learning. [Tutoring can yield important results](#) for students when done in effective ways, based on a significant body of research.

The best available evidence suggests that tutoring is most effective when it uses the following approaches:<sup>xvii</sup>

- **Use trained educators as tutors.** Teachers, paraprofessionals, teaching candidates, recently retired teachers, or highly trained tutors who receive a stipend (e.g., AmeriCorps members) are most likely to be effective, particularly when also given time for planning and collaboration with classroom teachers.
- **Provide high dosage tutoring each week.** Programs that include frequent sessions (e.g., daily or at least three sessions per week) of at least 30–50 minutes work best. The youngest students (e.g., early childhood through 1st grade) benefit from increased weekly sessions in terms of length and frequency.

- **Conduct tutoring during the school day whenever possible.** Tutoring programs that take place during the school day appear to have the largest effects. After-school tutoring programs have also been shown to have positive, although smaller, effects. When conducting tutoring during the school day, schools should do so in a way that ensures students still receive instruction on core content and have opportunities for enrichment. For example, tutoring could take place during study hall or flexible periods, during independent practice portions of a class, or as a complement to instruction in partnership with the classroom teacher.
- **Emphasize attendance and focused worktime during out-of-school tutoring.** Experts have suggested that afterschool tutoring programs may have shown smaller effects than in-school programs because less tutoring occurs. However, out-of-school time programs can be effective. To promote the best results, ensure these programs provide high-dosage tutoring.
- **Align with an evidence-based core curriculum** or use an evidence-based program and practices. Practices that support student learning in the classroom are also important in tutoring. Take specific actions to support student learning, including using quizzing, asking deep explanatory questions, spacing learning over time, incorporating worked example solutions with problem-solving exercises, connecting and integrating abstract and concrete representations of concepts, and combining graphical representations — like figures and graphs — with verbal descriptions.<sup>xviii</sup>

Schools and districts may review school-level data and practices to identify priority areas and outcomes.<sup>xix</sup> For example, educators can regularly conduct short, formative assessments and develop individualized learning progressions for students. While remaining focused on grade-level content, students could then engage in flexible groupings and in different modalities — independent practice, small group teacher instruction, technology-enabled guiding practice, small group practice — with scaffolding based on their mastery of various skills. Technology-based intelligent tutoring systems can also be used to augment adult support and these programs have been shown to increase student performance even with relatively low-dosage rates.<sup>xx</sup> Formative assessments can also be used to determine the impact of any new instructional models on student learning and to provide timely feedback to educators and to the tutors to inform instruction and target support.<sup>xxi</sup>

This [online tool](#), Learning Recovery: How to Develop and Implement Effective Tutoring Programs by the Department’s [National Comprehensive Center](#), provides a tutoring package for teachers that provides timely, useful, and relevant information on how to use tutoring in learning recovery efforts. This resource offers a collection of best practices that can be applied immediately to classroom practice and to district or state policies. It also provides best practices for planning the expansion of tutoring programs to the district or state level, including national cost estimates and how program design efficiencies may lower the cost of implementation. The [National Student Support Accelerator](#) also provides resources for high-impact tutoring, including a tutoring database, tutoring quality improvement system, and a toolkit for tutoring programs.

#### h. The role of school leaders

School leaders play a critical role in supporting the design and implementation of tutoring programs. For example, effective tutoring programs require the selection of effective tutors. School leaders may look to employ certified teachers, paraprofessional staff, teacher candidates enrolled in preparation

programs, or well-trained tutors who earn a stipend, such as AmeriCorps members.<sup>xxii</sup> Experienced and trained tutors who are compensated build the foundation for an effective tutoring program. For example, the [Tennessee Tutoring Corps](#) recruited and compensated qualified college students to support summer learning opportunities in math and reading for elementary students beginning in 2020.

