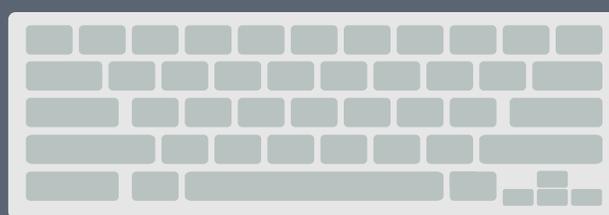
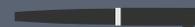


CONSIDERATIONS FOR CLOSING THE 2019-20 SCHOOL YEAR & SUMMER 2020

MAY 15, 2020

PART 1 - TRANSITION PLAN



Illinois
State Board of
Education

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
Acknowledgements	5
Introduction	7
<i>Closing the Current School Year</i>	8
Student Attendance	8
Wellness Checks and Community Connections	9
Grading	10
Minimizing Learning Loss	11
Picking up Belongings	12
Addressing Grief and Loss	13
<i>During the Summer</i>	13
Social-Emotional Supports	13
Summer School	13
Summer Meals	14
Device Distribution	15
Professional Development	15
Additional Resources	16
Conclusion	17

Executive Summary

ISBE releases this Part One of the Transition Plan Advisory Workgroup's recommendations for transitioning to in-person instruction. **This document focuses on considerations for closing out the 2019-20 school year and entering summer.**

Governor JB Pritzker announced on May 5, 2020, the [Restore Illinois](#) plan detailing a public health approach to safely reopen our state. The plan places the return to physical school buildings in a given region in Phase 4 of the five phases of recovery. The entire state is currently experiencing Phase 2. Different regions around the state may reach Phase 4 at different times, which may mean each district has a plan A, plan B, and plan C for facilitating students' safe return to school buildings.

ISBE would like to make clear that while Phase 4 allows for the resumption of face-to face instruction, this is not the same as a return to pre-pandemic operations. Extensive social distancing measures, enhanced sanitation measures, and other accommodations will be necessary to ensure the safety of students, staff, and their families.

Public health experts have communicated to ISBE and to the Governor's Office that they believe coronavirus transmissions may subside in the summer months, but spike again in the fall/winter. When your region enters Phase 4, and you have received approval from your local department of public health, you may consider starting the 2020-21. This may be possible in August, rather than after Labor Day. This would allow school districts to maximize the amount of time students have access to in-person instruction at the beginning of the school year, in the event a return to remote learning is necessary later in the fall. Once again, it's important to recognize even when districts reach Phase 4 and in-person instruction resumes, school will still look very different from what we are used to.

In the next few weeks, ISBE, in partnership with the Illinois Department of Public Health, will provide further considerations to help you navigate this transition.

To develop the transition considerations, ISBE convened an advisory group with the key lenses that should be present in developing local plans, including social workers, administrators, multilingual educators, special education instructors, and general education teachers. The advisory group firmly believes that an effective transition back to school starts with successfully closing out the current school year. Part One that ISBE is releasing today provides academic, social-emotional, and logistical considerations for the initial steps of this transition.

ISBE acknowledges the diversity of students, families, schools, and districts. ISBE strives with this document to meet local needs and, to the greatest extent possible, minimize the negative impact this crisis has on students' educational trajectories.

We know many of you are eager for more – for guidance on how to plan for the start of next school year and for when students return to the classroom. We are eager too. We cannot, however, lose sight of the fact that these considerations are matters of life and death. We are working closely with public health experts to ensure that any recommendations we provide to you contain the information you will need to welcome your students and staff back safely, with the minimum risk possible to their health and well-being. We must take every precaution with the lives of students and families in our hands.

This executive summary presents essential considerations for districts as they refine existing plans and develop new ones in preparation for the return to in-person instruction. The introduction and considerations that follow offer suggestions to help districts, schools, and educators effectively respond to the challenges associated with transitioning back to our school buildings in this “new normal” to meet the needs of all students across Illinois.

