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**Learning
Goes On**

A COVID-19 Resource for Education

February 12, 2021 Edition



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More resources and training for teachers, school administrators, families and communities are on our [Learning Goes On website](#). See [Spanish-language version](#) of this edition.

Education News

National – New CDC Guidelines

The [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#) issued new guidelines today for how schools should operate safely during the pandemic, being careful to note

they are not mandating that schools reopen. The “operational strategy” released today includes recommendations for determining the safest learning options for schools (fully in-person, hybrid, fully virtual) based on a four-tier scale that considers the rates of disease transmission in the community.

Additionally, the CDC recommends schools adopt five “layered mitigation” strategies with research-based practices which, in combination, should help to ensure student and staff safety in schools:

- Universal and correct use of masks, which should be required for all students and staff;
- Physical distancing of at least six feet, with classes reduced to smaller groups of students, or “pods,” to ensure separation;
- Hand washing and other respiratory infection prevention procedures;
- Frequently and thoroughly cleaning school facilities and ensuring effective ventilation systems; and
- Contact tracing protocols that allow for rapid responses to COVID-19 outbreaks.

Finally, the CDC encouraged states and schools to prioritize teachers and other school staff for vaccinations (though the CDC maintains that not all teachers must be vaccinated for schools to reopen safely). Additionally, schools should facilitate testing and ensure that reopening plans take into account the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on communities of color.

The CDC strategies will be supplemented by a scientific brief by the CDC and a [multi-volume handbook with school re-opening and safety recommendations issued by the U.S. Department of Education](#).

Texas – STAAR News

Texas Education Commissioner Morath [spoke with the Texas](#)

[Tribune](#) about the state of education during the pandemic. He noted that while the state’s assessment, STAAR, would be conducted in-person in order to gather data about student learning, a virtual option would not be offered, and families would not be required to bring their children into schools for testing.



He also shared his thoughts on the best ways to address educational inequities for students of color, including “increasing the rigor of the content students learn, supporting teachers’ professional growth and increasing the length of the school year.” He did not answer whether school funding would be cut due to COVID-19-related dips in student attendance – a concern shared by many school districts and advocates.

See [IDRA’s Recommendations for the 87th Legislative Session](#), including recommendations to extend hold harmless provisions and protect funding for

public schools.

Policy Update

If Teachers Controlled the Education Budget

In [IDRA's course at Texas A&M University-Commerce](#), we asked a group of current and former educators what they would do if they had power over the state's budget and could direct funds to make the greatest impact for our education system.

Below is what they said and a way for you to share your ideas.



“Oh, how nice this would be: unlimited funding. The power to pass any budget? Wow... **I would fund training.** This is an all-around training focus. Yes, training for technology that we so desperately needed when schools went online, but also training for career and further education resources along with the salary so that we can fund more counselors.”

“Teachers need **resources in their classrooms** to be successful. Many teachers do not have adequate resources to teach in the manner they need... Many teachers and students who do have technology do not have the proper training needed to use the technology in the most effective manner. Offering training for teachers and students could benefit everyone in the school community.”



“**Family and community engagement opportunities** are a great way to build the partnership between the school district, and the community in turn can help the success of the overall school community. By providing resources and training for families, the school district would be gaining the support and trust of those families within the community.”

“More funding for **mental health**, including SEL [social emotional learning]. Children and adults need to express their concerns.”

“I would **increase salaries** across-the-board for the industry of education. This industry should be competitive as a necessary and high-priority industry for attracting and retaining valuable members. It would be great if this industry could be one that people move toward because of the good pay.”

“Students, teachers and staff across the state should be given and/or have **access to current technologies** to help them complete their job

requirements. This could work even better if individuals could be given a fund or allocation to spend this money on their specific technology needs. For example, teachers each year should be given an allotment of a minimum of \$1,000 to spend on their technology needs for the school year. These funds would help to increase the potential for higher engagement and new instructional techniques where students would greatly benefit. This would need to be a reoccurring fund to keep up with the changes in advancements in technologies.”

“I would spend a significant amount of funding the **overall infrastructure** for new or renovated campuses and facilities across the state. Campuses are not able to keep up with the advances in technology and other resources that are currently available, and the system is in need of costly repairs just to keep the buildings open. Funding options directed specifically toward the infrastructure of districts could help speed up this process and take the burden off local communities.”



“A lack of broadband connectivity has widened the equity gap throughout the state. Training teachers to properly utilize technology will support the teachers, and students will benefit from a more enriched instructional experience. Working in a **safe and healthy environment** helps one focus on quality instruction and bridge the socio-emotional support that all students crave: person-to-person interaction.”

