



Office of the State Superintendent of Education

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR CONTINUOUS EDUCATION



INTRODUCTION

The past year has been unlike any other experienced by students, families and educators across the District. In response to the school closures necessitated by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in March 2020, educators rapidly adjusted their teaching methods and families doubled down to support their children’s education at home. In summer 2020, OSSE developed a set of [Guiding Principles for Continuous Education](#) to articulate clear and high expectations for continuous education during the 2020-21 school year, regardless of the learning environment.

As distance learning continued, students and educators alike have continued to make strides: some students report renewed focus and engagement with school, and many educators speak with enthusiasm about digital teaching techniques that are effective for their students. Yet for the majority of students, teachers and families, the past year has been a difficult one, complicated by the challenge of engaging with distance learning amid hardship and loss caused by COVID-19. In this moment, we have a unique opportunity to recover from the pandemic by reimagining education in the District—not as a return to “normal,” but a collective movement toward better educational opportunities for all DC students.

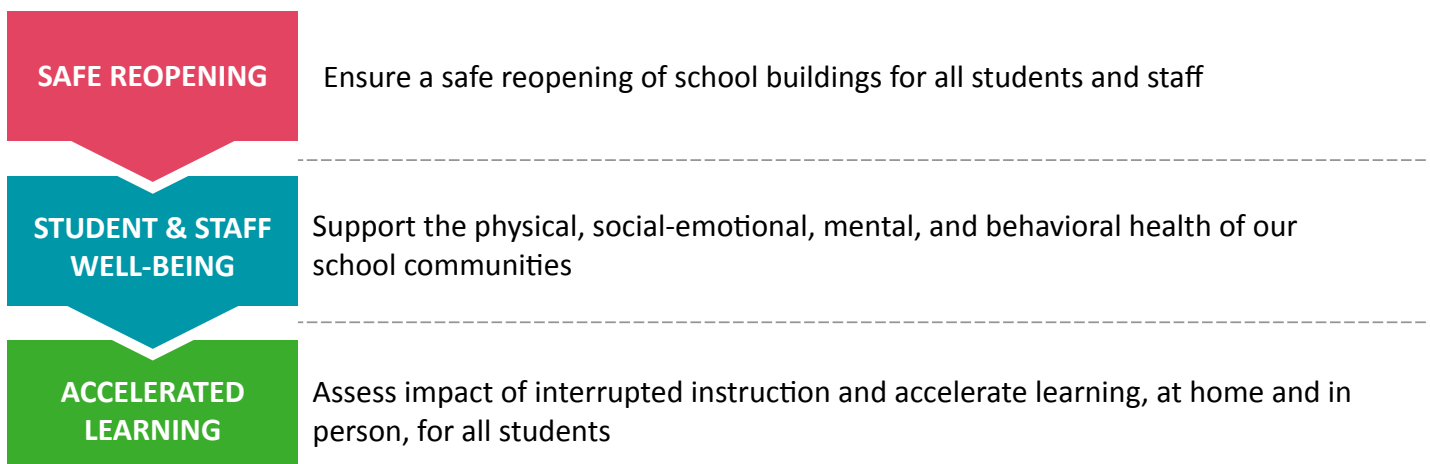
To help local education agencies (LEAs) meet the challenge of helping students, families and staff recover from the effects of COVID-19, we are updating last year’s Guiding Principles and re-aligning them to three recovery priorities: **Safe Reopening, Student and Staff Well-Being, and Accelerated Learning**. These guiding principles provide LEAs and families with clear and consistent expectations for serving students in person five days a week, as well as for offering distance learning under limited circumstances, including for students with medical certifications; to accommodate staff or students needing to quarantine; and in response to changes in public health conditions. They are intended to help LEAs develop effective and equitable continuous education plans that provide support for all students and are developed in partnership with families. They should also support families in understanding what they can expect for their students and the two-way communication that schools should establish with them. While the Guiding Principles acknowledge certain legal obligations, they extend well beyond that, offering a target for excellence and equity rather than a floor for compliance.

STRUCTURE

This document is organized by priority, topic and guiding principle.

