AASA COVID-19 RECOVERY TASK FORCE
GUIDELINES FOR REOPENING SCHOOLS:
An Opportunity to Transform Public Education

Introduction

AASA, The School Superintendents Association, is committed to supporting superintendents and other school district leaders throughout the country during this challenging and unprecedented time. The following report presents a synthesis of the **Guidelines for Reopening Schools** recommended by superintendents throughout the United States as part of an ongoing AASA task force.

During meetings of the task force, participants shared their own leadership experiences and insights during the COVID-19 crisis and interacted with other superintendents to recommend responses to the following essential questions:

- What are current superintendents thinking about the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and its impact on their school districts and communities?
- What are their plans so far for reopening?
- How can we bring consistency and alignment to formulate a set of recommendations to address the multiple issues associated with reopening?

AASA Executive Director Dan Domenech has continually emphasized the need for a clear national plan considering the diverse approaches and conflicting messages evident in states and districts and the multiple contingencies that may arise in light of the COVID-19 crisis. At the same time, he and the other task force participants agree that this unprecedented era represents a startling new time in public education. It provides superintendents, staff, students and families the chance to revitalize education as a public institution and incorporate strategies and processes proven effective in making education for all learners equitable, experiential, engaging and authentic.

Perhaps the most striking outcome of the task force discussions is a universal commitment to transforming the crisis we are facing into the opportunity to change public education as we know it. As Dan Domenech suggested at the conclusion of the May 13, 2020, task force meeting: *This is the beginning of a powerful change in American education. We all agree that we cannot return to business as usual. This can be a watershed point in our history where we succeed in promoting equity and excellence for all learners.*

This detailed AASA task force report includes recommendations for addressing the complex range of logistical and financial issues related to reopening. However, it goes beyond the traditional logistics of reopening schools and presents a comprehensive overview of the implications of reopening for transforming public education as we know it, including curriculum, instruction, assessment and professional development implications for educational leaders to consider as we move into the 2020-21 academic year.

AASA will continue to update this report and related resources posted on the AASA website as changes and updates occur at federal, state and local levels. As part of that process, we invite superintendents and staff to share with us their success stories and updates on emerging issues confronting them in this process of reopening and transforming public education.

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Summary of Task Force Highlights and Recommendations

Superintendents from throughout the United States participated in a series of Zoom meetings facilitated by Dan Domenech, executive director of AASA. The first meeting (May 4, 2020) encouraged participants to share their leadership experiences throughout the continuing COVID-19-related crisis; the second meeting (May 13, 2020) extended and refined the discussion to begin the work of formulating guidelines for reopening designed to ensure consistency of messaging and focus at a national level; and the final meeting (May 20, 2020) resulted in group consensus about these guidelines and their utility to guide both the reopening process and education throughout the coming academic year.

The ongoing discourse and recommendations generated by the 27 superintendents and state executives who participated in the task force center around 10 priority areas. These areas reinforce participants' agreement that reopening is just a starting point, and that the coming academic year must reflect the necessary changes revealed during the crisis, including an expanded focus on the safety, physical, social and emotional needs of students and staff.

As the group moved toward consensus, the following recurrent issues and concerns were evident:

- **Health and Safety as Essential Priorities:** Participants agreed that the health, safety and well-being of students, staff and families is a primary priority during reopening and throughout the coming academic year. Caution is essential and the need to restructure to conform to CDC guidelines is imperative, including acquiring resources and establishing protocols for testing, dealing with unanticipated COVID-19 related outbreaks, and ensuring ongoing sanitation of buildings and classrooms. ***No school or district should be forced to reopen unless they meet Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Guidelines.***

- **Addressing Inequities:** The closing of schools in response to the pandemic has focused a powerful spotlight on recurrent structural inequities evident in public education today, including student access to broadband/internet services; achievement gaps among racial, ethnic and economic groups; and disparities in resource access evident in many urban and rural districts compared to wealthier suburban districts. An essential priority will involve a national commitment to ensuring equitable access to affordable broadband for all jurisdictions to address obvious inequities in student and family access to the internet and virtual/distance learning.

- **The Importance of Social and Emotional Learning:** Participants consistently emphasized the need for educators to address emerging psychological, social and emotional needs of students, families and staff if we are to deal with learning loss and gaps extending from the crisis. Schools and districts must become both "trauma-informed" and "trauma-skilled." Superintendents on the task force emphasized the need for connection, collaboration, mutual support and assurance to students that they are valued members of the learning community. Social and emotional learning strategies must be a consistent part of instructional delivery throughout the academic year to enhance all learners' academic achievement.

- **Ensuring That Closure and Traditional Rituals and Ceremonies Are Addressed:** In light of the upheaval extending from the crisis, participants asserted the value of providing students and staff opportunities for closure, including end-of-year ceremonies and celebrations as well as opportunities for closure activities during future times of transition. The COVID-19 crisis has showcased the importance of shared/distributed leadership to engage stakeholders in collaborative problem solving, decision making, and building support structures.

- **The Power of Collaboration and Teamwork:** The COVID-19 crisis has initiated an astounding resurgence of collaboration and teamwork within school districts and as part of outreach partnerships with local and state agencies and organizations. These various forms of cross-functional teams and partnerships are essential for continuing the transformation of public education as we move into next phase of reopening and the implications of potential additional waves of infection.

- **The Importance of Leaders Understanding the Dynamics and Unanticipated Consequences of the Change Process:** All task force participants were clear that leadership in education must take a holistic, Whole Child approach and address the inevitable stresses and stages associated with any dramatic change. This process must consider the ambiguities and unanticipated issues that arise with rapid change and requires thoughtful, intentional and purposeful strategic planning to support the learning community as it confronts current and future crises.

Guiding Principles for School Reopening

At this stage of the work of the task force, the following 10 priority areas emerged as controlling ideas for reopening guidelines:

1. **Plan for Multiple Reopening Scenarios and Contingencies to Ensure the Health, Safety and Well-Being of All Students and Staff:** It is essential that district leaders and staff anticipate multiple potential scenarios associated with the reopening process. These may include a return to in-person learning, the continuation of virtual learning, or a blended approach involving some students and staff returning to in-person learning while others continue to participate in remote learning. Policies and procedures must be in place and maintained consistently for attendance, health screening and quarantine procedures, school closures, social distancing, hygiene, and cleaning aligned with the unique challenges of each scenario (informed by the recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

2. **Build a COVID-19-Response Reopening Infrastructure Aligned with Changing Scenarios and Needs:** Leaders and staff must prepare for a changing landscape when reopening occurs. They must give careful consideration to safety and sanitation, the implications of social distancing, and shifting roles and duties of staff as education returns to some form of normalcy. Accommodations must be made to address learning loss as well as ensuring support services for students, staff and families extending from the crisis.

3. **Ensure Students' and Families' Equitable Access to Technology Required for Virtual Learning:** The COVID-19 crisis has focused a stark spotlight on the many inequities evident in our diverse student populations. A critically important priority is the continuation of affordable access for all learners to broadband connectivity, the internet and related hardware. Task force members support AASA's recent letter to Congress urging them to support all students displaced from their classrooms, including $4 billion in direct funds to the Federal Communications Commission's Schools and Libraries Program, commonly called the E-Rate program, to help connect millions of students to the internet.

4. **Provide Continuing Support to Students and Adults to Address Their Immediate and Long-Term Physical, Psychological, Social and Emotional Needs:** Without question, social and emotional learning (SEL) has emerged as a critical priority. The psychological, interpersonal and emotional needs of students, staff and families must become a key focal point as some form of reopening occurs. In addition to requisite services and resources, SEL strategies and techniques must become a consistent part of classroom instruction, reinforcing safety, well-being and engagement within the learning community.

5. **Ensure All Schools Are Trauma-Informed and Trauma-Skilled:** Extensive professional development is necessary to ensure that staff understand the long-term effects of various forms of trauma (i.e., physical, psychological/mental, and relational). As staff become trauma-informed, district leaders and staff must ensure that policies, practices and staff capacities are in place to address the impact of trauma in its various forms and ensure that schools are safe spaces within which individuals and groups can express their concerns, anxieties and fears.

6. **Prepare for COVID-19-Related Changes in Human Resource Management and Practices:** Educational leaders must prepare for a variety of potential human resource and related contractual issues that may extend into the reopening process. These can range from salary concerns and elimination of negotiated cost-of-living raises to potential contingencies such as staff members' inability to return to full-time in-person employment because of health situations or family obligations.

7. **Offer Ongoing Personalized and Differentiated Professional Learning:** In the new educational environment we are entering, educational leaders must ensure that sustained professional development is available for administrators, teachers and support staff on a range of crisis-related issues. These include strategies for making virtual learning engaging and interactive, addressing SEL needs among students and staff, and enhancing staff understanding of what it means to be trauma-informed and trauma-skilled.

8. **Transform the Teaching-Learning-Assessment Process to Ensure Personalization, Engagement and Differentiation:** Educators throughout the United States have confirmed that the COVID-19 crisis has revealed the power and importance of transforming teaching and learning as we typically practice them. Classrooms must be safe, healthy and inviting learning communities. We also must ensure that all students feel respected, acknowledged and efficacious in their learning process.

    For example, curriculum must be culturally responsive and relevant, organized around such connecting schema as themes, universal and enduring understandings, and essential questions. Similarly, we must overcome our prior tendencies to "teach to the test," expanding our assessment repertoire to include a balance of formative assessment, criterion-based coaching and feedback, and summative assessment that is performance-centered and—whenever possible—project-based. Classrooms and schools must become increasingly personalized, engaging and differentiated environments that acknowledge and address students' varying readiness levels, interests and learner profiles.

9. **Anticipate COVID-19-Related Budget and Fiscal Management Issues:** Without question, these are unprecedented times in terms of public health and economic well-being. As schools reopen, educators must be alert to potential funding shortages, shortfalls, and budget reallocation to fund a range of health and sanitation supplies (e.g., thermometers, tele-scanning devices, sanitation supplies and materials) as well as budgetary implications of social-distancing requirements (e.g., funding for expanded transportation such as buses as well as enhancements of classroom spaces and furniture arrangements).

10. **Embrace a New Paradigm for Public Education:** Task force superintendents reinforced that educators would benefit from viewing the COVID-19 crisis as a breakthrough opportunity to transform schools and education as we know them. The crisis has reinforced long-standing inequities and imbalances within the United States extending from racial, ethnic, cultural and geographic divides. The lessons we have learned during the pandemic can lead us to a new way of ensuring the achievement of all learners while emphasizing their physical development and health issues, as well as their social-emotional learning progress.

Based on these 10 guiding principles, the AASA School Reopening Task Force has also generated specific recommendations for action steps that can help district leaders and staff operationalize these principles. These recommendations represent the consensus-driven opinions of participants combined with additional recommendations from national and international frameworks related to ensuring that the reopening of schools is as safe, efficient and personalized as possible.

**Establish Consistent Guidelines to Address
Multiple Scenarios and Contingencies to
Ensure the Health, Safety and Well-Being of All Students and Staff**

District leaders and their staffs must plan for multiple potential reopening scenarios and anticipate the potential contingency issues that will emerge with each scenario. A majority of the districts represented by task force superintendents are planning for a combination of potential opening approaches, including:

- Traditional in-person education (which many superintendents agreed may not be feasible within traditional August-September opening schedules);
- Virtual education as a primary educational delivery system;
- Staggered schedules (e.g., A-Week/B-Week; half-day schedules with alternating groups of students in attendance) to limit number of students within the physical building to reinforce distancing guidelines; and
- Eclectic designs in which students requiring intense in-person support (e.g., Special Education, English Learners, specialized programs such as Career and Technology Education) will be at the physical site while others receive their education using online/virtual formats.

Additionally, the task force supports the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations that universal guidelines and protocols be in place, regardless of the scenario adopted by the district or region. In partnership with local health officials, district leaders must assess the current level of mitigation needed based on levels of COVID-19 community transmission and the capacities of the local public health and healthcare systems.

For each of these contingencies and potential scenarios, the task force strongly recommends that schools and districts ensure resources for the protection of students and staff during the duration of the COVID-19 crisis; adequate supplies of personal protective equipment; and ongoing sanitation and decontamination of classrooms and school buildings. Participating superintendents were in consensus about the need for universal protocols and guiding principles for ensuring the safety and well-being of returning students, staff and families. According to international comparison studies published by the Learning Policy Institute, these protocols and principles should include the following:

- **Clearly Articulated Attendance Policies:** The multiple scenarios that school districts may face during reopening will require flexibility in attendance policies and practices. At-risk students and staff may need accommodations to remain in their homes, increasing the need for universal access to internet and related educational technologies for those engaged in distance learning.

- **Health Screening:** This issue will become a major challenge for reopening schools and districts, regardless of the scenario they are confronting. Procedures will include temperature checks and assurances that students or staff exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms do not enter buildings.

- **School Closure and Quarantine Procedures:** Task force participants confirmed that district leaders must develop contingency plans for closing classrooms or schools in the event that students or staff contract COVID-19. This process will necessitate efficient health screening procedures, quarantine protocols, and clearly articulated criteria to determine if school closings are needed. This process will involve a multi-faceted communication plan that ensures all staff, families and community members are informed of closures and quarantines.