Closing the Current School Year

- We recognize the effects of trauma caused by the pandemic and further emphasize the need to support the social-emotional needs of staff, students, and families. Consider providing broad counseling services within schools and the community, and possibly partnering with social service agencies, cooperatives, and other providers.
- Submit attendance for the 2019-20 school year in the Student Information System. Final data is due to ISBE by August 14. The primary purpose of attendance during this time is to account for instructional days, keep students engaged, and check in daily on students' well-being.
- Account for every enrolled student and conduct wellness checks where necessary. Ensure educators and staff are aware of their duties as Mandated Reporters of child abuse and neglect.
- Communicate with students and families about grades. ISBE continues to recommend:
 - Student grades should not fall below the grade earned as of March 17, 2020.
 - Students are able to improve any grade they had earned prior to the start of remote learning.
 - Students successfully complete/pass the courses in which they are enrolled.
- If an Incomplete grade is issued, the issuing teacher should identify the essential skills the student has not demonstrated and provide an individualized plan for the student indicating how those essential skills can be demonstrated, including through opportunities such as summer school.

- Minimize learning loss through activities such as preparing summer learning packets for students and holding virtual transition meetings between each student’s current teacher and their teacher for the 2020-21 school year.
- Provide a safe process for students to pick up any belongings left at the school building.

During the Summer

- Maintain avenues of virtual contact with students to continue to build positive relationships.
- Conduct summer school programming remotely. Districts should make every effort throughout the summer and prior to the start of the next school year to have any student who received an Incomplete grade complete their individualized plan and earn a passing grade.
- Look at the needs of the community and provide free meals through the Summer Food Service Program and Seamless Summer Option.
- Consider distributing devices and ensuring plans are in place for meeting all students technology needs for the 2020-21 school year, in preparation for potentially returning to remote learning again.
- Use the summer months to address needs for professional development and training support for educators in many areas, including anxiety, depression, trauma, and fear. Devote time for mental health and counseling plans, preparation, and training.
- Learning loss may vary considerably, so teachers or curriculum teams, composed of current grade level representatives and previous grade level representatives, are encouraged to meet to determine the standards that must be reviewed upon moving to the next grade level.
- Each student will have had a unique remote learning experience and finish the school year with varied experiences, skills, and mastery of prior coursework. Begin planning and preparations for how students will be assessed in each grade/course to inform teachers of current student progress and needs.
- Begin considering accommodations and preparations for Phase 4 to ensure schools are prepared for this “new normal.” Consider operations such as school cleaning schedules/practices and procurement of necessary supplies in quantities schools were previously not accustomed to buying, e.g. large volumes of hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, and cleaners. More detailed guidance will be provided in the forthcoming Part Two transition document.

Acknowledgements

The crafting of this document is the result of a collaborative effort with our partners across Illinois who worked tirelessly in these unprecedented times to develop recommendations for the transition back to in-person instruction. This first part reflects considerations for closing out the 2019-20 school year and entering summer. We are truly grateful that you gave your time and effort toward this project.

Every contributor engaged in thoughtful and respectful dialogue about how to best serve the needs of students in Illinois at this time. Thanks to the generous commitment of each advisory group member, we produced a document that reflects and accounts for the incredible diversity of our state.

Again, we extend our sincerest gratitude to this exemplary team. We recognize that your input was invaluable. We appreciate that you brought not only your talent and ability to this project, but also your grace and respect for others under these extraordinary circumstances.

Dr. Brenda M. Dixon

Research and Evaluation Officer
Illinois State Board of Education

Elaine Barlos
7th Grade Science Teacher
Oak Lawn-Hometown Middle School
Oak Lawn-Hometown SD 123

Mark Brown
6th Grade Science Teacher
Leman Middle School
West Chicago SD 33

Brenda Calvin
Principal
Sauk Elementary School
Matteson SD 162

Patricia Chamberlain
Instructor
Erikson Institute
Chicago

Dr. Sean Clayton
Director of Assessment
Illinois State Board of Education

Patrice Cogar
Teacher 5th Grade
Indiana Elementary School
Matteson SD 162

Eric Combs
2020 Illinois Teacher of the Year
Band Director
Richland County Middle School
Richland County SD 1

Michelle Coriasco, MSW, MSED
School Social Worker
Herrin Elementary School
Herrin CUSD 4

