



New Jersey School Boards Association

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Reopening Schools: Online Learning and the Digital Divide



**The Third in a Series of NJSBA Special Reports
on How the Coronavirus Is Changing Education in New Jersey**

October 23, 2020

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www.njsba.org/digital-divide2020

The New Jersey School Boards Association is a federation of the state's local boards of education and includes the majority of New Jersey's charter schools as associate members. NJSBA provides training, advocacy and support to advance public education and promote the achievement of all students through effective governance.

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October 23, 2020

Dear Member of the New Jersey Education Community,

The role of the local board of education has always been integral to the educational process. But today, COVID-19, by altering the lives of our students and their families, as well as the governance of public education, has underscored the importance of board responsibilities.

During the current public health emergency, local boards of education and administrators have faced challenges unlike any others they experienced in their professional lives. In the face of ever-changing, inconsistent and, often, inadequate state and federal guidance, they have made critical decisions in the interest of students' academic, physical and emotional health.

New Jersey's school leaders and educators have done an exemplary job guiding their school districts through this historically difficult time, identifying the right combination of in-person instruction and virtual learning, balanced with safeguards for the health of students, staff and families. They deserve the highest commendations for their creativity, flexibility and dedication to their students.

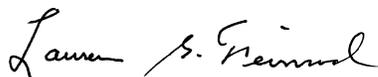
Since March, NJSBA has committed its resources to helping local boards of education meet the challenges of the pandemic through training, advocacy, direct services and research. The Association has generated a series of special reports—in the spring, summer and fall.

- **Searching for a 'New Normal' in New Jersey's Public Schools: How the Coronavirus Is Changing Education in the Garden State**, May 20, 2020, addresses the safe reopening of schools, students' mental health, academic and extracurricular programs, budgetary issues, and preparations for the future.
- **Choosing the Best 'Road Back' for Our Children**, August 31, 2020, provides an advocacy agenda for public education during the pandemic, including state and federal funding, assistance in securing personal protective equipment and technology, financial flexibility, and critical changes in law and regulation.
- **Reopening Schools: Online Learning and the Digital Divide**, our latest report, looks at the challenges facing school districts in delivering instruction remotely to all students during the pandemic and beyond.

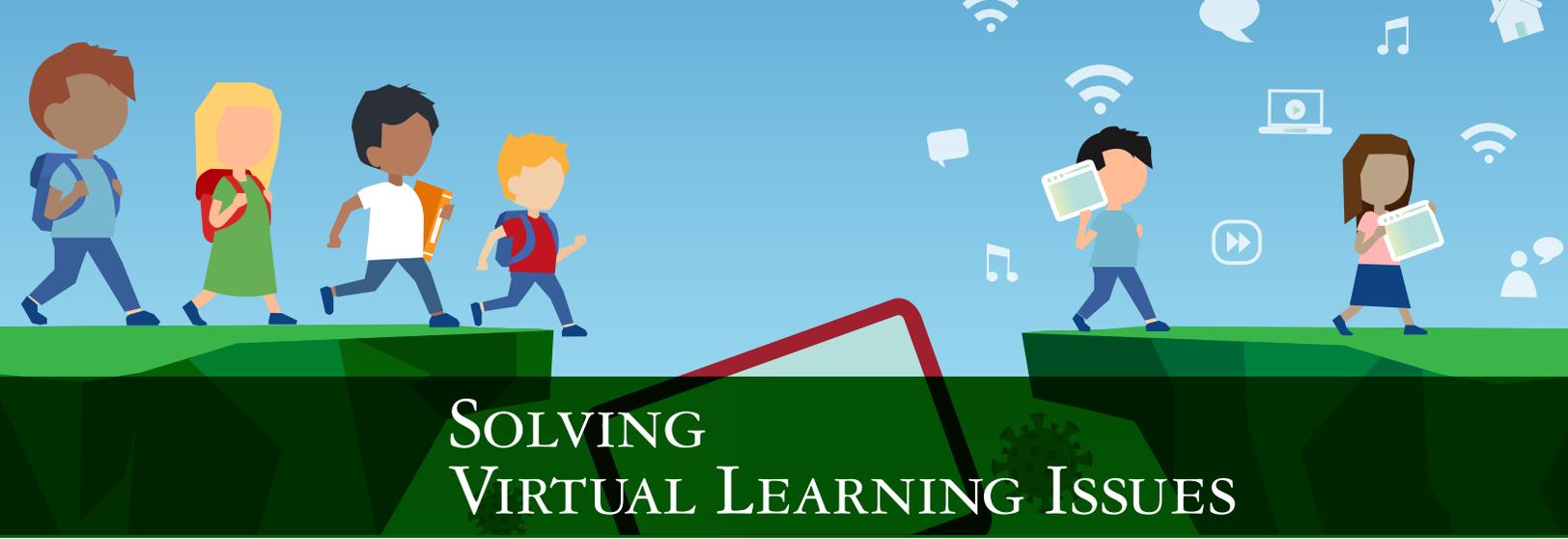
A fourth special report, on the impact of the pandemic on students' health and wellness, will be issued in early 2021.