- **Social-Distancing Protocols:** Both the CDC and the World Health Organization suggest keeping individuals at a six-foot distance from one another and reducing the number of people with whom an individual interacts directly. Protocols for social distancing may require reducing class size, keeping students in a stable homeroom class with teachers circulating, seating students farther apart, and reducing large-size events such as assemblies and sporting events. Key issues to focus on include: (1) arrival protocols; (2) mealtimes, recreation, and transportation; and (3) unique challenges in classes and programs requiring a high degree of student interaction and proximity as well as experiential learning (e.g., art activities, physical education, music, Career and Technical Education).

- **Hygiene and Cleaning Procedures:** In addition to reinforcing handwashing as a key priority, school and district staff must ensure that there is ongoing cleaning and sanitation of commonly touched surfaces to mitigate the virus. The range of potential sanitation, health and hygiene requirements emerging from highly interactive settings in which social distancing may be challenging compounds the need to address these issues. For example, what hygiene and cleaning procedures are necessary when students are sharing equipment, supplies, textbooks and related resources?

According to the CDC, schools and districts can reduce exposure risks by addressing three action planning processes:

1. **Develop a Cleaning and Disinfection Plan for All Buildings and Classrooms:**

   - Determine what needs to be cleaned. Areas unoccupied for seven or more days need only routine cleaning. Also, maintain existing cleaning practices for outdoor areas.
   - Determine how areas will be disinfected. Consider the type of surface and how often the surface is touched. Prioritize disinfecting frequently touched surfaces.
   - Consider the resources and equipment needed. Keep in mind the availability of cleaning products and personal protective equipment (PPE) appropriate for cleaners and disinfectants.

2. **Implement the Plan with Consistency and Quality Control Measures:**

   - Clean visibly dirty surfaces with soap and water prior to disinfection.
   - Use the appropriate cleaning or disinfectant product. Use an EPA-approved disinfectant against COVID-19 and read the label to ensure it meets your needs.
   - Always follow the directions on the label. The label will include safety information and application instructions. Keep disinfectants out of the reach of children.

3. **Maintain the Plan Throughout the Academic Year, Revising as Needed:**

   - Continue routine cleaning and disinfection. Continue or revise your plan based on appropriate disinfectant and PPE availability. Dirty surfaces should be cleaned with soap and water prior to disinfection. Routinely disinfect frequently touched surfaces at least daily.
   - Maintain safe practices such as frequent handwashing, using cloth face coverings and staying home if you are sick.
   - Continue practices that reduce the potential for exposure. Maintain social distancing, staying six feet away from others. Reduce sharing of common spaces and frequently touched objects.

Action Steps for Guiding Principle Two

Build a COVID-19-Response Reopening Infrastructure
Aligned with Identified Scenarios and Contingencies

As superintendents and their staffs plan for a variety of scenarios and contingencies in anticipation of reopening schools, a new kind of support infrastructure will be necessary to address health and psychological issues emerging from the COVID-19 crisis. Elements of the infrastructure include:

- Ensuring that cross-functional leadership teams are in place and operational to develop, implement and monitor reopening plans and address emerging contingencies related to COVID-19 responses (e.g., policies and procedures involving new COVID-19 cases within the school or community);
- Acquiring equipment and technology necessary to address student and staff health issues, including thermometers and other electronic telemonitoring/scanning devices to monitor student and staff temperatures and related PPE resources;
- Developing a cross-district or regional approach to equipment and resource purchase to ensure quality of the technology and to minimize the potential for price gouging among businesses;
- Ensuring that transportation (e.g., buses), meals and health services are available to students within the context of multiple scenarios and contingencies;
- Developing and communicating clear policies and regulations related to all phases of reopening, including procedures for addressing identified COVID-19 cases within the building or district and related interventions, supports and communication;
- Ensuring that students who are not attending virtual classes or appear disengaged from the process are identified to receive necessary support services; and
- Continuing to ensure open lines of clear and accurate communication to ensure that all stakeholders are receiving common messages and updates.

Task force members recommend the following action steps related to building a COVID-19-related opening infrastructure in anticipation of inevitable changes and structural reforms that will extend into the coming academic year:

1. Ensure that cross-functional leadership teams are operational.
2. Reinforce safety, health and wellness priorities extending from the crisis.
3. Enhance lines of communication to ensure clear and timely messaging.
4. Actively involve leadership groups (e.g., board of education, government agencies, colleges and universities, nonprofits, business leaders) in providing support and feedback regarding the reopening process and future changes in public education.
5. Ensure that funding sources are accessed and maximized to purchase equipment and resources related to safety, health and wellness.
6. Explore options for maximizing staffing required to reopen successfully.
7. Make appropriate adjustments to existing curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices to address learning gaps and loss extending from school closings and structural issues related to disproportionality.
8. Implement crisis response teams to address trauma-related issues experienced by students, families and staff.
9. Reinforce cross-departmental collaboration, including partnerships involving curriculum and instruction as well as student services.
10. Emphasize that student and staff members' health social and emotional well-being are district and school priorities throughout the coming academic year.

Specific Action Steps Related to a COVID-19 Reopening Infrastructure

1. **Wellness, Health and Safety Measures:**

   - Determine the criteria the district will use to monitor and measure the health and well-being of students, staff and families.
   - Assess the extent to which district operational definitions and controlling principles include the domains of physical, health, psychological, social, emotional and academic needs and development of all learners.
   - Evaluate the current or potential health issues that the district will confront as schools reopen (regardless of the approach the district takes—i.e., in-person, bifurcated, virtual). How will staff address them effectively?
   - Reinforce or develop policies, regulations, and practices to address potential health issues related to the reopening. For example, What will a school do if a student or staff members tests positive for COVID-19?
   - Determine what short-term and long-term safety measures will be necessary as schools reopen and continue throughout this coming academic year (e.g., social distancing, classroom/building cleaning, sanitation practices, and related logistics).
   - Articulate the varying wellness, health and safety measures the district will put in place for different age levels and populations (e.g., primary, intermediate, middle, high; Special Education; English Learners; Title I).
   - Ensure that the wellness, health and safety of our students and staff are addressed throughout reopening and the entire academic year.

2. **Technology:**

   - Examine what the crisis has taught district educators about staff and students' reactions to and needs related to the use of technology-driven teaching and learning.
   - Determine if there are pockets of staff, students and families who still lack full access to affordable WIFI, internet, and Chromebooks/laptops and related technology.
   - In partnership with local, regional and state agencies, determine how the district can address these gap areas.
   - Ensure that all staff members (administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, support staff) are trained to deal with the technological implications of reopening and offer continuing emphasis on distance learning.
   - Determine what professional development is necessary to ensure that virtual learning becomes engaging, personalized and differentiated.
   - Assess budget requirements needed to ensure that the district extends and refines its technology infrastructure.
   - Identify implications for student return of Chromebooks and other resources (e.g., What if technology is lost during the closing? What if equipment is broken? What if students have moved or cannot be located?)
   - Determine how the district will ensure that municipal and regional agencies and organizations continue to support free access to WIFI/internet services.

3. **Ensuring Academic Support and Addressing the Learning Gap:**

   - Identify the major learning gaps and issues of disproportionality that the COVID-19 crisis has surfaced or reinforced. Use the school reopening process to addresses these gaps and issues.

- Determine the immediate priorities the district is facing related to addressing students' learning gaps and areas in which they may benefit from acceleration.
- Address these gaps and issues in a multi-modal context (i.e., using a combination of virtual/distance learning and in-person teaching-learning).
- Use data to monitor student progress and assess the impact of the interventions and support services used to address these gaps and issues.
- Use the COVID-19 school closings to augment and enhance the district's approach to instructional delivery and learning. For example, how can the district ensure that all classrooms are personalized, engaging, authentic and differentiated to address students' varying readiness levels, interests, cultures and learner profiles?
- Use lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis to enhance the cultural responsiveness of schools and classrooms, ensuring that the district promotes equity and excellence for all students.

4. **Special Populations:**

- Evaluate how school closings have affected such groups as students with Individualized Education Plans, English Learners, Title I-eligible students, and Talented and Gifted Learners. To what extent has the closing contributed to students' learning gaps, engagement and/or sense of support and belonging?
- Determine strategies and processes required to address the learning, health and well-being, and social-emotional needs of each of these special populations.
- Ensure that the physical, psychological, academic and social-emotional needs of our special populations are adequately addressed as schools reopen—and beyond into the coming academic year.
- Use a range of data sources to monitor the academic, psychological and social-emotional development and progress of special populations.
- Make certain that adequate funding is available to support the needs of special populations. For example, how can the district leverage federal and state funding to expand delivery of services and interventions?
- Implement needed modifications to the district's Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) to ensure that all special population students' needs will be addressed.
- Engage key parent and stakeholder groups associated with each special population in providing feedback and suggestions concerning these issues.

5. **Progress Monitoring and Accountability Measures:**

- Articulate the major accountability issues the district must address extending from school closures and the COVID-19 crisis.
- Augment the monitoring of student progress to provide feedback and support to learners and determine interventions to address learning gaps extending from school closures.
- Modify programs and practices to address the diverse range of learning issues (e.g., anxiety, depression, stress, trauma, disengagement, etc.) that students may exhibit when they return.
- Make appropriate adjustments to traditional accountability measures and processes (e.g., pacing of curriculum implementation, intervention to reinforce standards missed during the closure, Tier II and Tier III interventions within the district's MTSS).
- Modify or adjust school improvement plans to address this new era of accountability.
- Use disaggregated data to monitor underachieving subgroups whose learning may have been most severely impacted by the school closings.
- Determine the role of standardized testing in accountability: Is this the time to use a more balanced and student-centered approach to progress monitoring and evaluation?

- Analyze the implications of school closings and the reopening process on grades, progress reports and report cards.
- Determine the reporting resources the district will need to inform the board, parents and community members about progress in addressing students' needs extending from the crisis and related learning gaps.

6. **Child Nutrition Services:**

- Ensure that students receiving free or reduced-price meals have access to food regardless of the scheduling configurations elected to use in the fall (e.g., A-Week/B-Week models; bifurcated in-person and virtual learning; virtual learning, etc.).
- Provide cross-functional services to ensure that all students are healthy and secure in terms of access to appropriate food and dietary needs.
- Develop an action plan for families who are food-deprived, including addressing issues related to non-English-speaking families and individuals.
- Put in place collaborations necessary to ensure that the school division works closely with city and state governments, social service agencies, food banks and other community groups, including religious institutions.
- Determine the fiscal and budget implications of this new approach to providing child nutrition services (e.g., continuing providing meals during times of closure and virtual learning, addressing sanitation requirements and social-distancing measures in cafeterias and classrooms).
- Address the emerging issue that as some parents fail to qualify for Medicaid because they don't meet the work requirements, some students will lose automatic qualification for free lunch, meaning schools will either forgo that reimbursement or have to do more work to get those students qualified.

7. **Facilities:**

- Ensure that regardless of the reopening model(s) used (e.g., traditional in-person, bifurcated with some students in school and others learning virtually, all virtual), districts have the facilities needed to accommodate student and staff needs.
- Address recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention regarding social distancing, sanitation, building cleaning and regularity of facilities upkeep and sanitation.
- Determine how schools will accommodate the six-feet social-distancing requirement in the face of classrooms that will not accommodate that requirement.
- Address the fiscal and resource requirements for buildings to be safe, healthy and aligned with CDC recommendations (e.g., thermometers, electronic scanning equipment, wipes and sanitation supplies, requirements for upkeep of sanitation procedures).
- Determine implications for student, staff, and visitor movement into and through buildings. For example, how will the school office deal with visitors and external staff entering and moving around the building?
- Address the staffing implications of this enhanced approach to sanitation and building health safety.
- Ensure that the district develops a range of scheduling options and related technological resources are available to accommodate a range of reopening approaches (e.g., total in-person; bifurcated models using a combination of in-person and distance learning; all virtual).

8. **Financial Services:**

- Identify the overall budget and fiscal management issues that the district must address immediately considering this crisis.
- Address budget shortfalls and cutbacks for the current and next fiscal year in light of expanding resource needs associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Analyze the budget implications and sources for purchasing COVID-19-related health equipment and resources (e.g., thermometers, testing equipment, sanitation supplies, human resources needed to provide continuous cleaning of buildings and classrooms, etc.).
- Use federal crisis funding (e.g., CARES Act and follow-up funding allocations) to address these needs while ensuring that we do not engage in "quick fixes," such as using funding for operational needs such as staffing in light of the funding time limits.
- Determine the most appropriate chain of communication between schools and central office.
- Explore the role of the board of education in approving decisions about budget cutbacks and reallocation. How will the district ensure that it is providing meaningful and sustained data and information regarding budgeting and purchasing?
- Ensure the completeness of the vetting policies and regulations that will need to be considered to guarantee timely acquisition of health and sanitation resources and equipment. Specifically, what procurement protocols will need to be followed? How will districts ensure quality control?