School leaders are key in coordinating and ensuring support for pre-service and on-going training for tutors and educators. Effective tutoring models include coordination between the classroom educators and the tutors, and school leaders can support educator schedules that include time for this work. School leaders can make tutoring a permanent part of the [school schedule](#) (e.g., using a [double-block model](#)) and structure (e.g., by providing credit for tutoring) to support students. School leaders can leverage existing partnerships or develop new partnerships with community-based organizations to target students most in need of support for learning acceleration.

### i. Creative approaches to staffing

As schools work to address different learning needs of students due to lost instructional time and historical inequities, one area for transformation is to change the one teacher per classroom model. Utilizing more adults in classrooms allows for prioritizing educator strengths and usage of break-out sessions so that educators can better facilitate the differentiated instruction students need.<sup>xxiii</sup> Changes should be made in consultation or in partnership with teachers, recognizing the impact that the pandemic has had on teachers, both professionally and personally.

Specifically, schools and districts can use ARP ESSER funds to –

- Extend the reach of effective teachers as teacher leaders who –
  - Work directly or in small groups with students most impacted by COVID-19 so that students with the greatest need have access to the most effective teachers.
  - Support partner teachers across a school in their professional development and working collaboratively to meet the needs of students. For example, Public Impact’s [Opportunity Culture](#) is an initiative to extend the reach of highly effective teachers, using school district data to develop staffing models focused on student achievement in math and reading. This model empowers highly effective teachers who serve as models and mentors for colleagues;
  - Support multiple co-teaching models<sup>4</sup> including by providing adequate time to collaborate and plan;

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<sup>4</sup> Examples of co-teaching models include: “(1) one teach, one observe involves one of the co-teachers leading large-group instruction while the other teacher gathers academic, behavioral, or social data on specific students or the class group; (2) station teaching involves dividing students into three groups and rotating the groups from station to station taught by the co-teachers at two stations and working independently at the third; (3) parallel teaching requires each of the co-teachers to instruct half of the students presenting the same lesson in order to provide instructional differentiation and increased student participation; (4) alternative teaching involves one teacher providing instruction to the majority of students while the other teacher works with a small group for remediation, enrichment or assessment; (5) teaming requires the co- teachers lead large-group instruction by both lecturing, representing different viewpoints and multiple methods of solving problems; and (6) one teach, one assist, also identified as supportive teaching, involves one co-teacher leading instruction while the other teacher circulates among the students providing individual assistance. Source: [A Study of Co-Teaching Identifying Effective Implementation Strategies](#).



- Lead remote instruction for a larger group of students, if remote instruction is still needed for some students after schools reopen for in-person learning, with co-teachers providing small group and individualized support; or
  - Lead [professional development](#), [professional learning communities](#), and grade-level or subject-area teams for educators across the school. Professional learning communities [are most effective](#) when they use data to determine student and educator learning needs; identify shared goals for student and educator learning; support educators' in their knowledge of content, content-specific pedagogy, how students learn, and management of classroom environments; select and implement appropriate evidence-based strategies to achieve student and educator learning goals; use evidence to monitor and refine implementation; and evaluate results.
- Engage qualified adults to support educators, students, and staff, such as –
    - Teacher candidates in partnership with local schools of education at institutions of higher education (IHEs);
    - Recently retired educators;
    - Paraprofessionals, AmeriCorps members, college students, and other volunteers with high-quality training to serve as tutors; and
    - Non-instructional staff, including school counselors, school nurses, and mental health professionals who can identify and support students who are highly mobile or chronically absent, such as students who are migratory, students experiencing homelessness, and students in foster care. These staff members can support finding and enrolling students on days and at hours convenient to families, as well as help students develop a sense of belonging in their new schools and identify challenging coursework and peer supports mid-year. In addition, these staff can support students and their families in completing college applications.
- Build and maintain a cadre of high-quality substitute teachers, including through partnerships with teacher preparation programs to hire teacher candidates in training and through outreach to retired educators, and compensating them through pay, benefits, and professional development, who can assist by –
    - Stepping into the classroom to support continuity for students when educators need to take time off;
    - Co-leading small group learning; and
    - Supporting release time for educators to allow for teacher professional development.
- Implement flexible and creative scheduling to support students while providing planning and collaboration time for teachers by, for example –
    - Holding entire days where the majority of time is focused on a single core academic subject;
    - Offering all “special” subjects (e.g., music, art, physical education) on the same day so grade-level teams can plan together; and
    - Holding shorter learning cycles, with more frequent breaks, some of which educators can use for planning (e.g. a trimester or quarter structure at the secondary school level, increasing the number of days for collaborative and job-embedded professional development and providing some of them consecutively).

