



Office of the State Superintendent of Education

# **GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR CONTINUOUS EDUCATION**



## INTRODUCTION

Since the 2019-20 school year, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) has provided and updated guidance and supports to local education agencies (LEAs) due to the unprecedented circumstances initiated by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. While the default operational position of most schools is in-person in school year 2022-23, variable conditions could require schools to move to situational distance learning. Responding to this possibility, OSSE is releasing updated guidance and additional flexibility for LEAs that might need to move to situational distance learning as need warrants.

The updated guidance also necessitates a corresponding update to OSSE's Guiding Principles for Continuous Education. OSSE updated its Guiding Principles for the 2022-23 school year, replacing the "Safe Reopening" priority with "Situational Preparedness." To reflect how the effects of the pandemic will linger in District schools for many years, the "Student and Staff Well-Being" and "Accelerated Learning" priorities remain with updated language and resources.

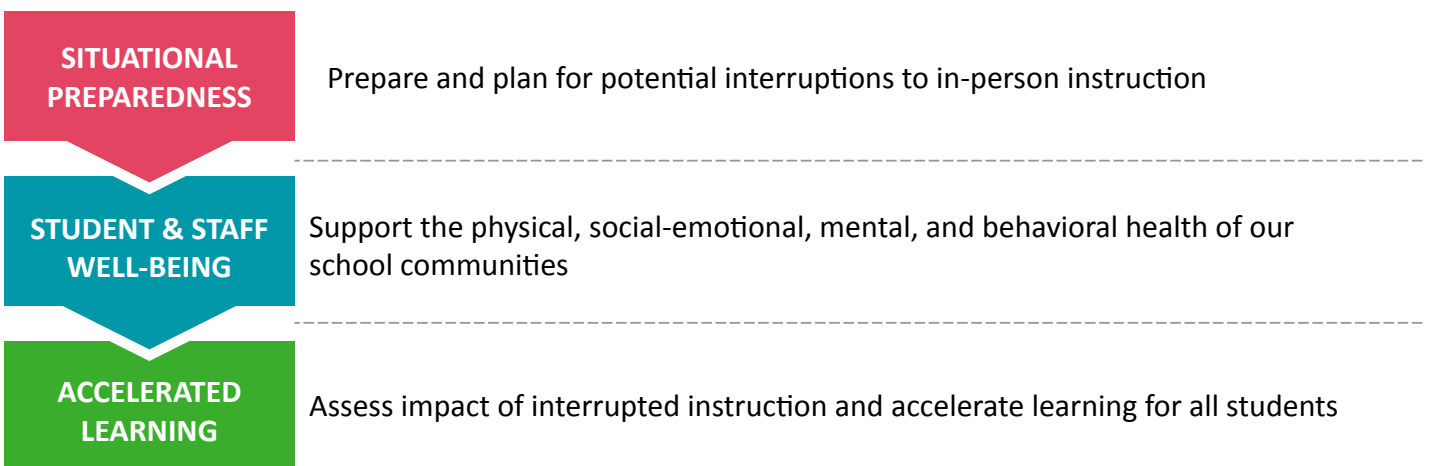
The priorities in this document are intended to help LEAs develop effective and equitable continuous education plans that provide support for all students and are developed in partnership with families. They should also support families in understanding what they can expect for their students and the 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 situational distance learning settings. While most District students will be learning in person in the 2022-23 school year, LEAs must still plan to offer distance learning under a situational basis, including in response to changes to 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 in situational distance learning settings.

## What is Interrupted Instruction?

DC students and educators have experienced school closures and extended periods of distance learning that likely resulted in 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, 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 interrupted instruction. 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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](#).”

## SITUATIONAL PREPAREDNESS

There may be situations when in-person schools will need to change instructional modalities. To limit the effects of interrupted instruction, LEAs should be prepared for such possibilities.

