

August 11, 2020

Dear Members of the Education Finance Committee:

As school districts across the state prepare to open, NAMI Minnesota, Aspire Minnesota, and the Minnesota Association of Community Mental Health Programs (MACMHP) urge educators, administrators, and policy makers to focus on supporting the mental health and wellbeing of Minnesota students. While your attention today will justifiably be on mitigating the spread of COVID-19, we must ensure that conversations about health and safety also include the mental health of students and school staff.

In the months since schools closed for the summer, many students have experienced social isolation in a potentially unsafe living environment, while others have been unable to access the full array of mental health supports they would typically obtain. Teachers and school-staff should be prepared and on the lookout so that they can identify the early signs of a mental illness and connect students with resources when necessary. We urge the Departments of Education and Health to continue promoting the Kognito suicide prevention training. This will ensure that every school staff member knows what to look for and when to connect a student with help for their mental illness. School districts should also list mental health resources available in their community on their websites and social media platforms (limit to Medicaid and free and reduced clinics), especially their school-linked mental health providers so families know where to get help.

It is also critical that school districts leverage school-linked mental health partners as a key resource. We encourage school districts to allow students to download telehealth apps to connect with their mental health professional on school-owned devices, allow mental health professionals to access school-based offices, even if the school is not open for in-person learning, for the purposes of in-person or telehealth therapy, and to ensure that co-located mental health professionals are able to access the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) that is distributed for school staff. We also suggest that schools be flexible around the delivery of school-linked mental health. Even if a school is open for hybrid or in-person learning, it may be best for school-linked mental health services to be offered via telemedicine to avoid cross-contamination between school buildings.

Finally, we urge schools to collaborate with school-linked mental health programs. This can include connecting school-linked mental health professionals to your multi-tiered system of supports teams (MTSS, or similarly named), to ensure that every student who needs an early intervention gets the right level of care right away. School-linked mental health grant dollars can also be used to support and build the capacity of teachers and other school staff to better engage students with mental illnesses. Even when remote or hybrid learning is all that a school can safely offer, teachers and staff can still receive support from school-linked mental health professionals as they navigate their leadership roles in support of students and the wider school community.

In addition to supporting school-linked mental health providers, it will also be important for teachers and school staff to understand the trauma impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. School-linked and local community-based mental health partners can provide training tailored to the local community, as well as serve as an ongoing resource for support. Another positive step schools can take is to provide transportation to Day Treatment for students with intensive mental health needs. Access to critical Day Treatment support with therapy, skills building, and a supportive environment helps students manage

their mental illness while living at home and requires transportation. Districts can support intensive mental health support by committing to the transportation for students to attend Day Treatment.

The health and safety of students, teachers, and school staff must be the number one priority as we consider schools re-opening this fall. Once schools decide on how to safely educate their students during the COVID-19 pandemic, whether it's in-person or distance learning, a key next step will be to make a plan on how they will meet the increased mental health needs of their students. Thank you for your time and attention to the mental health needs of Minnesota students.

Sincerely,

Sue Abderholden, MPH  
Executive Director  
NAMI Minnesota

Sam Smith  
Public Policy Coordinator  
NAMI Minnesota

Jin Lee Palen  
Executive Director  
MN Association of Community  
Mental Health Programs  
MACMHP

Kirsten Anderson  
Executive Director  
Aspire Minnesota



August 10, 2020

Dear Education Finance Committee Members,

After a summer of planning and careful consideration, and after reviewing the guidance that Governor Walz and the Minnesota Department of Education provided, Hiawatha Academies determined that we will start our academic program in distance learning. We will remain in distance learning through at least the first few weeks of the school year.

I would like to tell you a little more about how we arrived at this decision.

At the start of any school year, our community should be focused on building relationships, establishing routines, and strengthening academic habits that set the foundation for a great school year. The physical, emotional, and mental energy of our community should be focused on learning.

This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we must also prioritize the health, safety, and wellbeing of our scholars, families, and educators. In alignment with the Minnesota Department of Education guidance, Hiawatha Academies has established 5 conditions that must be met to safely reopen our school buildings and return to in person learning.

### **1. Our scholar experience**

- a. Our commitment is to provide an excellent and equitable learning experience for all Hiawatha scholars. Whether learning in school or at home, our scholars must have access to engaging and rigorous curriculum and learning opportunities.
- b. In order to ensure a high-quality experience, we have outlined essential components of our program that support the academic and socio-emotional needs of our scholars. We have invested in purchasing over 700 additional laptop devices and 100 wifi hotspots to ensure all scholars get connected. We are also committed to bringing our youngest learners in grades kindergarten to second grade back in person as soon as we can do so safely.

