
ACCESS & OPPORTUNITY



SCHOOL REOPENING TOOLKIT: ACCESS, OPPORTUNITY AND INTERVENTION/REMEDATION

The COVID 19 pandemic that caused extensive school closures during the 2019-20 school year has caused lasting changes in our educational system and changes to planning for the upcoming school year. Educators must plan to provide **access for all** student groups, **opportunities for daily instruction for all** student learners, and **intervention/remediation supports for all learners** can ensuring they return to successful learning pathways by the end of the 2020-21 school year.

All information in the document is non-regulatory guidance issued for general informational purposes only. This document is not intended to constitute legal advice. Because local school board policy and unique facts make dramatic differences in analyzing any situation, the Tennessee Department of Education advises each school district to consult with the local school board attorney for specific legal advice regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on school operations.

I. Reopening Overview

Our educational community must collaborate for the almost one million students counting on us and ensure that the COVID-19 pandemic does not cause lasting barriers in their educational careers. As the commissioner stated in the LEA opening guide, existing educational challenges have been intensified over the last six months.

Elevating Known Gaps and Accelerating a Child-Centered Strategy

During this crisis a number of challenges within our field have become apparent. In some cases, these are new challenges that we must face together. In others, they are challenges that have existed over decades and are now rapidly accelerating in greater public awareness and urgency. Frankly, these things are not new, but they have been brought to the forefront of the public consciousness and demand to be addressed in ways that may not have been so dire and so clear as we know them to be now.

- **Early Literacy:** In Tennessee, just over 33% of 3rd graders and 27% of 8th graders are reading proficiently. Proficiency rates on national assessments show that there has been no meaningful change in performance for the bottom 50% over the last 30 years. School building closures will only exacerbate this challenge, especially for children in our youngest grades.
- **Achievement Gaps and Equity:** Overall, Tennessee's achievement gaps have not closed in the last 15 years and school building closures will likely serve to widen those gaps further. This is not a new challenge, but the pandemic has served to more poignantly highlight the existing and persistent gaps in student achievement and opportunity.
- **Rural Communities:** Tennessee's student achievement in rural communities did not show the same growth and acceleration as suburban and urban communities over the last twelve years. The school building closures have continued to highlight the disparity that exists related to connectivity and broadband, access to more community resources, and opportunities to raise and use local funds in support of public schools.
- **Mental Health:** The pandemic has highlighted the significant challenges that districts, schools, and educators face related to student mental health and behavioral needs. The school building closures have served to bring this conversation to the forefront as children and families struggle with the anxieties associated with the pandemic, and in some cases additional familial struggles that would normally be identified and addressed earlier by schools.

In November of 2019, the Tennessee Department of Education, released [Best for All](#), a comprehensive and systematic strategic plan, that ensures all Tennessee students will be placed on a path to success.

Some student groups have larger challenges to success than others; and in light of COVID 19 school closures, many student groups will need additional ***access, opportunity, intervention*** and ***remediation*** to ensure success.

Districts and schools should walk through the specific steps of implementation with a focus on vulnerable student groups. These groups may include, but are not limited to:

- Children and staff with physical disabilities
- Children and staff with health concerns
- Children with learning or other disabilities
- Children and families who are highly mobile and/or homeless
- Children and families who speak languages other than English
- Children who are gifted
- Children with families who do not have transportation
- Families who have economic challenges, do not have broad band access or consistent communication contacts (no or changing phone numbers, lack of access to email, etc.).

This list can be extensive and different for every district, and therefore, guidance should be adapted by every district to meet the fragile student groups served within the district. However, districts should prioritize according to population, need, and impact. **Most importantly, districts and schools should not stop delivery of services because of challenges presented in serving specific populations**, but should instead reach out to the state, peer districts, and partners for support in developing plans that allow for all students to be reasonably and equitably served.

