

A TIME TO ACT:

A FRAMEWORK TO ACCELERATE LEARNING

A JERSEYCAN REPORT



About This Framework

New Jersey was one of the earliest states hit by COVID-19, forcing all schools statewide to be shuttered from mid-March through June 2020. As we approach the end of the 2020-21 school year, we see wide variation across the state in the mode of instruction – virtual, in-person or hybrid – and ongoing challenges with reliable internet connectivity for our most vulnerable families. Given our historical challenges in driving equitable academic outcomes for all New Jersey students, the pandemic has the potential to drastically exacerbate opportunity gaps for an entire generation of students. Furthermore, this crisis has hindered other critical aspects of school, including the development of peer relationships, after-school activities that support children’s mental and emotional well-being and a sense of routine.

JerseyCAN sees this moment not as a cause for despair, but instead as an opportunity for New Jersey to earn its longstanding reputation as a national leader for public education. A large body of research demonstrates that there are school systems nationwide and here at home that have successfully minimized the impact of COVID-19 on students. The time is now to widely distribute these stories for educators, school leaders and policymakers to learn from and adopt accordingly.

Given our long-standing track record of working with diverse partner coalitions, JerseyCAN has developed a framework to apply national best practices to our unique context in the Garden State. The purpose of this framework is to disseminate findings across sectors and demonstrate what is possible. This framework brief is intended to:

- ✓ Identify strategies that successfully accelerated student learning prior to the pandemic as well as emerging strategies and programs that are working for students and families now;
- ✓ Offer initial evidence-based policy solutions to accelerate student learning equitably across the state, focusing on those that are most time-sensitive at this stage; and
- ✓ Seed the ground for case studies to be published in the coming weeks to illustrate how these strategies are being employed in New Jersey and inform additional policy recommendations.

This work is informed by an extensive review of research and promising strategies from across the country as well as interviews with national and New Jersey experts. This brief highlights just a few of the numerous studies analyzed that support the initial strategies and policy recommendations for New Jersey offered here. The framework will grow and evolve as we continue our work in partnership with families, educators and leaders. **Above all, we seek to elevate the efforts of New Jersey’s communities during this challenging time, applaud the resiliency of our citizens and demonstrate our confidence that, together, we can deliver on the promise of a more equitable future for all our students.**

Framework to Accelerate Learning

The elements of this framework overlap and align to create an ecosystem of teaching and learning, with no one element taking priority over any other.



Student and Family Engagement

As we continue to face and ultimately recover from the pandemic, it is critical to meet students and families where they are. This includes confronting the **disproportionate impact** on the education, health and well-being of communities of color and aligning strategies that support social and emotional learning (SEL) as foundational to academic growth. Further, our research has surfaced the need to distinguish between SEL practices such as time management, communication and self-efficacy skills and mental health interventions to address anxiety, depression and other trauma-related impacts, which have **grown exponentially** during the pandemic. Just as district and school leaders have impressively adapted to meet the numerous health and safety needs of students over the last year – and as many district and school leaders have provided leadership to facilitate vaccinations for staff – future similar efforts will be needed to secure mental health supports for students and staff. Knowing that many large districts operated remotely for the majority of the 2020-21 school year and that **some degree** of online or blended learning will likely continue as the “new normal” in education, we must ensure students and families are equipped to succeed in this area, including related SEL and mental health supports and appropriate training in digital literacy. And we must support schools and systems in their efforts to treat parents as partners and leverage family engagement for student benefits.



Why We Must Act Now

School systems with a **strong foundation** of supporting SEL have shown more success in meeting student needs during the pandemic, pointing to the importance of these structures.

- Remote learning has **benefitted** some students and families and the positive elements of this modality can be leveraged for student success.
- Families are **acutely aware** of their children’s SEL, mental health and academic needs, are **more connected** to their children’s educators than ever before and **seek information** and resources to support learning at home.

Promising Strategies from Across the Country

- **The Education Trust** recommends providing funds and training to help adults with the skills they need to align SEL and academic growth; focusing mental health resources and professionals on schools and districts with the greatest needs; setting explicit expectations for student and family outreach and support with remote learning and accessing opportunities across the community to address SEL and mental health.

