Restorative Restart

The Path Towards Reimagining and Rebuilding Schools

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Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all students; however, its impact has been particularly devastating for students of color, students from low-income families, English learners, and other marginalized children and youth. As transmission rates decline and vaccination rates increase in California, many are eager to return to normalcy, but we must all recognize that even the prepandemic normal was not working for all students. The 2021–22 school year, therefore, constitutes a critical opportunity for schools to offer students, families, and educators a restorative restart. This is a moment for districts and schools to reimagine and rebuild equitable school systems where all students have the support and opportunities they need to thrive.

Every California district should take 6 weeks to offer students, families, and educators a restorative restart to the 2021–22 school year, leveraging recent federal and state investments to do so. During this time, schools should prioritize practices that not only begin to reverse the effects of pandemic-induced lost learning opportunities but also lay the groundwork for systemic transformation using evidence-based, whole child approaches to advance learning and engagement for all students.

The path towards reimagining and rebuilding education in California begins with the following 14 action areas. Click on each numbered practice below to go to the section of the report that provides research behind each action and practical guidance for its implementation.

Center relationships between and among families, students, and educators:

1. 
   Proactively connect one-on-one with each and every family.

2. 
   Create dedicated time and space for relationship building and reengagement.

3. 
   Implement positive and restorative discipline practices.

Understand whole child needs:

4. 
   Conduct regular student wellness screenings.

5. 
   Assess student learning and review data on attendance, engagement, and grades.

6. 
   Create an individualized action plan to meet the whole child needs of every student.

Strengthen staffing and deepen community-based partnerships to address students' individualized learning and mental health needs:

7 
Pair students with high-dosage tutoring.

8 
Provide mental health supports.

9 
Offer expanded learning opportunities.

10 
Staff up to support student reengagement.

Prioritize racial equity, relevance, and rigor in curriculum and instruction:

11 
Advance racial equity in curriculum and teaching.

12 
Offer students choice and voice in their learning.

13 
Focus on priority standards and lessons to accelerate learning.

Lay the groundwork for systemic transformation:

14 
Engage diverse teams to monitor improvement and build towards long-term change.

Introduction

When K–12 schools in California closed for in-person instruction in response to COVID-19 in March 2020, few would have predicted that most schools would remain physically closed for more than one year. Throughout this period, California's educators and students have continued teaching and learning remotely for the most part, demonstrating resilience and perseverance to sustain schooling under unprecedented circumstances. Nonetheless, the impact of COVID-19 and associated educational disruptions were challenging for all students; its consequences were particularly severe for students who had inadequate access to distance learning opportunities as well as for those from communities that were disproportionately affected by the economic and public health impacts of COVID-19.

Following this extended period of physical school closures, many Californians are eager to return to school in person. The state of California and the federal government have offered financial support to K–12 schools and districts to surmount the challenge of safely reopening schools amid an ongoing pandemic as well as to help restore equity to in-person learning. Signed on March 5, 2021, California Assembly Bill 86 provided schools with $2 billion in financial incentives to begin reopening schools for in-person instruction and $4.6 billion to fund expanded learning opportunities. On March 11, 2021, President Joe Biden signed into law the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which provided over $15 billion in relief funding for California's K–12 schools, the largest ever federal government investment in California schools (White House, 2021). Title I formulas are used to allot ARPA funds in an effort to direct the funds to the schools serving students from low-income families. These federal funds are in addition to the funds from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act and the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, which were enacted in 2020. The estimated combined total of one-time federal and state COVID-relief funding for K–12 schools in California is approximately $35.7 billion. Governor Newsom's 2021–22 budget proposal, if passed, would also significantly increase funds for schools in the upcoming school year (Newsom, 2021).

For decades, California has spent less than the national average on K–12 schools; funding has not been sufficient to meet the state's educational goals or address the needs of students, particularly given the state's high cost of living (Hahnel, 2020; Levin et al., 2018). This new infusion of federal and state funding may offer California schools the flexibility to reflect critically on the ways in which the prepandemic "normal" significantly underserved many of the state's students, particularly the marginalized and most vulnerable (Reardon et al., 2018). Although the scale of the new funds is substantial, they are one-time investments that should be used to address student needs induced by the pandemic while also investing in long-term system capacity to provide equitable, high-quality teaching and learning.

After more than a year of strictly virtual or physically distant participation in school, students are in need of a restorative restart in the 2021–22 school year—an opportunity to feel

safe, seen, supported, and engaged in learning. Although many are eager for a return to normal, even the old "normal" was underserving California's most vulnerable children and youth. Instead, as schools in California transition back to in-person schooling, they must build towards an education system that places equity at the center. The objective should not be to put back into place the previous practices that led to inequities but rather to reimagine and rebuild a system that supports all students with a focus on equity.

During the 2021–22 school year, education leaders, educators, and other stakeholders have the potential to reimagine and rebuild schools. They can not only reverse the effects of pandemic-induced lost learning opportunities but also lay the groundwork for systemic transformation by using evidence-based, whole child approaches to advance learning and engagement for all students. To take advantage of this moment, schools in California must place equity at the center so that all students, especially those most affected by the pandemic and systematic racism, have the support and opportunities they need to achieve their potential.

The Process of Developing This Report

This report is intended to guide school and district leaders in their plans and approaches to returning to school at scale at the start of the 2021–22 school year. The restorative actions included in this report were developed by California-based family and student engagement organizations, educator organizations, research institutes, and civil rights and equity groups. They arise from the evidence that has collectively emerged from focus groups with educators, students, and parents and guardians; polls and surveys of stakeholders; a deep review of the literature; and original research conducted on COVID-19's impact on schools and students.

To build towards a system that meets the needs of each student, **every California district should take approximately 6 weeks this spring, summer, or at the beginning of the school year to offer students, families, and educators a restorative restart**. By redesigning schools to be restorative places—places where students feel safe, known, supported, and fully engaged in learning—we can build towards long-term systemic transformation.

During this time, educators and staff should take action in the following areas:

- center relationships among families, students, and educators;
- understand whole child needs;
- strengthen staffing and deepen community-based partnerships to address students' individualized learning and mental health needs;
- prioritize racial equity, relevance, and rigor in curriculum and instruction; and
- lay the groundwork for systemic transformation.

This report offers a framework for advancing student learning for California's students as school and community leaders navigate the challenges that lie ahead when schools reopen at scale in the 2021–22 school year. It presents specific actions, grounded in the science of learning and development, that schools can take to ensure a restorative restart for students. This report also includes a guide to anticipate and plan for the costs associated with the five restorative restart action areas listed at the bottom of page 4.

Investing in a Restorative Restart by Planning for the Four Ts: Time, Talent, Training, and Technology/Materials

When making budgeting and resource-allocation decisions with federal and state relief funds for COVID-19 recovery, school administrators are tasked with effectively deploying those funds to address student needs. Decision-making is a central component of the role of school and district administrators, but navigating a school or district through a crisis can be exhausting and can result in decision fatigue (Pignatiello et al., 2018). To support operational decision-making, PACE has developed a framework that includes four key areas for budgetary consideration when allocating funds to meet student needs and support learning. When allocating funds for a restorative restart, administrators should consider the Four Ts of school resourcing to ensure that the restorative actions are comprehensively and adequately funded to meet local needs:

- **Time.** Districts will need to account for the additional or reprioritized time required of school staff during the restorative restart. Districts can do this by paying for additional time or by reducing current staff responsibilities (i.e., "taking things off their plates") to increase staff capacity to engage in these restorative actions. Examples of investing in time include extending instructional hours, adding contract days for professional development, increasing time for teacher planning and collaboration, and increasing time for staff meetings.

- **Talent.** A restorative approach to the school year is different from "business as usual" and will require new staffing, contractors, and partnerships to support the work. These may take the form of new positions and/or new hires (e.g., data analysts, family engagement coordinators, social workers, counselors, tutors, aides, and art and music teachers). In many cases, the need for talent to support the restorative approach will necessitate the launch of new contracts or new partnerships with community organizations. Some of these hires or partnerships may need to be short-term contracts or commitments because of the one-time nature of the windfall funding.

- **Training.** Districts must invest in staff capacity to teach and support students in new ways during the restorative restart. This will call for professional learning opportunities for all school staff in social-emotional support, restorative practice, cultural responsiveness, and universal design. This investment will primarily take the form of opportunities for teachers to work, reflect, and plan together as well as providing workshops and training. Funds may also be required to pay for substitute teachers to offer coverage during training and observation opportunities.

- **Technology/Materials.** The efforts made to close the digital divide should continue until all students have reliable access to computing devices and connectivity. Furthermore, the restorative restart may necessitate purchasing software licenses for wellness screeners, student information systems, formative assessment systems, and/or learning management systems.

The contents of the Four Ts cannot be prescribed for districts or schools because local implementation will vary by local assets, needs, and priorities; however, the framework can support discussion and planning among local leadership and stakeholders. The Four Ts are designed to provide a scaffold for discussing what elements are needed as districts plan to implement a restorative restart, so they can consider where they have assets in place already and where new investments are needed. In each of the five sections of this report, we provide an analysis of how to use time, talent, training, and technology/materials to implement the restorative actions.

System Challenges and Assets in the COVID-19 Context

Challenges Facing School Leaders During the 2021–22 School Year

Declines in well-being. Schools in California were closed as part of a public health effort to protect students and their communities from the spread of SARS-CoV-2; however, the closures are also associated with concerning impacts on student well-being. Nearly half of parents of teens surveyed nationwide reported a new or worsening mental health condition for their child since the start of the pandemic, with one in three parents with teen girls and one in five parents with teen boys reporting new or worsening anxiety in their child (C. S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2021). Among students surveyed between September and December 2020 across 14 states, the number one obstacle to their learning was feeling depressed, stressed, or anxious, with Latinx, Black, and multiracial students facing more obstacles on average than White or Asian students (YouthTruth, 2021). The mental health crisis is surfacing not only among

teens but also in younger children: between April and October 2020, the proportion of children between the ages of 5 and 11 visiting an emergency department because of a mental health crisis climbed 24 percent compared to that same time period in 2019; among 12- to 17-year-olds, the number increased by 31 percent (Leeb et al., 2020).

In addition to declines in student well-being, there have been similar declines in educator well-being. Teachers are concerned about their students' well-being (Bintliff, 2020), and nearly all teachers have experienced secondary traumatic stress associated with the emotional toll of supporting students who are experiencing trauma over the course of the pandemic (Panlilio & Tirrell-Corbin, 2021). Under the increased workload associated with reinventing lessons for online delivery or the challenge of juggling instruction for both in-person and virtual students in hybrid classrooms, teacher burnout in California is on the rise, as is the number of teacher retirements (Carver-Thomas et al., 2021). These challenges must also be understood and addressed to meet the needs of students adequately.

Declines in student participation and engagement. Though difficult to define and calculate precisely, student engagement in school has decreased during the pandemic. By one estimate, K–12 public school enrollment dropped by a record 155,000 students, a change about five times greater than the state's annual rate of enrollment decline in recent years; this decline reflects a number of factors, ranging from unenrolled eligible kindergarteners to higher-than-usual dropout rates (Cano, 2021).

Many teachers also report struggling with getting the students who are enrolled to engage or turn on their cameras during distance learning (Taketa, 2020). In the words of one student:

> *I think the biggest hardship with learning from home is that I find myself with absolutely no desire to work. It's habitual to get into my classes every day, but I find it hard to pay attention, hard to focus, hard to care (YouthTruth, 2021, p. 27).*

There are many possible reasons for the decline in student engagement in school. For instance, in spite of substantial technology investments and distribution efforts from the state and districts early in the pandemic, the digital divide still limits access to the devices and connectivity necessary for remote learning (Gao & Hayes, 2021) and disproportionately affects low-income households. Other factors that are likely affecting the decline in school participation include the lack of education accommodations and services for students with disabilities and English learners (ELs); increased barriers to accessing distance learning for students experiencing homelessness or in foster care; additional work or sibling childcare responsibilities; and the rise in acute mental health needs, abuse, or neglect (Korman et al., 2020). Finding and connecting with disengaged students and understanding their experiences over the past year will be essential for schools during the 2021–22 school year.

Learning lags and widening disparities. At the onset of the pandemic, researchers warned that student learning in English language arts (ELA) and math would slow due to COVID-19 (Kuhfeld & Tarasawa, 2020). Since then, analyses of formative assessment data collected during the pandemic confirmed that, indeed, student learning growth has slowed in comparison to typical years (Dorn et al., 2020; Pier et al., 2021; Domingue et al., 2021). This slowdown in learning growth may not come as a surprise because of the significant challenges that students, families, and educators had to overcome to continue teaching and learning under pandemic conditions.

This decline in learning was not experienced by all students equally, however. In California, researchers found significantly slower rates of learning, compared to typical years, in both ELA and math, with students in Grades 4–6 the most affected at 5–25 percent behind where they would be predicted to be in a typical year. However, these averages mask significant differences among student groups: students from low-income families in most grades—for both ELA and math—learned substantially less than did students from higher income families, whose rates of learning actually increased during the pandemic in some cases. English learner students—in nearly every grade for ELA and in early grades for math—learned substantially less than non-EL students. For example, although non-EL fifth-grade students' learning rates declined by roughly 10 percent, the learning rate of EL fifth-grade students declined by roughly three times as much (Pier et al., 2021). These "learning lags" are exacerbating what were already substantial and persistent achievement gaps in California (Reardon et al., 2018).

Assets Accrued During the 2021–22 School Year

The challenges that students, families, and educators have encountered over the course of the pandemic have been considerable. However, even in light of the difficulties, several assets have emerged as well.

Increased capacity in using technology for learning. Long touted as transformational by some education reformers, education technology—which includes personalized learning software, learning analytics, and assistive technology—was available prepandemic but had never been infused throughout the core work of teaching and learning (Hew & Brush, 2007). During the extended school closures, teachers and students developed the capacity to teach and learn online, and many became familiar with online learning management systems (e.g., Google Classroom, Blackboard, and Canvas). Most teachers (79 percent) report that they have discovered resources and practices during the pandemic that they plan to keep using after the pandemic is over (Arnett, 2021). Although work remains to be done, schools and districts have made significant progress in the effort to close the digital divide with sizeable investments in hardware, software, and connectivity (Gao et al., 2021). As schools reopen for in-person instruction, there may be an eagerness to shift away from screen time and back to pencil-and-paper business as usual. However, there are elements of remote learning (e.g., strategies for the efficient and effective use of asynchronous and synchronous learning) that can be deliberately continued to make the best use of in-person instructional time.

Greater family involvement. Another asset that has developed from pandemic schooling has been increased family partnership in learning and schooling: with schooling happening at home, families have had a clearer window into the core of schooling, and teachers have more readily seen families as valuable partners in learning. More than two thirds of parents surveyed in April–May 2020 agreed with the statement, "I am more connected with my child's day-to-day education now than ever before" (Learning Heroes, 2020, p. 13). Most educators and school leaders seemed to appreciate this increased family engagement: in a national survey of educators, administrators, and family engagement leaders, 94 percent agreed with the statement, "The role families play in their children's success is now more important than ever"; and 74 percent agreed with the statement, "The COVID-19 crisis has helped me better appreciate the important role families play in at-home learning" (NAFSCE, 2020, para. 3). Schools can continue to strengthen this parent and guardian connection to school to deepen and sustain their engagement in student learning and success. Research has shown that parent involvement is significantly related to better outcomes for students and the quality of the student–teacher relationship (Topor et al., 2010).

