



**CONSIDERATIONS FOR
EQUITABLE MISSISSIPPI
STUDENT AND FAMILY EXPERIENCES**
December 2020-February 2021



MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

The Mississippi Department of Education has partnered with a group of eight superintendents from a diverse range of school districts to outline the key issues districts need to consider as schools are operating during COVID-19.

The issues are divided into six topics:



This document, *Considerations for Equitable Mississippi Student and Family Experiences*, is a continuation of [Considerations for Reopening Mississippi Schools](#) and [Considerations for Coherent and Equitable Instructional Systems](#). These documents released quarterly are designed to help district and school leaders adjust to the unpredictable and changing nature of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Members of the Superintendents' Workgroup and MDE will lead two virtual meetings on December 15, 2020 and January 20, 2021 to discuss the specifics of this document and facilitate sharing.

DECEMBER KEY ACTIONS

ACADEMICS:

- Continue to support the teaching of grade-level content with support for unfinished learning in the context of grade-level work.
- Use assessments to strategically support instructional decisions and preparation.
- Continue observations and student work reviews to target issues and questions for conversations and focus groups.
- Make plan adjustments and communicate the changes.

OPERATIONS:

- Identify any key operational, scheduling, or staffing updates needed to achieve targeted improvement, including those to be done over Winter break.
- Support staff health, wellness, and motivation.
- Make plan adjustments and communicate the changes.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY:

- Engage in conversations with priority group families to inform the step back.
- Work with community partnerships and agencies to support families with additional needs.
- Make plan adjustments and communicate the changes.

COMMUNICATIONS:

- Engage in conversations with priority group students to inform the step back.
- Establish or make adjustments to standing communications channels in order to access communities for family engagement.

HEALTH AND SAFETY:

- Continue to stay in close communication with the Health Department and key health constituencies to update status and plans.
- Continue to monitor the health status of staff, students, and the community to make adjustments to learning scenarios.
- Make plan adjustments and communicate the changes.

TECHNOLOGY:

- Make sure all students and families have the technology they need.
- Make adjustments to EDLA plans in order to strengthen content and address challenges.
- Provide ongoing communications and professional development to support staff in using new technology.
- Stay in touch with suppliers and providers to troubleshoot any challenges.
- Make plan adjustments and communicate the changes.

JANUARY KEY ACTIONS



ACADEMICS:

- Continue to support the teaching of grade-level content with support for unfinished learning in the context of grade-level work.
- Conduct a follow-up leadership check-in to monitor progress on targeted academic improvements for the winter and new term/semester as applicable.
- Make plan adjustments and communicate the changes.

OPERATIONS:

- Continue to support staff health, wellness, and motivation.
- Conduct follow-up leadership check-in to monitor progress on targeted operational improvements.
- Make plan adjustments and communicate the changes.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY:

- Engage in conversations with priority group families to inform the step back.
- Conduct follow-up leadership check-in to monitor progress on targeted family and community improvements for the winter.
- Make plan adjustments and communicate the changes.

COMMUNICATIONS:

- Engage in conversations with priority group students to inform the step back.
- Conduct follow-up leadership check-in to monitor progress on targeted communication improvements for the winter.

HEALTH AND SAFETY:

- Continue to monitor the health status of students, staff, and the community and make adjustments to which scenarios the district is operating under where needed.
- Continue to check in with the Health Department and make adjustments to plans with new information about best practices.
- Make plan adjustments and communicate the changes.

TECHNOLOGY:

- Conduct technology needs assessment for spring summative assessments.
- Continue to support technology needs and build fluency and comfort with technology and applications, especially as it may pertain to assessment administration.
- Work with providers to continue to increase access.
- Make plan adjustments and communicate the changes.

FEBRUARY KEY ACTIONS

ACADEMICS:

- Continue to support the teaching of grade-level content with support for unfinished learning in the context of grade-level work.
- Reflect on priority groups of students' academic experiences for the year.
- Reflect on leadership check-in to monitor progress on targeted academic improvements.
- Continue to adjust plans based on areas of progress or challenge and communicate the changes.