- **Priority:** The three priorities capture the most critical areas of focus for LEAs in developing a comprehensive plan for continuous education: Safe Reopening, Student and Staff Well-Being, and Accelerated Learning.
- **Topic:** Each priority encompasses several topics. The topics collectively set a vision for excellence and equity in the context of continuous education.
- **Guiding Principles:** Each topic is further subdivided into Guiding Principles that help describe what each topic looks like when implemented effectively.

RECOVERY PRIORITIES



What is Continuous Education?

Continuous education takes place when both instruction and learning occur seamlessly across different learning environments, including in-person and distance learning settings. While the majority of District students will be learning in person five days a week in the 2021-22 school year, LEAs must still plan to offer distance learning under limited circumstances, including for students with medical certifications; to accommodate staff or students needing to quarantine; and in response to changes in public health conditions. Continuous education requires the development of a coherent and thoughtful plan to ensure that students experience the equivalent levels of rigor and quality across all settings.

What is Interrupted Instruction?

DC students and educators have experienced school closures and extended periods of distance learning during the COVID-19 public health emergency, likely causing interrupted instruction. Rather than the common framing of this phenomenon as “learning loss,” interrupted instruction shifts our focus to the instruction that has or has not taken place over the last year—and the actions needed from LEAs and educators to address the interruption—rather than focusing on learning deficits for which students are not responsible. If not swiftly addressed, however, interrupted instruction could set back student learning for years to come, with the strongest impact on students typically furthest from opportunity. These guiding principles provide LEAs with clear guidelines for developing comprehensive plans to address interrupted instruction.

Why Focus on Accelerated Learning?

We are encouraging LEAs to provide accelerated learning for all students, especially those most affected by the pandemic. The interrupted instruction that has occurred during the COVID-19 public health emergency is unprecedented for our students and school communities. Thus, traditional approaches to helping students “catch up” through remedial education—or focusing exclusively on concepts better suited for earlier grade levels—are insufficient to ensure full recovery from interrupted instruction.¹ In fact, a focus on remedial learning could worsen existing educational inequities, as schools are likely to disproportionately select students furthest from opportunity to receive remedial instruction.² Accelerated learning—in which educators place unfinished learning in the context of new learning, integrating both new information and the needed prior knowledge at the same time—is better suited to support all students to recover from interrupted instruction.³ High-quality assessments are also critical to effective delivery of accelerated learning, as they provide educators the data they need to tailor interventions for students.

1 TNTP, 2020. “[Learning Acceleration Guide](#).”

2 The Achievement Network, 2019. “[Unfinished Learning and Unfinished Teaching](#).”

3 Louisiana Department of Education. “[Accelerate: Louisiana’s Pre-K-High School Tutoring Strategy](#).”

SAFE REOPENING

Prioritizing safe in-person learning while maintaining consistent expectations across all learning environments will provide a strong foundation for accelerated learning for all students.

1.A: Physical Health and Safety

- **Operate in Accordance with DC Health and OSSE Public Health Guidance:** LEAs must operate in accordance with the most current public health guidance provided by DC Department of Health (DC Health) and OSSE and develop comprehensive health and safety plans that will support the safe reopening and operation of school buildings, including guidelines on masking, social distancing, handwashing and respiratory etiquette, cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, and appropriate response to a positive COVID-19 case.

1.B: Support Across Learning Environments

- **Deliver Five Days of In-Person Learning Each Week:** As a top priority of both the federal and District governments, LEAs should provide five full days of in-person learning each week for all students and should offer distance learning only under limited circumstances, including for students with medical certifications; to accommodate staff or students needing to quarantine; and in response to changes in public health conditions.
- **Plan to Support Learning Across All Environments:** LEAs should review and update plans describing how the LEA delivers instruction in a user-friendly, coherent and consistent manner across all learning environments and how the LEA is prepared to transition seamlessly across learning environments as needed.

