



Addressing Student Reengagement in the Time of COVID-19

RESOURCE GUIDE



About the National League of Cities, Institute for Youth, Education, and Families

The National League of Cities (NLC) is the voice of America’s cities, towns and villages, representing more than 200 million people. NLC works to strengthen local leadership, influence federal policy and drive innovative solutions.

NLC’s Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (YEF Institute) helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of the children, youth, and families in their communities. NLC launched the YEF Institute in January 2000 in recognition of the unique and influential roles that mayors, city councilmembers and other local leaders play in strengthening families and improving outcomes for children and youth.

About the Coalition for Community Schools

Supported by the [Institute for Educational Leadership](#), the Coalition for Community Schools evolved since 1998 as an ecosystem of national, state, and local cross-sector leaders that promote community schools as an equity-driven, research-based strategy, and fights for justice and investments for young people’s access to resources, supports, and opportunities they deserve to advance their hopes and fulfill their social responsibility.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all who contributed to initial student reengagement resource guide. Most importantly, thank you to the national organizations serving on the Student Reengagement Advisory Council, the cities, schools, and partners serving on the Peer Learning Community, and the youth sharing their voices and experiences in the time of COVID-19.

This resource guide was prepared for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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- ASPEN Education & Society
- American Institutes for Research
- Americas Promise Alliance
- American Federation of Teachers
- Attendance Works
- School Superintendents Association (AASA)
- Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (ALAS)
- Center for Law & Social Policy
- College of Charleston
- Excelencia in Education
- Education Trust
- Everyone Graduates Center, Johns Hopkins University
- Fowler Hoffman LLC
- Institute for Educational Leadership
- Jobs for the Future
- Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium
- National Parent Leadership Institute

About this Project

This resource guide and project are funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Partners, Strategies, Tactics, and Frameworks.....	6
A. Local.....	6
B. States	8
Sizing And Understanding The Problem	9
A. Understanding The Covid-19 Student Disengagement Issue	9
B. Guidance For City & School District Leaders And Partners.....	10
Seizing Opportunities, Overcoming Barriers	11
A. Local & State Policy & Practice.....	11
B. National Organization Resources.....	12

Introduction



Across the country, school and local leaders have reported steep declines in school enrollment and engagement since March 2020, with many students considered “missing” or “not contactable.” In response, the National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education, and Families has teamed up with the Institute for Educational Leadership’s Coalition for Community Schools to identify and advance strategies and tactics that cities, schools, and partners can use to reengage middle- and high-school students who lost contact with their schools due to the pandemic.

This Autumn 2020 resource guide highlights emerging strategies, tools, and frameworks, as well as policy guidance, to address this unique subset of students who need reengagement in the time of COVID-19. The partners intend for readers to “blend and braid” strategies and tools to match each community’s unique needs, cultures, and priorities. A subsequent January 2021 edition of the resource guide will contain a significantly enhanced range of materials.

Whereas a growing group of school districts have launched interventions to reconnect with “missing”

students and reengage those on the brink of dropping out; already stretched and challenged schools cannot respond to this crisis alone. City leaders as well as intermediary and community-based organizations, and reengagement centers previously focused solely on dropouts, have a collective role to play. All who hold a commitment to strengthening families and community, share an interest in student reengagement; current low enrollments affect individual students and have the potential to influence education funding flows and community vitality for many years beyond the pandemic. Although postsecondary institutions also face current challenges in student enrollment and engagement, zeroing in now on the reengagement of middle and high school students will pay long-term dividends in terms of successful access, persistence, and completion of college and career pathways, impacting the social and economic prospects and multigenerational mobility of many.



Moreover, COVID-19 and the ensuing school closures have served as reminders that schools provide supports and services well beyond the bounds of academic instruction. Closed schools and low enrollments result in decreased access to essentials such as hot and healthy meals, childcare, afterschool enrichment programs, social and emotional learning, health and mental health services, and basic human connections. Even as some schools reopen, students who remain disengaged will not benefit from the broader services that also become available.

