



TRANSFORMING SCHOOL DISCIPLINE COLLABORATIVE

Toolkit for Transforming School Discipline in Remote and Blended Learning During COVID-19

A component of the TSDC Toolkit for School Transformation



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About TSDC and This Document

The Transforming School Discipline Collaborative (TSDC) is a collaborative of organizations working to ensure that Illinois' schools are safe and supportive for all students. An interdisciplinary team of attorneys, school psychologists, restorative justice practitioners, school-based professionals, policy advocates, and community partners, TSDC is dedicated to supporting districts and schools to implement equitable and non-exclusionary discipline practices. We aim to meaningfully reduce the high number of school days that students lose due to exclusionary discipline policies and to eradicate inequities in the administration of discipline.

This document was developed by attorneys and professionals from Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, together with faculty and students from Northwestern Pritzker School of Law, in consultation with a diverse committee of educators and youth. This committee of educators and youth met in two focus groups during July 2020 to discuss the challenges they faced, compile recommendations for creating a positive learning environment, and review the draft toolkit. This document has been strengthened by feedback from TSDC steering committee members and other stakeholders. Katten provided pro bono help with the design.

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The goal of this document is to offer tools and suggestions to help guide Illinois school administrators, educators, and staff in creating a positive and supportive school climate and addressing challenging student behaviors in remote and blended learning environments during the COVID-19 crisis. We recognize that this is an uncertain time and that students and educators are adapting to an unprecedented environment. We also acknowledge that the COVID-19 crisis has compounded existing risk factors for marginalized students, particularly Black and Brown students and students with disabilities, who already faced disproportionately high rates of exclusionary discipline in school. Moreover, many Black students and educators have been affected by highly-publicized incidents of anti-Black police violence and structural racism.

While there are many challenges presented by the COVID-19 crisis, this is also an opportunity to think creatively about ways to address inequities, and to reimagine practices around school safety and climate, instead of returning to "business as usual". This document is intended to offer concrete, actionable suggestions from TSDC's existing prevention-oriented, student-centered framework, including the TSDC Model Code of Conduct, which focuses on restorative and mental health supports rather than punishment and exclusion. It does not offer legal advice.

Schools should not address these challenges in isolation but should meaningfully engage students and parents in developing these plans and coordinate with community agencies, faith-based organizations, and other natural supports. All communities, particularly communities of color, should be recognized for the strengths and resources they possess, rather than being viewed from a deficit lens.

"This toolkit elevates the missing voice in COVID educational conversation: the voice of our students."

Shayla Ewing (Teacher, Pekin High School, Pekin)

Executive Summary

Youth and educators faced unprecedented challenges throughout the spring and summer of 2020, including loss and trauma, and Black and Brown communities, in particular, were disproportionately harmed by the COVID-19 pandemic. In preparing for fall 2020, whether for remote or blended learning, schools will need to be **a safe haven for supporting the mental health and wellness** of students, families, teachers, administrators, and other school staff.

In these unprecedented times, schools should **prioritize creating a positive learning environment with trauma-responsive and restorative practices – and jettisoning punitive approaches to discipline.**

To accomplish this goal, schools should consider the following strategies:

- Make time to collectively reflect and recognize the individual experiences of students, families, educators, and staff during the pandemic.
- Adopt restorative practices to create space in the classroom (whether physical or virtual) to address conflict and harm.
- Adopt practices to support educators and staff and help them with healing.
- Train teachers and staff to recognize possible indicators of trauma, and adopt restorative and trauma-responsive practices to address them.
- Engage and empower parents, including frequent, two-way communication and transparency, and offer resources to help create a positive learning environment at home.
- Acknowledge the disproportionate harms experienced by Black and Brown communities, adjust disciplinary policies and practices to mitigate the effects of implicit bias, and offer anti-racism curriculum building.
- Provide space to build relationships and community, whether virtually or in-person.
- Plan to accommodate and offer additional targeted supports for students with disabilities, English learners, and other students who may need additional assistance.

With respect to disciplinary practices, schools should:

- Eliminate or significantly reduce the use of exclusionary discipline during this time, in recognition of the challenges students are facing.
- Revise disciplinary policies to adopt restorative rather than punitive practices, provide flexibility and a safe and supportive environment, and incorporate a culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and racial equity lens.
- Focus on re-engaging students rather than removing them from school.
- In online learning, offer clear, consistent expectations and use positive interventions to address challenging behaviors.
- Expand resources for mental health and emotional supports.
- Approach new challenges (such as wearing masks/social distancing) by offering patience and guidance to students as they acclimate to the current environment.

In responding to these new challenges, schools should involve all stakeholders, especially parents and students, in the creation of policies, the decision-making, and review and assessments of procedures. **Students, parents, teachers, and staff should feel heard, valued, and supported.**

Introduction: Challenges Faced by Students and Educators

The challenges the education community has faced these past few months have been unprecedented.¹ Educators and students have had to grapple with external factors that impacted their ability to educate and learn. In March, they had to adapt quickly to virtual learning, posing accessibility issues for many, and during a time of personal and societal uncertainty. Both educator and youth groups expressed the lack of structure in remote learning was anxiety-inducing and set the tone for the remainder of the school year.

It is also no secret that the COVID-19 shutdown disproportionately impacted Black and Brown communities more than their white counterparts. Schools struggled to maintain contact with students who lacked devices or reliable internet and to provide meals and paper assignments to students who needed them – disproportionately students of color.²

Furthermore, with the unspeakable murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, and other Black individuals – now more publicly visible but occurring for centuries – educators and students found themselves coping with the trauma of anti-Black police violence and searching for ways to be allies and support Black Lives Matter demands for justice. Youth amplified calls for schools to reevaluate the role of School Resource Officers and end their police contracts.³ Black educators faced challenges in addressing the protests and highly publicized police violence with their students while experiencing their own emotional toll. During this time, many students struggled to feel present in class and motivated in their schoolwork. Having the remote learning environment of COVID-19 compounded the trauma, particularly among Black and Brown students, in seeing these events play out in continual news cycles without in-person opportunities to process them – potentially fueling further trauma, anxiety, and depression.

Black and Brown students faced additional challenges including:

- physical health disparities
- inequitable access to internet service and devices
- expanded caregiving responsibilities
- a lack of space to engage in online learning
- loss of family income
- enhanced stress, trauma, and anxiety – including trauma from anti-Black police violence

Educators found it challenging to keep students engaged while attending to their own families, caregiving responsibilities, and personal needs. Technical issues, lack of devices, internet service, food insecurity, and absent communication with parents caused difficulties in keeping students engaged. For some courses where content depends on interaction, it became difficult to effectively teach the subject matter and ensure youth were at the same level of understanding compared with face-to-face instruction.⁴

Educators also said they struggled to find an online medium that would be easy and accessible for students to complete assignments and for the educator to assess the work. Lack of access to technology has likely disproportionately impacted students of color, those in poverty, and

¹ This section draws on challenges voiced by a diverse committee of educators and youth convened by TSDC to help develop this toolkit, as well as other sources. *See, e.g.,* Tawnell D. Hobbs and Lee Hawkins, The Results Are In for Remote Learning: It Didn't Work, Wall St. Journal, June 5, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/schools-coronavirus-remote-learning-lockdown-tech-11591375078>.

² See, e.g., <https://www.chicagotribune.com/coronavirus/ct-coronavirus-chicago-remote-learning-participation-20200527-c2zfv5fhffh55p44gegk26hle-story.html>

³ See, e.g., <https://time.com/5848959/school-contracts-police/>.

⁴ Jim Soland *et al.*, The impact of COVID-19 on student achievement and what it may mean for educators, Brookings Institute Brown Center Chalkboard, May 27, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2020/05/27/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-student-achievement-and-what-it-may-mean-for-educators/>.

with the intersection of such identities, who often have inadequate bandwidth or are in a living situation where multiple individuals must access a device at the same time, making the learning environment very challenging.

Keeping students engaged in virtual learning is difficult when teaching younger students, who are more likely to be distracted and potentially students with disabilities, who often rely on structure, routine, reminders and the face-to-face presence of educators who can organize their students with visual cues and other adaptations that are more challenging to implement in virtual environments. Without in-person instruction, parent or guardian involvement in virtual learning can be key. However, many parents or guardians must balance student involvement with their own work, taking care of other siblings, or other commitments. This is particularly challenging in situations where families, disproportionately Black and Brown, must choose between keeping an hourly position, losing a job, and tending to the educational needs of their children in the new normal of a virtual learning environment.

Educators also struggled with fostering a sense of community in the virtual classroom. Educators found it difficult to keep strong relationships with students when not all students could access or participate in synchronous learning sessions for a multitude of reasons.

Student drop-off made it more difficult to effectively teach in the virtual classroom. For example, one educator told us that in their classrooms of fourth and fifth graders, less than one-third of students participated regularly once school became virtual.

Students also faced new anxieties that made prioritizing schoolwork difficult. Students expressed a lack of motivation, difficulty balancing schoolwork because of external factors and having to reassess priorities because of economic hardship or familial caregiving responsibilities.⁵ For demanding courses like AP classes, students felt burdened by the AP system as it did not adapt its rigorous workload to the times. For some, this lack of flexibility resulted in punitive measures.⁶ And since March, many students have experienced a loss of family income, death of loved ones, caring for younger siblings, and loss of support systems.

Schools will need to address these needs through direct mental health and social-emotional supports, at a time when many agencies are challenged by the sheer need for services and ways to adapt them through telehealth supports that they may not have been positioned to move to in such a short time frame presented through COVID-19.

Many students felt anxiety, fear, worry, and stress as they grappled with these challenges and are expected to have similar experiences in the fall as we remain in the throes of the pandemic and the impact on mental health is yet to be accurately assessed and treated to date. Students worried about parents who were at risk of contracting the virus because they were essential workers, particularly among Black and Brown communities.⁷ For single-parent families, these challenges and the need for support could feel overwhelming.⁸

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/09/learning/what-students-are-saying-about-remote-learning.html>

⁶ For one extreme example, see <https://www.propublica.org/article/a-teenager-didnt-do-her-online-schoolwork-so-a-judge-sent-her-to-juvenile-detention?token=N4k88uB8H681Ql3s7NXVvflOxrkBWSTf>.

⁷ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/race-ethnicity.html>

⁸ <https://www.thenation.com/article/society/coronavirus-family-single-parents/>

Many students found themselves in survival mode, having to prioritize family needs over academic ones. One student told us of seeing several family members lose their jobs, relatives pass away, and others leave the country. During this time, the student's priorities shifted from focusing on school to helping their family heal and financially survive.

While some schools increased mental health and social-emotional support, some schools did not, and students found themselves creating outlets of support for themselves. As we transition to the fall, students and the school personnel that support them, are going to need to figure out how to add social-emotional, mental health support, coping strategies, and wellness to the academic curriculum. This will take significant effort and school personnel will need help and support in managing their own stressors, anxieties, and mental health concerns since the pandemic is impacting educators as individuals in this society as well.

As we prepare for blended learning this fall, or whatever format learning evolves to over the course of the school year, we must recognize that youth and educators experienced loss and grief in many ways. They experienced the loss of structure- our schools transformed in a weekend leaving educators and students to figure out how to quickly adapt to this new "normal." They experienced loss of community- they no longer could see other students, educators, family, or other loved ones. They experienced loss of jobs and family income. They experienced loss of sense of self-determination of priorities, shifting our focus to basic survival. In some cases, they lost family members and friends to COVID-19, and cultural practices for mourning their loss were disrupted. Further, while police brutality and racism is not new, having been institutionalized for centuries, the summer of 2020 has inflicted racial trauma on many Black youth and educators.

With so many students and educators experiencing loss and trauma during this time, schools should prioritize creating a positive learning environment with trauma-responsive and restorative practices – and jettisoning punitive approaches to discipline. This process should involve all stakeholders, especially parents and students, in the creation of policies, the decision-making, and review and assessments of procedures. This document offers tools and suggestions to help guide this process.

