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**From:** Amy Dowell <amy@edreformnow.org>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 16, 2020 11:37 AM  
**To:** StateBoard, SDE  
**Subject:** ERN CT Guidance for CT COVID-19 Education Recovery  
**Attachments:** ERN CT Education Recovery Lessons from Other States.FINAL.pdf

Dear Members of the State Board of Education,

Ahead of tomorrow's virtual meeting, I wanted to share with you a document that explores efforts in other states to provide academic guidelines for education recovery following school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, our research highlights Louisiana, Maryland, and Rhode Island as examples because they have each documented a specific, state-level vision for how local education agencies are to address continued learning, guided by research and by student needs. Beyond the logistical changes necessary to address ongoing social distancing requirements, we believe it is imperative that the state develop a strategy to address academic losses and exacerbated inequities.

Please note that the attached document has already been shared, in draft form, with both Commissioner Cardona and Governor Lamont's administration. It is my hope that this research will be useful to you as well as you develop plans to address this new reality for Connecticut's students and school districts. Thank you for all that you do on behalf of the state's students.

Sincerely,

Amy Dowell

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## Guidance for CT COVID-19 Education Recovery: Effective Strategies from Other States

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### Introduction

With the online school year ending and preparations for reopening and recovery now underway, local communities are seeking the State's leadership and guidance on how to address new academic challenges in the coming school year while delivering quality, continuous, academic instruction. **ERN CT recommends that Connecticut promptly establish requirements so that local districts can benchmark their responses against a statewide standard.**

In April, ERN CT released [four goals for the state to consider](#) as it strategized about a period of education recovery.<sup>1</sup> In May the Connecticut State Board of Education (SBE) published its own impressive list of priorities for directing state support to districts, largely reflecting ERN CT's goals.<sup>2</sup> We applaud the SBE's thoughtful, student-centered approach, especially given its emphasis on equity.

In this memo, we review plans from three states, all of which we believe are ahead-of-the-curve in their provision of state-level guidance for the coming school year. [Louisiana](#), which required local school systems to develop academic plans during the period of prolonged closures, now intends to build off of that progress using federal relief aid. Its statewide recovery plan asks school systems to identify the academic needs of every student,

**STATE-LEVEL GOALS  
FOR RECOVERY**  
(Click-able)  
[ERN CT's Goals for a  
2020 CT Education  
Recovery Plan](#)



establish a plan for every student, and provide agile, standards-aligned plans for continuous learning.<sup>3</sup> [Maryland's](#) recovery plan, which outlines practical strategies for local school systems, is the product of ongoing meetings with local school superintendents, as well as recommendations from five committees addressing: high school requirements, attendance, grading and reporting, English Learners, and learning standards.<sup>4</sup> Finally, [Rhode Island's](#) plan for distance learning delineates explicit research-based expectations for continuing to educate students remotely.<sup>5</sup> This guidance remains highly relevant in Connecticut, where districts will likely still need to tackle the immense task of providing effective, continuous remote learning, even as school doors gradually open.

#### EXAMPLES OF STATE PLANS FOR COVID-19

(Click-able)

[Louisiana's Recovery Plan](#)

[Maryland's Recovery Plan](#)

[Rhode Island's Distance Learning Plan](#)

**At a high-level, what all three states have in common is that each issued a comprehensive narrative outlining a statewide vision for how learning should be addressed in these unprecedented and anxious times.** These states are emphasizing meaningful remote learning across all local education agencies, use of diagnostic screeners to ensure that schools reopen on the right track, and prioritization of all students' needs. They are **leading** with understanding and compassion, **leading** with evidence-based policy decisions, and **leading** with the needs of students front-and-center.

## Continued and Meaningful Remote Learning

Whether due to a gradual, scheduled return to the classroom or to a second wave of infections, it is very likely that a recovery period in Connecticut will require segments of the student population to continue learning remotely. The unprecedented period of school closures now ending in Connecticut initially precluded the possibility of preparation because it was unanticipated. Consequently, remote learning experiences to date have been varied in terms of academic impact, both between and within districts.<sup>6</sup> However, anticipating that some amount of remote learning will continue during the 2020-21 school year, the State now has an opportunity to set clear expectations for how districts should handle remote learning by age group, grade level, and academic need. We suggest the following:

- 1) **Provide 4-6 Hours of Structured Learning Per Day.** In Louisiana, school districts are required to have a "plan for the continuous use of aligned curricular materials during periods of school facility closure or modified operations."<sup>7</sup> In support of this effort, Louisiana is prioritizing teacher development and adapting existing professional development plans to support educators.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, the Rhode Island Department of Education observes that even during distance learning, "schools should still expect secondary students to spend 4-6 structured learning hours per day." Rhode Island's plan notes that school hours and screen time are not synonymous; some assigned work should be screen-free. (To that end, Rhode Island provides tables with approximate quantities of recommended school time and screen time, divided by grade.<sup>9</sup>)

#### SPOTLIGHT:

[Rhode Island](#) issued a distance learning plan in April, articulating the explicit expectation that learning would go on even while schools were shuttered—and tasking districts with providing full, structured learning days; attendance protocols; and equitable grading practices.



**2) Choose Synchronous Remote Learning Whenever Possible (not asynchronous).**

Maryland's recovery plan says that students have both academic and social preferences for synchronous learning.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Rhode Island's distance learning plan notes that synchronous learning is especially important for younger students because online learning requires significantly more motivation, attention, and time to complete assignments.<sup>11</sup>

**3) Develop Remote Learning Tasks for One-on-One or Small Group Instruction Whenever Possible (not whole group).** Maryland's plan points to research finding that remote learning is most effective when it is dedicated to small-group or one-on-one tasks.<sup>12</sup>

## Start the School Year with a Diagnostic Screener

We must start the school year with a strategy that minimizes learning gaps and quickly identifies students with unfinished learning. Our national policy team at Education Reform Now calls using a screener or diagnostic assessment "essential" for a successful return to school.<sup>13</sup> Data from the diagnostic will: (a) help educators to identify the extent of the "COVID slide" and to decide whether to provide grade-level content or repeat missed content from the previous year; (b) inform individual remediation and define small groups for building missing skills;<sup>14</sup> and (c) inform statewide policy decisions and investments. We commend the SBE for prioritizing "a comprehensive high quality K-8 standards aligned curriculum with formative assessments that will be accessible statewide at no cost."<sup>15</sup> However, we highly recommend a statewide diagnostic screener, as well. To that end, we suggest the following:

- 1) The SBE should select a diagnostic screener that produces immediate results that are both meaningful to and actionable by educators, and provide it to districts at no cost.** The State should repurpose investments in the 2020 SBAC to cover the costs of the SBE's new statewide diagnostic. Louisiana's Department of Education will provide its school systems with a screener for grades K-3 and a diagnostic for grades 3 to high school at no cost, and it explains that all school systems in the state will both assess students and develop individual plans for those with the most significant learning gaps.<sup>16</sup>
- 2) The State should require districts to use the SBE's free, statewide diagnostic screener.** Through a single assessment, educators and researchers can learn from this period of school closures about what worked best for students, and inform statewide policy decisions and remediation going forward.
- 3) The State's screener should be used only to help teachers and researchers identify students' learning gaps.** It should not be used for school accountability or to evaluate teacher performance.

### RESOURCE ON SCREENERS (Click-able)

For a clear and useful table from ERN of the most well-established and widely-used diagnostic assessments—including subjects and grades covered, quality of assessment, length of assessment, turnaround time, cost per student, and alignment to the Common Core State Standards—[click here](#).

### SPOTLIGHT:

Louisiana's recovery plan links to [supplemental guidance](#) that specifically addresses diagnostics and screeners, identifying precisely which assessments school systems may use by grade and subject.



## Prioritize Recovery Needs of All Student Subgroups

According to the newly released guidance on reopening schools from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "full sized, in-person classes, activities, and events" create the highest risk for spread of COVID-19 in school settings.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the CDC advises "cohorting" small, static groups of students, and/or using staggered scheduling when possible.<sup>18</sup> Within the new confines of this dynamic public health reality, Connecticut's education leaders should outline explicit expectations for meeting students' academic needs, especially young, at-risk, black and brown, impoverished, and special needs populations. We suggest the following:

- 1) **Lengthen the School Day (not the school year).** Maryland's recovery plan highlights international research that longer days, rather than years, have a positive effect on both Math and Science learning. Moreover, if alternating or staggered scheduling are required during a recovery period, longer days may be easier to facilitate logistically.<sup>19</sup> Louisiana's recovery plan recommends that districts maximize students' learning opportunities by using adaptive and flexible staffing plans to accommodate extra time.<sup>20</sup>
- 2) **Provide In-person Math Classes.** If staggering schedules means that one subject needs to be prioritized for in-classroom learning, Math is it. Maryland's plan cited research that learning loss tends to impact Math more than ELA.<sup>21</sup>
- 3) **Provide Face-to-Face Learning for Student Populations with Greater Needs.** Maryland also identified research showing that low-performing students and early elementary students have the most trouble processing remotely.<sup>22</sup> Rhode Island's distance learning guidance specifically notes that online learning requires more effort for younger students, who need "pro-social and play-based activities" for their growth, development, and stress management.<sup>23</sup> If entire student bodies cannot return to the classroom at once, having students with higher in-person needs return to the classroom first would be ideal.

