









**Maximizing Student
Engagement & Learning:
A Guide to High School
Planning During COVID-19**

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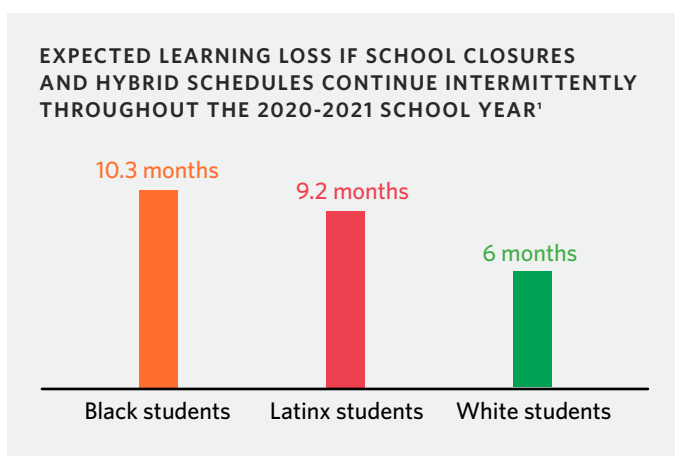
The abrupt, national pivot to remote learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic caused most schools to go into a reactive mode throughout the spring of 2020. Schools rightly focused on triaging and addressing students' most urgent needs through a time of deep crisis. As the pandemic continues into the fall, addressing these urgent needs and the trauma students and staff have experienced will continue to be an important priority. However, it will be critical to ensure students have deep and meaningful learning experiences despite the challenges of remote and hybrid learning.

This work is more pressing than ever, as the school closures present conditions that have exacerbated inequities already present in the US public school system. Students from historically marginalized backgrounds, including students of color and low income students, may be navigating additional challenges presented by remote learning that their privileged peers are not, such as lack of access to technology, employment as frontline workers, an interruption in social services, a distracting home environment, and higher COVID-19 hospitalization and death rates in their community.

An [analysis from McKinsey & Company](#) predicts that if school closures and hybrid schedules continue intermittently throughout the 2020-2021 school year, Black students will experience 10.3 months of learning loss and Latinx students will experience 9.2 months of learning loss as compared to 6 months of learning loss for white students. In addition, spring 2020 saw a series of high-profile instances of police brutality and racialized violence—including the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor—which may further contribute to a sense of anxiety and trauma, especially among Black students and educators.

It is critical to leverage this moment, which gives us an opportunity to examine and intentionally reconsider how we do school. This moment holds the potential for true innovation and can serve as an inflection point to consider and amplify intentional equity practices. Schools that embrace this charge have the opportunity to turn the tide of widening inequity by figuring out what is working for students, doubling down on those practices, and eliminating what is not serving students.

Springpoint developed this publication to guide the support we are providing to our school partners as they plan for remote or hybrid learning in fall 2020. To gather



best practices from the field, we interviewed school, district, and network leaders from around the country to discover what innovative schools did to maximize and learn from the spring remote learning period.

We believe that this tool will resonate with practitioners across the country who are facing similar challenges and opportunities, which is why we have released it more widely in the hope that it can support others in crafting learning environments and experiences that cultivate student engagement and learning. This is a living document that will evolve as our team and our partners learn more in the planning and implementation of remote and hybrid learning. We hope this frame helps guide your summer planning as we approach an uncertain 2020-2021 school year.

“To gather best practices from the field, we interviewed school, district, and network leaders from around the country to discover what innovative schools did to maximize and learn from the spring remote learning period.”

Guiding Principles

As many educators have always known, student engagement is the “lead domino” that ensures learning has an opportunity to take root. Further, student agency is exponentially more critical to the success of remote learning. More than ever, educators need to design learning experiences that support student success by ensuring students feel that the work they are asked to do is purposeful and connected to their values, that they are capable of mastering the learning they are asked to do, and that they have the skills to navigate meaningful work even when they are confused or overwhelmed. Once students experience success, they will hunger for more and gradually take on increasingly rich and meaningful learning.

To catalyze students' initial experience with success—and to set them up for sustained engagement and deeper learning—we suggest school leaders:

Narrow the focus.

Figure out and amplify that which is most important by articulating the core components of your programs that most directly and effectively help realize your school's mission. Support your staff in narrowing the focus of their work with students—by empowering them to do fewer things better—in order to achieve these priorities. For teachers, this might mean narrowing down the number of competencies, units, or projects they engage students in this fall. For advisors, this might mean choosing a few key metrics they track and regularly conference with students about. Narrowing the scope will allow staff and students to experience small wins that will compound success.

Keep it simple.

Return to your school's mission and select a small number of priorities that will guide your decisions and actions as a school community. Use them to help staff understand what to focus on in their role and what to deprioritize. Use them to help students and their families/supporters understand what is expected of them and why. Use them to help your community focus on the most important things.

Lower the barriers to entry.

Students will need to further develop skills like time management and digital literacy in order to own their own learning in a remote or hybrid setting. Students will also need multiple entry points into learning experiences so that, wherever they are in the development of those skills, they will be able to engage. Support your staff in teaching these skills and structuring learning experiences so that students can enter where they are and thrive.

Address equity.

As noted above, this unprecedented time has amplified existing inequities, particularly for underserved students. As you and your team work to address equity issues—both those that existed for years, as well as those created by the pandemic—we encourage you to think expansively about the range of equity issues your students might face, from access to fundamentals like food, housing, and technology to learning losses and trauma.

Individualize.

More than ever, students will need regular, personalized one-on-one coaching and feedback. True differentiation and personalization may be easier in a remote learning context, since it offers more fluid meeting structures, fewer classroom management challenges, and requires less reactive work for leaders and teachers. The time and energy not expended in these areas can be intentionally repurposed for one-on-one or small group coaching.



Areas of Practice: Descriptions

As we interviewed leaders, six areas of practice emerged as key levers for schools to prioritize in their planning. Each section below dives deeper into each areas of practice, outlining a set of recommendations alongside accompanying questions that can guide planning efforts and help practitioners ensure that key elements of remote or hybrid learning are in place.



Teaching & Learning

Schools successfully supporting remote learning are figuring out how to design learning experiences that prioritize the most critical competencies and content, and match modalities with outcomes to ensure deep engagement and opportunities for mastery.