Using Restorative Practices to Foster A Positive Learning Environment

With the challenges of remote learning and the potential challenges of implementing blended learning, it is vital to provide a positive learning environment by increasing access to trauma-responsive services and restorative practices.

Schools should recognize that the shared struggles of their staff and students will impact the classroom. A restorative and healing lens will create a better experience for all – students and educators alike – in the return to school.

Make Space for Collective Reflection and Planning

Schools should make time to collectively reflect and recognize the individual experiences of students, families, educators, and staff during the pandemic. These processes can occur in a variety of ways, including virtual circle practice.

Collective reflection questions⁹ could include:

- What have we faced in the last months with the transition to remote learning?
 - Did these experiences present struggles or positive outcomes for us individually and our communities?
 - Did we feel power in addressing those experiences?
 - Did we feel supported by our school and communities?
- Did these experiences impact our participation in the virtual classroom, and will they potentially impact us this fall?
 - How will these experiences affect others within our school?
- Are there practices we can utilize to address those experiences within the virtual or physical classroom? What do we want that to look like?
- How might we support others (classmates, educators, colleagues) in our classroom/school who may have endured trauma or conflict?
 - What context, individually or developmentally, might help us understand how to support others in these situations?
- How does this impact our overall school climate and culture: our notion for school safety, student participation, mental and social-emotional wellbeing as a school?

“I’d like teachers to know it’s okay to make mistakes and that we’re all going through these changes together. Also to recognize that students may need more understanding during this time.”

Gabriella Alba, student
(Warren High School,
Gurnee)

Supporting Students

Consider adopting the following restorative practices to create space to address conflict and harm, rooted in a social-emotional learning (“SEL”) framework.¹⁰ This model was created with input from students and educators to respond to current challenges. We recognize that, as times change, the need for and the tools can be transformed.

⁹ For more suggested reflection questions, consult <https://restoreourschools.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/recognition.pdf>.

¹⁰ <https://chicago.chalkbeat.org/2020/7/9/21318777/schools-must-address-emotional-needs-of-students-in-the-fall-education-leaders-say>

Ten Classroom Practices from Students & Educators to Build Community

1. **Create community agreements¹¹ for the school year.** Each student can contribute an idea, shared in a living and accessible document (e.g., Google doc) for all involved. As a group, decide what ideas all can agree to. Some examples of possible agreements could be:
 - o Keep class a judgment-free zone.
 - o Offer patience and empathy when other factors hinder a student's full participation.
 - o Identify ways to address harm. What can we do as a collective group when we are presented with a challenge within the group? What do we want this to look like?

Ask students what community agreements they need to feel supported and ready to learn, like:

- How will our class help students who miss session(s) due to poor internet service?
- Students might identify solutions like creating an online hub for class notes, or finding ways for the student or family to let the school know they need additional support to get online.

2. **Create space for checking in, including at the start of class.**¹² Check-ins help determine the energy in the class. Communicate that "it is okay to not be okay" and, if needed, follow up with additional supports. Community agreements should be shared at every check-in.

Check-ins can be used in-person as well as virtually. Some examples:

- Weather check-in: What's your weather? (Sunny, Rainy, Gloomy, Blizzard...)
- Questions on mood or updates ("[Roses and Thorns](#)").
- Needs check: Students choose a need not being currently met through anonymous surveys.
- Online tools: Polls to assess overall class moods, and chat tools for individual check-ins.

3. **Provide ongoing feedback.** Feedback is important in a physical classroom setting, but it's essential for online teaching to establish a personal connection with students.
 - o Offer students multiple options for giving and receiving feedback: through verbalization, written communication, commenting in a chat book, sharing art/visuals, etc.
4. **Provide a space for reclaiming power.** Identify and offer resources, accommodations, or formal and informal tools of support, that meet the needs of educators or students.

Try offering: meditation to cope with anxiety, outreach from a counselor or other staff, connections to community-based resources, or flexibility on a deadline.

5. **Opportunities for student leadership.** When educators share the mic with students, it helps build relationships and trust. Find roles for students to lead virtually or in-person.
 - o Let students lead a check-in or interactive activity like favorite quotes, birthday spotlights, appreciation/affirmation check-ins, or favorite memes.
6. **Prioritize student engagement.**¹³ Interactive or collaborative class activities allow for a better balance of screen sharing, interaction, and community building. Try:

¹¹ See <https://www.morningsidecenter.org/teachable-moment/lessons/sel-tip-start-year-community-agreements> for one example of tips on creating community agreements.

¹² <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2019/08/21/nobody-learns-it-in-a-day-creating.html>

¹³ Some possible tools are collected at: <https://www.iste.org/explore/learning-during-covid-19-2>

- Virtual lunch sessions and breakout rooms for discussions online.
- Collaborative art activities like zine making¹⁴
- Creating memes, drawing, or painting pieces related to the academic subject. This allows students to exercise their creative skills, opens space for class reflection, and allows educators to evaluate the understanding of the content.

Let students show and tell a meaningful item/talking piece that they can lift to the screen when speaking. This eases the potential stress for students to have the camera focused on them.

- 7. Collective decision-making¹⁵ in the classroom (“We” not “Me”).** Use collaborative tools¹⁶ to reinforce unity and community. Online learning is a collective commitment on both ends. Students should feel teachers are with them during hard times, not against them.
- 8. Address conflict and harm with empathy and collective healing.**
 - **Practicing empathy¹⁷** includes active listening,¹⁸ not providing advice unless requested, validating students’ emotions, and remembering they may face challenges different from your own.
 - Avoid alienating reactions (“You dropped the ball”) that emphasize blame on the person(s) harmed. Create collective solutions (“How can we fix this?”).
 - **Collective healing** from harm or collective trauma.¹⁹
 - How did the conflict or the harm impact the individual(s), witnesses, and the group as a whole? How do we heal?
 - Restorative justice practices can help resolve conflicts and build community.
- 9. Be an Ally.** Students and educators wanted the classroom to be a space where students can discuss current events, including issues of race, and where the educator can help to build knowledge on structural racism. (See section on Implicit Bias & Anti-Racism, page ..).
- 10. Address changing notions of safety in and outside the classroom.** The notion of safety will look different in remote and blended learning. Engage with students and educators to ask what they need to help feel safe physically and emotionally, and work collectively to put these ideas into action.²⁰ This might include offering a virtual outlet/suggestion box so students can provide feedback or concerns anonymously. Connecting with school-based mental health professionals can serve as a safe resource for students, as well as to teachers when they are concerned about a student’s personal safety in the home.

https://www.gse.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Protocols_Handout.pdf

<https://sites.google.com/cps.edu/selremote/home/building-community>

¹⁴ Alternatives, Inc. recommends <https://programminglibrarian.org/articles/zine-machine-diy-magazine-primer>

¹⁵ For example, see <https://sparkactivism.com/volume-1-intro/together-we-know-a-lot-consensus-decision-making-in-the-classroom/>

¹⁶ <http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/images/Re-ConnectingtotheSchool-inclass-activities.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://restoreourschools.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/empathy.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://www.edutopia.org/article/value-active-listening>

¹⁹ <https://trep-educator.thinkific.com/courses/intro>

²⁰ <https://restoreourschools.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/safety.pdf>

Supporting Educators

“Nobody can do everything—find people to support and who will support you.”

Jordan Hohm (Teacher, East St. Louis)

Educators have faced loss, trauma, and other challenges during the pandemic. Consider some of these practices to help educators collectively heal and feel supported:

- **Space for check-ins** - Teachers need support as well. Schools should offer ways for teachers to seek support from the school community, take a break, receive classroom consultation and take care of their wellness, mental health needs, and multiple demands on their time (including family responsibilities).
- **Health and wellness groups** - Staff led and weekly to have an outlet for checking in with colleagues and leadership. For educators, schools need to provide tools for them to have a space for support- to decompress from their own trauma and experiences. There is power in speaking with others who have similar roles, as well as hearing from educators holding different positions different from their own.
- **Training and continued professional development** - Educators will need trauma-informed training²¹ and training on practices rooted in restorative justice,²² healing justice,²³ transformative justice,²⁴ and anti-racism. The training should be tailored to needs emerging from COVID-19.
- **Anti-racism curriculum building**²⁵- Educators will need to know how to facilitate discussions with students to address the current social changes and demands as a result of efforts by the Black Lives Matter and Police Free Schools movements among other movements. The school should provide space for educators to create this.
- **Emphasize a sense of community among staff** - Offering things like virtual affinity clubs on shared interests or identities to foster a sense of community among the staff. This will allow staff to feel connected to each other.
- **Emphasize Self-Care**- Provide time, space, and resources for educators to practice self-care.²⁶
- **Provide mental health support resources to educators**²⁷ - Virtual resources and partnerships with community-based organizations can help support both educators and youth.
- **Provide an outlet for educators to ask for help** - Whether this is an online tool or designated team educators can contact, schools should normalize and reduce the stigma of asking for help.

²¹ See <https://trep-educator.thinkific.com/courses/intro> for free, open access trainings on trauma-informed educational practices through at least September 2020.

²² See <https://www.restorativeresources.org/educator-toolkit.html>

²³ See <https://badassvisionaryhealers.wordpress.com/healing-justice-principles/>

²⁴ “Where restorative practices creates opportunities to build community and transform interpersonal harm, and takes into account the needs of people who have harmed, people who have been harmed, and the community, transformative justice takes things a bit deeper by considering the need for transformation of systems that create harm.” <https://www.justschoolsproject.org/transformative-justice.html>

²⁵ See, e.g., <https://www.tolerance.org/moment/racism-and-police-violence>.

²⁶ See <https://www.waterford.org/education/teacher-self-care-activities/> and <https://inservice.ascd.org/maintaining-wellness-for-teachers-and-staff-during-distance-learning/>.

²⁷ See <https://statprogram.org/> and <https://learn.nctsn.org/course/index.php?categoryid=11>.

Addressing Trauma

In the return to school this fall, many if not all students, families, school staff, and educators will be grappling with the effects of trauma. Many students have experienced a loss of family income, illness or death of loved ones, caring for younger siblings, unstable housing, or other threats to their well-being. Both youth and adults have endured isolation and disruptions to their routines. In addition to the disproportionate harm that COVID-19 has caused to Black and Brown communities, many Black students have also had to cope with the trauma of anti-Black police violence during this time.

What is Trauma?

Trauma can be defined by the 3 E's:

1. An *event*, series of events, or set of circumstances that is
2. *Experienced* by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening, and that has
3. Lasting adverse *effects* on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.

This definition²⁸ emphasizes the way that trauma is **individualized**, meaning individuals who experience the same traumatic event may experience different emotional outcomes.

Unaddressed trauma is a public health issue with consequences as detrimental as issues with physical health. Long-standing, unaddressed trauma causes toxic stress that takes a physical toll, increasing the risk of chronic physical diseases as well as mental and substance abuse.²⁹

The term "**trauma-informed**" refers to a system that:

- realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery,
- recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in students, families, staff, and others,
- responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices
- seeks to actively resist re-traumatization³⁰.

Whether teaching online or in person, **educators should be prepared to identify behavioral indicators of trauma and to confront difficult situations** that may arise due to trauma. Instead of punitive approaches to discipline, which are counterproductive and may re-traumatize students, schools should **focus on restorative and trauma-informed approaches**.

"I hope that teachers understand that although we are kids we still deal with stress, trauma, and other issues that come up in our lives. School cannot be our number 1 priority especially when we are living through such a difficult time."