David Crouthers, LCSW
School Social Worker
Belleville West High School
Belleville SD 201

Jeff Dase
Asst. Superintendent of Teaching &
Learning
Decatur Public SD 61

David del Pozo
Teacher 5th grade Dual Language
Lincoln School, K-8
Peoria Public SD 150

Marek Dron
English/ELL Teacher
Lemont High School
Lemont Township HSD 210

Raul Gaston
Principal
Jefferson Middle School
DuPage County SD 45

Dr. Daniel Krause
Principal
Willowbrook High School
DuPage HSD 88

Heidi Lensing
Principal
Eagle Ridge School
Carbon Cliff-Barstow SD 36

Michael Lubelfeld, Ed.D.
Superintendent
North Shore SD 112

Dr. Paul O'Malley
Superintendent
Butler SD 53

Kimberly Onak
Special Education Teacher
Amos Alonzo Stagg High School
Consolidated HSD 230

Pilar Rocha
7th Grade Dual Language Arts
Leman Middle School
West Chicago SD 33

Spencer Saal, IFT
HS Science Teacher
Madison High School
Madison CUSD 12

Carter Shockey
12th Grade Student
Freeport High School
Freeport SD 145

Linda Stone
Teacher Special Education, LBS1
Skokie School
Winnetka SD 36

Nichole Stone
1st grade teacher
Ridgewood Elementary School
East Moline SD 37

Michelle Strater Gunderson
First Grade Teacher
Nettelhorst Elementary School
Chicago Public SD 299

Dylan Swank, IEA
English Teacher
Hoopeston Area High School
HACUSD 11

Barbara Thomas, Ph.D.
Research Director
Illinois State Board of Education

Brenda T. Thompson, LSCW
Founder/CEO
The Branch Family Institute

Bridget Westlove
School Social Worker
Eastview Elementary School
District 300

Introduction

ISBE convened the Transition Plan Advisory Workgroup in April 2020 to develop a transition plan to support students' return to in-person instruction following the move to remote learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. ISBE is releasing transition considerations in parts over the next several weeks. This first part reflects considerations for closing out the 2019-20 school year and entering summer.

Eight hundred fifty-two public school districts, all private schools, and other educational institutions in Illinois shifted to remote learning in March 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 public health crisis. Educators are doing their best to provide continuity of education for millions of Illinois children based upon the [Remote Learning Recommendations](#) issued by ISBE.

We acknowledge that virtually all students may have experienced gaps in learning, content mastery, and language development, and been exposed to trauma or loss during this public health crisis. We continue to emphasize that any conclusion to the school year and transition to the next school year should *do no harm* to students as a result of the remote learning period.

This document should *not* be interpreted to override the mutual obligations of the educational employer and the representative of the educational employees to plan at reasonable times and bargain in good faith with respect to wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment that may need to be addressed in order to end the current school year and enter the summer.

The advisory group's considerations are based on the understanding that closing out the school year and entering summer are not a "one-size-fits-all" approach. Local districts have different economies and contracts and must provide a variety of services to ensure their students are safe, supported mentally and emotionally, cared for, and able to learn. It is also important to recognize that even when districts reach Phase 4 and resume in-person instruction, school may look very different. School may not feel "back to normal" until a vaccine and effective treatment is in place. More detailed considerations will be provided in the forthcoming Part Two transition document.

This recommendation document is organized into two sequential focus areas: 1) the close of the current school year; and 2) summer.

Closing the Current School Year

Student Attendance

Final attendance for the 2019-20 school year is due to ISBE by August 14, 2020. Attendance for Remote Learning Days should continue to be submitted to ISBE in the same manner as prior to the COVID-19 pandemic – via the Student Information System.

The primary purpose of attendance during this time is to account for the instructional learning days and keep students engaged. Our students' overall well-being is always our highest priority.

