



Department of
Education

CLP Implementation Review

An Analysis of CLP Implementation
in Hamilton County Schools

Tennessee Department of Education | July 2021

Executive Overview

The COVID-19 health pandemic has been unlike any other time and has significantly shifted education in Tennessee and the nation. As noted in the department's [Reopening Schools: Overview Guide for LEAs](#), the pandemic elevated known gaps, and created a sense of urgency for a child-centered strategy. This has been especially true for our youngest learners, those with existing achievement gaps, those in rural communities, and those who need additional school-based services.

On June 22, 2020, the Tennessee State Board of Education promulgated the Continuous Learning Plan (CLP) Emergency Rule 0520-01-17 and Policy 3.210. Based on that rule and policy, the Tennessee Department of Education produced a template and rubric on June 26, 2020. Districts submitted CLP plans and implemented those plans throughout the 2020-21 school year.

As a part of the emergency rule, the department is required to submit a mid-year report and an annual report on CLP implementation. To collect data for the mid-year report, the department administered a survey to districts, and did so again in May for the end-of-year report. In addition, the department conducted implementation reviews with selected districts from April-June to inform the end-of-year report to better tell the story of CLP implementation in districts during the 2020-21 school year.

The department saw this as an opportunity to tell the unique stories of districts and how they stepped up to face unprecedented challenges and overcame those challenges, as well as to highlight the challenges that still exist. The department contracted with external researchers to conduct these reviews. As part of the review process, the researchers collected and reviewed artifacts, conducted focus groups with district staff, leaders, teachers, and parents, and produced the following report that highlights all of the hard work Hamilton County Schools (HCS) did this year, and captures some of the successes and challenges experienced.

CLP Implementation Review Process

The department contracted with Basis Policy Research to create this case study applying a mixed methods case study approach that included analyzing CLPs, artifacts, and interviews with district leaders, teachers, and parents. Researchers first reviewed the district's original CLP. They then reviewed additional artifacts submitted by HCS to better understand what occurred in practice HCS worked to implement the CLP and respond to challenges. Then, researchers conducted interviews with district leaders, teachers, and parents. Finally, researchers analyzed all information gathered to draft the following case study that tells the story of implementation for HCS, highlights their successes, and articulates their unique challenges.

District Selection

The department used a purposive sampling technique to generate a diverse sample of districts for review that can give us the best potential information on successes as well as challenges. In order to get a cross section of districts statewide with varying CLP experiences, the department identified districts who appeared most often in the bottom 10% (11 districts) and the top 10% (19 districts) of the following data points:

- Percent of students in full-time remote learning
- Percent of students with disabilities in full-time remote learning
- Percent of economically disadvantaged students in full-time remote learning
- Percent of K-2 students in full-time remote learning
- Percent of teachers who have missed more than 10 percent of instructional days
- Size of ESSER 1.0 allocation
- Percent of ESSER 1.0 funds remaining

Hamilton County Schools was selected using this criteria.

CLP Implementation

HCS serves 45,342 students in Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12. The district employs 184 instructional leaders and 3,354 teachers across 79 schools. The student population is mostly White (49 percent) or Black/African American (31 percent) with approximately a third of students classified as Economically Disadvantaged (2020 TDOE Report Card).

This report describes HCS's experience with CLP implementation, including the learning models used, teacher preparedness to implement different learning models, the technology used to support remote instruction, and procedures for monitoring implementation.

Model of Remote Learning

From the start of the school year, HCS allowed parents to choose between traditional in-person instruction and full-time remote learning. Students enrolled in the in-person option for face-to-face learning, remote learning, or a hybrid learning configuration depending on the phase of the school reopening plan. Students committed to in-person or remote learning for one semester at a time.