Deeper investment in expanded learning. A third asset emerging from the pandemic is more investment in California's expanded learning programming and infrastructure. Many families came to appreciate the support of expanded learning and youth development partners during distance learning in the form of learning hubs, which typically offered small groups of students in-person academic support and other whole child supports, such as enrichment, social-emotional learning, exercise, and healthy meals (Vance et al., 2021a). Expanded learning providers will continue to be central to a whole child approach to learning and development. Through Assembly Bill 86, the state has renewed its commitment to expanded learning with a $4.6 billion investment in Expanded Learning Opportunities Grants to local education agencies (LEAs). These student-centered resources have the potential to complement school-based learning and enrich equitable access to opportunities across the state.

Opportunities for student resilience and growth. Finally, students have demonstrated resilience in the face of tremendous disruption, uncertainty, and challenge. Many have experienced new levels of independence and increasing responsibility in their families and communities apart from school. Some have discovered new passions that have invigorated them with a sense of purpose, which may have ranged from challenging systemic racial injustice to developing new skills (Campa, 2020).

Taken together, advances in technological proficiency and capacity, increased family engagement in student learning, robust expanded learning supports, and appreciation for student resilience are valuable assets that have emerged during the pandemic and can be leveraged in years to come to promote more equitable whole child learning in and out of school.

The Path Forward: Reimagine and Rebuild Schools, Beginning With a Restorative Restart

Educators and school leaders may feel daunted by the dual challenges of addressing unfinished learning and meeting rising student social-emotional needs during an ongoing pandemic. When faced with data on declines in learning rates and widening achievement gaps, school leaders may feel a sense of urgency to address these concerns with a vigilant focus on increasing test scores. In what follows, we present an alternative vision for the restart of school that seeks to address whole child needs of students—not only their academic needs but also their needs for relationships, wellness, and engagement in learning that is meaningful to them.

Center Relationships Among Families, Students, and Educators

Decades of research have established that family–school partnerships are essential to student learning and school improvement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Bryk & Schneider, 2002), yet most schools have treated parent and guardian engagement as an extraneous service or communications task, not one that is immediately relevant to the main task of teaching and learning. With the closure of schools, families were more widely regarded as essential school partners (NAFSCE, 2020). In response, schools were challenged to work quickly and holistically to support families in creating safe and effective learning spaces for students. Early evidence has shown that in schools where teachers were supported to develop partnerships with individual families, effective responses to the COVID-19 crisis were the result (Liu and Helo-Villegas, 2020). Teachers and school staff were quickly able to establish connections to families, assess their learning and basic service needs, and provide necessary guidance and resources to support distance learning and other challenges.

Although families have been more involved in their students' schooling during the pandemic, overall many families have not had a positive experience with extended school closures and distance learning. In October 2020, only 35 percent of California parents rated their child's experience with distance learning as successful, which reflected a drop of 22 percentage points from the 57 percent of parents who rated distance learning as successful in March 2020. Families are seeking more meaningful connections, with an overwhelming 94 percent of parents desiring greater access to their child's teacher (Education Trust—West, 2020).

In addition, tensions surrounding school reopening amid the COVID-19 pandemic have brought attention to the mistrust that many parents have towards their children's schools. Research has found that the learning needs of Black and Latinx students, English learners, and students from low-income families were not being served under distance learning (Pier et al., 2021; Dorn et al., 2020). At the same time, data analyses showed that even when schools could be opened safely with virus-mitigating measures in place (van den Berg et al., 2021), substantial proportions of these students' parents did not want to send their children back to school.

In a survey conducted in early 2021, only 14 percent of Black and 29 percent of Latinx parents wanted in-person schooling, compared to 46 percent of White parents nationwide. Also, higher income parents—presumably those with more resources to support distance learning and enrichment opportunities—were also more likely to say they wanted their kids to be back on campus compared with those parents earning less (Johnson, 2021).

On its face, it would seem counterintuitive that the families who likely have the least flexibility and the greatest need to return to work opposed sending their children back to school. However, such perspectives may more accurately reflect the level of trust that parents and guardians have in schools to keep their children safe (Petrilli, 2020). For instance, Black and Latinx parents were more likely to say they have low or no trust that schools could keep their children safe from the virus (Samuels, 2020), particularly when these same families have dealt with preexisting and long-standing inequities long before COVID-19. Trust is the glue that binds school communities together (Bryk & Schneider, 2002), but in underfunded schools with substandard buildings (Griffith & Pearce, 2020) that have historically failed to produce equitable outcomes for generations of students (Anderson, 2021), trust is harder to achieve.

Rebuilding Teachers' Trust

Teachers' trust in their schools and/or districts has been shaken over the past year of pandemic-disrupted schooling. A survey of teachers conducted in California in January 2021 found that 77 percent considered their conditions of teaching at the time to be very challenging, with teachers working, on average, 8 more hours per week than they were before the pandemic. A majority of teachers (51 percent) felt their district lacked the expertise needed to help them (Inverness Institute, 2021). **During the restorative restart, schools and districts should be mindful about repairing trust and strengthening relationships among teachers and staff in schools.**

Common obstacles to building trust in schools that may have been at play during the pandemic include: top-down decision-making that is perceived as arbitrary, misinformed, or not in the best interests of the school; ineffective communication; lack of follow-through or support; and teacher isolation. To build trust and relationships among adults at school, a few practices that school leaders can implement include taking a personal interest in teachers' well-being; actively making themselves available; facilitating and modeling effective communication; involving staff in decision-making; celebrating experimentation and supporting risk; and expressing value for dissenting views (Brewster & Railsback, 2003).

For a synthesis of research on building trust between school leaders and teachers as well as among teachers, see *Building Trusting Relationships for School Improvement: Implications for Principals and Teachers* from Education Northwest.

When building towards recovery post-COVID, it is imperative to acknowledge explicitly if, when, and why student and family relationships with schools have deteriorated. Schools and districts must prioritize the process of establishing trust by collaborating with parents and guardians not as external agents or clients but as partners who are equally invested in their children's academic success. Too often, parents and guardians have contact with schools only in crisis situations as well as when the student has violated school rules or has been identified for special education services. Without establishing prior contact that signals value and trust between schools and families, these interactions foster mistrust, further alienating the student (Adams & Christenson, 2000).

RESTORATIVE ACTION 1

Proactively connect one-on-one with each and every family.

An essential first step towards building strong connections between schools and families is to connect proactively with each family. Specifically, teachers and school leaders should be supported to reestablish individual, personalized connections with students and their families so that they feel known and valued as well as have access to trusted school-based resources for support and guidance. Engaging students and families is especially important as schools design and implement programs for a supportive return to school. Recent research on engaging families to support student learning suggests that without addressing underlying issues of power, trust, racial bias, and lack of cultural competency, the approaches that characterize many school-based efforts to engage families can actually foster disengagement and resistance, especially among families of color, which can exacerbate racial and other inequities in education (Ishimaru, 2019).

The purpose of explicit parent–teacher home connections is to strengthen (and sometimes repair) the relationship between school and home. To form positive and proactive connections and active partnerships between teachers and families, schools need to focus on establishing "systemic respect." In their work with families in schools, practitioners at Seneca Family of Agencies make focused efforts to ensure that parents and guardians hear and feel that they matter, are valued, and are appreciated (Detterman et al., 2019, pp. 48–49). This "mattering" includes the following:

- **Attention.** Teachers notice when parents and guardians are present and available for their students, either virtually or in person. Similarly, parents and guardians notice when teachers are available and accessible to recognize the assets and needs of their children.
- **Appreciation.** Teachers value the little and big efforts that parents and guardians make to support student learning. Parents and guardians understand and appreciate the commitment of teachers to their child's success.
- **Importance.** Teachers recognize student and family circumstances and attend to their well-being as central to an effective teaching–learning strategy.

- **Dependence.** Teachers explicitly acknowledge the importance of parents and guardians in their child's education and their unique insights into a student's interests and challenges. Teachers invite parents and guardians to be partners in teaching and student success.
- **Reciprocal improvement.** Teachers and families set goals together to guide their work, reflect on their successes and setbacks, and identify the need for course correction.

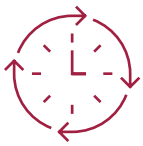
The Parent Teacher Home Visits program provides a framework and ample resources for parent–teacher calls or virtual visits to connect the expertise of the family on their child with the classroom expertise of the teachers. The visit is not a "drop-in" but rather an appointment set between two willing partners to learn more about the student and the family, their experiences, their hopes and dreams for the child, and their expectations of one another. The initial conversation, while primarily focused on getting to know the student and their family, often naturally leads to the educator and the family identifying specific ways in which they can each help the child with their goals throughout the year. These connections have been shown to help school communities and families work together to manage the uncertainties of distance learning. For example, at the beginning of the 2020–21 school year, teachers in the Oakland Unified School District made phone calls to connect with their students during the first 2 weeks of school as part of their Strong Start program (Stone, 2020).

To ensure that this practice is part of the culture and expectations across the entire community, parent–teacher home connections should meet these criteria:

- **They must be universal and focused on getting to know the child and the family.** While it is tempting to "target" visits to those students who are most disengaged, the stigma of a phone call from the school reinforces notions that schools police students and families who are "failing." A universal strategy emphasizes that school and home connections are important for all students and families; it also recognizes that the unique perspectives and insights parents and guardians have are extremely valuable to know about, especially as students return to in-person school. While ideally it is the student's teacher who invites each student's parent or guardian to connect virtually, some teachers (with large student rosters or where there is a language gap) may be supported by expanded learning partners to allow for meaningful conversations. For secondary students who have several different subject-specific teachers, visits could be completed by a consistent, designated caring adult who knows the student and can serve as a trusted connection from the school, such as a homeroom or advisory teacher, coach, or guidance counselor.
- **They should consider various platforms and modalities.** While some parents and guardians may respond well to a phone call or virtual meeting, others may prefer connecting through text messages or, when possible to do so safely, face-to-face interactions at home, school, or other community-based venues.

- **Teachers are trained and compensated for visits outside their school day.** These connections go beyond the open houses and parent–teacher conferences that are normally expected. Teachers need to be trained to do this well and compensated for the additional time it takes. This includes clear expectations for when visits or connections should be completed and opportunities for reflection and next steps (e.g., in grade-level teams, connected to referrals for additional support opportunities).
- **They include follow up.** A second formal "visit," either later in the year or at the end of the year, serves as a bookend to connect and reflect with families explicitly on student goals and experiences as well as to prepare them for the following year. The Parent Teacher Home Visit program finds that these individualized opportunities for positive connection also set the expectation and tone for regular, accessible communication throughout the school year that is not just limited to these formal "connection" visits.

Additional resources. For examples of resources to support parent–teacher connection—including sample emails, call scripts, and postconversation reflection and action in both English and Spanish—see *Tools for Educators to Listen to and Learn From Families During COVID-19 School Closures* from the Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools. For guidance for reaching out to Latinx families in particular, see *Reaching and Engaging With Hispanic Communities: A Research-Informed Communication Guide for Nonprofits, Policymakers, and Funders* from Child Trends Hispanic Institute and the Crimsonbridge Foundation.



RESTORATIVE ACTION 2

Create dedicated time and space for relationship building and reengagement.

Belonging is a basic human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) that is particularly salient after extended periods of isolation and distancing. During the pandemic, fewer than half of students reported feeling like they belonged in their school community (YouthTruth, 2021). Students with a greater sense of belonging in school feel more socially connected, supported, and respected. They are more likely to trust their teachers and peers, and they feel a greater sense of connection at school; they are less worried about being treated as a stereotype and are more confident that they are each seen as a unique person of value (Romero, 2018, p. 4). Stronger teacher–student relationships are associated with students' improved sense of belonging in school (Goodenow, 1993; Hallinan, 2008; Ibrahim & El Zaatari, 2020). In addition, numerous studies have illustrated the association between teacher–student relationship quality and future social and academic performance across childhood and adolescence (Allen et al., 2011; Cook et al., 2018; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Wu et al., 2010). The pandemic disrupted students' sense of belonging and their opportunities to develop school-based relationships. The following strategies can provide the structure for rebuilding them.

Ensure each student has a connection with a supportive adult and provide time to strengthen school-based relationships. Throughout elementary school, students tend to be grouped with one teacher; however, in middle and high school, students interact with up to seven or more teachers in one day, making it more difficult to establish meaningful student–teacher relationships. One structural approach to fostering relationship development in middle and high schools is through an advisory program. An advisory brings students and an educator together during the school day for brief, regular periods in a noncontent-specific setting to provide social-emotional connection and academic support and mentorship as well as to foster a small community of learners. The name may be different—advisory, homeroom, home base, crew, family, and so on—but the primary goal of these programs is to develop trusting relationships between adults and students as well as student-to-student ties. Advisories provide a reliable advocate for each student and create a strong support system. Advisories are sometimes led by administrators or other school staff in addition to teachers, which helps reduce the group size.

Successful advisories often:

- have a stated purpose that everyone in the building knows and accepts as the clear goal for the program,
- are organized to meet that purpose,
- have written content guidance for the routines and activities that take place within an advisory period,
- have a defined method of assessing the advisory program for improving the advisory system, and
- have school leaders who embrace the concept so that it is a continuously improving system supporting positive outcomes for students (DiMartino & Clarke, 2008).

Effective advisories can be built into the school schedule in different ways. In some models, advisories meet daily, as at Hillsdale High School where 25- to 45-minute advisory periods are scheduled 5 days a week (Garg & Maier, 2018, p. 12); advisory teachers loop with their group of 25 students so they are together for 2 years, fostering deeper relationship development. Other advisories are structured to meet once a week, such as the BARR model's weekly 30-minute I-Time lesson, in which teachers explicitly address students' social-emotional development and activities aim to improve communication as well as to support mutual understanding and collaboration; the year starts with activities that help students get to know one another and progresses to deeper conversations, such as on race, bullying, and substance abuse (Farnham & Altmann, 2019). Informal one-on-one conversations are a critical component of advisories, during which an adviser can support student progress, deepen relationships, and provide mentoring (National Equity Project, n.d.; CASEL, 2020).

Even without formal advisory programs, schools can still offer meaningful adult–student connections through mentoring programs during which students meet with a staff or community member weekly to discuss their challenges and goals as well as to navigate classes and social-emotional challenges (Faggella, 2017). Fostering educator-supported clubs and extracurricular activities is also a way to encourage relationship building and connection to school (Fredricks & Eccles, 2008; Knifsend et al., 2018).

In elementary schools, teachers use the ideas from advisory programs by setting aside dedicated time in the day for relationship building. Many teachers use the morning-meeting structure to greet each student, share information, or engage in a brief group activity (Responsive Classroom, 2020).

Additional resources. Relationship mapping is a strategy to ensure that each student has a relationship with at least one caring adult in school. For guidance on relationship mapping, see *Relationship Mapping Strategy* from the Making Caring Common Project at Harvard Graduate School of Education. To provide further information on the core practices of relationship development and the science behind the importance of relationships for learning, Turnaround for Children has developed the resource *Developmental Relationships* as part of their Whole Child Design Blueprint. The National Equity Project provides a guide to developing *Learning Partnerships* specifically with those students who have not experienced success at school through conventional approaches.

Attend to the process of teacher–student relationship development. Researchers have distilled the complex work of developing teacher–student relationships into a three-part framework that can be applied to improve teachers' relationships with their students. The three phases of teacher–student relationship development—*establish*, *maintain*, *and restore (EMR)*—help teachers understand their relationship standing with each student and support setting targets for deeper relationship development. The framework organizes concrete teacher practices informed by research (see Table 1); application of the framework has been tested in the field and has been shown to improve the quality of relationships between teachers and students (Cook et al., 2018).

