



Department of
Education

CLP Implementation Review

An Analysis of CLP Implementation
in Metro Nashville Public 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 Davidson County 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 Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) to better understand what occurred in practice as the district 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 MNPS, which 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 could provide 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

Metro Nashville Public Schools was selected using this criteria.

CLP Implementation

Models of Remote Learning

MNPS primarily used a fully virtual model throughout most of the 2020-21 school year. Within the first semester, seventy-three percent (73%) of its students were fully virtual; this decreased in the second semester, to forty-four percent (44%) of the student body. MNPS prioritized students within kindergarten to grade 2 for in-person instruction, as only about one third of these students were fully virtual within the first semester. Virtual students had both synchronous and asynchronous instruction every day, with the proportion of each varying by educational tier (e.g. Elementary, Middle, High School).

The district selected to adopt the Florida Virtual School (FLVS) curriculum for remote instruction, as indicated in the district's CLP. As students returned to in-person instruction, the district also applied and received a waiver from the State Board of Education to use FLVS for in-person instruction for the 2020-21 school year only. This decision, made with the support of the local school board, aligned with the district's LMS system and was one that could be implemented in a short time frame. One district leader celebrated this as a success by stating, "So that was certainly a success to stand up a virtual curriculum [and] distribute laptops so that by and large we were able to begin learning on day one" (Davidson County Leader Focus Group, 5/13/21).

MNPS adjusted midyear by communicating at a December 10th, 2020 principals meeting that, based on stakeholder feedback and site observations, each school would be required to implement at least one of the following "virtual model enhancements" to implement during the second semester:

- Small group instruction
- In person tutoring
- Additional Foundational Skills time
- Novel study
- Additional Math time
- Using adaptive programs for additional Tier I support (Pre-Review Questions, 2021)

Teacher Preparation and Instruction

As previously stated, MNPS selected its curriculum from Florida Virtual School specifically because it was a quality curriculum that arrived already developed. As described by one district leader,

[W]e allowed the teachers to focus on pedagogy rather than the content, which is huge because you can't create content and change pedagogy simultaneously. That's an ungodly lift on a teacher. So by having a curriculum that was stood up and ready for them to utilize, they had to learn how to use it but a lot of them had been in Schoology already (Davidson County Leader Focus Group, 5/13/21).

FLVS includes over one hundred and ninety (190) courses and focuses on incorporating real-life applications into its lessons. The curriculum provides learning modules that can be used across varying grades and contexts.

The district also designed and deployed professional development on virtual learning spaces, on student engagement and classroom climate, on student supports, and on learning loss. The professional development provided to teachers also reviewed the FLVS curriculum, clear unit planning, and how to use the materials to differentiate for students. As described by one district leader,

We did quite a few live events on how to set up your Schoology courses, how do you interact with your students, what are the feedback mechanisms that you have in there, how do you get quality feedback through the tools so that we know that the students are learning.... It was required participation for our teachers. We saw events sometimes with 1,500 people in there, so they were live production events. We did synchronous, asynchronous, and we still did have some on-site support, especially later on in the year (Davidson County Leader Focus Group, 5/13/21).

The district also had a teacher support help line, which had the capability of assuming control of a teacher's laptop remotely to model behavior and troubleshoot problems. Teachers also described significantly increased collaboration among their peers, with one stating, "[W]e would pop into each other's classes. We

shared our links and so the collaborative nature and the teamwork that developed in our staff was phenomenal” (Davidson County Teacher Focus Group, 5/6/21).

Despite these varied efforts from MNPS leaders, some teachers shared a different perspective, with one saying that, “[T]here was no real training for the students or teachers...it was left to the teachers themselves” (Davidson County Teacher Focus Group, 5/6/21). This suggests that experiences for teachers may have varied throughout the district.

Student Engagement and Academic Support

Student engagement was a challenge for MNPS, with twenty-eight percent (28%) of virtual students missing ten or more days over the course of the year. The district did have strong attendance policies and communications in place, but virtual learning still posed significant problems for students and families. One parent described the challenges,

[Virtual learning] was very, very stressful to our family, and I consider our family very resourceful. My mother is here to help. My husband is here...I thought that even with all of that, it was still very stressful. So I cannot imagine for someone who didn't have the resources. I had to manage Remind, Schoology, Florida Learning Virtual Service, broken laptops, power outages and internet outages (Davidson County Parent Focus Group, 5/20/21).

