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COVID-19 & Remote Learning: How to Make It Work



—Stephanie Shafer for Education Week

By **Mark Lieberman**

Few schools in the United States will get through the 2020-21 academic year without some form of remote learning, for some portion of the student body, for some period of time.

Until an effective vaccine for COVID-19 is widely available and distributed, the possibility of viral spread will pose an obstacle to many forms of in-person interaction, particularly in indoor spaces such as school buildings. Health officials' recommendations for social distancing in classrooms will limit the number of students who have the option to head to school every weekday. And safety concerns from parents, teachers, and other staff members will keep many people at home even if school buildings are permitted to reopen in some capacity.

To complicate planning for the school year, state and local education budgets are tightening, contradictory policy recommendations are circulating, and the coronavirus continues to spread. The rapid and massive shift to remote learning in the spring also revealed that access

About this Project

to Wi-Fi and digital devices at home remains inadequate for millions of U.S. households; and many schools lack the technological infrastructure or resources to ensure all students can learn online.

The burden schools will face to improve upon the scattered and chaotic remote learning efforts from the spring will be big—but not insurmountable, experts say.

“I think that too often the focus is on what’s lost and not on what’s potentially gained” from the constraints on traditional in-person instruction, said Chris Dede, a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, who has studied the use of educational technology in schools for decades.

Dede and other experts believe educators have many high-tech and low-tech tools at their disposal to provide students with meaningful learning experiences whether they’re in school physically or not. Almost every school in the country engaged in remote learning to an extent this spring, they say, which means every school has a foundation from which to grow. Add some extra time to plan over the summer, and the possibility of some in-person instruction in the fall that wasn’t possible in the spring, and educators and experts alike have reason for measured optimism.

“There’s a huge opportunity for a lot of schools and classrooms right now” to break out of traditional approaches and develop new ones, said Ryan Stanley, technology director of Alaska’s Educational Resource Center. “If a school is trying to do what they did, the way they used to deliver instruction, and pick it up into the distance classroom, they’re missing the opportunity.”

Education Week interviewed more than five dozen educators and experts, and examined numerous districts’ reopening plans as well as guidance from organizations that support remote and technology-enabled learning. In the fourth installment of How We Go Back to School, we offer tips, checklists, best practices, and expert advice on how to make teaching and learning at home engaging, productive, and equitable.

- **Downloadable Guide:** [How Educators Can Help Parents: 6 Remote Learning Tips](#)

THE REMOTE LEARNING TRANSITION

HOW WE GO BACK TO SCHOOL



Fourth in a series of eight installments.

These times are unprecedented. Through these eight installments, we will explore the steps administrators need to take to ensure the safety of students and faculty.

> **Part 1: Socially Distanced School Day**

> **Part 2: Scheduling and Staffing**

> **Part 3: Transportation**

> **Up next: Teaching**

How to Prepare for a Pivot Back To Remote Learning

Checklists for Teachers, Principals, and Tech Leaders



TEACHERS

- ✓ Continue to learn remote teaching skills even while schools are open
- ✓ Share virtual teaching tips and online curriculum ideas—now!
- ✓ Require that students use the learning management system



PRINCIPALS

- ✓ Anticipate more emails and online feedback from parents
- ✓ Construct and distribute a readiness assessment
- ✓ Explore external partnerships



TECH LEADERS

- ✓ Get 'everything' uploaded online
- ✓ Advocate for low-cost internet access
- ✓ Carefully vet tech products and scrap those that didn't work

Icons: Getty

SOURCE: Education Week reporting

No one wants to repeat the nightmare scenarios from this spring, when schools across the country were confronted with rapid mandates to close school buildings and hastily begin remote instruction. But the reality is that COVID-19 won't disappear until an effective vaccine is widely available.

As the current surge of cases in several U.S. states shows, the nature of the virus in a geographic region can change dramatically in a short time. Schools need to be ready to pivot back to teaching students remotely without taking several weeks off or scrambling madly to expand access and assemble resources. These insights from educators and experts will help clarify the biggest priorities for ensuring a smooth transition, regardless of the circumstances.