The objective of the *establish* phase is to foster student belonging, trust, and connection with the teacher. The key practice during this phase is *banking time*, or having individual interactions with students that are nondirective, validating, and responsive (Williford et al., 2016). The teacher intentionally "makes deposits" into the relationship that cultivate the student's attachment to and sense of belonging with the teacher, from which the teacher may later need to make "withdrawals" (e.g., providing constructive feedback or redirecting behavior). Gathering and referencing important information about a student, such as family members, hobbies, likes, and dislikes, is a critical part of the establish phase. Once a relationship is established, active effort is required to maintain it. The objective of the *maintain* phase is to cultivate the relationship proactively. Without this phase, an established relationship may deteriorate over time. The key

practice in the maintain phase is the 5-to-1 ratio of positive to negative interactions (Flora, 2000). Finally, the *restore* phase is triggered by misunderstanding, conflict, neglect, or some other negative interaction that may harm a relationship. Under the EMR framework, the objective in the restore phase is to enhance teachers' recognition of cues that indicate a need to restore the relationship; the teacher then engages in restorative conversation with the student that is brief and delivered privately at a convenient time for both the teacher and student.

Table 1. Examples and Descriptions of Establish-Maintain-Restore (EMR) Strategies

EMR practice name	Practice description
Establish	
Banking time	Find individual time to spend with a student to engage in relational conversation.
Gather, review, acknowledge	Learn information about students. Review that information to combat forgetfulness. Find natural opportunities to acknowledge or reference that information.
Positive greetings	Use the student's name. Welcome students and show that you value their presence.
Positive farewells	Offer words of encouragement. Thank students for participating. Wish students a good rest of the day.
Wise feedback	Communicate high expectations and reasons for feedback explicitly. Express care for student learning. Assure students that they are capable of meeting expectations. Allow students to advocate for help or provide feedback.
2 by 10	Spend 2 minutes per day for 10 days connecting with a student.
Objective observations	Conduct specific observations for students with whom you are struggling. Focus on objectively describing the student's behavior, putting aside your interpretations or judgments.
Maintain	
5:1 ratio	Maintain a ratio of 5 positive interactions to 1 negative interaction with each student including: • effective use of praise, • relationship check-ins, and • being mindful in the moment.
Restore	
Letting go	Make a fresh start after a negative interaction.
Taking ownership	Acknowledge your own mistake or missed opportunity.
Empathy statement	Show effort to understand the student's perspective.
Statement of care	Separate the deed from the doer.
Collaborative problem-solving	Work together to find win–win solutions.

Source. Adapted from Gaias et al., 2020.

Additional resources. *The Key to Effective Classroom Management* from Edutopia offers more information on the three-phase EMR process of teacher–student relationship development. It includes a relationship reflection form to help track and guide the process of relationship development for each student. Turnaround for Children offers the resource *Strategies to Build Relationships With Students*, which includes communication and interaction strategies that can be used as part of the EMR process to support relationship building with students.

Regularly monitor student engagement and conditions for learning within the classroom. Research on student motivation and engagement (Gripshover & Paunesku, 2019) indicates that to engage students in learning, teachers need to create learning conditions that help students: (a) feel valued and respected in the learning environment, (b) understand how schoolwork is relevant to their own lives and goals, and (c) recognize setbacks and constructive feedback as opportunities to grow. The Copilot-Elevate survey, from the Project for Education Research That Scales, provides a free, 5- to 10-minute anonymous survey that teachers can administer to monitor the conditions for learning in their classrooms. Teachers receive a set of evidence-based recommendations for adjustments to their practice based on patterns in their students' feedback. Teachers can regularly collect these data, which also come with just-in-time best-practice recommendations, to inform cycles of practice improvement that increase student engagement. By leveraging rapid student feedback and just-in-time best-practice recommendations, 92 percent of teachers using Copilot-Elevate improved at least one learning condition, and 65 percent successfully improved all measured learning conditions (Gripshover & Paunesku, 2019). These measures are formative and for improving teacher practice; they should not be used as part of evaluating teacher performance.

Prioritize play, creativity, and exploration in a community of learners. After students receiving instruction and completing assignments in front of screens and interacting only at a distance for longer than a year, a restorative restart to school should prioritize joy, creativity, and exploration in community. Although education advocates concerned about "learning loss" may question the use of instructional time for activities like recess, arts, field trips, and outdoor education, these opportunities, when implemented well, contribute to student wellness, critical thinking, engagement, belonging, and, ultimately, learning.

Recess. Recess is a critical time for students in the elementary school grades to engage with one another, develop social skills, and solidify relationships. During recess, students engage in unstructured play, exercise, and connect with peers. Research has demonstrated numerous positive outcomes associated with recess (London, 2021), including improved classroom attention and behavior (Barros et al., 2009), positive relationships with others, and improved social-emotional skills (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017). Together, these outcomes lead to enhanced learning for students (Durlak et al., 2011; Zins & Elias, 2007) and improvements in overall school climate (London et al., 2014).

Recess is most effective when these three conditions are met (London, 2021):

- **The play yard is organized and inclusive.** The play yard should be a place where everyone is welcome, with different activity zones that correspond to students' interests to engage the majority of students in play, including those who want to engage in imaginative play or have a quieter recess experience. Establishing a common set of rules for each activity can minimize conflicts.
- **Trained adults are present to monitor and support safe and inclusive play.** The presence of trained staff, aides, or "coaches" overseeing recess is critical to making it a safe and restorative experience for students. These adults should be trained in social-emotional development, behavior support, and conflict resolution so that students receive consistent support at recess.
- **Recess is provided every day for every child.** All children, even those who misbehave, need an opportunity to play at school, perhaps with additional assistance if their behavior does not meet school standards. Schools should prohibit the withholding of recess for misbehavior or missed schoolwork.

Playworks offers *Recess Lab*, a playbook to help principals and teachers reimagine recess that includes tools and games to develop kids' social skills, on and off the playground. They also offer a recess checkup for schools to self-assess their approach to recess.

The benefits of recess do not stop when a student reaches middle and high school. Students' need for relaxation, social connection, physical movement, and unstructured play may express itself differently in adolescence but remains essential. Recess or wellness breaks should be scheduled with enough time to allow secondary students to recharge and make connections with peers.

Arts. Arts education has been shown to have numerous positive impacts on student engagement, academic outcomes, and social-emotional skills (Bowen & Kisida, 2019). In addition to the many positive instrumental benefits on student outcomes (Swapp, 2016), the arts provide intrinsic benefits of pleasure, emotional stimulation, and expression that enrich children's lives beyond what can be captured academically (McCarthy et al., 2004). Particularly relevant in the context of pandemic recovery, the arts have been shown to help children process traumatic experiences and to have positive effects on healing and health (Smilan, 2009; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). However, the U.S. has seen a steady decline in arts education (Rabkin & Hedberg, 2011), although this decline has not been evenly distributed. In California, two times as many students in more affluent schools receive instruction in each arts discipline compared to students in high-poverty schools (Woodworth et al., 2007). A restorative restart can reverse this inequity by investing in the arts, particularly in high-poverty schools.

Outdoor education. Decades of research have established that exposure to the natural world is vital to physical and psychological well-being as well as for intellectual and social development (Ardoin & Bowers, 2020). Prior to the pandemic, millions of student participated in outdoor science education programs (such as residential outdoor science schools, nature preschools, nature centers, parks, zoos, aquariums, science centers, and museums), which provided experiential learning experiences not available in traditional classrooms (Collins et al., 2020). Participation in informal environmental and outdoor science education programs results in positive cognitive/academic, dispositional, social-emotional, and health outcomes (Ardoin et al., 2020). Now more than ever, students should be supported to engage with the outdoors, to breathe fresh air and feel the warmth of sunlight as they interact with the complex natural world in a community of learners.

Field trips. Field trips are opportunities to revitalize learning and to boost engagement and relationship development among students outside of the classroom. Research has shown that field trips expose students to new experiences. They can increase interest and engagement in content regardless of prior interest in a topic (Kisiel, 2005; Bonderup Dohn, 2011); lead to more positive feelings towards a topic (Nadelson & Jordan, 2012); and provide experiences that can be recalled and used long after a visit (Falk & Dierking, 1997). Benefits of field trips have been found to be generally much greater for students from less-advantaged backgrounds: the less prior exposure to culturally enriching experiences students have, the greater the benefit of a field trip, such as a tour of a museum (Greene et al., 2013). To make the most of field trips, they should be designed around specific educational objectives, students should be provided pretrip instruction or vicarious exposure, they should be actively involved during the trip, and teachers should follow up on the experience to make connections to the rest of the educational program (Morrell, 2003).

RESTORATIVE ACTION 3

Implement positive and restorative discipline practices.

Under normal circumstances, approximately 20 percent of students are expected to experience some mental health concerns (Costello et al., 2003); these rates are now expected to double or triple after the various challenges students have faced during the COVID-19 pandemic (National Association of School Psychologists, 2020b). In anticipation of a rise in student social-emotional and behavioral issues, schools should be prepared to implement positive and restorative discipline practices.

Getting discipline practices right has always been important, but sensitivity to and awareness of the administration of discipline may be higher now than ever because of increased social consciousness of systemic racism and disproportionate policing by race (Worland, 2020). Research on school discipline patterns finds that Black and Latinx students are more likely than their White peers to receive expulsion or out-of-school suspension as consequences for similar

problem behavior (Skiba et al., 2011). Prior to the pandemic, rates of out-of-school suspensions in California had been declining for all racial/ethnic groups; however, Black students still continued to be suspended at higher rates than other ethnic groups (Loveless, 2017). A single suspension increases the risk of school dropout and incarceration as well as reduces the likelihood of postsecondary success (Arcia, 2006).

As children grow, they become increasingly aware of widely held negative stereotypes about their group (McKown & Weinstein, 2003) as well as of individual and collective experiences of discrimination (Detterman et al., 2019); many students of color come to expect to be treated unfairly by their teachers (Killen et al., 2007). Discipline gaps are apparent to students and affect their perception of equity and their sense of belonging in school (Bottiani et al., 2017). The restorative restart to school is an opportunity to instill a sense of trust, fairness, and schoolwide commitment to equity through implementing the following strategies.

Dedicate time to reestablish expectations for behavior and to cocreate norms. When students return to school, rules and norms for behavior in school will need to be reestablished after extended periods of distance learning and physical distancing. Schools should dedicate time and space at the beginning of the year to review behavioral expectations (Marsh et al., 2018). Nearly all schools already have a set of rules that establish expectations around behaviors and help create a safe environment. Norms also contribute to a sense of safety but are distinct from traditional rules in that norms are created and upheld by the school community rather than an authority figure (CASEL, 2021). In this way, norms are a critical first step to implementing positive and restorative discipline practices. Norms are most likely to be internalized and thus are more effective when they are developed collaboratively with students. Norms are best established at the start of the year, but they can be revised as needed. The tool *Developing Schoolwide Norms* has been developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) as a resource for educators on how to create schoolwide norms collaboratively.

Analyze and understand patterns in disciplinary data. Schools should focus on enhancing safety, engagement, and conditions for learning as part of the restorative restart. It is recommended that schools assemble diverse teams to focus on the following three stages of understanding and addressing disparities in school discipline:

1. Gather, disaggregate, and analyze data on school discipline to answer the question, "Where do disparities in school discipline exist in our school?"
2. Next, address the question, "What are the root causes of disparities in school discipline?"
3. Finally, create an action plan that answers the question, "How will we address the root causes of disparities in school discipline?"

A detailed and comprehensive guide for this process can be found in *Addressing the Root Causes of Disparities in School Discipline: An Educator's Action Planning Guide*.

Shift from punitive to restorative discipline approaches. In contrast to the punishment- and exclusion-based "zero tolerance" approach to school discipline, restorative justice (RJ) is an approach to resolving conflict and repairing harm. It encourages those who have caused harm to acknowledge the impact of what they have done and gives them an opportunity to make reparations. It offers those who have suffered harm the opportunity to have their harm or loss acknowledged and amends made (Restorative Justice Consortium, 2011). Based on the failure of zero tolerance policies to promote a safe and equitable school culture, interest in RJ—also referred to as "restorative practices"—has grown in California, with marked drops in suspensions in districts that have implemented the approach (Washburn & Willis, 2018).

Although skepticism of RJ is often based on the notion that RJ is "too soft" and results in "no real consequences," district leaders must be consistent about moving beyond the punishment paradigm. From educators who are already overtaxed, a criticism of RJ is that "it is so much easier to suspend students in response to problematic behavior." Key approaches for contending with such resistance include providing firsthand exposure to RJ practices and enhancing communication about RJ responses in the school. It is also critical to institutionalize RJ in the school by investing in key infrastructure—namely staff, scheduling, and space—as well as by integrating RJ into daily school life. RJ relies on acknowledging and undoing tacit hierarchies and power dynamics that often exist in traditional approaches to school discipline; this can feel threatening to some adults because they view it as a challenge to their traditional position of control and authority. Creating space for staff reflection and growth as well as modeling more equitable relationships between leadership and staff have been promising approaches to loosening hierarchical patterns in school (Sandwick et al., 2019).

Key RJ practices include:

- community-building circles used to develop relationships and check in about emerging issues, an essential step to developing trust and vulnerability;
- mediations led by trained staff as a neutral third party to address conflict between two parties, usually students;
- harm and support circles led by trained staff to address conflict or other issues (e.g., attendance), which may include a facilitator, affected parties, and key support people;
- counseling for individuals and groups, as mandated by individualized education plans, referrals, or requests;
- reentry processes to support returning students following a suspension or classroom removal; and
- student leadership in RJ and school culture (as in student-led circles, peer mediation, peer mentoring, sexual orientation and gender diversity student groups, etc.), which promotes student buy-in and enhances student voice, agency, and community investment.

RJ practices alone are not sufficient to address the needs of students who are facing substantial adversity inside and outside of school (e.g., structural racism, economic insecurity, immigration concerns, family conflict, mental health issues, etc.). RJ works best in schools that also connect students with holistic services like mental health and other social supports, engage in difficult discussions about identity, and hire staff who are culturally representative of the student body.

Additional resources. For a toolkit to support implementing restorative practices in schools, see *Restorative Practices: A Guide for Educators*, developed by the Advancement Project, American Federation of Teachers, National Education Association, and Schott Foundation with the help of a working group of educators and school personnel. *Building Connections, Building Community* from the Center for Restorative Process offers ideas for restorative circles that help build trust, positive feelings, and a sense of belonging within the classroom community.

Reconsider visible security measures and the school resource officer role. Visible security measures, including security guards and security cameras, are not associated with improving academic outcomes but instead are found to have detrimental effects (Tanner-Smith & Fisher, 2016). As schools seek to ensure school safety, they must also consider the ways that the presence of security personnel and safety equipment jeopardizes student performance. Although the presence of metal detectors and police officers in school are intended to increase safety, research points to an increase in detection but no corresponding increase in students' feelings of safety (Leung et al., 2018). This calls into question the spending practices on security equipment in schools as they may not be achieving their intended goal. A similar concern arises from school resource officers and police in schools. The presence of police in schools increases the arrest rates for all students, but Black students are most overrepresented in school arrests, contributing to existing concerns about school-to-prison pipelines (Homer & Fisher, 2019). Although some have pointed to the need to train school resource officers on trauma-informed practices, the results from such efforts are mixed (Gill et al., 2016). Schools seeking to ensure a safe learning environment for students may therefore benefit from investing efforts away from visible security personnel or at least reorienting their presence and responsibilities. As an example, Oakland Unified School District's school board voted in 2020 to eliminate its school-based police force and apply the cost savings to hire more social workers, psychologists, and RJ coordinators for its schools (Harrington, 2020).