In the face of a challenging trio of issues—the ongoing public health pandemic, an economic crisis with high unemployment rates, and protests calling attention to systemic racism –city, school leaders, and partners will need to go beyond adopting reengagement strategies and tactics for a collective impact approach. Local responses must also confront the pre-existing social and economic inequities that have disparately disconnected low-income families, Black, Indigenous, students of color, and other already vulnerable student populations from schools during the pandemic.

As part of this work, the partners have developed this initial bank of resources with the hope of expanding the list and setting a foundation for an emerging understanding of student engagement and enrollment issues in the months to come. The YEF Institute and the Coalition for Community Schools welcome submissions of additional resources, tools, and policies to include in the next edition. Please send submissions to Gislene Tasayco, tasayco@nlc.org.

Partners, Strategies, Tactics, and Frameworks

Across the country, city, schools, and their partners have launched efforts to reconnect with students who lost contact with schools during the pandemic, identify their unmet needs, and get them back on track. However, pre-existing social and economic inequities present a myriad of difficulties in developing strategies and plans to reconnect. Factors to keep in mind that contribute to declines in student engagement and school contact include:

- Digital Divide
 - Food Access (Hunger, Malnutrition)
 - Employment
 - Caretaking of siblings and older adults
- Mental Health/Health
 - Peer & Adult Relationships
 - Remote Learning
 - Housing (Eviction/Affordability/Mobility)

This section lists strategies, tactics, and policies that cities, districts, and states have adopted to promote student reconnection.

A. LOCAL

City/ County, State	Population	Description
Dublin, Ohio	48,647	The City of Dublin, Ohio's Youth Council is connecting with students on an ongoing basis via social media, video conference calls, and emails in partnership with local schools. The City of Dublin, Ohio is also working with their schools to implement learning hubs in outdoor learning spaces.
Orlando, Florida	285,713	The City of Orlando, Florida's Parramore Kidz Zone (PKZ) modeled after the Harlem Children's Zone, is conducting weekly home visits and providing gift cards, bags of food, and age appropriate educational and social and emotional activities in partnership with Orange County Public Schools.
Cleveland, Ohio	383,793	The Cleveland School District is supporting and allotting time for teachers to have 1:1 conversation with youth and families to address their basic needs, they are called Family Care Plans .

Long Beach, California	467,354	Students in the City of Long Beach, California are receiving “re-engagement letters” checking in on them regarding basic needs insecurities while encouraging school district educators to offer online time to bond with students.
Albuquerque, New Mexico	560,218	Albuquerque Public Schools have put together an Attendance Reentry Plan: Remote Learning in Red that outlines a number of different tools and sample messages to connect and reconnect with youth and families in a remote learning environment.
Baltimore, Maryland	619,493	Baltimore City Public Schools in the City of Baltimore, Maryland are adapting reengagement center staff to assist with wellness checks for all students’ district wide.
Nashville, Tennessee	692,587	In the City of Nashville, Tennessee the Metro Nashville Public School District has assigned guidance counselors as navigators to check in on students by phone call or via online platforms every day.
Boston, Massachusetts	694,583	The Boston Public School District’s Supervisors of Attendance have been working to address truancy and chronic absenteeism in the City of Boston. During COVID-19, the Attendance Toolkit has been updated to fit within a remote environment with accessible sample templates, outreach & awareness collateral, research, and report tools.
Washington, District of Columbia	705,749	Washington, D.C. public schools will send students who have not attended virtual classes a “We Miss You” postcard and call relatives and emergency contacts to reconnect with students.
San Francisco, California	883,305	The City of San Francisco, California is utilizing 40 city facilities including libraries, recreation, and community centers to provide 6,000 of the most disconnected kindergarten- fifth grade youth Wi-Fi, academic, and social interactions.
Phoenix, Arizona	1.66 million	One of the largest school districts in the country, Phoenix Union High School District is using an initiative “Every Student, Every Day” to call students every day.