Andrea Cespedes, student, Chicago

²⁸ Samhsa's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma – Informed Approach- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services *available at* https://ncsacw.samhsa.gov/userfiles/files/SAMHSA_Trauma.pdfhttps://ncsacw.samhsa.gov/userfiles/files/SAMHSA_Trauma.pdf

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *Id.*

Behavioral Indicators of Trauma

Schools should train teachers and staff to recognize possible indicators of trauma,³¹ which may affect:

- **Cognitive abilities (thinking, learning, memory, attention):** Example behaviors may include difficulty sustaining attention, recalling information, or completing work.
- **Self-concept.** Examples may include feelings of worthlessness or powerlessness, resistance to trying new things or planning for the future, or a tendency to over-blame self or others for problems.
- **Emotional well-being.** Examples may include being resistant or easily dysregulated by the change in routines, mentally detaching when feeling overwhelmed or anxious, or an overwhelming need to control one's own environment.
- **Interpersonal relationships.** Examples may include isolation or withdrawal from others, difficulty trusting others, desire for too much or too little physical contact, or negative reactions to discipline or boundary-setting.
- **Other behaviors and reactions.** Examples may include being easily triggered or "set off", difficulty self-regulating (calming down), impulsivity, and resorting quickly to physical aggression. In the classroom, may engage in incessant chatter, clowning around, repeated interruptions, and other behavioral disruptions.

All school personnel should understand that providing trauma-informed care does **not** require that each adult dive deeply into details of a student's distress. Doing so can be overwhelming to school staff and re-traumatizing for the student. Instead, trauma-informed care involves personnel utilizing strategies and interventions that promote emotional and physical safety, resiliency, healthy student-adult relationships, and opportunities to develop social and emotional skills.

Trauma-Informed Interventions by Age Group

Note: For all students, the goal of these interventions is to re-establish feelings of safety and help them manage their emotions. To be effective, interventions require structure, predictability, and co-regulation (i.e., the adult educator must regulate their levels of stress and emotion).

Many of these strategies can be used across age groups, adjusting for language/vocabulary skills, attention span, and level of abstract thought.

Early Childhood and Elementary School – Trauma-Informed Interventions

- ***Self-regulation chart:*** Students identify and select a feeling card as well as several possible coping strategy cards. Educator guides students to consider which coping strategy would be most effective at the time and helps develop a plan to implement.
- ***Calm down box:*** An individual or classroom activity where educators guide students to create their "calm down" or "coping box," with tools they self-identified as helpful when escalated. Possible items: bubbles, fidgets, play-doh, stress balls, Legos, visual cue cards for deep breathing, word finds, coloring sheets, and stretch/exercise cards.

Goals for early childhood/elementary students:

- Speak in a way that is concrete and straightforward.
- Utilize visual aids, toys, arts and crafts, stuffed animals, etc.
- Assist students with emotional identification and expanding emotional vocabulary (e.g. "How are you feeling today?" posters or other mood charts).
- Provide direct guidance & social modeling.

³¹ See also <https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/complex-trauma/effects>

- *Personify stress, fear, or worry*: Arts and crafts projects that make abstract concepts, such as anxiety or anger, tangible (e.g., list of Things that “Bug” You).
- *Planned breaks that encourage play*: Build-in “coping time” throughout the day so students can learn the practice of taking breaks to regulate. Consider both “active” ways to de-stress (e.g. dance or “shake the sillies out”), as well as quiet times and soothing lighting, scents, and textures.

Middle School – Trauma-Informed Interventions

- *Journaling*: Educators can utilize prompts that encourage creativity or simply provide students the opportunity to write down their thoughts and feelings.
- *Self-identify coping strategies*: Consider utilizing games like “Coping Skill Bingo,” or another Coping Skill Checklist where students can test which coping strategies work the best. This helps students diversify their self-regulation strategies.
- *Mindfulness and meditation*: Consider YouTube videos that lead students in deep-breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and guided imagery.

Goals for middle school students:

- Conduct productive conversations about difficult topics including COVID-19 and race.
- Use communication strategies that build upon students’ expanding vocabulary, emotional consciousness and developing higher-order cognitive abilities.
- Allow time for activities that provide self-reflection.
- When possible provide opportunities for students to self-regulate.

High School- Trauma-Informed Interventions

- *Size of my problem/size of my reaction*: Assist students to identify appropriate or proportionate reactions to their stress, and effective coping strategies for varying sizes of problems.
- *The ABCs of Behavior*: Work to identify an alternative, healthier way to respond to a trigger.
- *Education on how the body responds to stress and trauma*: Students should work towards understanding the ways their bodies respond and react to trauma, chronic stress, and anxiety. Activities might include differentiating between fight, flight, fear, and freeze responses through social stories, or discussions and check-ins regarding physical symptoms of stress, such as changes in appetite, fatigue, headaches, stomach aches, etc.
- *Focus on building healthy relationships between peers and conflict resolution*: During times of conflict in the classroom, assist students towards a healthy resolution. Guide them to consider an alternative perspective with a “duck/rabbit” activity, where the image appears to be two different things depending on the point of view. Facilitate healthy communication by encouraging “I” statements (e.g., “I feel hurt because . . .” rather than “you hurt me . . .”) and conflict resolution (e.g. parts of an apology, compromise).

Goals for high school students:

- Students independently identify and utilize effective self-regulation strategies.
- Adult modeling and reinforcement are essential; however, efforts should be focused on the students walking through all steps of self-regulation themselves.
- Emphasize the two-step process of problem-solving: first, manage emotions and then consider reasonable solutions.
- As applicable, normalize to students the process of seeking support from a mental health professional to address issues related to trauma.
- Engage youth in conversations about their thoughts and feelings.

School-based, Trauma-Informed Care – Do’s and Don’ts

Do’s	Don’ts
Require all-staff training to understand trauma, symptoms, and impact.	Do not require or encourage staff to dig deep into the causes or sources of stress and trauma.
Emphasize the development of students’ resiliency through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Supportive adult relationships ✓ Self-efficacy and perceived control ✓ Adaptive skills and the ability to self-regulate ✓ Sense of self-value and feel they have something to offer others. 	Don’t equate student achievement and success with proficiency in every characteristic of resiliency or social-emotional competency. Students will have these in varying degrees, and that’s okay.
Understand that every behavior has an underlying meaning.	Do not require a “problem” before granting students access to trauma-informed services. Instead, trauma-informed care should be built into the school infrastructure and be omnipresent regardless of behavioral issues.
Prioritize the development of social and emotional competencies that foster resiliency.	Don’t insist or imply a student with signs of stress or trauma will “get over it.” Even if the situation doesn’t seem bad from the outside, it matters most how the student feels because it is his or her own experience.
Promote and foster school-wide connectedness and the development of supportive adult relationships.	Resist a “just don’t do it” approach to discipline.
Create safety through routines, structure, and predictability.	Don’t forgo opportunities for consistency when faced with conflict, change, or stress.
Utilize restorative disciplinary practices that keep a student in school and work to rebuild damaged relationships and understand the motivation of the behavior.	Resist punishments that exclude a student from class, school, or extracurriculars.

Parent Engagement

Parent engagement is key to a student's academic success. The advent of COVID-19 brought unique and unprecedented challenges that can disrupt the quality of the relationship between schools and parents. Now more than ever, as remote and distant learning brings education into the home environment, **a healthy relationship between schools and families** is imperative to meeting the educational, social, emotional, and behavioral needs of the students.

During times of remote and blended learning, parents and families play a larger role in addressing behavioral concerns. Parents with an improved understanding of **social and emotional learning (SEL)** will be better equipped to build SEL competencies alongside their students, such as healthy decision-making and self-management, which will overall strengthen their collective resiliency. Similarly, spending the time now to educate and assist parents in utilizing **restorative justice practices** will help reinforce behavioral expectations and consequences when students return to in-person instruction.

What schools can do to improve parent engagement:

- **Create** an environment where parents' voices are **heard** and **understood**. The climate must reflect the school's interest and willingness to value parents as partners in their student's education. Parents offer an asset to the student's educational process and should be involved in multiple aspects of the school's vision and decision-making process.
 - Consider hosting online opportunities (e.g., webinars, recurrent office hours) so parents can receive information and updates from the school, as well as ask questions and express their perspectives.
 - Take the necessary steps to ensure the inclusion of non-English speaking parents, working parents, or those in need of childcare.
- **Collect and regularly update contact information for families**. During the pandemic, families may move or change phone plans more frequently due to their financial circumstances. Frequently asking for updated contact information will help maintain consistent communication.
- **Foster frequent, two-way communication, and transparency**. Contact parents early and often, and use multiple means of communication to provide updates and solicit input. Communicating both an assessment of the school's strengths, as well as action steps towards addressing areas of growth, will promote and model healthy, two-way communication.
 - Promote transparency by inviting parents to attend classes (online or in-person) and connect with teachers.
 - Consider distributing surveys to parents to solicit parent feedback and assessment about certain topics related to discipline, safety, and climate. School administrators might benefit from being upfront and open about the purpose of collecting these responses. After the fact, share with parents the results of the surveys.
- **Offer families resources to help create a positive learning environment at home**.
 - Work with families to create a quiet, safe space for their students to engage in online learning. This may require connecting families with additional resources.
 - **Educate and train** parents on the SEL needs of their students, as well as the restorative justice practices currently in place at the school and support them towards reinforcing these interventions at home.

- **Illinois law**³² requires school districts to engage parents in discipline policy development, implementation, and monitoring as part of mandated parent-teacher advisory committees. In addition to convening the committee, consider involving parents more deeply by inviting a parent representative(s) to assist the school in reviewing, implementing, and revising existing restorative justice practices as well as other school disciplinary data (suspensions, expulsions) to foster transparency and collaboration between the school and families.
- **Empower** parents to become school-leaders and **view the family as an asset** to student's educations. Create opportunities for parents to collaborate with administration, staff, and teachers on issues related to discipline, school culture and climate, safety, and student wellness.
- **Relationships matter.** To facilitate parent engagement, the school must model and demonstrate, through its actions, that it is committed to building a supportive and meaningful relationship with families.
 - Community building activities can include (virtual or in-person): potlucks, fundraisers, school spirit/pride activities, coffee breaks, parents' nights, activities organized for off-school grounds, and resource connecting.

Other Resources for Parent Engagement and Building Community

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) created a [guidance page for families](#) to help their children cope with changes due to COVID-19. It has been translated into multiple languages.

The Rennie Center for Education Research's [Back-to-School Blueprint](#) features a guide to [rebuilding a community](#) that includes fostering parent engagement.

The Chicago Public Schools Office of Social and Emotional Learning details [SEL resources for families](#).

[ISBE's guidance](#) offers suggestions for parent engagement and community partnerships.

The CPS Office of Social and Emotional Learning's [SEL Resource for Families](#) includes mindfulness practices and tips on talking about coronavirus.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network's [Supporting Children During Coronavirus](#) resource page outlines how to have informative and supportive conversations with children about coronavirus.

Zero to Three created a [coronavirus resource page](#) and [racism and violence page](#) for parents with young children.

CNN and "Sesame Street" filmed an ["ABCs of Covid-19"](#) town hall for children and parents to better understand staying safe during the outbreak.

The Transforming School Discipline Collaborative has created a [Guide for Parent Engagement](#).

³² 105 ILCS 5/10-20.14.

Implicit Bias and Anti-Racism in the Remote and Blended Learning Environment

What is Implicit Bias? Implicit biases are unconscious prejudicial beliefs about another’s identity including race and ethnicity. Often implicit biases are shaped by culture or personal experiences, but not by conscious intent. Everyone has implicit biases which are constantly present in our daily lives. For school discipline, implicit biases can, and undoubtedly do, arise in the decision-making process. In the remote learning environment, educators and administrators may have implicit biases about what resources, access, and support students have at home as well as why students may exhibit certain behaviors.

What does implicit bias look like? Implicit bias can manifest in several different ways including microaggressions, assumptions, and stereotypes.³³

Microaggressions. Microaggressions³⁴ are brief verbal, behavioral, or environmental slights that communicate prejudices toward a particular person or group identity (race, socioeconomic status, gender, ability, etc.). Common categories of microaggressions include ascription of intelligence, denial of racial reality, denial or devaluing of experience or culture, making judgments about belonging, assumption of criminality, and assumption of immorality.

Stereotypes and Assumptions. Stereotypes are overgeneralized beliefs about a particular group of people informed by culture and are not inherently true. Stereotyping often leads to assumption making in accordance with stereotypes and not with reality. The effects of stereotyping can be especially harmful to students. For example, social psychologist Claude Steele presents evidence of these effects which he calls “stereotype threat.”³⁵ Stereotype threat occurs when members of a particular group (for example, of a particular race) experience a diminished capacity to perform because of the omnipresent negative stereotypes about their identity.

