

Summary



In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in March, 2020, metro Atlanta school districts closed their buildings and transitioned to virtual learning for the remainder of the school year. While everyone is awaiting guidance from public health experts around reopening dates and processes, our region's school districts have been busy preparing contingency plans for the start of the 2020-2021 school year. An important consideration in these plans is the projected learning loss students might experience as a result of schools' abrupt transition to virtual learning; projections suggest that the region's proficiency will drop by 3.6 points in ELA and 4.9 points in math. In light of this, Learn4Life reviewed district strategy documents and interviewed metro Atlanta's superintendents, who together are responsible for educating more than 600,000 students, to ask how they plan to deliver instruction in the coming months. The following is not a comprehensive list of every strategy, but rather a selection of innovative practices that have the potential to scale across the region.

Questions

- What are your plans for summer school?
- Given the absence of 2020 Georgia Milestones test results, what are your plans to establish a baseline of student learning as they return to school?
- Are you considering any new academic interventions for struggling students?
- Are you planning on any new investments in teacher professional development as a result of this crisis?
- Are you considering any new investments in wraparound supports (mental health, physical health, afterschool)?
- What do you need from the philanthropic, nonprofit or business communities?

School Districts

- [Atlanta Public Schools](#) (APS)
- [Clayton County Public Schools](#) (CCPS)
- [Cobb County School District](#) (CCSD)
- [City Schools of Decatur](#) (CSD)
- [DeKalb County School District](#) (DCSD)
- [Fulton County Schools](#) (FCS)
- [Gwinnett County Public Schools](#) (GCPS)
- [Marietta City Schools](#) (MCS)



Summer School Planning

Why it's Important

As the end of an unprecedented school year approaches, districts and schools are tasked with providing continuity for student learning (Office of Special Education Programs, 2020). In the immediate term, school districts are considering ways to can expand and enrich learning opportunities for students, especially students in disadvantaged communities and struggling learners. Summer school opportunities could assist schools with providing learning continuity amid school closures and address a potential 'COVID-19 slide' (Dixon, 2020).

District Innovative Practices

- **Provide free virtual summer school focused on remediation:** Summer learning sessions will include teacher led instruction ([CSD](#), [MCS](#)), and self-guided instruction with pre-recorded videos and tasks ([MCS](#), [APS](#), [CSD](#), [GCPS](#)). Some schools will also provide online tutoring each week in elementary and middle grades math and reading; education majors and graduate students will be assigned to specific students, meeting with them at least once per week for review and additional help (MCS).
- **Tentatively plan for in-person instruction in July:** Schools will provide 3rd-12th grade students who were unable to complete more than 70% of remote instruction with blended model instruction ([FCS](#)).
- **Prepare students for transition:** Students will have an opportunity to attend an orientation event to prepare them for their virtual summer programming ([CCSD](#)). Students will also have the option to audit classes with no risk to their GPA or academic standing ([CCSD](#)).
- **Offer enrichment programming:** Schools will provide advanced learning options (e.g. Virtual Summer Learning, STEM camps) for students grades K-11, during the months of June and July ([CCPS](#)).



Assessment Strategy for Fall Return

Why it's Important

Assessments allow schools to make critical education decisions. The disruption of assessments this past spring limits teachers' ability to gauge students' academic levels. As students return to school in the fall, research from the Center of Assessment (2020) highlights that the most urgent assessment needs should center on identifying the specific learning needs of students. These findings will assist schools with adopting appropriate interventions that address specific learning gaps (Boyer, 2020).

District Innovative Practices

- **Pause to acclimate:** Schools will wait two weeks to administer fall assessments to allow time for socio-emotional adjustments for students (FCS, CCPS), and deliver standardized "launch" units to get students re-engaged (CCSD).
- **Deliver norm-based assessments:** Districts will implement or expand [MAP](#) (CCPS, CSD, DCSD, MCS) or [i-Ready](#) (CCPS, FCS). Several districts administered those tests in early 2020 so students can be reassessed against that baseline to check progress.
- **Focus on minimal testing:** Districts will remove a lot of testing (longer district benchmarks) to allow for more teaching (CCPS).
- **Create and administer centralized unit pre-tests rather than standardized norm-based assessments:** Schools will administer short (10 minute) formative assessments so teachers know specific gaps for the next unit rather than a global reassessment of learning loss ([GCPS](#)).
- **Establish baselines:** Student progress and mastery levels will be assessed at the beginning of the year and monitored using the middle of the year and end of year benchmarks (CCPS).