B. STATES

State	Population	Description
California	39.51 million	Each Local Education Authority (LEA) is required to develop written procedures for tiered reengagement strategies for students that are absent from remote learning classes more than three school days or less than 60 percent in a school week.
Colorado	5.759 million	Colorado Youth for a Change (CYC) partnered with Serve Colorado and the Governor's Office to recruit, train, and place AmeriCorps members in school districts for the 2020-21 school year. The goal is to keep students engaged during COVID-19 by redeploying members as the Student Engagement Corps .
Mississippi	2.976 million	School districts across the state will dispatch attendance officers to the homes of students who do not participate in remote learning classes.
Washington	7.615 million	States have several questions and face several challenges in recording daily attendance in a virtual environment. The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction put together an Attendance & Truancy: Questions & Answers for School Districts toolkit to provide guidance for school districts when determining attendance policy and collection.

Sizing and Understanding the Problem

A. UNDERSTANDING THE COVID-19 STUDENT DISENGAGEMENT ISSUE

Across the [country](#), attendance is down and millions of students have gone unaccounted for as school opened for the 2020-21 school year. Since March, school and local leaders have recorded a [decline](#) in student engagement and enrollment, with still other students not reporting in for virtual learning. This section lists resources ranging from reporting to early research briefs that highlight the varied impacts of this crisis.

Resource	Organization	Description
National Survey of Public Education's Response to COVID-19	American Institutes for Research	AIR's national survey addresses how school districts and charter management organizations coped with issues related to school closures and responded in dramatically different fashion. The survey includes grades K-12 and compares high to low poverty access to resources and instructional materials.
COVID-19 and Student Performance, Equity, and U.S. Education Policy	Economic Policy Institute	This brief provides lessons from pre-pandemic research to inform school system relief, recovery, and rebuilding and offers key lessons as the education system responds to the coronavirus crisis, pandemic-related planning for next steps, and a three-pronged plan for addressing the adverse impacts of COVID-19 on education and rebuilding stronger.
A Decade Undone: Youth Disconnection in the Age of Coronavirus	Measure of America	The report predicts that the COVID-19 pandemic will cause youth disconnection rates to spike dramatically and estimates that the number of disconnected youths will easily top six million and could swell to almost one-quarter of all young people.
COVID-19 Closures: A Redefining Moment for Students, Parents and Schools.	Edge Research	The comprehensive parent survey that addresses COVID-1. school closures, virtual learning, and parent perspectives including high priority issues and the gap between many personalized tools they would find helpful being used. Of note, only 54% of parents felt prepared to support their children in a home learning environment.

Resource	Organization	Description
News article	Los Angeles Times	One of many news stories that highlight conditions six months after schools closed amid the coronavirus crisis. And with online learning in full swing, tens of thousands of students remain without adequate digital access and school districts in Los Angeles County report they still need nearly 50,000 computers and Wi-Fi hot spots.

B. GUIDANCE FOR CITY & SCHOOL DISTRICT LEADERS AND PARTNERS

Organization	Description
Afterschool Alliance	Tools for Programs & Networks to Engage in Conversations About School Reopening Plans : Afterschool programs are essential for meeting students' needs during the COVID-19 crisis and throughout recovery. As states release guidelines for the upcoming school year, principals and local leaders will drive decisions about how schools reopen and how they work with their afterschool partners.
Attendance Works	This guide calls for a systemic approach to supporting transitions to school that is data-informed and restorative. This guide is also focused on providing deeper support for students who missed out on accessing school lessons and on welcoming families.
EdSource	Describes how parents can serve as crucial links in mitigating the educational inequities that the coronavirus has exacerbated. According to parents and advocates across California, many low-income parents have become unemployed because of the pandemic, while others have no choice but to work outside their homes.
Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL)	The report Listen to Us was generated from a community forum conversation with youth with disabilities about the issues, policies, and practices that affect their lives and their communities. Youth share critical supports and services they need in a time of COVID-19.
Johns Hopkins University Everyone Graduates Center	Supporting Educators Through COVID-19 : Maintains a list of resources in an effort to help educators cope with the challenges of continuing to provide learning and support to students, families, teachers, and staff. More education related Covid-19 information here .
The School Superintendents Organization (AASA)	On April 30, 2020, AASA formed the AASACOVID-19 Recovery Task Force, made up of superintendents and the nation's foremost thought leaders in public education to create a consensus-driven set of guidelines for reopening schools effectively in the COVID-19 environment.