- **Review Grading and Retention Policies:** LEAs should review and update approaches to student retention and grading of student work to ensure consistency of rigor and expectations across all learning environments, including in-person and distance learning.
- **Provide Technology Access for Distance Learning:** LEAs should ensure access to appropriate and necessary devices as well as internet service required to enable distance learning in limited circumstances as needed, particularly for students with medical certifications, those who are experiencing homelessness or are in foster care. LEAs should review and update their technology security plans to help ensure the appropriate and responsible use of devices across learning environments; provide adequate, timely and appropriate technical support to students and staff; uphold all relevant laws and regulations concerning [student privacy](#) and data security; and provide trainings to families on any new or changing technology they must use.

STUDENT & STAFF WELL-BEING

For accelerated learning to take place, LEAs must account for the pandemic's impact on the physical, social-emotional, mental and behavioral well-being of students, staff and families.

2.A: Whole Child Supports

- **Rebuild Relationships:** LEAs should develop a clear plan for welcoming students back to the school building, with purposeful activities for all students to make sense of the pandemic's impact and strengthen relationships with school staff and each other, including developmentally appropriate activities on the impacts of the pandemic.
- **Provide Opportunities for Social-Emotional Learning:** LEAs should encourage teachers to use social-emotional learning curriculum, mindfulness and restorative practices, among others, either independently or in partnership with school behavioral health providers.
- **Screen, Monitor, and Refer Students with Mental Health Needs:** LEAs should identify, refer and monitor students with mental health, behavioral health and other non-academic support needs across all learning environments and consider implementing a universal screening approach to identify students' mental health needs.
- **Re-Establish Behavioral and Disciplinary Approaches:** LEAs should develop a proactive approach to behavior and discipline that accounts for the challenge of transitioning from distance learning back to the school building and focuses the school community on positive, relevant and developmentally appropriate practices, possibly including trauma-informed and restorative justice frameworks for discipline.

- **Ensure Food Access:** LEAs should ensure access to nutritious food for all qualifying students regardless of their learning environment, either through meal service managed by the school and/or through referral to community resources.
- **Support Family Wellness:** LEAs should be knowledgeable about and actively promote community resources available to families and should connect families in need to culturally and linguistically appropriate services offered by community-based organizations. LEAs should survey families for wellness needs via newsletters, website postings and automated communication methods.
- **Review Support Policies:** LEAs should review and update their student support policies to account for lessons learned during distance learning and to ensure continued applicability across all learning environments. Updated policies should include those pertaining to [suicide awareness and prevention](#), [responding to a school crisis](#), sexual harassment, [prevention of sexual abuse by school staff](#), [discipline](#), and [antibullying](#). These policies should be publicly available, easily searchable and in a user-friendly format.

2.B: Educator Wellness

- **Facilitate Access to Mental Health Supports:** LEAs should offer, to the extent practical, access to mental/behavioral health and trauma and grief supports for staff as needed, and should consider including mental health services and an employee assistance plan (EAP) in their employee benefits package if not already included.
- **Build Staff Community:** Just as for students, LEAs should create structures for staff to connect, process the pandemic's impacts and rebuild relationships and team culture. LEAs should reinforce supportive workplace norms and reduce stigma around accessing mental health supports and conducting self-care activities.
- **Engage and Support Talent:** LEAs should evaluate the suite of practices at their disposal to promote support, retention and success of staff during recovery from the pandemic, including recognition, appreciation, rewards, and/or professional development opportunities such as training, coaching, mentorship and professional learning communities, in order to retain talent over time and strengthen the LEA's ability to accelerate learning for students. LEAs should consider providing specific supports to new staff, particularly those who were unable access traditional supports for new staff as a result of the public health emergency.

2.C: Family Engagement⁴

- **Engage Families in Ongoing Two-Way Communication:** LEAs should review methods of two-way communication used during the public health emergency and should make plans to continue using effective methods with families. LEAs should also engage students and families to identify lessons learned during distance learning and gather feedback on what they need for a successful transition to in-person learning, and this feedback should inform the development of LEAs' continuous education plans. To engage families, LEAs should use multiple methods of frequent and proactive outreach – including but not limited to surveys – in families' preferred language.
- **Communicate Clearly About the Continuous Education Plan:** LEAs should develop a clear communications plan for families about their reopening. The communications plan should explain routines for sharing information with families, should be available on the LEA's website, and should be distributed directly to families prior to the start of the school year.
- **Share Assessment and Progress Monitoring Results:** LEAs should share with families the results of any formative assessments for their student(s) and their progress with learning, as well as information about the academic interventions and supports provided to their child and how specific supports can be requested from the school.
- **Ensure Language Access:** LEAs should translate family-facing documents into the major languages spoken by their families and make available interpretation services for in-person and virtual meetings with families, to the extent practicable and in compliance with the [Language Access Act](#).
- **Make Key Contact Information Available:** LEAs should make available on their websites contact information for key points of contact, including technical support, language access, school administrators, special education staff, and teaching staff. This information should be in an accessible and easily searched format.