- **Deep Dive:** [The Pivot Back to Remote Learning: Checklists for Teachers, Principals, and Ed-Tech Leaders](#)
- **Technology Counts:** [Like It or Not, K-12 Schools Are Doing a Digital Leapfrog During COVID-19](#)

EVALUATING ED-TECH TOOLS

Tips for Remote Learning Success

Craft a Digital Roadmap.

Policies and guidance at the state, district, and school levels can help prevent a lot of frustration and disappointment with online learning tools.



Prioritize Sustained Online Engagement.

Engagement with online tools dropped towards the end of this spring; schools will have to focus on sustaining long-term engagement this fall.



Help Students Learn Around the Clock.

Many students and families will need the flexibility to do classwork on nights and weekends.



Simplify. Simplify. Simplify.

Students need tools without a steep learning curve that they can navigate on their own or that parents can learn quickly.



Icons: Getty
SOURCE: Education Week reporting

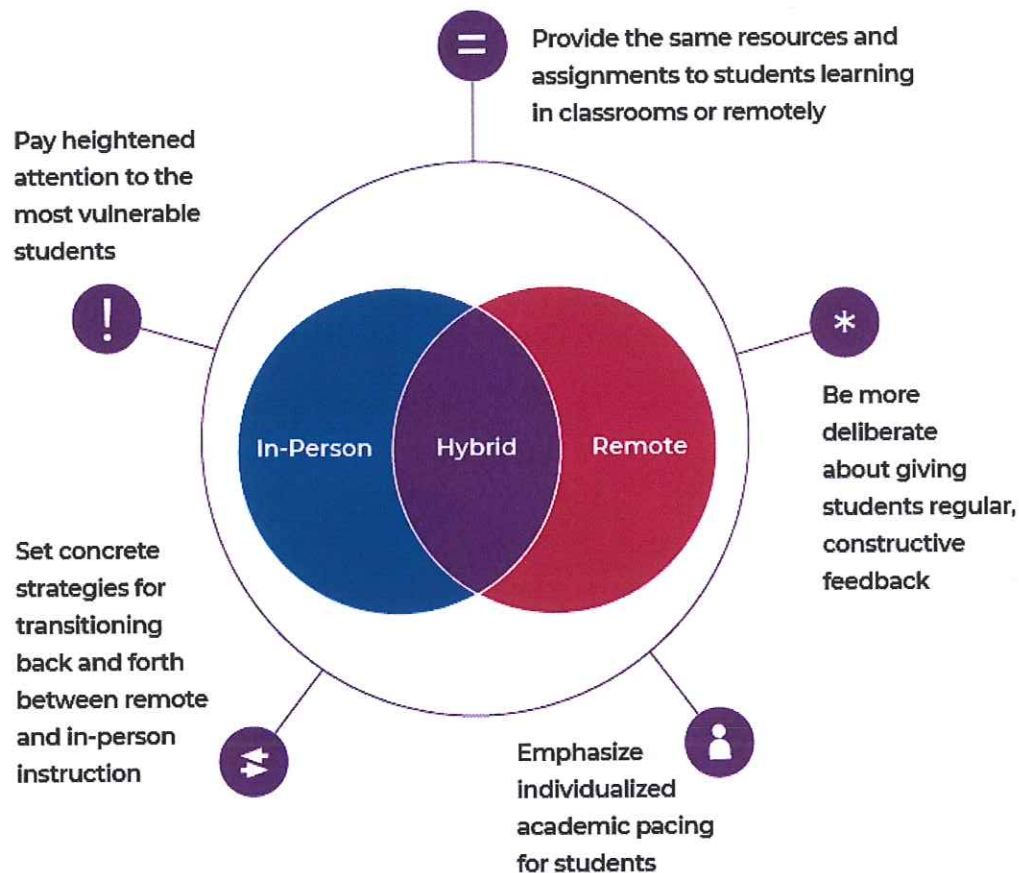
The number of students using educational technology tools skyrocketed during full-time remote learning this spring. But the uptick in usage strained educators, particularly if they hadn't previously been trained on those tools.