We believe that the information contained in our series of special reports will prove valuable to our members and help inform public policy on education during the pandemic and beyond.

Sincerely,



Lawrence S. Feinsod, Ed.D.
Executive Director



SOLVING VIRTUAL LEARNING ISSUES

In July, Governor Murphy announced a [state initiative](#) to address an obstacle to learning for many students during the COVID-19 pandemic—the digital divide. The lack of internet access and computer devices affected approximately 230,000 of New Jersey’s 1.4 million public school since the closing of school buildings in the spring, the governor said.

His plan included the use of state funding and federal coronavirus relief aid. It also involved an appeal to the private sector for contributions, in-kind gifts and grants.

BACKORDER, BROAD BAND NEEDS AND ECONOMIC DISPARITY

At the beginning of September, the New Jersey Department of Education estimated the number of children without internet [at 193,000](#).

A [September 19 report](#) posted by NJ.com illustrated the magnitude of the challenge facing school districts, including many of the poorest in ensuring that students are connected to online learning.

On October 8, the [Inquirer reported](#) on the challenges presented by difficulties in acquiring computer devices and lack of adequate internet access in the Philadelphia area, including several southern New Jersey districts.

The [New York Times](#) on October 12 noted the increased demand for low- cost devices and the difficulty school districts nationwide face in acquiring them. “A surge in worldwide demand by educators for low-cost laptops and Chromebooks— up to 41 percent higher than last year—has created months-long shipment delays,” stated the article.

In an October 15 [NJ Spotlight opinion article](#) citing racial disparity in access to in-person instruction, Mark Weber, an education analyst for New Jersey Policy Perspective (NJPP), provided statistics showing the severe impact of the digital divide on New Jersey’s students of color, a situation that, he said, is exacerbated by funding disparities. NJPP is an independent research organization.

DIGITAL LEARNING TODAY

During the summer, it was clear that remote instruction, which became essential after the state ordered school buildings to close in March, would remain prominent in district plans for the 2020-2021 academic year. The vast majority of school districts developed hybrid learning platforms, while a much smaller number opted for all in-person learning.

Many districts, however, requested and received waivers from the state to delay implementation of their hybrid instructional models due to an inability to meet health standards, acquire necessary technological equipment and provide adequate staffing for an in-person instructional component.

In his October 15 NJ Spotlight Op-Ed, the NJPP's Mark Weber wrote that the majority of New Jersey school districts began the school year with all-virtual instruction.