“A big mistake is thinking that fall 2021 can be fall 2019. Given the ‘two-way mirror’ experience parents had with their children’s education this year, what many parents expect and demand from schools next year is likely to shift. This is an opportunity for districts to build up more and different kinds of options for students and families.”

Michael DeArmond, Senior Research Analyst, Center on Reinventing Public Education

Student and Family Engagement



- The city of Chicago recently [announced a plan](#) to dedicate \$24M in federal stimulus funding to expand mental health services and behavioral teams to address student trauma in partnership with community groups.
- [The 74](#) highlights the concept of utilizing a range of adults in the school system as “navigators” who support individual students and families to ensure their basic health and educational needs are met during remote learning. According to [recent testimony](#) at the New Jersey Joint Committee on Public Schools, there are examples of LEAs in our state exploring and implementing these tools. One is the [Paul Robeson](#) Charter School in Trenton, which set up an advisory system to facilitate one-on-one check-in’s at least weekly with every student and family.
- A [recent report](#) from the Carnegie Corporation of New York highlights the use of surveys and feedback loops to promote strong relationships with students and families.

New Jersey Policy Recommendations

- Given the influx of federal stimulus funding, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) should assist local education agencies (LEAs) – which include districts and public charter schools – in identifying funding and matching services for SEL and mental health support.
 - › This includes initiatives built into the school day, such as adult coaching on SEL, mentoring and wellness checks, as well as wraparound services that address mental health needs.
- State leaders and districts should support the creation of school “navigators” or “ambassadors,” trained staff who support individual families and students with their health and education needs, as well as advisory systems to enhance support for student and family well-being.
- The state should incentivize LEAs to create individualized learning plans for every student. The [state of Colorado](#) requires such a plan (the Individual Career and Academic Plan) for each student beginning in grade nine and including individual/self-discovery, career exploration, academic planning and personal financial literacy. In addition, the [San Antonio](#) Independent School District is creating support plans for each student. New Jersey can learn from these two examples.
- State leaders should create a pilot program for LEAs that seek to group students according to their academic needs instead of by grade level and reconfigure school schedules based on students’ needs.

High Quality, Inclusive Curriculum, Instruction, and Training

Students and educators have faced significant challenges in learning through the pandemic given the changing nature of state and national restrictions and guidelines and local modes of instruction. Data from 2020 and from previous crises that resulted in school closures point to alarming gaps in learning that can have long-term ramifications for students. Moving forward, all students need access to high-quality curriculum and instruction to accelerate their learning; this requires flexibility, differentiation and more personalized approaches. A mix of in-person and remote instruction can be beneficial, but the design must be student-centered and educators must have opportunities for relevant training and professional development. Growing momentum for small groups of students learning together in “pods” or “hubs” points to more opportunities for personalization. States and LEAs must also confront a lack of consistent expectations for and definitions of quality when it comes to instructional content and materials, especially in a digital mode.



Why We Must Act Now

Teachers are concerned about students’ social, emotional and academic well-being and are seeking guidance, resources and changes to instructional content and practices to meet student needs.

- The rapid expansion of access to technology in education opens the door to new possibilities for reaching learners and educators in a variety of more personalized ways, including the expansion of learning hubs.
- A growing research base can help to illuminate which instructional practices are most successful in reaching students in the virtual environment.

Promising Strategies from Across the Country

- The 74 describes the National Summer School Initiative, now known as Cadence Learning, which elevates the reach of master educators through engaging virtual lessons along with coaching for teachers with proven success in accelerating learning for at-risk students.

“ There is nothing like the experience of watching an extraordinary teacher exercise their craft. Digital learning now allows the best teachers in America to expand their reach to other teachers and their students. The most important thing we have learned from the pandemic so far is the power to leverage the best teachers using technology and use that as a complement to in-person instruction.”

Chris Cerf, Cadence Learning and JerseyCAN Advisory Board

High Quality, Inclusive Curriculum, Instruction, and Training

- [Education First](#) highlights research-based strategies underway in nine states, including tutoring in Louisiana; options for state-provided curricular, instructional and delivery models in Massachusetts and a state-vetted virtual course program with free tools for remote instruction in core subjects in Texas.
- The [Education Trust](#) weighs in on principles for equity in extended learning time, including prioritizing new funding for proven interventions such as high-dosage tutoring for students in need, addressing state laws or regulations that create barriers for innovation and offering guidance to help LEAs select effective instructional models, materials and training.
- [Teaching Lab](#) emphasizes critical elements for accelerating learning: a focus on grade-level content, “just-in-time” support and multiple options for additional learning time such as tutoring and extended school days supported by high-quality materials.