### **2. Ensuring consistent options for families**

- a. Throughout the spring and summer, we heard from families both the challenges of distance learning and their concerns about sending their children back to school safely. We considered our ability to support the needs of scholars, families, and staff across multiple learning scenarios.
- b. Having some scholars learn at home while others learn in person is complicated. And, the possibility of moving rapidly to full distance learning if a student or staff member were to become ill could result in further instability especially during the foundational first weeks of the school year. We seek input and partner with families on our learning model.

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**3. Safety and needs of our staff**

- a. Similar to our families, our staff has expressed a deep desire to be in person with scholars as well as uncertainty about their ability to return safely given their personal health and family situations.
- b. Minnesota Department of Health guidelines require that scholars coming to school in person must stay in small groups for the entire school day. This means having additional staff to provide support, coverage, and maintain this smaller ratio. We are committed to providing legal accommodations and flexibility to our staff, and structuring roles and responsibilities so that the work they do has the highest possible impact on student learning.

**4. Our ability to implement risk mitigation strategies in our buildings and on school buses**

- a. Based on MDH and MDE guidance to run a hybrid learning model, we must keep our facilities and school buses at 50% or less occupancy and utilize available outdoor space. Hiawatha's buildings are not all the same. Some have modern HVAC systems, some have windows that can open and some have usable outdoor space. There are significant cost investments we will need to make to fully implement the recommended strategies.
- b. Our operations teams have worked all summer, without the traditional summer break, to create safety plans based on the most current scientific evidence for risk mitigation. Before bringing scholars and staff back into our buildings, we must be confident that we can fully implement all required and recommended risk mitigation strategies.

**5. Public health data and assessing the community spread of COVID-19**

- a. Last, but equally important is our ability to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in our community. Based on Minnesota Department of Health, COVID-19 cases statewide and specifically in Hennepin County continue to increase. Currently our county case rate is above 20 and it has increased each of the last 3 weeks. In addition case rates in Minneapolis City are even higher. COVID-19 has also disproportionately impacted communities of color. At Hiawatha Academies, our community is 99% students of color. Latinx Minnesotans are testing positive for COVID-19 at 9 times the rate and Black Minnesotans are testing positive at 7 times the rate of white Minnesotans. In order to move into hybrid and in person learning we must prioritize the health of safety of our scholars, families, and staff.

Our ultimate goal is to safely transition to hybrid and return to in person learning this school year. Right now, we must prioritize a strong start to the school year and the health of our community and that means beginning in distance learning.

With this decision comes increased expenses and priorities that must be part of our core work. At Hiawatha Academies we will continue to provide access to meals through our

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school food program and work with community partners to provide supplement meal distribution for families. However, the current requirements and lack of flexibility that we were granted this spring under the USDA waivers will create significant barriers to participation. On a recent survey 80% of our families indicated they would like to participate in our meal distribution and delivery program this upcoming school year. Without additional flexibility we won't be able to fully meet this demand.

An additional requirement outlined in the Governor's executive order is providing childcare to children of essential worker. While we are called to provide this service to our families, this program comes with additional staffing needs and programmatic expenses to meet the social, emotional and academic needs of our students. Current funds do not cover this program without asking our educators to take on additional work responsibilities. We have started conversations about a community wide approach to providing this care but have not yet found a better solution than providing it within our current model.

As we face the unprecedented start to the 20-21 school year, the Hiawatha Academies community will continue to embrace our guiding principles of Children at the Center, Stronger Together, and Learn and Grow. We will find the opportunities in the challenge as we know that every decision will maintain the status quo or permanently disrupt inequity on the path towards a more just future.

In partnership,  
Colette

Colette E. S. Owens  
Executive Director  
Hiawatha Academies

**Growing Learners. Growing Leaders.**

Hiawatha Academies | 3500 E. 28th Street | Minneapolis, MN 55406  
[hiawathaacademies.org](http://hiawathaacademies.org)

August 12, 2020

**Subject: Informational hearing of the Education Finance Division**

Dear Chair Davnie and Committee members,

Thank you for scheduling an informational hearing of the Education Finance Division focusing on Executive Order 20-82, the Safe Learning Plan for 2020-21 Guidance, and federal funds for K-12 public schools that relate to COVID-19.