The benefit heading into the 2020-21 school year is that schools now have more data than ever before that can show the tools students use to learn, and how those tools are being used. Sorting through those numbers can be daunting, and figuring out what to do with the findings adds an extra layer of complexity. Education Week talked to educators, school district technology directors, and senior executives from ed-tech companies to help educators understand how to make sense of technology usage data to evaluate the effectiveness of those tools in helping all students learn.

- **Deep Dive:** [Knowing How Students and Teachers Use Tech Is Vital](#)
- **Technology Counts:** [How COVID-19 Is Shaping Tech Use. What That Means When Schools Reopen](#)

DESIGNING HYBRID INSTRUCTION

The Essentials for Hybrid Learning



SOURCE: Education Week reporting

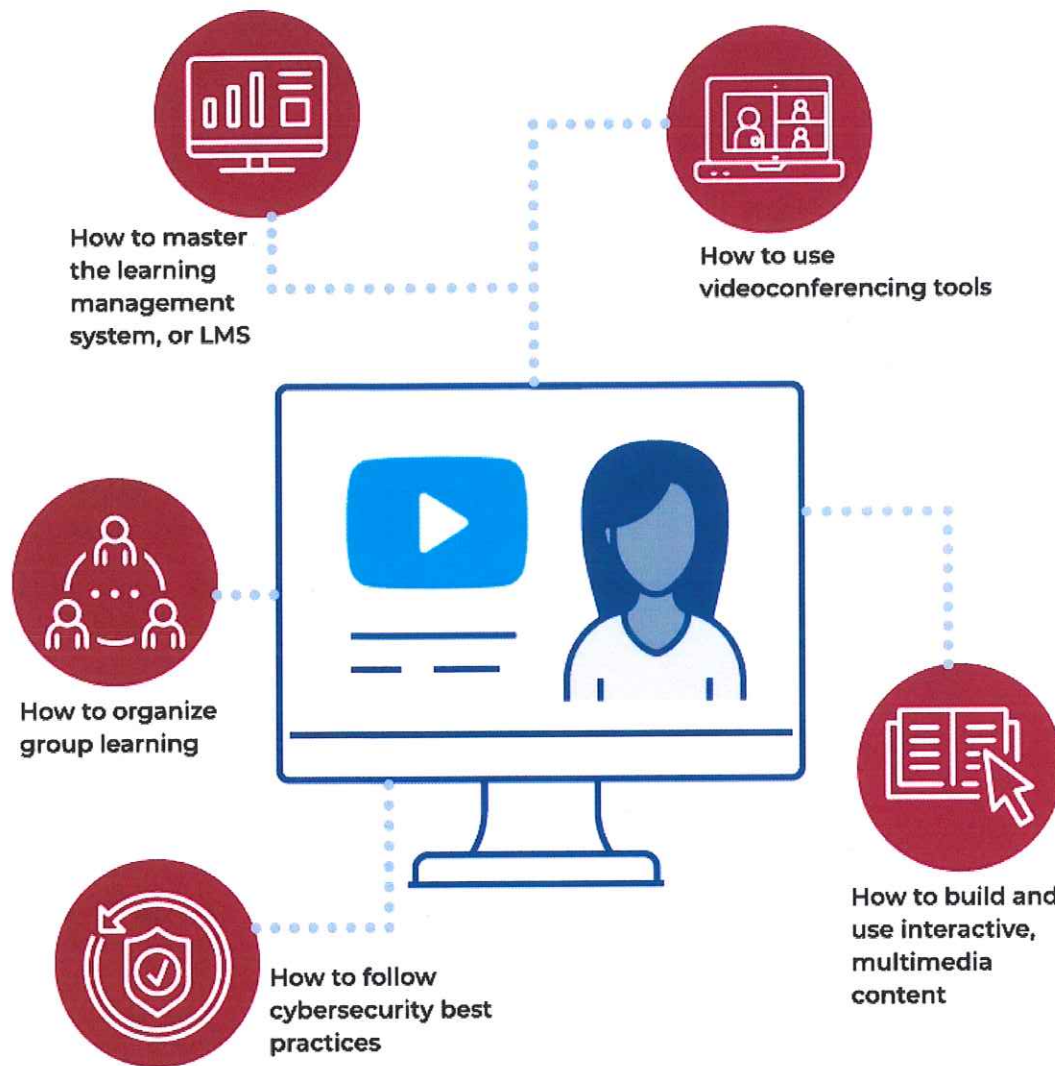
Many students will attend school in-person this fall, but not for the full five-day week. Even schools that fully reopen will have to serve students whose parents prefer to keep them home. All school districts will have to offer hybrid learning programs to some degree, with a mixture of in-person and online instruction.