9. **Human Resources:**

- Assess how budget cutbacks and reductions impact the district's ability to ensure full staffing.
- Determine how school and central office staff will receive support in the hiring process given the current limitations associated with the crisis.
- Address issues related to unavailability of certified teachers in key areas such as mathematics, science, world languages, CTE, etc.
- Develop action steps in the event students and staff have physical issues that prevent them from returning to a traditional brick-and-mortar building. Will the district need to expand staffing to allow for a combination of in-person and virtual learning, for example?
- Assess the extent to which policies and regulations related to teacher evaluation and retention need to be revisited and/or modified.
- Develop recommendations for how administrators will complete informal and formal evaluations.
- Differentiate practices for providing feedback to teachers who are facilitating learning in various instructional settings (e.g., virtual, small-group, traditional).
- Determine how the district will address academic areas that require in-person learning if the district continues learning in a virtual context (e.g., Career and Technical Education, Special Education, English Learners, Talented and Gifted, economically disadvantaged/Title I).

10. **Professional Development:**

- Identify the major professional learning needs of staff returning to school this fall.
- Ensure that teachers and support staff receive the professional development necessary for them to deliver effective instruction in a virtual format.
- Modify the professional development calendar to address emerging priorities associated with the crisis.
- Determine modifications required for opening days and related opening professional learning requirements necessary to address staff needs extending from the crisis.

- Ensure that the district's professional development programs include a focus on the psychological, social and emotional needs of staff and students.
- Reinforce consistency of quality and timing of opening professional development programs so that all staff receive common messages and engage in common focus areas (e.g., distance learning, trauma-informed schools, social-emotional learning strategies, etc.).

11. Student Services:

- Ensure that the district has accounted for all learners, including those who may appear to be "missing" as a result of not participating in previous distance learning or responding to teacher and counselor outreach during the time of school closing.
- Identify the psychological issues that students and staff will confront as they return to some form of schooling in the fall.
- Assess the social and emotional issues district staff will need to address related to both students and staff during the reopening process.
- Anticipate disciplinary issues and problems that may emerge as a result of student trauma, stress, physical issues and family problems.
- Determine how the district's student services department will work with schools, city and state agencies, and families and community groups to address emerging issues.
- Develop action plans for student services to be delivered to learners and their families in virtual contexts, such as tele-counseling and tele-health interventions.
- Support the needs of homeless and transient students, including students who may have entered or plan to enter the system during school closings.
- Determine staffing implications related to student services (health, safety, psychological, social, emotional) needed to provide a long-term safety net for students as schools reopen and throughout the academic year.
- Identify the kinds of professional development necessary to support student service employees as they address emerging needs associated with the crisis and ensure that a range of technologies are used to deliver services during reopening (i.e., to address emergent needs of students and staff with medical issues preventing them from returning to the physical school building).
- Determine how the Department of Student Services will collaborate with other departments within the school district to maximize services for students who need them.

12. Transportation:

- Identify the transportation issues that will surface if the district reopens using a modified in-person and virtual schedule. For example, how will the district ensure that students know which schedule they are on and when they will be picked up?
- Determine transportation-related budget implications of the reopening. For example, will the district need more buses if it uses a bifurcated approach to scheduling?
- Assess the financial implications of transportation issues extending from the crisis and reopening.
- Ensure that all schools have sufficient staffing to ensure ease of access to schools for all students.
- Collaborate with local and state agencies to ensure a smooth transportation process as schools reopen.
- Determine professional development implications for ensuring that transportation staff understand the range of psychological, social and emotional issues that students may bring to school with them during reopening after the crisis.

Action Steps for Guiding Principle Three

Advocate for an Equitable Technology Infrastructure

Students, families and staff must have access to the range of technologies (especially broadband/internet capability) to ensure that all learners have equitable access to virtual learning. Task force participants consistently emphasized that the COVID-19 crisis and related school closings have revealed and powerfully reinforced the major inequities inherent to school districts within the United States. Technology-related priority areas include:

- Ensuring student access to internet and related virtual learning resources;
- Continuing beyond the duration of the COVID-19 crisis the provision of WIFI hotspots and access services free of charge to families throughout a district;
- Making certain that the recently passed federal legislation to expand availability of broadband internet access is implemented, including funding going to high-needs urban and rural areas in which citizens currently are underserved;
- Ensuring that technology-driven curriculum and instruction accommodate the needs for personalization and differentiation among all students, but especially English Learners and those identified as requiring Special Education services; and
- Rethinking and refining the district's approach to professional development to ensure that all staff members have expertise in instructional design within a virtual/online setting.

Section One: The Challenges Confronting Educational Leaders Leading in a Virtual World

This is an unprecedented time in our history as a country and as a profession. Our response to the COVID-19 crisis powerfully reinforces the necessity of education to bring consistency and support to the lives of our students. As educational leaders, we must make certain that our students and our staff members regain some semblance of normalcy in order to maintain engagement and connection, and to sustain meaningful education during this time of upheaval.

A major goal for reopening schools and transforming students' education in the coming academic year is to reinforce and sustain positive relationships and connections among members of the learning community. These goals are especially important for helping learners feel safe and engaged in this new virtual world. As we search for ways to use distance learning as an educational delivery system, we must continue to acknowledge the importance of students' relationships with their peers and their teachers. What is perhaps most important in leading virtual learning is helping our students and staff overcome isolation.

In spite of the distance we must maintain and the disruption to our normal patterns of interaction, we still can sustain relationships with our students, bring smiles to their faces, and reinforce the connections that may seem broken in the face of isolation. What makes this even more critical is that amid this national crisis, people around our students are becoming ill and experiencing unprecedented economic and personal challenges. Connections with teachers and peers can be a welcome relief and healing force in students' lives.

As educators, we can continue to provide support, stability and normalcy to our students. We must focus our leadership to let our students know that we miss them and that we are there to support them.

Section Two: Promoting Connectivity and Engagement in a Virtual Learning Environment

How can educational leaders promote connectivity and engagement during this time of isolation and transition? There are several ways to reach out to and make personal contact with our students and staff on a consistent basis and ensure that distance learning is as engaging, interactive and experiential as possible. Here are few of the strategies—we invite you to share your own success stories with us about education in this new virtual world:

1. **Address the Equity Priority:** The first step toward equity is providing, as much as possible, the technology and connectivity to students and families.

   - Distribute Chromebooks and related technology resources to those who need it with simple directions and access to technology workshops for students and parents.
   - Ensure affordable broadband WIFI connectivity and internet access to staff, students and families who require support in accessing them.
   - Commit to achieving some level of equity, ensuring that every student has a support network and personal contact with teachers regardless of their access to technology.
   - Reinforce this sense of contact and connectivity by making weekly or more frequent contact with every learner via phone calls, emails, letters, and either individual, small-group or even whole-class video conferencing meetings.

2. **Set Reasonable Expectations:** Given the disruption in students' and staff members' lives, the expectations for learning and connection must be reasonable.

   - If virtual learning continues as part of the reopening process, don't expect teachers to replicate the classroom or expect students to complete all the work that would have been accomplished if they were in school.
   - Recognize and reinforce that remote teaching, particularly online learning, takes teachers much more time to prepare for and facilitate than teaching in the regular classroom.
   - Acknowledge the limits of what students might be able to accomplish in a more limited amount of time and set reasonable learning targets to reduce student anxiety and apprehension.
   - Give students time and support in this new blended learning environment to help them function in a meaningful and productive way so they can be proud of what they are able to do.

3. **Reinforce Routines and Collaborative Support:** It is essential that students experience a sense of routine aligned with their in-school experience.

   - Provide a schedule of when teachers will be available or when online learning will occur to bring a sense of order to students' and their families' day.

   - Provide a schedule for teachers to be available online for office hours to provide parents and students an opportunity for individual support.

   - In a blended or virtual learning environment, consider having elementary teachers whose students have access to technology and connectivity host daily virtual morning meetings for students.
   - At the secondary level, encourage teachers to use technology to host virtual advisories for middle and high school students either in small groups or in their regular advisory groups.

4. **Ensure Engagement and Interactivity as a Key Focus Area:** Ensure students' social interaction and emotional engagement are priorities during distance learning activities by enhancing remote learning activities that are project-based or require students to work together remotely.

   - Provide video lessons that students can access and assignments that include discussion and sharing of ideas or experiences in order to personalize and engage student learning.
   - During virtual learning weeks or situations, ensure that video conferencing occurs 1-3 times a week, moving students from whole-group meetings to small-group conferences.

5. **Vary Pedagogy:** The virtual world requires sensitivity to students' varying attention spans and the inevitable distractions of their home environment.

   - Strive to make distance learning as interactive as possible.
   - Reduce focus on didactic presentation and increase focus on discussion, feedback, coaching and counseling, as needed.

6. **Encourage Student-to-Student Interaction:** Students' relationships with peers are essential in a virtual world.

   - Strive to integrate a range of strategies to enhance this interaction, including a major focus on small-group project-based learning.
   - When feasible, form project teams so that students can interact (via collaborative research, discussion, presentation, etc.) using such platforms as Zoom and Google Classroom.
   - Form interest groups that can allow small teams of students to pursue reading selections and performance-based tasks aligned with standards as well as their desired areas of investigation.

7. **Build a Sense of Community in Spite of the Distance:** Key to effective virtual/distance learning is building a sense of community in the classroom and the school so that students know they are included, valued and known.

   - Encourage school administrators and teachers to create individual and collective messages in which each teacher expresses caring and support for students and lets them know they are missed.
   - Have faculty create fun videos such as a dance video with each teacher participating for a couple of seconds each to brighten students' day.
   - Host virtual talent shows with submissions of videos from students edited together and shared online or via cable TV.

8. **Promote Meaningful Progress Monitoring:** Districts can allow for a great deal of flexibility in this area but need to ensure that students and parents are receiving ongoing feedback on learner progress.

   - Make certain students are clear about learning targets for a lesson or unit.
   - Provide regular individual feedback on student work to support learners in achieving identified lesson and unit outcomes.
   - Encourage students' development of such habits of mind as self-awareness, self-regulation and self-assessment.

9. **Provide Student Support Services and Programs:** Successful reopening includes a deep commitment to extending meaningful and productive relationships to the work of counselors, psychologists and social service workers.

- Ensure that these professionals reach out to students and families through phone, email and video conferencing.
- Establish or reinforce virtual technology to allow student support personnel to continue providing individual and small-group therapy using teletherapy tools.
- Reinforce collaboration by having these individuals reach out to teachers so that students who are not participating are identified and contacted.
- Stay connected with students and their families, ensuring they receive the services and resources they need, including health services, food, psychological services, and social-emotional programs and services.

Action Steps for Priority Four

**Address the Psychological, Social and Emotional
Needs of Students and Adults**

Another major and recurrent theme in the task force discussions centered on the need to address the "whole learner." Specifically, participants emphasized their concerns about how the COVID-19 crisis has affected the psychological, social and emotional well-being of both students and staff. They also expressed deep concern about a range of issues related to these areas, including:

- The importance of district staff understanding the range of emotional reactions students, staff and families are experiencing during this crisis, and the significance of placing social and emotional learning needs ahead of a rush to return to formal academic instruction;
- The high level of need for closure rituals and ceremonies to ensure that students and staff are supported during this time of transition (e.g., virtual graduations, virtual proms, acknowledgment of athletes and scholars, provision of closing activities for staff, etc.);
- The need to integrate social and emotional learning (SEL) strategies and routines into students' daily classroom experience, whether they are learning in a virtual or in-person context;
- The importance of anticipating the range of physical, psychological and emotional needs that students are experiencing; and
- The value of understanding that staff members are also suffering during this time and may have widely varying reactions to the idea of returning to school (e.g., fears for safety and health; pre-existing conditions that may make them vulnerable to the virus; the necessity of caring for at-risk family members, etc.).

<u>Section One</u>: **Leading Social and Emotional Learning**

AASA is currently involved in an extensive range of collaborative partnerships with significant national organizations considered leaders in the field of social and emotional learning. Its SEL partner organizations include the Chan Zuckerberg Institute (CZI); the Wallace Foundation; the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL); and the Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, & Academic Development. This next section of the task force report provides an overview of social-emotional learning for use by superintendents and other educational leaders working to introduce and sustain SEL implementation in their learning organizations within the context of school reopening and transformation.

<u>Section Two</u>: **Understanding the Importance of Social and Emotional Learning**

Although the term "social and emotional learning" covers a range of focus areas and concepts, all national leadership organizations associated with SEL emphasize that it is an educational philosophy emphasizing the powerful relationship between students' cognitive/academic achievement and their development of social skills, emotional self-regulation competencies, and the capacity to interact effectively in team settings.