The Four Ts for investing in centering relationships. To prioritize relationships of mutual support and high expectations among families, students, and educators that address students' individualized learning and mental health needs, districts should consider investing in the following:

Time

- Teacher, staff, and partner meeting time for planning and reflecting on relationship development, student engagement, and behavior
- Stipends to educators for mentoring and/or adjusting schedules to accommodate advisories
- Stipends to staff for leading student clubs and extracurricular activities
- Time for community-building activities, including dedicated time in the first weeks of school for reengaging and rebuilding relationships
- Compensation to teachers for time to conduct parent/family outreach and virtual visits

Talent

- School-level family engagement coordinators
- Translators to support family outreach
- IT support for virtual visits (at home and school)
- School-level coordinators to support developing and implementing programs that support relationship building, restorative practices, and/or social-emotional development
- Recess coaches and/or aides
- Art and music teachers
- Field trip coordinators and chaperones

Training

- Design of protocols/scripts for virtual visits and professional development in the parent-visit protocol
- Guides and agendas for teacher collaboration and reflection, including training on reviewing student data and making action plans
- Resources and support for follow-ups to virtual visits
- Professional development for all school staff in deepening adult–student relationships
- Professional development for all school staff in restorative discipline approaches

Technology/Materials

- Multiple connection platforms to support virtual visits (e.g., Zoom, Google Hangouts, and texting platforms like Hustle.com or GetThru.com)
- Learning management and communications platforms (e.g., ParentVue, Peach Jar, and Remind)
- Systems to track data on implementation
- Computer and Wi-Fi equipment or upgrades for families and teachers
- Survey and data analysis infrastructure to monitor student engagement and disciplinary patterns
- Materials to support recess and play, sports, and the arts

Understand Whole Child Needs

Even prior to COVID-19, students were coming to school with complex unmet health and wellness needs. Now, the economic and racial disparities of the disease have further exacerbated structural inequalities in terms of financial, housing, and food security. As a result, schools and districts must be prepared to anticipate students' mental and emotional health, physical health, and social systems of support as fundamental to learning. To do so, schools should have in place comprehensive systems for screening and monitoring student well-being and learning needs. This will call for investments in measurement, system infrastructure, and professional capacity.

RESTORATIVE ACTION 4

Conduct regular student wellness screenings.

Many students will start the school year with issues that may hinder their readiness to learn. Reports have shown increases in the areas of fear and anxiety (Jones, 2020); cyberbullying and online toxicity (L1ght, 2020); and depression, sickness, loss, grief, and cases of abuse (Guild, 2020). Schools must be prepared to identify and address social, emotional, and behavioral issues affecting students. During the restorative restart, schools should administer universal screeners and analyze the resulting data in order to connect identified students to support teams and appropriate providers as well as adhere to tiered intervention and follow-up protocols. All schools currently collect data on students that can inform what supports students need; data may include office discipline referrals, attendance data, and grades. These data may help pinpoint students who are demonstrating observable externalizing difficulties but may underidentify students with internalizing difficulties, such as anxiety, depression, or symptoms of traumatic stress (Eklund et al., 2017).

Universal screening is a systematic needs assessment of all students on academic or wellness indicators at the beginning of the academic year and throughout the year. Universal screeners are administered, scored, and interpreted within a short timeframe to inform timely decision-making, referral, and access to interventions. In contrast to assessments or evaluations used as part of the Individualized Education Program process to identify specific interventions and modifications for special education, screenings are not typically designed to diagnose; instead, they are used to refer students for further assessment or to identify students' immediate needs and help them obtain necessary services. Screening instruments are typically short in length and do not require a long period of time to administer, nor do they require an advanced degree to administer, interpret, and/or score (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2019). Table 2 lists a nonexhaustive set of wellness screeners that have been used in schools.

Table 2. Examples of Options for K–12 Wellness Screeners

Screener	Time	Grade range
Behavioral and Emotional Screening System (BESS)	5–10 minutes	PreK–12
CORE Student Well-Being and Learning Conditions Diagnostic Survey	15 minutes	4–12
Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA mini)	1 minute	K–12
Panorama Student Well-Being Survey	10–15 minutes	3–12
RISE Assessment: Risk Inventory and Strengths Evaluation	15–20 minutes	4–12
Social, Academic, and Emotional Behavior Risk Screener (SAEBRS)	1–3 minutes	K–12
Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) Performance Screening Guide	10–25 minutes	PreK–12
Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)	5–10 minutes	PreK–12
xSEL Labs SELweb Assessment	25 minutes	K–6

Source. Adapted from Oliver, 2018.

When implementing student wellness screeners, the following issues must be addressed:

- obtaining district, staff, and family buy-in;
- allocating resources (fiscal and staffing) to support the screening process;
- defining roles and responsibilities of all staff involved in the screening process;
- addressing ethical and legal/liability considerations (e.g., parental consent and student assent, communication, and confidentiality);
- selecting the right standardized screener(s) for your school/district (contextual fit);
- training and professional development regarding screening (administration, data analyses, decision-making, intervention selection, and decision rules);
- developing and expanding data systems; and
- identifying and coordinating resources necessary to support students in need of additional intervention (SAMHSA, 2019).

Additional resources. For more guidance on how to prepare for and conduct wellness screeners, see *Evidence-Based Practices for Assessing Students' Social and Emotional Well-Being* from PACE and the Annenberg Institute, which includes strategies to consider as well as strategies to avoid.

RESTORATIVE ACTION 5

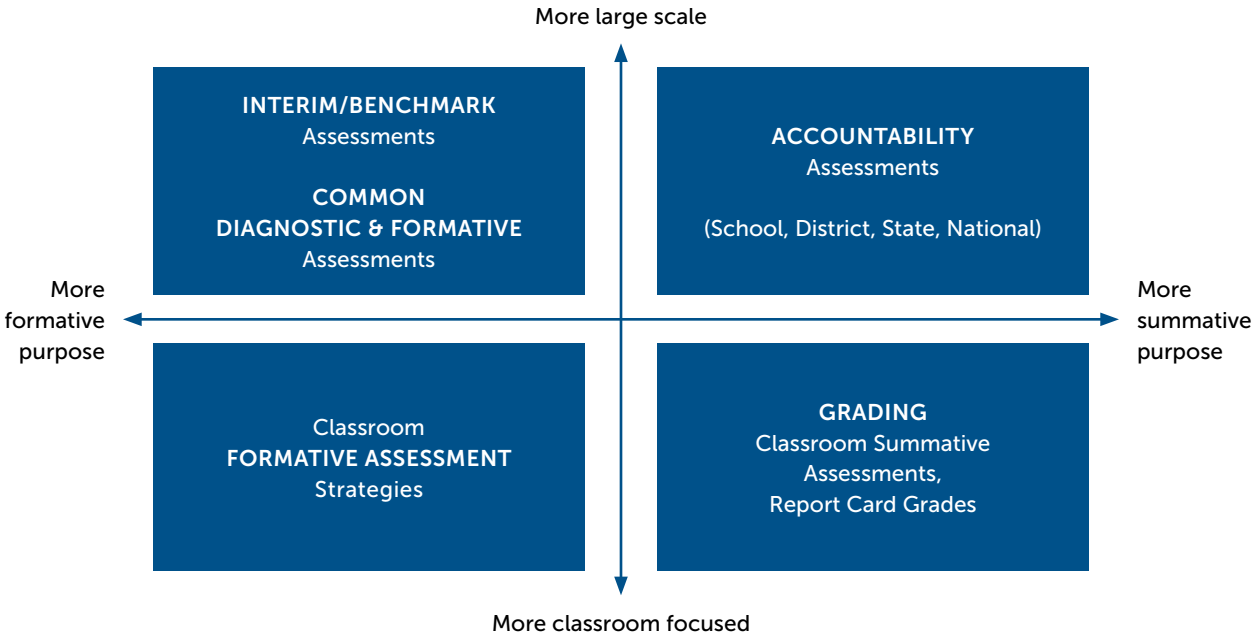
Assess student learning and review data on attendance, engagement, and grades.

Research indicates that students will be entering the 2021–22 school year with unfinished learning from the previous year. Learning rates during the pandemic slowed compared to typical years, and the impact of COVID-19 on learning has been much worse for low-income students and those learning English (Pier et al., 2021). This year, teachers are going to need to help students recover learning they missed in prior years while remaining grounded in the current grade level's curriculum. To do so, teachers will need information on what students know and don't know to guide their instructional planning. School leaders will similarly require information on student learning needs to guide school-level program development and intervention planning.

Formative assessment refers to all activities that teachers and students engage in to provide feedback that modifies teaching and learning (Black & William, 1998): a core requirement for assessment to be formative is that the feedback is used to improve teaching and learning. *Summative assessment*, in contrast, focuses on evaluating student knowledge of material at a given point in time in relation to a standard or benchmark. Some classify "diagnostic" assessment as a third category that occurs prior to instruction and pinpoints student strengths and weaknesses; however, because diagnostic assessments are intended to inform instruction, they fall under the broad category of formative assessment, albeit producing data collected before instruction that are used to inform instruction (Brookhart, 2010).

Assessments of student learning take different forms and can be applied to different purposes. The framework in Figure 1 organizes various kinds of assessments of student learning by purpose and focus. The quadrants are organized along two dimensions: (a) the degree to which the data are applied to make judgments about learning relative to benchmarks (summative purpose) versus being applied to monitor learning progress as part of the instructional process (formative purpose); and (b) the degree of scale of implementation, which can range from very large scale (i.e., statewide) to small scale (i.e., a single classroom).

Figure 1. Four-Quadrant Framework for Describing Types of Assessments



Source. Adapted from Brookhart, 2015, p. 1.

The focus at the beginning of the school year should be on formative purposes of assessment so that the data can be used to improve teaching and learning. To implement a formative assessment system, a district should attend to the following issues:

Begin by clarifying the objective of the assessment and how the results will be used. At the start of the new school year, the fundamental questions to guide decisions about the purpose of assessment are: (a) Who is making the diagnosis (e.g., teachers)? (b) What is the diagnosis about (e.g., student skills in a given area)? (c) How will the diagnosis inform specific action (e.g., provide information to differentiate instruction)? Responses to these fundamental questions may take the form of the following use cases:

- Teachers use information on the skills of individual students to assign them particular activities in the coming week.
- School administrators use information about math skills in fourth-grade classrooms to decide whether to schedule an extra period for math learning or to provide one-to-one tutoring for some students.
- District leaders use information about the performance of individual schools to allocate additional resources.
- State leaders use information about student performance in the aggregate and form subgroups of students to argue for more education funding and to ensure equity (Lake & Olson, 2020).

The form of the assessment must follow the purpose. Each of the preceding use cases calls for a different assessment design and analytic plan. With the limited amount of time for testing and the need for prompt information on student learning at the start of the year, educators and system leaders should prioritize use cases about teaching and learning. A general summative assessment would not provide the specificity of information teachers need to make just-in-time instructional decisions to meet their students' learning needs. In contrast, a preassessment grounded in the precursor skills and knowledge required for upcoming lessons would provide actionable information to guide instructional planning and delivery.

Formative assessment not only is useful for providing information to educators but also gives students feedback on their own learning and is a means through which students can be continually engaged in the learning process itself. Simple formative assessment strategies (e.g., exit tickets, thumbs up/down, jigsaw, think-pair-share, etc.) can boost student interest and engagement.

Build off existing data and embrace a hypothesis-testing mindset. Administrators and educators should be prepared to provide targeted learning supports for students when they return to school in the fall. Planning and preparation for these targeted supports can begin now by reviewing existing data. Conclusions based on spring assessment data may be less reliable than in prior years because of uncertainties introduced by remote test administration. Missing cases and incomplete assessment data are also likely to be greater than in previous years. Nevertheless, many decisions for the 2021–22 school year will need to be made with the available, yet incomplete, information in hand.

School and district leaders are encouraged to gather existing student-level data on grades, attendance, and engagement in addition to test-score data. After gathering and analyzing these data and monitoring them in real time, leaders can develop hypotheses about how best to meet student needs in the year ahead (e.g., targeted tutoring). Diagnostic assessment information collected in the fall could then be used to confirm or refine these hypotheses. Educators must be prepared to adjust their hypotheses as new or better information becomes available (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2020).

As part of *Pathways to Engagement: A Toolkit for COVID-19 Recovery Through Attendance*, Attendance Works offers a four-step protocol for how to use data to identify priority groups of students and develop multitiered approaches to engagement:

1. **Establish your team.** Convene a small group of leaders if you are just starting or integrate into the work of an existing team.
2. **Identify priority groups.** Use data to identify which group(s) of students or schools most need additional engagement and to understand their strengths and challenges better.

3. **Craft engagement strategies.** Take a multitiered approach to engagement, especially for priority student groups, that starts in the spring, continues in the summer, and is amplified in the fall.
4. **Reflect, learn, and improve.** After each phase of work, invest in taking stock to assess what worked and what can be improved for the future.

Additional resources. The *Equity Reset Toolkit* from Pivot Learning and UnboundEd provides a suite of resources for creating a data-driven equitable education recovery plan. It contains survey templates, data collection tools, assessment recommendations, data analysis protocols, and an implementation timeline. For recommendations regarding survey tools from the California Department of Education, see the *School Conditions and Climate Work Group Recommendation Framework*.

Provide district support for administering and making use of diagnostic and formative assessments. To a large extent, teachers need flexibility over their formative assessments to ensure that they gather the personalized, just-in-time data they need on a particular topic or subset of students; however, there is much that a district can do to support the work of formative assessment through investment in common formative assessment systems, which can provide actionable information to teachers as well as equip schools and districts with information to make better decisions (Hough et al., 2018). For formative assessments to be effective, teachers need flexibility and support from districts.

Relying strictly on teacher-designed formative assessments would be burdensome for teachers, introduce variability in assessment quality, and limit school and district understanding about real-time student learning progress. Many districts in California use formative assessment platforms that provide actionable data on individual students to inform instruction as well as school-level decision-making about organizational and professional learning needs in the school. The three assessment providers listed in Table 3 have been rated by the National Center on Intensive Intervention as the highest among other vendors in the areas of accurate skill coverage, reliability, and validity. The content in all of these assessments is aligned to Common Core State Standards, and the turnaround time for the data is immediate, with criterion and normed scores. Districts currently not using a formative assessment platform provider could benefit from starting the year with a system in place to quickly gather low-stakes data to inform classroom- and school-level decision-making. This investment would be useful not only at the start of the year but also throughout the year to track learning and provide feedback on improvement efforts across the school and district.

Table 3. Highly Rated Diagnostic and Formative Assessments

Assessment	Company	Subject	Grades	Length	Turnaround time	Cost per student	Number of U.S. schools already using product
i-Ready Diagnostic Assessment	Curriculum Associates	Math and reading	K–12	45–90 minutes per subject	Immediate	$6.00 [a]	19,700
MAP Growth	NWEA	Math, reading, and ELA	K–12	45 minutes	Immediate	$13.50 [a]	40,000
Star Reading	Renaissance Learning	Reading	K–12	15–30 minutes	Immediate	Not available	30,000
Star Math	Renaissance Learning	Math	1–12	20–40 minutes	Immediate	Not available	30,000

Source. Adapted from Munyan-Penney & Barone, 2020.

[a] Volume discount may lower cost per student.

To enrich the formative assessment of literacy development, districts may consider supporting such evidence-based and widely used literacy screening tools as DIBELS, AIMSweb, and easyCBM. Districts may also consider the Literably K–8 reading assessment; like other literacy screening tools, it is designed to inform instruction, screen students for reading difficulties, identify students' reading levels, and monitor students' response to intervention. The Literably system differs from other reading assessments in that, rather than reading aloud to a teacher, students read into a tablet or computer. The predictive validity of Literably has been found to be commensurate with other reading assessments (Townsend & Domingue, 2018; Domingue et al., 2021).

