

# K-12 Education Recovery Task Force

May 7, 2020 meeting summary

At the third meeting of the task force, discussion focused on governance and operations. Task force members were divided among four teams to discuss task force development, schedule options, funding, and technology.

## Play 1 – Task Force Development

The majority of SREB states have convened a task force or advisory panel to address the opening of K-12 schools. These task forces take multiple names with most having their origins to address this spring's remote learning needs. The state task forces are focused on closing out the school year and providing solutions to end-of-year events such as graduation ceremonies. The focus is evolving to actions dealing with the summer school decisions and the reopening of school in the fall.

It is recommended that state and/or district task forces focused on opening of schools include the following:

- Chief Academic Officer
- Board of Education Member
- Director of Curriculum & Instruction
- Director of Finance
- Director of Facilities
- Director of Human Resources
- Director of Transportation
- Director of Technology
- Director of Pupil Personnel
- Building Administrators
- Teachers
- Educator Professional Associations
- Parents
- Students
- Community Health Providers
- Mental Health Specialists
- Public Safety Agencies
- Higher Education Representatives
- Legislators
- Childcare Providers
- Business Leader
- Public Television Executive

A common element of the state efforts is a subtle move from guidance and advisory efforts to establishing guidelines and policies. With this shift, the groups are establishing deadline dates for specific decision making for May and June. Task forces are encouraged to convene weekly at least through June, with a goal of having frameworks for opening school approved public health officials by early July.

Given the unpredictable nature of the pandemic and the possibility that schools might reopen to different timeframes, members stress that task forces or subcommittees might need to keep meeting, problem-solving and adapting their plans well into the late fall or winters.

Clear, frequent communications with the public are essential. Most states have websites containing information and advice about the coronavirus and updates on education and economic recovery plans. Press releases and press conference with governors, task force representatives, boards of education and public health officials are common.

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## Play 2—Calendar/Schedule Options—Human Capital

The group was asked to review five possible scheduling scenarios to determine if any other scenarios could be considered as districts and schools plan for the new school year. The group suggested an additional scenario, a **hybrid schedule** (although the idea may be included under an existing category) in which a portion of the students and staff would return to the school building, while a portion would be in virtual learning (online, take-home lessons). This scenario would benefit both staff and students who are considered at-risk. In addition, the group saw the need to layer existing scenario options within three categories--early start, traditional start, and late start. This would allow districts some flexibility in identifying “when” a given scenario may have the best impact.

The group strongly felt that a communication plan would be essential (regardless of the selected scheduling scenario). Communications would need to focus on the benefits of virtual learning (that virtual learning is not less effective than classroom instruction--if this is true) and safeguarding health for students and staff. This would be especially important if schools were requiring social distancing. Parents and community members would need to understand, for example, why attending school with 250 students would be safer than attending with 500--and why school policies may differ from businesses, a governor's guidance, etc.

**Students** need more training on the effective use of devices to support virtual learning. Equitable access to technology is important for all scenarios. In addition, schools and districts need to think through the use of online textbooks that are ultimately not provided in an accessible format (i.e., 7-point font that can be difficult to see in a video conference). For districts with limited internet access, plans should include a process for students to download textbooks and other materials periodically.

Many districts and schools have not yet weighed operational (schedule) options for the upcoming school year; most are still trying to close out the current year. Participants also discussed the importance of planning for class schedules, and establishing guidelines for other traditional campus activities such as lunch with grandparents, rules for parents as classroom volunteers, etc.

As the group discussed the impact on **parents**, all scenarios would create challenges for families who need childcare. In addition, delayed start times could create additional transportation challenges. All scenarios would have an impact on nutritional services, as well. Extracurricular activities would also be impacted, from when sports practices or games could be held to hosting events for larger audiences.

The final discussion focused on **attendance**. Regardless of the schedule options, the group saw that a key challenge around defining “seat time.” Restarting school provides a unique opportunity to identify what students really know within a set curriculum. This could redefine credit by examination. However, how we define “seat time” and the earning of credit will have implications on athletic eligibility and how students are counted for funding formulas (i.e., full-year, partial-year, etc.). Attendance will need to be redefined by all stakeholders. A request was made to identify schools already using a mastery learning approach (vs. seat time) and to share their policies and guidelines.

## **Play 2—Calendar/Schedule Options—Operations**

In addition to the scheduling scenarios SREB listed, Virginia has thought through implications of students attending every fifth, fourth or third day.

### Transportation

Social distancing, disinfecting, personal protective equipment, staffing and funding are concerns for these states under any of the alternative scheduling scenarios. Additional bus runs to accommodate physical distancing will mean buses have to be disinfected between routes. Drivers will need to be paid for additional hours, and those who have second jobs may have to choose between their bus driving position and other jobs. Additionally, many bus drivers have underlying health conditions. Together these may result in a significant shortage of drivers.

Additionally, anticipated fuel and supplies will see significant cost increases. Logistics will be especially difficult in rural areas.