In addition to student achievement, a focus on social and emotional learning in schools and districts offers a powerful catalyst for enhancing professional learning and organizational productivity. AASA, CZI, CASEL, and the Aspen Institute all agree that social and emotional learning involves schools and districts addressing the following action steps:

- Adopt SEL standards of practice and performance that are integrated into students' academic experiences, grades K-12.
- Deliver high-quality curriculum that integrates social and emotional skills and competencies into the teaching-learning process.
- Integrate a range of teaching and assessment tools to enhance classroom climate and management, including strategies to engage students' sense of responsibility, efficacy and community commitment.
- Use a range of feedback and assessment tools and processes to monitor students' progress along a social and emotional learning continuum.
- Provide all staff with professional development that reinforces educators' understanding of the importance of SEL in promoting student learning and strategies to reinforce students' SEL development during their K-12 education.
- Engage parents, community members and stakeholder groups in activities and partnerships designed to promote SEL awareness and reinforce its value for student learning.

Section Three: Understanding Key Components of Social and Emotional Learning

Research supported by RAND, CASEL, and the Aspen Institute confirms that students' social and emotional well-being and development are essential for their academic achievement. According to the National Commission on Social, Emotional, & Academic Development, "The evidence base demonstrates that there are a variety of skills, attitudes, and character traits that are embedded in and support learning. These generally fall into three broad categories: (1) SEL-related cognitive skills and competencies; (2) social and interpersonal skills and competencies; and (3) emotional skills and competencies."

- **SEL-Related Cognitive Skills and Competencies:** Social and emotional learning experts agree that educators can support student achievement and academic growth by direct modeling and teaching of specific SEL-related behaviors, including supporting students' ability to focus, pay attention, and stay engaged in on-task behavior; set goals, plan, and organize; and demonstrate perseverance, problem solving, and decision making skills and processes. A key point is that frequently, these skills mistakenly are assumed to develop naturally or automatically in students; consequently, they usually are not taught explicitly in the classroom through modeling, shaping and internalizing strategies.

- **Social and Interpersonal Skills and Competencies:** Similarly, educators frequently assume that students will develop interpersonal skills as a natural part of their growth and maturation. However, the research on SEL and its impact on learning emphasizes that children and youth need coaching, support and ongoing feedback to acquire and integrate the ability to read social cues, navigate social situations (both within and outside the classroom), negotiate and resolve conflicts with others, and cooperate and work effectively in teams. The SEL-sensitive classroom, therefore, should be highly interactive, focused on student discourse, and grounded in various cooperative learning structures and processes.

- **Emotional Skills and Competencies:** Research on SEL also confirm the value of helping children and youth recognize and manage their emotions, including their internal reactions to self and conscious awareness of how their actions are affecting others around them. SEL researchers strongly advocate the integration of learning activities into subject matter curriculum. For example, teachers can include activities to help students recognize how emotions and emotional interactions affect literary characters, understand how individual and group emotional reactions affect historical events and groups, analyze how emotional trends and patterns affect economic issues, and similar investigations in other academic areas. Students benefit greatly from ongoing

support and coaching to help them understand the perspectives and experiences of others and demonstrate empathy both within and beyond the classroom.

Section Four: Implementing Key Elements of Social and Emotional Learning in Schools and Districts

According to *A Practice Agenda in Support of How Learning Happens*, a major research report published by the Aspen Institute/National Commission on Social, Emotional, & Academic Development, effective districts and schools emphasize the following action steps:

- Integrate social and emotional learning as a priority in vision, mission and guiding principles for the district and schools at all grade levels.
- Communicate clearly articulated social and emotional learning standards integrated into students' academic experience and used to monitor their progress along a learning continuum.
- Integrate clear and aligned SEL standards into daily classroom practice, including reinforcement of key SEL-related cognitive skills (e.g., focusing and paying attention, setting and achieving goals, planning and organizing, and perseverance and problem solving).
- Model and shape students' social and interpersonal skills and competencies, including learners' ability to read social cues, navigate social situations, negotiate and resolve conflicts, and cooperate and function effectively in team settings.
- Help students recognize and manage their emotions and empathize with the emotions and perspectives of others.
- Provide professional development to educators to reinforce their understanding of social-emotional learning's importance and key processes for reinforcing it in their classrooms.
- Ensure that all schools are safe and supportive learning environments conducive to the growth and development of diverse student populations.
- Develop and implement a Multi-Tiered System of Support, including short and long-term interventions for students experiencing learning challenges (including academic, psychological, and social services support).
- Actively engage parents, community members and stakeholder groups in understanding and supporting social-emotional learning as a systemic priority.

Section Five: Performance Indicators of Social and Emotional Learning in Effective Classrooms

Many AASA partners and collaborators, including the RAND Corporation, The Wallace Foundation, the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, and CASEL, reinforce the power and impact of integrating social and emotional learning into students' daily classroom academic experiences. In effective classrooms, educators should be able to observe:

- Clearly articulated and understood SEL norms and processes for student-teacher and student-peer interaction that reinforce the value of the classroom as a true community of learning;
- Daily inclusion of social and emotional learning objectives into lesson plans and delivery;
- Modeling of effective social-emotional learning strategies and behaviors by the instructor, reinforcing and acknowledging students' demonstration of key cognitive skills, social and interpersonal skills, emotional recognition and self-regulation, as well as empathy;
- Evidence that students can "see themselves" in the curriculum they study, including making connections between content and students' life experiences and backgrounds.
- Student engagement and positive social interaction via experience-based and small-group-focused learning activities such as cooperative learning, seminars, project-based learning, problem solving and decision making and analysis of perspectives.

- Classroom management as an opportunity for shared decision making, problem solving, and conflict resolution involving the instructor and students.
- Integrated opportunities for students to reflect on their own social-emotional growth and development, including periodic "town meetings" in which students consider classroom norms, practices and behaviors, and how they might be improved.

Section Six: Supporting Social and Emotional Learning in Districts and Schools

AASA's Social and Emotional Learning Cohort as well as research studies sponsored by the RAND Corporation, CASEL, and the Aspen Institute provide numerous examples of districts and schools whose educational leaders have reinforced the following key systemic elements:

1. **Reinforce SEL as an Articulated Systemic Priority:** Effective leaders are relentless in ensuring that district and school visions, missions and guiding principles reinforce SEL and its value in promoting high levels of achievement for all learners.

2. **Ensure a Sustained Commitment to Promoting Safe and Supportive Learning Environments in Both School and Community Settings:** In addition to reinforcing clear and sustainable norms and practices for safety, effective leaders are committed to making educational settings inviting and engaging for every learner.

3. **Promote Accountability for Ensuring That Educators Teach Students Social, Emotional and Cognitive Skills Explicitly and Embed Them in All Academic Learning:** School and district leaders must ensure that their K-12 curriculum integrates SEL standards, teachers integrate SEL into their daily classroom practice, and assessments include processes to monitor students' growth in relationship to key SEL performance standards.

4. **Demonstrate a Deep and Sustained Commitment to Ensuring Adult Learners' SEL Competencies:** Professional learning is essential for helping educators move along a learning continuum related to SEL, including knowing its value, applying key SEL strategies and processes, and modeling SEL behaviors in educational settings.

5. **Ensure Continuing Engagement of Parent, Community and Stakeholder Groups in Supporting SEL Implementation:** Effective leaders ensure that these groups are actively involved in learning about SEL, understand its value for student growth and development, and reinforce SEL strategies to promote the learning process.

6. **Engage in Strategic Planning and Continuous Improvement Processes to Implement, Scale Up, and Sustain SEL Implementation:** In successful SEL districts and schools, SEL is a clear and sustained priority in systemic strategic planning and school improvement plans, including a commitment to continuing funding for professional learning.

Section Seven: Accessing Funding Sources to Support Social and Emotional Learning Programs and Initiatives

The RAND Corporation's recent brief "How the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Can Support Social and Emotional Learning" confirms that ESSA offers extensive opportunities to support school-based SEL interventions and programs. The report also cautions that educational leaders must be "sure that the SEL interventions they are interested in implementing are both evidence-based and can be supported by funding available through ESSA." The RAND brief identifies three funding streams that can support SEL implementation:

1. **<u>Title I: Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged</u>:** Title I supports SEL-related services such as school-wide assistance programs, targeted assistance programs, and school support and improvement activities—all of which require sensitivity to the social-emotional development of learners.

2. **<u>Title II: Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High-Quality Teachers, Principals, and Other School Leaders</u>:** Title II can be used to build teachers' SEL capacity via professional development opportunities such as Supporting Effective Educator Development and School Leader Recruitment and Support grants.

3. **<u>Title IV: 21st Century Schools</u>:** Title IV authorizes funding to support a variety of programs aimed at improving the educational opportunities of students, such as Student Support and Enrichment Grants, 21st Century Learning Centers (Part B), and National Activities (Part F), including integration of SEL into academic and non-academic support programs offered outside the regular school day.

Become Trauma-Informed and Trauma-Skilled

As an extension of task force participants' discussions of SEL-related priorities, many emphasized the need for staff members to become what William Daggett and others call "trauma-informed" and "trauma-skilled." Trauma can range in its impact from the obvious physical signs to lasting effects on student and staff psychological well-being, coping mechanisms, and their capacity to feel safe and secure within the physical school environment. Priority focus areas related to this theme include:

- The need for crisis intervention teams to work with students in disadvantaged or challenging home circumstances, especially in light of growing needs extending from the COVID-19 crisis and related school closings;
- The increasing importance of cross-functional teaming and partnerships to provide a holistic approach to student and staff health, psychological well-being, and social-emotional interactions (e.g., ensuring that community health providers, food banks, social services, etc., are working in partnership with the school district);
- The necessity of providing ongoing professional development to all staff on the significance of trauma, its long-lasting effects, and its impact on student achievement and staff performance; and
- The need to ensure that policies, regulations and practices connected to addressing trauma-related issues are updated and clearly understood by all staff members.

Section One: Leading Trauma-Sensitive Instruction and Trauma-Skilled Schools

AASA is deeply committed to supporting educational leaders in all aspects of their work with districts and schools. Recently, the importance of understanding the impact of trauma on students and staff has emerged as a national educational priority. In partnership with a variety of national leadership organizations—including The Wallace Foundation, the RAND Corporation, and the International Center for Leadership in Education—AASA has confirmed its profound dedication to expanding the knowledge base of educational leaders involving what has been called "trauma-sensitive instruction" and "trauma-skilled schools." This commitment is especially evident in the work of the AASA Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Cohort. We encourage you to share the information below with educators in your respective schools and districts, inviting them to explore this critical issue as an increasingly significant issue.

Section Two: Why Has the Issue of Trauma Emerged as a National Educational Priority?

The COVID-19 crisis has accentuated the range of potential effects trauma can have on students, staff and families. These effects include the stress and psychological impact of economic devastation, unreported incidents of physical and psychological abuse, food deprivation, and the range of health issues confronting families, including the myriad losses associated with illnesses and deaths in families and communities. Task force participants consistently emphasized that many students are also being traumatized by their lack of access to the familiar and supportive structures of traditional schooling that gave them a sense of order, stability and connectivity.

According to Karen Onderko, director of research and education for Integrated Listening Systems, *"Trauma is the response to a deeply distressing event that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope, causes feelings of helplessness, diminishes their sense of self and their ability to feel the full range of emotions and experiences."* In this age of immediate social media information access and connectivity,

we see evidence of traumatic situations throughout the world on a daily basis, from weather and environmental disasters such as floods, hurricanes and fires to the epidemic of violence and mass shootings and the immigration-related displacements evident throughout the United States in recent months and years.

A World Mental Health survey conducted by the World Health Organization recently found that at least a third of the more than 125,000 people surveyed in 26 different countries had experienced some form of trauma. According to developers of this survey, the actual number is probably much higher. Generally, trauma is categorized as one or more of the following: (1) psychological abuse; (2) physical abuse; (3) domestic violence; and/or (4) complex post-traumatic stress disorder.

Considering these issues, why has trauma become a national educational priority? According to Sandy Addis, director of the National Dropout Prevention Center, and Bernadine Futrell, former director of the AASA Leadership Network:

- Trauma is a major problem in schools and districts today.
- It is a primary root cause of school behavior and learning problems.
- Our dropouts are primarily the trauma-impacted students who have not been helped to go beyond and past the influences of trauma in their lives.
- Mental health professionals in schools are valuable but will not solve the problem alone or in isolation from other staff, parents and community members.
- Trauma training for educators is essential but will not solve the problem, which requires a long-range systemic commitment to providing appropriate support services.

Addis and Futrell also state that: (1) 67% of students witness at least one act of violence or crime each year; (2) 50% witness more than one act of violence or crime each year; (3) 15% witness six or more acts of violence or crime each year; (4) 2.5 million children in America are homeless each year; and (5) 57% of homeless children are without food for one or more days per month. **According to the Successful Practices Network, more than half of our children are negatively impacted by childhood trauma and many, if not most, will never be identified.**

<u>**Section Three**</u>**: What Should Educators Understand About the Effects of Trauma on Students?**

Research suggests that trauma can cause students to demonstrate a variety of issues and problems related to their self-esteem, behavior and psychological responses, including:

- Inappropriate or unacceptable behavior involving in-class disruption, disrespect, and conflict with peers;
- Poor attendance;
- Academic failure;
- Grade retention;
- Higher incidence of dropout behavior and failure to graduate; and/or
- A lack of resilience, resulting in students' loss of connection, security, achievement, autonomy and fulfillment.