The modality used in the HCS Learning Continuum Plan was based on one of four phases, dependent on the current risk of spread of COVID-19 in the community. Phases were in place for at least two weeks while the district monitored data. These phases were as follows:

- Phase 1: All schools were closed, and students completed coursework through remote learning (Remote);
- Phase 2: Reduced on-campus hours for all schools, with two days per week of face-to-face instruction (Hybrid);
- Phase 3: Schools were open, short-term closure procedures occurred for COVID-19 affected buildings (In-Person);
- Phase 4: Completed return to in-person learning, curriculum delivered on campus (in-person).

After reviewing COVID-19 case data and stakeholder surveys (e.g., parents/guardians, and teachers), HCS revised the first two phases prior to the start of the second semester for kindergarten through third grade students. Phase 1 now allowed K-3 students to attend in-person learning two days per week, and Phase 2 included four days of in-person learning per week.

35 percent of students elected to enroll in remote learning through “HCS at Home.” More than 40 percent of students classified as Economically Disadvantaged enrolled in HCS at Home in the first semester, with that number dropping by almost half in semester two. Moreover, a third of Students with Disabilities participated in HCS at Home in the first semester, reducing to 18 percent in semester two. For the most part, students in HCS received extensive in-person instruction in the 2020-21 school year due to the district remaining in Phase 3 for most of the year. However, the district did transition to Phase 1 and 2 for several weeks in December, January, and February due to increased case counts.

Teacher Preparation and Instruction

Most teachers (between 81 and 100 percent) participated in professional development on remote instruction. Professional development offerings focused on the digital tools HCS purchased to support remote learning, including Zoom, Kami, ClassLink, and Nearpod. Once the school year started, HCS was able to provide weekly Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for teachers who had hybrid courses, as well as teachers who were teaching fully remote. As one district leader noted: “We had a wide variety of options happening at different times across different platforms that allowed teachers to access learning.” The description of weekly PLCs is further corroborated in feedback from the 2021 Tennessee Educator Survey (TES), administered by the department, where 82 percent of teachers reported collaborating with educators in their school around virtual instruction.

While the district provided extensive professional development opportunities, some teacher focus group attendees expressed the desire for more support from HCS. One teacher commented, “I did not feel like I got a lot of support in terms of learning how to make digital content and remote content for students, so

there was a very steep and unforgiving learning curve.” When asked what support teachers needed, another teacher noted, “I think there really needs to be more support in how you teach in a virtual environment and not just the tools that we needed to teach in a virtual environment.” Moreover, 45 percent of HCS teachers reported on the TES that they did not receive *sufficient* professional development from the district related to instruction in a virtual learning environment.

A prevailing theme from the Tennessee Educator Survey and the HCS teacher focus group is the challenge student engagement posed to teachers supporting remote learning. Approximately 84 percent of teachers indicated that facilitating student participation in class activities was a “moderate” or “major” concern for teachers while teaching virtually. Moreover, over half of teachers cited facilitating student participation as one of the two biggest challenges they experienced in the past year. The challenges teachers faced were evident in one teacher’s description of student engagement in remote learning,

“One of the things that I noticed with students, they would log on to virtual class, but maybe keep their cameras off the entire time. So really be there, but not interacting with class. And also, maybe even their camera had to be on...having the camera facing up at the ceiling where the teachers knew that they were clearly not paying attention to school. So, they were there for attendance purposes, but really not engaged in the learning that was happening.”

It is important to note that one teacher described being purposeful about using the learning platform and how it positively contributed to student engagement at the secondary level.

“We tried to incorporate breakout rooms so that they could have some small group interactions because we kept our Zooms 45 minutes or less...Because they shouldn't be on zoom for the full class period and then be working on all assignments outside of class or outside of school time. So, we were very intentional on when we met on Zooms and what we had them complete. ...We tried to make it similar to what they would do in class, but manageable.”

Regarding student learning in the remote setting, HCS described the following trend in their pre-review questions,

“We saw a higher percentage of our remote students failing than our in-person students. We believe this comes from students not receiving enough of the one-on-one time and support that the students receive in the building. We also know that we struggled to give remote students the same level of engagement with their learning as we did for our in-persons students.”