In addition, districts could support teacher formative assessment by obtaining guidance from providers of high-quality instructional materials for curriculum-based measures or by facilitating opportunities for school- and grade-level teams to collaborate before fall instruction to develop their assessments of the specific precursor knowledge and skills deemed necessary for success in units at the start of the year (CCSSO, 2020).

Invest in assessment literacy and data analysis capacity. Investing in the capacity of educators to understand what data to collect on student learning, how to collect it, how to interpret it, and how to use that information to adjust their instruction is more likely to improve student learning than other costlier changes. Noted education scholar James Popham has made the claim that the single most cost-effective way to improve our nation's schools is to increase educators' assessment literacy, because when "assessment-literate educators make educational decisions based on appropriate assessment-elicited evidence, the resultant decisions will almost always be more defensible—meaning, more likely to improve students' learning" (Popham, 2018, p. 2).

If data are to be useful for informing instruction, they must be analyzed and interpreted. To do so, teachers must regularly plan for assessments and then gather, analyze, interpret, and respond to information about student learning to improve it. Teachers need resources and professional support to implement formative assessment well. Collaboration about assessment has been found to be more predictive of school and teacher performance than collaboration about other instructional domains (Ronfeldt et al., 2015). School leaders can support formative assessment and data use for improving student learning by protecting time for collaboration as well as establishing collaborative structures (e.g., grade-level or content-area meetings) and norms for regularly discussing student achievement data and the implications for instruction. The Data Wise Improvement Process offers a comprehensive, robust protocol for collaborative data inquiry that can be used to maximize teacher learning while reviewing student data and planning for assessment. The Center to Support Excellence in Teaching also provides regular professional learning opportunities for building capacity in data analysis and formative assessment for instructional improvement.

Do no harm. Testing can induce disproportionate psychological stressors on some students and counteract the development of a safe learning environment. Black and Latinx students and, in some domains, girls, are most susceptible to stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995). *Stereotype threat* is the fear of being "viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype" (Steele, 1999, para. 10). In addition, students living in poverty are most affected by "stress bias" induced by standardized testing. Research has shown that changes in levels of the stress hormone cortisol during weeks of standardized testing hurt student performance—and students coming from neighborhoods in which lower income families live and where there are more incidents of violence were most affected (Heissel et al., 2018). Caution must be taken to communicate that the purpose of testing is not to make judgments about students' intelligence but rather to inform teachers' instruction to ensure that the content is appropriate and necessary.

Furthermore, assessment should not be exploited to excuse practices that cause harm. For example, assessments should not be gatekeepers to withhold grade-level content or track students into low-level content, which may increase the achievement gap and historically has been much more likely to affect English language learners and students of color.

RESTORATIVE ACTION 6

Create an individualized action plan to meet the whole child needs of every student.

Once teachers and school-level teams have developed clear mechanisms for establishing connections with families and students as well as for monitoring student learning and wellness, they must make clear their plans for how to meet each child's unique needs. These plans could take one of several forms.

A Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) applies evidence-based practices that increase in intensity and individualization in response to data on student need. At its foundation, an MTSS model provides all students with high-quality, evidence-based instruction and support in core content, behavior, and social-emotional learning, known as Tier 1. Approximately 80 percent of students should be able to meet benchmark targets through Tier 1 instruction and support. If fewer than 80 percent meet the established goals, Tier 1 approaches should be reconsidered and refined (Hoover, 2011). Using data on student progress, students identified as needing more intensive support are provided with Tier 2 instruction and support, typically in small-group contexts, to address specific issues in core content, behavior, or social-emotional learning. For students in need of further support, intensive instruction and support are provided in Tier 3, typically in a one-on-one context with an educator or support provider. MTSS is a systematic approach that schools can apply to ensure that instruction and intervention are matched to students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs.

Each student has had a unique experience during the pandemic and will require a personalized plan for getting them back on track for postsecondary success. In many states, secondary students each have an individualized learning plan (ILP), which is both a document and a process that students use—with support from school counselors, teachers, parents, and guardians—to define their career goals and postsecondary plans in order to inform their decisions about their courses and activities throughout high school (Office of Disability Employment Policy, n.d.). Although California is one of just a few states that does not require all middle and/or high school students to develop and maintain an ILP, districts can consider incorporating ILPs in middle and high schools to make schooling more personalized and purposeful for students as part of a restorative restart to school. For postsecondary planning and preparation, California College Guidance Initiative is is a schoolwide online platform and resource that provides in-depth knowledge and skills focused on career and college readiness as well as choosing high school pathways. The website provides material for students beginning in middle school, gives information on A-G requirements, and offers personalized career assessments and search tools for exploring postsecondary options.

Whether using MTSS or ILPs, research recommends starting with an asset-based mindset when developing learning plans for students. Educators should inventory students' strengths, including personal characteristics like self-determination or resilience and other assets like connections to a sport, a religious faith, or caring adults in their lives. This enables educators to create support plans that build on positives or strengths (McAdoo et al., 2003; O'Connor & Fernandez, 2006). The deficit-based approach to assessing needs can lead to focusing on negatives and what students lack while failing to take advantage of assets; it can thus result in placing limits on students' postsecondary options. A strengths perspective assumes that every individual has resources that can be mobilized towards success in many areas of life and is characterized by "efforts to label what is right" (Buckingham, 2007, p. 6). The strengths philosophy explores ways to empower individuals to flourish rather than simply survive; it presupposes that capitalizing on one's best qualities is likely to lead to greater success than would be possible by making a comparable investment of effort into overcoming personal weaknesses or deficiencies (Lopez & Louis, 2009). Once these student-centered plans are developed, teams of trusted school staff must be assigned to monitor the plans and advance each student's social-emotional, language, and academic progress through schoolwide and classroom-level planning and individualized supports.

The Four Ts for investing in understanding whole child needs. To identify and develop plans for addressing the unique needs of every student, districts should consider investing in the following:

Time

- Regular time for teachers in grade- and subject-level teams to analyze and interpret student data together to inform their instructional planning
- Regular time for school teams to review student data, evaluate the efficacy of interventions, and revise plans

Talent

- School-level data lead
- School-level family engagement coordinators to engage the community in student surveys and screeners
- District-level data analyst(s)
- Team lead(s) for developing and implementing individualized plans for student support

Training

- Professional development in data analysis and use
- Professional development in screening for student needs and protocols for response

Technology/Materials

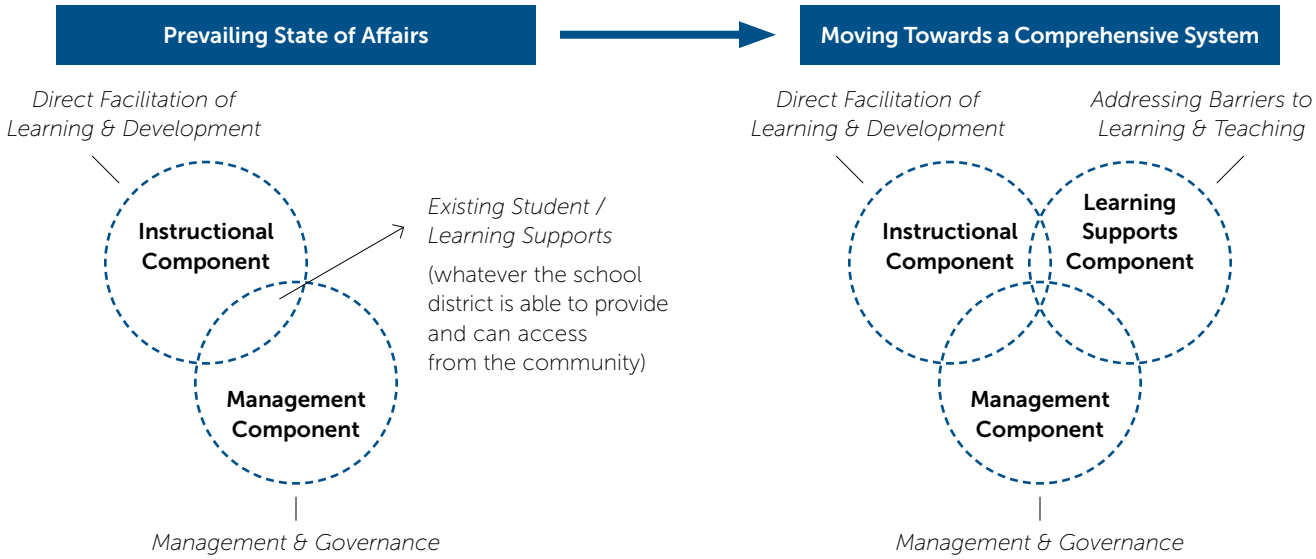
- Wellness screener system, administration, and scoring
- Formative assessment systems for students in different grade levels and subjects

Strengthen Staffing and Deepen Community-Based Partnerships to Address Students' Individualized Learning and Mental Health Needs

Policy and practice in K–12 schools are guided primarily by a two-component framework: (a) instruction and (b) management. Other school personnel serve to support one or both of these components. Because of the myriad challenges to student learning and engagement associated with the pandemic, an enhanced framework is necessary to ensure that efforts to address these challenges are explicitly and purposefully pursued as a primary and essential component of schooling. In the current context, the third component of *learning supports* is necessary to address factors that affect learning, development, and teaching as well as to reengage students in classroom instruction (Adelman & Taylor, 2020).

This three-component framework, shown in Figure 2, elevates learning supports (i.e., counseling, social work, social-emotional development, mental and physical health, and academic support) as an equal component of school policy and practice, alongside instruction and management. This requires personnel, partnerships, and an operational infrastructure that integrates programs and services promoting mental and physical health, school readiness, social-emotional health, and targeted support with the core work of school. For more on how to address systematically the overlapping learning, behavioral, and emotional problems that can interfere with learning and teaching in the context of COVID-19 recovery, see *Restructuring California Schools to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching in the COVID-19 Context and Beyond*.

Figure 2. Expanding the Framework for School Improvement Policy and Practice



Source. Figure from Adelman & Taylor, 2020.

Weaving school and community resources together will be a critical component of providing the learning supports that students need. For many schools and districts, the challenges of distance learning have underscored the need to partner with families, civic institutions, and community-based organizations. The most useful partners were those with deep community history and trust that had leadership and staff who often lived in the neighborhoods they served as well as demonstrated professional expertise in community and youth development, advocacy and organizing, and addressing the basic needs of families. These partnerships have been critical to assessing learning and basic family needs, distributing technology, understanding student and family concerns and priorities, and responding to rapidly shifting public health conditions (Vance et al., 2021b).

As educators plan towards a restorative restart, community-based partnerships should continue to be engaged as valuable resources to address both learning and emotional connection needs of students, their families, and educators. District and school leaders must deploy community partnerships and resources strategically, especially to leverage state and federal recovery funds most effectively. Some partners may be important contracted resources to provide essential mental health services or auxiliary staffing. Others may be invaluable for designing and implementing a trusted, effective, and integrated service delivery system.

Leveraging school and community resources to provide students with learning supports will be a critical aspect of a restorative school restart. This section discusses three types of learning supports in particular: high-dosage tutoring, mental health supports, and expanded learning opportunities.

RESTORATIVE ACTION 7

Pair students with high-dosage tutoring.

High-dosage tutoring (HDT) offers a strategy for reengaging students in learning when they return to school. HDT has been shown to support the academic growth of elementary students in literacy and of middle and high school students in math across a range of demographic groups (Robinson et al., 2021, p. 10), including low-income students (Dietrichson et al., 2017). These programs have been shown to reduce learning gaps, helping students to make up more than a year's worth of material (Nickow et al., 2020). HDT models can give individualized instruction that students who have struggled with distance learning need and provide another opportunity for creating a positive relationship between each student and a caring adult.

Tutoring models that are consistently most effective at improving student academic outcomes are HDT programs wherein students meet individually with the same adult two or more times per week to receive individualized instruction as part of the regular school day (Nickow et al., 2020). The components of HDT highlighted in this section have been identified as

most important for driving improved student outcomes in those settings where students receive instruction from an adult who is not their regular classroom teacher. Although a classroom teacher could provide HDT, staffing the program through other means allows teachers to focus on classroom instruction, and research shows that other trained adults can effectively lead HDT sessions for students (Baye et al., 2018). Additionally, embedding tutoring in the school day ensures that students can meet regularly with tutors and reduces the negative stigma that can be associated with tutoring. Staffing HDT systems with trained adults from the community protects teacher time as well as provides an opportunity to bring in people from the community who reflect students' backgrounds—including their ethnicity, culture, and language—and can create yet another student–adult relationship to support students in school.

HDT models require a higher level of structure compared to what is traditionally expected in tutoring programs in order to best support students academically, socially, and emotionally. The following components are considered most important for creating HDT programs:

- **Student and their tutors build strong relationships.** The most important part of the HDT model was the same across all of the practitioners surveyed: building a relationship between the tutor and student. For this reason, HDT models prioritize students working with the same tutor whenever possible. For example, Step Up Tutoring in Los Angeles Unified School District requires that all tutors make and complete a 3-month commitment to serving a single student, and Match Corps tutors commit to a full year serving the same students.
- **Students and their tutors meet more than once per week.** When tutors are able to meet with their students more frequently each week, the likelihood that students will make academic progress increases. Tutoring models where students interact with their tutors only once per week are unlikely to affect students positively. HDT programs that are effective at improving student academic performance recommend meeting with students at a minimum two to three times per week for 30–60 minutes per session: 50–60 hours per semester (Sawchuk, 2020).
- **Tutors can work with more than one student but with no more than three students at a time.** Tutoring has been shown to be effective with more than one student at a time (Allensworth & Schwartz, 2020). However, tutoring in groups of more than three indicates diminishing returns for students as instruction can no longer be individualized to the same extent. Instruction begins to reflect small-group dynamics rather than personalized one-on-one support.
- **Tutors receive training and ongoing support.** Tutors will need to be trained in how to support individual students effectively even if they have previous teaching experience. Effective tutoring programs train tutors prior to working with students and continue training throughout the year. Additional training is essential to support students with specialized needs, such as English language learners and students with disabilities.

- **A clear background and vetting process for tutors is established.** Tutors will need to be vetted and approved to work with students if they are not already district employees. Common processes include fingerprinting and background checks, which can take several days or weeks to complete.

The following are other important recommendations suggested by HDT practitioners and service providers as beneficial for HDT models:

- **Tutoring time is incorporated into the regular school day.** When possible, HDT practitioners recommended making tutoring time a part of the traditional school day. In this way, students view tutoring and tutors as part of their school experience. This model also allows more opportunities for tutors to communicate with and support teachers. However, it is often more difficult to find tutors who have availability during the school day, and in-school tutoring can eliminate the classroom teacher as a provider.
- **HDT has been more effective in math than literacy for students at the middle and high school level, while it has been more effective in literacy than math for students in elementary grades.** Match Corps, a 1-year tutoring fellowship based out of Boston, found that having both a teacher and tutor trying to explain the same math concept to elementary students was confusing and counterproductive for students. Additionally, including HDT in the school day is often difficult in elementary settings with an integrated instructional model compared to middle and high school schedules.
- **Tutors check in regularly with classroom teachers and coordinate outreach to students' parents and guardians.** Students, teachers, parents and guardians, and tutors all benefit when tutorial materials are aligned with classroom instruction and target individualized student needs. HDT programs should set clear expectations for teacher–tutor relationships and set aside time for regular meetings. For example, Step Up Tutoring asks teachers to expect to spend 20 minutes per week coordinating with their tutors as a group. Additionally, tutors can be used as part of school outreach to parents and guardians by sharing student outcomes and collecting information to inform instruction.