How does implicit bias affect school discipline? Black students are disproportionately disciplined, particularly for subjective or discretionary offenses like defiance, disrespect, or disruption.³⁶ Dress codes are also disproportionately enforced against Black students.³⁷ Preschool children experience similar levels of racial bias in expulsion and suspension rates as well.³⁸ These disparities both result from and reinforce stereotypes about Black students. Because implicit biases operate at the subconscious level, little mental effort is required for individuals to rely on stereotyping and assumptions. A conscious mental effort is needed to disrupt the streamlined thought processes for behavior assessments. In this way, educators and administrators may perpetuate racial bias in school discipline without being consciously aware that they are doing so.

³³ The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State University offers resources at <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/researchandstrategicinitiatives/school-discipline/>.

³⁴ University of Denver, Microaggressions in the Classroom, <http://otl.du.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/MicroAggressionsInClassroom-DUCME.pdf>.

³⁵ A summary of this research is available at American Psychological Association, Stereotype Threat Widens Achievement Gap, <https://www.apa.org/research/action/stereotype>.

³⁶ For example, see NAACP LDF, Locked Out of the Classroom: How Implicit Bias Contributes to Disparities in School Discipline (2017), https://www.naacpldf.org/files/about-us/Bias_Reportv2017_30_11_FINAL.pdf.

³⁷ Christina Samuels, Why Do Schools Hang On to Discriminatory Dress Codes?, Education Week (March 2020) <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/03/11/why-do-schools-hang-on-to-discriminatory.html>.

³⁸ For instance, see data at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/news/2017/11/06/442280/new-data-reveal-250-preschoolers-suspended-expelled-every-day/>.

Considerations for Addressing Racism and Implicit Bias in Remote and Blended Learning

- *Acknowledge that COVID-19 affects everyone differently based on race, age, culture, etc.* Develop students' abilities to cross-culturally communicate by affirming racial and cultural identities. Create opportunities for students to learn from and with each other.
- *Examine and address biases.* Reflect on discipline/student code of conduct policies to mitigate against bias. Educators should examine what assumptions they are making about the communities they serve and recognize trauma may manifest through behavior.
- *Slow down thinking.* To disrupt implicit bias, stop and reflect before disciplining students (including muting or excluding a student from synchronous learning). Develop checklists to require additional steps to explain and reflect on reasons before issuing discipline.³⁹
- *Ask, don't assume.* Provide the individual with the opportunity to tell their experience from their point of view.
- *Focus on re-engaging students* rather than removing them from school. Consider the impact of these unique circumstances, including the disruption to everyday living, grief, and trauma, on students' behavior and emotional well-being.
- *Invest* in learning opportunities and supports for faculty and staff of various identities and roles that focus on building relationships, social and emotional wellness, and navigating differences across culture, power, and privilege. Prioritize supporting and retaining educators from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; specifically, educators who identify as Black, Indigenous, and/or people of color.
- *Support student-centered learning, agency, and voice.* Invite multiple voices to contribute to the curriculum (through story, song, poetry, text, artifacts, or presentation) in ways that honor student identity, history, and culture. Create learning opportunities that address white privilege and the dismantling of white supremacy. Health for all students requires deepening equity consciousness.
- *Continuously raise faculty and staff awareness* of racism and stigmatization. Administrators should set expectations and provide opportunities for faculty and staff to reflect on their practices and participate in conversations around identifying and examining biases. Through collaboration, educators can learn from each other and open communications between varying levels of the education system. Invest in professional learning in cross-cultural conflict, anti-bias and anti-racist teaching, and trauma-informed healing processes. Provide educators tools to develop their capacity to speak up against racism.

"Anti-racism training and other opportunities are amazing tools that can benefit a teacher educating students from different ethnic backgrounds. As a student of color who attends a high school with a predominately white teaching staff this is something that makes me feel supported and as if I am not alone.

"Oftentimes it can feel like my teachers don't understand certain issues that I face because of where I come from or the color of my skin. But with some effort teachers and school officials can go out [of] their way to learn more about struggles their students face and be understanding to their students."

Emily Arizmendi, student (Cristo Rey High School, Waukegan)

³⁹ Douglas Starr, Meet the psychologist exploring unconscious bias—and its tragic consequences for society, Science, <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/03/meet-psychologist-exploring-unconscious-bias-and-its-tragic-consequences-society>

Anti-Racism and Anti-Bias Resources for Educators

Anti-racist teaching and educator allyship: [Rethinking Schools](#) is a nonprofit publisher dedicated to strengthening public education through social justice teaching and education activism, with anti-racist teaching materials.

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) created a [resource page for talking to children about bias and racism](#) that individuals who are Asian American/Pacific Islanders are experiencing during COVID-19.

Anti-racist teaching: [Teaching Tolerance](#) provides free supplemental curriculum resources to educators and is dedicated to anti-bias and [anti-racist teaching](#). They have compiled a comprehensive catalog of materials on [Race, Racism, and Police Violence](#).

[1619 Project](#): from the New York Times reframes American history beginning with the arrival of African people in Virginia and offers [reading guides, activities, and other resources](#) for bringing the 400 year legacy of slavery, racism, and activism to your classroom.

[The Zinn Education Project](#) features downloadable lessons and materials organized by [theme](#), [time period](#), and grade level, and offers [professional development](#) for educators.

[Racial Equity Tools](#): This resource includes compiled articles and video links to assist in teaching the [history of racism and organized movements](#).

Trainers in school psychology have compiled [race and diversity resources](#) that include a reading list for children and adults.

Embracerace created a collection of [webinars, articles, and action guides](#) related to race in the US. Embracerace encourages talking with children about racism and supporting young activists.

[Facing History and Ourselves Trainings and Tools](#): provides [lessons](#) to educators on “conscious teaching.” These lessons cover current events and issues emerging from Covid-19. They have recently released materials for [Reflecting on George Floyd's Death and Police Violence Towards Black Americans](#).

[National Museum of African American History & Culture](#): The museum provides online tools and guidance to educators on [how to talk about race](#).

[#GetFreeWrites: Writing Prompts on Police Brutality and Racist Violence](#): Created by [Dark Noise Collective](#), a group of multiracial, spoken word artists. This can be used as a discussion starter in the classroom.

The [Anti-Racist Resource Guide](#) includes resources to understand, explain, and solve racial injustices surrounding anti-Blackness and police brutality.

For elementary schools: [Social Justice Books](#) provides a [guide for selecting books](#) based on grade level and subject matter, and their [Young Readers' Editions](#) provide social justice books that have been adapted for young readers.

Age-Appropriate Resources for Younger Children, Including Early Childhood

Trauma-informed, restorative practices should be age-appropriate. There are many resources targeted at supporting young children and their families, which can be found below. Families with young children are dealing with stress, trauma, and other challenges. Schools and early childhood education providers should be ready to connect parents and caregivers of young children with virtual mental health services. For example, Erikson⁴⁰ offers such services in English and Spanish for parents and caregivers of young children regardless of their ability to pay.

Resources for Early Childhood:

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) created a [guidance page for families](#) to help their children cope with changes due to COVID-19. It has been translated into multiple languages.

The Illinois Pyramid Model State Leadership Team, in collaboration with the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (GOECD), has developed an [Emotional Well-Being Toolkit: Resources for Children, Families, & Caregivers](#) to help manage stressors and promote wellness during these challenging times.

The CPS Office of Social and Emotional Learning's [SEL Resource for Families](#) includes mindfulness practices and tips on talking about coronavirus.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network's [Supporting Children During Coronavirus](#) resource page outlines how to have informative and supportive conversations with children about coronavirus.

Zero to Three created a [coronavirus resource page](#) and [racism and violence page](#) for parents with young children.

CNN and "Sesame Street" filmed an ["ABCs of Covid-19"](#) town hall for children and parents to better understand staying safe during the outbreak.

Sesame Street and Autism wrote a [guide for parents of children with autism](#) on how to explain the virus to their child and teach them ways to cope with changing times.

The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University collected [resources, guides, and podcasts](#) related to early childhood development and coping with COVID-19.

⁴⁰ See <https://www.erikson.edu/center-children-families/>.

"I would like to see teachers take into consideration the stress and effects that the pandemic has on students. Some students may be facing other problems outside of their transition to remote learning and need support from teachers emotionally to get through these times. . . . **Give students a break!**"

Quincy Martin, student (Oak Park River Forest High School, Oak Park)

School discipline policies in Illinois have been transformed since Public Act 99-0456 (often called "SB 100") went into effect in 2016. In passing SB 100, the Illinois legislature sought to end "zero-tolerance" policies and limit the use of the disciplinary exclusion. **These requirements also apply to discipline in the remote and blended learning environments.**

SB 100 amended the Illinois School Code to, among other things, require that schools:

- **Eliminate zero-tolerance policies.** School boards may not institute "zero-tolerance policies" which require suspending or expelling students for particular behaviors.⁴¹
- **Limit exclusionary discipline as much as possible.** School officials must limit the number and duration of expulsions and suspensions to the greatest extent practicable.
- **Not encourage students to drop out** based on behavioral or academic difficulties.

Restrictions on exclusionary discipline also apply to **early childhood education**. Public Act 100-0105, which becomes effective January 1, 2018, prohibits the expulsion of children from licensed early childhood education programs, including school- and community-based programs and licensed child care providers serving children ages 0-5.

For K-12 students, expulsions and suspensions of more than three days may only be used if:

- Appropriate and available behavior and disciplinary interventions have been exhausted;
AND
- The student's continuing presence in school would either pose a threat to the safety of other students, staff, or members of the school community, or substantially disrupt, impede, or interfere with the operation of the school.

A suspension of 3 days or less may only be used for K-12 students if:

- The student's continuing presence in school would pose a threat to school safety; OR
- The student's continuing presence would pose a disruption to other students' learning opportunities.

During the pandemic, **SB100 likely prohibits schools from expelling or suspending students from remote learning in most situations.** In addition to being counterproductive during a time when most schools are struggling to keep students engaged, schools are unlikely to be able to show

⁴¹ There are two narrow statutory exceptions to this rule. First, a student may be expelled for bringing a weapon (if used or attempted to be used to cause bodily harm) or a firearm to a school or school-related activity or event. Second, a student may be suspended or expelled for making an explicit threat on an Internet website to a school employee, student, or school-related personnel, under certain circumstances.

that a student’s online participation constitutes “a presence in school” that poses a safety threat or substantial disruption when there are no in-person classes and limited synchronous interaction.⁴²

After reviewing SB100 and several states’ reopening guidance, we recommend schools do the following:

1. End Exclusionary Practices and Focus on Re-Engagement During COVID-19

While only a few state boards of education have addressed discipline issues during pandemic-related school closures, those that have (such as Wisconsin, Arizona, and Connecticut) recognize that students are facing increased grief, isolation, loss, and trauma during this time and that this may lead to more challenging behaviors. Guidance from these states⁴³ recommends that schools:

- **Eliminate or significantly reduce the use of exclusionary discipline** during this time, in recognition of the challenges students are facing.
- **Revise disciplinary policies** to provide flexibility, a safe and supportive environment, and to incorporate a culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and racial equity lens.
- **Focus on re-engaging students** rather than removing them from school, whenever possible.

During this unprecedented time, educators must take an active approach to engage rather than excluding students. In surveys, most teachers said their students were less engaged during remote instruction than before the pandemic.⁴⁴ They also reported that student engagement declined during the semester, particularly for the most vulnerable students.⁴⁵ With the challenges of online student engagement, educators should actively try to engage these students, not exclude them.

“Reduce or eliminate exclusionary disciplinary action as students have already experienced significant lack of services, educational opportunities, and isolation during school closure.”