The district did strongly focus on its Progressive Attendance Intervention Strategy, which used reports from the district’s data warehouse to identify students with low or irregular attendance. These students had bi-weekly check-ins with a school staff member to address issues related to transportation, technology access, and other academic and socio-economic needs (CLP Mid-Year Report – Davidson).

Teachers at the elementary level described having success through setting up “Bitmoji” classrooms, which mimics a traditional classroom. Within this tool, teachers created announcements or recognized a student’s birthday in class. Students clicked on a book on the screen to read the book, or clicked on a different classroom’s link when it was time to transfer to a different class, such as art or physical education.

In order to comprehensively address student attendance and engagement in school, the district did design and implement its “Navigators” program, which paired over five thousand district employees with a caseload of 6-12 students. Navigators would regularly check-in with their paired students in order to identify barriers to school attendance and engagement, such as missing supplies or helping fix an access issue. Navigators assisted with everything from housing stability, student emotional states, reliable internet access, and general academic success. Despite some student populations facing greater challenges with

school attendance and engagement than others, the district plans to continue the program and continue to support students beyond the pandemic.

MNPS also addressed the challenges of providing virtual services to students with disabilities head on by creating Continuous Learning Individualized Plans (CLIPS), which were plans for each student that described how the IEP goals would be met within a virtual environment. These plans did not change IEP goals, but instead described what steps would occur to meet these goals in a virtual space. Every single IEP had a CLIP created for it, and the district described holding “over 10,000 of those CLIPS meetings by August 4th [2020]” (Davidson County Leader Focus Group, 5/13/21). Some teachers, however, stated that the training for the creation of these CLIPS was inadequate, with one saying, “the training was just a recording of the video of them telling us we had to write the clips. There was no real training...we ended up just having to create a lot of tactile hands-on daily tasks for students and deliver them to their houses. And it was extremely overwhelming” (Davidson County Teacher Focus Group, 5/6/21). Parents also expressed struggles with district support for students with disabilities, with one parent stating that the year was “a nightmare”. The parent continued, “[My child] was expected to sit for an hour in front of a computer screen and do reading and math supports at a fourth-grade level when he's at a kindergarten level... He cannot do it on his own. So I, who also work, had to literally become his teacher” (Davidson County Parent Focus Group, 5/20/21).

Despite the inherent challenges in supporting students in remote instruction, district leaders were pleased to find that on the winter formative assessment, completed by students the second half of January, the achievement gap for students with disabilities had not widened. This is evidence that CLIPS and efforts by MNPS teachers and parents helped students with disabilities maintain a similar learning pace to their peers throughout the year.

Technology

MNPS made significant investments into technological hardware for its students; as stated by one district leader, “Anybody who wants or needs a device has access to it...We've had them sitting at the schools. Where we found people not wanting, students not wanting devices, mainly high school students already have their own device” (Davidson County Leader Focus Group, 5/13/21). This was supported by the parent focus group, during which one parent described a damaged laptop that was quickly and easily replaced.

MNPS leaders and teachers also described the benefits of leveraging platforms with which teachers were already familiar. The district continued to use the LMS that had been in use prior to the pandemic, and also continued to use Clever as a single-sign-on system. One district leader described Clever as instrumental to the district's success, because it allowed all students to use just one place to log-in to all available virtual resources.

District leaders did describe technological challenges among student populations, particularly with English Learners. One leader offered the anecdote of a first-time computer user receiving a username that consists of lower-case letters but having a laptop keyboard on which only upper-case letters are shown. Other students did not know how to use the control-alt-delete functionality to bring up the computer's log-in screen. The district attempted to address this by providing instructional videos to households. Teachers and parents also described other technological barriers and stated that personal connections were the most commonly used method for providing technological assistance to families. One teacher described spending hours every night troubleshooting technological issues with parents.

The district also established virtual help centers with one in each geographic quadrant. Centers were staffed by a Support Hub (district office staff) throughout the school year. The centers logged almost 16,800 family contacts providing support with technology, distributing school supplies, and addressing other needs.

A spring, 2020 survey among MNPS students revealed that 71% had access to wireless internet, 11% did not have access, and 18% did not respond to the survey. The district addressed this challenge through the distribution of Wi-Fi hotspots, but encountered an unexpected issue unique to dense, urban areas,

Long term, everybody in the country knows...that individual hotspots is not going to get where we need to be...Where we found when we went with a single solution was we overloaded cell towers. So we actually degraded service for a neighborhood when we only had one provider for a hotspot. And it took some time to figure out that was what was going on. And we had to really work with the cell providers and we had to get multiple providers of cellular connectivity in in order to make sure our students could be connected... the cell companies weren't ready for that kind of load coming into neighborhoods that were traditionally underserved (District Leader Focus Group, 5/13/21).