The preferred method of collecting attendance is always a one-to-one daily connection between the teacher and the student. However, we recognize that this method is not available or practical for all districts and student scenarios under the COVID-19 conditions. We encourage and suggests several ideas for how classroom teachers can collect and count a student as present when the one-to-one daily connection is not practical:

- Video conference “check-ins.”
- Wellness checks coupled with a question on student engagement/participation in lessons.
- Phone calls coupled with a question on student engagement/participation in lessons.
- Text messages or email communications coupled with a question on student engagement/participation in lessons.
- Packet collections by school personnel.

For example:

- If the attendance method covers a week timespan (e.g., a weekly packet), then once the packet comes back completed the student should be marked present for each of the days the work packet was intended to cover.
- If the phone call or text message occurs every other day and the interaction is coupled with a question on student engagement/participation in lessons covering the same timeframe, then attendance should be recorded for the same number of days.

If schools cannot ensure student attendance through supportive measures, it is recommended that school personnel follow the normal procedures of referring students to your school's regional truancy officer as outlined in the Illinois School Code, Section 26-2a: “A ‘truant’ is defined as a child who is subject to compulsory school attendance and who is absent without valid cause, as defined under this Section, from such attendance for more than 1% but less than 5% of the past 180 school days.”

We also recommend continued efforts to note when students are *engaging* with the school. This can be used as a means to record attendance, interaction with the school, or both.

Task	Frequency	Resources	Recommendations
Attendance	Daily	Teacher Assistants Clerical Staff Social Workers Psychologists Counselors	Email Phone Call Video Chat Google Form Packet Pickup
Grades	Weekly	Teacher	Use Grades during Remote Learning as Feedback Use Incomplete as Last Option
Communication to Students & Families	Daily	Teacher Assistants Clerical Staff Administrators	Email Phone Call Video Chat
Instruction & Support	Daily	Teacher Assistants Clerical Staff Administrators	Remote Learning Plan
Wellness Check	Daily	Teacher Assistants Clerical Staff Social Workers Psychologists Counselors Resource Officers Truancy Officers	Email Phone Call Video Chat Home Visit
Packet Pickup	Weekly	Clerical Staff Administration Teachers	Continue Distribution Plans in Place

Wellness Checks and Community Connections

Districts are encouraged to make every effort to locate and check in with all students and families to the best of their ability. These connections will help ease student and family stress over any upcoming transitions throughout the next year. Teachers need to communicate immediately with social workers and counselors if a family is experiencing grief/loss so that the support staff personnel can connect that family with the appropriate resources. Clinical and community services and support services are recommended for physical and mental health needs.

Where possible, school and community partnerships should be established and enhanced during this time. Indeed, this time may be an especially opportune moment to strengthen school and community ties to marshal collective resources and develop innovative solutions to support student, family and community success.

Educators are mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect. The lack of access to in-person instruction does not change obligations to ensure the physical and emotional safety of all children in our care. **The advisory group strongly recommends during this transitional and remote learning time a *wellness check* be conducted to every degree possible for all children, especially those most at risk for disengagement.** ISBE and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services released [guidance](#) for contacting students and performing wellness checks.

The Illinois Child Abuse Hotline can be reached at 1-800-25-ABUSE (1-800-252-2873). The Hotline operates 24 hours per day, 365 days a year. Reporters should be prepared to provide phone numbers where they may be reached throughout the day in case the Hotline must call back for more information.

Additional Resources:

- [Flowchart for Reports](#)
- [More Tips for Mandated Reporters](#)
- [Manual for Mandated Reporters](#)
- [Disclosure Tip Sheet](#)
- [Training Links for Mandated Reporters](#)
- [Checklist for Mandated Reporters](#)
- [Abused and Neglected Reporter Act](#)

Grading

ISBE continues to recommend that:

- Student grades be maintained at and not fall below the grade as of March 17, 2020.
- Students be able to improve any grade they had in place prior to the start of remote learning.
- Every student should be given the opportunity to successfully complete/pass the courses in which they are enrolled.