II. Vocabulary and Shared Use of Terms

- **Access**- ensuring every student has access to a day of instruction every day regardless of the learning environment; in particular, districts should have solutions for each vulnerable student group that it serves
- **Benchmark/Checkpoint**- an assessment that measures standards-based, concept driven content and identifies gaps in learning that have occurred because of school closure or lost learning. This is for informative purposes only.
- **Closure**– students are not able to attend school in the traditional school building; staff engagement and staffing policies vary by location
- **Conditions for learning** – the requirements or context that should be in place in order for a student to learn in a face-to-face or distance learning setting
- **Diagnostic assessment** – the results of diagnostic assessments explain what is needed for skills-based intervention (consistent with RTI2 framing and special education designation language)
- **Digital learning** – learning using technology (in this document, specifically computer-based) including synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities
- **Distance learning** – primarily defined as when students and teacher are not housed in a physical classroom or school building
- **General Outcome Measure**- is a quick assessment that only takes a few minutes and can be provided repeatedly to assess the same skills each time. They are standardized and nationally normed for comparison to grade-level peers.
- **Instructional continuity** – assurance to continue coursework and instruction despite a significant or lengthy disruption
- **Opportunity**- ensuring that vulnerable student groups will receive targeted supports, additional scaffolds, and increased entry points to instruction to accelerate their learning to be equitable to on-grade level peers
- **Intervention**- student specific skill-based support in reading, math and writing as measured by a diagnostic assessment. Supports typically are delivered during Tier II and Tier III time; however, additional supports can be provided in Tier I instruction. Flexibility for delivery of supports will be needed within the reopening of school, but skill-based interventions should be delivered based on 2020-21 diagnostic data.
- **Progress Monitoring**- monitoring of skill-deficits identified by diagnostic data. Progress monitoring should be re-assessed based on 20-21 diagnostic/screening data.
- **Remediation**- planning changes to instruction that help fill academic gaps that occurred due to school closures
- **Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI²)**- Tennessee’s framework for teaching and learning that begins with high-quality, Tier I instruction throughout the day and emphasizes intervening with students when they first start to struggle to avoid prolonged learning challenges
- **Vulnerable populations** – those students most likely to be negatively impacted by closures

III. Questions for Consideration

Access and Opportunity Questions for Consideration

Access is ensuring every student has access to a day of instruction every day regardless of the learning environment; in particular, districts should have solutions for each vulnerable student group that it serves.

- Do all students have access to a full day of instruction every day?
- Do all teachers plan using high-quality materials and do all students have access to high-quality instruction necessary for learning on-grade level content regardless of in-person or distance learning?
- Does the district have plans to provide additional supports and resources for vulnerable groups of students, including the ability to provide alternate instructional day options for those students who cannot access the district's instructional delivery model?
- Have all schools in the district created an assessment schedule that determines skill gaps and learning loss for all groups of learners to determine what students' needs are in building knowledge, mastering standards, and developing the skills necessary to be successful in their grade level?
- Have districts considered how teachers will ensure that students are engaged in lessons with multiple entry points, appropriate and specific scaffolds, and specific targeted feedback to ensure learning is occurring?
- Do all teachers have resources and specific lesson strategies that provide multiple entry points for vulnerable groups of students even if those students cannot participate in the district's method of instructional delivery?
- How will the district ensure that all students have access to well-being supports, nutritional resources, and safe home environments?
- How will the district ensure that all students have access to devices and internet if the instructional delivery method requires them?

Opportunity means ensuring that vulnerable student groups will receive targeted supports, additional scaffolds, and increased entry points into learning to accelerate their learning to be equitable to on-grade level peers.

- How will the school and district ensure that students with learning challenges (e.g., learning loss, intervention needs, language barriers) or environmental challenges (lack of broadband access, lack of parent support, or history of transiency or chronic absenteeism) have the same opportunities for successful on-grade level learning?
- How will the district/school use high-quality instructional materials to ensure all student groups can effectively engage in learning (e.g., resources in native language, alternate entry points and independent assignments for students with learning challenges, or additional scaffolds or supports for at-home learning)?
- How will teachers, schools and the district prioritize supports for vulnerable learners such as increased focused learning time (e.g. extended day, double block of core content) or add learning supports (digital tools, additional tutoring)?
- How will districts utilize instructional coaches and interventionists to address additional needs vulnerable student groups may have?
- How will educators engage families with children who are more vulnerable and collaborate to ensure their child's academic needs are met?
- How will all educators respond and provide additional supports to ensure our vulnerable groups of students who are not progressing in building knowledge, mastering standards and developing the skills necessary to be successful in their grade level? (Note: This support system will have to be tailored to the learning environments determined by the district and tailored to the possible alternative instructional models designed to support certain student groups).
- How will the district respond if they cannot engage vulnerable groups of students to ensure that all students have the opportunity to receive in-person daily instruction?
- How will the school and district ensure that all children have the opportunity to receive consistent well-being supports, nutritional resources, and safe home environments? Vulnerable groups of students will be in most need of these services and district should consider how to prioritize supports for the vulnerable students they serve.

