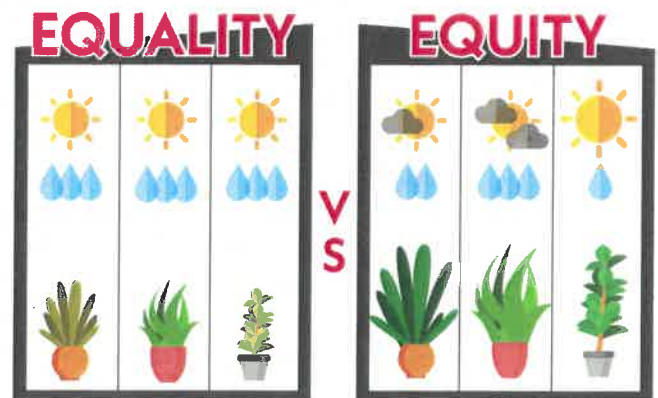


## TEN RETURN TO SCHOOL EQUITY STRATEGIES



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

- 1. CENTER EQUITY** - Evaluate whether your plan will improve or worsen disparities between student groups and establish measurable equity goals that are informed by your diagnostic data. Consider conducting a [Return to School Planning Equity Audit](#).
- 2. REFLECT** - Establish processes and accountability levers to facilitate equitable implementation of your plan and mitigate unintended disparate impacts and consequences. Monitor the impact of your plan on under-served groups, including students of color, multilingual students (ELs), students experiencing poverty and homelessness.
- 3. STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS** - Ensure family engagement, student support, instructional approaches, assignments and learning opportunities are culturally relevant and culturally responsive. Consider implementing protocols to ensure that strategies and initiatives have been evaluated through a cultural and economic competency lens.
- 4. OUTREACH** - Devote adequate resources to outreach, communication, and family engagement, in multiple languages and through multiple channels to ensure that the most vulnerable families have access to information and understand expectations of students. Identify community partners and stakeholders and empower them with information in support of your communication efforts.
- 5. PRIORITIZE** - Prioritize access to learning loss recovery programs/interventions for students who are disproportionately impacted by learning loss during school closures. Before mandating participation and attendance in these programs, evaluate unintended consequences and disparate impact. (i.e. students in low-income families, students whose families have been impacted by unemployment, those whose parents are essential workers, students with disabilities who have struggled to get services remotely, students whose families have been disconnected from school during the school closure, and English learners).
- 6. MITIGATE** - Identify and mitigate barriers to student participation for reasons outside of the student's control (i.e., caring for younger children, housing instability, health concerns, transportation, adult support).
- 7. REFRAME** - Examine discipline/student code of conduct policies to mitigate against bias and embed safeguards to evaluate student trauma manifesting through behaviors. This is especially important for marginalized student groups disproportionately impacted by exclusionary discipline policies.
- 8. SUPPORT STAFF** - Provide professional development and instructional resources to school leaders and teachers related to "student engagement" and "cultural responsiveness" to support their delivery of remote and virtual distance learning instruction. Particular emphasis should be placed on facilitating understanding of the impacts of social determinants of health, poverty, unemployment, and cultural values on student learning post COVID closures.
- 9. CLOSE THE DISTANCE** - Access to devices and the Internet alone are not sufficient to ensure delivery of high-quality distance learning that is available and engaging to all students. Prepare multiple delivery modes for remote learning, avoid an over reliance on technology to facilitate student engagement in learning, and ensure adequate support for families to be partners in student learning.
- 10. DOUBLE DOWN** - Now is the time to double down on equity investments. Examine the use of federal stimulus (CARES Act) funding to address equity gaps (small class size, technology, access to early learning). Prioritize funding to meet the needs of English Learners, students with disabilities, undocumented students, and students living in poverty.



# CENTERING EQUITY

## RETURN TO SCHOOL EQUITY PLANNING

As we begin planning for return to school, our commitment to ensuring that Virginia's public education system is one that provides equitable educational opportunities to all students is unwavering. Meeting the needs of all Virginia learners, especially those disproportionately impacted by school closures or learning loss, is especially important during this time. As we transition our guidance at the VDOE from a focus on continuity of learning amid current extended school closures, to return to school recovery planning, equity must remain at the center of our work. Our goal is to provide guidance and support to local schools and division leaders to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on our students to the greatest extent possible. The considerations, key steps and strategies below were informed by the work of the Return to School Recovery Task Force and its Equity Planning Subcommittee.

The extended period of school closures in Virginia have exacerbated previously existing differences in student experiences, levels of support and access to resources. NWEA, a nonprofit organization that develops and offers student assessments, [estimates](#) that students may return to school in the fall (in-person, or virtually) with roughly 70% of the learning gains in reading relative to a typical school year. In mathematics, students are likely to show much smaller learning gains, returning with less than 50% of the learning gains and in some grades, nearly a full year behind what we would observe in normal conditions ([The COVID-19 slide: What summer learning loss can tell us](#), NWEA).

## KEY STEPS TO ENSURING EQUITY DURING COVID

- **Meet Student Needs First**
  - Prioritize the physical and social-emotional needs of particularly vulnerable students. Ensure safety, belonging and mental health as a foundation for learning.
- **Ensure Equitable Access and Adequate Supports**
  - Achieving equity in distance learning is more complex than simply providing equality in access to learning resources and technology. Insufficient support for families and students may widen disparities instead of narrowing them.
- **Centralize Communication to ALL Families**
  - Be mindful of the needs of vulnerable student groups including early learners, English learners, students experiencing homelessness, economically disadvantaged students, and students with disabilities.
- **Develop and Implement a Return to Learning Equity Audit**
  - The impact of sustained learning loss during this period of school closures combined with disparities in implementation of continuity of learning models has the potential to exacerbate previously existing gaps in student achievements. Begin identifying students experiencing learning gaps now and developing strategies to mitigate the longer-term impact of school closures on these students.