Districts interested in learning more about HDT may consider the following:

- SAGA is an HDT provider that has a documented record of success improving student outcomes by up to 2.5 years' worth of growth in upper grade math and lower grade literacy. The organization has an online tutoring platform, SagaConnect, that allows for synchronous online tutoring. Saga also has a self-paced tutor-training course, SagaCoach, which includes a series of free, publicly available training videos for new tutors. The organization can also be contracted by districts and schools to train incoming tutors.

- EdResearch for Recovery details even more research-supported specifics around setting up and carrying out effective HDT programs in their practitioner-focused brief *Accelerating Student Learning With High-Dosage Tutoring*.
- Tutor.com is an online tutoring platform that provides live, on-demand access to tutors who support students in all K–12 core curriculum classes, including bilingual instruction. LEAs as well as public libraries and universities can contract with Tutor.com for hourly or per student rates at a cost that is generally significantly less than in-person tutoring. Students must bring their curriculum and materials to the tutoring sessions as Tutor.com does not provide any of these materials. Fresno Unified has integrated Tutor.com with its learning management system to give students easy access to the service. It is worth noting that the evidence of the effectiveness of online tutoring is unclear compared to in-person models, and existing research suggests that most students who need tutoring may be unlikely to sign up voluntarily (Heinrich et al., 2010).

RESTORATIVE ACTION 8

Provide mental health supports.

The mental well-being of students is a growing concern, with more than half of students surveyed in California saying that they have felt like they have needed mental health services since the onset of the pandemic (Youth Liberty Squad, 2020). With the likely surge in need, schools and districts should put systems in place to meet students' mental, behavioral, and emotional health needs, which are fundamental to learning (Jones, 2021). Even prior to the pandemic, most students did not have their mental health needs met, with less than 5 percent of California's Medi-Cal-eligible students receiving the services to which they were entitled (California Department of Health Care Services, 2019). Students are much more likely to receive mental and behavioral health services when these services are provided on their school campus; in fact, research has found that low-income students are 21 times more likely to receive services if provided at a school (Juszczak et al., 2003).

Identifying, tracking, and referring students with mental and behavioral health concerns involves multiple steps and processes, but the ultimate goal is to ensure that the right services are matched to needs. To do so, schools should establish the following four steps prior to the start of the school year:

Step 1: Establish a coordination of services team. The first step is to establish a collaborative team approach to identifying and addressing student mental wellness needs. A coordination of services team (COST)—sometimes called a "coordinated care team"—is a multidisciplinary, school-based structure, team, and process for organizing a comprehensive, integrated continuum of support and opportunities to support student learning, promote student wellness, and address barriers to learning. COST is one important component of a

strong school-based approach to whole child teaching and learning that prioritizes student, teacher, and family relationships as well as integrates social-emotional wellness and belonging, trauma-informed practices, and a safe, supportive school culture as foundational to universal teaching practices.

COST make-up varies by school and available resources (either from the school or community). An ideal COST has consistent, stable team members who bring instructional, social-emotional, mental health, family, and special education perspectives and expertise.

Possible members include:

- designated staff serving as a COST coordinator,
- school administrators,
- school counselors,
- school nurse,
- school psychologist,
- special education staff member,
- teacher representatives,
- afterschool providers,
- parent liaison,
- school health center staff,
- social workers or clinical case managers, and
- other student or family support providers.

To be effective, COST must be visible as a functional body and system of accountability for prompt, consistent, and responsive action. It puts in place an accessible, realistic, and responsive referral system with multiple entry points for students, teachers, families, and community partners. In contrast to a formulaic and transactional system where a student might be "pushed out" and referred to an external provider, the COST process ensures an individualized connection, or a "warm handoff," involving multiple knowledgeable, caring adults so that students are personally connected to a provider by someone they know and are therefore more likely to follow up and engage. In addition to ensuring responsive interventions, COST conducts regular review and analysis (e.g., 8–12-week cycles) of schoolwide and student-level data to identify students in need of additional support. COST is responsible for establishing and supporting the subsequent steps in this process prior to the start of the year to ensure that a system is in place to match services to students' mental health needs.

To provide detailed guidance on establishing an effective COST structure and process, the Alameda County Health Care Services Agency's Center for Healthy Schools and Communities developed a *Coordination of Services Team Guide*, a COST design and implementation road map for school staff and partners in elementary, middle, or high school settings.

Step 2: Establish a centralized, schoolwide referral system for students, teachers, and families to connect to appropriate resources. The next step is to define a referral process by which students will be linked to appropriate services or supports. Universal screening systems are one component of referral systems (see p. 25); however, the results of one screener should not necessarily deploy a COST review. For example, many students may fall below benchmark on well-being assessments; reviewing schoolwide trend data such as these (e.g., where more than 20 percent of students fall below benchmark) would imply the need for Tier 1 interventions for all students (Gee et al., 2020).

In addition to data from universal screeners, referral forms are another component of the referral process that can be completed by (a) school staff, (b) a parent or guardian, (c) a peer, or (d) the student. Example referral forms can be found on pages 31–35 of *School Mental Health Referral Pathways Toolkit*. After creating referral forms, COST must determine how the referral process will be deployed and communicated (i.e., Where can the referral forms be found and submitted? Who will review the forms?).

Based on the universal screener and referral form data, COST should develop a plan for further triangulating and deepening its understanding of the scope of students' issues with background information on the student through reviews of records, observations, and conversations with the parent or guardian. COST should define decision rules for making recommendations for interventions as well as have a safe, secure system for record management.

Step 3: Map the resources available to support mental health and development, using the full scope of resources available in the school and community. The next step is to develop a database of all school and community resources available to meet student mental health concerns. Although external mental health professionals play a critical role in supporting students—especially those students who need the most intensive services—teachers, school counselors, and even parent volunteers can also be influential in improving children's mental health outcomes (Sanchez et al., 2018; Feiss et al., 2019). High-leverage impact practices include those that explicitly integrate mental health interventions into academic instruction, such as an explicit mental health curriculum or services added to the core curriculum (Gee et al., 2020).

As part of this mapping of resources, COST should critically examine the breadth and quality of interventions provided at school (e.g., Are there sufficient types of interventions to match diverse student needs?). The team should also examine issues related to access to community-based resources (e.g., Will data be shared? Are memorandums of understanding necessary? How will contact be initiated between families and community partners to ensure a warm handoff? How will services be tracked?). Strategies for building effective partnerships to support mental health can be found on page 41 of *School Mental Health Referral Pathways Toolkit*. Given that race and ethnicity can shape how effective school-based mental health support programs are for adolescents (Feiss et al., 2019), schools should ensure that mental health services are culturally responsive (Castro-Olivo, 2017).

Step 4: Prepare to review the effectiveness of interventions and supports collaboratively and systematically. The final step in the referral process is evaluating intervention effectiveness. COST provides a regular, collaborative forum for staff, school leaders, and providers to review the degree to which the needs of individual students are being met by the interventions put in place. The team should decide on approaches for determining how progress will be monitored, how frequently to review, and how decisions about cessation of services are made.

Additional resources. Find more information and tools to develop school-based mental health systems in *School Mental Health Referral Pathways Toolkit*, developed by Now is the Time Technical Assistance Center and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *A California Guide to Sharing Student Health and Education Information* from the California School-Based Health Alliance provides an overview of the laws that relate to sharing student/patient information (the Health Information Portability and Accountability Act [HIPAA], the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act [FERPA], and California state law) as well as best practices and resource materials for schools and health providers. The California School-Based Health Alliance's *California Student Mental Health Implementation Guide* provides information to LEAs and county behavioral health departments as they seek to partner to deliver comprehensive, high-quality school mental health services.

RESTORATIVE ACTION 9

Offer expanded learning opportunities.

In the context of COVID-19 recovery, schools and districts are grappling with how they can best meet students' wellness and learning needs (California AfterSchool Network, n.d.). To meet students' social and emotional needs while advancing their learning towards grade-level standards, it is critical to invest strategically in expanded learning opportunities and partners. *Expanded learning* refers to before school, afterschool, summer, and/or intersession learning programs that focus on developing the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs and interests of students through hands-on, engaging learning experiences (California Education Code—EDC § 8482.1). Regular participation in expanded learning programming is associated with improved social-emotional and academic outcomes (Vandell, 2013), often with greater effects for low-income youth and youth of color (Mahoney et al., 2005). Another benefit is that parents and guardians value these programs, with 83 percent of parents of children in afterschool programs agreeing that they help working parents keep their jobs (Afterschool Alliance, 2014).

Throughout the pandemic, expanded learning partners have been instrumental in creating some measure of consistency and connection for many students. Expanded learning programs continue to serve students who have been hardest hit by school closures, including Black and Latinx students, English language learners, and students who are living in poverty (Williams, 2020). Many expanded learning partners established learning hub models to support distance learners with

in-person education support, offering academic support to small groups of students as well as enrichment, social-emotional learning, exercise, and healthy meals and snacks (Vance et al., 2021a).

Such efforts reflect the significant state and local investments that have resulted in a strong and sophisticated expanded learning workforce that contributes to student success. Research has found nine factors that are associated with quality expanded learning programs (Bodilly & Beckett, 2005):

- a clear mission;
- high expectations and positive social norms expected of participants;
- a safe and healthy environment;
- a supportive emotional climate;
- small total enrollment;
- stable, trained personnel;
- appropriate content and pedagogy relative to the children's needs and the program's mission, with opportunities to engage;
- integrated family and community partners; and
- frequent assessments.

The California Department of Education and the California AfterSchool Network have put forth *The Quality Standards for Expanded Learning in California*, which are intended to develop a shared vision of expanded learning program quality in the state.

When it comes to collaboration among schools, districts, and expanded learning partners, three primary principles emerge as critical drivers for effective partnerships in a restorative restart:

- **Principle 1: Collaboratively plan and implement integrated services.** School and expanded learning partnerships should be explicitly designed to provide integrated learning opportunities that mitigate the impacts of the pandemic and extended school closures on students, especially for marginalized students and families. These partnerships should develop integrated plans for the near term as well as for the future, beginning with intentional conversations to understand the needs and priorities of students and families.
- **Principle 2: Provide integrated supports that reflect the science of learning and development.** Research on the science of learning and development pinpoints five interrelated design and implementation strategies that support youth to thrive (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Expanded learning providers can be vital partners in carrying out each of these strategies.
- **Principle 3: Prioritize equity.** Schools and expanded learning partners must strive to design more equitable policies, environments, practices, and experiences in response to COVID-19 through equity-centered vision setting, system design, and staffing choices (Vance et al., 2021b).

Expanded learning providers have long offered enrichment and learning opportunities that complement and extend the learning goals of schools. Today, the challenges presented by COVID-19—including growing achievement gaps and escalating disparities between families who can and cannot afford to pay for high-quality learning supports—make school partnerships with expanded learning providers an essential component of the approach to addressing student needs.

Additional resources. *No Longer Optional: Expanded Learning in School Reopening* is a brief from Partnership for Children and Youth and The Opportunity Institute that describes the ways in which expanded learning partnerships are essential to achieving equity in school reopening and recovery. For additional information on key principles of high-quality expanded learning partnerships, see the brief from PACE and AIR, *Expanded Learning Partnerships: A Foundation for Rebuilding to Support the Whole Child*. Included with the brief is a companion tool, *Planning Integrated Whole Child Supports*, which is intended to help schools and expanded learning providers develop a comprehensive plan for designing and implementing integrated services for students and families.

RESTORATIVE ACTION 10

Staff up to support student reengagement.

California's schools are currently underequipped to address the rising levels of student engagement and wellness needs. Prolonged shutdowns and school closures have left young people socially isolated. One study estimates that up to 500,000 students in California have disappeared from school, and March 2020 may have been the last time they experienced any formal education, virtual or in person (Korman et al., 2020). Many more students have been chronically absent (Jacobson, 2020).

Even prior to the pandemic, California ranked at or near the bottom of all states in terms of the percentage of students with access to various types of school-based mental, behavioral, or physical health supports. One study found that California ranked 39th in available nurses per student; in terms of counselors, California ranks last among the 50 states. Yet California's youth do not have low needs: for example, California ranks 28th among states in terms of the estimated percentage of children with a serious emotional disturbance (Reback, 2018, p. 10). Table 4 presents data from 2019 on ratios of students to support service personnel in California.

Although districts must be responsive to the engagement and wellness needs of students, the need to staff up should be balanced by the fiscal realities that come with one-time COVID-relief funding. In addition, school staffing responsibilities should be considered within the constellation of other agencies and organizations that are funded (often through sustainable, noneducation dollars) and equipped to provide support services to students. Community-based

Table 4. Ratio of Students to Support Service Personnel in California in 2019

Student support position	Students per support personnel	Recommended ratio of students per support personnel
Counselor	626:1	250:1 (American School Counselor Association, 2015)
Librarian/Library media teacher	7,896:1[a]	785:1 (California State Auditor, 2016)
Nurse	2,410:1	750:1 (National Association of School Nurses, 2011)
Psychologist	1,041:1	500:1 (NASP, 2020a)
Social worker	7,308:1	250:1 (School Social Work Association of America, 2013)
Speech/Language/Hearing specialist	1,093:1	N/A, depends on need (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, n.d.)

Source. Adapted from Population Reference Bureau (n.d.).

[a] Based on 2015 data, which is the most recently available data.

supports and services may also more frequently reflect the racial, ethnic, and linguistic make-up of the students they serve as well as be able to connect students and families with additional services as needed. Instead of hiring additional direct services support positions, districts might consider investing in the staffing infrastructure and practices needed to leverage, organize, and coordinate essential student support services and opportunities available through community-based organizations, health services organizations, and other public-sector partners.

Community school strategies, for example, have emerged as a promising approach to mitigate the social and learning impacts of COVID-19. Advocates describe community schools as a way to organize the resources of a community to address and eliminate barriers to learning: "A place-based strategy in which schools partner with community agencies and allocate resources to provide an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement" (Maier et al., 2018, p. 17).

The core staffing role, sometimes called a "community school coordinator" or "resource manager," is a dedicated, site-based administrator whose focus is to provide a consistent organizational "backbone" to cross-sector partnerships and programs. Serving as "chief of staff," their role is to work with site leaders to leverage the assets of community and civic partners as well as to ensure that they are responsive to the specific needs of school communities. As part of a school's administrative leadership team, this manager is primarily responsible for coordinating and aligning across school leaders, staff, and partners to ensure that students, teachers, and families are supported. They serve as an adviser to the principal, providing leadership for coordinating the work of different partners within the school and aligning the work of partners with school faculty. This administrator's work may include facilitating a COST process, reviewing student- and school-level data, and creating and strengthening interdisciplinary approaches to meeting student,

family, and teacher needs. Return-on-investment studies of community school coordinator positions highlight the importance of the organizing infrastructure in being able to leverage local community assets, programs, and staffing resources. An individual in this position not only is responsible for connecting students to services but also supports and sustains access to services by seeking and securing public funding sources, such as Medi-Cal reimbursements (DeNike and Ohlson, 2013; Bloodworth & Horner, 2019).