Advocates within Minnesota's disability community are well aware that the COVID-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented situation for which no one was prepared. Teachers and staff did their best, yet distance learning models employed over the past several months simply did not work for many families of children with disabilities. After a challenging end to the school year, districts, administrators, and agencies worked to plan for a fresh start for the new school year, but many students with disabilities and their families felt that their concerns remained unaddressed.

On July 22nd, the undersigned organizations and several other key partners in special education advocacy worked together to provide an opportunity for parents of children with disabilities to express their hopes and fears regarding the 2020-2021 school year.

During that town hall, a diverse group of families from throughout Minnesota spoke about what worked for them, what didn't, and what they would like to see done differently. The co-hosts of that town hall meeting prepared a summary of stated concerns which have been organized into several broad topics - equity, distance learning, in-person learning, transition, mental health/trauma informed care, and recommended practices.

We offer this summary of their testimony, the lessons learned from the past several months, and ideas to consider as we work collaboratively toward solutions. We look forward to working with the legislature, agencies, and administration on next steps that center the experiences of students with disabilities and their families during the 2020-2021 school year

With sincere thanks,

The Arc Minnesota  
Autism Society of Minnesota  
Down Syndrome Association of Minnesota  
Epilepsy Foundation of Minnesota  
Legal Services Advocacy Project  
Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid/Minnesota Disability Law Center  
Minnesota Autism Council  
Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities

Multicultural Autism Action Network  
Proof Alliance  
Somali Parent Autism Network

# Pandemic Planning: Hopes and Fears for Returning to School

Held on July 22, 2020

A virtual town hall meeting hosted by:

The Arc Minnesota

Epilepsy Foundation

Proof Alliance

Minnesota Disability Law Center

Somali Parent Autism Network

Multicultural Autism Action Network

Autism Society of Minnesota

Minnesota Council on Disabilities

Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities

Minnesota Brain Injury Alliance

Pacer Center

Minnesota Autism Council

Ed Allies

Recording available at <https://www.facebook.com/thearcminnesota/videos/280939539644250/>

The following summary represents concerns expressed by families of children with disabilities during the virtual town hall and possible solutions:

## **EQUITY**

### Equity Concerns:

- Traditionally underserved groups had less access to technology. Schools did provide some technology, but not enough, and not with sufficient support. One ipad for a family of six was not sufficient. Many families felt they needed technical support and did not have access to it.
- Parents with disabilities did not receive the support they needed. Parents were crying out for help and felt unheard. Parents were overwhelmed by concerns about housing, feeding their families, and maintaining employment. Hearing “We are trying to make it work” was not sufficient when basic needs were not being met.
- Parents of multiple children with disabilities did not receive adequate support. Distance learning didn’t work for many families. Daily check-ins with the teacher did not work and some families feared being reported for truancy. Some schools updated IEPs for

distance learning. Others did not. There was very little guidance as to recommended practices or minimum recommendations. Parents felt that they could work within a framework, but no framework was provided.

- Schools are going to end up going back to distance learning plans again and stakeholders have not spent enough time talking about lessons learned in the past five months (at the end of the 2019-2020 school year).
- Families are concerned that missing months of school will change the trajectory of their child's lives.
- Families want to know what schools are going to do about compensatory education for those for whom distance learning did not work.
- It was extremely challenging for families balancing needs of children and work expectations and summer care.
- Some school districts discriminated against children needing higher levels of support during summer care. School districts suggest higher federal settings not because children were not successful where they are, but because they did not have adequate PPE to support kids in a lower federal setting. The civil rights of these children with disabilities are being violated.
- Children's mental and physical health is suffering as a result of isolation.
- Some teachers did a fantastic job of reaching out and providing 1:1 support. Others did not.
- Students who cannot work from home (whether due to parents working out of the home or whether distance learning doesn't work due to disability needs) should have access to in-person options with appropriate support.

## Equity Recommendations:

- Districts need to consider what assumptions are being made in terms of student access to technology, a quiet place to work, sufficient bandwidth, the technical know-how within the family to troubleshoot and provide options to ensure that all students have equitable access to educational programming and connections with school.
- Districts should prioritize in-person options for those who are most at risk of inequities and of worsening mental and physical health.
- MDE should provide guidance indicating that change in settings must be based on a student's needs. Changes in placement cannot be based on a district's inability to provide PPE.
- MDE and MDH could work collaboratively to ensure that districts can access PPE.
- Districts and MDE must be prepared to provide in-person options for students that cannot work from home.
- MDE should provide guidance to districts and districts should consider the needs of the child in the context of their family situation. The importance of social connections, relationships, athletics, support services, cultural connections should be considered in the context of student mental health.

