

K-12 Education Recovery Taskforce

April 30, 2020 meeting summary

The Southern Regional Education Board has convened a regional K-12 Education Recovery Taskforce to collaborate on strategies for re-opening schools in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Members of the taskforce include education policymakers, state and district superintendents, principals and teachers from the 16 SREB compact states. The taskforce is proactively anticipating challenges and weighing solutions for states, districts and schools. The taskforce's highest priority is to address students' needs and develop a playbook of actions and strategies that states, districts and schools may use in their planning.

At the second meeting of the taskforce, SREB's president Dr. Stephen Pruitt reminded members that the purpose of the taskforce is to complement planning efforts taking place in SREB states by helping states think through different scenarios and learn from one another. The taskforce continued to concentrate on immediate concerns for opening schools in Fall 2020. After reviewing three resources — [notes from the first meeting](#), Opportunity Labs' [Return to School Roadmap](#) and McKinsey & Company's [School-System Priorities in the Age of Coronavirus](#), the teams focused their discussion around the critical areas of **governance and operations, health and wellness, and quality instruction**.

At the third meeting, scheduled for May 7, 2020, the taskforce will focus on governance and operations. The taskforce will consider various actions and implications related to state/district planning committees, scheduling options, funding, and technology.

State Education Agencies

According to taskforce members, districts and schools are actively seeking guidance from state education agencies on how to deal with the impact of COVID-19, even in states that are typically considered "local control." Members reported that their state agencies are vetting requests for guidance on providing quality distance learning, feeding students while out of school, ensuring the safety of students and staff, and developing school reopening and contingency plans. As one member said, "Opening schools will not be in the traditional way."

Related to governance and operations, state team members identified several scheduling options districts and schools may implement — such as a mix of in-person, online, hybrid or blended classes — that will have implications on staffing and transportation. Some of school reopening scenarios may require state education agencies to revise policies related to attendance, funding and accountability.

When asked to identify two priorities on which to concentrate, the team came to a consensus on **wellness** and **instruction**. Districts will need to ensure that both students and staff are safe when they return in the fall. Districts and schools will need safety guidelines and some means of offering mental health assessments to students and staff who may be struggling. Schools will also need support and resources to offer blended forms of delivering instruction.

Local Education Agencies (Districts)

The local education agency team pointed to the importance of including students, parents and the community in discussions about reopening schools. The team also reported that teachers are concerned about how to assess students' learning in relation to power standards at the start of the school year as well as how to scaffold instruction. Team members noted that districts have many questions about scheduling, budgeting, using facilities and conducting extracurricular activities.

Team members agreed to focus their discussion on **school operations** and **instruction**. Some items of consideration for operations include creating flexible attendance policies, managing staff health concerns, offering virtual instruction and evaluating teachers. Members also held a lengthy discussion on pedagogy and what quality instruction will look like after COVID-19. The team recommended that districts provide guidance on beginning-of-the-year screeners, deliver professional learning on using digital platforms and offer advice on how to make the best use of federal and state funds to address the needs of each student.

Team members also noted that districts will need to be both creative and realistic with their budgets. “We will have to do more with less,” said one team member. As districts revisit their budgets, they should consider whether the innovative practices they adopt now will be sustainable and determine how reserve funds can be repurposed. When adjusting a school calendar or schedule, districts will have to consider the impact on staff allocations and teacher contracts. To maximize student learning, districts will also need to establish protocols for assessing students’ learning, identifying learning gaps and creating and delivering targeted interventions. Team members agreed that all actions must be implemented with a focus on equity.

Building Level (Schools)

The school team expressed concerns about providing social and emotional supports for teachers and students, especially the most vulnerable students. The team also believed that the taskforce should address the digital divide in rural and urban settings. After an extensive discussion, the team came to a consensus to focus their discussion on **governance** and **instruction**.

Examining the McKinsey & Company report, the school team focused on the need to create flexible school reopening plans that anticipate different scenarios in the spread or reoccurrence of COVID-19. Schools will need guidance on how to implement reopening and contingency plans. Team members agreed that states, districts and schools must involve students and parents in discussions about these plans.

Team members also envisioned questions that may arise related to different scenarios. For example, if a school reopens with a blended model of in-person and distance learning, how does the school know whether the online instruction it is offering is effective? Which students seem to do well with online instruction? What types of assessments will be used to capture student learning in this blended approach? Answers to these questions may result in the development of individual education or learning plans for each student. Team members recommended that a districtwide or statewide learning management system could help schools implement personalized learning plans for students. Team members noted that offering a blended model of instruction will require intensive, on-going professional development for teachers and administrators. They also stressed that schools and districts must address equity issues related to access to the internet and distance learning resources.