New Jersey Policy Recommendations

- The NJDOE should build on its [initial grants](#) and subsequent [increased allocations](#) to districts to support learning loss and provide guidance on the most effective use of funding, strategies and training for expanding learning time and enhancing personalized learning, with a focus on historically underserved students.
 - › This should include ways to utilize school support staff, such as reading specialists and paraeducators, to provide one-on-one or small group [support](#) to students through high-dosage tutoring and intensive summer programming. New Jersey leaders can look to guidance from the Louisiana Department of Education on [summer programming](#) and its statewide P-12 [tutoring initiative](#) as one helpful example of state leadership.
 - › State leaders must also look toward the next wave of reforms, including more intensive after-school programming, publicly funded, equity-focused learning pods or hubs (such as the [initiative](#) introduced by NJ Senate Education Chair Teresa Ruiz) and a pilot program on the extended school day and year.
- Legislators and other state leaders should support efforts to adapt [retention policies](#) to provide families with the option to request that their child be retained in their current grade. For example, there is currently a bill moving through the legislature that provides that a school district will permit a student enrolled in grades K-8 during the 2020-21 school year to repeat his or her grade level in the 2021-22 school year if the parent or guardian makes a written request to the district on or before June 30, 2021.

Effective Resource Allocation for Equitable Systems

COVID-19 relief packages from the federal government are directing hundreds of billions of [dollars](#) to education, with the vast majority of public K-12 funding going to states for allocation to local districts and schools. While this unprecedented influx of resources will undoubtedly boost pandemic recovery, the [money must be spent](#) with a focus on equity and the realization that this funding will not last forever. States and LEAs must be [strategic in planning](#) to address the immediate needs of students, families and educators and to establish sustainable school, district and state systems. Critical to this effort is smart, robust and [inclusive](#) data collection to understand how relief funding is spent and how the full range of student outcomes tracks with those investments. Further, while the NJDOE has [reported](#) that New Jersey has closed the digital divide, [national research](#) shows that ongoing support will be required to ensure all students have reliable, high-speed connectivity for the future.



Why We Must Act Now

- A significant [window for innovation and sustainability](#) has been opened by the influx of federal funding coming to states and LEAs, including the ability to address long-standing infrastructure needs through one-time investments.
- A [range of examples](#) demonstrates how states can lead in identifying high-quality instructional materials and models – including sample curricula and professional development – through systems such as a state clearinghouse showing where investments can be directed to most effectively serve students.
- A recent [National PTA](#) survey shows that families support transparency in school and LEA spending and desire a focus on equity when it comes to resource allocation.

Promising Strategies from Across the Country

- [Education Resource Strategies \(ERS\)](#) provides “5 power strategies” for an equitable pandemic recovery: 1) Empowering, adaptable instruction; 2) Time and attention; 3) The teaching job; 4) Relationships and SEL; and 5) Family and community partnerships – and highlights the need for collaboration between community, school, district and state leaders to ensure the right conditions are in place to drive positive change.

“Students and parents are the first and second stakeholders in education – students are the receiver and parents are the decider of where their children go to school. They’re not the ninth and tenth stakeholders. They must be meaningfully engaged in conversations about resource allocation before decisions are made – not after.”

Tafshier Cosby, CEO, Parent Impact

Effective Resource Allocation for Equitable Systems

- [The Education Trust](#) offers advice for state leaders in directing federal stimulus funding, including school-level spending equity plans, direction of funds to the most vulnerable students, attention to the digital divide and supports to meet students' physical, social and emotional health needs.
- [ExcelinEd](#) offers a range of ideas for states to help prioritize both short- and longer-term investments that incentivize innovation and improve school and state infrastructure.

