

EDUCATIONAL EQUITY & CORONAVIRUS



The Education Trust—Midwest

The State of Michigan is taking important steps to protect the health and wellbeing of students and the general public during the coronavirus pandemic. While we hope that the need for school closures will not need to be extended, we also recognize the need to respond to continually evaluate community health needs and respond appropriately.

Addressing educational equity throughout the current crisis starts by recognizing that vulnerable students are at particular risk during this time of school closures. As a result, planning by the state, school districts, and schools should include specific steps to ensure that extended school closures do not exacerbate educational inequities and that all students receive the services and support they need.

As school leaders adjust emergency plans, here are 8 specific steps they should explore in order to promote instructional equity and preserve student well-being throughout this period of school closures.

PROMOTE INSTRUCTIONAL EQUITY

1

Invest in supports to address gaps in opportunity for vulnerable students

State leaders should commit to protecting and prioritizing funding for vulnerable students if there are budget shortfalls as vulnerable students are at the greatest risk for impact. Michigan state leaders should also take swift and immediate steps to find significant additional dollars to invest in addressing the instructional needs of vulnerable students in the state, such as creating opportunities for additional learning time over the summer and ensuring equitable access to technology and high-quality, standards-aligned digital learning resources.

2

Support families and teachers to address increases in racism and xenophobia.

Districts need to send pro-active messages to teachers and families to address racist and xenophobic bullying head on.

Educators should be supported in engaging in proactive and meaningful discussions with their students around bias and bullying and addressing victims and perpetrators of bullying when incidents occur. This could include providing educators with resources and activities to begin these conversations with their students.

Visit edtru.st/COVID-19 for resources.

3

Ensure equitable access to high quality learning materials and engagement

Schools should prepare to provide rigorous instructional materials to students when schools are closed. This could take the form of learning resources and grade-appropriate, standards-aligned texts to keep students engaged and learning. Schools should not rely on remote or distance learning unless the school district has previously provided all students with access to required materials, including technology. Schools should also communicate to parents about their expectations and available resources, recognizing that many parents will not have access to personal leave or sick days to work with their children.

4**Work closely with teachers, counselors and support staff to ensure continuation of services for all students.**

Schools should engage teachers in preparing instructional materials to continue students' learning. This can include providing grade- and instruction-appropriate periodicals, texts, links to instructional videos, and at-home activities. Where feasible, schools should provide training and support to teachers for these needs, if they have not already done so. Schools should also work with school counselors to anticipate and meet the needs of students who rely on school counselors and psychologists for socioemotional support, for postsecondary planning, and for whom additional time at home or away from school can itself be emotionally stressful.

5**Address the specific learning needs of English learners and students with disabilities.**

School districts should ensure that the learning materials made available meet the specific needs of students with disabilities, English learners, and students in temporary housing, and that outreach is conducted to these students and their families about the available resources.

To support English learners, schools should also ensure that information about resources and support is available to families in multiple languages.

6**Provide breakfast and lunch to students who rely on school meals.**

School districts should work with their food service providers to make meals available for students who are low-income for the full duration of school closures. Schools should offer grab-and-go meals — not provide meals in a group setting — at school sites and, to the extent eligible and geographically feasible, at sites in the community, including but not limited to food banks, food pantries, and other community feeding organizations. The U.S. Department of Agriculture is granting waivers so that affected states can provide meals in the community consistent with their summer meal programs, and schools should implement this option.

7**Coordinate with trusted community partners.**

Schools should work with community-based organizations, faith communities, after-school providers, and other trusted partners to ensure clear and consistent communication to students and families about accurate coronavirus information and the resources and supports available. Schools should also connect with local organizations that may offer programming or other services for students when schools are closed, consistent with guidance from health officials, and make resources available at these locations. All communications and outreach should be in multiple languages to meet the community's needs.

8**Connect families to other services they may need.**

While schools cannot be expected to do everything, they are a vital and trusted hub for students and their families in a time of uncertainty.

Schools should work with their local government partners so that they are able to point families to health, housing, legal, and other resources — recognizing that this may be a period of additional economic hardship for families. All communications and outreach should be in multiple languages to meet the community's need.