OPERATIONS:

- Continue to support staff health, wellness, and motivation.
- Reflect on priority groups of students' academic experiences for the year.
- Reflect on leadership check-in to monitor progress on targeted operational improvements.
- Consider permanent staffing, budget, facility, nutrition, transportation, or general operations changes for the 21-22 school year.
- Continue to adjust plans based on areas of progress or challenge and communicate the changes.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY:

- Reflect on priority families' experiences for the year.
- Reflect on leadership check-in to monitor progress on targeted family and community improvements.
- Continue to adjust plans based on areas of progress or challenge and communicate the changes.

COMMUNICATIONS:

- Reflect on priority students' and families' communication experiences.
- Reflect on leadership check-in to monitor progress on targeted communication improvements.
- Continue to adjust plans based on areas of progress or challenge and communicate the changes.

HEALTH AND SAFETY:

- Reflect on priority students' and families' health and safety experiences.
- Continue to monitor the health status of students, staff, and the community and make adjustments to which scenarios the district is operating under where needed.
- Continue to check in with the Health Department and make adjustments to plans with new information about best practices.
- Continue to adjust plans based on areas of progress or challenge and communicate the changes.

TECHNOLOGY:

- Apply data from technology needs assessment for spring summative assessments plan and make any adjustments as needed.
- Continue to support technology needs and build fluency and comfort with technology and applications.
- Work with providers to continue to take efforts to increase access as well as capacity for spring summative assessments.
- Continue to adjust plans based on areas of progress or challenge and communicate the changes.

March: This committee will release the next round of considerations in March to be used to finish this academic year and begin to reimagine 21-22.

PREPARING FOR THE CONVERSATIONS (DECEMBER)

Midyear is an opportunity to take a step back, gather information, and plan in a deliberate way for the rest of the year. Leaders have been checking in with students, parents/caregivers, and community members all year long. Raising the voices of all community members, especially those from priority groups, is a key strategy towards equity and inclusivity. One way to begin the midyear would be with targeted conversations, talking with priority groups of students and families about their experiences so far. These conversations can allow for a holistic stocktake and step back for leaders which is vital before starting a new semester. Through one on one discussions, leaders can better understand root causes, challenges, and opportunities for continuous improvement. This is a hard year for schools and families because everyone is having a different experience. In our work with partners we have noticed that it is important to be intentional about understanding the experience of students and families - with particular focus on the students and families for whom the current schooling may not be working. Only by understanding the experience and designing solutions for those experiencing the most challenge can we ensure equitable schooling. Informal learning from students and parents/caregivers is meant to add voice and insight to existing data sources, not to replace them.

Districts should begin by choosing a priority group of students that has been highlighted by data from previous step back meetings outlined in the [Considerations for Coherent and Equitable Instructional Systems](#). This priority group should be one the district needs to learn more about the student and family experiences. Districts will need to determine how students and parents/caregivers are identified and if conversations happen individually or in a focus group. They will also need to identify who will lead the conversations, the anonymity of participants, the questions to ask, and how the information will be documented. The following pages have sample templates that can be used or changed.

HOW WILL WE GATHER STUDENT AND PARENT/CAREGIVER VOICES?

What is the student priority group?	
How will the students and families be identified?	
How many students and parents/caregivers will participate?	
How will the district ensure that the identified parents/ caregivers participate (timing, language, technology)?	
When, where, and how will the conversations be conducted?	
Who from the districts will conduct conversations?	
How will the conversations be conducted (individual or group)?	
Will participants be anonymous?	
What questions will be used?	
How will the data be documented?	