WHY IT MATTERS

Students will likely experience periods of remote learning this coming school year. Teaching and learning will have to adapt to ensure students have rich learning experiences that strategically leverage time, resources, and roles to support their success.



Student Supports

Schools successfully supporting remote learning are ensuring that students regularly connect with a primary person for social-emotional, academic, and other support.

WHY IT MATTERS

Connecting with students is even more critical during this challenging time and provides an essential foundation for supporting students in making needed academic progress that can ensure they do not experience significant learning loss.



Culture & Connection

Schools successfully supporting remote learning have made it a priority to adapt the highest impact pieces of their school culture to the remote environment.

WHY IT MATTERS

Students need to feel connected to their school community to bolster both their social-emotional wellness and motivation to participate in learning.



Leadership

Schools successfully supporting remote learning are leveraging a handful of mindsets and actions to create a remote culture where students and staff are successful.

WHY IT MATTERS

Students, staff, and the rest of the school community look to their school leader to provide clarity about priorities, to look ahead, and to anticipate and plan for what is coming next—especially in uncertain times.



Operations

Schools successfully supporting remote learning are defining the most important policies that have to shift, selecting a few common technical platforms and protocols, refining staff roles, and adjusting their schedule to support remote learning.

WHY IT MATTERS

Students, teachers, and all other members of the school community need to know what is expected of them and how to meet those expectations within the school's structures.



Continuous Improvement

Schools successfully supporting remote learning collect and analyze data and solicit stakeholder feedback, which help drive reflection and iteration cycles that consider short- and long-term implications.

WHY IT MATTERS

Reflection and iteration cycles can surface immediate shifts required by these times and help schools identify more permanent changes to the school model that will better serve students.

School Readiness Checklist

This section outlines a series of discrete recommendations along with accompanying readiness questions to help guide your planning process. You can download or copy this [Google Doc](#) for easy editing access. We have also included a [printable tool](#) in the appendix that you can use to write out your responses to each question and sketch out any further ideas and necessary steps.



Teaching & Learning

RECOMMENDATIONS

⊗ **Narrow the focus for students.**

Concentrate students on fewer assignments at any given time and consider shortening unit and grading cycles. Be sure to maintain high expectations in all assignments and touchpoints. Small wins will eventually lead to larger successes when critical aspects of student learning are prioritized, as opposed to trying to focus on too many things and stretching students and staff too thin. (For more about narrowing the focus see page 2).

⊗ **Increase opportunities for student success.**

According to research, moderately difficult tasks that are within students' reach have the most utility. When students feel/see/experience success in small increments, they are likely to lean in to do more.

READINESS QUESTIONS

How many assignments/projects at a given time are your students being asked to complete?

Has your team identified the highest-priority skills and content students need? Have you ensured that courses are more narrowly focused on these priority areas?

Is all instruction and assessment focused on these highly prioritized—and ideally shared—set of skills?

Have you shortened the length of units/grading cycles?

Are assignments and projects an appropriate lift for students to complete remotely and/or independently (i.e., not overwhelming yet not excessively simple)?

Do students feel like they can do the work and are they actively doing it?

RECOMMENDATIONS

⊗ **Narrow the focus for teachers.**

Ensure that teachers can focus on building relationships with students, creating interesting learning experiences, and providing actionable, useful feedback to students.

⊗ **Infuse student learning with purpose and meaning.**

Curriculum should connect to student values, emphasize applicable skills, and center on topics that are relevant to students' current context as a means of magnifying engagement.

⊗ **Provide regular, actionable feedback to students.**

Leverage synchronous and asynchronous feedback tools, focusing on short cycles of individualized and bite-sized feedback.

⊗ **Reward students for effort, growth, and mastery.**

With a narrow set of prioritized competencies or skills, students have more opportunities to demonstrate growth and mastery. Be sure to set up practices that recognize and celebrate successes to expand student engagement and effort.

READINESS QUESTIONS

Do you have curricula for each course? Is it all accessible online?

Regarding curricula, what gaps and holes do you have? Where might you need to develop a plan?

What are teachers being told to prioritize in terms of content and skills? Have you updated rubrics to reflect that?

Have you minimized busy work for teachers and leveraged their schedules to focus on instruction and relationship building? Have you differentiated teacher roles such that some teachers spend more time on developing curriculum and others spend more time on instruction?

Are assessments authentic and focused on topics that are meaningful to students?

Have you provided the curriculum team with flexibility and training to create or adapt curriculum in ways that will ensure relevance?

Do learning experiences provide a window to the world as well as a mirror for students' lived experiences?

How are you training and supporting teachers to provide feedback remotely?

What remote feedback structures are you modeling for teachers?

How are students being formally assessed?

Is there an opportunity to narrow the focus of assessment so that students are recursively practicing and mastering prioritized skills?

RECOMMENDATIONS

⊗ **Use data to leverage opportunities for differentiation.**

Teachers who use weekly data around mastery of skills and establish protocols, such as our [Looking At Student Work](#) (LASW) protocol, can leverage data to both differentiate curriculum planning and individualize student coaching.

⊗ **Pair modalities with purpose.**

When curriculum is designed to blend synchronous and asynchronous structures then schools will see more engagement, flexibility, and efficacy. By focusing asynchronous lessons on content and skill acquisition, “live” time can be used more dynamically (e.g., collective meaning making, small or large group discussions, coaching students and presenting work for feedback or exhibition, etc.)

READINESS QUESTIONS

What structures are in place to support teacher analysis of student mastery of skills?

Have you set up regular data protocols and touchpoints (e.g., LASW meetings)?

How are teachers analyzing trends arising from their feedback and LASW meeting? How are they using those insights in their planning work?

What is your school’s philosophy about how synchronous remote learning time should be used versus asynchronous learning time? What data informs that philosophy?

Have you intentionally matched the modality to the purpose? (e.g., video conferencing for discussions and feedback). Do modalities effectively maximize engagement?

What guidance and professional learning will support teachers as they design courses that blend synchronous and asynchronous elements?

Student Supports

RECOMMENDATIONS

⊗ Establish a primary person system.

This system should include small adult-to-student ratios where the primary person is charged with building trusting relationships with students, keeping them connected to the school community, and providing them with effective academic case conferencing in order to ensure student progress and connectivity.