New Jersey Policy Recommendations

- The NJDOE should provide extensive outreach, guidance and trainings on spending federal and state funding for accelerating learning, including expenditures that address short-term needs and solve longer-term infrastructure and systems challenges while avoiding the fiscal cliff when funding runs out. State guidance should include:
 - › Strategies for meaningfully engaging families in local decisions about allocating resources;
 - › One-time investments to expand broadband as well as the technological and WIFI infrastructure of classrooms, school buses and out-of-school settings that provide community support, as permitted by [New Jersey's ESSER funding](#);
 - › Alleviating the financial burden on students or families by covering fees for collegiate or industry level programs or exams or for work-based learning opportunities; and
 - › Training or refreshing teachers in the use of data-driven instruction as well as user-friendly methods to communicate data, tools and learning strategies with families.
- State leaders should partner with local and national philanthropic organizations to support local trainings that share expertise about effective resource allocation and data collection requirements to assess the effectiveness of investments.



💡 Educator Support and Innovative Staffing

The pandemic has proven just how essential educators are in the American workforce. Support by and for educators is woven throughout every element of this framework. Building on the foundation described in the [JerseyCAN Educator Workforce Series](#) last year, there is no better time to invest in innovative and flexible practices that allow educators to reach students most effectively. Opportunities are also ripe to further [diversify the teacher pipeline](#), from recruitment through retention, so that the educator workforce better reflects the students it serves. States and LEAs should [explore pathways](#) that allow school staff such as paraprofessionals and substitute teachers to fill immediate student needs brought on by the pandemic while pursuing full certification, where desired.



Why We Must Act Now

Educators who reported [supportive working conditions](#) before the pandemic felt more successful in facing the challenges brought on by teaching and learning during COVID-19 than those with unfavorable working conditions, pointing to the need to promote a collaborative school environment with open communication.

- New federal funding can be used to [invest](#) in educator preparation programs in minority-serving institutions (MSIs) as well as mentorship and affinity models that offer support to diverse teacher candidates.
- [Recent research](#) shows the vast majority of LEAs are considering new roles and duties for educators and other school staff and points to funding as an historical hindrance to innovation in this area; however, new federal dollars can provide needed support.

“Initiatives that accelerate learning – such as summer programs, high-dosage tutoring, navigators and other enrichment activities – shouldn’t just be learning opportunities for students, but for teachers, too.”

Lynn Olson, Senior Fellow, FutureEd, and Education Policy Research Center at Georgetown University

Promising Strategies from Across the Country

- The [American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education](#) (AACTE) recommends the exploration of innovative approaches to preparing teacher candidates for full certification through pandemic recovery, including a [“team-based professional apprenticeship model”](#) in Arizona.
- [FutureEd](#) describes new and expanded roles for excellent educators, including master and mentor teachers (as seen in [Cadence Learning](#)) as well as multi-classroom leaders (part of Public Impact’s [Opportunity Culture](#)) in addition to flexible staffing models.

💡 Educator Support and Innovative Staffing

- [Teaching Lab](#) is expanding its virtual educator professional learning model with a focus on accelerating learning in English Language Arts (ELA) and math for Black and Latinx K-12 students.
- [The 74](#) explores a successful apprenticeship program in Colorado that provides high school students with a pathway into teaching and helps to diversify the local teacher pipeline.



New Jersey Policy Recommendations

- Policymakers and educator preparation providers should ensure pathways of preparation are experience-based and [provide on and off ramps](#) for future teachers to earn as they learn and for current non-certified staff such as paraprofessionals to join a path to teaching. This might include a residency or apprentice model that offers paid on-the-job training with classroom instruction to prepare program participants for highly-skilled careers in education.
- The NJDOE should [allow for regional master classes](#) that share staffing for high-level, low enrollment coursework, which might include:
 - › College professors or industry professionals partnering with high school teachers to deliver content;
 - › Extending temporary certification for current teachers who want to add another endorsement to staff a course; and
 - › Allowing LEAs to work with certified teachers in other LEAs through the use of technology and school-based support staff.



Data for Understanding Student Learning

The pandemic has resulted in an explosion of public demand for data as people seek to understand the virus and its impact on health, education, the economy and more. While local, state and national education data systems have expanded over several decades, the infrastructure surrounding these systems typically lacks the agility needed to quickly pivot to new and different collections in a time of crisis. **Education data** is more critical than ever to provide transparent information about student learning before, through and after the pandemic according to modes of instruction – in-person, remote (both synchronous and asynchronous) and hybrid – and specific interventions. Traditionally disadvantaged students are more likely to be **learning remotely** and to be facing at least one **barrier** related to living conditions, technology access, etc. required to do that learning effectively. Clear and timely **formative and summative data** are needed to empower teachers, families and education leaders to design and implement effective strategies to reach all learners.