By working with businesses and community leaders, MNPS was able to troubleshoot these unique issues and find solutions.

Attendance

MNPS artifacts revealed a very structured and clearly defined set of attendance expectations. District leaders created an attendance letter template for schools to customize that clearly describes the importance of student attendance and parents' roles in supporting student attendance (2020-21 MNPS Attendance Expectations Template). Despite this consistency in messaging, student attendance was still a significant challenge for the district, with a reported 28% of the student body missing ten percent (10%) of instructional days during the year.

The district defined attendance among virtual learners as those who “log into Schoology by 11:59 pm each instructional day and actively engage in learning opportunities by, but not limited to, submitting assignments, completing assessments, participating in online classroom discussions, and/or interacting with teachers” (2020-21 MNPS School Attendance Procedures). Davidson County also overcame barriers to attendance through its “Navigators” program, which paired households with over 5,600 Davidson County staff members to provide various assistance and referrals.

Monitoring

District leadership describe basing decisions around when to engage their CLP as “grounded in the data and the science of when it would be the perfect time to match safety and speed in getting our students back into the in-person learning environment” (Davidson County Leader Focus Group, 5/13/21). This leader continued by describing the challenges of making systems decisions in an interconnected, geographically dense environment. This, and the numerous choice options available to families (including out-of-zone school choice options and thirty-two charter schools), minimized the effectiveness of a geographic cluster-level approach to school closure. Stated differently, the density of the city and mixed households prevented precise measures that would have allowed for example, keeping the Antioch cluster open while closing Cane Ridge.

District leaders described their instructional monitoring as a traditional improvement cycle, using MAP results to identify problem areas, designing solutions, implementing, then measuring again to determine success. District leaders looked at Microsoft usage data weekly as well as other platform-level usage statistics. District leaders also conducted weekly walk-throughs of every virtual classroom, which assessed the frequency of teacher posting, feedback frequency, and other metrics.

At first, district leaders struggled with the participation rate of students in their formative assessment, MAP. Scores came back from the first assessment varied more than what is typical in the district. District leaders suspect that since this was the first time the assessment was administered at home, parents may have provided assistance to test questions or explanations which would not be permitted within a traditional classroom. The district’s participation rate was also lower than normal. District leaders approached this problem using an approach of continuous improvement, with one district leader stating,

[We] provided a support package in December knowing that MAP was coming again in January. ...we really just put the expectation out there that we want to get to where we always have been. It's what's right for our kids....And then basically we just gave them the resource packages and then let our schools do what they do. And they were very successful in being able to focus and we continue to track participation rates all throughout. So literally every single day, there was a member of [Executive Director of Research,

Assessment and Evaluation] Dr Chargas's team sending me a package telling me which schools were at which percent. The schools had it itemized by kids so that they could even dig down and look and say this kid took his reading but not his math, call the parent.

Biggest Successes

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

Initially, Virtual Learning was Very Stressful, but Teachers, Students, and Parents Adjusted to the New Reality

Numerous focus group participants described the beginning of the school year as being very challenging; adjusting to a virtual instructional environment was hard for all stakeholders. District leaders, teachers, and parents all described undergoing significant growth throughout the year. One teacher stated, "As the year went on...I became more aware of how to teach from the computer...you can see my lessons and my plans drastically change over the year...it's been a really huge learning year as a professional" (Davidson County Teacher Focus Group 5/6/21). Other teachers agreed with this assessment, with one stating that, "[Remote learning] required me to be more engaging in technology and being more aware of what's out there to use".

Teachers and parents also described the significantly increased communication over the school year. One teacher said, "[T]he best thing about this year is just really, I feel so close with my students' families. And it just really reiterated to me the importance of relationships with our students, but also their families" (Davidson County Teacher Focus Group, 5/6/21). Parents who participated in the focus groups also described being impressed by the commitment and adaptability of MNPS teachers. One parent described the year as, "[T]he level of communication [from teachers] was really great. Me and these teachers this year, that was my village. We got through it" (Davidson County Parent Focus Group, 5/20/21).