All of the schools Springpoint interviewed pointed to a strong primary person/advisory model as the structure that engaged students during the remote learning transition period. Students who feel supported by and connected to their primary person, often referred to as an “advisor,” can more easily access the support they need to engage in remote school and more regularly participate in synchronous and asynchronous learning activities. (For more information about designing advisory systems, please see Springpoint’s [advisory case studies](#).)

⊗ Establish norms for effective case conferencing.

Norms should help to ensure that conversations are specific, concrete and bite-sized; help students connect their work to their personal vision of success and long-term goals; foster a sense of belonging; and normalize struggle.

Every student is having their own experience with remote learning. Some students might appreciate having this time to set their own schedule while others need help prioritizing and sequencing work time. Rather than assume the experience of each student in their caseload, advisors need to regularly check in with students and review academic data to identify where increased support is needed.

This targeted one-on-one support should help students value the work they’re doing, believe they can do it, and access social emotional support to navigate challenges.

READINESS QUESTIONS

Have you established advisors’ responsibilities and defined what those mean in a remote/hybrid setting?

Do advisors understand the core outcomes of their role (e.g., advisees will pass 80% of courses; 90% of advisees will regularly engage advisory activities, etc.)?

What expectations have you set for the type of support advisors should provide in whole-group advisory versus one-on-one check ins?

What are the expectations for advisors to balance their time spent on individual/whole group check ins?

How have you assigned advisory groups? Have you considered how to leverage existing relationships to create effective groupings?

How do advisors leverage trauma-informed practices to support students?

Have you articulated a clear and specific vision for case conferencing? Is it codified on paper?

Are protocols differentiated for diverse student needs? How/when will you train your team on this vision?

What routines and schedules will achieve the vision for effective case conferencing? What are the weekly or bi-weekly components of managing both case conferencing and the primary person system? How will advisors be supported in assessing case conferencing effectiveness and improving their practice?

What structures will support teachers, advisors, and other stakeholders in sharing information regarding specific students, as needed?

What structures exist outside of advisory to support students’ needs (e.g., SPED services, ELL services, social work support, etc.) and how do advisors connect students to these resources?

RECOMMENDATIONS

⊗ **Track student data to identify which students need what support.**

Regularly reviewing student data will highlight the range of student needs and allow your school to provide targeted, individualized support.

The following types of data are important to consider tracking in a remote or hybrid setting.

- Student work completion.
- Synchronous learning experience attendance (e.g., Zoom class attendance).
- Frequency of student communication with advisors and/or teachers.
- Student survey results.
- Course completion.
- Mastery of skills and/or GPA.

⊗ **Empower advisors to differentiate support based on individual students' needs.**

One of the opportunities in remote or hybrid learning schedules is the ability to provide students with differentiated check ins, both in terms of content and frequency. Advisors should use data to help them determine individual students' needs, track the impact of their support, and differentiate student support accordingly (e.g., daily check ins for a few students, twice weekly check ins for others, once weekly check ins for most, etc).

⊗ **Rely on the primary person as the main contact for communication to families supporters about community events and their progress.**

Avoid inundating students' families/supporters as that may make it overwhelming to engage. Consider strategically funneling communication through students' advisors in an attempt to streamline outreach from the school. Advisors can be responsible for sharing expectations around what students should be doing and how they are progressing (e.g., progress within a course, on track to graduation, etc.).

READINESS QUESTIONS

What structures have you created for advisors to review qualitative and quantitative data about their assigned group of students?

Have you identified what pieces of schoolwide data (e.g., class participation, assignments completion, etc.) you will regularly track to monitor which students need additional support or services?

Do you have a team regularly meeting to review that data, assess which students need additional support, make a plan for providing that support, and follow up on the results?

How are you disaggregating and analyzing this data to understand if equity gaps exist and, if they do exist, which students are impacted? How are you adjusting your student support practices to close equity gaps?

Have you developed a bank of advisor strategies for reaching out to and supporting students?

How will advisors track the strategies of support they provide each student and the efficacy of those strategies?

What is your school's communication plan for different types of communication (e.g., whole school announcements, updates on individual students' progress, etc.)?

What communication can be funneled through advisory?

What communication roles have been developed for family engagement coordinators, teachers, college advisors, etc.? When and how do they reach out directly to students' families/supporters?

Culture & Connection

RECOMMENDATIONS

⊗ **Figure out what it is that makes your school special to students.**

Use that “secret sauce” to figure out the school-wide/grade-level remote culture structures you will commit to as a school, aligned to your values.

Many students feel disconnected from school during remote learning, so efforts to make school present in their lives are critical to ensuring students feel connected to a robust community that cares about them.

⊗ **Commit to a small number of simple and consistent schoolwide strategies for fostering community.**

Simple, consistent touchpoints are critical when students and staff alike have so many responsibilities on their plates. Find bite-sized remote activities that produce a similar feeling as a hallway high five, such as texting a student to say congratulations or moving morning meetings to a livestream and including student shout outs.

READINESS QUESTIONS

What are the key aspects of your school’s in-person culture that must be preserved in a remote or hybrid setting?

What is your school’s philosophy about students’ connection to your school community?

How does this philosophy manifest in guiding principles/expectations?

How are these guiding principles/expectations being monitored/assessed?

How have you included students in designing and implementing these school culture structures? Are they reflective of your students’ identities?

What small strategies/touchpoints will you commit to regularly doing as a school community? Who will engage in these? (*Keep in mind the overarching goal to narrow the focus for teachers and advisors and prioritize their key responsibilities.*)

How can you engage students and staff in creating and implementing these strategies for fostering community?

How will you communicate these commitments to students, families, and staff?

RECOMMENDATIONS

⊗ **Make teacher-student connections a priority.**

Our research shows teachers should be focused on relationships with students, making learning interesting, and providing feedback to students. We recommend simplifying the playbook for them by clearly differentiating between regular practices that will deepen relationships with students versus what practices can be deprioritized or let go altogether. Be sure to make outreach expectations clear.

⊗ **Make student-student connections a priority.**

Peer relationships help keep students connected to school so it is important to intentionally create opportunities for them to support and uplift each other. Schools have seen success creating structures that enable students to connect socially and support each other through this time.

⊗ **Save showstopper strategies for rites of passage.**

Time is at a premium during periods of remote and hybrid learning. Therefore, complex and time-consuming strategies that build culture and connection are best leveraged as a small number of significant rites of passage.