Arizona Department of Education, Roadmap to Reopening Schools

Research shows that there is a causal connection between suspensions/ expulsions and student outcomes, such as achievement, retention, absenteeism, and dropping out of high school. reintegrating students. Because research demonstrates that students who feel connected to other learners are more engaged, schools should work to reintegrate students into whatever learning format the school is pursuing for the upcoming school year.

⁴² See <https://www.endzerotolerance.org/single-post/2020/05/07/School-Discipline-in-the-Era-of-COVID-19>.

⁴³ Arizona Department of Education, Roadmap to Reopening Schools (June 2020), https://www.azed.gov/communications/files/2020/03/FINAL-DRAFT-AZ-Roadmap-for-Reopening-Schools_6_1_20-1.pdf; Connecticut State Department of Education, Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut’s Plan to Learn and Grow Together (July 2020), <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/COVID-19/CTReopeningSchools.pdf>; Virginia Department of Education, Recover, Redesign, Restart 2020 (July 2020), http://doe.virginia.gov/support/health_medical/covid-19/recover-redesign-restart-2020.pdf; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Education Forward: Reopening Wisconsin Schools (June 2020), https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sspw/pdf/Education_Forum_web.pdf.

⁴⁴ See Educators for Excellence, Voices from the Virtual Classroom: A Survey of America’s Teachers on COVID-19-Related Education Issues (2020), https://e4e.org/sites/default/files/voices_from_the_virtual_classroom_2020.pdf;

⁴⁵ <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/06/03/most-educators-want-schools-to-stay-closed.html>

2. Minimize Disciplinary Exclusions from Online Learning

Exclusion from synchronous learning such as Zoom or Google Meet should be considered akin to regular suspension and avoided accordingly. For example, banning a student from Google Meet for multiple classes is similar to suspending a student from school for a couple of days. Indeed, exclusion from the virtual learning environment may be more disruptive to a student's learning and behavior than exclusion from the live classroom. Nonetheless, school officials should continue to make all reasonable efforts to resolving such threats, address such disruptions, and minimize the length of student exclusions to the greatest extent practicable in the remote learning environment.

Given that, in the online learning environment, and exclusion from synchronous learning is akin to a regular expulsion, schools should collect and track data on the number of such exclusions imposed, and provide this data to ISBE and for public transparency. Also, schools are likely obligated under the Illinois School Code to provide students the opportunity to make up work for alternative credit after exclusion from the synchronous learning environment, just as for a suspension.⁴⁶

3. Plan Appropriately to Meet Due Process Requirements

The challenges of providing due process during a pandemic also support the recommendation that **schools should eliminate or significantly reduce the use of exclusionary discipline during this time**. Whether in the live or remote learning environment, schools must meet due process requirements during disciplinary hearings. This includes providing translators for language access and adequate notice. In the remote learning environment, this includes ensuring internet access for students and families.

Before expulsion, public schools must provide notice of when the hearing will be, what the student is charged with, an opportunity to be heard, and an opportunity to confront adverse parties and evidence. In particular, as part of the student's right to cross-examine witnesses, the "expansive use of accusatory hearsay" is not permitted and the school district generally must present at least one eyewitness to the incident at issue in the hearing in support of its case.⁴⁷

During school closures and social distancing requirements, it is difficult for schools to provide the due process required for disciplinary hearings. Some school districts are proceeding with expulsion hearings during the pandemic over telephone or video conference. This presents challenges for students' due process rights; with schools closed, students may face barriers in accessing the vital educational records needed to form a defense. Virtual hearings also present challenges for presenting and cross-examining witnesses.

Postponing expulsion hearings also pose due process concerns, given the uncertainty about when such hearings can be held in-person. School districts should be conscious when they pursue this option as it can exacerbate the fear and anxiety related to the educational futures of our most vulnerable students by postponing expulsion hearings until schools physically reopen.

Placing a student in an alternative setting pending the hearing also raises concerns at a time when student engagement is particularly challenging. Before seeking to place a student in an alternative school, districts should consider:

- (1) the physical barriers in connecting to an alternative placement during school closures, and
- (2) the ability for students to form connections at a new virtual educational placement.

⁴⁶ 105 ILCS 5/10-22.6(b-30).

⁴⁷ Colquitt v. Rich Township High Sch. Dist., 298 Ill.App.3d 856, 865 (1st Dist. 1998).

4. Support Students During Pending Disciplinary Actions

ISBE has not issued guidance to specifically inform schools about how to treat students who were expelled before the pandemic. However, given that the Illinois School Code obligates school districts to limit the use of exclusionary discipline to the greatest extent practicable, we recommend school districts take the following steps to ensure compliance:

- Eliminate or reduce the length of pending expulsions, in recognition of the loss of services and isolation that students have already experienced during school closures.
- Ensure that students have access to virtual learning materials, including devices and the internet, as well as meals and support services during any period of suspension or expulsion. This is required by the Illinois School Code, which requires that students be provided “appropriate and available support services” during a suspension and be allowed to make up work.
- Continue to count remote learning or Act of God Days toward the total number of days of a suspension or expulsion, and allow students to return to school on the date originally determined at the disciplinary hearing. During school closures, all students suffered exclusion from their typical learning environment. Educators should not be in the practice of unnecessarily extending the time a student is excluded from the classroom.
- Take steps to promptly re-engage students, including helping them make up any missed work, once any suspension or expulsion is completed, as required by the Illinois School Code.

This approach is consistent with that recommended by boards of education in other states, such as Virginia,⁴⁸ which have addressed disciplinary matters in their pandemic-related guidance to schools.

⁴⁸ Virginia Department of Education, Recover, Redesign, Restart 2020 (July 2020), http://doe.virginia.gov/support/health_medical/covid-19/recover-redesign-restart-2020.pdf

Addressing Challenging Behaviors During Online Learning

The Illinois School Code requires Under S.B. 100, educators are required to exhaust all appropriate and available interventions and must document whether interventions were attempted or whether it was determined that there were no appropriate and available interventions. These standards still apply in the online learning environment.

During remote learning, an exclusion from synchronous learning environments like Zoom or Google Meet should be considered akin to an out-of-school suspension or expulsion. During the pandemic, exclusion from the virtual learning environment may be even more disruptive to a student's learning and behavior than exclusion from the live classroom. **Schools are obligated to avoid such exclusions to the greatest extent practicable under the law.**

This section offers suggestions for possible interventions that avoid excluding the student from the online classroom. Just as with in-person exclusionary discipline, schools should collect and track data on any exclusions imposed on synchronous or asynchronous learning, and provide this data to ISBE and for public transparency.

Offer Consistent Expectations and Use Positive Interventions to Address Online Disruptions

Now more than ever, students need consistency and stability to thrive. Educators should create consistent expectations for their students regardless of the learning format. Instituting consistent expectations can have positive effects for both students and educators. With clear guidance on what is expected of them, students feel more confident, engaged, and connected to their school community. A consistent set of expectations can help teachers recognize a change in a student's behavior and positively address it. Understandably, the interventions educators turn to in the traditional classroom might not work for the virtual space. Educators should institute the same set of expectations, but apply different interventions that better serve the method of instruction.

“As students and staff return to school, it is important to remember that behaviors communicate needs. Understanding what the behavior is communicating is more important than ever in the aftermath of a pandemic that has impacted many facets of children's and adult's lives. . . . When students don't understand the harm their behavior causes, we should teach, not through punitive means, but through approaches that are known to work and based on sound evidence – social emotional learning, restorative practices, and trauma-informed care.

“Developing clear, consistent, equitable school-wide behavior expectations with a plan to teach and reteach expectations to all students is an important first step towards creating a trauma sensitive approach and to preventing potential discipline issues.”

Virginia Department of Education, [Recover, Redesign, Restart 2020](#).

Educators should keep in mind they may need to remind students more than once, particularly in the virtual learning space. For many students, these online platforms are still new. While students need to adhere to guidelines regarding platform features to limit disruptions in the virtual space, it is also incumbent upon educators to create the conditions for students to be successful in practicing and learning these new and not-so-intuitive guidelines, like unmuting before speaking. Additionally, teacher attention is often given to inappropriate behaviors rather than expected behaviors. Many minor behaviors can be reduced when teachers focus on proactively and consistently encouraging and reinforcing the expected behaviors happening throughout the virtual classroom.

Educators can provide students with guidance or work to identify community agreements to facilitating positive conversations online, such as:

- **Assume positive intent:** Encourage students to read any virtual classroom communication with the assumption that educators and peers have good intentions.
- **Emotion is difficult to convey online:** Remind students that without being able to see their facial expressions, other people may not know when they are kidding or being sarcastic.
- **Reread their messages:** Suggest students reread their messages for friendliness and respect before sending them.

Supporting Student Needs During Online Learning

Schools should consider that within their students' homes, there may be distractions that take place during instruction time. In particular, Illinois' most vulnerable students – including Black, Brown and Indigenous students, students experiencing homelessness, emerging bilingual students, students of migrant and farmworker families, students experiencing disability, students in foster care, and students navigating poverty – face disproportionate challenges to engaging in online learning. Educators should focus on how to support the strengths and resiliency of these students and their families during this time.

With that in mind, schools should be conscious that the following circumstances may be out of their students' control:

- **Interrupting-** In the classroom environment, students understand the need to raise their hands before speaking. The skill becomes less intuitive for students in the online space and may be especially challenging for students with poor internet connections. Remember that in the virtual classroom, as in the physical classroom, implicit racial bias often affects perceptions of which students are unruly or disruptive in-class participation.⁴⁹
- **Off task** (browsing the internet, using a cell phone, etc)- Holding students accountable for participation is an important way to show them we care about their ideas and their active engagement during face-to-face and online class sessions. However, when shifting to teach remotely, it is important to consider the extenuating factors that could impact student ability to be "present" during real-time (synchronous) class sessions, such as:
 - Access to reliable internet
 - Access to a quiet space to engage online

In Loco Parentis: Physical Location and the Opportunity to Control

The Illinois School Code provides that educators have *in loco parentis* authority to maintain discipline – meaning teachers “stand in the relation of parents and guardians to the pupils. . . **in the absence of their parents or guardians.**” In online learning environments, however, parents or guardians are not absent, but rather assume responsibility for the safety and supervision of their child within their home. As such, educators should consider what behaviors are within their control in the online learning environment.

Instead of focusing on minor inappropriate behaviors that may be out of a teacher's control, consider focusing on setting clear expectations and consistently encouraging and reinforcing expected behaviors throughout the virtual classroom.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/implicit-bias-training/resources/ki-ib-argument-piece03.pdf>.

- Comfort with an online environment
- Health concerns for themselves or family member
- Technology shared with family members
- Limited data plans
- **Guests** (pets/ family members)- Students are often not in control of guests entering their designated study space during online instruction. In particular, marginalized students are more likely to lack quiet, dedicated space for online learning and may be more vulnerable to these interruptions. See below for suggestions on addressing these distractions.
- **Clothing** (i.e. Wearing pajamas)- With traditional in-person learning, educators have *in loco parentis* authority to set guidelines around possible distractions such as clothing. In online learning environments, parents or guardians maintain physical control of the student.
- **Eating**- Because students are under their parent or guardian’s supervision, educators have less control over when a student snacks. Although this behavior may be distracting, educators only can control so much through screens. Keep in mind that many students are experiencing food insecurity during the pandemic, as well as disruptions to their schedule, and maybe caring for others in their household; these and other factors may disrupt a student’s meal schedule.

Rather than punish students for interruptions or challenges they face to online learning, schools should set students up for success by teaching and reiterating clear, consistent, and equitable expectations for student behavior, as well as using positive interventions to address distractions (see below).