Intervention Questions for Consideration

This section focuses on aligning RTI² guidance into the reopening of school planning and aims to help districts to help think about the different roles of intervention and remediation.

In a typical school year, interventions should begin based on current diagnostic data. Because COVID-19 caused extended school closures, most diagnostic data is significantly outdated. Districts should first focus on re-establishing school culture and create trust with students. Each of the following questions should be considered in making decisions appropriate for the district, school and student situation.

District Planning Decisions

- The district instructional team should consider how and when to complete the universal screening process before beginning providing interventions. While last year's data should be considered, learning loss and regressions will not be included in last year's data.
- If a district has students in the middle of data collection, the team will need to consider "starting over" with data collection for students already receiving Tier II or Tier III intervention or continuing data collection where they left off last year. This decision should be made on a student-by-student basis using prior progress data, amount of instruction missed, and whether the student received supports during school closure.
- In the absence of student data from spring 2020, including the spring universal screening, the school RTI² teams should make decisions about student interventions, how to use historical data for tiered intervention, and formal data collection with a student-centered focus. Gaps in instruction will likely cause the need for school teams to collect additional data (e.g., new universal screening data) before making any intervention decisions for the 2020-2021 school year.

District Intervention Delivery Decisions

- If intervention is to occur virtually, what staff members will provide intervention and what training and resources are needed?
- What is needed to ensure that teams have appropriate data to make decisions regarding dyslexia-specific interventions? How will decisions be communicated to those responsible for coding which students receive dyslexia-specific interventions in the district's student information system (SIS)?
- If on a staggered schedule, how will in-person interventions be prioritized?
- What family communication will be provided to support a child's intervention at home (i.e., tips, environment, tools)?

Each of these considerations are contingent on local situations and should be discussed by the district and school-based teams to ensure that decisions support a child-centered approach to learning.

As a reminder, nationally normed, general outcome measures on grade-level should be used for progress monitoring to help identify the student's achievement gap progress and needs.” Since these measure broad student outcomes, it is recommended that teams also consider additional measures on the student’s instructional level to better measure incremental progress. Additionally, teams may want to consider other sources of data that indicate whether the student is mastering specific skills taught (e.g. mastery measures for lesson planning purposes).

A Note on Special Education Referrals/Evaluations: Please see the **Special Education Toolkit**. Guidance will continue to be updated throughout the summer and fall as new information emerges.

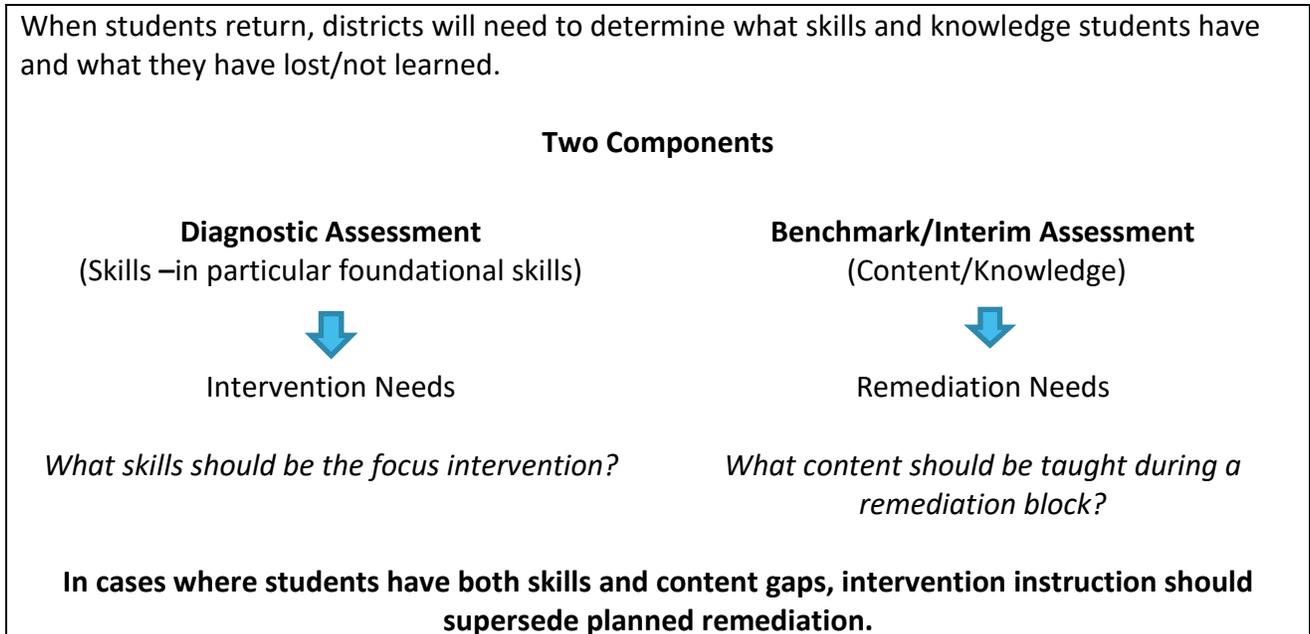
Remediation Questions for Consideration

Note: This information can also be found in the Academics Toolkit.