READINESS QUESTIONS

How do you want your school's philosophy about culture and connection to express itself in teacher-student relationships?

What expectations do you have of teachers for connecting with students? How is success defined? *(Keep in mind the goal to narrow roles and responsibilities to narrow the focus for teachers and advisors)*

How will these expectations be communicated to teachers?

How will these expectations be balanced with teachers' other responsibilities?

What do you want peer-peer relationships to look like in a remote/hybrid setting?

What student leadership structures exist in your school that might be translated to a remote environment?

Have you engaged students in developing structures to support student-student relationships?

What are the most critical rites of passage at your school? Which might you need to let go of?

How were these rites of passage celebrated in person?

What elements and/or outcomes of those celebrations do you want to preserve?

How might these celebrations be moved to a remote/socially distanced structure?

How are you harnessing student, family, and teacher input to conceptualize and realize new ways to celebrate these rites of passage?

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ⊗ **Define what is most important; bring everything back to the mission and ardently prioritize.**

Consistently and purposefully return to your mission statement, portrait of a graduate, etc. to identify a small number of priorities that will guide decisions. Ground decisions and communication to stakeholders in these priorities.

- ⊗ **Shift constraining mindsets about what is lost in a remote environment to help stakeholders imagine what can be gained.**

Stakeholders look to school leaders to see the positives and the possibilities that come with great challenges. As one leader told us, "The heaviest lift was in the beginning. It really was me getting over myself and saying, 'Our school isn't the brick and mortar building. We are the school.'"

- ⊗ **Distribute leadership and focus some of your own capacity on removing obstacles for your staff.**

Strategically distributing leadership allows you to harness the creativity of many minds and empower staff to co-create elements of your school.

READINESS QUESTIONS

What three to five elements of your mission should be prioritized during remote learning?

What is your plan for continuously reminding stakeholders of the need to simplify and focus on these prioritized aspects of the school's mission?

How will you use these priorities to help your community understand what success looks like?

How are you centering equity as a value and a practice? How are these values and practices used to ensure that outcomes are equitable across all student demographic groups?

How are you seeking out information about how your students, families, and staff are feeling about remote learning? How are you reflecting on your own feelings?

What opportunities are you and your stakeholders most excited about?

How are you regularly communicating to your stakeholders about the opportunities that this time presents?

What existing leadership structures exist in your school?

What support do these leaders need from you to own their piece of the work? How will you communicate clearly with them about this?

Are there any gaps? Who might you tap to step into leadership roles to address these gaps?

How are you engaging students and families in leadership opportunities?

RECOMMENDATIONS

⊗ **Help staff re-envision their role and create opportunities for success in the new role.**

Teachers are deeply tied to the roles they understood prior to the pandemic; many have expressed feeling lost in remote learning. Leaders have seen a morale boost when they have supported teachers in rethinking their role, redefining what success looks like, and providing opportunities for teachers to feel success.

⊗ **Pivot to remote instructional leadership.**

With a growth mindset, continue observing, providing feedback, and conducting LASW meetings.

⊗ **Understand your new context and new ideas in the field.**

Set aside time to learn and develop a deep knowledge base to understand what is going on in your school and seek to mine new ideas from other schools.

READINESS QUESTIONS

How did your school define teacher success prior to the pandemic? Other staff roles? (e.g., counselors, advisors, etc.)

What core principles of success are still true in a remote setting? What's different?

How might you create and communicate new measures of success?

What instructional feedback methods have you designed for remote learning?

Have you continued the facilitation of LASW meetings and re-trained your staff for this new context?

Have you identified and leveraged teachers who are finding success with remote instruction and/or student engagement?

Have you interviewed students and families about their experience? How are you using the data from these interviews? Are you regularly assessing whose voices have or have not been heard to ensure the rich diversity of perspectives in your school informs major decisions?

Have you experimented with remote learning strategies yourself to understand and to model them?

How are you creating the time and space to connect with others so you can learn about new ideas and best practices externally?



Operations

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ⊗ **Use data collected from students and families, as well as data collected this spring, to create a schedule that can work for all students' circumstances.**

A hybrid of both synchronous and asynchronous options are necessary for student engagement. Students all have different experiences—from their personal circumstances to their learning preferences. Ensure that the schoolwide schedule provides multiple entry points that honor students' home and work lives and gives students agency over how they participate.

Time for advisory and individualized support should be prioritized and consistent. Students and families should know exactly what the schedule requires and how to locate assignments and instructions for each class.

- ⊗ **Retain full staff and departmental meetings.**

Opportunities for connection, community, and collaboration are as important for teachers and staff as they are for students. Be creative about how this time is spent but do not stop holding this time.

READINESS QUESTIONS

Have you created a schedule that allows for synchronous and asynchronous learning in each course?

How has the schedule been communicated to teachers and reinforced in the grade team/content team/coaching structures?

Does your schedule have designated time for advisory/small group community check-ins/activities?

When do teachers have time in their schedules to meet with students?

Do students have 24/7 access to content?

Are all students clear about what counts as attendance? How are you tracking it?

How does the schedule ensure students access essential services, such as special education or English Language Learner supports?

What is your staff/department meeting structure?

How are you using these structures to plan for connection, community, and collaboration?

What structures have you created or maintained to share cross-departmental knowledge and best practices?

RECOMMENDATIONS

⊗ **Be very selective with which platforms are used and keep them consistent from class to class.**

Asking students and families to figure out how to navigate a number of different platforms adds challenges and creates barriers to access. (This is less relevant if significant time during the school year was dedicated to imparting digital literacy).

⊗ **Prioritize redesigning your grading policy to reward mastery and effort.**

Remote learning creates an opportunity to drill down on the absolute necessities. The “why” behind each grade matters so much more in a remote context and should be revisited often. Hold students to the same standard for rigor but simplify expectations for completing assignments.

⊗ **Rewrite teacher and staff expectations.**

All adult roles change in remote learning. Each staff member will need different guidance on how they should adjust their time and what they should expect from themselves and their students.

⊗ **Develop a streamlined communications strategy that carefully considers the volume of external communications going to students, families, and staff.**

Parents and guardians are receiving a high volume of communications from school-based staff and local/state government officials. Creating a strategy for outreach will help simplify the messages parents and guardians are sorting through and ensure more effective communication.