- Use targeted incentives to encourage educators to work in high-need subject areas and high-need schools, such as loan forgiveness, grants, or service scholarship programs that significantly underwrite the cost of postsecondary education in exchange for a commitment to teach in a high-need field or school for a minimum number (e.g., four) of years (see the [North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program](#)).

While there are no quick fixes to ensuring that students have access to the educators and support staff they need to succeed, there are tools that can serve as a starting point. For example, the Center for Great Teachers and Leaders at the American Institutes for Research provides [evidence-based toolkits](#) for equitably building the educator workforce, including the [Talent Development Framework](#) and considerations specific to [COVID-19](#), as does the [Learning Policy Institute](#). The [New England Consortium on Secondary Schools](#), [Learning Policy Institute](#), and the [National Comprehensive Center](#) among others, have also outlined strategies for increasing both the diversity and qualifications of educators, including for [educators of Native American students](#) specifically. These strategies include cultivating interest in teaching among children of color at earlier ages, providing competitive compensation and retention packages, providing supports to complete preparation programs, and streamlining certification and licensure processes.

### III. Supporting parents and caregivers in their child’s success

Supporting parents and caregivers in their efforts to support their own child’s learning is critical to addressing the impact of lost instructional time and increasing student success. Strong family-school partnerships can promote children’s literacy, better prepare students for learning and improve student academic achievement and health.<sup>xxiv</sup> Positive family-school partnerships also benefit parents as they can increase awareness of community resources available to the family.<sup>xxv</sup> Under the [interim final requirements](#) for the ARP ESSER program, issued by the Department on April 22, 2021, school districts must engage in meaningful consultation with stakeholders, including students and families, and provide the public the opportunity to provide input on spending plans and plans to safely return to in-person learning and continue services. This consultation, and the opportunity for the public to provide input, can strengthen partnerships with families and within communities. Parents and guardians play a critical role in their child’s [success and there are several steps](#) districts and schools can take to engage and support families.

#### a. Engaging and communicating with parents and caregivers

Students – and educators – benefit when families are engaged in their schools. For families and schools to form this essential partnership, schools should communicate goals and information with families and welcome, and be responsive to, their feedback. To be most effective in support of student success, communication should go in both directions – schools should share information with families, and families should be encouraged to share feedback with schools. School reopening planning should include students and parents with many perspectives, including families of students of color, families of students with disabilities, families with multilingual learners, families who have transportation access and functional needs, advocates for students in foster care, and families experiencing homelessness. When educators and school staff can more fully see their student’s lives, they are better able to build authentic relationships and partnerships with families, leading to improved support for student success.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Personal outreach is a promising way to engage and reengage students and their families. For example, no matter the reason for their absences, school district officials should work quickly to locate and reengage students who have been chronically absent or disengaged and should do so in a non-punitive manner. In this outreach, school leaders should use one-on-one conversations with students and families – conducted in the family’s home language with translation or interpretation support and in accessible formats for individuals with disabilities – as much as possible to allow families (and students) to openly voice any concerns they may have, including personal information about individual students. If families do raise questions or concerns, or share feedback, school leaders should ensure that they provide a timely, respectful, and collaborative response.