Despite differences in the percentage of failing grades between remote and in-person students, HCS reported comparable benchmark results and attendance among both groups of students.

Technology

In order to assess the technology needs in the district, HCS collected information about device accessibility and WiFi access through the school registration and School Reopening Survey prior to the school year. All students in grades six through twelve had HCS devices due to the district's pre-existing one-to-one initiative. Devices for K-5 students were distributed based on need, with HCS prioritizing students in grades three through five and families with no access to devices. Moreover, the district redistributed devices available in elementary schools and used federal relief funding and local dollars to support one-to-one technology for grades three through five. Upon meeting one-to-one access for grades three through five, the district had over 4,000 devices to distribute to students in grades K-2.

District leaders reported Economically Disadvantaged students, students residing in the urban core, or on the periphery of the county were more likely to have limited WiFi and internet access. To address this, students could access WiFi at free digital drive-thrus at 26 strategic locations across Hamilton County, or use public WiFi hotspots available throughout the county. However, one of the greatest successes from the past year was the partnership HCS established with EPB, the local electricity provider, to establish a program offering free high-speed WiFi to eligible students. One district leader commented,

"I think one of the greatest stories that came out of this is the collaboration between our local utility, EPB, and the city of Chattanooga, and Hamilton County government and Hamilton County schools, and the ability to identify students and families that were lacking internet connectivity..."

Finally, only 12 percent of teachers cited lack of internet access for students as one of the two biggest challenges experienced while teaching virtually, suggesting the lengths the district went to provide internet access for students helped facilitate the remote learning experience.

Attendance

The HCS CLP indicates that students participating in HCS at Home, "[would] be expected to sign-in daily at a designated time and be engaged in a blending learning model (two-way, real time, pre-recorded videos, etc.)". Teachers described major challenges with remote student attendance and engagement. One stated,

"I would say attendance and accountability was a struggle across the board for students. They would log into class and then log out, or they would just not complete the asynchronous work. And so there was not a lot of accountability on the end of the parents and the students to submit the work."

Moreover, results from the HCS CLP Annual Survey and Tennessee Educator Survey corroborate teachers' sentiment. Approximately 23 percent of full-time remote students missed 10 percent or more of instructional days in the first semester. The second semester was mostly comparable with almost 21 percent of full-time remote students missing several instructional days. Moreover, approximately 77 percent of teachers reported attendance was a "moderate" or "major" challenge while teaching virtually. Similarly, more than half of teachers reported that student attendance was one of the biggest challenges while teaching virtually.

Monitoring

HCS established an oversight plan to monitor different components of the CLP, including instruction, attendance, instructional technology, professional development, and communication and engagement. Some areas for monitoring and oversight also included several sub-components the district planned to track. For example, professional development focused on virtual or distance learning, student engagement and classroom climate, student supports, and learning loss. The plan also included the oversight owner, key performance indicators from the HCS Future Ready 2023! strategic plan, and the monitoring focus. Regarding the latter, the monitoring focus for professional development on virtual or distance learning includes: (a) ensuring effective professional development is delivered to staff related to virtual or distance learning; and (b) ensuring technical training on distance learning tools, integrating instructional practices in digital/distance learning, and strategies for how to reach vulnerable groups of learners in a distance learning environment.

Moreover, HCS established the School Reopening Task Force that included representatives from different stakeholder groups. Task force members included the Chief Talent Officer (co-chair), Director of JROTC (co-chair), Integrated Student Supports Program Manager (project manager), school principals, teachers, parents, students, and community and district leaders.

The task force routinely met to discuss the implementation and oversight of different components of the CLP and review the COVID-19 data dashboard, which included active case counts for internal stakeholders (staff and students), school closures, and employee vaccinations. In coordination with the school board, the task force recommended the following CLP adjustments in the second semester, "increasing on-campus instruction for younger learners and eliminating the transition bands from the Phase Tracker, and then eliminating the Phase Tracker entirely in the spring."