- MDE should come provide parent outreach about the availability of complaint process or try to introduce a shorter-form/early dispute resolution process (similar to OCR)..

## **II. DISTANCE LEARNING**

### Distance Learning Concerns:

- Distance learning requires a very high level of executive function.
- Distance learning simply did not work for some students, especially those who require in person contact for communication cues or physical proximity.
- Many families were frustrated that schools required multiple platforms, multiple apps, and multiple log-ins.

### Distance Learning Recommendations:

- Ensure that in-person options for some students for whom distance learning is simply impossible are available. This could be sending some staff to homes, offering designated sites, or collaborating with nearby districts and facilitating open enrollment to those districts and providing transportation (just a few examples). MDE should look into whether paraprofessionals could conduct home visits to work on distance learning activities much like the day/employment programs were sending staff to homes for adults with disabilities.
- Develop a parent-oriented set of possible avenues for supports at home: MDE/DHS should look into possibilities for PCAs to provide educational support (e.g. there is a red line between educational support and HCBS. PCA support would be allowed for homework, but not school specifically? Where is the line in a distance learning situation? Are there work-arounds?).
- School districts should use consistent organization systems. Parents do not have the time or bandwidth to chase down assignments through multiple platforms. For example, assignments assigned at 9 am and due at 11 am do not work in a family with working parents.
- Some platforms allow small group work, which may better suit some students' learning styles. Schools should explore/offer (but not mandate) small group work as an option or as part of the distance learning experience. Districts should consider encouraging small family/student groups learning together to combat social isolation and share strategies.

## **III. IN-SCHOOL LEARNING**

### In-school Learning Concerns:

- Are there going to be staff available for students with complex medical support needs?

- What happens in a situation where the student is not at a high risk or immunocompromised, but a family member is? Will students with immuno-compromised family members be provided with distance learning options?
- Wearing masks, washing hands, and social distancing are not possible for some children. Some children who are sensory seeking are not going to be able to avoid contact with others.
- What is happening to children who are being discharged from treatment centers and have never been to school?

### In-School Learning Recommendations:

- MDE should provide guidance and districts should prioritize students for whom distance learning did not work in determining who receives in-person services.
- Districts should clarify to families what support will be available in schools so that they can make informed choices.
- There could be recommendations for schools about accommodations for protocols such as mask-wearing, hand-washing, and social distancing for students with disabilities or for whom those things are challenging. There could also be tools communicating these expectations and available accommodations in clear ways to families and students.
- Guidance to districts around how to handle perceived behavioral issues with health protocols and suggested alternatives to exclusionary discipline.

## IV. TRANSITION

### Transition Concerns:

- Students who were in their final year of transition this spring missed out on some of the most important parts of their education. They are “aging out” of the educational system and their legal educational entitlements are ending. The last semester of transition is critical. Distance learning is not appropriate nor is it least restrictive for many students with disabilities. For some students, distance learning created incredibly isolating circumstances in which meeting goals and objectives was impossible, and regression was prevalent. The absence of a quarter may take a semester to compensate. Students caught in this unfortunate chain of events through no fault of our own need support. They missed out on vocational training and the opportunity to build connections to adult services that are critical to ensuring a successful transition to life after school.
- Families lost access to a lot of services and therapies as a result of COVID. Demands went up. Supports went down.

### Transition Recommendations:

- MDE should consider adding additional time for students in transition to allow them to ensure that transition goals, including the hand-off to adult services, are met.

- The legislature or governor should consider using federal COVID funding to support this effort.

## **V. MENTAL HEALTH/TRAUMA INFORMED CARE**

### **Mental Health/Trauma Informed Care Concerns:**

- Many families were deeply affected by the trauma around George Floyd’s murder and the aftermath.
- It feels like schools are rushing to put children in schools for their mental health without a lot of regard to what may happen to mental health if the student, a family member, or a teacher should become sick.
- Parents with disabilities had very high expectations placed on them and very little support.
- Families did not receive 1:1 attention that is guaranteed under their child’s IEP. It often felt as if distance learning left the “individual” part of an IEP behind.
- Students need social opportunities as well educational opportunities.