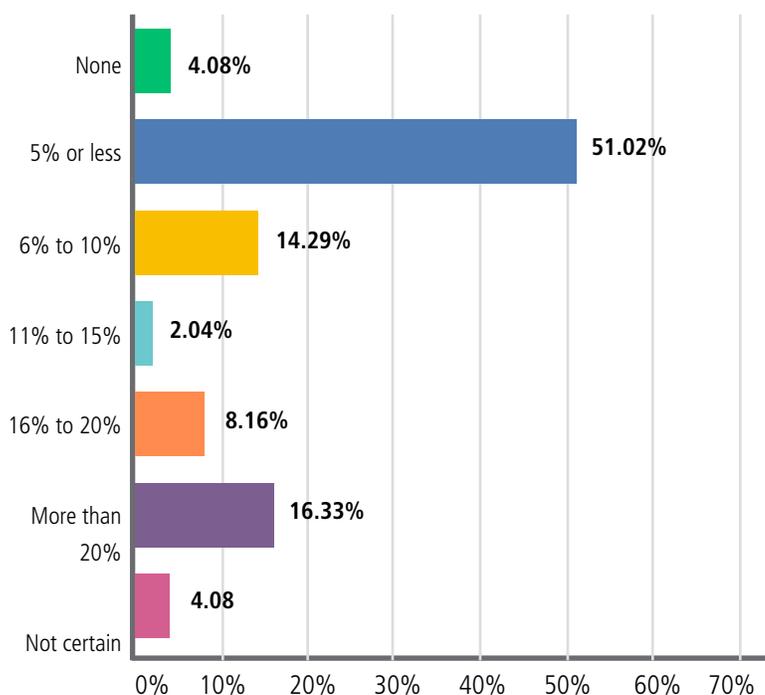
"...New Jersey has required districts to offer families the option of enrolling students in full-time distance learning if they choose to," he stated. "But over one-half of students don't have a choice: They are attending schools where the year started with fully remote learning."

An NJSBA survey of superintendents at the end of July asked, "What percentage of students in your district need additional support — such as access to the internet and technological equipment — to participate in virtual instruction?"

Nearly a quarter of the superintendents who responded said that 16% or more of their students lacked internet access.

Some complained that they did not have enough time to develop and implement their reopening plans.

What percentage of students in your district need additional support — such as access to the internet and technological equipment — to participate in virtual instruction?



SOURCE: July NJSBA Survey of Superintendents

SCHOOL DISTRICTS TAKE INITIATIVE, BUT NEED SUPPORT

As the result of their own initiative, many school districts have made progress in closing the digital divide.

For instance, in an October 7 news article, [Paterson](#) officials reported that, after struggling to obtain the necessary equipment, every student has a device—complete with Wi-Fi.

The digital divide is not confined to the poorest communities. The [Flemington-Raritan Regional](#) school district in Hunterdon County, for example, has taken the initiative to address internet connectivity issues, while also using grant money to provide access to one-to-one digital devices.

The COVID pandemic shows no sign of abating in the near future. On October 8, state [Department of Health Officials](#) stated that they “expected to see New Jersey’s numbers surge in the fall, especially with more people heading back indoors as the weather cools.”

Clearly, digital learning will play a role in public education during the public health emergency and beyond.

“Virtual instruction will continue to be a critical part of the educational landscape, even after the pandemic subsides,” said Dr. Lawrence S. Feinsod, NJSBA executive director. “Giving all students the ability to participate in effective online learning is essential to our goal as educators.”

As part of its August 31 special report, “Choosing the Best Road Back for Our Children,” NJSBA presented an Advocacy Agenda for Public Education during the Pandemic. The agenda called for initiatives related to student connectivity, such as a statewide system for procuring technological equipment and other pandemic-related goods and services; increased state and federal financial support; and financial flexibility.

In addition, the Association operates a statewide purchasing cooperative, NJSBA TEC, designed to help districts secure pandemic-related goods and services including virtual learning management platforms, cybersecurity and electronic devices. The NJSBA TEC program was cited as a resource for local school districts in the state’s school reopening plan, issued in June.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the current report on the digital divide, NJSBA reviewed published articles and studies, conducted more than half a dozen surveys of school officials, and interviewed board members and superintendents. This report makes several recommendations for action by the state and local school districts to address the digital divide and online instruction.

- **Provide Updates on State Efforts to Close the Digital Divide** The New Jersey Department of Education should provide a status report on the awarding of the [2020 Bridging the Digital Divide](#) grants and related philanthropic contributions to local school districts. The update would enable the state to identify the need for additional support and funding.