Positive Interventions to Address Distractions in Online Learning

1. **Interrupting Interventions**- In the virtual classroom, if a student interrupts to express their insights, questions, or challenging observations at an inopportune time during instruction, educators can table the conversation by stating, “That’s a great thought. Let me capture that comment in our parking lot.”
2. **Off Track Interventions**- Educators should provide numerous opportunities for active participation in the virtual classroom. Because student engagement is often fostered through connection, give students ample opportunities to express themselves. Educators should be realistic about students’ attention spans, especially in virtual learning. Educators should meet students where they are socially and emotionally. Stress and trauma can impact students’ attention spans. Therefore, educators must try to be empathetic to students’ struggles during particularly difficult times. Interventions educators should consider:
 - a. **Implement Brain Breaks**- Brain breaks are short mental breaks taken throughout a lesson or academic activity. They help children remain calm, focused, and engaged, and they’ve been shown to reduce stress.
 - b. **Implement a Self-Reporting System**- When it comes to refraining from distracting behavior (i.e browsing the internet during class), online learning requires students to display a level of self-discipline; however, not all students have this skillset. Educators could implement a self-reporting system for students to keep track of instances where they became distracted. It should be expressed to students that the information is not intended to shame students or affect their academic grades. Rather, by keeping track of when the student became distracted and why educators can help facilitate solutions and strategies with students in conferences. Research indicates the positive relationship between self-monitoring and academic achievement. A recent study conducted in the

web-based environment also shows that students who are prompted to monitor their progress demonstrate better achievement than those who are not.

3. **Guest Interventions-** In online learning, students' availability to quiet, private study spaces will vary. Although guests can be a distraction, this is not a moment to discipline students for something out of their control. Instead, some educators have found opportunities to embrace these visitors as an opportunity to connect.
 - **Consider a Virtual Show-and-Tell-** Younger students may be eager to share their furry friends with the rest of the classroom. Some educators have designated time for a virtual show-and-tell for their students to introduce the class to their pets. Setting up the space for students to bond can help limit interruptions within instruction time.

Addressing Continued Improper Use of Online Learning Tools

If a student continues disruptive behavior in the online classroom, educators should consider interventions that do not exclude the student from learning. Possible interventions:

- Give a warning.
- Schedule a virtual conference with the student and family to discuss the behavior, check-in on home life and circumstances that may be contributing to the behavior, and work through a solution together.
- Require the student to complete a reflective assignment on their own, without having the student miss synchronous instruction time.
- Create a learning module that goes over expected behaviors in the virtual learning environment.
- Implement restorative justice practices to reduce recidivism and foster positive relationships moving forward.

Addressing Potential Safety Issues Online

Safety is always a primary concern; this extends to online and blended learning environments. In online learning, educators should be conscious of two categories of online behaviors:

1. **Behaviors with Specific Connection to School-** Any communication that is threatening in nature within the online class discussion board, chat function in synchronous (Zoom, etc.) instruction, or online harassment of classmates on social media should be considered an immediate concern. These comments include anything that is harassing, profane, obscene, suggestive, solicitous, indecent, sexually explicit, pornographic, threatening, abusive, defamatory, libelous, derogatory, discriminatory, or hate speech.
2. **Online Activity not Connected to School-** Educators should not monitor or discipline a student's social media unless there is a clear, reasonable connection to school & a safety or disruption threat directly related to members of the school community. Again, schools should keep in mind that if the instruction is 100% virtual, a student's participation in online learning will rarely pose a threat to other students or staff.

Cyberbullying Interventions: Many online platforms give educators the ability to manage screen sharing, recording, and file-sharing options. Educators can implement these protections upfront to limit students' capability of sharing unwanted or unexpected images or messages. Because students need to understand any new disciplinary policies upfront, educators should consider adding an

addendum to their Student Code of Conduct for virtual learning. Consider adding the following to a code of conduct and/or list of community agreements:

1. **Respect Others' Perspectives.**
2. **Use Kind Words.**
3. **Be Safe Online.** Tell students to avoid sharing personal information, photos, and videos online in public forums or with people they do not know in real life. Explain to students that images and comments posted online will be permanently on the internet. Furthermore, students should be advised not to post information that could identify others or compromise their safety.
4. **See Something Say Something.** Educators should inform students that if they see something online that makes them feel uncomfortable or unsafe, they should tell their teacher.
5. **Potential consequences or interventions.** Possible interventions for students who violate expectations can include:
 - Create a learning module or lesson that reminds students of their expectations in the virtual classroom.
 - Have students complete a reflective assignment on why the behavior was inappropriate.
 - Have students attend a virtual mediation to go over why the specific activity was a violation of the code of conduct addendum.

See the section below on “Bullying and Harassment” for more suggested considerations on this issue.

Weapon Interventions: Schools should review expectations with students and evaluate definitions of threats with school staff members, including definitions of what is considered a safety threat and what behaviors warrant intervention. Consider revising the student code of conduct to ensure that schools provide clear, consistent expectations in this area.

The Illinois School Code provides that a student shall be expelled if they bring a firearm to school, any school-sponsored activity or event, or any activity or event that bears a **reasonable relationship to the school**.⁵⁰ This rule also applies to weapons such as knives or billy clubs, **if used, or attempted to be used to cause bodily harm**.⁵¹ The superintendent and board have the discretion to modify or reduce the length of any such expulsion and should consider doing so during the pandemic, considering the challenges students face at this time.

Because students are within their homes during distance learning, schools should proceed cautiously and use discretion in considering whether online behavior bears a reasonable relationship to the school. To illustrate, a student’s family may have a firearm displayed on the walls of their home as art, which could show up in the background of a Zoom call – however, this does not bear a reasonable relationship to the school. In evaluating whether to respond to online behavior at home or on personal social media, schools should assess whether the behavior poses a direct safety threat to other students or staff, as well as whether the weapon was used or attempted to be used to cause bodily harm.

⁵⁰ 105 ILCS 5/10-22.6(d)(1-2).

⁵¹ *Id.*

Addressing Challenging Behaviors During Blended Learning or In-Person Instruction

Schools and districts that opt to provide some in-person instruction to students this fall should prepare for a transition that may be challenging for many students. In addition to the challenges outlined elsewhere in this document, students must adjust to the following:

- **Less flexible structure:** Remote learning offered many students more flexible schedules and less structure. Students will need to adjust to more structure in the return to in-person learning.
- **New rules:** Students will need time to adjust to the additional health and safety protocols.
- **Need for PPE:** Students may not have adequate cloth masks required by new protocols, or may struggle with remembering to bring or wear a mask every day.
- **Learning loss:** Due to school closures and the shift to remote learning, students may have fallen behind academically and feel pressure to “catch up” – particularly for the most vulnerable students who encountered the greatest barriers to online learning.⁵²
- **Less screen time:** Students will need to adjust to in-person instruction and less screen time.
- **Different interactions:** ISBE recommends that schools thoroughly and thoughtfully consider the transition from the home environment (with extended time with parents/caregivers) to the school environment (with increased interaction with school staff and peers) means for all learners.
- **High-priority student needs:** ISBE recommends placing a high priority on providing in-person instruction to students who have IEPs (individualized education program), 504 plans, and/or who receive the English language supports. Also, schools should consider prioritizing in-person instruction for students under the age of 13 and those who have had greater difficulty learning remotely. Schools should remember that while many of these “high priority” students are most in need of in-person instruction, they are likely to face additional challenges in adjusting to the return to school.

School staff should keep this uncertainty and challenge in mind when dealing with students who struggle with the transition to blended or in-person instruction.

“Give Students a Break!” It’s a refrain we heard from students, teachers, and experts in education while developing this toolkit. Students have experienced loss and trauma during the pandemic, and this may manifest in challenging behaviors. Teachers and administrators should be patient when dealing with students. Punitive disciplinary measures will only hinder student adjustment. Instead, **try restorative approaches** like those recommended earlier in this toolkit.

Schools and districts are encouraged to use professional development days to prepare evidence-based instructional methods and materials, to plan to attend to students’ social-emotional and mental health needs, and for training on new health and safety protocols. This preparation will help teachers and administrators to be patient when dealing with students and avoid issuing counterproductive exclusionary discipline. ISBE has urged schools and teachers to design supports to meet students’ individual needs in the transition from home to school. These supports can include but are not limited to, tutoring, extended school days, support personnel, and technology.

⁵² See, e.g., Stephen Sawchuck, 5 Tips for Measuring and Responding to Learning Loss, Education Week, June 12, 2020, <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/06/12/5-tips-for-measuring-and-responding-to.html>.

For schools in Illinois, return to blended or in-person instruction requires adopting new health and safety protocols including mask-wearing, social distancing, hygiene/hand washing, and other measures.⁵³ This is new to students, who need patience and guidance from their teachers to acclimate.

“Students must never be excluded from face-to-face instruction, disciplined for struggling to learn, and/or disciplined for struggling to adhere to new procedures for how school operates.”

Oregon Dept. of Education, Ready Schools, Safe Learners: Guidance for School Year 2020-21

Under SB100, schools are required to exhaust all alternative measures/interventions before moving to exclusionary discipline. This policy is more important now than ever. Students have been learning remotely for months and a return to in-person learning is crucial for them to not only catch-up but also to excel. If students were to return to school only to face exclusionary interventions, it would defeat the purpose of returning to school, at a time where in-person learning is needed more than ever.

Possible Interventions Around Mask Wearing, Social Distancing, and Hand-Washing

In assessing what interventions may be appropriate for students who struggle with mask-wearing, social distancing, or hand washing, a helpful tool for teachers and administrators is the **TSDC Model Code Disciplinary Checklist**.⁵⁴ We recommend applying the checklist where possible, including these recommendations:

- **Identify restorative practices, possible referrals, and trauma-informed interventions:** Before imposing discipline, school staff must first consider whether a restorative practice or another alternative to suspension or expulsion is an appropriate or available option. This may be as simple as providing additional masks to students who forget or lose theirs, or could involve referring students to appropriate services where the behavior results from:
 - 1) family situations, trauma, or grief;
 - 2) addiction, mental illness, or substance abuse; and/or
 - 3) bullying, abuse, or self-defense.Students returning to school from remote learning will no doubt be dealing with some type of trauma or grief caused by the pandemic, as well as other personal/academic/financial situations. So before issuing exclusionary disciplinary measures, school staff should be trained in trauma-informed practices and prepared to refer students to other services to assist.
- **Create safety protocols:** Planned protocols will help determine whether a student’s conduct/behavior poses a real threat to school safety based on actual risks and objective evidence, and not on stereotypes or generalizations. In making the determination, consider a *list of factors*, including:
 - the conduct at issue;

⁵³ See <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Part-3-Transition-Planning-Phase-4.pdf> for detailed descriptions.

⁵⁴ For TSDC’s Model Student Code of Conduct, see https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B8d8PTyuz_W_Q2doWHIJYmNBYUU/view.

- the root cause of the conduct and whether it has been addressed (such as underlying anxiety or discomfort for a student refusing to wear a mask or a medical condition that should be accommodated);
- age of the student and their ability to understand consequences;
- the capability of the student to carry out any threat;
- student’s discipline history and the frequency of inappropriate behavior; and
- effect of the conduct on the school environment.

Dress Codes and Mask-Wearing

ISBE’s transition guidance recommends that schools and districts examine and communicate which policies apply to the requirement of wearing a face covering while in school buildings, and handle violations in the same manner as other similar policy violations. For many schools, the student dress code may bear the most similarity to a mask-wearing requirement. Schools that plan to cover mask-wearing as part of their dress code should take this opportunity to examine **potential racial and gender bias in their dress codes** and revise their dress codes in accordance with the law.

Pre-pandemic, many schools had taken steps to revise or reevaluate their dress codes to address problems of disproportionate enforcement against Black students.⁵⁵ Black girls are particularly vulnerable to burdensome and disproportionate dress code enforcement.⁵⁶ Moreover, schools that enforce dress code violations through suspensions or expulsions likely violate SB 100, because these minor offenses do not pose a safety threat or substantial disruption to the school community.⁵⁷

Accordingly, schools that revise their dress codes to address mask-wearing should also review and, if needed, revise their policies⁵⁸ to ensure that the dress code:

- Does not invoke punitive consequences or lead to exclusionary discipline.
- Will not be enforced by school police.
- Remedies slip-ups, such as providing additional face covering(s) to any student who loses, forgets, or cannot afford a mask, without excluding the student from class time.
- Stays gender-neutral.
- Sets clear and specific guidelines, avoiding subjective terms like “inappropriate” which can lead to biased enforcement.
- Incorporates student and community feedback.

