



## AT A GLANCE

1. [States Consider Many Approaches to Tackle Learning Loss](#)
2. [National Organizations Call on Cardona to Resist Assessment Waivers](#)
3. [School Reopening Push Continues Despite Lagging Vaccination Progress for Teachers](#)

## THE QUICK SHEET

### Education Department Launches New Effort to Track School Reopening | NPR

In the first federal attempt to depict the state of school reopening in America since the pandemic forced classes online nearly a year ago, the research arm of the Education Department, the National Center for Education Statistics, launched a survey of over 7,000 elementary and middle schools to gather information on virtual learning, attendance rates, and other indicators. Stemming from one of President Joe Biden's first executive orders, the survey represents one piece of [his plans to get schools open](#) within his first [100 days](#) in office. Many of the bolder actions Biden seeks to make hinge on the confirmation of his nominee for Education secretary, Miguel Cardona, and congressional approval of [\\$130 billion in education funding](#) included in a much larger COVID-19 stimulus proposal.

Roadblocks remain to meet Biden's timeline. Infection rates are high in much of the country, even as [millions of school kids are missing out](#) on academic and emotional supports offered during in-person school. Adding to the trepidation of returning to school, teachers [continue to express health fears](#), citing the deaths of fellow educators and a slow or unclear vaccine rollout and teachers unions in many communities have challenged school reopening plans. Meanwhile, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki [recently said](#) that Biden's goal is for more than half of schools to have some in person instruction "at least one day a week" – not necessarily fully reopened – by Day 100 of his presidency.

## NATIONAL UPDATES

### Keep Schools Open All Summer, and Other Bold Ideas to Help Kids Catch Up | NPR

Eleven months after schools across the United States, and the world, first shifted to remote learning, many students are still learning in remote or hybrid settings and available data has consistently shown significant learning loss. In fact, McKinsey & Company concluded that American students could [lose an average of five to nine months of learning](#) by the end of June. While the public largely agrees something must be done to combat the impact on learning, consensus on how best to tackle the challenge has yet to emerge. Suggestions have included expanded [summer school or programs](#), [more required school](#)

[days](#) per year, longer school days, more comprehensive tutoring services, and community-based [educational and life skills programs](#). Financially, one estimate puts the full cost of recovery at \$12,000 per student over five years along with a 20% increase in spending for large districts. Many also believe that schools will need to [adjust](#) curriculum, instruction and educational technology, as well as how they support their students in their personal lives. Notably, some of the adjustments made in response to the pandemic [may be here to stay](#), as a recent RAND report found that one in five districts planned to create, expand, or maintain online learning capacity after the coronavirus pandemic has ended.

#### **Letter to Cardona Urging Rejection of 2021 State Assessment Waivers** | National Education and Civil Rights Organizations

Seeking a stronger commitment from Cardona ahead of his Senate confirmation hearing last week on the issue, 19 national education and civil rights organizations, including the Collaborative for Student Success, the National Urban League, and the National PTA, [issued a letter urging Cardona](#), if confirmed, to “refrain from issuing waivers to states that would allow them to bypass student assessment requirements for the 2020-21 school year” and instead “call on all states to administer summative statewide assessments.” The appeal to Cardona, who is widely expected to be confirmed, comes as additional states voice an intent to either [move forward with spring testing](#) or pursue a [second year of waivers](#) - and as new polling data in states like Colorado show [strong public and parent support for using assessment data](#) to tackle learning loss. The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions is expected to vote on Cardona’s confirmation this Thursday, though a full Senate vote has yet to be scheduled.

**‘We’re Not Being Taken Care of’: Many Teachers Still Ineligible for Vaccines** | Education Week  
Left to determine their own methods for distributing limited initial supplies of COVID-19 vaccines, individual states have set out with plans that depict varying approaches to prioritizing teachers - with only roughly half of states having started administering vaccines to educators. Despite the lagging numbers, pressure increased on states and districts to reopen schools with a statement by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Rochelle Walensky that schools could [begin reopening even if a majority of its teachers remain unvaccinated](#). Though Walensky [echoed top experts](#) on the need to prioritize teachers in state vaccination plans, she stated, “I also want to be clear that there is increasing data to suggest that schools can safely reopen and that safe reopening does not suggest that teachers need to be vaccinated.”

#### **STATE UPDATES**

##### **CO: Colorado Joins Multistate Effort to Improve how Teacher Prep Programs Cover Reading** | The Colorado Sun

In a six-state effort spearheaded by the Mississippi-based Barksdale Reading Institute, Colorado will work to share state-level strategies for integrating the [science of reading](#) into teacher preparation programs to improve early literacy outcomes across the state. The initiative comes as [national conversations about literacy](#) in American continue to gain focus, and as [multiple Colorado surveys depict growing parent concerns](#) about learning during the pandemic.

##### **IA: Sioux City Community Schools Announces Permanent Virtual Learning Option** | Siouxland Proud

Sioux City Community Schools Superintendent Paul Gausman announced that the district will offer a permanent virtual learning option for all K-12 Iowa students starting August 2021, citing likely continued demand and parent comments that some students did better in a virtual or hybrid learning environment than in a traditional school setting. Students who enroll in the virtual school will receive a laptop and will take Common Core-aligned classes taught by certified district teachers.