READINESS QUESTIONS

Are classrooms simple enough to navigate such that students’ families/supporters could be taught how to support their students?

How many platforms and/or tools are being used currently? More than three or four? Is there any system for managing usage?

What state or local expectations do you need to meet with your grading policy?

Do students have opportunities to self-assess?

Do students understand how they are being graded?

Have teachers been clear about revising what skills need to be demonstrated and what requirements are? *(This is especially relevant for larger assignments like capstone projects.)*

How have staff roles changed in remote learning?

How have you thought about staff roles and how they align with your school’s remote learning philosophy?

What efforts have you made to communicate and standardize those changes?

Is there a system for sending out communications to students and families?

Are you or any one on your staff monitoring communications to families from the district/state?

Is there a primary contact person assigned to each student?

∞ Continuous Improvement

RECOMMENDATIONS

⊗ Engage students in feedback cycles.

Provide regular and diverse opportunities for students to both share their experience with remote learning and contribute ideas for future planning. (For sample survey questions, see Panorama Education's [Back-to-School Surveys](#).)

⊗ Engage students' families/supporters in feedback cycles.

Support families/supporters by providing regular communication and prioritize collecting feedback from them. (For sample survey questions, see Panorama Education's [Back-to-School Surveys](#).)

⊗ Use data and stakeholder feedback to inform rapid iteration.

Schedule regular time for continuous improvement and use available data and stakeholder feedback with an inquiry lens to inform the short- and long-term design process.

⊗ Schedule time to codify lessons learned for future planning.

View this time as an opportunity for longer term shifts in school design and set aside periodic pause points for reflection.

READINESS QUESTIONS

What methods are you employing to invite feedback from students?

Have you created feedback structures that are regularly shared and accessible via text, email, and your website?

Have you created other methods of student engagement (e.g., town halls, small focus groups, one-on-one conversations)?

How are you making sure that you hear from a diverse range of students to understand multiple perspectives?

Have you created training materials for families/supporters?

Have you created feedback structures that are regularly shared and accessible via text, email, and your website?

How are you making sure that you hear from a diverse range of families/supporters to understand multiple perspectives?

How are you creating the processes and mechanisms to foster and clearly name what you and your team are learning internally?

What regular meetings/structures are in place to review data trends at a high level?

What protocols are helping you analyze and leverage data to inform rapid iteration?

What are your big picture takeaways about what is and is not working for students, regardless of context?

Are there long-term implications you have already identified?

How are you capturing and codifying lessons learned as you go?

Additional Resources

We hope that this guide can support you in your school design and planning work. In addition to this guide, we have seen several resources, directories, and tools from fellow education organizations that can also serve to support fall planning:

- ⊗ CASEL's [Reunite, Renew, and Thrive: Social and Emotional Learning \(SEL\) Roadmap for Reopening School](#)
- ⊗ Bellwether's [External COVID-19 Resource](#)
- ⊗ Transcend Education's [Library of School Design Examples and Resources](#)
- ⊗ The Learning Accelerator's [Always Ready for Learning Resource Bank](#)
- ⊗ New Vision for Public School's [Remote Teaching and Learning Website](#)
- ⊗ Catalyst:Ed's [Roadmap for Schools and Systems](#)
- ⊗ New Leaders' free, asynchronous [Virtual Leadership Academy](#)

We are always interested to learn more about how great schools are supporting their students and we constantly strive to understand how we might enhance our resources and offerings. Please reach out to us with any questions, thoughts, ideas, or feedback: info@SpringpointSchools.org. We look forward to continuing to hone our expertise and are glad to keep sharing our learnings and resources, especially during these challenging and uncertain times.

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Mariela Graham, Principal
High School of Arts and Technology

Margaret Green, Principal
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Dr. Chris Hanks, Principal
Grand Rapids Public Museum School

Benjamin Helfat, Headmaster
Boston Adult Technical Academy (BATA)

Derek Jensen, Coordinator
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Kristen Kelly, Principal
John Adams College and Career Academy

Ethan Knecht, Assistant Principal
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Chris Lehmann, Founding Principal/CEP
Science Leadership Academy Schools

Adrienne Level, Program Director
Boston Day and Evening Academy

Stephen Mahoney, Principal
Holyoke High School

Patrick McGillicuddy, Principal
East Brooklyn Community High School

Jon Minton, Principal
Sherrie Nelson, Assistant Principal
Elizabethton High School

David Nitkin, Partner
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Geoffrey Schmidt, Engagement Director & Design Leader
Holyoke Public Schools, Opportunity Academy

Ron Schmidt, Principal
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Kelly Silva, Design Leader
Brockton Public Schools

Barry Sommer, Director of Advancement
Lindsay Unified School District

Chris Terrill, Executive Director
Crosstown High School

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The Urban Assembly School for Emergency Management

Merilee Valentino, Principal
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Norma Vega, Principal
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Jessica Waters, Executive Director
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Kristin Wiedmaier, Principal
William Smith High School

Jen Wisniewski, Walkabout Advisor & Teacher
Jefferson County Open School

Sara Yuen, Principal
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Greg Zimdahl, Teacher Leader
The Young Womens' Leadership School of Astoria

Appendix: Printable School Readiness Checklist

In this section, you will find a printable version of the checklist that you can use to write out your responses to each question and sketch out any further ideas and necessary steps.

⊗ **Narrow the focus for students.**

Concentrate students on fewer assignments at any given time and consider shortening unit and grading cycles. Be sure to maintain high expectations in all assignments and touchpoints. Small wins will eventually lead to larger successes when critical aspects of student learning are prioritized, as opposed to trying to focus on too many things and stretching students and staff too thin. (For more about narrowing the focus see page 2).

READINESS QUESTIONS

How many assignments/projects at a given time are your students being asked to complete?

Has your team identified the highest-priority skills and content students need? Have you ensured that courses are more narrowly focused on these priority areas?

Is all instruction and assessment focused on these highly prioritized—and ideally shared—set of skills?

Have you shortened the length of units/ grading cycles?

⊗ **Increase opportunities for student success.**

According to research, moderately difficult tasks that are within students' reach have the most utility. When students feel/see/experience success in small increments, they are likely to lean in to do more.

READINESS QUESTIONS

Are assignments and projects an appropriate lift for students to complete remotely and/or independently (i.e., not overwhelming yet not excessively simple)?

