



MAREE: An Equity Guide For Reopening Maryland's Schools

When the COVID-19 pandemic forced school buildings across Maryland to close their doors, it disrupted every student's education. However, Black and Latino students, students from low-income backgrounds, English learners, and students with disabilities **faced tremendous inequities** before the pandemic. The public health crisis, school closures, and the impending recession-that is likely to hit vulnerable populations and the schools they serve especially hard - **will deepen these existing inequities**. The Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education, a coalition of education advocacy, civil rights, and community-based organizations that are committed to eliminating racial disparities in Maryland's education system, calls upon district leaders to take the following actions to ensure all students have the resources and supports they need to thrive when schools reopen for the 2020-2021 school year.



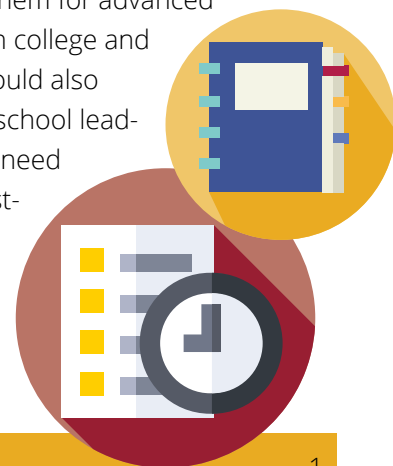
10 Equity Recommendations for the 2020-2021 School Year

1. Address learning gaps through expanded learning time, schedule adjustments, and targeted interventions that prioritize students from low-income backgrounds, students with special needs, English language learners, and students with the greatest learning gaps.

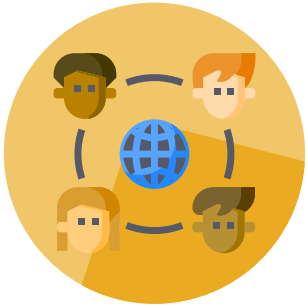
District and school leaders are finding ways for students to continue to learn in light of school closures, but, by some estimates, students will have missed [30% to a full year of learning](#) while schools are closed. Whenever students return to school, there will be a need to make up this lost learning time for weeks, months, and even years to come. Families faced multiple barriers to participating in distance learning, for reasons ranging from inadequate access to technology to competing responsibilities that limited the time available to focus on learning. These challenges are greater in communities with more students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and English learners. Without targeted and research-based solutions to get these students on track, there is a risk they will fall even further behind.

2. Ensure that all students have access to high-quality, standards-aligned curriculum and coursework and make appropriate adjustments to curriculum to address learning gaps, while maintaining a focus on college and career readiness.

Our commitment to holding all students to high standards should not change as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. The return to school offers an opportunity for district leaders to take a step back and ensure the curriculum they provide to all students is not only standards-aligned but is a culturally relevant, rigorous, and engaging curriculum in which students can see themselves and that prepares them for advanced coursework and success in college and career. District leaders should also ensure that teachers and school leaders have the support they need to make appropriate adjustments to the curriculum when students return to school after extended school closures.



3. Continue building an infrastructure to support distance/virtual learning and continuity of services, such as access to food, mental health services, special education services, and English language supports. This includes both ensuring that students have access to reliable high-speed internet access, devices, and IT support, and that students, families, and teachers have been trained on how to provide/access virtual instruction.



Depending on public health guidance, distance or virtual learning may need to continue through the school year. But in many communities, especially communities of color and low-income communities, students do not have access to the technological resources they

need to connect to virtual learning opportunities. Additionally, with schools closed, many teachers are setting up virtual learning experiences – and many students are engaging in virtual learning – for the first time. We must close the digital divide in Maryland, and not just if virtual learning is needed in some form, but because technology and the internet are essential to schooling and life in the 21st century.

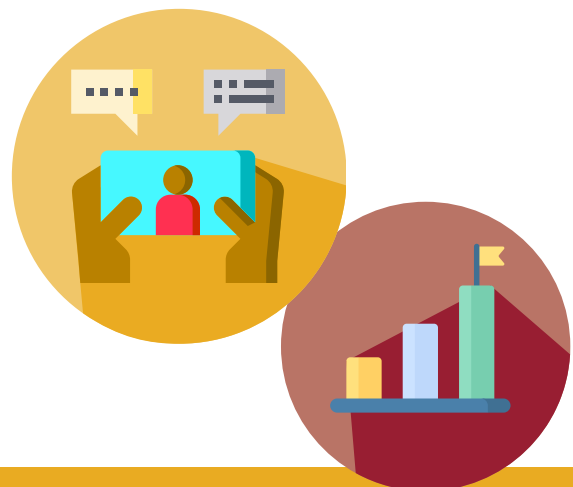
4. Collect and report disaggregated data on disparities and the impact of the pandemic as well as the effectiveness of interventions. The district must also set clear accountability benchmarks and goals for student access to and quality of learning.