2.D: Attendance and Re-Engagement

- **Follow Updated Attendance Policy:** LEAs should track and record student attendance daily in accordance with OSSE's 2021-22 school year attendance guidance (forthcoming).
- **Re-Engage Students in Learning:** LEAs should develop an approach to identify and re-engage students who have been consistently less engaged with distance learning in school year 2020-21 and conduct individualized outreach to students and their families to re-engage them in learning for the 2021-22 school year.

⁴ We acknowledge that family engagement should be appropriate to the age of the students served. Adult charter schools should consider every reference to families as inclusive of adult learners as well.



To accelerate learning, LEAs must develop a comprehensive and inclusive plan that benefits all students, with a focus on those who have experienced the most significant learning gaps due to the pandemic.

3.A: Setting Clear Goals and High Expectations for All Students

- **Assess Extent of Interrupted Instruction:** LEAs should assess individual student performance using validated interim or benchmark assessments to determine the extent of interrupted instruction that occurred during the public health emergency.
- **Develop a Comprehensive Plan to Accelerate Learning:** Based on these assessment results, LEAs should develop comprehensive continuous education plans to accelerate learning for all students, especially those with the most significant learning gaps, while maintaining expectations that are high, consistent, clear and developmentally appropriate across learning environments. The plans should also ensure that robust systems of evidence-based academic intervention and support take place across all learning environments.
- **Address Needs of Students Typically Furthest from Opportunity:** The comprehensive continuous education plans should focus on accelerating the learning of students with the most significant learning gaps, as well as students typically furthest from opportunity, including students with disabilities; English learners; at-risk students; students experiencing homelessness; students who are incarcerated; migrant students; students of color; students in foster care; and students marginalized based on gender and/or gender identity, including LGBTQ+ students. These approaches should account for the unique impact the pandemic may have had on students from these groups (e.g., disproportionate illness and deaths from COVID-19 among Black and Latino DC residents; COVID-19 outbreaks in carceral settings).

3.B: Employing Intentional Strategies for Accelerating Learning

- **Maximize Opportunities for Accelerated Learning:** The comprehensive plan for accelerated learning should consider how LEAs can use time purposefully to maximize students' opportunities to accelerate learning, such as via summer or weekend programming; an extended school day or year; or effective interventions such as [high-dosage tutoring](#). Any additional learning time should not come at the expense of developmentally appropriate play and other age-appropriate breaks in the academic day needed to sustain an effective learning environment.

- **Ensure Access to High-Quality Grade-Level Content:** The plan should prioritize access to high-quality, grade-level content for all students, rather than remedial content, while also allowing for differentiated instruction. LEAs should ensure that students typically furthest from opportunity receive the same access to interventions to accelerate learning as their peers and that accelerated learning approaches are not used to “track” students or to place them in more restrictive environments.
- **Update Strategies for Credit Attainment, Graduation, and Postsecondary Enrollment:** LEAs serving students in grades 9-12 should review and update approaches to ensuring that all students remain on track to graduate, and that the class of 2022 makes a successful post-secondary transition, including developing additional options for credit recovery and deploying additional staffing to support postsecondary transitions if needed.
- **Retain Effective Practices Used During Distance Learning:** LEAs should consider whether and how new practices used during distance learning have had a positive effect on students' social-emotional and academic progress, as well as strengthened partnerships with families, and how to continue and extend their use for students' benefit (e.g., use of engaging digital teaching techniques). LEAs should specifically consider practices that worked for students typically furthest from opportunity attending the LEA.
- **Update Professional Development Plans:** LEAs should review and revise their staff professional learning plans to account for lessons learned during the pandemic, as well as to build skills for staff to meet new and emerging student needs around safe reopening, well-being and accelerated learning. Specifically, staff should receive sufficient training to deliver effective social-emotional learning experiences to students; identify, support and refer students with mental health needs; employ an approach to behavior and discipline that is positive, relevant and developmentally appropriate; and accelerate learning for students typically furthest from opportunity.