Do students feel like they can do the work and are they actively doing it?

⊗ **Narrow the focus for teachers.**

Ensure that teachers can focus on building relationships with students, creating interesting learning experiences, and providing actionable, useful feedback to students.

READINESS QUESTIONS

Do you have curricula for each course? Is it all accessible online?

Regarding curricula, what gaps and holes do you have? Where might you need to develop a plan?

What are teachers being told to prioritize in terms of content and skills? Have you updated rubrics to reflect that?

Have you minimized busy work for teachers and leveraged their schedules to focus on instruction and relationship building? Have you differentiated teacher roles such that some teachers spend more time on developing curriculum and others spend more time on instruction?

⊗ **Infuse student learning with purpose and meaning.**

Curriculum should connect to student values, emphasize applicable skills, and center on topics that are relevant to students' current context as a means of magnifying engagement.

READINESS QUESTIONS

Are assessments authentic and focused on topics that are meaningful to students?

Have you provided the curriculum team with flexibility and training to create or adapt curriculum in ways that will ensure relevance?

CONTINUED

Do learning experiences provide a window to the world as well as a mirror for students' lived experiences?

⊗ **Provide regular, actionable feedback to students.**

Leverage synchronous and asynchronous feedback tools, focusing on short cycles of individualized and bite-sized feedback.

READINESS QUESTIONS

How are you training and supporting teachers to provide feedback remotely?

What remote feedback structures are you modeling for teachers?

⊗ **Reward students for effort, growth, and mastery.**

With a narrow set of prioritized competencies or skills, students have more opportunities to demonstrate growth and mastery. Be sure to set up practices that recognize and celebrate successes to expand student engagement and effort.

READINESS QUESTIONS

How are students being formally assessed?

Is there an opportunity to narrow the focus of assessment so that students are recursively practicing and mastering prioritized skills?

Use data to leverage opportunities for differentiation.

Teachers who use weekly data around mastery of skills and establish protocols, such as our [Looking At Student Work](#) (LASW) protocol, can leverage data to both differentiate curriculum planning and individualize student coaching.

READINESS QUESTIONS

What structures are in place to support teacher analysis of student mastery of skills?

Have you set up regular data protocols and touchpoints (e.g., LASW meetings)?

How are teachers analyzing trends arising from their feedback and LASW meeting? How are they using those insights in their planning work?

Pair modalities with purpose.

When curriculum is designed to blend synchronous and asynchronous structures then schools will see more engagement, flexibility, and efficacy. By focusing asynchronous lessons on content and skill acquisition, “live” time can be used more dynamically (e.g., collective meaning making, small or large group discussions, coaching students and presenting work for feedback or exhibition, etc.)

READINESS QUESTIONS

What is your school’s philosophy about how synchronous remote learning time should be used versus asynchronous learning time? What data informs that philosophy?

Have you intentionally matched the modality to the purpose? (e.g., video conferencing for discussions and feedback). Do modalities effectively maximize engagement?

What guidance and professional learning will support teachers as they design courses that blend synchronous and asynchronous elements?

Establish a primary person system

This system should include small adult-to-student ratios where the primary person is charged with building trusting relationships with students, keeping them connected to the school community, and providing them with effective academic case conferencing in order to ensure student progress and connectivity.

All of the schools Springpoint interviewed pointed to a strong primary person/advisory model as the structure that engaged students during the remote learning transition period. Students who feel supported by and connected to their primary person, often referred to as an “advisor,” can more easily access the support they need to engage in remote school and more regularly participate in synchronous and asynchronous learning activities. (For more information about designing advisory systems, please see Springpoint’s [advisory case studies](#).)

Have you established advisors’ responsibilities and defined what those mean in a remote/hybrid setting?

Do advisors understand the core outcomes of their role (e.g., advisees will pass 80% of courses; 90% of advisees will regularly engage advisory activities, etc.)?

What expectations have you set for the type of support advisors should provide in whole-group advisory versus one-on-one check ins?

What are the expectations for advisors to balance their time spent on individual/whole group check ins?

How have you assigned advisory groups? Have you considered how to leverage existing relationships to create effective groupings?

How do advisors leverage trauma-informed practices to support students?

Establish norms for effective case conferencing.

Norms should help to ensure that conversations are specific, concrete and bite-sized; help students connect their work to their personal vision of success and long-term goals; foster a sense of belonging; and normalize struggle.

Every student is having their own experience with remote learning. Some students might appreciate having this time to set their own schedule while others might have increased responsibilities at home that are immediate and need help prioritizing and sequencing their work time.

Rather than assume the experience of each student in their caseload, advisors need to regularly check in with students about their experience as well as review students' academic data to identify which students need increased support. This targeted one-on-one support should focus on supporting students to value the work they're doing, believe they can do it, and access social-emotional support to navigate challenges.

Have you articulated a clear and specific vision for case conferencing? Is it codified on paper?

Are these protocols differentiated for different types of student needs? How/when will you train your team on this vision?

What routines do you need build into their schedule to ensure that the vision for effective case conferencing is achieved? What are the key, weekly or bi-weekly components of managing case conferencing and the primary person system? How will advisors be supported in assessing the effectiveness of their conferencing with students and improving their practice?

What structures will support teachers, advisors, and other stakeholders in sharing information regarding specific students, as needed?

What structures exist outside of advisory to support students' needs (e.g., SPED services, ELL services, social work support, etc.) and how do advisors connect students to these resources?

Track student data to identify which students need what support.

Regularly reviewing student data will highlight the range of student needs and allow your school to provide targeted, individualized support. The following types of data are important to consider tracking in a remote or hybrid setting.

- Student work completion.
- Synchronous learning experience attendance (e.g., Zoom class attendance).
- Frequency of student communication with advisors and/or teachers.
- Student survey results.
- Course completion.
- Mastery of skills and/or GPA.

What structures have you created for advisors to review qualitative and quantitative data about their assigned group of students?

Have you identified what pieces of schoolwide data (e.g., class participation, assignments completion, etc.) you will regularly track to monitor which students need additional support or services?

Do you have a team regularly meeting to review that data, assess which students need additional support, make a plan for providing that support, and follow up on the results?

How are you disaggregating and analyzing this data to understand if equity gaps exist and, if they do exist, which students are impacted? How are you adjusting your student support practices to close equity gaps?

