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PUBLIC EDUCATION

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THE STATE OF THE AMERICAN STUDENT: FALL 2022
A GUIDE TO PANDEMIC RECOVERY AND REINVENTION

Reporter's Guide

QUESTIONS FOR ASSESSING HOW YOUR STATE OR DISTRICT IS TRACKING PANDEMIC IMPACT AND RECOVERY

The 2022-23 school year might mark a return to something resembling "normal" in education. But the effects of the pandemic still linger, and state and district leaders need to ensure every student catches up. As you plan to cover the consequences of learning delays and the promise of academic recovery in your communities, keep these key questions in mind.

Are student performance data publicly available, and are they broken out by student group (racial, demographic, students with disabilities, English learners, etc.) for each grade and subject?

Average figures mask inequity and variation of impact. The most vulnerable students suffered the most severe academic impact, and early data are showing they are also recovering at a slower pace, which is widening preexisting achievement gaps.

Federal law requires states to publish assessment data, high school graduation rates and chronic absenteeism data, disaggregated by student groups. But it's up to states to decide:

- When the data get released. Do they make results public within weeks after students take the tests, like Texas, or well into the following school year?

- The public accessibility of the data. Can parents easily access reports for their child's school or district?

- How much detail states report. Do they lump all students with disabilities into a single category, or do they allow the public to look closely at specific groups, like students with autism or learning disabilities? Do they report student results at the intersection of important characteristics, like disability and race?

- How student academic data relate to the Covid-19 pandemic. Does the state break out data based on whether students attended school primarily in person or remotely during the 2021-22 school year—a factor that experts agree mattered more than race or income in shaping how students fared during the pandemic?

Some states combine multiple data sources into a single accessible dashboard. Connecticut's EdSight integrates data from more than 30 different sources that can be analyzed by student groups. The dashboard reports attendance and participation data monthly to help identify and direct support to districts experiencing attendance declines.

Digging deeper into student characteristics, test results, and other data, such as attendance rates, can help reveal schools and districts worth highlighting—either for exemplary efforts supporting academic recovery, or for calling attention to groups whose needs are not being met by existing recovery efforts.

In some states, advocacy groups or independent researchers may already be exploring these connections, as the Helios Education Foundation has done in Arizona.

Has anyone clearly articulated the state's goals for student recovery?

State leaders must define what a successful recovery looks like for students and clearly communicate specific priorities for intervention and improvement.

Otherwise, they leave schools and districts on their own to set priorities for academic recovery, and leave parents and students with no guarantee that school systems will meet their needs.

North Dakota has developed a PK-12 Education Strategic Vision Framework with aspirational goals focused on student outcomes. The state's education department has also used some of its federal recovery funding to launch the Be Legendary School Board Leadership Institute, working with school board leaders to adopt student outcome goals and ensure their districts implement systems to monitor progress toward those goals.

Has a state or school district you cover articulated similar goals? Are those goals shaping other actions they take, or are they just a hollow bureaucratic exercise?

In the coming years, it will be worth following up: Is the state or school district reaching goals leaders set, and if not, how do they plan to adjust course to ensure every student gets back on track academically?

How does the state know its investments of federal relief funds are working?

To effectively evaluate what's working, states should publicly report per-pupil spending of their federal Covid-19 relief funding and evaluate what impact that spending is having on students' academic recovery.

Connecticut's COVID-19 Education Research Collaborative plans to evaluate investments to scrutinize recovery strategies, provide high-quality data, and guide resource decisions for the students most in need.

Government agencies collect and publish student and school data but often lack the capacity to produce targeted and timely research that evaluates how spending and policy decisions affect student results. Partnerships between researchers, policymakers and practitioners can help make faster sense of that data to inform decisions that might accelerate recovery.

For example, North Carolina's collaborative COVID-19 Learning Impact Program solicits research and evaluation proposals evaluating the impact of Covid-19 and the effectiveness of intervention strategies.

What are states and school districts doing to help students catch up—and how effective are those strategies?

Tutoring is a powerful, proven tool to help students make up academic ground.

But are states and school districts designing their tutoring initiatives in ways that research shows make them most effective?

Key features of evidence-based tutoring programs include:

- Training tutors to ensure they are equipped to give students effective support.

- Delivering a high enough "dosage" of tutoring to make an impact—at least three sessions per week or a weeklong intensive session.

- Offering tutoring during the school day to maximize student participation.

Enlisting enough tutors, training them adequately, and giving them ongoing support can be expensive, but offering tutoring on the cheap (for example, by skimping on training or settling for just one session per week) can reduce its effectiveness.