3.C: Supporting Special Populations

Students with Disabilities

LEAs must include students with disabilities in the general application of these guiding principles. After doing so, LEAs are additionally responsible for reviewing and conducting the following activities to ensure the continued provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE). OSSE encourages LEAs to conduct individualized review of student data to identify appropriate accelerated learning instructional approaches. LEAs should also consider whether or not a student's individualized education program (IEP) is designed to support accelerated learning; and engage families in information sharing regarding the LEA's plan for the delivery of accelerated learning, IEP services designed to support accelerated learning, and the delivery of FAPE.

- **Ensure Delivery of Accelerated Learning:** LEAs should assess students' current levels of performance, designate or design appropriate accelerated learning instructional approaches, and provide accelerated learning to address any learning gaps resulting from interrupted instruction in the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years. LEAs should communicate information to families about any regression experienced by their student and plans to address student-level regression through accelerated learning.
- **Update or Amend Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) as Appropriate:** With the participation of each student's family, LEAs should use data to develop or amend IEPs, as appropriate, to plan for the delivery of accelerated learning in instances where a child requires changed or additional special education supports to access accelerated learning. LEAs must provide any and all resources needed to fulfill students' IEPs within the least restrictive environment, including supports designed to ensure access to accelerated learning instructional approaches.
- **Complete Outstanding IEP Renewals:** LEAs should swiftly develop a plan to complete all outstanding IEP renewals, including reviewing and changing staffing assignments, schedules and responsibilities of related service providers as necessary and obtaining qualified outside contract support if needed.
- **Provide Timely Evaluations:** At both the campus and LEA level, LEAs should swiftly develop a plan to complete all outstanding evaluations, including reviewing and changing staffing assignments, schedules and responsibilities of related service providers as necessary and obtaining qualified outside contract support if needed.
- **Ensure Continuity of Services Across Environments:** LEAs should prioritize in-person services for students with disabilities. Within the first two weeks of the school year, LEAs should plan for and communicate to families about how they will ensure continuity of services across all learning environments in screening, referring,

evaluating, identifying and supporting students with disabilities as public health guidance evolves—such as during quarantines, hospitalizations, or unplanned school closures, or for students with medical certifications who are participating in distance learning—while complying with applicable laws and policies, including the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#) and [state policies](#) and regulations. LEAs should also communicate how students will be supported to manage transitions between learning environments.

- **Support Students with Disabilities in Foster Care, Carceral and Non-Public Settings:** LEAs should collaborate with other child-serving agencies such as DC's Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) and the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS), as well as non-public schools that serve students with disabilities, to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities in these settings, including supports for IEP implementation.

English Learners

- **Identify English Learners in a Timely Manner:** LEAs should identify English learners in a timely manner, including re-screening all students who were screened provisionally during distance learning using [state-approved English proficiency screeners](#) within 30 days in the in-person learning environment.
- **Ensure Continuity of Services Across Environments:** LEAs should prioritize in-person services for English learners. Within the first two weeks of the school year, LEAs should plan for and communicate to families about how they will ensure continuity of services across all learning environments in the screening, referring, evaluating, identifying and supporting English learners as public health guidance evolves—such as during quarantines, hospitalizations, or unplanned school closures, or for students with medical certifications who are participating in distance learning—while complying with applicable laws and [state policies](#).
- **Review English Learner Program Plans:** Based on student performance during the public health emergency, LEAs should review and update their English learner program plans to ensure they are based on sound educational theory and research; that they have sufficient resources and personnel to implement the programs effectively; and that they are evaluated as effective in advancing the linguistic and academic goals of English learners, per the [US Department of Education and US Department of Justice](#).



Office of the State Superintendent of Education
1050 First St NE, Washington, DC 20002