⊗ **Empower advisors to differentiate support based on individual students' needs.**

One of the opportunities in remote or hybrid learning schedules is the ability to provide students with differentiated check ins, both in terms of content and frequency. Advisors should use data to help them determine individual students' needs, track the impact of their support, and differentiate student support accordingly (e.g., daily check ins for a few students, twice weekly check ins for others, once weekly check ins for most, etc).

READINESS QUESTIONS

Have you developed a bank of advisor strategies for reaching out to and supporting students?

How will advisors track the strategies of support they provide each student and the efficacy of those strategies?

⊗ **Rely on the primary person as the main contact for communication to families supporters about community events and their progress.**

Avoid inundating students' families/supporters as that may make it overwhelming to engage. Consider strategically funneling communication through students' advisors in an attempt to streamline outreach from the school. Advisors can be responsible for sharing expectations around what students should be doing and how they are progressing (e.g., progress within a course, on track to graduation, etc.).

READINESS QUESTIONS

What is your school's communication plan for different types of communication (e.g., whole school announcements, updates on individual students' progress, etc.)?

What communication can be funneled through advisory?

What communication roles have been developed for family engagement coordinators, teachers, college advisors, etc.? When and how do they reach out directly to students' families/supporters?

Culture & Connection

🕒 Figure out what it is that makes your school special to students.

Use that “secret sauce” to figure out the schoolwide/grade-level remote culture structures you will commit to as a school, aligned to your values.

Many students feel disconnected from school during remote learning, so efforts to make school present in their lives are critical to ensuring students feel connected to a robust community that cares about them.

What are the key aspects of your school’s in-person culture that must be preserved in a remote or hybrid setting?

What is your school’s philosophy about students’ connection to your school community?

How does this philosophy manifest in guiding principles/expectations?

How are these guiding principles/expectations being monitored/assessed?

How have you included students in designing and implementing these school culture structures?
Are they reflective of your students’ identities?

⊗ **Commit to a small number of simple and consistent schoolwide strategies for fostering community.**

Simple, consistent touchpoints are critical when students and staff alike have so many responsibilities on their plates. Find bite-sized remote activities that produce a similar feeling as a hallway high five, such as texting a student to say congratulations or moving morning meetings to a livestream and including student shout outs.

What small strategies/touchpoints will you commit to regularly doing as a school community? Who will engage in these? *(Keep in mind the overarching goal to narrow the focus for teachers and advisors and prioritize their key responsibilities.)*

READINESS QUESTIONS

How can you engage students and staff in creating and implementing these strategies for fostering community?

How will you communicate these commitments to students, families, and staff?

⊗ **Make teacher-student connections a priority.**

Our research shows teachers should be focused on relationships with students, making learning interesting, and providing feedback to students. We recommend simplifying the playbook for them by clearly differentiating between regular practices that will deepen relationships with students versus what practices can be deprioritized or let go altogether. Be sure to make outreach expectations clear.

How do you want your school's philosophy about culture and connection to express itself in teacher-student relationships?

READINESS QUESTIONS

What expectations do you have of teachers for connecting with students? How is success defined? *(Keep in mind the goal to narrow roles and responsibilities to narrow the focus for teachers and advisors)*

How will these expectations be communicated to teachers?

How will these expectations be balanced with teachers' other responsibilities?

⊗ **Make student-student connections a priority.**

Peer relationships help keep students connected to school so it is important to intentionally create opportunities for them to support and uplift each other. Schools have seen success creating structures that enable students to connect socially and support each other through this time.

What do you want peer-peer relationships to look like in a remote/hybrid setting?

What student leadership structures exist in your school that might be translated to a remote environment?

Have you engaged students in developing structures to support student-student relationships?

⊗ Save showstopper strategies for rites of passage.

Time is at a premium during periods of remote and hybrid learning. Therefore, complex and time-consuming strategies that build culture and connection are best leveraged as a small number of significant rites of passage.

READINESS QUESTIONS

What are the most critical rites of passage at your school? Which might you need to let go of?

How were these rites of passage celebrated in person?

What elements and/or outcomes of those celebrations do you want to preserve?

How might these celebrations be moved to a remote/socially distanced structure?

How are you harnessing student, family, and teacher input to conceptualize and realize new ways to celebrate these rites of passage?

Leadership

- ⊗ **Define what is most important; bring everything back to the mission and ardently prioritize.**

Consistently and purposefully return to your mission statement, portrait of a graduate, etc. to identify a small number of priorities that will guide decisions. Ground decisions and communication to stakeholders in these priorities.

What three to five elements of your mission should be prioritized during remote learning?

What is your plan for continuously reminding stakeholders of the need to simplify and focus on these prioritized aspects of the school's mission?

How will you use these priorities to help your community understand what success looks like?

How are you centering equity as a value and a practice? How are these values and practices used to ensure that outcomes are equitable across all student demographic groups?

⊗ **Shift constraining mindsets about what is lost in a remote environment to help stakeholders imagine what can be gained.**

Stakeholders look to school leaders to see the positives and the possibilities that come with great challenges. As one leader told us, “The heaviest lift was in the beginning. It really was me getting over myself and saying, ‘Our school isn’t the brick and mortar building. We are the school.’”

READINESS QUESTIONS

How are you seeking out information about how your students, families, and staff are feeling about remote learning? How are you reflecting on your own feelings?

What opportunities are you and your stakeholders most excited about?

How are you regularly communicating to your stakeholders about the opportunities that this time presents?

⊗ **Distribute leadership and focus some of your own capacity on removing obstacles for your staff.**

Strategically distributing leadership allows you to harness the creativity of many minds and empower staff to co-create elements of your school.

READINESS QUESTIONS

What existing leadership structures exist in your school?

What support do these leaders need from you to own their piece of the work? How will you communicate clearly with them about this?

Are there any gaps? Who might you tap to step into leadership roles to address these gaps?

How are you engaging students and families in leadership opportunities?

⊗ **Help staff re-envision their role and create opportunities for success in the new role.**

Teachers are deeply tied to the roles they understood prior to the pandemic; many have expressed feeling lost in remote learning. Leaders have seen a morale boost when they have supported teachers in rethinking their role, redefining what success looks like, and providing opportunities for teachers to feel success.

How did your school define teacher success prior to the pandemic? Other staff roles? (e.g., counselors, advisors, etc.)

