Learning Recovery

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principles for action

MOST NETWORK
Leaders in Youth Development

**with input from the
Maryland Education Coalition**
www.marylandeducationcoalition.org

Approaches to Learning Recovery

No one yet knows what the full impact on students from school closures during COVID-19 will be. The estimates are both dire and confounding, leaving many educators wondering where to begin. It is critical that investments in research-based strategies begin now with the students in Maryland who have the greatest risks – students who were disconnected, students with IEPs that weren't being met, and students who were already off track from grade level reading and math. While designing strategies to implement learning recovery, there are three principles that policy makers should apply to their decisions:

- **Targeted Investments**
- **Holistic Approaches**
- **Trauma-Informed Practices**

targeted investment

With limited resources, investments should be made with the students who have been the most impacted. Universal strategies such as extended school days and school year are expensive, and research indicates concerns about educator burn-out and retention. However, extended learning models can also produce positive student outcomes when implemented with fidelity to best practices which include:

- Assessing and building family and community support for alternative schedules;
- Agreement with educators and educators' unions on time commitments and expectations;
- Extensive planning which includes not just adding time but redesigning how instructional time is used and balanced with social emotional supports;
- Plans for extending supports in place during the traditional school day for students with disabilities; and,
- Sustained funding that will support models for extended implementation.

Alternatives to whole school interventions include providing targeted afterschool, weekend and summer programming for the students who need the most support utilizing a second shift of caring adults.

For students with disabilities and students who have other specific needs, for example English Language learners, programs should be designed to meet students' individual needs and should be staffed with trained and knowledgeable educators. Efforts to expand learning should be coordinated with Maryland's Community Schools created through the Blueprint Concentration of Poverty Grants.

holistic approaches

When students experience significant loss of academic instruction, the temptation is to emphasize intensive additional academic time. However, if that additional time is not approached holistically, it may do more damage than good.

Rather than emphasizing what students are lacking--remediation--focusing on giving students the support they need to move forward--acceleration--offers a more effective approach.

This allows students to remain connected to their grade level curriculum and to move forward. This approach also recognizes that education is more than academics by ensuring that students' social and emotional wellbeing is assessed and addressed, and that instructional strategies are engaging, balanced, and differentiated.

In afterschool programs we look to learning experiences that complement, rather than replicate, the school day. STEM and Arts Integration both offer hands-on learning that builds students' skills and confidence. In addition, providing regular opportunities for young people to move and be physically active boosts students' learning readiness and allows for greater concentration as well as improved attitude and outlook.

In the interim, while school systems are open on only a limited basis or are closed entirely, it is important to consider how to begin learning recovery now, particularly for students with disabilities and other vulnerable groups of students. Use of tutoring services, contracts with community-based organizations and private providers to provide in-person services at home or at learning centers, or temporary use of open private or nonpublic schools are several ways school systems could choose to deliver at least some services to students to mitigate the negative impact of school closures.

trauma-informed approaches

Even prior to the pandemic, too many young people were experiencing high levels of trauma, often repeated and consistent, in their lives. With the advent of the pandemic, even more children have experienced disorienting levels of stress, displacement, and loss. Educators and adults who work with children have also experienced significant trauma, and will bring their frustration and mounting stresses back to school when reopening occurs.

Trauma-informed approaches help recognize that many behaviors and actions are rooted in trauma's activation of human's natural fight or flight instincts. By recognizing and using research-based strategies, educators and youth development facilitators can help avoid triggers and de-escalate anxiety and overwhelming emotional surges when they occur. Training on trauma-informed approaches and Adverse Childhood Experiences should be provided across the board for students, faculty, staff and partners working in schools. Assessment tools should be in place when students return to schools.

Additionally, as school systems prepare to reopen, an important part of trauma-informed practice will be to ensure that schools welcome students back with a recognition that they will bring whatever trauma they have sustained to school with them.

Proactively banning suspensions and the use of restraint and seclusion in the absence of a serious crisis demonstrating imminent, life-threatening harm would help create a more nurturing and welcoming school environment.

Additional Resources

- [Supporting the Social and Emotional Learning of Systematically Marginalized Students in a Pandemic](#)
- [Expanded Learning Models](#)
- [Remediation Won't Help Students Catch Up. Here's What Will](#)
- [The effects of an afterschool STEM program on students' motivation and engagement](#)
- [Young Audiences of Maryland, Results of 2019 Summer Learning Art Academy](#)
- [Impact of Coordinated-Bilateral Physical Activities on Attention and Concentration in School-Aged Children](#)
- [Restarting and Reinventing School: Restart and Reinvention](#)
- [Bolstering Learning for Young People in Maryland during the Pandemic: The Case for Partnerhip](#)

Maryland Out of School Time Network
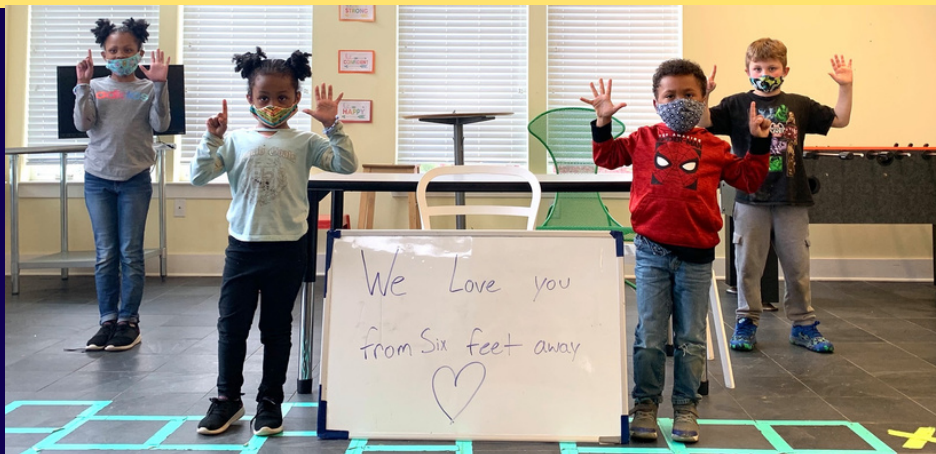   emitchell@mostnetwork.org
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