As part of the state's initiative to close the digital divide, the NJDOE has made available a \$54 million formula grant, using a portion of the federal coronavirus relief fund. School districts may apply for the funding and apply it toward the purchase of digital devices and internet connectivity for one-to-one student use. In July, the New Jersey Economic Development Authority solicited information from private firms and philanthropic organizations to determine private support for efforts to bridge the digital divide.

On October 15, the department issued an [update](#), informing school districts that they may submit request for reimbursement of technology expenditures until October 23. In addition, devices and services ordered by districts need not be delivered before reimbursement may be requested.

- **Develop a Statewide Report on What Students Learned During the Shutdown and a Strategic Plan to Address Learning Loss.** Working with local districts, the NJDOE should assess the level of student learning during the shutdown. Aggregated data should be collected to provide a clear, statewide picture of what happened during that period. This would be an important step toward developing a funded strategic plan to help address remediation.
- **Develop a Statewide Report on the Delivery of Special Education Services.** What was the experience of New Jersey's 246,693 special education students during the shutdown? What will happen if schools are forced to shut down again? What is the state plan to address learning challenges and compliance with state and federal requirements?
- **Develop a Program to Improve the Quality of Online Instruction** Whether school districts implement 100% virtual programs or hybrid structures of virtual and in-person teaching, online learning will be part of public education. A June 8, 2020 Microsoft report, [Education Reimagined: The Future of Learning](#), points out, "... traditional pedagogy does not transfer flawlessly to digital." Educators need professional development to effectively teach classes online. How can the NJDOE help districts and provide resources to assess and improve the quality of online instruction?
- **Improve Remote Instruction.** The [Sustainable Jersey Digital Schools program](#) issued a report in August, titled the [Remote Digital Learning Roadmap](#). The program, a collaboration of the Sustainability Institute at The College of New Jersey, the NJDOE and NJSBA, is supported by the state's major educational organizations. It is designed to promote and recognize sound digital learning practices in public schools. Local school boards and superintendents should review the "Roadmap" report and consider participation in the Sustainable Jersey Digital Schools program if they have not already done so.



HOW THE POTENTIAL OF ONLINE LEARNING CAN BE REALIZED

With Training, Resources and Guidance, How Can Teachers Use Online Lessons to Change and Improve the Delivery of Knowledge?

A battery of newspaper reviews of online education during the spring shutdown gave thumbs-down, often undeserved, to school district efforts to keep students engaged in the learning process. Proponents of technology in education maintain that new approaches and improved course content can engage children by employing the digital tools they have become accustomed to at an early age.

Before the potential of online learning can be realized, however, access to the internet must be universal—and free in high-poverty areas—with high-quality professional development for teachers.

Some are wary of the rapid advance of technology because of the amount of money involved, and the dangers of exposing adolescents to more time sitting in front of devices and not interacting with peers.

On June 8, [CNBC reported](#) that “...from a \$107 billion market in 2015, the industry is expected to triple by 2025 to be worth \$350 billion, as more people look for learning resources online.”

In an [August 6 article](#) in the *Washington Post*, education researcher Andy Hargreaves urges caution about the rush to embrace technology in education.

Hargreaves writes that a report by Microsoft on “reimagining education” (cited earlier) has constructive advice on how to create meaningful learning and provide health protections and social distancing once children return to school. “Yet its ultimate vision is for a ‘hybrid learning environment’ where ‘technology will be prominent.’...”

“... A lot of reimagining education is about how learning will be leveraged or delivered in a blended or hybrid format that is available anytime, anywhere, through public-private partnerships involving digital technology,” Hargreaves said. “After years and billions of dollars of investment in digital technology in schools, there is little firm evidence that it substantially improves children’s learning...”

Hargreaves argues that children, especially adolescents, are stressed by too much time sitting in front of computer, and that what they need, most of all, is human interaction.

Before the potential of online learning can be realized, access to the internet must be universal – and free in high-poverty areas, with high-quality professional development for teachers.

Proponents of more technology in education fundamentally disagree.

Microsoft's 34-page "Education Reimagined" report paints a picture of a national education system that is badly in need of a reawakening.