A grade of Incomplete must be changed to a completed grade within the time period specified by the district or school. We encourage districts to develop a policy around how Incompletes will be made up and make note of the above recommendations. We encourage districts to make all students, parents, and teachers aware of how Incompletes will be handled. Some suggestions are:

- Remote summer school
- An early start of the new school year
- Extended day when the new school year starts
- Saturday school for districts that offer Saturday school

We further recommend issuing Incomplete grades infrequently, and only when it is in the best interest of a student's overall progressive learning so that students, teachers, schools, districts, parents, and communities can transition from this school year to the next. All efforts should be made for students to successfully complete their current courses as soon as possible. We advise that students who were already successfully completing their coursework and earning a passing grade prior to March 17, 2020, to continue to engage with their teacher and school. These students should not be given an Incomplete unless there are unique circumstances specific to the best interest of the student.

Students who were not earning a passing grade prior to March 17, 2020, should continue to complete any missing assignments from prior term. Unless there are extenuating circumstances specific to the student, only those students who were not earning a passing grade prior to March 17, 2020, and have not engaged in remote learning, should be considered for an Incomplete. However, if a student and their family have been advised of a potential retention or failure of a course prior to March 17, 2020, then the failing grade as of March 17, 2020 is not a result of the suspension of in-person instruction. Therefore, if this grade is not remedied by the end of the school year, then the failing grade may remain.

These recommendations do not imply that instruction, new learning, and assessment of learning should cease. Rather, the assigning of or lowering a grade during remote learning that may potentially prohibit a student from moving forward a grade level, successfully completing a course, or graduating high school would be deemed an adverse impact on the student. In addition, if the student was at a passing level as of March 17, 2020, the lowering of a grade or issuance of an Incomplete based upon work assigned during the remote learning period would be deemed an adverse impact on the student.

If an Incomplete grade is issued, the issuing teacher should identify the essential skills the student has not demonstrated and provide an individualized plan for the student indicating how those essential skills can be demonstrated. Schools should not simply list missing assignments that identify essential skills the student still needs to demonstrate. Rather, the key components of the course and those the student has and has not yet demonstrated at a satisfactory level should be included in the plan. Incomplete grades and any identified skills gaps will contribute to providing comprehensive support for individual students, when necessary.

Minimizing Learning Loss

Efforts should be made to minimize loss of learning content, skills, and language acquisition and to informally check for understanding and generally assess student learning levels during this fourth quarter of the school year. Districts should plan for closure and wrap-up of the previous year:

- Consider holding virtual transition meetings between each student’s current teacher and their teacher for the 2020-21 school year.
- Districts should consider the appropriateness of looping teachers for the summer school and/or the 2020-21 school year, when possible.
- Consider preparing summer packets of learning to give to students to assist with minimizing learning loss.

Picking up Belongings

Each district should develop a process for students and educators to collect their belongings. When creating pick up schedules districts must ensure all efforts be made to follow social distance guidelines. This will ensure the process keeps everyone safe and protected. Ideally, guidelines should minimize entry into buildings. Plans should be crafted and implemented with maximum empathy for students and families who may have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in ways that create or exacerbate inequities. Try to create flexible timeframes to accommodate families struggling with transportation issues or limited resources at home and families collecting materials for multiple students.

If entry is allowed, ISBE makes the following recommendations:

- Schools and districts should consider creating schedules for a limited number of individuals to enter buildings for the gathering of a student’s personal belongings. Schools and districts should consider creating timeslots per hour per building based on multiple criteria (e.g., number of students, building layout, and internal resources available to oversee the process).
- All individuals entering the building should wear face coverings while in the building.
- Unless a student requires one-on-one assistance, guests who arrive to assist students should be required to remain in their vehicle until the student brings their items outside to be loaded into their vehicle. If one-on-one assistance is necessary, only one guest may accompany students into the building. Parents or guardians may also gather personal belongings on behalf of students.
- Wipes and sanitizer should be made available for staff and students in school buildings. Hand sanitizer should be made available at entrance/exits and other high traffic areas.
- Staff should sanitize any carts provided by the school between uses.
- Schools should consider janitorial support that may be needed to address litter produced during this process and to sanitize the school following access by parents, guardians, and students.
- Individuals may not enter the building if they are ill.

Addressing Grief and Loss

The COVID-19 public health crisis resulted in upheaval that has impacted children and adults in various ways. Abrupt suspension of in-person instruction resulted in the loss of hallmark school events, including class trips, spring sports, plays and dances, prom, and graduation ceremonies.

