



## COVID Slide Quick Sheet 03.24.2021

### AT A GLANCE

1. [Feds Ease Social Distancing Requirements, Cite New Science](#)
2. [Schools Look Toward a Summer of Learning](#)
3. [States Close Digital Divides, But Gap Persists Nationwide](#)

### THE QUICK SHEET

#### **CDC Eases Social Distancing Guidelines Seen as a Hurdle to School Reopening** | Education Week

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention updated its guidance for social distancing for U.S. schools last week, saying 3 feet of space between students wearing masks is sufficient in most cases to prevent transmission, rather than the 6 feet of distance required throughout most of the pandemic. The move is the latest in the Biden administration's efforts to coax schools open in the face of [severe implications for America's school children](#) and following massive investments in [school budget relief](#), [COVID-19 testing](#) for staff and students, and initiatives intended to [support students in poverty](#). Efforts to reopen schools are increasingly becoming evidence-based, as a [review of over 130 COVID-19 school studies](#) established little link between schools and community transmission and seeks to provide a roadmap for more schools to open their doors.

### NATIONAL UPDATES

#### **States Target Learning Loss with Summer School and Extended Days, but Some Parents Want Option to Hold Kids Back** | The 74 Million

State education leaders across the nation are debating the most effective ways to maximize learning time for students after a prolonged year of classroom closures, with many considering [extended summer programming](#), intensive tutoring programs, and other interventions. Similarly, parents are also split on what will be best for their children's progress. The 74 Million's Linda Jacobson specifically highlights a number of states considering bills to allow parents the choice to have their child repeat a grade, a trend seen as [national survey data from the CDC](#) shows parents' skepticisms about remote learning continue to build. For lawmakers, parents, and educators - who are also, of course, [grappling with the implications](#) of the pandemic on their craft - the nearing end of this school year is making apparent [just how much](#) COVID-19 might [alter the course of public education](#) in the U.S.

## **12 Months After Pandemic Closed Schools, 12 Million Students Still Lack Reliable Internet** | The 74 Million

Presenting one of the clearest ways to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing inequities, the nonprofits Common Sense and the Southern Education Foundation are out with new analysis that says nearly 12 million students remain “underconnected” a year after schools were forced online. Ranging from urban to rural, the report describes a range of communities [left behind in the push to increase internet connections and distribute devices](#), while underscoring that those most likely to still be struggling with access are also those who are most likely to have faced long standing barriers even before the pandemic. The findings [echo concerns expressed by acting chair of the Federal Communications Commission, Jessica Rosenworcel](#), who announced that the Biden Administration will further leverage billions of new dollars included in the American Rescue Plan for device and internet access. “This pandemic has taught us like nothing before that broadband is no longer a nice to have, it’s a need to have, for everyone, everywhere,” she said.

**Cardona Keeps Tough Stance on State Tests as He Focuses on School Reopenings** | Education Week  
Education Secretary Miguel Cardona signaled that he’s unlikely to reverse course on the Biden administration’s decision to require states to move forward with annual summative assessments this school year, commenting on the issue after announcing a National School Reopening Summit and other actions focused on school recovery. Meanwhile, some [nonprofit organizations are working to clarify the role that student assessment data can play in meeting student needs](#).

## **STATE UPDATES**

### **CA: 'No One is Sure What to Expect': Schools, Colleges Add More Counseling Services to Address Student Mental Health** | Ed Source

Education stakeholders at all levels are increasingly focused on the mental health needs of students as schools reopen, citing significant upheaval to their everyday lives, including being separated from their friends amid distance learning, losing loved ones, and facing family unemployment. Amy Cranston, executive director of the Social Emotional Learning Alliance for California, notes that schools can help students understand and process their emotional needs. Expert suggestions include daily check-ins with students, physical activity, engaging projects, and training teachers to recognize signs of serious mental health conditions to know when interventions are necessary.

### **CO: Coronavirus is Straining Colorado Kids’ Mental Health. The State Hopes Free Counseling Sessions Will Help.** | The Colorado Sun

Across Colorado’s 178 school districts, wide-spread concerns about students' mental health and wellbeing are rising. Two state proposals to help track and address mental health concerns are being considered by lawmakers and, if approved, could provide students and educators with free mental health screenings and counseling sessions. “This proposal, which is part of the Colorado stimulus package and our behavioral health roadmap, will help to connect students with critical services to help provide support during these difficult times,” said Shelby Wieman, acting press secretary for Gov. Jared Polis.