“It is well past time to get creative when it comes to fostering **active family engagement**, especially in critically impacted communities. Investing in schools goes beyond updating infrastructure and resources and moves into the realm of outreach. Would it be easier to get parents in buildings, in classrooms, involved if schools had community use laundry facilities? Or a day care? Or free family breakfast? What if schools also invested in parents and were able to offer a variety of helpful and fun night classes related to the GED or English language instruction or cooking classes or guitar lessons? What if schools also hosted various well-funded and intentionally advertised cultural events and community celebrations?”



school, at every level.”

“In a world that requires digitally-powered education, our education system is behind the eight ball when it comes to technology. The divide between the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ is appalling. But even more appalling is the fact that the technology in the hands of the ‘haves’ is outdated and, in most cases, antiquated. So, the benchmark we are using for a best-case scenario of bridging the digital divide is subpar at best. **Educational technology needs an overhaul** statewide, at every

“It’s time schools were **staffed in ways that make sense**. Students deserve timely and thoughtful feedback along with true data-driven instruction with personalized reteach and enrichment opportunities. At the same time, teachers deserve to have full lives outside of school. Funding could significantly reduce caseloads of teachers and mental health personnel to ensure that students get what they need while their supporting adults don’t struggle with feeling overwhelmed to the point of inadequacy.”

“My first priority will be to establish a comprehensive plan to support school efforts to establish and to provide for a **safe, conducive learning environment** for all our students. This means [personal protective] equipment (PPE), testing, contact tracing and vaccination. If students are not safe, it is harder for students to learn. Children whose learning has been disrupted from areas that are especially hit hard by the pandemic, like Laredo, Texas, or Los Angeles, are poised to observe significant learning losses. Getting a handle on the pandemic should, therefore, be a top priority.”

In IDRA’s course through Texas A&M University-Commerce, we are supporting the development of scholar/educator advocates who can understand and influence state policymaking. These students are helping us to examine and refine our own policy positions and how they impact schools.

Do you have ideas for how you would spend funds on public schools?

Share them with the hashtag:

#WhatSchoolsNeed.



Follow us on Twitter, [@IDRAedu](https://twitter.com/IDRAedu), and follow IDRA's Education Policy Fellows, [@IDRAeduFellows](https://twitter.com/IDRAeduFellows).

If you would like to be more involved in the education advocacy work IDRA is doing with students, families, teachers and others with lived expertise, [join Texas Education CAFE Advocacy Network](#) (see below for details).



IDRA Classnotes Podcast #208

To my teacher colleagues...

Remember the impact that you have. It doesn't matter if you're virtual or you're in person. What you say, how you act, how you interact with your kids, it says something to them. And you may not know the impact you have on them for a couple of years. That impact is probably even more important now that kids are isolated socially. Just remember, your words and actions mean so much to your kids.

— Jennifer Schulze-Aguirre, M.A.
Brandeis High School, Northside ISD



Podcast episode: Teaching High-Level Math through Distance Learning

<https://idra.news/Pod208>



New Classnotes Podcast Episode Teaching High-Level Math through Distance Learning

Math is proving to be the subject that is experiencing the greatest distance learning challenges for students at all age levels. Numerous studies are showing the effects of the disruptions of COVID-19 on student learning leading to students being significantly behind in math. No doubt, schools will adjust to help students get back on track. But what about students who are close to graduating and those taking higher-level math courses?

We welcome on our podcast high school educator, Jennifer Schulze-Aguirre, M.A., who teaches Algebra 1 through AP Calculus BC at Brandeis High School in Northside ISD. She has a master's degree in curriculum and instruction with a math emphasis and has been teaching teenagers for 14 years. In this episode, she discusses the challenges that are unique to math through distance learning. And she describes the creative ways she is addressing them and how she will transfer those strategies to her classroom after the pandemic.

Get details and listen now!

The Role of Principals

Educational Leadership in Unpredictable Times

It is safe to say, no school principal expected the job to be easy. But schooling during a pandemic can make the most experienced principal feel like a novice.



Prior to COVID-19, IDRA led [leadership coaching](#) in several schools with a focus on equipping principals to be visionary leaders, student advocates, instructional leaders, collaborators and risk-taking innovators to improve student achievement. Even though the pandemic brought extraordinary challenges, these leadership skills provide the foundation for effective principal leadership in such a chaotic time.

This year, principals across the country strove to demonstrate calm amid a storm. School administrators have to diligently foster hope and encouragement among their staff. This means creating space in new ways to check in with faculty, staff and community members and to listen to their perspectives while honoring their contributions.