The team noted other transportation considerations for states to address: Will students be screened when they board the bus? What will the protocol be if a student arrives at school sick after riding the bus with other students? What are protocols for students who walk, bike or ride in cars to schools for their arrival at school?

### Nutrition & Food Services

The expense of sustaining meals for students over the summer is a concern.

The typical lunchroom with hundreds of students may not be possible. Possibilities are feeding students breakfast, lunch and even supper in the classroom, or phasing into larger groups – from 10 to 25 to 50 – as conditions improve.

Members said they had not yet experienced food service supply chain problems, but it is something they feel needs to be constantly monitored.

As with bus drivers, will extended hours of work be needed for food service workers to prepare and deliver meals in an alternative format and then assist with clean-up following meals.

### Facilities

Schools need a well-defined standard for what is a clean facility, and that will come from state health. Once that is defined, how will schools accomplish it? Maryland's guidance emphasizes handwashing because it is impractical to keep an entire school disinfected throughout the day.

Financial, staffing and supply constraints are all concerns. Members identified several questions that will need to be answered.

- How will schools keep common areas clean, such as restrooms, hallways and gyms?
- Who will be responsible for disinfecting: Teachers? Principals? Custodial staff? What is the liability for schools related to staff health?
- What will schools need in terms of an isolation area for sick students?
- Should schools limit the number of access points to enter and leave the building?
- Will visitors be allowed to mix with the general student population?

Cleaning in classrooms for our youngest learners is also a concern. As they are active and moving in classrooms, how will the classroom be kept clean? Will a new structure be needed for those classrooms that involve more seat time?

Career and technical education programs have special considerations. Disinfectants cannot be used on some materials, and cleaning every nail or wire is not possible. Gloves and masks could be safety concerns in operating some equipment. And multi-county CTE centers may need to consider distancing students from hotbed counties from students from counties with no cases.

Cleaners, soap, PPE and even toilet paper are hard to come by, and schools/districts will need funding for the quantity of disinfectants and protective equipment. Training for custodial and other staff will be vital and will also add to expenses. Who and what equipment will need to be worn needs to be established? Will all teachers wear masks? Students? Gloves?

### Policies to Modify

Waivers for attendance non-traditional instruction requirements will have to be considered. Several states still have seat-time and minutes requirements. Kentucky's funding is based on average daily attendance. Attendance is tied to West Virginia's accountability plan. Maryland is grappling with the implications of having siblings in different attendance cohorts.

Contracts for maintenance, transportation, nutrition and teaching staff may need to be modified to add hours or alter schedules. Maryland's plan calls for a four-day school week that uses day five for professional development, particularly to support remote instruction.

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## Play 3—Funding

### The taskforce responded to the following questions:

What are the most immediate funding needs of districts and schools?

In **Georgia** every state agency is facing a 14% cut in funding. CARES money will backfill some of the cuts in the short term, however they are facing additional funding needs in mental health, tele-health and cleaning supplies. **Alabama, North Carolina and South Carolina** all have immediate needs in technology. Broadband internet is a major funding needs, as is the technology devices. **North Carolina** considers many of their technology devices collateral damages and they will need to replacement. **Alabama** is also focusing on special education, extended school year and compulsory education. **South Carolina** is looking at funding for summer reading programs, transportation and PPE. Most of their schools donated PPE to nurses and hospitals. **Delaware** has protected funds for the current year, however they are concerned about next year's funds.

What considerations should be made for the systemic use of federal, state and local funds?

**North Carolina** suggests that funding should follow the **vision and priorities** set by the district and state. Systems thinking is more important than ever and prioritization is essential. **Alabama** is focusing on the fact that states cannot do everything and will need to prioritize the most important needs. States must ensure that they recognize gaps for vulnerable populations. **South Carolina** suggested that states utilize all funding (especially the CARES money) to create sustainable initiatives. They agree that support needs to go to the most vulnerable populations. **Georgia** has 180 school districts ranging in size from 160 students to 360,000 students. This is a local control state and priorities will be handled at local level. **Mississippi** is developing a document to lay out to districts where funding can be spent and helping them to prioritize how to spend the dollars. By obtaining waivers, districts have longer time to spend the money so that they won't be rushing to try to spend by deadlines. They will share the document they have pushed out to districts. It includes a needs assessment to determine technology needs in order to provide online instruction.

What services will need to be scaled and sustained during and after the pandemic?

The group as a whole expressed the need for nursing and social emotional learning supports. **Georgia** discussed sustaining the meal programs for not only students, but communities as well. **Alabama** expressed a need to focus on building the remote learning capacity. Teachers need to be trained on the platform and understanding student needs in a remote environment.

How should districts and schools prioritize their spending needs?

All states expressed the need to engage stakeholders (families, students, faculty, staff, etc.) about the priorities instead of a top down approach. **Georgia** is prioritizing the CARES money to backfill cuts. **Alabama** will create an application for the funds that will force districts to be strategic and thoughtful about how to spend money. **Delaware** reminded the group of CDC recommendations

back in March. Decisions on what will need to be done will be based on the transmission of COVID-19 in the community and on the health status of the community. **GA:** Rural areas already have childcare dilemmas. Learned many childcare facilities will not be opening back up. Considerations for how to address this challenge need to be made. All of the states also agreed that spending on childcare may need to be addressed if student schedules are not in the traditional format. (ex. Teachers/Parents are back to work five days a week, but students are not.)