### **Mental Health/Trauma Informed Care Recommendations:**

- Districts need to understand the effects of the pandemic of racism as well as COVID. MDE should provide additional training and support for trauma-informed care.
- MDE needs to provide frameworks. Site-based decision-making worked well in some ways, but resulted in an extremely uneven distribution of educational service. Many school districts needed more guidance.
- Districts and administrators need to prioritize the avoidance of causing additional harm to already traumatized students.

## **IX. RECOMMENDED PRACTICES**

- Distance learning requires different and more sophisticated levels of executive function than in - person learning. MDE should provide guidance and recommend curricula for teaching executive function and districts should be prepared to teach executive function skills needed to successfully manage distance learning.
- Parents felt forced to “pick their battles” with their children as well as with school districts. In some situations, relationships with schools became adversarial rather than supportive. Districts must consider that relationship repair work with families may be required.
- Some special ed teachers provided no support at all during distance learning. Many families felt as if students lost 4-5 months of progress and in some cases regressed. Public schools did not have enough guidance from the state about what their responsibilities were. Many students who required a lot of IEP required para support (as

high as 1:1) did not receive any. MDE should provide a greater degree of direction about the responsibilities of the public schools.

- Distance learning placed a heavy burden on families and caregivers. Teachers and staff should be clear about what the expectations are around caregiver support for distance learning models. If a family is expected to provide many hours of one-on-one time with a student, school staff should make sure that expectation is articulated and works for the family.
- Since the work of educating children with disabilities shifted the relationship between schools to families during the distance learning model, districts should also shift their thinking from an IEP (individual education plan) mindset to an IFSP (individual family support plan) mindset. MDE should partner with other agencies and districts should partner with other service providers to ensure wrap-around services where needed.
- Teachers and staff should minimize the number of different apps, tracking systems, logons, and passwords students (and families) are required to keep track of.
- Districts should ensure that students who were assigned paras at school are assigned paras at home.
- MDE should provide minimum guidelines for student contact and a framework for distance learning expectations.
- Districts should be mindful of what level of executive function skills their students have, and what level of executive function their distance learning plans require, and be prepared to teach those skills needed to fill the gap.
- MDE should offer evidence based resources for teaching executive function skills.
- If parents self-disclose their own disabilities and need accommodations for distance learning or hybrid learning, districts need to provide additional support for those students and their families, much like they provided technology to families who disclosed a need.

## **X. RESOURCES**

The following links provide ideas about what other states are doing, what looks promising, and other ideas for policy solutions.

[https://www.city-journal.org/ny-success-academy-distance-learning?fbclid=IwAR0pE\\_58gn6nPjZhMYkn80iZEPzN7DUzZ-5gCffn4xhCjkcFjYI3bQVAyEw](https://www.city-journal.org/ny-success-academy-distance-learning?fbclid=IwAR0pE_58gn6nPjZhMYkn80iZEPzN7DUzZ-5gCffn4xhCjkcFjYI3bQVAyEw)

<https://www.the74million.org/article/social-distancing-for-the-most-vulnerable-students-a-teacher-who-needs-to-self-quarantine-online-back-to-school-toolkit-can-help/>

[https://chiefsforchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CFC-TheReturn\\_5-13-20.pdf?fbclid=IwAR32QUMQK9q9Pfn4q8QvmnbnoHb8yYmJAehK0PImsxge\\_\\_C7qUljQ6cSxoU](https://chiefsforchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CFC-TheReturn_5-13-20.pdf?fbclid=IwAR32QUMQK9q9Pfn4q8QvmnbnoHb8yYmJAehK0PImsxge__C7qUljQ6cSxoU)

[https://www.the74million.org/article/researchers-urgent-message-for-schools-start-planning-now-for-a-precipitous-covid-slide-next-year/?fbclid=IwAR0DJfLHpUHA8n-l3jpH7YoMXqaQlwxE1tgY\\_W4yW5vyXFZVtH0ObXvToM4](https://www.the74million.org/article/researchers-urgent-message-for-schools-start-planning-now-for-a-precipitous-covid-slide-next-year/?fbclid=IwAR0DJfLHpUHA8n-l3jpH7YoMXqaQlwxE1tgY_W4yW5vyXFZVtH0ObXvToM4)

<https://www.trendsmap.com/twitter/tweet/1292090698246782977>

8/9/2020

Hello,

My name is Karin Hogen and I am an 8th grade language arts teacher in White Bear Lake Area Schools. My daughter also attends the same school district. I would like to submit written comments for the upcoming Education Finance Division meeting as follows.