Annual information about student learning relative to grade-level standards is foundational to educational equity. It provides classroom educators, school leaders, families, and advocates with a clear understanding of where students are excelling and where they may need additional support. This information alone won't close achievement and opportunity gaps, but it is necessary to ensure that underserved students are

on track to meet grade level standards, receive support they need, and have equitable opportunities for expanded learning, especially in these unprecedented times. It can also help us identify the schools that are showing promising results so that other schools can learn from them. Beyond data from annual statewide assessments, districts must collect data on critical information about students' access to and quality of learning, such as access to high-speed internet and one-to-one devices, attendance in virtual learning, and student engagement in remote classes.

5. Provide high-quality diagnostic assessments to regularly identify students in need of intervention and monitor progress, with minimal loss of instructional time. This includes reviewing all IEPs as part of a district's responsibility to follow the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Low-stakes, high-quality, districtwide diagnostic assessments on academic, social, and emotional needs administered at the district level will help educators and school leaders tailor curriculum and instructional materials, professional development, daily instruction, and other supports to meet students' academic and social and emotional needs and to accelerate learning. Data from diagnostic assessments can also be useful for district leaders who need to make systemic decisions about additional targeted funding and resources to help students recover from COVID-19-related closures.



6. Put in place the resources and structures to address the social and emotional needs of students, families, and staff, including adequate mental health and support staff and restorative justice practices to minimize out-of-school discipline practices.

Many students and educators will have experienced stressful situations throughout the pandemic, including deaths of family members, job losses and financial insecurities, or unsafe home environments. Students and teachers of color and students from low-income backgrounds will be particularly affected by these experiences. Districts should ensure they are providing the supports students need for their social, emotional, and academic well-being, rather than responding with punitive discipline practices that disproportionately impact students of color and students from low-income backgrounds or with deficit thinking that underestimates what children of color and children from low-income families are capable of accomplishing.

7. Shield the highest-poverty schools from layoffs or hiring freezes and prioritize the placement of personnel in schools with students with the greatest learning losses.

Teacher salaries and benefits make up [more than half of school spending in Maryland](#), so districts may have to lay off staff in response to budget shortfalls. Schools serving the most students of color and students from low-income families could bear the brunt of these layoffs, for example, if [districts base layoff decisions solely on seniority](#), since [these schools have more novice teachers](#). Teachers of color are also particularly vulnerable to budget cuts, given their concentration in high-need schools and racist policies and practices that target people of color.



8. Set clear budget priorities that indicate a) how the district plans to use state and federal resources to support the highest-need schools, b) in the case of declining revenues, how the district will preserve academic and social-emotional supports for students from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, and students who are English learners, and c) how the district will cut budgets to account for different levels of need across schools and students, and report on how revenue was used.

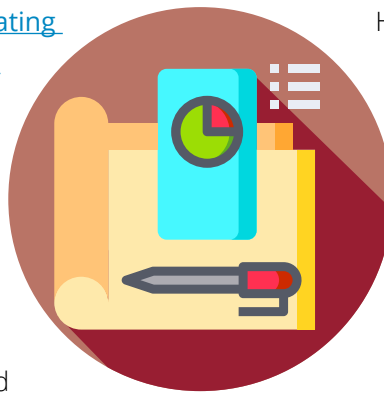
Districts and schools are expected to face [massive budget cuts](#) in the upcoming year due to declining state and local revenues, and [our highest-poverty districts will be hardest hit since they are more likely to be dependent on state revenues](#). While the federal government has provided some [stabilization funding](#) to begin to address these gaps, what has been provided to date is inadequate, and it's too soon to know whether any additional support will be [enough](#) to address the disparate impacts across districts. We do know, however, that these looming cuts will exacerbate long-standing [funding inequities in Maryland](#) and put our most vulnerable students at further risk of losing the resources their schools need.



9. Develop a strategy to reengage families prior to the 2020-2021 school year to ensure attendance, assess needs, and communicate timely information in the home languages of students' families.

Schools in Maryland were already [graduating and enrolling in college far fewer Black and Latino students and students from low-income backgrounds than their White and wealthier peers.](#)

The school closures due to COVID-19 could exacerbate these inequities. Students and families have spent a long time away from school, and the number of students that schools have disengaged will likely grow unless districts develop a strategy to maximize and target engagement and supports for students, build the confidence of both students and families, and ensure that families receive critical and timely information in a language and format that is accessible to them.



10. Prioritize high-quality early care and education options for low-income families, families of dual language learners, and families with young children with disabilities.

High-quality early childhood education is critical to the rapid development that happens in the first five years of a child's life and has long-lasting benefits well into adulthood. But, in Maryland, many children of color, especially Latino children, and children from low-income families are not enrolled in early [childhood programs](#). The pandemic will likely magnify these inequities. As a result of COVID-19, many early care and education centers have been forced to close or reduce their capacity. Parents of color and low-income families with young children will be unable to return to work until safe, high-quality early care and education is available to them.

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MEMBERS OF MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR RACIAL EQUITY IN EDUCATION