Why We Must Act Now

A **Data Quality Campaign** poll shows that parents overwhelmingly support the use of data to understand student learning needs.

- The **Education Trust** calls for leveraging this unique time and federal investment to provide the technology and training to transparently diagnose student needs more quickly and effectively than before.
- **Learning Heroes**' research shows that parents are more engaged in their children's education than ever before and seek more information about their academic and social and emotional well-being.

Promising Strategies from Across the Country

- **America Succeeds** recommends states use a common diagnostic and summative (end of year) assessment program to consistently identify student learning needs, especially as students switch from virtual to hybrid to in-person learning programs.
- **NWEA** recommends a combination of quantitative and qualitative data measures that can be used to identify individual student needs and help to inform differentiated approaches to meet those needs.

“ We must overcome the fear of data in education. Having as much robust data as possible only helps us better understand student needs. Doctors order full bloodwork for a check-up so they have a picture of how the whole human system is working. We need this same mindset in education.”

Katrina Miller, Director of Educational Partnerships, SAS

Data for Understanding Student Learning

- [The 74](#) calls attention to the need to collect [opportunity to learn](#) data and to invest in assessment literacy and training to ensure educators and school leaders can use data to support individual students.

New Jersey Policy Recommendations

- In upcoming months, Governor Murphy should establish a new interagency government commission to focus on (1) Providing clear guidance for reopening schools, (2) The coordination of public resources needed to accelerate learning, and (3) The data collection efforts needed to track outcomes. In order to ensure a collaborative approach to data collection and analysis, this commission should:
 - › Include the New Jersey Departments of Education, Children and Families, Human Services and Office of the Secretary of Higher Education;
 - › Align all related state data systems so that information about pandemic responses and outcomes can be used to the fullest potential to inform policy decisions and state and local investments; and
 - › Oversee a task force to accelerate learning with representation from key stakeholders outside of government, similar to the one recently initiated in the [state of Connecticut](#).



→ Next Steps: Our Most Pressing Priorities



This brief synthesizes the extensive research and best practices that are emerging across the country and within New Jersey. Since it will take a multi-dimensional approach to accelerate learning, we have included several recommendations across the framework to help guide state and local leaders in planning for this summer and fall. **In the very near term, we encourage each of the key players to focus on the following to accelerate learning for New Jersey students:**

- For **Governor Murphy** and his team, the top priority should be the creation of the interagency government commission and task force to guide a collaborative education recovery.
- For **the Legislature**, the top priorities should be finishing bills in motion such as the learning pod/hub funding, grade retention option and teacher residency bills and quickly moving to adopt legislation on the pilot programs described above.
- For **the NJDOE**, the top priority should be to quickly adopt robust guidance and trainings on the strategies that the state has already identified and incentivized with the most recent learning loss grants – such as high dosage tutoring and more intensive summer programming – as well as emerging best practices to support students' social and emotional well-being and mental health.
- For **district and school leaders**, the top priority should be continuing to focus on intensive summer programming and planning robustly for fall 2021 with the use of high-quality, inclusive curriculum and interventions.
- For **parents and families**, the top priority should be continuing to seek out information and data on their children's SEL and academic growth as well as available resources to support learning at home.
- For **philanthropists and funders**, the top priority should be supporting and facilitating trainings for districts and schools by national and state experts who can provide detailed guidance on the effective use of federal stimulus funds.

Over the coming months, we will expand the elements of the framework as well as policy recommendations and share case studies that show how New Jersey schools and districts are leading these efforts through a series of videos, short written briefs and infographics.

JerseyCAN recognizes the tireless efforts that our educators, leaders and families have undertaken to keep our students as safe and healthy as possible over this past year. As we look ahead, we aim to support these efforts by illuminating the research and best practices that will accelerate student learning and unearth the most impactful strategies that must continue into the future.

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About JerseyCAN

JerseyCAN: The New Jersey Campaign for Achievement Now advocates for all students across the state to have access to high-quality schools. We work to improve policies and programs to support equity and excellence in New Jersey education.

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