LEARNING FROM STUDENTS AND PARENTS/CAREGIVERS (DECEMBER - JANUARY)

Information gathering from the field has been ongoing and vital for districts as we navigate this complex year together. In doing so, districts have used many different strategies for gathering stakeholder feedback: surveys, focus groups, and public meetings, to name only a few. The suggestions for conversations below are meant to give an important perspective from a targeted group of students that could provide nuance and personal accounts of life as a student or caregiver in your district. Together with the other information gathering being done, a more complete picture can arise.

After the logistics have been decided, the conversations and learning from students and parents/stakeholders can begin. The information gathering stage is conducting the conversations and then collecting data from other sources to help identify and understand any issues and potential solutions. Of course, the person conducting the conversation is best to explain the purpose, review expectations, express gratitude, and answer any questions. After the conversations, other data sources can be identified to add context.

PRIORITY GROUP

Student Sample Conversation Starter Questions:

TOPIC	QUESTION	NOTES	OTHER DATA
General	What is one thing you like about school?		
General	What is one thing you wish you could change at school?		
Academics	Are you learning what you think you should be? Please explain.		
Academics	Do you feel connected to your teachers and other students? Please explain.		
Operations	Is your school offering meals, transportation, and clean classrooms/ bathrooms for you? Please explain.		
Family and Community	How often are you absent from school? Please explain.		
Communications	How do you learn about what is happening at school (announcements)?		
Health and Safety	Do you feel safe and healthy at school and extracurricular activities? Please explain.		
Technology	Do you have the technology, connectivity, and knowledge you need to be successful this year? Please explain.		

Parent/Caregiver Sample Conversation Starter Questions:

TOPIC	QUESTION	NOTES	OTHER DATA
General	What is one thing you think is working well at school this year?		
General	What is one suggestion you have for the district this year?		
Academics	Do you feel your student is learning the grade level requirements? Please explain.		
Academics	Does your student feel connected to his/her teachers and other students? Please explain.		
Operations	Is your student's school being cleaned, offering meals, and providing transportation to your satisfaction? Please explain.		
Family and Community	How often is your student absent? Please explain.		
Communications	How do you learn about what is happening at school (announcements)?		
Health and Safety	Does your student feel safe and healthy at school and extracurricular activities? Please explain.		
Technology	Does your student have the proper technology, connectivity, and knowledge to be successful this year? Please explain.		

STUDENT AND FAMILY EXPERIENCES STEP BACK MEETING

(January-February)

After the conversations have been conducted and other data collected, it will be time for a Step Back Meeting to find trends, challenges and opportunities for the identified priority students.

Agenda Starter for Step Back Meeting:

Objectives

- What is our focus priority group?
- Step back from the eyes of our priority students and accompanying data.
- Reflect on the overall picture and identify areas of focus.
- Prioritize the biggest problems to solve and outline action steps towards solving each one.

Goals

- Ensure we are clear on a priority group of students and goals.
- Consider the learnings from the conversations and data.
- Align on what is working and target improvement.
- Establish next steps.

Agenda (2 hours)

- Introductions and Framing (15 minutes)
- Clarify priority group and Goals for the year (15 minutes)
- Review of previous Stocktake and Step Back from [Considerations for Coherent and Equitable Instructional Systems](#) (can be completed individually and then compare notes or as a group) (20 minutes)
- Review informal conversations of priority students and parents/caregivers adding other important data (25 minutes)
- Prioritize focus issue(s) (20 minutes)
 - Student Family Experiences Reflection
 - What are we doing that is working?
 - What are we doing that is not working?
 - What are we not doing?
- Consider resources and decide next steps (25 minutes)
 - What next steps are we taking?
 - Do we want to have more conversations with students and families in this priority group?
 - Do we want to identify another priority group for future work?