The Four Ts for investing staffing infrastructure to deepen community-based partnerships and address students' individualized learning and mental health needs. To strengthen staffing and deepen community-based partnerships, including during summer and out-of-school time, districts should consider investing in the following:

Time

- Time for one-to-one tutoring during the regular school day, during which targeted students do not miss key instructional content or relational opportunities
- Paid time for teachers to coordinate with tutors, mental health providers, and expanded learning providers about the ongoing curriculum (approximately 20–30 minutes per week)
- Extended contractual hours to compensate teacher time for expanded learning or tutoring, as needed

Talent

- Coordinators/resource managers to leverage and organize community-based resources, such as counselors, social workers, nurses, and psychologists
- District- and school-level expanded learning staff and partners
- Tutors and staff for expanded learning programs (e.g., high school or college students, parents and guardians, former educators, and community or existing expanded learning partners)
- Staff and partners dedicated to providing Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports, such as delivering interventions to students in small groups or one-on-one (e.g., reading groups)

Training

- Training for teachers and staff about how to coordinate services and engage with tutoring and expanded learning support providers or (if applicable) provide such supports themselves
- Training for new roles (e.g., tutors and expanded learning providers)
- Focused training for all parties on serving student populations with language learning needs and students with disabilities

Technology/Materials

- Online tutoring services to support students working with tutors in person and provide access in areas where there may not be enough tutors to support in-person tutoring
- Complementary curricular materials for expanded learning

Prioritize Racial Equity, Relevance, and Rigor in Curriculum and Instruction

A wave of demonstrations and uprisings in response to systemic racism and injustices experienced by communities of color has occurred simultaneously with the pandemic. Increased attention to police violence and anti-Black racism as well as the rise in anti-Asian hate crimes during the pandemic underscore the urgency of districts and schools explicitly addressing racial equity as part of teaching and learning (Jeung et al., 2021; Quirk, 2020). It is critical for attention and resources to be directed towards providing high-quality instruction that prioritizes racial equity and is relevant and rigorous for all students.

Learning is most productive when students engage in meaningful inquiry tasks that are intrinsically motivating, with ample opportunities for collaboration and feedback to foster growth in knowledge and skills at a student's own pace. During this process, students actively generate knowledge as they engage in tasks that are at the appropriate level of challenge and tap into their interests and curiosities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

A one-size-fits-all approach to teaching and learning will not meet the disparate needs that students will have when they reenter the classroom. Instruction tailored to diversity in cultures, values, and learning differences, offering meaningful choices in learning opportunities for students, will boost student engagement in a restorative restart. This section describes research and practices for advancing racial equity in curriculum and teaching, which offers students choice and voice in their learning and focuses on priority standards and lessons to accelerate learning.

RESTORATIVE ACTION 11

Advance racial equity in curriculum and teaching.

A first step towards advancing racial equity in instruction is for educators to reflect personally on bias and the historical foundations of race and racism as well as about their impact on the lives of students and in society. This is essential in large part because teachers' belief in their students' academic capabilities is known to be vital for student success (Hallinan, 2008; Jussim & Harber, 2005); however, research has found that teachers tend to underestimate the academic abilities of students of color compared to their White peers, even after controlling for prior test scores and homework completion. These underestimations of student ability have been shown to harm students' self-conception and lead to poorer academic outcomes (Cherng, 2017). A resource developed by the National Museum of African American History and Culture, *Talking About Race*, is designed to help educators and others better understand and discuss bias and race. ADL's *Anti-Bias Tool & Strategies* provides a broad range of tools, strategies, and lessons designed for K–12 educators and administrators to support efforts to promote safe, respectful, and inclusive learning environments, with resource categories that include schoolwide strategies and support, classroom tips and tactics, discussion and activity guides, and historical information.

Understanding the role of race and culture is particularly essential in California, which is the most culturally diverse state in the country (McCann, 2020). More than 40 percent of California's students speak a language other than English at home. California's students are 55 percent Latinx, with the next largest group being White at 23 percent; these numbers are nearly the inverse of teachers, who are 61 percent White and 21 percent Latinx (Ed-Data, 2021). Because of the dramatic demographic shifts that occurred in California over the past few decades (Lin & Watson, 2020), today's teachers were educated at a time and place not nearly as diverse as the schools in which they currently teach. Noted sociologist of education Dan Lortie (1975) observed that teachers primarily learn to teach through their "apprenticeships of observation" as pupils themselves; as a result, teachers tend to teach the way they were taught.

What the research from the science of learning and development shows, however, is that students learn best when they can connect what happens in school to their own cultural contexts and experiences, when their teachers are responsive to their strengths and needs, and when their environment is "identity safe" (Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013). Culturally responsive teaching is defined as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (Gay, 2010, p. 31). Culturally responsive approaches scaffold learning by helping connect instruction to students' individual experiences and cultural resources. Leveraging prior knowledge, experience, and interests, teachers can reduce the cognitive load and mental effort of navigating cultural differences, creating space for new learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

A framework developed by New America (Muñiz, 2019) synthesizes what culturally responsive teachers know and do (see Figure 3). Corresponding with the framework for culturally responsive teaching is *Culturally Responsive Teaching: A Reflection Guide*, a thoughtful resource that offers reflection questions to guide self-appraisal, goal setting, and critical discussion on each of the competency areas. This resource is intended to enable teachers and those who support them to promote rigorous, relevant learning that leads to the engagement, achievement, and empowerment of all learners.

A class's curriculum plays a critical role in culturally responsive teaching because it shapes how students understand content and the world within which they locate themselves. The curriculum contains the stories, histories, and worldviews deemed worthy of exploring and understanding. Curricula can contribute to the centering and normalization of certain people, cultures, and values—and not others (Peoples, 2019). The Education Justice Research and Organizing Collaborative at NYU Steinhardt's Metropolitan Center has developed a *Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard* that families, educators, students, and community members can use to determine the extent to which their schools' ELA, science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics curricula are culturally responsive. See *Books Matter: Children's Literature* by ADL for a curated collection of children's books that can promote discussions about identity, diversity, bias, and social justice. The collection ranges from picture books to books for young adults.

Figure 3. Eight Competencies for Culturally Responsive Teaching

Source. Figure from Muñiz, 2019.

RESTORATIVE ACTION 12

Offer students choice and voice in their learning.

When students return to school, it is essential to reengage their interest in learning and offer them choice and voice in the learning process (Benner et al., 2019). Students are more invested and engaged in learning when they perceive the learning to be meaningful to them. Research shows that learning environments that are meaningful to students have the following characteristics (Quay, 2017):

- **Future oriented.** The learning environment conveys to students that a range of personally motivating future goals and "possible selves" are available and that students will be supported in achieving them (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006; Browman et al., 2017).
- **Agency supportive.** Students have regular opportunities to have voice and agency (express their authentic selves, make choices that are meaningful to them, and be a source of action), collectively or individually (Ryan & Deci, 2000).
- **Engagement driven.** Schoolwork is designed to sustain interest and engagement (Larson & Rusk, 2011; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Carr & Walton, 2014; Reeve & Jang, 2006):
    - Tasks and assessments are engaging (authentic, collaborative, problem oriented, etc.) and perceived as valuable (relevant to students' interests and goals).
    - Learning environments are designed with consideration of the potential negative effects of extrinsic motivators (evaluation, reward, and punishment) and controlling or autonomy-undermining behaviors (e.g., instructors monopolizing discourse, focusing on commands and compliance, or telling students the right answer instead of giving time to discover it) on students' engagement and their desire to learn.
- **Connection themed.** Curricula, tasks, and leadership opportunities encourage students to connect what they are learning with their lives, their identities, their communities, and a self-transcendent purpose (Dee & Penner, 2016; Hulleman & Harackiewicz, 2009; Yeager et al., 2014).

Universal Design for Learning. The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework that can enhance student choice and voice in the classroom. It offers educators a guide to making instruction work for all learners through engagement, accessibility, and choice of expression. Based on the understanding of the neural systems in the brain involved in learning, UDL is an approach to identifying and removing barriers in instruction while building scaffolds and supports that meet the learning needs of all students.

UDL is grounded in three principles (CAST, 2018):

- *multiple means of engagement*—tap into students' motivation by offering and aligning learning opportunities with their interests and goals;
- *multiple means of representation*—use a variety of approaches to presenting content; and
- *multiple means of action and expression*—provide students with a range of options for engaging in learning and demonstrating what they know.

CAST offers the *Universal Design for Learning Guidelines* as a tool for implementing UDL, which can be used by educators, curriculum developers, families, and anyone else who wants to apply the UDL framework in a learning environment. These guidelines offer a set of concrete suggestions for how to ensure that all learners can access and participate in meaningful, challenging learning opportunities.

Project-based learning. Problem- or project-based work also fosters student choice and voice by enabling students to pursue expertise in areas of personal interest. Research has identified four principles of design differentiating meaningful problem- and project-based work that leads to understanding, and does not exist only for the sake of doing group work (Barron et al., 1998): (a) learning-appropriate goals; (b) scaffolds that support both students and teachers; (c) frequent opportunities for formative assessment and revision; and (d) social organizations that promote participation and result in a sense of agency. Project-Based Learning Works offers *8 Ways to Get Started with Project-Based Learning* as a scaffolded introduction to project-based teaching and learning.

Additional resources. *A Pathway to Equitable Math Instruction* is an approach to mathematics that centers Black, Latinx, and multilingual students in Grades 6–8, addresses barriers to math equity, and aligns instruction to grade-level priority standards. The *Pathway* offers guidance and resources for curriculum planning as well as scaffolded opportunities for self-reflection for educators to develop an antiracist math practice. For secondary students, Linked Learning is an approach that extends beyond project-based learning to provide opportunities for students to connect their academic learning with application in the real world. This model combines academics, career technical education, work-based learning, and comprehensive support services to engage students in their learning and prepare them for postsecondary success.

Research on Class-Size Reduction

Most Americans agree that smaller class sizes are preferable to larger (Howell et al., 2007). All else being equal, research indicates that students benefit from smaller class sizes (Mosteller, 1995; Chetty et al., 2011). However, research has also shown that sweeping efforts to reduce class size can result in complicated, unintended consequences. For example, when the need for new teacher hires in California schools increased due to class-size reduction in the 1990s, experienced teachers in high-needs schools moved to newly created positions in more affluent communities (Jepsen & Rivkin, 2009). Research suggests that students learn more in larger classes with effective teachers than in smaller classes with ineffective teachers (Hansen, 2013). Because policies to reduce class size can inadvertently draw experienced teachers away from higher needs schools, they can exacerbate existing inequities (Jepsen & Rivkin, 2009).

Although reducing class sizes may seem like an attractive strategy for pandemic recovery, doing so increases the need for teachers and infrastructure to support smaller classes. However, California lacks a robust supply of qualified teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2018a) and adequate facilities for all students (Brunner & Vincent, 2018).

For these reasons, districts considering class-size reduction should take the following points into account:

- **The availability of qualified teachers to fill new positions.** California was already facing a shortage of qualified teachers prior to the pandemic, and this shortage has become more severe due to COVID-19, with many leaving the field (Carver-Thomas et al., 2021). Districts should assess the degree to which qualified teachers are locally available to hire and any potential equity impacts on schools that are harder to staff.
- **Magnitude of reduction.** Findings on the benefits of class-size reduction are based on research conducted on very large reductions, with approximately 7 to 10 fewer students per class (e.g., reducing the class size from 22 to 15 students). The efficacy of smaller reductions in class size is not as well established (Whitehurst & Chingos, 2011).
- **Targeting.** Research has shown that smaller classes are most effective in the early grades, with evidence suggesting that kindergarten or first-grade classes of 13 to 17 students are ideal (Mosteller, 1995). It has been shown that students of color and students from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit the most from smaller class sizes (Nye et al., 2000), so resources for class-size reduction could be targeted to support these student demographics.

- **Facilities.** When reducing class sizes, finding additional adequate classroom space is always a concern. These concerns are intensified amid a pandemic that requires increased attention to physical spacing and ventilation requirements (Griffith & Pearce, 2020).
- **Professional development.** Smaller class sizes can provide greater opportunities for active learning and student engagement (Blatchford et al., 2011); however, this is not always the case. Researchers have found that instructional practices in classrooms of larger and smaller size are largely similar (Stecher & Bohrnstedt, 2000). If class sizes are reduced, teachers will require professional learning opportunities to take advantage of the teaching and learning opportunities afforded with smaller class sizes.
- **Sustainability.** Given the popularity of class-size reduction, it may be politically difficult to increase class size again when budgets can no longer support small classes. When considering implementing class-size reduction using stimulus funds, schools should clearly communicate that reductions in class size are temporary and class size will likely increase again when one-time funding is spent.

Supporting teachers to achieve racial equity, relevance, and rigor in curriculum and instruction. Schools and districts will need to provide robust professional learning and collaboration opportunities to support instructional practice that is equitable, relevant, and rigorous. A review of studies of professional development over 3 decades found that effective professional development incorporates most of the following elements: (a) it is content focused; (b) it incorporates active learning; (c) it supports collaboration; (d) it uses models of effective practice; (e) it provides coaching and expert support; (f) it offers feedback and reflection; and (g) it is of sustained duration (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2017).

To provide structured learning opportunities for teachers that result in changes in practice and improvements in student learning, schools and districts should attend to the following:

Invest in ongoing and embedded professional development. In contrast to the "one shot" model of professional development in which a teacher attends a 1-day workshop, professional development that results in changes in practice reflects an ongoing cycle that includes the following:

- introducing and learning, where educators build knowledge about the new approach and see examples of others demonstrating specific aspects of it;
- heavily scaffolded practice, where educators have opportunities to explore key ideas in simulations and practice discrete skills before combining them into an overall approach;

- practice in context, where educators get to try out the new ideas in their own teaching; and
- analyzing practice and consolidating learning, where feedback and reflection support teachers in recognizing aspects of practice they are enacting well and how they could further improve (Myung et al., 2020).

Most professional development lacks sufficient opportunities for iterative cycles of practice in context and for analyzing practice to consolidate learning. As a result, much of teacher professional development is ineffective at improving teacher practice (TNTP, 2015; Timperley et al., 2007).

Increase time for professional development and teacher collaboration in the workday. Stand-alone professional workshops are contained and convenient to schedule; however, these opportunities do not provide the time, structure, or support that results in robust, sustained professional learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, p. 36). Teachers need time to reflect on and learn from their practices, coplan instructional activities, observe one another teach, and collect and analyze data. Collaboration can lead to improvements in teacher practice and student learning when it is highly structured and focused around how changes in teacher practices will improve students' experiences and outcomes (Cordingley, 2015).

Research on Instructional Aides

Although large-scale studies have shown that, generally, instructional aides have little if any impact on student achievement (Gerber et al., 2001; Finn et al., 2001), more nuanced reviews of research have found that teaching assistants who are trained and supported to work one-on-one or with a small group of students with learning difficulties can contribute to significant learning gains, particularly in literacy in the primary grades (Blatchford et al., 2009; Farrell et al., 2010; Gottfried, 2018). Other research has suggested that the positive effects of instructional aides on academic achievement are stronger for students of color than for White students (Clotfelter et al., 2016).

Taken all together, research indicates that simply having more adults in classrooms is not enough to affect students positively. When aides provide targeted help to students on a one-to-one or small-group basis, using an approach with which they are familiar and that they receive support to implement with fidelity, student learning improves (Farrell et al., 2010). Such strategies require clear roles for aides, collaborative partnership, and proper training and support for aides as well as primary teaching staff as part of a systemic approach to supporting students. Districts and schools could consider investing in training, support, and monitoring so that aides can further strengthen an MTSS system to provide tiered, small-group, or one-on-one support for students who need it.

Invest in developing depth of local expertise. Although working with an external provider is often necessary for professional development, developing deep internal capacity in particular areas should be a priority, even when all staff are being trained. Administrators or staff could select staff members to gain deeper skills, knowledge, or expertise in particular areas so as to serve as local coaches or mentors for other educators over the long term.

