



DISTRICT CONSIDERATION GUIDANCE TO SUPPORT

# Learning Acceleration

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IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOMS

2021



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## INTRODUCTION

The school year of 2020-2021 has been challenging for all of us. COVID-19 has affected in-person learning for over 55.1 million children across the country. Certainly, there are many more early childhood students who have been affected that have not been captured in the recorded data.

During this time, educators had to reach children in multiple ways to ensure learning was taking place, as well as, take care of their own families. Social and emotional well-being became, and still is, at the forefront for all stakeholders involved in the education of our students. Learning cannot take place or be built upon without meeting students' basic needs of feeling safe and secure in their learning environment.

District Consideration Guidance to Support Learning Acceleration in Early Childhood Classrooms has been created to help school districts think meaningfully about how to approach the upcoming school year to provide the best pathways of learning for students in school districts. This document provides considerations for summer/fall school innovations to extended day and community partnerships. Districts are encouraged to use these considerations when developing a plan to use federal funds to accelerate student learning due to COVID-19.

According to Darling-Hammond and Edgerton, a supportive return to school to accelerate learning should involve redesigning the school so that it is relationship friendly, supporting brain development and learning through expressive art, exercise, and outdoor play, assigning learning tasks that are authentic and culturally responsive, intensively tutoring through additional learning time, and assessing what students need socially, emotionally, and academically (Darling-Hammond & Edgerton, 2021).

Through intentional planning, using evidenced-based interventions and curricula, engagement strategies, and a commitment to teaching at grade-level, students will be able to excel, expand, and accelerate their knowledge throughout the school year.

## **DISTRICT CONSIDERATION GUIDANCE TO SUPPORT LEARNING ACCELERATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOMS**

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The purpose of this guidance document is to inform districts of considerations to support learning acceleration of students in the early childhood classroom. These considerations are recommendations to provide a more targeted effort in helping schools mitigate learning.

### **Consideration 1 – Summer School Innovations**

To prepare students for fall academic instruction consider the following flexible summer opportunities:

- **Kindergarten Camp/First Grade Camp**  
Providing summer school or summer camp for early childhood students with a focus on social emotional skills allows students the opportunity to adjust to school, cope with separation anxiety, have access to behavior interventions, and develop executive functioning skills such as self-regulation. Offering students and families access to mental health advocates, crafts, and games through programming will strengthen basic academic skills through social engagement that will prove to be useful with peers. These project-based, community-school model, and character-building programs can deliver these services in the school community that are easily accessible for families. Nature-centered programs focus on science in addition to other content areas and social emotional standards. You can look for examples of these programs through your local extension service, natural science museum, or textbook companies.
- **Digital Self-Paced Learning Programs**  
Technology has become a permanent part of everyone’s life. Because students learn at different levels, having a digital self-paced learning program for all students to build mastery of academic skills at their own pace is essential to the growth of each student. Using a digital self-paced program consistently is also a good way to involve parents in their student’s learning without overwhelming them.
- **Restore Gaps in Learning and Focus on Lower-Level Skills to Work Toward Mastery**  
To lower the stress level in students about attending summer school, students should work on lower-grade level skills to build mastery in standards that were taught the previous year.
- **Staff Attend Intensive Professional Development**  
The summer is a great time to invest in teachers to provide intensive professional development in areas such as technology, differentiated instruction, hybrid instruction, and quality lesson planning through both in-person and virtual training.
- **Food Insecurities**  
Providing breakfast and lunch during the summer or during times when school is out helps to supplant meals not being provided by parents or caregivers who work during the day while school is out. Having bus delivery available to provide food in areas where students live provides reliability and accessibility, particularly for those who have no means of transportation to get to summer feeding programs.

## **Consideration 2 – Fall In-School Innovations**

To help students become successful during the school year consider the following:

- **Kindergarten to First Grade Transition Class**

This transition class consideration is for first graders who are not developmentally ready to thrive in first grade. Students in this class would spend the first few weeks focused on selected kindergarten skills that are needed to be successful throughout the year in grade one. After the first few weeks, the children would transition into regular first grade content.
- **Restructure Early Childhood Teaching Staff**

As a result of a significant drop in kindergarten enrollment for the 2020-2021 school year due to COVID-19, consider restructuring the teaching staff, including assistant teachers, to adjust to the significant increase of students that may enroll in kindergarten or first grade depending upon district enrollment policies. Consider using multiple pieces of data such as where the student attended the prior year, screener information such as Brigance, social emotional readiness, parent information, MKAS, etc., to determine placement to ensure student success. Reviewing data will be substantially important for the six-year-old student entering first grade.
- **Support Pre-K to Kindergarten & Kindergarten to First Grade Looping**