Educator Collaboration Increased

MNPS teachers described increased collaboration with their peers, learning from each other about technology and virtual teaching. One teacher stated,

A group of elementary school coaches just of their own volition got together and created slide decks that they shared across the district...that was a huge support to us...It had your morning meeting slides in there. Then it went into our foundational skills slides and it followed the scope and sequence....it really was a benefit to us once we started getting those slide decks and at least at our school, we have not stopped

using them. So that's been a really great help...thank you, wherever you are (Davidson County Teacher Focus Group, 5/6/21).

Another teacher described gathering at least twice a week either as a small group or school-wide to share learnings from the week, serving as an informal technology support to each other. She added, “[T]hat was probably the best thing for me...[the] teamwork that pulled our whole faculty together during that time” (Davidson County Teacher Focus Group, 5/6/21).

The District Prioritized K-2 Students for In-Person Learning

District leaders describe the challenges of re-opening decisions in a large city, where households are interconnected, without geographic dispersal. Families span multiple schools, and the multitude of choice options prevented a reopening approach based on a zip code or school cluster approach. When re-opening, the district did significantly prioritize the younger grades in order to provide in-person instruction to those with the greatest need. Within the first semester, seventy-three percent (73%) of MNPS students were fully virtual, but only thirty-six percent (36%) of the district’s students in kindergarten to grade 2 were fully virtual. Within the second semester, more of the general student population returned to some in-person learning, so forty-four percent (44%) of all students were fully virtual. Of the K-2 population in the second semester, thirty-five percent (35%) were fully virtual. Students in younger grades are more of a vulnerable population, since it is so vitally important that these form strong, positive relationships with their peers and teachers. Numerous district stakeholders also described the importance of learning how to read within an in-person context. In both semesters, significantly more students in grades kindergarten to grade 2 were in in-person learning compared to the overall student population.

Biggest Challenges

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

Virtual Teaching Required Increased Work by Teachers

MNPS leaders described the implementation of a new virtual curriculum, and many teachers describe teaching full-time virtually for the first time. Focus group feedback from teachers and parents indicate that this adjustment required many more hours of instructional preparation. As described by one teacher, “Teachers put in...probably twice as much work as we've ever done in a regular school year. At least for me, I've been around 30 years...And this is the hardest I've worked since probably my first year teaching” (Davidson County Teacher Focus Group, 5/6/21). Teachers mentioned having to create videos, create or manipulate slide decks, and provide technical assistance to students and parents. Just as a second-year

teacher brings efficiencies and experience gained through the first year, undertaking a second year of virtual learning would likely be easier than the first – but it still bears noting that a significant proportion of MNPS teachers were teaching virtually for the first time, and had a significant burden related to preparation throughout the year.

Providing In-Person Learning for Students with Special Needs

Teachers and parents who participated in the focus group described challenges in ensuring students with disabilities received the same accommodations in virtual environments as in a traditional school setting. One parent stated, “The one-on-one supports were not available for families with disabilities, [my child] must have them to get through the academic process” (Davidson County Parent Focus Group, 5/20/21). Other parents agreed, describing challenges in replicating the supports their child with disabilities received at school while learning at home. MNPS appeared to have prioritized students in grades kindergarten to grade 2 to return to in-person learning, but the district was unable to accomplish the same with students with disabilities, English Learners, or economically disadvantaged students. Stated differently, attendance data reveals the same percentage of these student populations were in virtual learning compared to the entire student body. For example, within the first semester, seventy-three percent (73%) of the entire student body was in fully virtual learning, while seventy-two percent (72%) of students with disabilities, eighty percent (80%) of Limited English Proficient students, and seventy-three percent (73%) of economically disadvantaged students and were in fully virtual learning. However, students with disabilities that had difficulty accessing virtual learning were brought back to schools prior to any other groups of students.

Student Engagement

Student engagement during virtual learning has been found to be a very common issue within other districts, so MNPS’s experience is certainly not unique when MNPS teachers and parents described challenges with student engagement during virtual learning. One teacher stated, “Some of my students still just don’t come to class...We have our guidance counselors have gone to houses. There have been a long list of things that we have attempted and they just don’t see [virtual learning] as real school” (Davidson County Teacher Focus Group, 5/6/21). Parents referenced the district’s Navigator program, which paired 5,600 MNPS staff members with six to twelve students (Pre-Review Questions, 2021) and the district should be commended for attempting a program to increase student engagement. Feedback from teachers and parents, however, was that challenges with student engagement within MNPS classrooms occurred frequently.