Building trust has become a priority as misinformation spreads and correct information changes regarding not just the virus and health precautions but also state and local policies affecting school operations.

School leaders of course must stay up to date with public health conditions and local responses. Teachers and staff look to their leaders as models for healthy behaviors and disease mitigation.

Effective leaders take steps to remove irrelevant duties and lighten the task load to make space for new responsibilities and work environments teachers face. This includes providing flexible deadlines to prioritize the most important duties.

A particularly large challenge many people working remotely continue to struggle with is the sense of constantly being on the clock. For the sake of their staff and long-term impact, leaders must define realistic boundaries and adhere to them.

It is important for leaders to be observant and know the needs of the people they work with. Empathy and authenticity are competencies that leaders

demonstrate and model to influence and help others to lead. Building meaningful relationships, providing emotional support, and offering a space to provide comfort when in distress shows that leaders are willing to talk through concerns. It is crucial to lead with empathy, strive for flexibility, and model behaviors that prioritize the health and well-being of the people we work with and serve.

Many of the methods teachers used in the past to support students are not possible right now. They need altered systems to help them engage students, promote attendance and promote learning. Leaders can provide coaching and mentoring to promote professional growth for adapting to this new environment and preparing for the next school year.

Effective leaders create meaningful ways to connect with families to explain safety measures and academic expectations and to assure families that the school's structures are in place. It is critical that leaders have a listening ear for family insights, concerns and partnership for students' progress.

Students must have access to rigorous curriculum and lessons that prepare them for college. This has not changed during COVID-19. Assessment and monitoring should be ongoing to determine mastery. With genuine support, students will master the academic concepts, high expectations and objectives of each content area.

In education, the principal is second only to the teacher as the individual who impacts student success the most. With the skills and strategies listed above, principals can strengthen teacher and staff resilience and advance student academic outcomes – even during a pandemic.



Upcoming Webinar

Principals Leading in a Pandemic

IDRA
International District of Regency Associates

Equitable Practices for Online Learning
free webinar series

<https://idra.news/LearningGoesOn>

Principals Leading in a Pandemic

February 25, 2021 • 2:00 pm - 3:30 pm cst

Educational leaders are juggling many priorities with the extraordinary challenges COVID-19 brought for principals and all campus administrators. This webinar will explore lessons learned during the pandemic on how to provide thoughtful and effective leadership.

Principals Dr. Timothy Vaughn from Edgewood ISD and Rawan Hammoudeh from San Antonio ISD will join Dr. Nilka Avilés of IDRA to discuss the competencies they have used in finding solutions to the challenges and concerns during this pandemic.

[Visit our website](#)

Webinar Recording

Impact of the Pandemic on Bilingual Education

In-person student engagement with teachers is ideal for listening, speaking and other social interactions that are critical parts of language development. But virtual platforms and limited in-person engagement caused by COVID-19 precautions hinder such engagement.



Our latest webinar features a phenomenal Texas educator, Grace Delgado, executive director of multilingual services for Aldine ISD. She reviews programming and instructional considerations for bilingual education and serving emergent bilingual students, as well as relevant applications for virtual and remote learning.

This webinar is part of the IDRA EAC-South's free [webinar series on Equitable Practices for Online Learning](#).

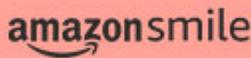
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With Amazon Smile, you can shop while raising money for a cause you care about! Visit smile.amazon.com and select IDRA as your charity. Thank you for helping IDRA support teachers & families to ensure that Learning Goes On during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond!



Texas Education CAFE Advocacy Network

JOIN TODAY!

IDRA's Texas Education CAFE™ Advocacy Network



Family & community advocacy network focusing on education issues in the Texas legislative session

<https://idra.news/Subscribe>

IDRA's family leadership in education process, [Education CAFE™](#), supports parents and caregivers to understand and influence public school policy and

practice. Families in Texas have various opportunities to inform legislators and staff about their priorities, needs and hopes for the education of their children, from birth through college graduation.

Due to COVID-19, there will be a drastic change in how the general public can interact with policymakers during the Texas legislative session. Now more than ever, policymakers need to hear from the very people their decisions will impact. IDRA launched a family and community advocacy network focusing on education issues in the Texas legislative session. We invite families and community advocates to join in.

Start by signing up to receive our new email alerts, available in English and Spanish.

[Sign up now!](#)

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The Intercultural Development Research Association is an independent, non-profit organization. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.

IDRA works hand-in-hand with hundreds of thousands of educators and families each year in communities and classrooms around the country. All our work rests on an unwavering commitment to creating self-renewing schools that value and promote the success of students of all backgrounds.