Other funding considerations for each of the phases below.

**Georgia** is increasing by 1,000 cases a day and difficult to put it into the framework. **Delaware** expressed that everyone is in different places so it is difficult to answer the question. **Mississippi** is exploring what money may lapse that can be used in the future, noting CARES money, new title dollars and new state funds will be there in June. **Georgia** is considering all funding streams and/or funding deadlines. The whole group discussed timelines for funds and the operation needs that must be set such as setting the calendar, hiring teachers, meal decisions, etc. This will have to be adjusted as they go.

*Big Ideas that were shared for each question:*

- *Spending should depend on community's needs and not based on centralized board*
- *Understanding Funding Sources and when and how they can be spent*
- *Strong need for states and districts to stay aligned with their vision and priorities when making funding decisions*
- *States may have to grapple with the fact that we may not be able to open schools in an in-person format just yet*
- *Social/Emotional Needs are a larger funding consideration than in previous years (reallocating money is imperative)*
- *Who has control? (Governor, Schools Districts, Health Department, CDC)*

**Additional questions/thoughts for consideration:**

- Create a guidance document to help districts make the decisions about funding options (MS has started this)
- Thirst for knowledge to share ideas and documents
- Funding extensions/exceptions

	<b>Imagine May - June</b>	<b>Plan June - July</b>	<b>Implement August - September</b>	<b>Adapt October - January</b>
Funding	Carryover Funds (Waivers to completed) Seek additional Grant opportunities available under CARES in addition to allocations that can fill the gaps	CARES Funding New Cycle of State funding Governor's GEER education money	Title dollars carryover (Spending Plan) State Dollars (Should have actual budgets by this date)	

	during the downward peak			
Operational Tasks	Understanding the different money sources and how they can be spent (Spending Plan)	Fill Teaching Positions Fill Staff Positions (school bus drivers) Professional Development based on immediate needs.		



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## Play 4—Technology

### Internet and Device Access

States, districts and schools face significant challenges with the shift to virtual learning because many students and teachers lack access to the internet and the devices they need to learn and teach online. Rural communities in particular may have no high-speed broadband internet service or cellular towers, increasing pressure on states to work with service providers to bring these services to all citizens.

Post-pandemic, learning and achievement gaps between students will be larger than ever due to the technology gap. States need long-term technology solutions to close these gaps.

In the short term, states and districts are purchasing laptops and hotspots to distribute to students and teachers, seeking free or reduced-cost internet or cellular service for families, and placing Wi-Fi units or Wi-Fi-equipped school buses in locations where students and families can upload and download assignments. Members agreed that for families and communities without internet, paper packets are challenging to deliver and even harder to collect and grade given fears about spreading the coronavirus.

Securing funding to support online learning is a top priority for states and districts. Members noted that 1:1 device programs include high, hidden costs beyond the purchase of devices, such as:

- Building and updating an information technology infrastructure in schools and districts
- Securing free or low-cost internet access for families and staff
- Distributing, tracking, repairing and setting filters and virus protection on 1:1 devices
- Adopting and maintaining learning management systems
- Employing IT and instructional technology personnel
- Providing professional learning for teachers on online and hybrid learning pedagogies
- Protecting student data
- Supporting students and families in using devices and learning online

Group members asked, should states offer competitive grants for districts to design and support their own technology programs? Would a statewide procurement process offer greater purchasing power and better rates at the cost of limiting districts' technology choices?

**Tennessee** may use CARES funds to provide devices to students and staff. **Delaware** is partnering with the governor's office and using CARES funds to invest in the infrastructure needed to support online learning; districts will need to use their funds to purchase devices that meet their students' needs.

In **Virginia**, school divisions are collecting data on the thousands of students who lack access to the internet and/or the devices they need to learn online. The state will use CARES funds to support personnel who can assist school divisions with their technology plans.

**Arkansas** has made strong efforts to bring high-speed broadband internet to all of its districts,



which then maintain networks within schools. Recent ACT Aspire testing helped the state identify internet access problems, and state IT and instructional technology personnel are currently assessing district needs.

## Video Content

**Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee** and **Virginia** are partnering with PBS affiliates to offer instructional programming. **Arkansas** is working with PBS to create and air educational programs that align with learning guides for grades K-2, 3-5 and 6-8. The **Tennessee** Department of Education drew on open-source curricula to create over 200 instructional videos for grades K-8 that air on PBS and are also available on YouTube. Tennessee plans to build a resource library of open-source curricula and lessons and offer competitive grants to districts seeking to create new instructional video content. In addition to airing educational programs on PBS, **Virginia** has seen use of its Virtual Virginia learning management system grow from around 15,000 students to several hundred thousand.