These losses, coupled with the public health requirement to stay at home and practice social distancing, can disrupt normal functioning. We recognize the effects of trauma caused by the pandemic and **further emphasize the need to support staff, students, parents, and the community from a social-emotional, safety, and basic needs perspective as we consider students' academic needs.** Districts may consider providing broad counseling services within schools and the community. Schools may also consider partnering with social service agencies, cooperatives, and other providers, with appropriate consent from families and intergovernmental agreements or contracts.

During the Summer

Social-Emotional Supports

The abrupt suspension of in-person instruction and shift to remote learning were traumatic for some students and families. As a result, districts' Social Emotional Standards board policy may need to be revisited, publicized, communicated, and broadly applied. Also, for children in the elementary school grades, virtual activities should be considered to assist students in obtaining social and emotional closure for the current school year.

We also recognize the importance of traditional junior high/middle/high school celebratory events (e.g., graduation, student recognition programs) and their role in the high school student experience. School districts should continuously review and follow all [recommendations](#) and requirements from the Governor's Office and IDPH.

It is recommended that educators continue to reach out to students and families so that positive relationships are maintained. Building relationships will alleviate some of the anxiety that many students may have when returning to school.

Summer School

Districts should make every effort throughout the summer and prior to the start of the next school year to have any student who received an Incomplete grade complete their individualized plan and earn a passing grade.

The Governor's [Restore Illinois plan](#) to reopen the state places in-person schooling in Phase 4 of the five phase plan. All regions in Illinois are experiencing Phase 2 as of early May. **Schools and districts should plan to conduct summer school via remote learning in 2020, due to the ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency.** ISBE also developed [remote learning recommendations for summer school](#), which includes information on planning, content selection and instruction, and attendance/clock hours. It is recommended that districts review and potentially allocate monies received through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security ([CARES Act](#)) to fund these educational supports. Schools should:

- Provide educators planning time to revise scope and sequence based upon student needs from assessments and identify prioritized standards. Provide collaboration time across grade levels and even schools to ensure clear articulation across grade levels.
- Be mindful of the impact of trauma on the ability to focus and retain new information/knowledge. Teachers will need to plan frequent breaks in teaching and gradually build up the instructional time.

Some junior high/middle/high school courses traditionally include summer assignments. It is recommended that modifications and adjustments be considered for such assignments. It is further recommended that there be no adverse impact on student grades for these assignments/assessments.

Summer Meals

Public Act 096-0734 requires all school districts in Illinois planning to operate an academic summer school or enrichment program in a building with 50 percent or more of the students eligible for free or reduced-price meals must operate a summer feeding program for at least the duration of the summer school program.

We encourage all school districts to look at the needs of their community and provide free meals as needed once their school year ends through the Summer Food Service Program and Seamless Summer Option.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has extended current flexibilities due to the pandemic to allow school districts to continue to provide free meals to all students as they are now through June 30, 2020. USDA has recently provided an extension to three nationwide waivers through August 31, 2020. ISBE is continuing to work with USDA to determine what type of flexibilities may be available after June 30, 2020. Watch for announcements under What's New? at www.isbe.net/nutrition and reference our [COVID-19: Child Nutrition Response Waivers and Q&As document](#) for additional information.

Device Distribution

During the summer months, districts should also consider distributing devices and ensuring plans are in place for meeting all students technology needs for the 2020-21 school year. Public health experts have communicated to ISBE and to the Governor's Office that they believe coronavirus transmissions may subside in the summer months and spike again in the fall/winter. Local education agencies should consider using CARES Act funds to strengthen district infrastructure for remote learning in preparation for potentially returning to remote learning again.

Professional Development

Consider using the summer months to address needs for professional development and training support for educators in many areas, including e-learning and remote learning, as well as social-emotional professional development focused on anxiety, depression, trauma, fear, public health crisis, fear of being together, fear of being apart, and students with adverse childhood experiences. Unemployment, domestic abuse, and community concerns are all factors that may impact educators at home. We suggest professional development days be devoted to mental health and counseling plans, preparation, and training.