Educators can approach these trauma-related effects through the lenses of student behavior and school safety. For example, the National Dropout Prevention Center and the Successful Practices Network assert that educators should assess where they are along a continuum related to how well they understand trauma and student behavior:

1. **Trauma-Informed:** Knowing that trauma can alter student perceptions and reactions, leading to behavioral changes.

2. **Trauma-Sensitive:** Understanding why trauma-related behaviors occur and attempting to accommodate behaviorally challenged students.

3. **Trauma-Skilled:** Understanding how trauma impacts student behavior and adopting specific action steps to alter practices, climate and interactions to achieve improved behavior, psychological well-being and resilience.

Section Four: What Should We See in Trauma-Skilled Schools?

Trauma-skilled schools demonstrate a continual commitment to ensuring staff understanding of the impact of trauma on student behavior and overall school safety. They also ensure that specific action steps are in place to help trauma-affected students rebuild and develop resiliency, and reduce the likelihood of student aggression toward peers, educators and the school as a learning organization. What William Daggett and others call "trauma-skilled schools" demonstrate the following:

- **Modify School Climate and Culture to Build Student Resilience:** Trauma-skilled schools represent safe, orderly, inviting and engaging learning environments. They reflect a commitment to personalization and sensitivity to the needs and strengths of all learners. There is a sustained commitment to ensuring that students' social and emotional development is a school-wide priority in addition to commitment to equity and excellence related to academic achievement.

- **Provide Ongoing Professional Development to Support Staff Understanding of Trauma, Its Impact on Student Learning and Behavior, and the Importance of Building Resilience:** Sustained professional learning supports staff in the use of trauma-related strategies that work for all students, influence the overall school culture by changing it with consistent behavior by all, and impact the mindset of all faculty, staff and students as well as all relevant policies and practices.

- **Help Staff Acquire Skills Necessary for Handling Trauma-Based Situations:** According to Daggett, educators need four skill sets to deal with trauma in schools: (1) prevention strategies, (2) intervention techniques, (3) supports for recovery processes, and (4) understanding of referral services.

Section Five: What Should We See in Trauma-Skilled Classrooms?

Trauma-skilled classrooms reflect a combination of effective teaching and learning practices and classroom management strategies. When used consistently, these practices can produce true communities of learning in which students feel safe, respected and resilient. Such classrooms should exhibit:

1. **Relationship Building:** Instructors clarify their role in relationship to students, establish themselves as safe and caring individuals, reinforce an environment of mutual respect, give students the opportunities to make choices and decisions, and establish discourse about safety and the steps they will take to help students be safe.

2. **Clear Expectations and Norms:** Trauma-sensitive classrooms have clear expectations for student and teacher behavior, a clear and sustained structure for interactions and study, spaces for students to go to if they are feeling overwhelmed, and environmental conditions that promote engagement and resilience (e.g., visual, auditory and sensory resources that accommodate students' varying emotional and cognitive states).

3. **Opportunities for Personalization of Content and Approaches to Learning:** These classrooms reflect a commitment to differentiation, accommodating students' varying learner profiles, interests and readiness levels. When feasible, students can make choices about content, process and product as an extension of independent and small-group investigations and project-based learning.

4. **Integration of Trauma-Sensitive/Informed Interventions:** For students who may be experiencing emotional or psychological difficulties resulting from trauma, teachers can use a variety of strategies, including: (a) modeling and coaching strategies for students to identify feelings and cope with negative reactions; (b) providing support for students to find positive ways to cope with conflicts and upsets; (c) reinforcing strategies for students to connect with friends, peers and supportive adults; and (d) supporting students in accessing support services such as counseling to address trauma-related needs.

Section Six: How Can Educational Leaders Support Students and Staff in Dealing with Trauma?

The National Dropout Prevention Center and Bill Daggett's International Center for Leadership in Education assert that trauma-skilled educational leadership requires a deep systemic commitment to building a continuum of support and intervention for trauma-affected learners. These organizations emphasize five stages that comprise a trauma-skilled educational continuum:

1. **Fostering Staff Knowledge:** Ensure that districts and schools have systemic guiding principles, staff understanding, shared operational language, ongoing analysis of the population served, and evidence of trauma-related behavioral patterns.

2. **Building Staff and Student Resilience:** Reinforce and sustain students' sense of connection, security, achievement, autonomy and fulfillment.

3. **Promoting Trauma-Related Skills Acquisition:** Train staff in techniques and strategies related to prevention, intervention, recovery and referral.

4. **Assessment and Implementation:** Monitor and adjust policies, practices and human resources related to trauma intervention and student services.

5. **Maintenance and Validation:** Incorporate trauma-related strategic planning, program and intervention implementation, and verification through ongoing data analysis and progress monitoring.

Section Seven: What Additional Services and Support Structures Should Trauma-Skilled Schools Offer?

Schools that are effective in addressing the needs of trauma-affected learners offer a variety of support services and structures, including the following:

1. **Provide Information for Students and Parents About Trauma-Related Services:** These schools help students identify school-based and external individuals and places that are safe and provide appropriate support interventions, including physical, emotional, psychological and family support programs.

2. **Integrate Direct Instruction About Coping Strategies into Both Classroom and School-Based Services:** Teachers, counselors, administrators and support staff can become a support network trained in using trauma-related strategies with students, including: (a) teaching stress management and relaxation skills; (b) modeling calming behaviors during crises (e.g., remaining calm, quiet and present); (c) practicing mindfulness and positive self-talk, serving as role models for students; and (d) focusing on relationships and connections.

3. **Promote Parent and Community Outreach:** Trauma-skilled schools consistently ensure that parents and community members are informed about school-based initiatives and services related to trauma support and intervention. Programs can range from information sessions conducted at both the school and community centers to more intensive forms of training such as teaching adults coping skills to decrease emotional intensity; implementing strategies for building connections; sharing ways parents and community members can support safe, orderly and inviting schools; and deepening shared understanding about community needs and resources.

4. **Build Consensus About Trauma-Related Pitfalls and Ineffective Practices:** All members of the learning organization should learn about and avoid frequently made mistakes when working with trauma-affected students, including making assumptions, judging the trauma, taking student behaviors personally, engaging in unfounded psychological analysis, and taking on the burden of "fixing" the trauma independently.

Prepare for Potential Changes in
Human Resource Management and Contract Negotiations

Another important issue raised during the task force discussions centered on staffing issues and the implications of the COVID-19 crisis for the coming academic year. They recurrently cited issues related to policies and practices related to human resource management, including:

- The reality that many staff members—especially instructional staff—may be in an age group identified as vulnerable to the physical impact of COVID-19 (e.g., How will their needs be met? What if they cannot return to a physical building during the continuing crisis? How will districts address requests for lifting of contract requirements to allow for early retirements with related benefits?);
- The importance of working closely with teaching and support staff (including their associations and unions) to ensure that if contract modifications or benefits are affected by budget reductions, there is a consensus about the most viable approaches to handle these issues;
- The need to revisit certification requirements (e.g., early hiring of university students completing their certification but not yet employed) in order to fill potential vacancies resulting from the pandemic crisis;
- The necessity of reexamining the range of services and resources provided by the district to address unanticipated physical and psychological issues extending from the COVID-19 crisis; and
- The stark reality emerging in districts throughout the United States of how budget reallocation and shortfalls resulting from the crisis may impact staffing allocations in both the short-term and long-range contexts.

Task force participants identified the following implications for human resource management and contract negotiations that may arise as schools prepare to reopen:

1. **Explore the Implications of Staff Who May Have Medical or Childcare Issues Preventing Their In-Person Return to School:**

- Ensure that leadership teams responsible for human resources management during the reopening are in communication with staff who may not be able to return because of their own medical issues, childcare or family health concerns.
- Determine policies, procedures and protocols for these staff members to contact appropriate personnel to notify the school district of their needs and plans.
- Examine contract implications for emergency, medical and FMLA leave in light of expanded staff reductions resulting from these circumstances.
- Prepare for additional early retirements as staff members make decisions about returning or remaining at home.
- Investigate the feasibility of extending childcare services through local organizations and agencies to support emerging staff needs.

2. **Anticipate the Range of Potential Staff Needs as Reopening Occurs:**

- Form and sustain cross-functional teams involving human resources, student services, and health, social and psychological services, and safety organizations within the community.

- Integrate issues related to social, emotional and physical well-being of staff into your human resources decision-making processes.
- Ensure that health and physical needs of staff and families are considered as part of the school reopening process, including clearly articulated policies about social distancing, temperature checks, classroom and school sanitation procedures, and related logistics for schools and offices.
- Work collaboratively with internal and external agencies to ensure that staff members' psychological and mental health needs are addressed, including information concerning services and agencies they can access if they or family members are experiencing health or psychological issues.

3. Align Contracted Salaries and Benefits with Economic Issues Your District May Be Facing:

- Be clear about the potential for budget cutbacks and reductions related to the need to build a reopening infrastructure and make up for diminished operating budget income.
- Work closely with teacher and administrator organizations (including unions and teachers associations) to investigate the need to address potential staff reductions or elimination of cost-of-living increases resulting from contractual and funding issues generated by the unanticipated emergency.
- Investigate formal as well as informal observations and evaluations when staff are working at home and teaching via distance learning.
- Issue regular updates as changes or modifications are made related to contracted salaries, services, insurance and related human resource issues.

4. Ensure That Teachers, Administrators and Support Staff Have Clear and Sustainable Communication Channels to Receive Updates and Express Their Perspectives and Concerns:

- Expand staff access to information updates.
- Consider the implementation of staff forums and discussion venues to receive feedback and recommendations related to proposed or potential human resource issues, including dealing with possible budget reductions.
- Make certain that a variety of media and platforms are used to communicate significant information related to human resource issues extending from the reopening process.
- Have a comprehensive list of individuals and service agencies that staff can access to get updates, address emerging problems, and understand changes in the school and district landscape.

5. Examine Certification Requirements and Emerging Needs for Ensuring All Classrooms Have the Teaching Staff Needed:

- Work with local and state agencies and organizations (including colleges and universities) to extend options for teachers and administrators completing certification requirements.
- Engage in cross-functional partnerships to determine the most effective ways to deal with teacher shortages extending from the crisis. For example, how will the district ensure that schools are fully staffed by the time of reopening? What will the district do to address significant areas of teacher shortage (e.g., Special Education, English Learner services, CTE, math and science, world languages, etc.)?
- Determine if expansion and refinement of staff services are necessary to address emerging staff needs related to health, safety, trauma, family crisis, economic issues and related concerns related to the COVID-19 crisis.

6. **Analyze Staffing Implications If Expanded Health, Social Services and Psychological Services Are Necessary to Address Emerging Mental Health and Psychological Stress-Related Issues:**

- Plan for multiple potential contingencies as reopening and potential "second-wave" issues emerge.
- Determine how staffing will be handled if a bifurcated approach is used (i.e., Who will teach in person? Who will teach at home using distance/virtual learning? How will determination of staffing assignments be handled to ensure alignment with negotiated contract protocols?).
- Engage in problem-solving scenarios involving potential issues schools and the district may face related to mental health, psychological stress and physical health as the school year continues.

7. **Make Certain That Financing Is Available to Meet Professional Development Needs as Part of School Reopening:**

- Work closely with offices of curriculum and instruction and professional learning to determine priorities for professional development available to staff during the reopening process.
- Ensure that professional development options are available to professional and paraprofessional staff as well as support staff (especially in areas such as distance learning and social-emotional learning).
- Expand opening professional development options to include issues related to staff members' dealing with the crisis and its multiple implications for their health and social-emotional well-being as well as those of their families.
- Collaborate with district, local and state agencies to ensure that (to the extent possible) funding is available to address emerging professional development needs.

8. **Investigate the Implications of Federal Funding Cycles and Recovery Monies Related to School Reopening and Infrastructure Experiences Extending from the Crisis:**

- Work closely with internal and external agencies and funding sources to keep on top of changing budget cycles and future iterations of recovery act funding.
- Determine with relevant internal and external groups how allocated federal funding can or cannot be used to supplant operational funding or address shortfalls.
- Make certain that human resource employees are kept informed about the range of federal funding requirements and policies, including issues related to Title I funding allocations, including current discussions of using funds for private and parochial schools.

Offer Personalized and Differentiated Professional Learning

Task force superintendents expressed support for professional learning as a significant priority during this period of crisis and transition. Specifically, they identified the following needs and target areas related to professional learning:

- The need for professional learning for all staff related to addressing the social and emotional needs of students, their families and educators;
- The necessity of using multiple modalities and approaches for professional development, including expanded virtual options, study groups, action research teams, and instructional rounds in which educators address emerging problems of practice;
- The importance of training all staff in key concepts and strategies related to being trauma-informed and trauma-skilled;
- The need to focus on ensuring that all staff members are technically proficient and comfortable with instructional design within a virtual context, including making online learning engaging, student-centered and interactive; and
- The value of expanding the range of professional learning opportunities available to staff, including highlighting best practices and strategies used by exemplary teachers and administrators to address emerging issues extending from the crisis.