Balance tight and loose professional development priorities. Aligning professional development strategies with district instructional goals is crucial for districtwide coherence (Childress et al., 2011). However, research suggests that providing opportunities for teachers to participate in making their own decisions about their learning needs and priorities for professional development increases the success of the experience (Parker et al., 2010).

RESTORATIVE ACTION 13

Focus on priority standards and lessons to accelerate learning.

Students will be entering the 2021–22 school year having covered less of the previous year's content than they typically would have. Districts can support teachers by reviewing each grade level's scope and sequence from the previous year and identifying priorities to guide instructional planning for the upcoming year or by providing support for schools to do this work. This prioritization will be the first step in ensuring that teachers are prepared to help all students attain the prerequisite knowledge and skills required for learning current grade-level content.

Identifying instructional priorities to scaffold teacher planning can be done in a collaborative process that focuses on prioritization, not elimination. Stakeholders should seek objectivity as they apply selection criteria to guide prioritization. Criteria for identifying priority standards may include: (a) endurance, the degree to which the concept or skill represents learning that goes beyond one grade level or grade; (b) leverage, the degree to which a concept or skill has crossover applications within the content area and interdisciplinary applications to other content areas; and (c) readiness, the degree to which the standard is a prerequisite concept or skill for the next grade or course. External exam requirements may also come into consideration as criteria (Ainsworth, 2013; Reeves, 2001; American Association for the Advancement of Science, 2001). Ainsworth (2013) suggests the following process for developing instructional priorities:

1. Mark initial selections using selection criteria and reach initial consensus.
2. Look for connections to state tests and make changes as needed.
3. Chart and compare selections for each grade.
4. Vertically align selections across grades, resolve uncertainties, and reach group consensus.
5. Acquire feedback from all involved sites.
6. Revise, publish, and distribute the instructional priorities.

To a greater extent than in years past, teachers will have to cover content from the previous school year while also being responsible for teaching grade-level standards. Guidance on instructional priorities will scaffold teacher discussion, collaboration, and planning as educators determine how to integrate critical content from prior grades into the scope and sequence for the coming school year while also advancing grade-level instruction. Achieve the Core developed *Priority Instructional Content in English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics* to serve as an example for schools and districts to support planning and decision-making amid pandemic-disrupted schooling.

Educators should pursue their priority grade-level standards with differentiated interventions as a means of addressing significant learning losses and accelerating student learning back to grade level. With the extent of unfinished learning, grade retention or remediation may seem like appropriate approaches to meeting student learning needs. Remediation courses for students who are missing foundational skills can seem like a way of "meeting students where they are," but they often fail to provide grade-level content to students, without which students will never catch up (TNTP, 2018). Alternatively, high-quality instruction with an emphasis on grade-level content with differentiated support benefits all students, especially those furthest behind (TNTP, 2020).

Similarly, studies show that grade retention should not be considered as an approach to addressing learning loss because it has not been found to boost student achievement in the long term. Grade retention increases the likelihood of students dropping out and lowers rates of college attendance; these negative effects are higher for middle and high school students than for elementary school students (Marsico Institute, 2012; Steiner & Weisberg, 2020; Xia & Kirby, 2009).

Although remediation should not be the focus of instruction in 2021–22, teachers should develop deep familiarity with the prior year's content in preparation for addressing significant student learning loss in the fall. Teachers should be prepared to recognize and fill student knowledge gaps as part of delivering differentiated, grade-level instruction. The TNTP *Learning Acceleration Guide*, part of the *COVID-19 School Response Toolkit*, offers specific goals and strategies that can help schools begin accelerating students back to grade level in any instructional format, with an emphasis on grade-appropriate assignments and strong instruction.

The Four Ts for investing in making teaching and learning relevant and rigorous.
To support educators in prioritizing racial equity, relevance, rigor, and priority standards in curriculum and instruction, districts should consider investing in the following:

Time

- Professional development days for teachers and other school staff
- Consistent time for feedback and reflection on teaching practice
- Time for teacher collaboration and joint planning during the school day

Talent

- Instructional coaches
- Substitute teachers to cover for professional development or peer observations
- Instructional aides, particularly in Grades TK–3
- Partnerships with local teacher preparation programs to strengthen the teacher pipeline

Training

- Training for all teachers and staff in culturally responsive teaching, UDL, and project-based learning
- Deeper training for subsets of teachers to develop local expertise
- Professional development opportunities that balance teacher interest and district priorities

Technology/Materials

- Online professional development opportunities
- Materials to support professional development

Lay the Groundwork for Systemic Transformation

RESTORATIVE ACTION 14

Engage diverse teams to monitor improvement and build towards long-term change.

The emphasis of the restorative restart is on the first few weeks of the 2021–22 school year; however, this effort is intended to establish and strengthen the foundation for systemic transformation that supports a whole child orientation to teaching and learning well beyond COVID-19 recovery. To ensure a restorative restart to the 2021–22 school year, schools should immediately put in place a team not only to lead the effort during the first few weeks of school but also to navigate the transformational work to ensure that the restorative practices and culture are implemented, integrated, and sustained over the long term. These teams should plan for the restorative restart and then continue meeting throughout the school year in order to shift focus from pandemic response to a sustained effort to build equitable, antiracist, restorative learning environments for all students.

The following critical components must be included in this teams' work.

Stakeholder engagement. This work begins by assembling a diverse coalition of school community members to lead the restorative restart work before, during, and after the return to school. This team should represent academic, mental and behavioral health, student services, data analysis, human resources, and family engagement experts as well as a broader group of stakeholders, including underrepresented students, family members and caregivers of color, educators, labor representatives, and community partners. These individuals will establish an ambitious vision for how students will experience the restorative restart as well as how school will be transformed to be more equitable in the long term.

Efforts to engage these individuals should take into account what is known from research about the conditions that shape stakeholder engagement at different levels of the system by:

- ensuring that all stakeholders are aware of opportunities to engage, mitigating against participation fatigue, and investing time in building stakeholders' skills and knowledge so that they have the capacity to contribute fully;
- developing a culture of trust among leaders and stakeholders by increasing transparency, sharing information, supporting increased stakeholder voice in two-way communication, honestly seeking feedback, and demonstrating responsiveness;
- working towards establishing strategic plans as guideposts for engagement;

- partnering with community-based intermediary organizations to build capacity to organize engagement; and
- reflecting on and assessing institutional beliefs about appropriate roles in decision-making (Marsh et al., 2018).

Student and family voices. Special attention should be dedicated to elevating and empowering student and family voices as indispensable to the process of restorative restart and transformation. To do this, traditional power dynamics of school governance must be reversed: instead of school authority figures imposing their ideas, the insights and experiences of students and families should be elevated. It is incumbent on those with power and privilege in the setting to be aware of traditional power imbalances and make themselves vulnerable by sharing authority and the consequences for joint actions that are taken (Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

Labor–management collaboration. Another critical aspect of stakeholder engagement for reimagining and rebuilding schools is collaboration between labor and management. Significant harm has been done to labor–management relationships during the pandemic in some districts, often related to disagreements on timelines for the return to in-person learning (Blume & Newbury, 2020). In these districts, priority should be placed on repairing harm and restoring trust between union and district leaders. See *Dinuba's Journey: From Conflict to Cooperation* from the California Labor Management Institute for an example of a district moving from an adversarial to a collaborative labor–management relationship. In that district, the trust developed through informal conversations between district and union leaders laid the groundwork for new collaborative relationships through which labor–management problem-solving structures and contract negotiations were codeveloped.

Monitor progress, rapidly improve, and evaluate impact. Although the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic may be in the past, volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity will continue to be mainstays in schools during the 2021–22 school year as districts navigate the challenges of understanding and meeting rapidly evolving student needs (Myung & Kimner, 2020). More than ever before, schools and districts will need to be adaptive, resilient, and innovative to meet the needs of students during the restorative restart to school. When implemented thoughtfully, data monitoring and continuous improvement strategies can equip school leaders and educators with the tools they need to meet student needs in these uncertain times.

In this dynamic environment, a key role for the restorative restart teams will be evaluating whether new programs and approaches have been effective at meeting students' needs and addressing inequities—and then modifying plans as needed. In the rollout of the restorative restart, new approaches and interventions should be planned and structured to promote collective learning about the change. See the *Continuous Improvement Toolkit* from the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence for protocols that support cycles of inquiry, including the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle.

Regular collection of data together with analysis, inquiry, and iterative testing of new ideas will be essential when operating in the uncharted conditions of pandemic recovery. No school or district can be expected to design and implement a fail-proof plan for the restart of a school year during a pandemic on the first attempt. Close monitoring of data (e.g., formative assessments, attendance, and assignment completion) and swift, responsive adaptation can help schools continuously improve (Grunow et al., 2018). This may require substantive investment in data capacity in the form of data infrastructure as well as staffing, such as data analysts at the district level, who synthesize quantitative and qualitative data from schools and detect patterns to inform improvement, and data and improvement leads at the school level, who drive data-driven decision-making and improvement efforts. Protecting time for collaborative planning and data review as well as building data fluency among staff will be critical to the success of this work (Hough et al., 2018).

This period of recovery will usher in new levels of innovation, and districts should lay the groundwork now for analyzing which interventions are effective, for which students, and under what conditions. This information will help district leaders determine which programs can be phased out and which programs are essential to keep. This knowledge will support long-term planning and budgeting, including making the case for increased local, state, or federal funding for education to sustain new programs that have been highly effective.

Make progress towards addressing long-term challenges. While focusing on implementing restorative practices for the 2021–22 school year, the restorative restart team should also be mindful of the structural changes that are critical to meeting whole child needs that take more time to address and that require persistent and deliberate efforts to resolve. The pandemic has exacerbated issues that have beset California schools for decades and will require ongoing attention.

For example, California has long had a shortage of qualified teachers, particularly in high-need fields and schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2018b). During the pandemic, this shortage has become more acute because of increases in early retirements and resignations as well as reductions in the pipeline of incoming teachers (Carver-Thomas, et al., 2021). A similar trend in turnover appears to be happening among school leaders as well (Freedberg, 2021). To enable long-term school transformation, districts and schools must strengthen their teacher and principal pipelines to ensure that schools are staffed and led by individuals who are diverse, well prepared, and committed to their school communities. They must also take strides to ensure that district leaders and school board members reflect the demographics and diverse perspectives of their communities. California schools have been inadequately funded for years, and although the recent windfall will shore up school budgets in the short term, schools and districts will need fiscal plans in place for when these funds expire (Hahnel, 2020). Districts will also need to continue efforts to distribute resources equitably within their district boundaries as well as to dismantle policies that sustain segregation and inequitable access to opportunities in their schools.

Community school strategies are seen as promising for mitigating the learning impacts of social and economic distress currently affecting so many California students, families, educators, and communities. Most of these efforts focus on organizational partnerships, student and family supports, and other "wraparound" services that have not traditionally been within the scope of education. While such strategies are important, community schools that are built with one-time funding to provide, for example, health and wellness programs and direct services are not likely to be effective or sustainable in the long run. Instead, a sustainable community school strategy must balance short-term needs and long-term goals for school transformation. Districts should strategically deploy recovery dollars to respond to immediate and urgent needs while also leveraging and organizing existing district and community resources (Kimner, 2020) to support an effective and sustainable student- and relationship-centered approach to teaching and learning.

The Four Ts for empowering teams to rebuild and reimagine systems. To lay the groundwork for systemic, long-term transformation by cocreating plans with students and families of color, educators, and community partners, districts should consider investing in the following:

Time

- Stipends for team members to meet regularly and engage in the work of continuous improvement

Talent

- Recruitment of a diverse team that reflects expertise in academics, mental and behavioral health, student services, data analysis, human resources, and family engagement
- Intentional engagement of a broader group of stakeholders, including underrepresented students, family members of color, educators, labor representatives, and community partners

Training

- Training in continuous improvement and system change methodology

Technology

- Investment in data systems that track and monitor improvements in process and outcome data of interest

Summarizing the Four Ts

A restorative restart will require new investments in how schools address whole child student needs. This report uses a Four Ts framework to prompt reflection on local budgeting and spending priorities that will foster a restorative restart. In summary, school and district leaders are encouraged to consider the following areas for investment in a restorative restart:

- **Time.** School calendars and schedules may need to look different this year to accommodate planning for and implementation of activities that support a restorative restart, such as family outreach, relationship building, and attending to students' academic and wellness needs. Additional requests of staff time will require additional compensation. While many schools will need to add time to the school year or day, in some schools and districts this may also entail subtracting tasks or deprioritizing prior initiatives or programs to increase time to focus on the restorative restart.
- **Talent.** For decades, schools in California have not been adequately staffed to meet student needs; now, greater student needs resulting from the pandemic have made increasing the number of adults in schools to support whole child needs and address barriers to learning even more urgent. The recent infusion of federal and state funds has opened the window to this possibility. Although the one-time nature of the funds shortens the time for implementation and the impact of additional support, new staff and partners can still be deployed to address short-term needs in a burst of support, which might include forging connections and building trust with families, identifying and addressing disparities in unfinished learning, and meeting mental health needs. Partnering with community-based organizations is efficient and sustainable because it leverages available local resources and these partnerships can persist after the stimulus funds expire.
- **Training.** Teachers, staff, and school leaders will be challenged to adjust their practice in the restorative restart to center relationships with students and families, address whole child needs, and promote engaging and rigorous teaching and learning. Robust professional learning opportunities and support for teachers will be critical to ensure that students experience a coherent and consistent restorative restart. Protecting ongoing time for teacher and staff teams to collaborate, learn, plan, review student data, and examine their practice must be a cornerstone of professional learning during the restorative restart and beyond. Staff and community partners will also need to be trained to ensure alignment in strategy and coherence in the student experience.

- **Technology/Materials.** Ongoing efforts to close the digital divide must continue, and leaders should assess and capitalize on technological assets—hardware, software, and knowledge—developed during distance learning. Digital infrastructure can also strengthen core components of the restorative restart, such as data collection on student wellness, formative assessment and progress monitoring, and referral processes. Technology and other learning materials can continue to be used asynchronously, which will help ensure that in-person instructional time is well tailored to be relationship centered, rigorous, and engaging.

Conclusion

Faced with the mounting disproportionate challenges of declining student wellness, engagement, and learning rates over the period of pandemic-disrupted schooling, schools and districts have critical decisions to make in 2021–22. Returning to school "as normal" will not be sufficient to meet student needs or to close long-standing equity gaps that have only been exacerbated during the extended school closures. During past periods in which schools faced increased scrutiny and urgency to increase student achievement, they have fallen into a myopic focus on raising test scores, particularly for those students with the lowest scores. Concern about student learning levels and equity led to the No Child Left Behind legislation that was passed in 2004, which caused many school districts to increase reading and math instruction at the expense of other components of the curriculum, best-practice instructional approaches, and teacher relationship development with students (Henley et al. 2007; Crocco & Costigan, 2007). Research has shown that while this policy approach has increased understanding of between-group differences in achievement, it has failed to increase learning meaningfully or to close achievement gaps (Braun et al., 2010; Chudowsky et al., 2009). In the wake of COVID-19, the achievement alarm is sounding again, with many concerned about learning loss and the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on students by race and income. This time, however, rather than focusing on test prep and further narrowing the curriculum (Berliner, 2011), the focus should be on a whole child response that expands learning to support wellness, connection, and engagement so that students can begin the 2021–22 school year with a restorative restart, which will lay the groundwork for reimagining and rebuilding education in California over the long term.

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