### SPOTLIGHT:

Maryland's recovery plan includes a clear and succinct chapter committed to synthesizing research on what works best for students. Their guidance leverages this research to help students and teachers adjust to this new normal.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> ERN CT (April 2020). *Goals for a 2020 CT Education Recovery Plan*. Retrieved May 2020 at [https://f618d851-8e74-4de9-9eb1-372f70db03ee.usfiles.com/ugd/f618d8\\_cb04834788324405877337a6ddbc81f8.pdf](https://f618d851-8e74-4de9-9eb1-372f70db03ee.usfiles.com/ugd/f618d8_cb04834788324405877337a6ddbc81f8.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Connecticut State Board of Education (May 2020). *State Level Priorities: Sustaining Local School District Capacity & Providing Equity and Access to High Quality Education for All Children*. Retrieved May 2020 at <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Digest/2019-20/CSDE-K-12-Funding-Priorities.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Louisiana Department of Education (May 2020). *Strong Start 2020: Louisiana's Plan*. Retrieved May 2020 at [https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/strong-start-2020/strong-start-2020-louisiana-s-plan.pdf?sfvrsn=9479b1f\\_20](https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/strong-start-2020/strong-start-2020-louisiana-s-plan.pdf?sfvrsn=9479b1f_20).

<sup>4</sup> Maryland State Department of Education (May 2020). *Maryland Together: Maryland's Recovery Plan for Education*. Retrieved May 2020 at [marylandpublicschools.org/newsroom/Documents/MSDERecoveryPlan.pdf](https://marylandpublicschools.org/newsroom/Documents/MSDERecoveryPlan.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Rhode Island Department of Education (April 2020). *Distance Learning 2020: Guidance for Ensuring Educators, Families, and Students are Supported*. Retrieved May 2020 at [https://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/COVID19/Distance\\_Learning\\_Guidance\\_2020.pdf](https://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/COVID19/Distance_Learning_Guidance_2020.pdf).

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<sup>6</sup> See e.g., J. Kroeker (May 26, 2020. CT Insider). *Experts: Data on Distance Learning Like 'The Wild West,' engagement hard to measure*. Retrieved May 2020 at [https://www.ctinsider.com/news/coronavirus/ctpost/article/Experts-Data-on-distance-learning-like-the-15296210.php?utm\\_campaign=CMS%20Sharing%20Tools%20\(Premium\)&utm\\_source=t.co&utm\\_medium=referral](https://www.ctinsider.com/news/coronavirus/ctpost/article/Experts-Data-on-distance-learning-like-the-15296210.php?utm_campaign=CMS%20Sharing%20Tools%20(Premium)&utm_source=t.co&utm_medium=referral).

<sup>7</sup> Louisiana Department of Education (May 2020).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Rhode Island Department of Education (April 2020).

<sup>10</sup> Maryland State Department of Education (May 2020). Page 6.

<sup>11</sup> Rhode Island Department of Education (April 2020).

<sup>12</sup> Maryland State Department of Education (May 2020). Page 6.

<sup>13</sup> Munyan-Penney, N. and Barone, C. (May 2020). *COVID-19 Response: Diagnostic Assessment*. Retrieved May 2020 at <http://edreformnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/COVID-19-Response-Diagnostic-Assessment.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Connecticut State Board of Education (May 2020).

<sup>16</sup> Louisiana Department of Education (May 2020).

<sup>17</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (May 2020). *Considerations for Schools*. Retrieved May 2020 at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Maryland State Department of Education (May 2020).

<sup>20</sup> Louisiana Department of Education (May 2020).

<sup>21</sup> Maryland State Department of Education (May 2020). Page 5-6.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid at Page 6.

<sup>23</sup> Rhode Island Department of Education (April 2020).

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The state chapter of a national organization and affiliate of DFER CT, Education Reform Now CT is a 501(c)(3) that operates as a think tank and policy advocate, promoting great educational opportunities and achievement for all by increasing equity, protecting civil rights, and strengthening the social safety net.