Districts are thinking creatively about how they can design these outreach strategies. One example is Hillsborough County Schools in Florida, which had more than 7,000 students who were not enrolled in a school district school, program, or home school at the start of the 2020 school year. The district sent social workers on a door-knocking campaign to homes, hotels, motels, and shelters (this outreach could also be done by other staff or trusted members of the community); created social media pages in Spanish to reach their majority Latino student population; and shared COVID-19 [dashboards](#) on their website to help parents make informed decisions about sending their children back to school. District leaders also held virtual community meetings, further establishing transparency that promoted trust. By

December 2020, Hillsborough County Schools had located 6,700 of their students in effort to get them enrolled and back in school.

### b. Expanding home visits

Home visits can be helpful tools for schools and families, as they provide opportunities for educators and families to build trust and communicate about students' interest and well-being. These should be done safely, including through masking and distancing. One study showed that schools with high trust levels among parents, teachers, and school leadership are more likely to experience improvement in math and reading achievement than schools where trust levels among these groups are lower.<sup>xxvii</sup> Another study found positive behavioral, academic, and parent involvement outcomes for students who received a home visit.<sup>xxviii</sup>

To facilitate trust, schools may decide to expand existing home visiting programs and focus particularly on the students most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. One example is the Dallas Independent School District (DISD), which in early 2021 [expanded](#) its Home2Home Visit Initiative, a home visitation program, to several schools with predominantly Black student populations. During home visits, teachers engaged with families on the interests and goals of students, while focusing on building trusting relationships between schools and families.

### c. Sharing data and resources with families to support student learning

Parents, caregivers, and other family members play important roles in students' academic progress and growth, as they often reinforce and extend learning at home or in their communities.<sup>xxix</sup> Districts and schools can use ARP ESSER funds to invest in parent and caregiver training in educational practices, or provide [tools](#) specifically designed to facilitate or extend at home learning, particularly targeting families of students most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Facilitating feedback loops between families, schools, and districts – for example through parent and caregiver surveys – can ensure that policies and practices are continually responsive to the families and communities they serve.

Schools should share information with parents and caregivers on how students are doing and resources to support their success. Schools should use a variety of approaches to ensure that they reach all families on a consistent basis.<sup>xxx</sup> Communication should be provided in native languages spoken by families and through a variety of formats accessible to individuals with disabilities including individual emails, texts, and calls from teachers and school leadership; school-level posts on school websites; all-school emails and texts; and home visits (as previously described). Schools should also periodically assess whether their communication strategies are effective and make any adjustments based on that analysis and on any feedback from families.

For parents to effectively use the information, schools need to communicate clear recommendations for how they can support their student through academic and enrichment activities. Schools can leverage the lessons learned from the pandemic that support families in effectively using technology in supporting their children. For example, schools can provide digital literacy training for families. Schools should be thoughtful and realistic about what parents are able to do, particularly for families that have encountered hardships during the pandemic. For example, the National PTA developed the [Four 'I's for Family Engagement](#), which offers guidance for schools to develop an inclusive approach through meaningful consultation and building relationships. The PTA recommends taking an individualized

approach to family and community engagement and integrating efforts with the broader educational system.

Data about student performance should be shared in plain language, using visual representations as feasible and in accessible formats for individuals with disabilities. Specific, actionable tips for families should be included along with the data to help them to understand student strengths and needs and how best to support them. Schools and districts can increase access to information, building family capacity to support students, including through a website that provides high-quality, standards-aligned materials for families to use.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Schools can consider making parent consultation available in-person or virtually and providing times that are both within and outside the regular school day and on weekends. For students with individualized learning plans, schools can ensure that their families have contributed to their development and that the plans are used as tools for families to engage with their student's learning.<sup>xxxii</sup>

## IV. Using high-quality assessments to support student learning

COVID-19 has impacted each student and their access to educational opportunity differently. Some students could not access online content due to lack of access to broadband or technological devices. For others, COVID-19 may have impacted their family's health and economic well-being. Further, the inequities in student access to educational opportunities that existed prior to COVID-19 have likely been exacerbated. As students continue to return to in-person learning and we work through the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important for educators and parents to know where students are in their learning and what is needed to support their success. These efforts can be aided by high-quality assessments that provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate their thinking; are aligned with state standards, grounded in the content students are expected to learn, and instructionally relevant; and provide educators and parents the information they need to effectively support student success. ARP ESSER funds can be used to administer and use high-quality assessments that are valid and reliable, to accurately assess students' academic progress, and assist educators in meeting students' academic needs, including through differentiating instruction.