□ What is the difference between traditional intervention and planned remediation as a result of COVID 19 school closures?

Often, interventions are provided after learning has occurred. Interventions focus on gaps in skills necessary to understand concepts. For the case of this toolkit, remediation may include re-teaching of content that was covered through distance learning. Whereas, intervention should be considered regardless of loss of learning and should be prioritized over remediation to ensure skill gaps are closed as quickly as possible. Because remediation is needed for a myriad of reasons during the reopening of school, it is important for the educator team to develop flexible solutions.

Steps for Diagnosing and Supporting Learning Loss



How much learning was lost for all students in my district?

Educators will need to determine a plan to assess the current learning needs and present levels of mastery for all students. This may include a benchmarking assessment for standards in major content areas, diagnostic assessments in early grades, and an analysis of coursework at the high school level. While educators and districts may assume all students need remediation when planning for the school year, it is important to consider that many students did learn content during the extended school closure. So, assessing the academic needs of each individual student is critical and should drive instructional programming.

When should benchmarks be given to determine remediation needs?

In addition to creating a plan to determine learning needs, educators should strongly consider the need for students and teachers to reconnect, establish learning cultures, and to create trust in the new, challenging learning environment before using benchmarks and diagnostics to assess students. Educator teams will need to work intentionally and collaboratively to establish a balance between reestablishing relationships and developing learning plans. Reestablishing relationships can be completed through formal curricula or through a variety of embedded classroom structures and activities. These are important planning decisions within the framework for instructional delivery.

What should teachers do with benchmark data?

Teachers will need collaboration with district staff and school leadership to analyze diagnostic and benchmark assessments, determine learning gaps, and incorporate missed learning into 2020-21 content-specific scopes and sequences. Strategies within lessons also need to be intentional. Teachers should not focus on increasing independent practice in face-to-face learning or distance learning situations, but instead, learning experiences should increase discussion opportunities and guided practice within the learning day (virtual or in-person). Students may have larger misconceptions due to significant periods of independent practice without support throughout school closure experiences. Discussions and guided practice will help strengthen teachers' abilities to discern misconceptions and to re-teach within the lesson.

Finally, teachers will need to increase feedback and checks for understanding to ensure that learning gaps do not interfere with building new content mastery. Districts should consider ways to provide teachers with modeling, sample tools, and support to ensure they are focusing on closing students' learning gaps. See the [Assessing Student Learning Toolkit](#) for additional guidance.

III. Best Practices

Access and Opportunity

The district leadership team should look at available 2019-20 data (family connection logs, family surveys, or reports of regions without connectivity) to determine what vulnerable student groups had challenges accessing instruction during the fourth quarter. The district staff will likely want to include school staff to determine specific challenges of the student groups they serve. The instructional plan, schedules, and wellbeing outreach plans should target and prioritize vulnerable student groups.

Districts should host a series of virtual summer engagements with their families across communities focusing on collaborative partnership to support learning for reopening school. Engagement sessions should ensure:

- Family insights and challenges are heard,
- Presenters have culturally responsive practices, and
- Two-way communication methods are established.

By taking an asset-based approach, schools can build partnerships with vulnerable students' families and develop locally appropriate solutions to solve student access challenges.

Classroom Culture

Classroom culture plays a big part in building partnerships with families, both in person and in digital learning spaces. Creating trust between the teacher, student and even families is essential to providing opportunities for all students, but especially vulnerable student groups. Teachers must appreciate individual differences and foster multiple opportunities for students to engage in digital learning and in person learning. Even though many classrooms will include social distancing and less “carpet time or learning lab” experiences, teachers should actively find opportunities for student groups to engage, for students to give feedback, and for teachers to scaffold learning. All of these activities will create a strong culture within an in person or digital space. In addition, these activities help students accelerate their learning, bridge learning loss, and foster natural scaffolds for learning. Moreover, these opportunities foster increased language usage.