What core principles of success are still true in a remote setting? What's different?

How might you create and communicate new measures of success?

⊗ Pivot to remote instructional leadership.

With a growth mindset, continue observing, providing feedback, and conducting LASW meetings.

READINESS QUESTIONS

What instructional feedback methods have you designed for remote learning?

Have you continued the facilitation of LASW meetings and re-trained your staff for this new context?

⊗ Understand your new context and new ideas in the field.

Set aside time to learn and develop a deep knowledge base to understand what is going on in your school and seek to mine new ideas from other schools.

READINESS QUESTIONS

Have you identified and leveraged teachers who are finding success with remote instruction and/or student engagement?

Have you interviewed students and families about their experience? How are you using the data from these interviews? Are you regularly assessing whose voices have or have not been heard to ensure the rich diversity of perspectives in your school informs major decisions?

Have you experimented with remote learning strategies yourself to understand and to model them?

How are you creating the time and space to connect with others so you can learn about new ideas and best practices externally?

⊗ **Use data collected from students and families, as well as data collected this spring, to create a schedule that can work for all students' circumstances.**

A hybrid of both synchronous and asynchronous options are necessary for student engagement. Students all have different experiences—from their personal circumstances to their learning preferences. Ensure that the schoolwide schedule provides multiple entry points that honor students' home and work lives and gives students agency over how they participate.

Time for advisory and individualized support should be prioritized and consistent. Students and families should know exactly what the schedule requires and how to locate assignments and instructions for each class.

Have you created a schedule that allows for synchronous and asynchronous learning in each course?

How has the schedule been communicated to teachers and reinforced in the grade team/content team/coaching structures?

Does your schedule have designated time for advisory/small group community check-ins/activities?

When do teachers have time in their schedules to meet with students?

Do students have 24/7 access to content?

Are all students clear about what counts as attendance? How are you tracking it?

CONTINUED

How does the schedule ensure students access essential services, such as special education or English Language Learner supports?

⊗ **Retain full staff and departmental meetings.**

Opportunities for connection, community, and collaboration are as important for teachers and staff as they are for students. Be creative about how this time is spent but do not stop holding this time.

READINESS QUESTIONS

What is your staff/department meeting structure?

How are you using these structures to plan for connection, community, and collaboration?

What structures have you created or maintained to share cross-departmental knowledge and best practices?

⊗ **Be very selective with which platforms are used and keep them consistent from class to class.**

Asking students and families to figure out how to navigate a number of different platforms adds challenges and creates barriers to access. (This is less relevant if significant time during the school year was dedicated to imparting digital literacy).

READINESS QUESTIONS

Are classrooms simple enough to navigate such that students' families/supporters could be taught how to support their students?

How many platforms and/or tools are being used currently? More than three or four? Is there any system for managing usage?

⊗ **Prioritize redesigning your grading policy to reward mastery and effort.**

Remote learning creates an opportunity to drill down on the absolute necessities. The “why” behind each grade matters so much more in a remote context and should be revisited often. Hold students to the same standard for rigor but simplify expectations for completing assignments.

READINESS QUESTIONS

What state or local expectations do you need to meet with your grading policy?

Do students have opportunities to self-assess?

Do students understand how they are being graded?

Have teachers been clear about revising what skills need to be demonstrated and what requirements are?
(This is especially relevant for larger assignments like capstone projects.)

⊗ **Rewrite teacher and staff expectations.**

All adult roles change in remote learning. Each staff member will need different guidance on how they should adjust their time and what they should expect from themselves and their students.

READINESS QUESTIONS

How have staff roles changed in remote learning?

How have you thought about staff roles and how they align with your school’s remote learning philosophy?

What efforts have you made to communicate and standardize those changes?

⊗ **Develop a streamlined communications strategy that carefully considers the volume of external communications going to students, families, and staff.**

Parents and guardians are receiving a high volume of communications from school-based staff and local/state government officials. Creating a strategy for outreach will help simplify the messages parents and guardians are sorting through and ensure more effective communication.

READINESS QUESTIONS

Is there a system for sending out communications to students and families?

Are you or any one on your staff monitoring communications to families from the district/state?

Is there a primary contact person assigned to each student?

Continuous Improvement

⊗ Engage students in feedback cycles.

Provide regular and diverse opportunities for students to both share their experience with remote learning and contribute ideas for future planning. (For sample survey questions, see Panorama Education’s [Back-to-School Surveys](#).)

READINESS QUESTIONS

What methods are you employing to invite feedback from students?

Have you created feedback structures that are regularly shared and accessible via text, email, and your website?

Have you created other methods of student engagement (e.g., town halls, small focus groups, one-on-one conversations)?

How are you making sure that you hear from a diverse range of students to understand multiple perspectives?

⊗ Engage students' families/supporters in feedback cycles.

Support families/supporters by providing regular communication and prioritize collecting feedback from them. (For sample survey questions, see Panorama Education's [Back-to-School Surveys](#).)

READINESS QUESTIONS

Have you created training materials for families/supporters?

Have you created feedback structures that are regularly shared and accessible via text, email, and your website?

How are you making sure that you hear from a diverse range of families/supporters to understand multiple perspectives?

⊗ Use data and stakeholder feedback to inform rapid iteration.

Schedule regular time for continuous improvement and use available data and stakeholder feedback with an inquiry lens to inform the short- and long-term design process.

READINESS QUESTIONS

How are you creating the processes and mechanisms to foster and clearly name what you and your team are learning internally?

What regular meetings/structures are in place to review data trends at a high level?

What protocols are helping you analyze and leverage data to inform rapid iteration?

🕒 Schedule time to codify lessons learned for future planning.

View this time as an opportunity for longer term shifts in school design and set aside periodic pause points for reflection.

READINESS QUESTIONS

What are your big picture takeaways about what is and is not working for students, regardless of context?

Are there long-term implications you have already identified?

How are you capturing and codifying lessons learned as you go?

About Springpoint

Springpoint is a national nonprofit that partners with districts, charters, and communities to rethink high school and empower young people to succeed. We ground our school design work in positive youth development and student-centered practices. We are committed to ensuring that all students have access to rigorous and relevant learning experiences that set them up for postsecondary success. To do so, we provide school design and planning guidance, implementation and iteration support, and strategic advising. Our customized partner supports and the adult learning experiences we develop help educators do school differently.

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