We also know that COVID-19 has had a traumatic impact on many students, demonstrated by increased anxiety and mental health needs (as previously described). Communications with students about where they are in their learning should not be made in ways that further contribute to that trauma or anxiety or feelings of failure or self-doubt. As we work to better understand where students are and what is needed to advance their progress, educators should take an asset-based approach that supports student growth across a learning progression. It is important that as educators and parents share information related to student performance with students, it is done in a way that communicates high expectations, recognizes where students are, and describes the kinds of support that will be provided to support their continued growth. Assessments should not be used for punitive purposes, such as remediating or tracking students into low-level, and less challenging and less engaging courses and content. The Department also [encouraged](#) states and school districts to consider other steps within their purview to further reduce the stakes of assessments administered in the 2020–2021 school year, such as excluding their use from students' final grades, grade promotion decisions, educator evaluations, and local school ratings.

### a. The role of diagnostic and formative assessments

Diagnostic and [formative assessments](#) can provide information to educators and parents as to where students are performing relative to their grade level and how students are progressing over time, and can build educator capacity for evaluating where students are in their learning progression. When designed and used effectively, diagnostic assessments can play an important role in guiding teaching and learning and support and enhance [curriculum mapping](#). For example, diagnostic and formative assessments can support teaching and learning when they are designed to--

- Treat students' current understanding as assets to be leveraged in future learning;
- Make students' thinking visible;
- Assess student learning along multi-grade continuums and learning progressions, including grade-level performance;
- Use performance-based approaches and connections to curriculum to directly support teaching and learning along learning progressions in culturally and linguistically responsive ways; and

- Include clear interpretation guidance so teachers will understand how to support students and so students understand and continue their progress.

Research shows that students learn by [building on prior and current knowledge](#) rather than just collecting isolated facts and skills. Diagnostic and formative assessments are important because they can provide timely information and identify specific [aspects of student understanding](#) relative to learning progressions that can help educators better understand where students are on a coherent continuum of learning. This information can help teachers tailor instruction to build student understanding to the next concepts and skills on that progression—meaning, the ideas and skills that have clear conceptual connections to students’ current understanding and lie just beyond where students are currently performing. This approach is often referred to as the “zone of proximal development,<sup>5</sup>” which ensures that students develop gapless conceptual understandings needed to support future learning. This approach can result in increased student achievement relative to grade-level standards and college- and career-ready expectations for all students and can be particularly supportive for multilingual learners.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

For example, diagnostic assessments can be designed to provide multiple opportunities for teachers to individually assess students, including through performance tasks and guided interviews that connect student performance to strengths, areas for growth, and personalized learning pathways. Data can be used to inform individualized learning plan documents on what each student needs to learn next and in ways that enable teachers to differentiate instruction. Teachers can then “[scaffold up](#)” to provide students with the support they need to engage with grade-level content. Many districts are using these kinds of diagnostic assessments that incorporate learning progressions to understand students’ current knowledge, skills, and abilities, and support teachers in their instructional planning.

Technology can be an important tool for educators regularly administering formative assessments and adapting instructions based on the results. This is especially true when technology embeds formative assessment and enables authentic and enriching learning experiences. To avoid using technology in a way that emphasizes routine drills focused on repetition with lower levels of adult support, leaders should [set standards](#) for [digital learning](#), and provide educators ample professional development on the effective use of technology. Additional strategies for the effective use of technology, are included in [Volume 2](#).