Section One: Key Principles for Professional Development Related to Reopening

An emerging and recurrent theme in all dialogues and discussions involving task force superintendents was an emphasis on not conducting "business as usual." The COVID-19 crisis has shone a powerful spotlight on practices and traditions that are now outmoded or in need of transformation as schools reopen. The superintendents were especially emphatic that the crisis has established a moral imperative for public education: antiquated practices sustained through traditions in the old industrial model of education must give way to a new paradigm reflective of the interconnectivity, global focus, diversity and technology-based world of the 21st century.

Effective and sustained professional learning is even more critical as schools reopen and students, staff and families adjust to this "new normal." Following are design principles for professional development cited by many task force members:

- Professional development must be highly interactive and personalized, regardless of the medium used (i.e., virtual, blended, in-person).
- Reopening professional learning should emphasize strategies and processes that educators, including support staff and paraprofessionals, can employ to reinforce students' sense of connectivity, safety, efficacy and comfort in returning to school.
- The use of technology—including the effective design and delivery of distance-learning lessons—should become a part of all educators' repertoire, reinforced by modeling of best practices during professional learning workshops.
- The range of professional development offerings given to returning educators should model best practices for classroom instruction, including protocols, routines and rituals for reinforcing a sense of community and mutual support.

- School districts must prepare for a range of contingencies and scenarios, depending on the conditions present during school reopening, including the possibility of continuing virtual/distance learning, modified schedules involving some students being taught in-person while others learn virtually, and/or traditional in-person learning in school buildings).
- Priorities for professional learning must include strategies and best practices to ensure that all staff work effectively in responding to trauma-based situations and trauma-based disciplinary actions on the part of some learners.
- The focus of professional learning during reopening must involve a Whole Child emphasis, including modeling and reinforcing teachers' understanding of ways to enhance students' health, well-being, physical growth and development, and social-emotional needs and development.

Section Two: Recommended Actions Related to Professional Development and Reopening

1. **Include Ceremonies and Rituals Essential to Reinforce Staff Members' Sense of Routine and Community Affiliation:**

   - Integrate a range of welcome-back activities and acknowledgments to celebrate the achievements of staff during school closings.
   - Highlight partnerships and group collaboration activities that reflect the power of connectivity and mutual support evident during the school-closing crisis.
   - Encourage staff to reflect on "lessons learned" during school closings: What lessons did we learn? What do we need to do differently as the school year opens? How can we sustain the camaraderie, outreach, and attention to students' social and emotional needs evident during school closings?
   - Ask staff to reflect on their experiences with virtual/distance learning and generate suggestions for professional development from which they might benefit to enhance future lesson design and delivery.

2. **Emphasize Strategies and Research-Based Actions Involving Social and Emotional Learning (SEL):**

   - Provide sessions on strategies teachers and aides can use to welcome back students and help them to feel safe, invited and welcomed back to school.
   - Integrate suggestions for SEL-related routines and protocols, modeling such techniques as morning meetings, reflection opportunities, metacognition strategies, and reinforcement of the classroom as a learning community.
   - Reinforce staff understanding and use of both simple and complex cooperative learning structures, extending from Listen-Think-Pair-Share reflections to complex techniques like JIGSAW investigations and in-class competitions.
   - Demonstrate ways that teachers and aides can model and reinforce students' ability to demonstrate effective interpersonal communication skills.
   - Use periodic reflection checkpoints during workshops to help staff see the value of self-regulation and self-assessment.
   - Make certain that workshops are varied and engaging, using a range of experience-based interactive activities aligned with effective lesson design (e.g., articulation of objectives, engaging warm-ups, modeling and shaping of key skills and knowledge, opportunities for independent application, ongoing feedback and coaching, and meaningful closure activities).

3. **Provide Workshops for All Staff About the Impact of School Closings and the COVID-19 Crisis, Including Trauma-Related Effects:**

- Provide sessions involving the meaning of trauma, its multi-faceted impact on individuals and groups, and specific insights concerning the potential traumatic effects of COVID-19 and school closings.
- Develop consensus-driven ideas and strategies for identifying evidence of trauma in individual students and staff as well as evidence of subgroup trauma extending from unique challenges students and staff may have confronted during school closings.
- Encourage staff to understand the continuum of trauma-informed schooling, including what it means to be trauma-skilled in responding to students who are demonstrating signs of sustained effects extending from trauma.
- Offer sessions that help classroom educators understand the range of personnel, student services, and support programs that students and families can access—or that they can access if there is evidence of trauma-based actions/reactions in their classrooms.
- Expand professional development opportunities to all support personnel (including bus drivers, custodians, cafeteria workers and office workers) to ensure that they are both celebrated for their contributions and that they understand the potential ways in which the school closing experience may have generated trauma-based reactions among students and staff.

4. **Emphasize School-Specific Professional Learning Personalized to the Needs of the Staff:**

- Be sensitive to the range of needs and challenges that individuals are facing as they return to school in order to personalize professional development.
- Consider options for personalizing and differentiating professional development to customize it for the unique needs and priorities identified for a specific school site or program office.
- If funding and logistics allow, consider how educators might be given options customized to their specific needs and objectives.
- Take into account how employees new to a school site may need extra support and professional learning as they acclimate to the culture and changing dynamics of their new site and the after-effects of the COVID-19 crisis.
- Consider ways to expand staff access to a range of customized program options, including recording workshops and sessions they may have missed if they are in other sessions.
- At the conclusion of all individual sessions and at the end of each professional development day, encourage staff members to debrief on how they are feeling, how they are reacting to the sessions, and how they plan to use workshop knowledge and skills in their classrooms or other settings.

5. **Integrate Effective Uses of Technology and Social Media to Reinforce Strategies for Learning in a Virtual World:**

- Ensure that staff experience models and exemplary practices related to virtual and distance learning as part of their professional development experience.
- Use a variety of social media and virtual learning to build a sense of collective support, interaction and debriefing.
- Model strategies for making learning in the virtual world interactive, including opportunities for online breakout rooms and discussion sessions integrated into workshops and professional learning programs.
- Encourage staff to post their experiences and insights concerning the use of workshop-based virtual learning strategies and insights.

- Showcase throughout the year examples of elementary, middle and high school teachers using technology and social media effectively in their classrooms and schools.
- Integrate synchronous and asynchronous virtual learning experiences, ensuring that individuals unable to attend a session in person have access to a virtual learning archive of prior workshops, discussion sessions and webinars.
- Highlight for staff available webinars and other resources aligned with school and district priorities and problems of practice related to reopening and strategic planning focus areas.

6. **Anticipate Unique Challenges Related to Reopening and Engage Participants in Using Design Thinking to Address Potential Problems of Practice:**

- Present to staff the concept of "design thinking," encouraging them to follow its key steps as they identify and generate solutions to problems of practice arising from reopening and COVID-19-related issues and concerns.
- Encourage professional development participants to develop a deep understanding of the members of the learning community they serve, especially their students and families, reinforcing SEL dispositions such as empathy.
- Engage participants in identifying emerging problems and "unpack" them by questioning the problem, questioning related assumptions, and questioning implications.
- Pose to participants COVID-19 problems with solutions that are ill-defined or unknown, reframing the problem in practical and humane ways.
- Ask participants to adopt a hands-on approach to prototyping and testing proposed solutions.
- Encourage participants to use their design thinking solutions in their classroom and school settings, providing tools and platforms for them to share updates and insights.

7. **Integrate into Professional Development Strategies and Actions Designed to Support Staff in Addressing Learning Gaps and Disproportionality Issues Extending from the Crisis:**

- Reinforce research and current reporting that confirm the potential for major learning gaps for all students as they return to school.
- Ask participants to brainstorm and identify priorities related to these gaps, including ways they can support students in transitioning to higher grades or course levels while addressing areas in which their knowledge and skills may be underdeveloped as a result of closings.
- Encourage educators to determine "power standards" (i.e., standards with a high level of significance, transferability and foundational strength) that students should have mastered in the previous grade level and generate suggestions for integrating those standards into initial lessons and units.
- Engage participants in discussions of strategies to assess student achievement data to identify individuals and groups who may be most at-risk because of school closings.
- Explore strategies for staff to address the needs of special populations, including students with Individualized Education Plans, English Learners, Gifted, and Title 1 learners.
- Develop strategies to address issues of disproportionality extending from students' inequitable access to technology, internet and virtual learning resources.
- Ensure that participants understand the assessments and data analysis measures they can use or access to identify and address emerging or continuing learning gaps.
- Integrate school improvement plans into these discussions, reinforcing staff understanding of school and district priorities related to identified learning gaps and disproportionality issues.

8. **Model Cultural Responsiveness as Part of Your Professional Learning Activities:**

- Ensure that staff members explore and understand the significance of students' cultures and backgrounds as key parts of their life experience and education.
- Explore with staff what it means to be "culturally responsive," including integrating whenever possible multiple perspectives, references to students' various cultural traditions, and strategies to understand how culture can shape and inform students' perceptions and construction of meaning involving key themes, issues and events.
- Encourage staff to reflect on how students' various cultures and communities may have been impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, including differing perspectives about health, safety, security and well-being.
- Ask staff to analyze the implications of available student achievement data and academic progress using the lens of disaggregation (i.e., how have different student subgroups and communities been affected by the crisis?).
- Brainstorm ways to have teachers and other staff use a range of culturally responsive strategies for welcoming students back to school and addressing emerging needs and concerns.

9. **Expand the Range of Designs Used to Deliver Professional Learning Related to Reopening:**

- When using keynote speakers, employ available technology so staff members can hear the speaker(s) without having to leave their school or home (if virtual learning continues in the district).
- Extend and refine staff members' use and competency related to Zoom, social media and online lesson design and delivery.
- Integrate a range of designs to model interactivity and participant-sensitive pacing during professional learning sessions, including opportunities for electronic voting, expression of opinions, breakout chat groups, and other platforms.
- Offer opportunities for staff to identify areas of concern or need related to the use of technology in their classrooms and schools, including varying degrees of students' home access to internet and hardware.
- Identify and present models and exemplars of effective virtual learning to showcase techniques and resources available to teachers to help them replicate these best practices.
- Encourage follow-up collaborative planning and action research as participants move beyond opening-of-school professional development into the academic year.

10. **Use Opening-of-Schools Professional Learning as a Springboard for Sustained Professional Development Throughout the 2020-21 Academic Year:**

- Reinforce that the coming academic year is a journey that staff and students will move through together.
- Use feedback generated during opening professional development sessions to chart a course for follow-up professional learning throughout the coming academic year.
- Encourage staff to form study groups and discussion teams to extend and refine their initial professional development experiences, including opportunities for sharing lessons and resources for teachers across schools teaching the same courses or grade levels.
- Plan professional learning for the coming academic year as an extension of the needs analysis conducted at the time of school reopening, including strategic planning for the possibility of a second wave of school closings that may occur if another wave of COVID-19 cases impacts the district or region.

Action Steps for Priority Eight

Transform Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

Task force superintendents were unanimous in their assertion that the COVID-19-related crisis has allowed us to examine how we design our curriculum, teach our students, and monitor their progress. Their recommendations reinforced the adage that in crisis there is opportunity. Their recommendations included the following:

- Written curriculum must continue to address required standards, but it should reflect what we have learned during the crisis: the need for personalization, differentiation and social-emotional learning to become key components of our curriculum design process.
- The teaching-learning process must be personalized and differentiated to accommodate the range of readiness levels, interests and learner profiles evident in the students we are serving.
- Assessment cannot return to traditional practices. It must become more balanced and emphasize coaching-based formative assessment vs. teaching to the test.
- Amid the COVID-19 crisis, we have all seen the inadequacy of a test-driven organizational culture. We must take a more holistic approach to assessment.
- We need to emphasize performance assessment and project-based learning while providing immediate and sustained feedback and coaching, monitoring and assessing student progress, including learners' acquisition and deepening of such SEL-related skills as self-regulation, interpersonal communication and citizenship.