Simply adding mandatory mask-wearing to existing dress code policies invites bias through overly strict restrictions, shame-based punishments, and discretionary application of rules – and

⁵⁵ Christina Samuels, Why Do Schools Hang On to Discriminatory Dress Codes?, Education Week (March 2020) <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/03/11/why-do-schools-hang-on-to-discriminatory.html>.

⁵⁶ NWLC, Dress Coded: Black girls, bodies, and bias in D.C. schools (2018), https://nwlc-ciw49tixgw5lbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/5.1web_Final_nwlc_DressCodeReport.pdf.

⁵⁷ See <https://www.nprillinois.org/post/illinois-issues-rewriting-rule-book#stream/0> (“State Sen. Kimberly Lightford, the Maywood Democrat who sponsored SB 100, says dress code violations are exactly the type of “minor offenses” that inspired her legislation.”).

⁵⁸ These recommendations are drawn from the TSDC’s Model Code of Conduct as well as NWLC’s “Dress Coded” report.

can risk liability for the district. Schools should take this opportunity to rethink their use of dress codes and remove biased, punitive, and counterproductive measures.

Handling Repeated Violations

School staff should be patient and understanding when dealing with any violations of new health and safety protocols around mask-wearing, social distancing, hand hygiene, or other requirements. Students likely need time and assistance to adjust to the return to live instruction and new rules. Treat violations as opportunities for learning and relationship building; a punitive approach will have counterproductive effects.

School staff should take into consideration that some students may need individual accommodations for disabilities. A student's difficulty adjusting to these rules could be cause for an evaluation for an underlying disability.

If a student repeatedly refuses to wear a mask or adhere to other health and safety protocols like hand washing – even after providing supplies and resources, exhausting behavioral interventions with the student and family, and exploring the possible need for accommodations for underlying conditions – a switch to fully remote learning should be considered as a potential intervention. Suspending or expelling a student for refusing to wear a mask or adhere to health and safety protocols is unlikely to change the behavior, and does not comport with schools' legal obligation to limit the number and duration of expulsions and suspensions to the greatest extent practicable.

“Many students, like adults, love to embrace, give high-fives, fist bumps, and receive appropriate adult attention. When students falter in adhering to the new operating procedures, center grace and patience and reteach the expectation. Never implement consequences that deny access to instruction as a result of these challenges.”

Oregon Dept. of Education, Ready Schools, Safe Learners: Guidance for School Year 2020-21

Safety Considerations for In-School Suspensions

ISBE's return to school guidance dictates that districts should develop sanitation procedures per recommendations of the CDC, IDPH, and local health departments. These procedures should entail more frequent cleaning and disinfection, as is necessary to reduce exposure. The guideline recommends assigned seating, marked paths of travel within the classroom, and built-in times for hand hygiene, etc.

Schools must ensure that any physical space used for in-school suspensions or other disciplinary interventions, adheres to safety, cleaning, and disinfecting guidelines. The additional time and effort it will take to set up an additional sanitary area for in-school suspensions (as well as having proper amounts of school staff to monitor the cleanliness, distancing of students, and adherence to assigned seating/hand hygiene, etc) offer another reason to avoid removing students from class for disciplinary purposes.

For students who are in-school only part-time during blended or hybrid learning, schools should seek to maximize the benefit of in-person instruction. Schools should avoid or limit the use of discipline that removes students from class instruction time – whether in-school or out-of-school suspensions or expulsions. Instead, the focus should be on restorative, trauma-informed practices that improve student engagement and build community.

Bullying and Harassment in Remote or Blended Learning

Bullying is known to cause lasting damage to students' mental and physical health.⁵⁹ Teachers need to be acutely aware of the bullying that occurs outside the walls of a school, especially during a time when most student interaction takes place online. Long-term impacts include an increased likelihood of developing anxiety and other mental health conditions, a downtrend in academic achievement, and increased difficulties in interpersonal relationships.⁶⁰

Illinois' Bullying Prevention law defines bullying as **any severe or pervasive physical or verbal act or conduct** (including electronic communications and cyber-bullying) directed at a student with the effect of

- (1) placing the student in reasonable fear of harm to their person or property;
- (2) causing a substantially detrimental effect on the student's physical or mental health;
- (3) substantially interfering with the student's academic performance; or
- (4) substantially interfering with the student's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by a school."⁶¹

"Bullying" and "harassment" are often used interchangeably. Sometimes the term "harassment" is used to refer to bullying behavior based on a protected class, such as the student's race, gender, disability, or national origin.⁶² If a student experiences harassment or bullying based on a protected class, this is a form of discrimination that schools are legally obligated to address under federal law.

Setting Classroom Expectations About Bullying & Harassment

Because not all conflicts or disagreements are bullying, teachers can set expectations by explaining to students what bullying *is*. Using examples in the classroom to help students understand the difference between bullying and differences of opinion, for example, is an essential process and one that can help foster a positive classroom environment from the start of the academic year.

Setting expectations is essential in a remote environment to create an environment of trust and respect. It is important to understand that differences of opinion and disagreements are not bullying – only when a student singles out another student and teases him or her for holding that opinion (either publicly or privately) does a difference of opinion escalate into bullying.⁶³

Challenges in the Remote & Blended Learning Environment

During remote and blended learning, schools should be prepared to address cyber-bullying behaviors, which may arise for reasons including:

- (1) Students are spending more time on screens due to online learning;

⁵⁹ Wolke D, Lereya ST. Long-term effects of bullying. Arch Dis Child. 2015;100(9):879–885. doi: 10.1136/archdischild-2014-306667 (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4552909/>/<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4552909/>).

⁶⁰ *Id.*

⁶¹ <https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/fulltext.asp?DocName=010500050K27-23.7>

⁶² <https://www.pacer.org/bullying/resources/questions-answered/bullying-harassment.asp>.

⁶³ <https://www.pacerkidsagainstabullying.org/what-is-bullying/conflict-vs-bullying/> offers video clips that explain the difference between bullying and conflict. Additional videos break down the basics of bullying for students and teachers/administrators alike.

- (2) Synchronous online classrooms offer new ways to create visual distractions by posting distracting or inappropriate pictures or text (aka “Zoom bombing”);
- (3) Increased anxiety, which is likely during a pandemic, can often exacerbate both the likelihood and the impact of cyberbullying.⁶⁴

One issue facing students across the country relates to sexting,⁶⁵ which could be perceived either as a form of bullying or a form of sexual harassment. In these types of situations, schools should consider how far their responsibility to monitor students’ treatment beyond the school walls extends [refer to the Discipline section of the toolkit]. Finally, schools must ensure that they consider a way to effectively resume student disciplinary procedures regarding harassment that were halted as a result of the transition to remote learning.⁶⁶

Some bullying behaviors that have been anecdotally observed in classrooms across the United States throughout the pandemic include the following: sexting, threats and other forms of intimidation made via social media platforms, students taking unflattering pictures of other students (as well as staff) during virtual meetings and then posting them, increased instances of anti-Asian xenophobia, increased instances of anti-Black sentiments resulting from recent events, among others.⁶⁷

Anecdotally, such behaviors have included a student displaying a gun during a Zoom class,⁶⁸ a student using drug paraphernalia during a Zoom class,⁶⁹ and students taking to social media sites to degrade other students.⁷⁰ Additionally, students have taken unflattering pictures of other students when they are speaking or on-screen during a Zoom class, and then posting those photos for large amounts of people to see and mock. However, there is little data on trends or effective interventions relating to these behaviors in the age of COVID-19.

Addressing Bullying and Harassment in the Remote or Blended Learning Environment

As teachers prepare for the start of the new academic year, separate plans to address bullying must be made for the three different potential classroom environments: (1) fully remote classroom; (2) fully in-person classroom; and (3) blended classroom. Should classrooms remain almost fully remote, teachers will continue to lack direct visibility to many potentially bullying behaviors and, therefore, teachers and administrators must pay especially close attention to classroom engagement, comments in Zoom chats, student references to comments and posts on various social media sites, and other things that might indicate a student (or students) is being bullied or is bullying.

Because there is very little empirical data about cyberbullying in the age of COVID-19, schools should take a restorative approach whenever possible with protocols. In taking a

⁶⁴ <https://www.stompoutbullying.org/blog/cyberbullying-during-covid-19>

⁶⁵ <https://www.bglaw.com/coronavirus-covid-19-online-education-and-dealing-with-student-discipline-in-massachusetts/> (provides useful examples of bullying and harassing behaviors likely to increase during COVID pandemic and remote learning).

⁶⁶ <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/03/26/coronavirus-creates-title-ix-obstacles> (considers the issue of harassment-related hearings in higher education during the pandemic)

⁶⁷ For example: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/12/covid-19-fueling-anti-asian-racism-and-xenophobia-worldwide>, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/parents-fear-anti-asian-racism-as-schools-mull-reopening>

⁶⁸ <https://www.fox5dc.com/news/montgomery-county-public-schools-student-shows-a-gun-during-online-learning-session>

⁶⁹ <https://www.nbcsandiego.com/news/local/video-appears-to-show-high-school-student-smoking-from-homemade-bong/13421/>

⁷⁰ <https://www.stompoutbullying.org/blog/cyberbullying-during-covid-19> provides recent updates on bullying in the time of COVID-19.

preventive approach, schools can adopt technology controls to help prevent zoom bombing as much as possible and work through restorative approaches and community-building circles to prevent harm.

Below is a list of possible questions for teachers and administrators as you plan for the fall:

1. What can be done to address the predictable chaos surrounding a return to school after months of COVID-related disruptions to students' day-to-day lives?
 - a. What can schools do to address students' anxieties and potential misbehaviors before they occur? Note that bullying can result from unaddressed student anxiety, fear, and restlessness from being home.
2. What are some alternatives to discipline that have helped curb negative classroom behaviors relating to bullying and harassment early on? For example:
 - a. Devote meaningful time to creating a positive classroom culture (see the section on Using Restorative Practices to Create a Positive Learning Environment). Have students share their thoughts, fears, concerns, etc. with their classmates to encourage understanding.
3. Have training focus on thinking through and making decisions on hypotheticals. The following are a few examples:
 - a. Ex: In blended learning, how can teachers best observe classroom behaviors both in the physical classroom and in the virtual classroom? Consider how best to implement interventions before exclusion.
 - b. Ex: What happens if some students wear masks and others do not? How can bullying issues associated with this ("mask shaming") best be handled?
 - c. Ex: How does mask-wearing, or remote learning, affect a teacher's ability to discern bullying and/or to read student body language to understand how students are feeling at a given moment? What can teachers do to enhance communication with students – can teachers devise some classroom codes or gestures that students can use to express certain emotions/feelings even when faces cannot be read?
 - d. Ex: How can teachers include students who are chronically bullied and thus disengaged from school (either in a remote setting *or* an in-person setting)? How can teachers make themselves more aware of who these students are? What preventative mechanisms can be put in place right away to address such issues?
4. Consider having students and teachers collaborate on community agreements for the class that identify what behaviors are considered acceptable or unacceptable.
5. How will you review and revise your anti-bullying prevention programs?
 - a. [Illinois Anti-Bullying Statute](#) requires every district to enact a policy specific to addressing concerns related to bullying.
6. How will you engage with parents?

Bullying and Harassment Resources:

Lesley University offers [resources for teachers](#) that detail several ways to meaningfully reduce and prevent bullying in their classrooms.

[Pacer Center's Kids Against Bullying](#) offers video clips that explain the difference between bullying and conflict. Additional videos break down the basics of bullying for students and teachers/administrators alike.

Stomp Out Bullying's [Cyberbullying During COVID-19](#) page outlines bullying warning signs and ways that parents and educators can help prevent cyberbullying.