Seizing Opportunities, Overcoming Barriers

Amid COVID-19 and compounding crisis's, cities, schools, and partners are developing and implementing strategies to reach students newly disengaged due to pandemic conditions. This section contains guidance at the state and local level, as well as materials that national organizations have developed to support a spectrum of stakeholders, from afterschool programs to postsecondary institutions.

A. LOCAL & STATE POLICY & PRACTICE

Organization	Description
Achieving the Dream	Achieving the Dream developed a Toolkit for Actionable Decision Making in Times of Disruption to build stronger, resilient for postsecondary institutions that can be adapted for K-12 school and local leaders.
Aspen Institute	How Governors and Mayors Can Support Schools So Schools Can Support Students suggests concrete actions state and local leaders can take now to ensure schools have access to money, people, and collaborative structures that ultimately benefit students, families, and society.
Future Ed	Blueprint for Testing : Outlines how and when states, school districts, and schools should use assessments in this unprecedented period: to gauge student learning, help accelerate students to grade-level performance, and provide systems-level insights into educational recovery.
Council of the Great City Schools	With continued challenge to youth engagement in COVID-19, the Council of Great City Schools has put together a resource to strengthen supports for English Language Learners including distance learning strategies, identifying needs, and calls for systems wide services.
National Governors Association	For state policy makers: NGA Education has created a number of resources to help inform state policy makers on critical education issues related to COVID-19, as well as a state re-opening tracker.
National League of Cities	Whereas efforts to mitigate the spread and impact of COVID-19 vary across municipalities, the role of city officials has remained the same: to protect and serve people who call their community "home". Creating Community Learning Hubs is an emerging solution to do exactly that.

B. NATIONAL ORGANIZATION RESOURCES

Organization	Description
Afterschool Alliance	A Blueprint for How Afterschool Programs & Community Partners Can outlines strategies for how school and local leaders can leverage afterschool and summer learning programs to tackle reopening challenges in a remote learning setting.
American Institutes for Research (AIR)	A report from AIR suggests that texting parents may provide an effective way to reduce chronic absence in elementary school. The study tested a messaging strategy that started with basic messages, and then “adapted” to provide additional intensified messaging for families whose children had more absences.
Aspen Education & Society	The Coming Back to Climate: How Principals Can Use School Climate Data to Lead toolkit provides guidance for school leaders to use school climate data to create safe and nurturing environment for youth amid COVID-19.
Association of Latin American Superintendents (ALAS)	ALAS has put together resources for leaders across the country that assures every school in America effectively serves the educational needs of all students with an emphasis on Latinx youth.
Attendance Works & FutureEd	The Attendance Playbook provides ideas and strategies addressing absenteeism during distance learning.
Coalition for Community Schools	Students are facing a myriad of needs including learning, social-emotional, healthcare – that schools and communities will need to respond to. The Coalition for Community Schools has several resources for how to leverage community schools in a time of COVID and guides for implementing community school models.

Organization	Description
Education Trust	During the COVID-19 pandemic , Ed Trust has a compilation of resources for parents, teachers, advocates, and policymakers to consider and use in responding to the varied impacts keeping equity at the forefront.
Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium (MAEC)	MAEC has a compendium of resources to support equity and learning during COVID-19 which includes resources or educators and families particularly how to serve and support vulnerable student populations.
National Urban League	Restart Smart: Four Guiding Principles to Reopening suggests areas to focus on when reopening during a pandemic. Suggested action items include virtual home visits, virtual apprenticeships, and elevating youth voice to help inform local decisions with a key focus on: health and safety, family and community input, an intentional focus on equity, and resources and funding.
REL Appalachia	Dropout Prevention in the Time of Covid 19 : Students on the path toward dropping out of high school often exhibit signals that they are at risk well before they stop engaging in school. This briefing will help educators understand and look for signs of disengagement to support at-risk students during COVID-19 closures.