Educators are also encouraged to use resources from [CASEL](#), [Mindful Schools](#), [Second Step](#), etc., as well as rely on the expertise of staff members to provide a social-emotional safety net for students during remote learning and the return to school transition.

In the event remote learning returns during the next school year, districts should also consider continued professional development specific to remote learning and e-learning over the summer. ISBE will continue sharing professional development opportunities via ISBE's Weekly Message, as well as at www.isbe.net/keeplearning. Additionally, Illinois' Learning Technology Center is continuing to develop [resources](#) for educators during remote learning.

It is imperative during remote learning and the transition back to in-person instruction that any professional development includes an opportunity for every adult staff member to participate, as appropriate. Special care should be given to providing the time and resources necessary for support staff/personnel to engage in and participate in meetings and trainings that support current remote circumstances and the transition back to in-person instruction.

Planning for Assessments to Determine Students' Skill Levels

Each student will have had a unique remote learning experience and finish the school year with varied experiences, skills, and mastery of prior coursework. For this reason, it is recommended that districts/schools begin to plan for how students will be assessed in each grade/course to

inform teachers of current student progress and needs. Planning for assessing each student should begin at the end of the 2019-20 school year.

These assessments are not meant to replace existing screening or placement assessments currently in place at the local level. Please note that any learning plans and assessments should be modified with appropriate accommodations for students who require interventions. The format and timing of skill-level assessments is determined at the local level.

Information from these assessments should be used to modify the anticipated curriculum and inform instruction so that students are supported and can remain in and have the best opportunity to be successful in the grade/course in which they are enrolled. The assessments should only be used for addressing learning loss, not grade level or course placement.

To avoid testing stress and burnout, plan to appropriately space testing and progress monitoring (e.g., two- to three-week window from returning to in-person instruction to beginning testing) so that students can gradually transition to standard testing and progress monitoring.

Districts/schools that distributed devices to students to use during the remote learning period will need to take inventory of these devices to ensure enough are available for online testing.

Specific to students with Individual Education Programs (IEPs) or 504 Plans, English Learners (ELs), and students who may need additional support: A more specific and individualized learning plan may be necessary to assist in the transition back to in-person instruction.

Note: The 2020 ACCESS scores can be used for EL student placement because the ACCESS testing was completed prior to the implementation of remote learning as a result of the COVID-19 public health crisis. Educators should request scores from their administrators.

Additional Resources

Although not exhaustive, listed below are some available resources to consider in addition to your available local resources:

- [Character Lab](#) conducts research and provides evidence-based information on the development of individual characteristics that are beneficial to others and ourselves.
- [Coalition for Community Schools](#) advocates for the community school strategy as a means to unite schools, students and families to support student success.
- [Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning](#) works with schools, districts and states to guide practice and research and inform policy on social and emotional learning.

- [Illinois Association of School Social Workers](#) supports the professional development of school social workers.
- [Illinois Education Association](#) is an organization composed of P-20 educators and educator support personnel that advocates for public education employees.
- [Illinois Federation of Teachers](#) is an organization composed of education and public service professionals.
- [The Illinois Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers](#), which is a membership organization of professional social workers.
- [Leading Ed Partnerships](#) supports the professional development of school leaders.
- [Trauma Responsive Educational Practices Project](#) is a professional learning community for educators that seeks to support the creation of schools and classrooms that meet the socio-emotional and academic needs of children.
- [Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence](#) conducts research and teaches people how to develop their emotional intelligence.

Conclusion

The ISBE Transition Plan Advisory Workgroup convened to provide recommendations, clarity, and suggestions for wrapping up the end of the school year and entering the summer, as well as further transition considerations that ISBE will release in the coming weeks. These considerations reflect multiple stakeholder viewpoints, expertise, advice, and synthesis of available information. This effort supports general considerations for closing out the school year, addresses academic and learning variables, summer school considerations, and the impacts of remote learning on social and emotional learning.

The advisory group shares concerns that the significant inequities, consequential digital divides, and important mental health needs that have become more prominent during remote learning. The advisory group's suggestions seek to mitigate the impact of inequities and encourage the provision of supports for students, staff, and families.



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