**IN: Voucher Supporters, Opponents Spar at Statehouse** | Chalkbeat Indiana

A set of controversial legislative proposals in Indiana are sparking intense debate on the issue of expanding funding for private school education through the state's limited existing voucher program. Though action on the issue is uncertain, other education investments are likely - including a [\\$150 million grant program](#) to support schools, universities, and other organizations assisting students who have fallen behind due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

**LA: State Launches Tutoring Initiative to Address Unfinished Learning, Improve Academic Achievement** | KNOE

The Louisiana Department of Education plans to dedicate \$1 million to the "Accelerate Initiative" - a tutoring program focused on providing struggling students across the state with increased access to free tutoring sessions. The spring initiative includes 24 lessons that are meant to be conveyed during tutoring sessions. State Superintendent Cade Brumley noted, "Reading and math are fundamentally important, and it's been a challenging year since last March. And we're just trying to do everything we can as a state agency to help support our kids."

**MI: House Bill Would Require Schools to Employ at Least One School Counselor** | Michigan Live  
Michigan State Rep. Felicia Brabec has introduced a bill that would require schools to employ at least one counselor for every 450 enrolled public school students. Brabec stated, "As a clinical psychologist, I recognize the importance of meeting the mental health needs of students in Michigan. Students need resources available to them that can help lower the rates of depression, anxiety and suicide in our younger students and teens." Brabec additionally noted that Michigan [maintains the second lowest student-to-counselor ratio in the nation](#), according to data from the American School Counselor Association. The conversation in Michigan echoes those in legislatures across the nation, as state leaders continue to grapple with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' mental, health, and academic wellbeing.

**MN: Gov. Tim Walz Proposes Automatic College Acceptance for Qualifying Minnesota High School Seniors** | StarTribune

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz has proposed that qualifying high school seniors who meet agreed-upon academic benchmarks will automatically be accepted into some local colleges and universities through a new admissions program called "Direct Admissions Minnesota". The governor included \$35 million in his recent state budget plan for the program, with officials and advocates saying the investment in students could help increase college access in the state and potentially remedy some of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' educational and economic prospects.

**MO: Education Commission Expects Students, Teachers Back in Classrooms this Fall** | Fox2Now  
Margie Vandeven, Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)

Commissioner, says she “sees light at the end of the tunnel” for the state’s students, as a majority of districts in the state have begun offering some form of in-person instruction and districts plan for spring testing to proceed this school year. Vandeven said the data from state tests will help education officials and teachers “to get a handle on” what learning gaps look like for students across the state. Vandeven said she expects to have students back in classrooms this fall.

#### **NY: 1 in 5 High School Students Got Incomplete Grades in the Spring. NYC is Giving More Time to Complete the Work.** | Chalkbeat New York

Students who received a “course in progress” mark in lieu of “F’s” as schools abruptly shut down last school year will be able to apply for more time to earn credit for those courses, according to New York City education officials. The move could impact up to 72,000 students in the nation’s largest district - though some advocates are warning that continued pandemic disruption could mean many of those students are unlikely to be in a position to handle the added workload. To receive the extra time, students, families, or principals must file an appeal by Feb. 22.

#### **TN: Tutors Tackling Pandemic’s Impact on Student Learning in Middle Tennessee** | WKRN

In Nashville, a local tutoring program is sharing how it has witnessed student and family needs change and grow during the pandemic. Learning Lab Director Ryan Mathis said his tutors have seen a huge increase in demand - as emerging data in the state suggest staggering declines in literacy and math abilities and parents fear their child could be held back or unprepared to continue with the next grade. Mathis says a new \$100 million state initiative to tackle literacy concerns in Tennessee is further driving demand for tutors. “No matter where you land on your thoughts on that, it’s understanding the significance of third-grade level reading proficiency and how that impacts students on a trajectory for the rest of their academic career,” he said.

#### **TX: Proposed Bill Would Require Texas High School Students to Take a Mental Health Class** | KSAT

A series of bills being considered in the Texas legislature would require expand the state’s focus on mental health education in schools by requiring students to take a course in mental health in education, requiring training on “trauma-informed school care,” and would additionally require districts to begin tracking incidences of bullying and cyberbullying. The set of bills builds on the 2017 “David’s Law” that many credit with a 23% decline in the youth suicide rate in the state. The proposals follow a similar trend of state legislatures including mental health concerns in their education priorities amid the pandemic.

#### **WA: Legislators Sink Their Teeth into Pandemic-era Issues for Schools** | The Seattle Times

Lawmakers in Washington state are considering nearly 60 education proposals this legislative session, with actions likely to take place on the matters of reopening schools for in-person learning, extending emergency waivers of graduation requirements, and further bolstering internet and technology investments. An additional bill, if passed, would tighten state expectations for school counselors in order to “maximize the amount of time these staff spend directly serving children.

### **NEWS FLASH**

#### **More Young Students are Headed Back to Classrooms. Will High Schoolers Join Them?** | Chalkbeat

[Teachers in Schools, Capitol Insurrection Lessons, Biden's Reopening Plans: Survey Results](#) | Education Week

[FCC Takes One Step Closer to Offering E-Rate Funds for Remote Learning Technology](#) | Education Week

[The Digital Divide Has Narrowed, but 12 Million Students Are Still Disconnected](#) | EdSurge

[As Reopenings Move Forward, so do Plans to Maintain Online Learning Options](#) | K-12Dive