Schools that currently have or plan to develop this capability will be better-positioned to effectively serve students' learning needs in the long term, even once the pandemic is over. The key is to adopt a set of core principles that can be applied in either face-to-face or remote contexts, and to acknowledge which aspects of the learning process can and can't be accomplished remotely. Education Week outlines the best practices for each aspect of the hybrid approach.

- **Deep Dive:** [How to Balance In-Person and Remote Instruction](#)
- **Technology Counts:** [How COVID-19 Is Shaping Tech Use. What That Means When Schools Reopen](#)

VIRTUAL PD

Remote Instruction Skills Educators Need



SOURCE: Education Week reporting

Well-honed online teaching skills will likely underpin the success of remote instruction this school year, moving districts away from the chaos, inconsistencies, and low student engagement from the spring. But to get there, schools will need to put in place effective, ongoing professional development programs for teachers, principals, and district administrators.

Based on interviews with educators and experts, one priority is very clear: Classroom educators, principals, and district leaders need to make a big commitment to mastering their learning management systems, honing video teaching skills, understanding what remote assessment should look like, providing PD for school and district administrators, and utilizing training resources from nonprofits and education companies.

- **Deep Dive: 5 Tips for Remote Learning PD Success**

4 Ways to Tackle the Digital Divide



Icons: Getty

SOURCE: Education Week reporting

An EdWeek Research Center survey in April found that 62 percent of leaders in districts with poverty rates under 25 percent said everyone who needed home internet access had it. For leaders in districts where the poverty rates exceed 75 percent, the reported rate of access was just 31 percent.

That is a huge digital equity gap going into the 2020-21 school year.

Many districts are using the summer to put in place approaches to begin to close such equity gaps—or at least prevent them from widening if schools return to full-time remote learning or some combination of virtual and in-person instruction. To bridge those gaps, Education Week put together five key digital equity lessons learned from the spring that can be applied to the 2020-21 school year. Those lessons learned are based on extensive interviews with school district leaders around the country, data on the digital divide, and expert analyses.

- **Deep Dive:** How to Address Big Tech Equity Challenges
- **Technology Counts:** Coronavirus Pushes Schools Closer to a Computer for Every Student

Education Week spoke to many experts for this installment. In alphabetical order, they are:

Alaina Adams, digital content expert and administrator, Phoenix Union High School District (Arizona); Salisha Adams, English department chair, KIPP Newark Collegiate Academy North (Newark, N.J.); Sarba Aguda, chief academic officer, KIPP New Jersey and Miami; Thea Andrade, chief achievement officer, Phoenix Union High School District (Arizona); John Armstrong, director of technology and information services, Joliet Public Schools (Illinois); Linnette Attai, president, PlayWell; Bernadette Ball-Oliver, executive director of high schools, Savannah-Chatham County School District (Georgia); Michael Barbour, associate professor of instructional design, Touro University California; Mary Batiwalla, director of evaluation analytics, ClassLink; Brian Beatty, associate professor of instructional technologies, San Francisco State University; Karolyn Belcher, chief academic officer, Charleston County School District (South Carolina); Kenneth Bouwens, director of CTE/STEAM and Innovation, Louisa County Public Schools (Virginia); Michelle Burke, instructional technology specialist, Madrid-Waddington Public Schools (New York); Dan Carroll, founder, Clever; Tawni Casteel, math teacher, PXU