## 1. A Prepare and Plan Now

- **Deliver In-Person Learning:** As a top priority of both the federal and District governments, LEAs should provide in-person learning, as outlined in their approved instructional model and calendar, to the greatest extent possible for all students. LEAs should offer situational distance learning only under limited circumstances in line with OSSE's Situational Distance Learning Guidance.
- **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 situational distance learning.
- **Provide Technology Access for Distance Learning:** If the LEA chooses to do so, it should ensure access to appropriate and necessary devices as well as internet service required to enable situational distance learning in limited circumstances as needed, particularly for students deemed most at-risk. 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.
- **Train and Support Educators and Families:** LEAs should provide training for educators and families on the LEA's situational distance instruction model and any related technology and/or tools (for example, chosen learning management system, video technology, etc.) prior to needing to go into situational distance learning, preferably at the start of the school year.
- **Established Schedule and Expectations:** LEAs should set and communicate a clear schedule and expectations for a situational distance learning day, including how attendance and engagement will be measured, prior to the start of the school year.

## 1.B Clear Communication Plan and Family Engagement<sup>4</sup>

- **Develop and Disclose a Communications Plan:** LEAs should develop a clear communications plan for families. The communications plan should explain routines for sharing information with families; methodology for quickly notifying all students, staff and families in a given school community of a move to situational distance learning; and the LEA's method for family engagement during situational distance learning in particular. The plan should be available on the LEA's website and should be distributed directly to families prior to the start of the school year.
- **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 use feedback to inform plans for any possible returns to situational distance learning. To engage families, LEAs should use multiple methods of frequent and proactive outreach in families' preferred language.
- **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.

## 1.C Attendance and Re-Engagement

- **Follow Updated Attendance Policy:** LEAs should track and record student attendance daily in accordance with OSSE's 2022-23 school year attendance guidance (forthcoming).
- **Re-Engage Students in Learning:** LEAs should develop an approach to identify and re-engage students who continued to be less engaged in the 2021-22 school year and conduct individualized outreach to students and their families to re-engage them in learning for the 2022-23 school year.

<sup>4</sup> 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.



## STUDENT & STAFF WELL-BEING

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

### 2.A Physical Health and Safety

- **Consider DC Health and OSSE Public Health Guidance:** LEAs should consider any current public health guidance provided by DC Department of Health (DC Health) and OSSE. Health and safety plans must be publicly accessible and describe how the LEA will reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in its facilities.

### 2.B: Whole Child Supports

- **Rebuild Relationships:** LEAs should continue 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 partners.
- **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 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.
- **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](#), sexual harassment, [prevention of sexual abuse by school staff](#), [discipline](#) and [bullying prevention](#). These policies should be publicly available, easily searchable and in a user-friendly format.

### 2.C 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.

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 Expectations for All Students

- **Assess Student Performance in the Context of Interrupted Instruction:** LEAs should assess individual student performance using validated interim or benchmark assessments to determine the ongoing effects of interrupted instruction.
- **Maintain and Update a Comprehensive Plan to Accelerate Learning:** In their 2021-22 Continuous Education Plans (CEPs), LEAs developed 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. LEAs were encouraged to base their plans on student performance on administered assessments. For the 2022-23 school year, LEAs are encouraged to review and update their plans to reflect lessons learned in the last school year. The plans should continue to 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:** LEAs should continue to 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 (ELs); 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 might continue to have on students from these groups.

### 3.B Employing Intentional Strategies for Accelerating Learning

- **Maximize Opportunities for Accelerated Learning:** LEAs should continue to consider how they 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-impact 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:** LEAs 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 2023 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 continue to 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 situational preparedness, 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 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 continue to address any learning gaps resulting from interrupted instruction. 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 and special education staff as necessary and obtaining qualified outside contract support if needed.
- **Ensure Continuity of Services Across Environments:** 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,—while complying with

applicable laws and policies, including the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#) and [state policies, guidance](#) 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:** As described in "[Delivering Education Services to English Learners: Policies and Procedures for Administrators, Instructional Leaders, and Teachers in the District of Columbia](#)," within 30 days of stage 5 enrollment at the start of the school year, or within two weeks of placement if not identified at the beginning of the school year, LEAs must complete EL identification and notify parents that their child was identified as needing EL services.
- **Ensure Continuity of Services Across Environments:** 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 ELs while complying with applicable laws and [state policies](#).
- **Review English Learner Program Plans:** LEAs should review and update their EL 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 ELs, 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