Biggest Successes

Focus group transcripts and analysis of CLP artifacts suggest the three biggest successes within HCS were:

New community partnerships to provide eligible students with access to technology

HCS established partnerships with EPB, the city of Chattanooga, and Hamilton County Government to provide eligible families with free access to high-speed internet. District leaders, teachers, and parents celebrated these partnerships as “one of the greatest stories that came out of [the pandemic].” As one parent stated,

“I think one of the most successful things in Hamilton County for what has happened with remote learning is the community partnerships that we have been able to create, especially with EPB and Verizon to be able to get internet out to homes that did not have internet access.”

HCS teachers are using technology in new and improved ways

Teachers’ proficiency with integrating different forms of technology in the classroom has grown considerably amid the pandemic. When describing the successes of remote learning, one teacher commented,

“As our students have gotten their Chromebooks and I’ve certainly been moving more towards working within the digital space and the digital realm, this definitely was a year where I just had to fully dive in, and I feel like I was able to develop a lot of practices that I’ve been focusing on for the past couple of years...I really set myself up for the future.”

Moreover, another teacher followed this comment with, “I would add onto that and say, I also learned a lot of resources that are technology based that I did not know about because I didn’t have to know about them and then can now incorporate that into my practice.”. Finally, district leaders commented on how teachers have begun using technology in new and improved ways. As one district leader mentioned, “Several [teachers] have said to me ‘I have done things this year that I never would have thought I would have been able to do.’ That’s been great.”

Student self-advocacy and communication improved in the remote learning environment

Teacher and district leaders reported student communication and self-advocacy improved while learning in a remote environment. For instance, one teacher commented:

"I have a lot of students who took on a role of self-advocation that they hadn't before, were much more consistent and purposeful about communicating with their teacher outside of school hours if they needed anything, and are much stronger email communicators than I've ever seen before."

Similarly, a district leader added,

"The communication that my students have learned, how to really email their teachers, communicate back and forth with their teachers...I think that's been great that they've learned how to take ownership and responsibility with checking on their grades."

Biggest Challenges

Focus group transcripts and an analysis of CLP artifacts suggest that the three biggest challenges within HCS were:

Engaging Remote Learners

Results from the Tennessee Educator Survey indicate that 77 percent of teachers reported attendance was a "moderate" or "major" challenge while teaching virtually. Additionally, over half of teachers reported that student attendance and facilitating student participation in class activities were the two biggest challenges while teaching virtually. One teacher echoed these findings when she commented that, "I would say attendance and accountability was a struggle across the board for students. They would log into class and then log out, or they would just not complete the asynchronous work."

Ensuring teachers had adequate professional development related to digital instruction

Approximately 45 percent of teachers reported not receiving sufficient professional development related to instruction in a virtual learning environment (Tennessee Educator Survey, 2021). Moreover, the parent focus group revealed that some participants did not perceive teachers as being prepared to deliver effective virtual instruction. Several teachers in the focus group also commented that the HCS professional development focused on using the online learning platforms and were missing information about integrating content virtually and effectively interacting with students. As one teacher commented, "as far as delivering instruction, there were a few quick PDs over the summer about it, but not really what was necessary to actually deliver content well, every single day to live students."

Meeting the needs of students with disabilities and English learners

District leaders, teachers, and parents commented on the challenges associated with supporting students with disabilities and/or English Learners in a virtual environment, noting that English Learners were less likely to have access to and familiarity with technology. Moreover, access to technology impeded HCS' communication with parents of English Learners. As one district leader noted, "it was really just being able to communicate with [English Learner] parents because a lot of them do not have access, internet access at home." For students with disabilities, maintaining necessary or required services in a virtual environment was especially challenging.