In this time of uncertainty, having a consistent teacher for two years to work with the same students lessens the demand of another teacher trying to assess where a student is academically and social-emotionally. The looping teacher generally has an understanding of what the student knows from the previous year which can result in the student making better connections to the curriculum. Additionally, rapport with the teacher will already be built, so students will be able to move into content more readily. Teachers will also have more knowledge of family background and student needs that will prove beneficial for both teaching content and school/home communication.
- **Intensive Professional Development**

More intensive Universal Design for Learning (UDL) training for teachers to help accelerate learning is crucial now more than ever. Discovering new ways and improving old ways to conduct interventions and differentiate instruction in the hybrid school era is vital not only to students but also to classroom management. Teaching to the far ends of the learning spectrum and not to the “average student” will help growth.
- **Intensive Wellness Training**

Strategies to manage stress, burnout, and other social-emotional needs help teachers respond skillfully to the demands of the classroom environment. Results of wellness training will be improved instruction, more emotional support for students, and a greater self-efficacy.
- **Food Insecurities**

Providing not only breakfast and lunch, but also an afternoon snack during the school day for all early childhood classrooms will provide the extra energy students need to get through the school day. This is especially important if the students eat lunch prior to 11 a.m. in the morning and if the parent or caregiver does not get home until later in the evening to prepare dinner for the family.

### **Consideration 3 – Extended Day**

To provide enrichment for extended student success consider the following:

- **Provide Academic Enrichment/Tutoring**  
Consider holding extended day services for pre-k through first grade students before school, after-school, or both for enrichment or tutoring services. Some students need extra support to get them to the next level. Providing flexible assistance for these students will help them make gains academically while nurturing their social-emotional development.
- **Alternate Enrichment/Tutoring Teachers**  
Consider providing tutoring three or four days a week. If using the four-day method, hire enough teachers so that they only work two days a week to avoid burn-out from working extra hours. Possibly contract with childcare providers or youth programs to work with children after school on campus. Hold weekly meetings with staff to exchange information to ensure the students are working on skills to get them to the next level.
- **Food Insecurities**  
Providing either breakfast, an end of day meal or snack, or both, will depend on the type of extended day program offered. Making sure that a child's basic needs are met in terms of food should be addressed in all areas of the school day.

### **Consideration 4 – Community Partnerships**

To assist with the opportunities of tutoring and mentoring consider the following:

- **Partner with Child/Youth Programs**  
Consider partnering with youth programs, area high schools, childcare centers, Head Start centers, churches, and businesses to cooperatively work together to assist each other and specifically students who need more development. Since most middle and high school students must obtain community service hours, tutoring students will serve as a win for both the school district and the partnering child/youth agency. When partnering with one of these groups, school districts should create a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), or a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the partner by establishing a plan that all can agree on and get the proper signatures for support. All communication between partners will need to be documented and placed with the agreement. Both the school district and the partner should have copies of the documents on file.

## **RESOURCES**

Accelerating Learning as We Build Back Better:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/lindadarlinghammond/2021/04/05/accelerating-learning-as-we-build-back-better/?sh=314f515e6722>

Building Positive Relationships with Young Children:

<https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/building-positive-relationships-with-young-children.pdf>

Calming/Self-Managing Resources:

Help us Calm Down: [https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Calm-Down\\_Posters\\_EN.pdf](https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Calm-Down_Posters_EN.pdf)

Help us Stay Calm: [https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Stay-Calm\\_Infographic.pdf](https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Stay-Calm_Infographic.pdf)

Darling-Hammond, L., & Edgerton, A. (2021, April 5). Accelerating Learning as We Build Back Better. Forbes. Retrieved from:

<http://forbes.com/sites/lindadarlinghammond/2021/04/05/accelerating-learning-as-we-build-back-better/>

Life is Good Playmakers - The Healing Power of Optimism:

<https://www.lifeisgood.com/kidsfoundation/playmakers-work.html>

Mississippi Department of Education Office of Child Nutrition: <https://www.mdek12.org/OCN>

Mississippi Museum of Natural Science: <https://www.mdwfp.com/museum.aspx>

Mississippi State University Extension Service: <http://extension.msstate.edu/>

National Head Start Association - Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Tool Kit:

<https://www.nhsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/toolkit-new-early-childhood-coordination-requirements-in-the-essa.pdf>

Overcoming COVID-19 Learning Loss:

<https://www.edweek.org/leadership/overcoming-covid-19-learning-loss/2020/08>

Rebuilding the Pyramid: Reconnecting After a Break:

<https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Rebuilding-the-Pyramid.pdf>