HELPFUL RESOURCES FOR ACTION:

ACADEMICS:

NEW

- [Effective Distance Learning Strategies to Present Grade Level Content](#), by Instruction Partners
- [Effective Distance Learning Strategies to Make Thinking Visible](#), by Instruction Partners
- [Effective Distance Learning Strategies to Facilitate Student Discussion and Collaboration](#), by Instruction Partners
- [Publishers Information to Support Learning during COVID from Collaborative for Student Success](#)
- [2020–21 Priority Instructional Content in English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics from Student Achievement Partners](#)
- [The Principal’s Guide to Building Culturally Responsive Schools from the National Association of Elementary School Principal](#)
- [Mississippi Instructional Materials Matter](#) by MDE
- [Guidance for Accelerating Student Learning](#) by Instruction Partners
- [Distance learning guidelines for ELA and Math](#) by Instruction Partners
- [Sample Pacing Guide for Tier 1 Instruction](#) by Instruction Partners
- [Roles and Responsibilities for Supporting Instruction](#) by Instruction Partners
- [Key Considerations for Instructional Planning](#) by Instruction Partners
- [Teaching Comes First \(Assessment Whitepaper\)](#) by ANet
- [Principles for Choosing and Using Assessments](#) by ANet
- [Grading Guidance Across the Reentry Scenarios](#) by Instruction Partners
- [Example Collaborative Planning Expectations](#) by Instruction Partners
- [Sample Observation and Feedback Structures](#) by Instruction Partners
- [MDE Instructional Planning Guides for English Language Arts K-12 \(2020\)](#) by Instruction Partners
- [MDE Instructional Planning Guides for Mathematics K-12 \(2020\)](#) by Instruction Partners
- [MDE Instructional Planning Guides for Science K-12 \(2020\)](#) by Instruction Partners

HELPFUL RESOURCES FOR ACTION:

OPERATIONS:

- [Key Trade-Offs Calculator for Staffing and Facilities](#) by ERS
- [Tips for Planning and Facilitating Virtual Meetings](#) by TNTP
- [IDEA Schedule Decision Tree](#)
- [Day in the Life Of \(Simulated schedule from students and families perspectives\)](#) by CCSSO
- [The Economics of Transitioning from Remote to In-Person School](#) by ERS

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY:

NEW

- [Are kids showing up? Gathering Attendance Data](#), by Instruction Partners
- [Attendance and Assignment Completion Tracking](#), by Instruction Partners
- [Attendance Playbook: Smart Strategies for Reducing Chronic Absenteeism in the COVID Era](#), from FutureEd and Attendance Works
- [Virtual Home Visits](#) from Healthy Families America
- [Partnering with Families Virtually](#) by TNTP
- [MDE SEL draft standards](#), by MDE
- [MDE SEL resources](#), by MDE
- [Engaging Students and Families](#) by Flamboyant Foundation
- [Platforms for Gathering Stakeholder Feedback](#) by instruction Partners

COMMUNICATIONS:

NEW

- [Tips on Strengthening Communications with Families](#) by Instruction Partners
- [Talking Points](#) translation app
- [EASTalk](#) communication app by Family Engagement Lab

HELPFUL RESOURCES FOR ACTION:

HEALTH AND SAFETY:

NEW

- [Community-Care and Self-Care Strategies for Schools during the Coronavirus Crisis](#) from WestEd
- [Educator Resilience and Trauma-Informed Self-Care](#) from The Center for Great Teachers and Leaders
- [Reflecting on Personal SEL Skills](#) from Casel Schoolguide
- [Helping Children Cope with Changes Resulting from COVID-19](#) from National Association of School Psychologists
- [Defining Trauma-Informed Instruction and Social-Emotional Learning](#) by Instruction Partners
- [Feedback Survey to Staff](#) by Instruction Partners
- [Executive Summaries of Trauma-Informed and Social-Emotional Learning Research](#) by Instruction Partners
- [Staff Training on SEL and Trauma-Informed Instruction](#) by Instruction Partners

TECHNOLOGY:

- [Making Sure Every Child Has Home Internet Access](#), Edweek Blog
- [Distance Learning Platform Comparison Chart](#) by Instruction Partners