



Educating Through the Pandemic: National Assessment Gets Postponed in 2021; Reopening Trend Reverses Amid Spike in Virus Cases; Schools Everywhere Face Steep Declines in Enrollment; and More...

AT A GLANCE

1. [National Assessment Gets Postponed in 2021](#)
2. [Reopening Trend Reverses Amid Spike in Virus Cases](#)
3. [Schools Everywhere Face Steep Declines in Enrollment](#)

THE QUICK SHEET

ixnaying the NAEP | Assessment HQ

Last week, the National Center for Education Statistics announced the decision to [postpone](#) the administration of the biennial NAEP assessments in reading and mathematics, drawing the concern of prominent education officials who say the lack of national education data will hinder efforts by policymakers, district leaders, and advocates to navigate schools through crucial points in the pandemic and recovery. [Education Secretary Betsy DeVos said](#) the 2021 NAEP assessments “would have shed light on the significant learning loss following the school closures last spring,” but that “much more valuable and actionable measures of learning loss will be the [annual assessments](#) required of states by the Every Student Succeeds Act.” The delay comes as district and [state](#) school officials are becoming more [vocal](#) about their [struggles to measure student achievement](#), and as speculation continues to surround the [topic of testing](#) as the coronavirus [surges](#) and the nation awaits the transition of presidential administrations.

Without the valuable data gleaned from NAEP, it’s all the more important that states move forward with annual testing so that teachers have a complete and consistent picture of how each student is doing and how best to support them.

NATIONAL UPDATES

Schools Are Closing For Millions Of Kids As Teachers Get Sick and COVID Cases Surge. Some Districts are Holding Out. | USA Today

A nationwide surge in COVID-19 cases is delaying an increasing number of school district plans to reopen buildings for in-person instruction, including in large, urban districts in cities like [Denver](#) and [Las Vegas](#).

Seven governors, including Andrew Cuomo of New York, [urged schools to remain open](#), stating that evidence suggested schools were not increasing transmission rates where appropriate health and safety precautions had been implemented. And while there had been momentum for schools to reopen their doors, Robin Lake, director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education, said she expects the [trend to reverse](#) as the numbers of cases, hospitalizations, and deaths climb. The CRPE team additionally published an analysis that the [school reopening “churn” is dominating the time of district leaders in a significant way](#), leaving little time for officials to focus on identifying much needed improvements to remote education, student and family engagement, and assessment systems.

Public School Enrollment Plummets Amid Coronavirus Pandemic | The Boston Globe

From Boston to [Missoula](#), school districts of all sizes and settings are facing steep declines in student enrollment, particularly at the kindergarten and elementary levels. In [New Mexico](#), state agencies and local school leaders are coordinating efforts to find 12,000 missing students who did not appear when online classes began months ago. In [California](#), nearly 1 in 5 students is considered chronically absent so far this school year, adding to the thousands of students that officials estimate were not enrolled when school began. Officials for Washington County Public Schools in Maryland announced their [lowest enrollment in eleven years](#), noting that hundreds of families opted to homeschool their children this year or, as was the case for many parents of kindergarten-aged children, chose to push their child’s first year of public school back, hoping the pandemic would abate by the 2021-22 school year. In [many of these districts](#), school funding formulas are based on the previous year’s enrollment data, leaving local school leaders braced for sharp constrictions of their budgets, even if most students return to classes next year.

Schools Grapple with Substitute Teacher Shortages, Medical Leave Requests, Survey Finds | Education Week

New survey data compiled by the EdWeek Research Center found that increasing teacher medical absences and a sharp decline in the number of substitute teacher applicants are applying new pressure to many districts across the nation. Local officials in [Missouri](#) called their teacher shortage a crisis, while a [pilot program in Connecticut](#) is bringing in college students to serve as teaching apprentices in order to ease the need for staff. Though many local [teachers unions](#) had stated that large portions of their membership were considering leaving the profession, [additional analysis](#) shows that a mass exodus from teaching hasn’t happened quite yet, despite teachers facing greater [challenges](#) than ever before.

STATE UPDATES

AR: Pandemic Harder for Certain Students | Northwest Arkansas Democrat Gazette

While the pandemic has complicated learning for all students, students who receive special education services, are English learners, or who have faced other barriers to learning are, at times, finding the challenges of virtual learning insurmountable. Arkansas education officials have worked to address this issue by providing schools with the most current information and resources from national organizations and the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs, hosting virtual discussion groups for special-education staff members, and providing funding for digital programs for students with severe cognitive disabilities.

AZ: Scottsdale Unified School District to Close Schools due to Lack Of Staffing | ABC15

Arizona's Scottsdale Unified School District closed five schools on Nov. 30 after learning that the district did not have enough teachers or substitutes available. With cases rising in the state, Superintendent Scott Menzel noted during the Nov. 23 governing board meeting that finding substitutes to staff high schools has been the district's biggest problem this year. Additionally, , the Arizona Interscholastic Association Executive Board has [voted to postpone](#) winter high school sports until January.

IL: Chicago Sets Jan. 11 School Reopening Date for Pre-K, Some Students With Disabilities | Chalkbeat Chicago

Officials have announced that Chicago Public Schools will reopen on Jan. 11 for children with disabilities and pre-kindergarten students. The district's statement acknowledged that the youngest students and highest-need learners were not receiving the same quality of instruction virtually as they would in physical classrooms and the district additionally planned to bring kindergarten through eighth grade students back to school by Feb. 1. In response, Jesse Sharkey, President of the Chicago Teachers Union, pointed to surging coronavirus numbers and stated, "Just unilaterally picking an arbitrary date in the future and hoping everything works out is a recipe for disaster." School officials countered that efforts to mitigate the spread were successful in other states.