Public schools in Minnesota have been and remain underfunded. According to Northstarpolicy.org (<https://northstarpolicy.org/back-to-the-future-declining-school-aid-in-minnesota>), per pupil funding for public schools has actually gone down when adjusted for inflation. "In constant 2019 dollars, per pupil state operating aid to school districts fell by \$2,063 from FY 2003 to 2012."

Schools were already in a dire situation before COVID-19, and now we are in even more of a crisis situation. Due to the requirements that must be in place to keep students and staff safe (which I agree with), schools are hemorrhaging money while an economic crisis will only decrease their revenue simultaneously. Schools must now spend funds on the purchasing of PPE, cleaning supplies, more materials to make sure students aren't sharing materials, increased bus drivers and busing routes, increased custodial staff, technology for every student to use while at home, even more wifi hot spots for families without internet, and increased mental health supports.

Public schools were already struggling to get by and this crisis will only make it worse. More funding is needed for our schools in order to keep them from falling off a cliff and failing our state's students.

Thank you for your time

--

Karin Hogen



August 12, 2020

Chair Davnie and House Education Finance Committee  
St. Paul, MN

Re: Ensuring Equitable Fall Learning Plans and Guidance

Dear Chair Davnie and Members of the Committee,

As students prepare to return to school for the 2020-21 school year, it's imperative that they are provided a safe, rigorous, and engaging education. As you know, Governor Walz's recent executive order, [EO20-82](#), allows districts and charter schools to determine the most appropriate learning models to resume instruction this fall based on defined public health criteria—distance, hybrid, or in-person learning. As districts make their decisions, it is important that state education leaders—including this committee—provide guidelines and resources that will ensure learning is equitable and high quality no matter the model it resumes in.

### **Access to Internet and Devices**

The Governor's framework means that many Minnesota students will be online for at least part of the year—whether that's part of a hybrid model, temporary school closures, or full-time distance learning. Ensuring internet and device access should be a top priority so that no student falls behind due to preventable technical barriers.

The onus to provide students with reliable internet access and devices cannot be on districts and charter schools alone. First, the Minnesota Department of Education should play a coordinating and supporting role to ensure districts have what they need to connect students this fall. For example, in response to feedback from stakeholders who identified universal internet as a top issue, the [Maine Department of Education](#) secured internet and devices for 100% of families with school-aged children who reported a need. MDE should also play a role in gathering and disseminating updated information on ongoing gaps in access to technology to help policymakers understand and address ongoing gaps. To support this work, this committee and the Legislature must pass legislation during the next special session to close the digital divide, ensuring all students have access to reliable internet and devices in order to meaningfully engage in distance learning.

### **Address Learning Loss**

[National projections](#) show that students will return to school this fall having lost 30% of their reading gains and nearly 50% of their math gains. In order to address this learning loss, the Legislature must require school districts and charter schools to measure where each student is at—communicating areas for catch-up and growth to students and families, and using findings to inform teaching, tutoring, and additional supports. [Some state agencies and districts across the country](#) are requiring diagnostic assessments to identify gaps and then tailored support to accelerate learning. This will be a critical foundation for getting back on track.



### **Equity Focused Learning Models**

As schools are making decisions on which model to resume instruction in this fall, the Legislature must ensure that all models are equitable. First, distance learning models should provide students with the resources and support they need to succeed—access to synchronous learning, reliable internet and devices, feedback on assignments, opportunities for students to interact with their peers, and office hours. In California, the [state Legislature enacted](#) a number of new distance learning requirements to address gaps that emerged and were exacerbated in the spring. Districts must align distance learning with grade-level standards, provide tailored support to students who are behind, and provide daily live interaction for teaching, monitoring progress, and maintaining relationships—which can happen online or over the phone. Teachers are also required to communicate with parents about student learning progress.

Second, state leaders should ensure schools and districts implement hybrid learning models through an equity lens, prioritizing in-person learning for the most vulnerable learners, allowing those students to come to school for in-person instruction and other students to engage in distance learning. And in-person learning models should be done safely, following guidelines from the Minnesota Department of Health and the CDC and monitoring projections, especially within communities that have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

Now more than ever, the Legislature must call for rigor and equity in Minnesota schools. If schools are going to meet the challenges they will face in the coming months and years, state and federal policymakers must step up to provide flexibility, additional funding, and guidance on key program and policy questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "MK", enclosed within a circular scribble.

Michelle Koffa  
Policy Manager, EdAllies