Section One: Redefining Curriculum as a System for Promoting and Monitoring Learning

As schools plan to reopen in the coming months, the next academic year can be a vehicle for transforming education as we know it. Curriculum leaders Fenwick English and Allan Glatthorn consistently emphasized that curriculum is not just written guides and lessons. Instead, it is a system for promoting and monitoring student learning. The COVID-19 crisis has accented the interdependence of the various levels of a curriculum system articulated by English and Glatthorn:

1. **The Ideal/Organic Curriculum:** The documents and media used to express a district's values and guiding principles, including vision and mission statements. *Does the district's ideal curriculum reflect a commitment to the health, well-being, social-emotional growth and academic achievement of all learners accented so powerfully during this national crisis?*

2. **The Written Curriculum:** The written guides and supporting lessons used to inform the teaching and learning process within a district. *Are curriculum guides written to articulate a clear sequence of standards implementation while advocating for teaching-learning activities aligned with the needs of the Whole Child (i.e., health and physical development, social-emotional development and academic achievement)? Is the written curriculum clear, coherent, aligned and culturally responsive?*

3. **The Taught Curriculum:** What actually occurs in classrooms as teachers implement the written curriculum with learners. *Are classrooms inviting and engaging communities of learning? Do students see the purpose and meaning of the content and skills they are studying? Are classrooms personalized and differentiated to address students' varying readiness levels, interests and learner profiles?*

4. **The Assessed Curriculum:** Those components of the curriculum identified for purposes of progress monitoring, assessment and evaluation. *Does assessment focus on key power standards for which all students are expected to achieve proficiency? Is assessment balanced in its approach, emphasizing a combination of diagnostic, formative and assessment feedback? Does assessment support the learning process rather than detracting from it (i.e., emphasizing student feedback and coaching rather than mechanical teaching-to-the-test)?*

5. **The Supported Curriculum:** The range of resources, professional learning and support systems necessary to ensure that all instructors are effective with their students. *Do all students have equitable access to needed resources, including internet access and hardware needed for distance learning? Does professional learning contribute value to teachers' expertise and competency to reinforce students' access to a rigorous and engaging curriculum and address the individual needs of all learners?*

6. **The Learned Curriculum:** The knowledge, skills and habits of mind acquired by students within the context of their formal school experience. *Do all students develop proficiency of identified curriculum power standards? Do the various levels of the curriculum support student growth and development in becoming a life-long learner? Can every student see himself or herself in the curriculum they are studying?*

7. **The Hidden Curriculum:** The unconscious or unexpressed issues that arise when there is a lack of alignment between or among various levels of the district's curriculum. *Do staff or students experience a sense of mixed signals or contradiction between what is articulated and what is practiced? Are there areas in your curriculum system that show issues related to misalignment?*

Section Two: Suggested Action Steps for Transforming Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment During Reopening and the Coming Academic Year:

What are the implications of reopening and the upcoming academic year for curriculum, instruction and assessment? The following action steps surfaced throughout the task force discussions:

1. **Revisit Your Ideal/Organic Curriculum to Address Emerging Priorities:** How do your vision, mission and guiding principles reflect the priorities and lessons learning during the crisis?

   - Ensure that your vision statement identifies a true "North Star" to which your school district is heading in offering a Whole Child approach to education.
   - Make certain that your mission statement reinforces the importance of social-emotional learning and health/physical growth and development as essential components of students' academic achievement.
   - Incorporate into district guiding principles performance indicators for monitoring students' health, physical development and social-emotional growth in addition to their academic progress.

2. **Ensure That Your Written Curriculum Integrates Social and Emotional Learning:** How can you use the COVID-19 crisis as an entry point for discussing and addressing gaps or structural issues related to your written curriculum, including its pacing and sequencing?

   - Use school closings to revisit the extent to which your written curriculum has clearly articulated content and performance standards sequenced in a logical and spiraling way.

- Use feedback from teachers, students and parents about the issue of power standards: To what extent were the most significant and spiraling (i.e., reused and revisited with increasing levels of depth and proficiency) academic standards clearly articulated to allow for ease of lesson design and delivery during school closings?
- Determine areas of your written curriculum in which social-emotional learning standards might be integrated so that they become a part of ongoing progress monitoring.
- Ensure that your written curriculum reinforces routines, classroom management strategies, and community building needed to ensure a safe, orderly, healthy and engaging learning environment in each classroom and content area.
- Make certain that your written curriculum is culturally responsive, developing all learners' cognitive skills, processes and habits of mind essential for becoming an independent learner.

3. **Develop Recommendations and Performance Indicators for Instruction That Addresses the Whole Child and COVID-19-Related Issues:** What are the unique challenges and needs that both students and staff will have as they reenter school and adjust to this new normal?

- Ensure that all staff, including teachers, paraprofessionals and support staff, have the knowledge and skills to support effective virtual learning.
- Develop recommendations and performance criteria for what effective lessons and units should look and feel like when presented virtually via distance learning.
- Anticipate the need for students and staff to express their experiences, emotions and feelings resulting from the COVID-19 crisis and the challenges—and opportunities—of reopening.
- Ensure that lessons always include strategies and processes that reinforce norms, protocols and routines that support students' sense of safety, support and efficacy (e.g., morning meetings, class community debriefings about what works and doesn't work, opportunities for celebration and acknowledgment, team building).
- Make certain that lesson design reinforces group interdependence, collaboration and mutual support, including ongoing use of cooperative learning structures (e.g., Think-Pair-Share, small-group discussions and debriefings, JIGSAWs, games and tournaments, etc.).
- Encourage small- and large-group debriefings and discussions, including opportunities to discuss and debate alternative perspectives and points of view about key topics and issues.
- Emphasize the importance of teacher modeling and coaching related to students' ability to self-regulate, engage in metacognitive reflection, apply interpersonal communication and conflict resolution skills, and display ethical citizenship.
- Help teachers to understand the range of trauma-based behaviors that may affect students' learning experiences and potential disciplinary issues.

4. **Determine How Your Assessed Curriculum Will Need to Change in Response to Student Needs:** To what extent does your assessment system need to be revised and expanded to ensure a balanced approach to student progress monitoring?

- Use school closings as a discussion point for revisiting current models of assessment and evaluation of student progress. To what extent do you use a balanced approach that includes diagnosis, ongoing feedback via formative assessment, and evaluation based on determining all students' successful mastery of key power standards?
- Provide professional learning to support teachers' use of coaching strategies that deliver criterion-based feedback and support students' progress toward independent application of key knowledge and skills.

- Incorporate into your approach to progress monitoring, strategies and processes for monitoring students' development of social-emotional learning skills and competencies, including self-regulation, interpersonal communication and citizenship.
- Emphasize the value of authentic, performance-based assessment, including culminating independent and small-group projects that are authentic and engaging for learners.
- Assess the extent to which your current assessment system addresses students' varying readiness levels, interests and learner profiles.

5. **Assess Your Supported Curriculum to Ensure It Reinforces Your Reopening Infrastructure:** To what extent did the COVID-19 crisis reveal inequities and disproportionality concerns related to textbooks, supporting materials, technology and distance-learning resources, and emerging professional development priorities?

- Continue your efforts to provide equitable access of all students to resources needed for virtual learning, including technology as well as reliable broadband/internet access.
- Consider how you will support bifurcated models of schooling, including the possibility of some students and teachers engaged in in-person learning while others are working remotely.
- Encourage staff to see the power of collaboration to ensure that classroom teachers can address the range of needs and emotional issues students may face during reopening (e.g., knowledge of counseling, health, social and psychological services, and related internal and community organizations available to students and their families).
- Investigate the implications for textbooks and support materials if your school district uses a multi-modal approach, including some students learning in-person while others learn virtually.
- Analyze the major impact of COVID-19 and school closings on special populations, including the services and supports students will require in such areas as Special Education, English Learners, Title I, and Talented and Gifted).

6. **Expand Your Focus on Student Learning to Include Support and Monitoring Related to Issues Extending from COVID-19 and School Reopening:** To what extent is reopening an opportunity to examine and adjust your approach and focus related to monitoring student progress and achievement?

- Form crisis intervention teams to address current and emerging issues related to trauma, health, safety and potentially unreported incidents of abuse experienced by students.
- Use feedback from staff and community to identify areas of strength and areas in need of enhancement related to available student services, counselors, health resources, safety protocols, communication and social and psychological services.
- Examine the quality of your data dashboard and its capacity to provide meaningful and timely data about the range of needs and issues that students may be facing as they return to school.
- Provide both professional learning and community outreach sessions to ensure that staff, families and community members are updated about the reopening process and services and resources available to them.

7. **Evaluate Potential Gaps and Contradictions That May Result in a Hidden Curriculum During Reopening:** How do patterns and behaviors observed among students, staff, parents and community members during school closings suggest areas in which omissions or contradictions are evident in your district's curriculum system?

- Engage staff in ongoing discussions and feedback sessions related to curriculum alignment. To what extent do your written, taught, assessed, supported and learned curricula align? Are there areas in which misalignment is present?
- Begin study groups and action research teams to address identified problems of practice extending from these initial discussions.
- Incorporate suggestions and recommendations into the next budget-planning cycle to address resources needed to eliminate causes of a "hidden curriculum."

Action Steps for Guiding Principle Nine

Anticipate Potential Budget Shortfalls and COVID-19-Related Expenses

Task force superintendents consistently voiced their concern about anticipated immediate and long-range budget shortfalls and expenses extending from this crisis. All of them are facing some form of budget reduction or reallocation during the present fiscal year. Many are also hearing about potential major reductions (ranging from 16% to 18% of projected budget allocations) during the coming fiscal year. School district budgets are subject to the compounded impact of federal, state and local budget cuts, the confluence of which can be dire. Concerns expressed included the following:

- Dealing with existing and proposed budget reductions and their potential impact on service delivery, staff cost-of-living raises, and related contractual obligations;
- Addressing the need for local, state and federal agencies to allow for a greater range of budget adjustments and reallocations to deal with COVID-19-related contingencies;
- The very real impending priority of building a reopening response infrastructure that will include vetting and purchasing of masks, PPEs, thermometers and related testing equipment, expanded bus availability (to accommodate alternative scheduling models), and costs related to sanitation and building maintenance; and
- Recurrent concerns about public perceptions: e.g., *The minute we open schools, people will think everything is open. How do we message people in the community about reopening and the necessary restrictions and protocols we must follow to ensure the health and safety of students and staff?*

Section One: Anticipating Budget and Fiscal Issues Associated with Reopening

1. Gather information concerning local, state and federal funding sources related to building a COVID-19 response infrastructure that will meet the needs of returning students and staffs.

2. Analyze budgetary implications of health, safety and sanitation equipment purchases necessary for successful reopening (e.g., thermometers, thermal imaging technology, sanitation equipment and supplies).

3. Anticipate funding implications related to space configurations required for social distancing, including the possibility of using and/or leasing adjacent or accessible buildings outside of the immediate school structure.

4. Analyze transportation implications of reopening, including potential need for leasing of buses to address the transporting of students if an alternating schedule configuration (e.g., A-Week/B-Week) is used or if schools use a half-day model, alternating students in attendance.

5. Investigate staffing implications and related funding issues if additional teachers and paraprofessionals are needed to provide intervention, coaching and support for students demonstrating learning gaps that require intensive intervention.

6. Continue to build your technology infrastructure, including processes for dealing with lost equipment and resources if students have moved or cannot be located during school closings.

7. Address the stark reality of contract issues involving negotiated salaries.

8. Analyze the implications of some staff and students requiring at-home accommodations because of compromised health (i.e., how will their needs be supported in addition to the regular schooling process?).

9. If possible, expand professional development funding to accommodate emerging needs for training in areas such as virtual learning, technology integration, social and emotional learning, and trauma-skilled education.

10. Work collaboratively with local, state and federal agencies to ensure that the most accurate and recent information concerning funding sources—and potential cutbacks—are accessed and addressed expeditiously.

Section Two: Navigating Federal and State COVID-19 Funding Cycles

Superintendents consistently cited the continually changing landscape associated with federal funding and state pass-through funding initiatives. It is imperative that district leaders stay informed about recurring budget cycles and get clear interpretations of how funding can be used. A major recurrent issue in the task force discourse centered on the ways in which Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos is emphasizing reallocation of Title I funding for use with private and parochial schools. Following is a synthesis of current federal and state COVID-19-related funding cycles and priorities:

Phase 1: Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act (3/6/20)

1. $8.3 billion emergency package; 3x request from White House.

2. Includes $2.2 billion to help federal, state and local health agencies prepare for and respond to COVID-19.

Phase 2: Families First Coronavirus Response Act (3/18/20)

1. **Nutrition Provisions:**

   • $500 million for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to provide nutrition assistance for children and their mothers who have lost their jobs as a result of the outbreak.

   • $400 million for The Emergency Food Assistance Program to help local food banks meet increased need for low-income Americans.

   • $100 million for nutrition assistance for Puerto Rico and other U.S. territories.

   • A provision that allows the Department of Agriculture to approve state plans to provide emergency Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) food assistance to households with children who would otherwise receive free or reduced-price school meals in the event that their school is closed (The MEAL Act).

   • Gives the Secretary of Agriculture the authority to approve state waivers addressing nutrition assistance with school closures even if it increases cost to the federal government.

- Provides provisions to allow child and adult care centers to serve food to go, allow the Secretary of Agriculture to waive meal pattern requirements in child nutrition programs if there is a disruption in food supply, and allow the Secretary of Agriculture to issue nationwide school meal waivers during the emergency.

- Allows participants to be certified for WIC without being physically present at a WIC clinic.

- Suspends work requirements for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) during the emergency.

- Allows states to request waivers for emergency CR-SNAP benefits to existing SNAP households up to the maximum monthly allotment.

2. Health Provisions:

- Provides free COVID-19 testing to all Americans, regardless of insurance.

- Medicaid and CHIP, which cover over 45 million children between the two programs, will cover diagnostic testing, including the cost of a provider visit to receive testing, with no cost to the patient.

- Increases states' federal medical assistance percentage (FMAP) for public health programs like Medicaid and CHIP for the duration of the emergency.

- Increases Medicaid allotments for U.S. territories.

- Ensures that American Indians and Alaskan Natives do not experience cost sharing for COVID-19 testing.