## b. The role of summative assessments

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) requires states to administer statewide annual assessments in mathematics and reading or language arts in grades 3 through 8 and at least once in grades 9 through 12. Science assessments must be administered at least once during grades 3 through 5, grades 6 through 9, and grades 10 through 12. These assessments must be developed and administered following national professional testing standards, including ensuring the accessibility of the assessments and that they are free from bias. Annual assessments may include projects, portfolios, and extended-performance tasks.

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<sup>5</sup> The “zone of proximal development” refers to “the space between what a learner can do without assistance and what a learner can do with adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.” See <https://www.wested.org/resources/zone-of-proximal-development/> for this definition and the role in supporting English learners.

The Department remains committed to supporting all states in assessing the learning of all students. Data on student learning obtained through high-quality summative assessments can help identify where opportunity gaps are persistent and have been exacerbated—particularly during the pandemic—and, along with other data, can help states direct resources and support to close those gaps. In [guidance provided to states](#) in February 2021, the Department emphasized the importance of flexibility in administering assessments in the 2020–2021 school year as a result of the pandemic and supported the use of assessment data as a source of information to help parents and educators target resources and support, rather than for accountability purposes.

Statewide assessment data provides a snapshot of student performance for educators, state and district leaders, and families that can be used to provide additional insight into how funds and other resources can be distributed to support students, educators, and parents/caregivers. For example, states can use data from these assessments to inform how they target funding from the [5 percent ARP ESSER state set-aside](#) to address the academic impact of lost instructional time. Participation and performance data from annual statewide assessments is required under the ESEA to be reported by student subgroup and can provide critical and comparable information to educators, state and district leaders, and families on the share of students who participated in the assessments and who did not participate by student subgroup and the impact of lost instructional time on student achievement across the state.

The Department encourages states, when posting state assessment results for the 2020–2021 school year, to prominently and in plain language provide information about the context of the data, including its limitations as a result of the pandemic. For example, in a situation where participation rates are low, uneven across student groups, or both as a result of the pandemic, the results should include clearly worded context that such data are incomplete and, where applicable, are not representative of the make-up of the state, district, or school population. As always, assessment data should be viewed alongside other important measures of student outcomes and opportunity to learn data to provide a more complete perspective on resources, support, and student success (examples of opportunity to learn indicators are included in [Volume 2](#)). As previously mentioned, the Department also encourages states and school districts to consider other steps within their purview to further reduce the stakes of assessments this year, such as excluding their use from students’ final grades, grade promotion decisions, educator evaluations, and local school ratings.

### c. Performance-based assessments

Diagnostic and summative assessments can include [performance assessments](#) and can be seamlessly integrated into teaching and learning processes. Performance assessments offer one way to develop useful information about how well students understand important concepts and can also be embedded into instructional lessons to support student learning. When well-designed, performance assessments can provide extensive and nuanced evidence of student abilities, including [meaningful insight](#) into student thinking and performance. States and districts could also provide rubrics and supports for teachers around developing learning goals, interpreting student performance, and next steps based on the information provided from these assessments.

Well-designed performance assessments can provide students with [culturally and linguistically responsive ways of demonstrating progress](#), while poorly executed assessments can be damaging to students’ progress. One example of how a district is using a performance assessment in a culturally and linguistically responsive way is the [Chicago Public School’s Curriculum Equity Initiative](#), which includes a



performance-based assessment system as part of the district-wide approach to culturally responsive and equitable teaching and learning. This includes an assessment system, with performance tasks, that is free from bias and reflects diverse communities, cultures, histories, and contributions. The system includes diagnostic and formative assessment supports as part of curriculum resources and a comprehensive data system that allows teachers to use performance-based assessments throughout the district to assess student progress over time. The Department’s Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast and Islands (REL NEI) also offers an [online course](#) for educators on using performance-based assessments.