Supporting Students in Special Education

During the pandemic, schools remain obligated to comply with the core requirements of state and federal disability laws (including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act [Section 504], and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act).⁷¹ Among other things, this means that schools must continue to do the following:

- Identify, locate, and evaluate all children with disabilities residing within the state who need special education and related services.⁷²
- Provide a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to every student with a qualifying disability.⁷³
- Conduct evaluations within 60 school days of receiving written parental consent to determine the educational needs of a particular student.⁷⁴ Schools must also re-evaluate each student with a disability at least once every three years.⁷⁵
- Convene Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings on the same timelines normally required by federal law.
- Provide Extended School Year (ESY) services when the student’s IEP team determines they are necessary to provide the student with a FAPE.⁷⁶
- If necessary, provide compensatory education or services to make up for past missed services or inappropriate services, which should include services missed due to the pandemic.⁷⁷
- Follow IDEA requirements for students facing discipline (including conducting a Manifestation Determination Review (“MDR”) with members of the IEP team and the parent, when a student faces more than 10 days of suspension, to decide if the student’s disability was the primary cause of the disciplinary incident.)

ISBE has recommended that school districts place a **high priority on in-person instruction in the fall** for students who have IEPs or 504 Plans and that these students **attend school in-person daily** during blended remote learning.⁷⁸ At the same time, many districts may still decide to remain fully remote for the fall.

For discipline and establishing a positive school climate, keep in mind the following considerations⁷⁹ for supporting students with disabilities:

- **Accommodations for face masks:**
 - Consider that some students with disabilities may be unable or unwilling to wear face masks, for reasons relating to their disability, and may need reasonable

⁷¹ Secretary DeVos Reiterates Learning Must Continue for All Students, Declines to Seek Congressional Waivers to FAPE, LRE Requirements of IDEA (2020), <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/secretary-devos-reiterates-learning-must-continue-all-students-declines-seek-congressional-waivers-fape-lre-requirements-idea>; <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Part-3-Transition-Planning-Phase-4.pdf>; <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/SPED-FAQ-04-20-20.pdf>.

⁷² 20 U.S.C.A. § 1412.

⁷³ Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) refers to [20 U.S.C.A. § 1401](https://www.isbe.net/Documents/SPED-FAQ-04-20-20.pdf). FAPE is, further defined in the statute.

⁷⁴ 20 U.S.C.A §1414.

⁷⁵ 20 U.S.C.A. §1414. Law includes exception to re-evaluations if there is a waiver from the local education agency or a parent waiver.

⁷⁶ <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/SpEd-FAQ-Return-to-InPerson-Instruction-2020630.pdf>

⁷⁷ Id.

⁷⁸ <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Part-3-Transition-Planning-Phase-4.pdf>

⁷⁹ Drawn from ISBE recommendations at <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/SpEd-FAQ-Return-to-InPerson-Instruction-2020630.pdf> and <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Part-3-Transition-Planning-Phase-4.pdf>.

accommodations from the school. In addition to accommodating students, schools should ensure that other students and staff members understand and normalize these accommodations and that intervention from others is not necessary.

- Consider the effect that staff wearing protective face coverings may have on some students with disabilities, including students with communication deficits or hearing loss. In such cases, schools may need to consider using adapted face coverings, use of assistive technology, or other supports for effective communication.
- **Accommodations for social distancing and hand-washing:**
 - Consider that some students with disabilities may struggle with changes in routine or understanding personal boundaries. In addition to accommodating these students, schools can help prepare families with advance notice and extra communication about anticipated changes to the learning environment.
 - Consider offering additional social work or counseling services or increased social and emotional (SEL) programming to help students with this transition.
 - Consider additional staffing or supplies to assist students who have physical or emotional disabilities with proper handwashing techniques, or alternatives to handwashing if practical.
- **Accommodations for remote learning:**
 - Make sure that students, parents, and guardians have access to the technology and services they need.
 - Develop effective alternatives, including through new uses of technology to services that were provided and currently cannot be provided in the short-term.
- **Additional staffing and services:**
 - Identify compensatory services or education that may be needed to make up for past missed services or inappropriate services.
 - Recognize that additional staffing and services may be needed to help students with disabilities transition to blended learning or reacclimate to remote learning in the fall. Consider holding a reintegration meeting to address any specific health concerns or learning needs or gaps identified during remote learning.
- **Engage parents and families** (see Parent Engagement, page 14).
- **Training and professional development:**
 - Provide teacher and staff professional development on the accessibility needs of students with disabilities, including behavior and social/emotional supports.

Special Education Resources:

The Autism Training and Technical Assistance Project published a guide on [Remote Learning for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder](#).

The ISBE Special Education Services Department created guidelines for remote teaching of students who have [intellectual or multiple disabilities](#), are [blind or visually impaired](#), or are [deaf or hard of hearing or DeafBlind](#).

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) compiled NASP and Federal Government resources for [special education and service delivery](#) during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Sesame Street and Autism wrote a [guide for parents of children with autism](#) on how to explain the virus to their child and teach them ways to cope with changing times.

The US Department of Education released a Q&A document detailing the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\) dispute resolution procedures](#) in the COVID-19 environment.

If a school district provides remote learning for its students, it must provide **language accommodations** and **language instruction services** to English Learners. Many accommodations may be effectively provided online. These may include, for example, extensions of time for assignments, videos with captioning or embedded interpreting, accessible or translated reading materials, other language services provided through video conferencing, an online translation dictionary, or other technological solutions.

Schools should explore additional ways to support families whose primary language is not English in accessing resources for their children. For example, the district may have a bilingual coordinator or another individual who can support families. Districts can coordinate parent-support groups for parents who speak the same language. Schools can encourage parents to support one another with children who are English learners, and connect with community agencies which may provide supports as well.

Considerations around disciplining English Learners during the pandemic:

Any communications regarding behavior, notifications, and due process must be provided in a language the English Learners' family can understand. Because parents and guardians of English Learners are entitled to meaningful communication in a language they can understand, schools must provide services such as translated materials, a language interpreter, and adequate notice of the information about any program, service, or activity that is called to the attention of non-LEP parents, virtually. There may need to be extra intentionality around this point during the pandemic. If a school was in the procedure of relying on certain office personnel to provide translation services, the staff member may now also be working from home. Schools need to create plans to address the mechanics of these types of scenarios.

Conclusion

Many students, teachers, and staff return to school in fall 2020 having faced loss, trauma, and grief. Whether schools return to 100% remote or blended in-person instruction, schools will need to be a **safe haven for supporting the mental health and wellness** of students, families, teachers, administrators, and other school staff.

Over and over again, in conversations with students, teachers, and experts in education, we heard the same theme: “Give students a break!” The challenges students have faced during this time may manifest in challenging behaviors, and schools need to respond with patience and grace. Punitive disciplinary measures will be counterproductive.

Schools also need to ensure that teachers, administrators, and school staff are supported and have opportunities for healing and self-care. Work to create a positive learning environment with trauma-responsive and restorative practices should help to build community and strengthen relationships among teachers, students, parents, and others in the school community.

Moving forward, educators and youth identified priorities that include:

- **Resource Access** - Educators and students need equitable access to resources, ranging from meals to tech support, internet access, and communication tools. This access will allow for youth to feel connected with their peers and educators and will allow for stronger participation in the classroom. Providing these resources will foster inclusion and increase the capacity to address each other’s needs. Schools should survey or assess the needs of students and families and proactively work to provide these resources.
- **Flexibility** - With external factors disrupting the ability to work, students asked for flexibility with student workloads and deadlines. Flexibility should also be offered to educators, as they may be facing external factors that disrupt their ability to work.
- **Open communication and understanding:** Students asked for understanding regarding situations outside of school that overwhelm students, such as mental health, economic, and family issues. There is a necessary balance between schoolwork and home life. Through open communication with school administrators and students, educators can better understand individual youths’ situations and provide schoolwork flexibility as needed.
- **Trauma and Mental Health Support for Educators and Students** - Students and educators have expressed increased feelings of anxiety, stress, and fear as they have experienced loss, trauma, and hardship as a result of Covid-19. Mental health and trauma support are needed for all, including both youth and educators.
- **Professional Development and Resources for Educators** - Educators acknowledged their role in learning about students’ needs and implementing restorative justice resources into their classrooms. High-quality professional teaching from community organizations and restorative justice coordinators can equip educators with ways to meet the social-emotional and mental health needs of students in remote teaching and in-person instruction. Educators should be informed on how to implement social-emotional development exercises throughout the day. Additional training should provide remote learning skills that will keep students motivated and engaged in the class, such as icebreakers and access to interactive online programs.
- **Providing Space for Reflection and Dialogue** - Especially with the recent events caused by COVID-19, providing a space for dialogue between youth and educators is essential. School community members need a place to express their emotions and process the outcomes of hardships in a comfortable, supportive, and understanding environment. Educators also need a space to reflect and heal amongst colleagues,

allowing them to receive support and share what is going on in their own lives. A simple daily check-in between educators and within classrooms can provide this space for youth and educators to listen and learn more about each other.

- **Restorative Justice Practices** – Restorative justice (RJ) programming offers a space for open dialogue and community building. RJ coordinators are trained in facilitating circle sessions, which can occur in-person or over a video call. These circle sessions provide students and educators with a safe outlet to share how they are feeling mentally and emotionally. This system builds a culture of support that allows for engagement and collaboration between school community members. Successfully implemented restorative-justice programs have seen an increase in attendance and conflict-resolution and a reduction in suspensions.

In developing plans to address these challenges, it is vital that schools meaningfully engage students and parents throughout the process and coordinate with others in the community. Students, parents, teachers, and staff should feel heard, valued, and supported.

Additional Resources

Restorative Toolkits as Guiding Tool for the Return to School:

[Reunite, Renew, and Thrive](#): CASEL’s SEL Roadmap for Schools in the Return to School during Blended Learning provides tools and resources for emphasizing SEL.

[RESTORE: A Restorative Lens for Education](#): Created by a [Restore Our Schools](#), a coalition of researchers, RJ practitioners, and educators. This toolkit focuses on the return to school.

[Communities for Just School Fund Toolkit \(CJSF\)](#): This toolkit provides recommendations on how to foster positive and safe schools that places the well-being of students at the forefront. CJSF also wrote an important piece on [culturally sensitive social-emotional learning practices](#).

The TSDC has written [toolkits](#) for educators and administrators seeking to practice [Restorative Justice](#) with general and [Special Education](#) students.

[Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach](#): Created by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). This toolkit provides background on trauma and suggests appropriate interventions to help people overcome their traumatic experiences.

Remote Learning Guidelines and Resources:

[ISBE Remote Learning Recommendations](#) emphasize accessible and equitable planning, instruction, and grading which consider the home contexts of *all* students. Grade level recommendations, recommendations for special education, multilingual learners, and dual enrollment or alternative programs are all included.

The Transition Advisory Workgroup in partnership with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) created [guidance for all schools](#) in the 2020-2021 school year.

[The Chicago Public Schools Office of Social and Emotional Learning](#) has issued [guidance for responding to challenging behavior online](#), which includes adhering to their existing [Restorative Practices Toolkit](#).

The [Learn Away!](#) website is designed for educators teaching K-12 to find and share remote learning resources. It was developed in a partnership between the University of Illinois, the Illinois Board of Higher Education, ISBE, educators across the state and partner organizations. [Educator resources](#), [curriculum ideas](#), and a form to [share resources](#) are all available on the site.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison created a [collection of remote learning resources](#) for English Language Learners.

[PBS Learning Media](#) offers *no-cost* educational videos in all subjects for students from Pre-K through 12th Grade that adhere to state standards, with a [portal for students](#). [PBS Kids](#) is available for early childhood students.

Edutopia has released articles on [extending classroom management online](#), [teaching through a pandemic](#), and the [five best strategies](#) for distance learning.

Building Community:

The Chicago Public Schools Office of Social and Emotional Learning details best practices for [building community](#) in remote learning.

The Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy created a [Back-to-School Blueprint](#) that features a guide to [rebuilding the community](#).

[Re-Connecting to the School: E-Stories in the Classroom](#) provides tips to educators during distance teaching and recommends activities that strengthen connections in the online classroom.

[How to Share Space: Creating Community in Classrooms and Beyond](#), created by Project NIA, can be adapted to online learning communities.