Returning to In Person School

Vulnerable student populations should be prioritized when considering reopening school for in person learning environments. In person learning provides the opportunities for teachers to increase intensity of support, provide frequent checks for understanding, and alter learning supports continuously. Distance learning will not allow for this level of support to learning.

- ***Students and staff with physical disabilities, students with learning disabilities and English Language Learners:***

Students with learning challenges should be given priority to attend school in person before other student groups. Research shows that intervention, scaffolding, and assessing for learning occur best in face-to-face environments. Therefore, districts should prioritize vulnerable student groups when returning to in-person learning schedules. *Note: All students should continue to be held to high, grade-appropriate expectations and provided with any supports they need to meet or exceed those expectations.*

- ***Students with health concerns:***

Students with health concerns should receive access to high-quality curriculum AND instructional support in an at-home environment. Digital instruction that includes synchronous and asynchronous environments is preferential. If distance learning cannot involve digital tools, instruction should include opportunities for teachers to scaffold learning, check for understanding and provide academic feedback on a consistent basis. *Note: All students should continue to be held to high, grade-appropriate expectations and provided with any supports they need to meet or exceed those expectations.*

- ***Students and families who are highly mobile, have transportation gaps, are economically disadvantaged, have challenges to mental well-being, or have broadband access issues:***

Students with a variety of barriers to learning should be given priority to attend school in person before other student groups. Research shows that intervention, scaffolding, and assessing for learning occur best in face-to-face environments. Therefore, districts should prioritize vulnerable student groups when returning to in-person learning schedules. *Note: All students should continue to be held to high, grade-appropriate expectations and provided with any supports they need to meet or exceed those expectations.*

Digital Solutions

Note: This information can also be found in the Information Technology Toolkit.

During the 2019-20 school year, many families could not access digital learning experiences because of limited broadband access, lack of digital devices, or lack of technology literacy. Many districts are working to prioritize increasing digital access for students and moving towards a 1:1 environment. This focus could increase access for all learners.

There are two avenues to pursue for procurement—local procurement and state contract to increase devices within a district. With each of the five large manufacturers (Dell, Lenovo, HP, Apple, and Microsoft), state contracting devices and pricing is included as an appendix to this toolkit. By selecting the device and operating system (OS) platform, you can create models to determine budget and thus maximize device strategies for your district.

Intervention Best Practices

Although schools may be reopening in various models (i.e., traditional, staggered schedule, alternating days, distance learning, etc.) and intervention may not look the same, it is critical that intervention takes place and the RTI² Framework is followed to the greatest extent possible. In order to do this, it is important to adhere to the core practices of the RTI² Framework as closely as possible, including:

- use of assessment for screening and diagnostics;
- use of RTI² decision-making process; and
- application of standards of intervention practice.

Best Practice Questions for Designing Intervention include:

- What are we trying to accomplish?
- What is it that we want learners to know, understand, and be able to do as a result?
- How do we design the learning opportunity in order to engage learners and move them to the desired outcome?
- How will we ensure fidelity to interventions to the greatest extent possible?

Districts should strongly consider re-administering universal screeners before placing students in Tiers or making intervention decisions.

Progress Monitoring Considerations

Progress monitoring schedules should begin once intervention groups are launched. The rate at which a student regains skills should help guide the RTI² team's decisions, and decisions should take into consideration the learning environment and availability of the best quality intervention. A student's change or lack of change in skill development may be due to:

- a disruption to learning,
- the need for a more intensive intervention, or
- a change in the intervention setting.

In addition, a district will need to determine how progress monitoring will occur in nontraditional models (i.e., virtually, in-person, scheduled in-person timeslots, etc.)?

Ultimately, the goal of intervention is to provide high-quality instruction targeted and designed for our most vulnerable students to master the skills needed to access the grade-level standards. *As schools reopen and plan for the challenge of determining how best to provide interventions, districts should prioritize in-person learning for those students who need intensive interventions.*

Districts, schools and interventionists should work closely with families and solicit input regarding intervention plans and methods of delivery. Finally, as districts review the intervention design, they should select one that best enables the interventionist to maintain fidelity given the model of delivery. What does the intervention require of the instructor and the student? Is this possible in the current mode of delivery? Note any limitations in intervention delivery in order to address issues and consider the impact during decision making. The team may determine that a change in intervention programming is needed due to a change in method of delivery.