IN: Operation Education: South Bend Schools Aims To Outfit all Buses With WiFi By Year's End | WSBT

Operation Education plans to use some of the \$1.8 million from the Governor's Emergency Education relief grant to equip all 205 of South Bend's district buses with WiFi by the end of this year. This is a dramatic increase from January, when the district had 20 buses with WiFi and plans to equip all buses over 10 years.

LA: Louisiana Superintendents Ask For Looser Quarantine Rules | Education Week

Several Louisiana public school systems are requesting that state coronavirus quarantine rules, which have sent thousands of students home from school home, be relaxed. These rules state anyone who is in "close contact," defined as being within six feet of a person who has tested positive for at least 15 minutes, or those who present with COVID-19 symptoms, must stay home for 14 days. The Louisiana Department of Health declined however, due to the state's alarming third surge in cases and hospitals warnings that their facilities could be overwhelmed.

MD: Maryland Lawmakers Say It's Time to Close the Digital Divide | Education Week

Virtual learning has highlighted the depth of the digital divide as well as increased the necessity of closing it as quickly as possible. According to state lawmakers, thousands of families live in areas considered "digitally disadvantaged," which has impacted students' abilities to attend virtual classes. Andrew Coy, the executive director of the Digital Harbor Foundation, calls for increasing the minimum delivery speeds that the FCC says internet service providers must offer. Multiple Maryland lawmakers are planning to introduce proposals in the upcoming legislative session aimed at expanding the authority of the Office of Rural Broadband, more clearly defining and funding technology resources for teachers and students, and capturing better data about the availability and use of internet and technology throughout the state.

ME: 'Steep Learning Curve': Educators are Finding Rewards Amid the Challenges Of Pandemic

Teaching | Central Maine

Teachers in Maine are reporting working exhausting hours as they navigate teaching in this unprecedented school year. Many districts, including Spruce Mountain in Central Maine, have adopted a hybrid teaching model requiring different lesson plans for those attending in-person classes, as well as those who are fully remote. Despite the extensive challenges, teachers say they have found several benefits, including smaller class sizes, students appreciating being in class and overcoming adversity, and even, in some cases, improved assessment scores.

MT: Montana Announces \$13M in Coronavirus Relief for Schools | Education Week

Gov. Steve Bullock announced that Montana schools will receive nearly \$13 million in additional coronavirus relief funds and called for Congress to pass additional school financing relief for 2021, saying that current aid will help schools finish this school year, but that most will enter next year “empty-handed.” Over 180 schools were approved for additional funding after receiving \$75 million in July. The federal coronavirus relief funds must be spent prior to the end of December.

ND: North Dakota Starts Free Rapid COVID-19 Testing for Teachers | Education Week

A pilot project in North Dakota is providing free rapid Covid-19 testing to teachers, staff, and school administrators in an effort to quickly identify and isolate people who may not yet be showing symptoms. Amid a dramatic spike in cases the past two weeks, State Superintendent Kirsten Baesler is hopeful that the rapid tests will help keep in-person learning safe. Grand Forks School District is also [taking an extra step and shifting to online-learning](#) between the Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday breaks to mitigate the spread of the virus.

UT: Salt Lake City Will Allow Elementary Students to Come Back To School In Person Beginning In Late January | The Salt Lake Tribune

Following a contentious district school board meeting, officials voted 4-3 to allow Salt Lake City students to return to elementary school classrooms for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic began early this year. Although some members of the board expressed uncertainty about sending students back while the county experiences its highest yet rate of COVID-19 transmission, Board President Melissa Ford insisted it is a risk worth taking.

TN: What You Need to Know As Metro Nashville Public Schools Students Return to Virtual Learning | Tennessean

Due to an increase in local coronavirus cases and significant staffing challenges, Metro Nashville Public Schools Director Adrienne Battle announced on Nov. 23 that all students will attend classes virtually for the remainder of the semester. The district will consistently review local conditions to determine when it is safe to reopen school buildings to students, she said.

VA: Failing Grades Spike in Virginia’s Largest School System as Online Learning Gap Emerges Nationwide | The Washington Post

Fairfax County Public Schools in Virginia, one of the largest school districts in the country, released an internal analysis that shows that the percentage of students failing classes has dramatically increased this school year. The district, which has been mostly online since March, has seen the number of middle and high school students earning an F in at least two classes rise by 83%. District officials said the trend

is in line with growing evidence from across the country that online learning is negatively impacting student achievement.

NEWS FLASH

[More than 1 in 4 Homeless Students Dropped Off Schools' Radar During the Pandemic](#) | Education Week

[Stuck on Mute: Kids in Juvenile Lockups Can't Be Seen or Heard by Teachers During Remote Learning](#) | Chalkbeat New York

[Ten Ways to Make Online Learning Work](#) | COVID Collaborative. CGCS, CCSSO, NGA, AEI

[Elementary, Middle School Students Falling Behind In Math Amid Pandemic: Research](#) | The Hill

[How Schools Are Navigating Meal Logistics During Pandemic](#) | Education Dive