**CT: State Launches Education Task Force to Help Prepare for School Life after Pandemic** | WFSB3

The Connecticut State Department of Education has launched a task force focused on assisting the state's education recovery and providing a framework for enhancing student learning and opportunities this spring and summer. The task force's top five priorities are expanding academic supports, connecting families and communities, prioritizing safety and social-emotional wellbeing, closing the digital divide, and building summer enrichment programming.

**CT: In Remote School, F Students Quadrupled** | New Haven Independent

The number of New Haven high schoolers failing classes has increased dramatically, mirroring a trend seen in many districts that relied on prolonged remote instruction. The number of students with F's in five or more classes this winter was four times higher than the previous year, according to data from New Haven Public Schools. African-American and male students have been disproportionately represented among the students struggling with remote school.

**IA: Sioux City School District Launches Virtual Academy** | Sioux City Journal

The Sioux City school district has provided more information about a new online school that will be open to all the district's over 15,000 students, as well as students from other Iowa districts. The K-12 virtual academy will provide laptops and internet equipment and online classes will begin this fall. Students will participate in classes daily and follow the same academic calendar as the traditional public schools.

**IL: Chicago Public Schools to Invest \$24 Million in Student Trauma and Mental Health Programs** |

Chalkbeat Chicago

Chicago plans to spend \$24 million of its \$1.8 billion in federal stimulus funds on a plan to boost mental health services in the city. Over the next three years, a grant program will seek to expand the number of behavioral support teams for schools and increase services provided by community organizations and nonprofits. Chicago has not yet detailed how it will spend the remainder of its federal stimulus funds. But district leaders have said they will release an "unfinished learning" plan that will detail efforts to re-connect students with decreased attendance or who have lost contact with schools entirely.

**MA: All Massachusetts Elementary Schools Will be Fully In-Person by May 3, State Says** | MassLive

Massachusetts education officials announced that all elementary schools in the state will be fully in person by May 3 as schools transition from remote learning. Districts were asked to stick to that timeline or request a waiver. Boston Public School officials are asking the Massachusetts education board for a three-week delay before returning to full-time in-person learning at its elementary and middle schools. Superintendent Brenda Cassellius is also asking for an extension to the same date for the Horace Mann School for the Deaf, the McKinley Schools, and the Carter School.

**MI: Some Michigan Schools Return to Remote Learning Amid Rise in COVID-19 Cases** | Detroit Free Press

Despite [recently instituted safety precautions](#), some Michigan schools have further delayed reopening or returned to a virtual setting after sharp spikes in COVID-19 transmission. Don Wotruba, executive director of the Michigan Association of School Boards, notes that the "start-stop-restart process" is not new and opines that the real test will come after spring break, as federal guidance weakens social distancing measures and ramp up testing and vaccine distribution.

### **[NJ: Department of Education Announces NJ Schools Have Bridged the 'Digital Divide'](#)** | RLS Media

New Jersey education officials have announced that all schools in the state have reported connecting all students with the technology and internet needed to engage in remote and hybrid learning systems. Closing the “digital divide” has been a major obstacle for schools since the onset of the pandemic.. Gov. Phil Murphy noted, “Closing the digital divide wasn’t just about meeting the challenges of remote learning – it’s been about ensuring every student has the tools they need to excel in a 21st century educational environment.”

### **[TN: Tennessee Meets Pandemic with Summer Learning Camps, Phonics, Testing](#)** | Education Next

Tennessee’s plan to help schools and students recover from pandemic-related disruption and learning loss could be a model for other states, says David Monsouri, CEO of Tennessee SCORE, a nonprofit advocacy organization in the state. With an influx of federal relief dollars, state lawmakers have passed legislation expanding summer school programming, investing in literacy efforts, and to clarify flexibility schools will have in administering summative annual assessments. And while Monsouri applauds the moves, he urges education officials to ensure strong implementation of the new investments in the state’s public education system.

## **NEWS FLASH**

### **[3 Strategies for Helping Students in Crisis Return to School](#)** | K-12 Dive

### **[USDA Extends Free Universal School Meal Service for Children Through the Summer](#)** | Education Week

### **[New Data Highlight Disparities In Students Learning In Person](#)** | NPR

### **[Teachers’ Union Leader Raises Concerns About CDC’s Eased Distancing Guidelines for Schools](#)** | Education Week

### **[Most States Fail to Measure Teachers’ Knowledge of the ‘Science of Reading,’ Report Says](#)** | Education Week

### **[The Coming Literacy Crisis: There’s No Going Back to School as We Knew It](#)** | Education Week

### **[Feds’ First Survey of Pandemic Learning Finds Nearly Half of Students Taught Remotely](#)** | Education Week

### **[How COVID-19 Will Make Fixing America’s Worst-Performing Schools Even Harder](#)** | Education Week