Remediation

*Note: This information can also be found in the **Academics Toolkit**.*

Beginning of Year Assessments

Based on the earlier section, diagnostics tests aim to analyze what **skills** students have mastered in the past. The results are used to identify areas that need more attention in future instruction. With great consideration given to the amount of instructional time lost, a best practice would be for diagnostic assessments to be given to students within the first month of reentry to school. Second, benchmark assessments will provide that vertical content teams can use to revise on-grade level scope and sequences. Educator teams should balance the importance of reestablishing strong connections and building relationships with the timing of diagnostic and benchmark assessments.

TDOE Benchmark Assessments

TDOE will provide all TN districts content-specific benchmark assessments for grade 3 through high school. Existing diagnostics can be used in grades K-2 to determine gaps in foundational literacy skills, gaps in conceptual math skills, and quick curriculum-based comprehension measures to determine the needs of our earliest learners. Then, significant time and analysis of the data should be given during PLC settings. Teachers and leaders will be able to determine student needs and adapt instructional plans to best fit the needs of their learners. This data-driven approach is considered one of the best practices in ensuring instruction continues and designing gap instruction to support learners.

Foundational Skills

Early learners may need a higher intensity of practice in sounds-first activities, fluency, and decodables to reinforce the automaticity of reading. Plan for these activities after diagnostic assessments are provided. Middle and high school students may have developed misconceptions or

have gaps in content knowledge that may also need to be addressed within the scope and sequence of content. Vertical content teams should have the opportunity to assess benchmark data and adapt scopes and sequences accordingly.

Remediation Intensity

Best practice research indicates that struggling students need 30 minutes of extra time daily to catch up to their peers. Closing achievement gaps and raising the achievement of students who are struggling is attainable when the instructional day allows for 30 minutes or more of time for remediation. Find ways to include extra time during the school day that is specifically protected for remediation. Each district will have unique needs and will need to develop appropriate local solutions. For example, a district can adjust the master schedule to create additional skinny periods for additional remediation supports.

IV. Additional Recommendations

Extending the school day could look like accommodating an additional 30 minutes for a morning period to access dedicated time for remediation or intervention. Districts could create a digital “zero period” with a one-to-one environment. By adding a digital course to students’ day, students could add additional coursework, take a remediation course, or have additional intervention options during their day. This decision should be a collaborative process that engages employees, families, and additional stakeholders to determine if this solution is appropriate for the local school/district community.

Other considerations for students:

- **Include Every Student:** Build in flexible periods so that they are accessible to all students. Transportation, student internships, extra-curricular activities, and other student interests and obligations will continue to complete for time and should be considered. Try to avoid creating flexible periods at the very beginning or very ending of the school day.
- **Use Data for Intentional Placement:** It will be important to use data from screeners and other diagnostic tools to purposefully schedule students into the most appropriate flexible intervention. A flex period, whether intended for remediation or enrichment, will significantly lose effectiveness if students are not placed intentionally based on data. Student choice should also be valued in planning their individual placement.
- **Identify Untapped Expertise:** Your district likely has personnel in each school that has untapped expertise. Survey faculty at each school to find their areas of expertise and training that may be useful during flex periods.
- **Alternate Ways to Demonstrate Mastery:** The district’s instructional team should determine multiple ways for students to demonstrate mastery based on curriculum, grade band, and method for delivering instruction. Students should have multiple ways to demonstrate their learning to ensure that students can have appropriate learning supports or continue learning on grade level.
- **Whole Child Supports:** Be sure to consider the social well-being of each student. Some students may benefit from whole child supports more than an academic remediation or enrichment flex courses. Use district and local community experts to plan and facilitate class sessions and programs to meet individual needs.

V. Resource List

School Closure Toolkit for Academics

[Link](#)

This site provides an interactive search feature for both educators and parents. Users can search for resources by subject area, grade level, and by open source curriculum. Instruction resources include

Online Learning Tool

[Link](#)

This online learning tool is under development, and in August, will provide curriculum-based videos, lessons, teacher and student resources, and family support resources. Those resources will be launched in the full tool release on August 1st. The resources can be used in an online environment and as a downloadable resource. In addition, the entire Pre K-2 foundational skills curriculum supplement and supporting teacher video training packages. K-2 math resources will also be available in August. K-2 foundational skills curriculum supplement will be housed [here](#) in June and July and moved to the online learning tool in August.

What Works Clearinghouse

[Link](#)

The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) reviews the existing research on different *programs, products, practices, and policies* in education. *Our goal* is to provide educators with the information they need to make evidence-based decisions. We focus on the results from *high-quality research* to answer the question “What works in education?”