#### d. Using assessments as part of understanding students’ social and emotional needs

Assessment practices can also be designed to help educators better understand students’ social and emotional needs. For example, formative assessment practices can include student discourse prompts and reading, writing, and oral reflections and activities that include [elements that are centered](#) on students’ experiences, perceptions, and identities. A blog series by the [National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment](#) describes some key activities states can take to include social and emotional learning as part of balanced systems of assessment. Another resource is RAND’s [SEL Assessment Finder](#), a web-based tool that provides information about assessments of interpersonal, intrapersonal, and higher-order cognitive competencies. District practitioners can use the tool to explore design features and intended uses of available assessments. Free resources also include the [Washoe County School District Social and Emotional Competency Assessments](#) that measure the self-reported social and emotional competencies of students in grades 5-12 and are available in Spanish.

Districts can also lead the development of these kinds of assessments themselves. For example, the [CORE districts](#) in California worked with partners to develop the [Rally Platform for Student Success](#) that enables districts and schools to consider comprehensive assessment data from multiple sources over time, together with well-being and learning conditions surveys, student reflections, and teacher notes. The Rally Platform includes predictive modeling of student performance based on a holistic picture of students’ experience and is used to support instructional planning and connecting students to appropriate available resources.

#### e. Supporting educator assessment literacy and development

In addition to supporting high-quality assessment instruments designed for student learning and growth, states and districts should provide educators with professional learning opportunities to build their assessment literacy. Assessment literacy refers to the knowledge, skills, and process associated with designing, selecting, implementing, scoring, and/or using high-quality assessments to improve student learning. Several examples of how to support educators include:

- In Oregon, the [Building Educator Assessment Literacy](#) (BEAL) project focuses on building educator capacity for using assessments through scoring Smarter Balanced performance tasks and reflecting on implications for teaching and improving student performance. Following BEAL trainings, 92 percent of educators reported having a better understanding of how to use curriculum-embedded performance assessments in their classroom, and 84 percent of educators reported that the professional development approach supported deeper understanding of the state standards.

- The National Education Association (NEA) has created a micro-credentials site with certification banks on a wide variety of topics to make it easier for educators to access professional learning opportunities. This includes the [Assessment Literacy stack](#), which includes six micro-credentials for educators to develop their knowledge and skills to utilize meaningful assessment practices.
- [The Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity \(SCALE\)](#), the [Center for Assessment, 2Revolutions](#), and others offer free courses and modules focused on classroom-based assessment literacy and performance assessment activities.

Districts such as Chicago Public Schools and San Francisco Unified School District are leveraging ongoing and embedded professional learning opportunities to focus on student work analysis from performance assessments and data deep-dives from other assessment sources to connect assessment literacy directly to teachers' classroom activities. In New Hampshire, the [Performance Assessments for Competency Education](#) (PACE) initiative centers teacher professional learning for performance assessment development, implementation, and scoring.

Principals also play a critical role in these previously described efforts and should be fully supported by states and districts as they work to implement these kinds of strategies. Principals and other school leaders are responsible for developing and monitoring systems to ensure the quality of instruction and student learning. Principals also play a critical role in the development and implementation of assessment systems by supporting staff in using multiple forms of assessment, providing feedback, and creating opportunities for students to demonstrate learning in an equitable, student-centered environment. Principals can also monitor and adjust targeted interventions based on ongoing screening and assessments, for example for students identified as multilingual learners or in need of additional supports. Principals should also ensure that parents receive the information they need to support their child's success.

#### f. Department resources

Resources provided by the Department to support states and districts in addressing the impact of COVID-19 on students, educators, staff, and families include:

- [Frequently Asked Questions: Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Programs Governor's Emergency Education Relief Programs](#)
- [ED COVID-19 Handbook, Volume 2: Roadmap to Reopening Safely and Meeting All Students' Needs](#)
- [Questions and Answers on Civil Rights and School Reopening in the COVID-19 Environment](#)
- [Frequently Asked ARP Homeless Children and Youth Questions and Answers](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions: Using American Rescue Plan Funding to Support Full-Service Community Schools & Related Strategies](#)
- [Safer Schools and Campuses Best Practices Clearinghouse](#)

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