Supports for Struggling Learners

Why it's Important

Students have not been in a traditional classroom setting since the beginning of March. While it is difficult to speculate how the damage caused from missing months of school will impact students, research on 'summer slide' suggests that, on average, students experience about a month of learning loss over the summer break and low- income students are generally more affected (Quinn & Polikoff, 2017). In the coming months, school districts are tasked with addressing how best to bridge learning gaps for struggling learners.

District Innovative Practices

- **Restructure instructional time:** Schools will be encouraged to repurpose approximately 45 minutes of the elementary school day for academic support (FCS).
- **Find additional hours to catch students up:** The district will consider using what would have been fall break to continue virtual instruction (MCS). There is also consideration of providing additional learning time built-into the master schedule and/or Saturday academy and after school supplements if budgets allow (CCPS, DCSD).
- **Rollout intensive instruction:** Students who were absent during virtual learning will be placed in small pull out groups for several weeks to receive interventions for spring 2020 curriculum (MCS).
- **Offer virtual education supplements:** Tools like iReady, [Read 180](#), [System 44](#) and [Dreambox](#) will be available to provide supplemental support for students while they are not in the building (APS, CCSD). APS' "Summer Recharge" can be found [here](#).
- **Focus on critical standards:** Over the summer, schools will rebuild the scope and sequence with extra emphasis on the power standards (FCS).



Teacher Professional Development

Why it's Important

In the fall, students are likely to return to school further behind than in a typical school year, and virtual learning in the summer and possibly the fall may complicate teachers' ability to plan how best to approach instruction. Now more than ever there is an urgency to educate students and have well-prepared teachers (Deans for Impact, 2020). To address this, school districts will need to retool professional development experiences so that both current and new teachers are set up for success in the months ahead.

District Innovative Practices

- **Rearrange professional development opportunities:** Schools will (a) shift some of the '20-21 post-planning days to pre-planning days (APS) and (b) build seven days into the '20-21 calendar in which students will learn virtually to allow for more teacher professional development opportunities (CCPS).
- **Train teacher leaders:** Schools will select teacher leaders in each content area to receive training from central office staff and vendor-partners during the summer, and the teacher leaders will provide job-embedded support to their colleagues throughout the school year (CCPS).
- **Video record exemplar teachers:** The district will highlight best instructional practices for teachers to view and learn from (FCS).
- **Provide new teachers with digital onboarding:** Previously, only HR processes were completely online, now all orientation for new teachers is available virtually (GCPS).
- **Deliver professional development via Zoom:** Training will be delivered to teachers over Zoom to model how to use tools to deliver instruction (CSD, CCSD).



Additional Wraparound Services

Why it's Important

Research highlights that there is a positive correlation between students' social and emotional skills and their academic outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011). It is likely that the relationships and support systems upended by recent school closures will present both changes and challenges to students and staff (Walker, 2020). As schools and districts continue to look for ways to repair the damage caused by the pandemic's interruptions to learning trajectories (Daniel, 2020), the social and emotional impacts of the pandemic should also remain a priority.

District Innovative Practices

- **Expand social-emotional support:** Schools will (a) offer mindfulness clubs to all MS and HS students (CCPS), (b) implement the [Rethink Ed SEL](#) curriculum and professional learning modules with all stakeholders; (CCPS), (c) encourage HS students to participate in "You Are Not Alone" sessions via social media f (MCS), and (d) Retool SEL curriculum to include modules for COVID (FCS).
- **Support basic needs:** The district will add greater capacity within the student center for counseling and the food/clothing pantry (CSD).
- **Encourage trauma-informed care and practices for teachers and students:** Districts are forging partnerships with wraparound providers like [CHRIS 180](#) (APS), and increasing the number of school-based mental health providers (DCSD).
- **Provide remote instructional support:** Schools will work to expand [tutor.com](#) and partnerships with library system (GCPS). Schools will also incorporate what students enjoyed about virtual learning into the new school year (CCSD).



Community Support

Needs from philanthropic, business, and nonprofit partners

- **Support extra-educational needs:** School districts need to maintain a focus on teaching and learning, so it is important for other sectors to fill in needs that fall outside of school districts' primary missions, including:
 - Food security
 - Wireless connectivity and devices for all household members
 - Family services such as mental health counseling and rent support
- **Access to unrestricted funds:** Educational needs are changing quickly during this crisis. Districts need more flexibility to respond nimbly to the changing landscape.
- **Continued non-profit coordination:** The community has rallied around the common cause and goals for the past two months. Districts are eager to see that level of coherence continue.

Citations

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