3. Paid Sick Leave, Unemployment Insurance and Family and Medical Leave Provisions:

- Provides employees of employers with fewer than 500 employees the right to two weeks of fully paid leave when they are sick, or two weeks of paid leave at 2/3 of their normal rate to care for a family member.

- Provides employees of employers with fewer than 500 employees the right to take up to 12 weeks of job-protected leave.

- Provides $1 billion in 2020 emergency grants to states to meet the increased need for Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits.

- Provides several tax breaks for employers who give their employees mandatory paid leave during the emergency.

Phase 3: CARES Act (Passed 3/27)

1. $15.5 billion for the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program.

2. $8.8 billion for Child Nutrition Programs to ensure students receive meals when school is not in session.

3. $3.5 billion for Child Care and Development Block Grants, which provide childcare subsidies to low-income families and can be used to augment state and local systems.

4. $750 million for Head Start early-education programs.

5. $100 million in Project SERV grants to help clean and disinfect schools and provide support for mental health services and distance learning.

6. $69 million for schools funded by the Bureau of Indian Education.

7. $5 million for health departments to provide guidance on cleaning and disinfecting schools and day-care facilities.

8. The $13.5 billion in stabilization fund money could be used to provide K-12 students internet connectivity and internet-connected devices; a separate item in the bill for rural development provides $25 million to support "distance learning."

Using CARES Act Funding:

1. Under the CARES Act, states and districts are set to receive $13.2 billion for K-12. The money must be spent by September 2021, although it's not clear whether the funding can be directed at costs already incurred related to the pandemic (that is our hope).

2. There is an urgent push by governors to expedite the process for moving these funds to districts, which AASA supports, but it still could be at least two months before they show up in districts' coffers.

3. Once the funds are released, districts can use them in several ways:

   - For any activity authorized in ESSA, IDEA and Perkins CTE;

   - To coordinate with public health departments to prevent, prepare and respond to COVID-19;

   - To address the unique needs of low-income students, students with disabilities, English learners, racial and ethnic minorities, homeless and foster care youth;

   - For PD for staff on sanitation and minimizing spread of pandemic and purchasing supplies to clean and sanitize buildings; and

   - Planning for and coordinating long-term closures including how to provide meals.

Phase 4: COVID Package (4/23/20):

   - The proposal includes $310 billion for the Paycheck Protection Program, including setting tens of billions aside for smaller lenders, $25 billion for testing, and $75 billion for hospitals.

Action Steps for Guiding Principle Ten

Embrace a New Paradigm for Post-COVID-19 Education

Finally, task force superintendents were unanimous in their belief that we have entered a new age of education in the United States and around the world. The new emerging paradigm includes the following key focus areas and processes:

- An expanded and renewed commitment to educational equity, ensuring that all learners have access to broadband communication and the internet and have the resources to learn in a virtual environment;
- The absolute necessity to take a Whole Child approach to students' education, including sensitivity and responsiveness to their physical development and well-being, their sense of personal efficacy and self-regulation, their capacity for effective interpersonal communication and interaction, and their understanding of their responsibilities and roles as a citizen;
- The reality that distance learning and all its attendant opportunities and downsides is now a fundamental delivery system in our world, and districts must ensure that all staff receive professional learning to address this technology-based approach;
- The need for cross-functional teaming and collaborative structures/approaches to addressing crises such as the one we are experiencing, including expanded collaboration with agencies and organizations within the region (e.g., universities and community colleges, social service agencies, food banks, nonprofits, and businesses/corporations);
- The critical importance of ensuring consistent messaging and communication with all stakeholders within the learning community; and
- The reality that students, families and staff are engaged in a social experiment that is unprecedented in modern history.

The AASA superintendent task force on school reopening involved continuing discourse concerning the ways in which the COVID-19 crisis has reinforced and, in some cases brought to the surface of public education, major inequities, inequalities and disproportionalities inherent in our national system. Participants were united in their assertion that the reopening process can launch a transformation of public education as we know it. Specifically, we now have the opportunity to ensure students' equitable access to quality education that is personalized, differentiated and consistent with the rigors and demands of the technology-driven and change-dominated world of 21st century education.

Task force participants revisited the following themes related to this transformation process. They agreed about the importance of these themes becoming guiding principals for all educational districts and organizations, regardless of the design and approaches taken during the reopening process.

1. **The Importance of Educating the Whole Child:**

- Traditional education in the industrial age emphasized conformity, consistency and predictability related to core academic outcomes and basic student proficiencies.
- In contrast, 21st century education must emphasize a holistic approach to teaching, learning and assessment, including monitoring and supporting student health, well-being, interpersonal and social interaction and collaboration, efficacy, and academic progress.

- Task force participants strongly emphasized the value of ensuring that students experience schools as inviting, engaging and authentic places of learning in which they feel valued, known, respected and encouraged to succeed and thrive.
- Students' education must emphasize John Dewey's priorities for the purpose of education, including ensuring that all students become life-long learners, ethical citizens, and capable of success in chosen career pathways.
- A Whole Child approach is also culturally responsive and sensitive to students' backgrounds, cultural traditions and perspectives.

2. **The Imperative of Addressing Inequities That Impede Student Achievement:**

- Task force participants were united in their assertion that the COVID-19 crisis and school reopening offers us an opportunity to address the significant inequities at the heart of public education. A recurrent discussion, for example, centered around the need for all students to have access to hardware and internet access more readily available in many suburban districts.
- The high incidence of COVID-19 cases and related mortality rates associated with highly diverse communities and regions finds parallels in patterns of underperformance and underachievement by many minority students.
- School and district leaders must work closely and consistently with community partners, including post-secondary education, governmental agencies, nonprofit service providers, early childhood, and health services to ensure that all students receive the care, support and resources needed to ensure their well-being and physical growth and development.
- The economic disproportionality evident in a range of districts and regions (including urban centers, rural locations and tribal settings) necessitates that educators unite in bringing resources and services necessary to bridge the inequity divide (including universal broadband/internet services, health services, and psychological/counseling services).

3. **Health and Safety as Key Focus Points in Public Education:**

- As suggested previously, the COVID-19 crisis has revealed a multitude of educational and resource inequities. These inequities have consistently highlighted the radically differing access students and their families have to medical services and health support systems.
- Participating superintendents were adamant that geography should not determine the quality of education a student receives or the adequacy of health and safety services they can access.
- Superintendents were also clear that the range of traumas experienced by students and their families reinforces the necessity of a more coherent and consistent integration of health and safety education into students' curriculum.
- It also affirms the growing importance of community schools in which students and families can access on-site health and safety services and supports as part of school operations.

4. **The Power of Clearly Articulated Communication Involving Policies, Practices and Funding:**

- An effective educational system benefits from leaders within the district and those in local, state, and federal agencies sending clear and consensus-driven messages and information concerning policies, protocols and funding streams.
- Superintendents in the task force emphasized that a major problem in facilitating responses to the COVID-19 crisis and the reopening of schools involves the confusing and sometimes contradictory information and requirements given them by different organizations.

- Transforming public education in a post-COVID-19 world requires effective communication that articulates a consensus-driven body of information that is timely, appropriately updated as data and requirements change, and coherently designed to ensure understanding by a range of education and community groups.
- It is especially critical that when a national pandemic or other crisis occurs, all levels of government are in agreement about messages communicated and protocols to be followed.

5. The Need for Social and Emotional Learning as an Integral Part of K-12 Education:

- The task force superintendents unanimously agreed that social and emotional learning is an essential part of both school reopening and the future of public education as we know it.
- They recommended that staff receive meaningful professional development involving strategies and techniques for building a welcoming and engaging learning environment for all students.
- Schools and classrooms as true learning communities must incorporate SEL-related proficiency standards and related progress monitoring into the assessment of student progress.
- Key SEL focus areas should include supporting students to become self-aware and self-regulating; display effective in interpersonal and collaborative interaction and communication; monitor their emotional reactions, ensuring appropriate responses to conflict resolution and problem solving; and demonstrate the behaviors and habits of mind consistent with ethical citizenship.
- Direct instruction and coaching of students as they develop and apply SEL skills and competencies should be integrated into all levels of the curriculum.
- Similarly, professional development should include a focus on preparing educators to understand the importance of SEL and ways they can reinforce students' ability to apply SEL skills as life-long learners.

6. The Necessity of Schools and Districts Becoming Trauma-Informed and Trauma-Skilled:

- The COVID-19 crisis and related school closures has resulted in a range of trauma-related responses and reactions among students, staff and families.
- Research confirms the long-term effects of trauma (from physical and psychological abuse to health and food scarcity issues) on student achievement.
- Schools become trauma-informed when all staff members understand the nature of trauma and its impact on the individual, including long-lasting effects on learning, well-being and efficacy.
- They become trauma-skilled when educators are prepared to provide services and interventions necessary to address students' behaviors and issues extending from trauma they may have experienced.
- Professional development should also include ongoing emphasis on the importance of educators becoming both trauma-informed and trauma-skilled.

7. Virtual/Distance Learning as an Organic Component of Teaching and Learning:

- Provide ongoing professional development to reinforce staff members' understanding, skills and confidence in the design and implementation of distance learning.
- Explore with staff strategies to ensure that virtual/distance learning is engaging, interactive and varied in its teaching-learning approaches (e.g., establishing purpose and clarity of lesson objectives, involving students in warm-up activities to activate and review prior learning, minimizing didactic/lecture-focused instruction in favor of cooperative learning structures, and using a range of student sub-grouping practices to reinforce connectivity and interaction).

- Integrate into virtual learning a range of social and emotional learning strategies, including virtual morning meetings, advisories, small-group coaching, and opportunities for group as well as individual reflection and self-assessment.
- Highlight examples of elementary, middle and high school virtual lessons that capture the criteria used by the district for exciting and engaging online learning activities.
- Incorporate range of feedback and progress monitoring tools and practices to help students monitor their progress toward standards proficiency, including reflection checkpoints, use of scoring rubrics, opportunities for peer feedback and coaching, and one-on-one and small-group feedback sessions.

8. **The Power of Collaboration:**

- Encourage school-based and district-level staff to engage in ongoing opportunities for discussion, problem solving, and decision making.
- Reinforce the value of differing voices and perspectives as a vehicle for moving through reopening, including dignifying feedback and offering a variety of channels and platforms for staff to provide it.
- Continue to reinforce the value of cross-functional partnerships involving representatives from community organizations, parents, government agencies, businesses and college/university partners. They are vitally important in ensuring a holistic and consistent approach to school reopening in the face of ongoing community and regional health and safety concerns.
- Explore opportunities for using cross-functional team collaboration to apply for funding sources (e.g., federal grants and recovery funding programs), highlighting the ongoing effectiveness of community partnerships and public education.

9. **The Need to Ensure That Every Student's Education Is Personalized, Differentiated, and Engaging:**

- Expand your district's efforts to incorporate social and emotional learning as a priority during school reopening and the coming academic year.
- Emphasize the value and necessity of addressing students' needs in a holistic way, including their health, physical growth and development, nutrition, emotional and interpersonal needs, as well as their academic achievement.
- Personalize students' educational experience by encourage options for choice concerning content and approach to demonstrating proficiency, alternative forms of assessment aligned with individual student learning modalities and varied and engaging learning strategy options.
- Encourage students to express their voice and perspectives as members of the learning community, including holding regular class meetings to discuss individual and group progress relative to community building and academic success.
- Whenever possible, differentiate instruction to address students' varying readiness levels, interests and learner profiles.
- Make learning engaging by emphasizing varied learning strategies, interactivity, construction of meaning, cultural responsiveness, and focus on experiential learning.
- Adopt the "10-2" rule: no more than 10 minutes of direct instruction or lecture without at least two minutes of student debriefing, interaction and experiential application.

10. The Importance of Anticipating and Preparing for Predictable and Unanticipated Change as a Part of Continuous Improvement and Strategic Planning:

- Reinforce with staff and students the value of the change process as well as the inherent stresses that accompany it.
- Model techniques and strategies aligned with facilitating the change process effectively, including design thinking, action research, instructional rounds, and peer coaching and feedback.
- Acknowledge that the change process (especially change associated with traumatic or unanticipated issues such as COVID-19) inevitably involves varying Stages of Concern and Levels of Usage. There is no single or unitary response: Change represents a continuum.
- Incorporate rituals, ceremonies and opportunities for celebration as students and staff move through the change continuum, including encouragement and reinforcement of positive, pro-active responses and attitudes related to the changing school environment.

AASA will publish future iterations of this report as schools reopen and the transformation we all hope for begins to take place. We acknowledge and deeply thank all the superintendents and other participants who contributed to the ideas and recommendations in this publication. As a tribute to them, we close with four compelling statements about the power of education and the future of the institution in the 21st century:

- *Education is the most powerful weapon, which you can use to change the world—Nelson Mandela, Former President of South Africa*

- *The illiterate of the 21st century will be not those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn—Alvin Toffler, Author of Future Shock*

- *Great leaders harness personal courage, capture the hearts and minds of others and empower new leaders to make the world a better place—Maxine Driscoll, Author of* **Leadership Really Matters**

- *As we look ahead into the 21st century, leaders will be those who empower others—Bill Gates, Co-Founder of Microsoft*