States and school systems can increase bang for the buck by focusing on the areas of highest need—for example, low-income students who spent the longest periods of time in remote learning and saw the most severe academic impact during the pandemic. Research, including evidence compiled by Brown University's Annenberg Institute, suggests tutoring initiatives can maximize their impact by focusing on the students who have fallen furthest behind.

There are also community organizations enlisting parents to help students catch up. With the right training and support from trained educators, community members and volunteers can be effective tutors.

How do tutoring initiatives in your state or district stack up with what research says will be most effective? Are districts partnering with organizations that can help make ambitious tutoring initiatives possible?

How did the pandemic affect absenteeism?

Student disengagement and absenteeism were problems before the pandemic. But they exploded after schools across the country shut down.

How are states and school districts reporting the numbers of students who are chronically missing from school, which is typically defined as being absent for 10% or more of the school year?

Do districts and state education departments disaggregate data by school and by demographic groups? How did these numbers shift during the pandemic, and are districts reaching out to these students to help them reconnect with school and overcome any barriers?

Keep in mind the pandemic may have shifted the profile of chronically absent students. For example, before the pandemic, the problem was heavily concentrated in schools with high poverty rates. An analysis by Johns Hopkins University researchers found 15% of Florida's schools were home to at least half the state's chronically absent students.

But there are signs the problem has become much more widespread. What do the data show in the states or school districts you cover? And how are school systems updating their responses as a result?

What are districts doing to fulfill their legal obligation to students with disabilities?

Throughout the pandemic, the federal government has been clear: Districts still needed to fulfill their legal obligation to provide special education services to students with disabilities.

The enormous disruption and, in some cases, regressions that these students and their families experienced during the pandemic were well documented. What are school districts doing to make these students whole?

Are they providing compensatory education services to help make up for special education services students did not receive during the pandemic? Are those efforts meeting the needs of students with disabilities, or are they falling short? Are they being scaled back as school systems return to normal?

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act allows anyone to file a state complaint if they feel the rights of a child have been violated (see this example complaint form from Florida). How did the number of complaints filed in your state change during school closures? How did it change after schools reopened?

How is your state (or local districts) seizing the window of opportunity for change and using one-time recovery dollars to support innovations that will result in durable systemic change?

States have an opportunity to use federal funding to implement innovative strategies that help students recover in the short term, but also produce lasting improvements in public education.

For example, Colorado Governor Jared Polis distributed $30 million in Response, Innovation, and Student Equity (RISE) Fund grants to help students in communities hit hard by the pandemic and produce "sustainable innovations" that improved educational opportunities for students.

Is your state or district using any of its federal relief funding to invest in lasting, systemic changes? What do those initiatives look like, and can they be sustained after federal funding dries up?

CRPE Resources

The Center on Reinventing Public Education is committed to tracking and reporting data on pandemic recovery as well as identifying promising innovations that reimagine teaching and learning.

This year's State of the American Student report is the first of a series of annual reports we will produce each fall through 2027. The following CRPE research is devoted to following recovery and reinvention during that time, including:

- The Evidence Project, our collection of pandemic-related data on schools and families, will soon begin highlighting the latest nationwide research on academic and social recovery. Keep up by subscribing to the free newsletter or use keywords to search our research tracker.

- CRPE has also collected and analyzed extensive data on school district pandemic responses. You can access reports on specific topics and can search records by district or city on our website.

- We're also committed to identifying the most innovative American learning environments and highlighting what they're doing differently, especially when it comes to helping marginalized students succeed. The Canopy project, a joint effort between CRPE and Transcend, an education nonprofit, features profiles of creative school models that hold promise for replication and expansion.

- Our research on pandemic learning pods and hubs offers important ideas about what families and teachers value that larger systems should consider. In the future, we're planning to explore new approaches to learning that arose inside and outside traditional education systems, before and after the pandemic.

- For promising ways districts and states are spending their federal dollars to support recovery and reimagining, visit the EduRecoveryHub, co-sponsored by CRPE, the Collaborative for Student Success and the Edunomics Lab.

- For big ideas about how to move to a more joyful, equitable and resilient education system, see CRPE.org and, in particular, our 25th anniversary series Thinking Forward.

Get in touch with relevant CRPE experts

ROBIN LAKE, DIRECTOR: Public education and the pandemic, students with disabilities and other complex learning needs, education system change.

BREE DUSSEAULT, PRINCIPAL AND MANAGING DIRECTOR: School system pandemic responses, learning acceleration strategies.

CHELSEA WAITE, PRINCIPAL: Education innovation.

To speak with one of these or other experts or to learn more about our work, please contact Lisa Cohen at lisacohencomm@gmail.com or 310-395-2544.

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