The question facing educators now is will they embrace some of the discoveries they made during the move to online learning – or can they learn from the crisis and use technology to improve the way they teach kids?

The "Education Reimagined" report suggests that districts should embrace the digital revolution that is already here.

"How will we choose to respond?" the report asks. "Will we patch together a reaction (to the pandemic), or use this opportunity to transform the system itself? The question becomes, what will be more appealing - reverting to the status quo or using the opportunity to help students become knowledgeable and skilled change makers through deeper learning? We argue that the solutions lie before us. We have the opportunity to creatively manage the immediate issues while building a bridge to a reimagined education system."

The COVID crisis made it clear how important virtual learning can be to the future of school districts, the report argues.

One educator told the researchers that her "a-ha moment" occurred "as we moved from treading water to starting to swim... Teachers who embraced those uses of digital saw more powerful learning ... from their students."

THREE STAGES OF TRANSITIONING TO DIGITAL LEARNING

The Microsoft report describes three stages of adaptation to digital learning. The first stage is the "unsettled zone," where the immensity of the required changes results in educators simply getting devices to students and delivering online content with rudimentary videos and less-successful interactive instruction."

The second stage that digitally-committed districts experience is the "learning zone." In this stage, districts rose above merely surviving and began to learn how to navigate, and fully use, the "new remote environment."

In this "learning zone" stage, districts had to solve the following issues:

- Ensuring the continuity of academic learning for students,
- Supporting the students who lack skills for independent study,
- Ensuring the continuity and integrity of the assessment of student learning,
- Ensuring support for parents so they can support student learning, and
- Ensuring the well-being of students and of teachers.



	UNSETTLED ZONE	LEARNING ZONE	GROWTH ZONE
Individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do I get connected? What content will I teach? What tools, platforms, strategies should I use? How do I cope with so many lists of resources? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are my students doing? How can we best connect and check in? What is worth learning? How will I design learning that engages? How do I balance screen and non-screen experience? How will I assess learning and well-being? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who is learning? Who is struggling? What skills helped my students most? How can they develop these skills? How do I ensure both well-being and learning?
Systems	<p>How do we:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide access to technology? • Provide connectivity? • Manage food safety? • Provide content for learning? • Manage communication? 	<p>How do we:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide continuity of academic learning? • Support students who lack independent skills for learning? • Provide continuity and integrity of assessment? • Support parents to support students? • Attend to well-being of students and teachers? 	<p>How do we:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure well-being? • Provide quality learning? • Use a hybrid model that combines the best of remote and situated learning? • Shift from digital as delivery to connectedness?

SOURCE: New Pedagogies for Deep Learning, Education Reimagined: The Future of Learning

Finally, in the “growth zone,” schools are ready to implement a new way of delivering education that embraces technology in the way that students embrace it.

“In the Growth Zone, systems recognize that they are no longer working on a temporary or stopgap solution. Until treatment, vaccines and large-scale testing are available to all, the delivery of education in both physical and remote settings is essential,” the Microsoft report says. “It becomes clear that technology is a crucial part of the solution during the disruption. What emerges is a recognition that it is time to move beyond a blend of traditional teaching and online instruction, both happening within brick and mortar, to something more.”

While assessing the impact of the new technology during the pandemic, Microsoft and its research partners found that teachers and administrators learned powerful lessons about the possibilities and limitations of virtual education.

What they discovered was so powerful, the report argues, that they did not want to slip back to the status quo. The lessons learned included the following:

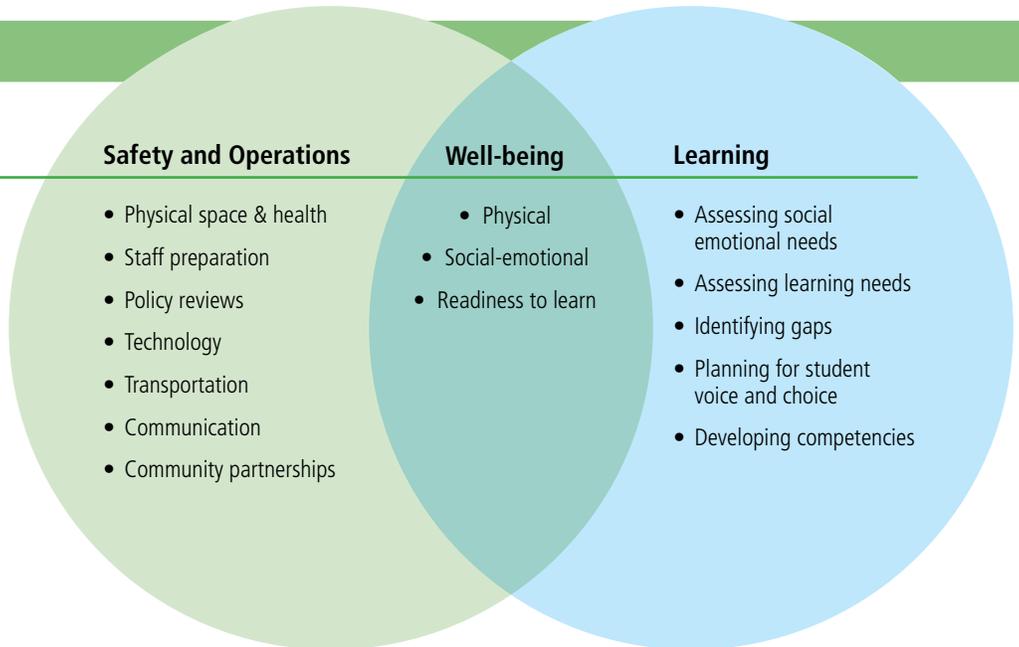
- Acknowledgement that well-being was a critical pre-condition for learning.
- Technology shifted from being a vehicle for delivery/transmission to a mechanism for collaboration, social connectedness and culture building.

- Self-regulation and learning to learn were key determinants of student motivation, engagement and success.
- Students who found themselves with more choice and voice exceeded expectations finding ways to help themselves and collaborate with others.
- Collaboration among teachers and leaders emerged because the focus was clear.
- In the absence of high stakes testing, systems relied on teacher and leader professional judgments.

Key Questions

Decisions filtered through the lenses of Equity, Well-being & Quality Learning

1. How are we doing? Students, teachers, leaders, families
2. What did we learn about our students?
3. What did we learn about our parents/ families?
4. What did we learn about our systems?
5. Who has learned well during this phase? Why?
6. Who struggled the most? And why?
7. What learning gaps exist?
8. What skills most enabled students during this time?
9. What skills most enabled teachers?
10. How did technology help/hinder?
11. What were the bright spots?
12. What communications worked best?



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SOURCE: New Pedagogies for Deep Learning, Education Reimagined: The Future of Learning

CONCERNS ABOUT THE OVERREACH OF BIG TECHNOLOGY

Hargreaves, the education researcher from Boston College quoted earlier, raises concerns about maintaining a balance between technology and the value of in-person relationships.

“Even before the novel coronavirus, excess screen time and technology use had already increased adolescent anxiety, especially after the global penetration of smartphone use among adolescents beginning around 2012. Digital addiction also distracts young children from outdoor activity, free play and face-to-face relationships,” Hargreaves writes. “During the pandemic, young children up to age 11 have been spending more than double the amount of screen time recommended by pediatricians....”

“When they get back to school, children will not need more of the anytime-anywhere Big Tech strategy. They will need more face-to-face support in the here and now ... to get help dealing with the post-traumatic stresses that accompany disasters such as this; to get the special education support to help them deal with learning disabilities and ADHD distractions for which there was little or no support at home, and so on. Learning in the here and now in school will need more human and less hybrid learning. It will need less technology, or more judicious use of it, than most kids have experienced during covid-19.”

Finally, Hargreaves re-emphasizes his concern that access to the best technology should not be available only through “market forces” for “privileged access.” Instead, he argues, “we need to create conditions for technologically enhanced learning that are universal, public and free to those who need it. Learning-related technology ... should be a civil right, alongside food, shelter and education itself.”

INSIGHTS ABOUT ONLINE LEARNING FROM THE FOUNDER OF THE KHAN ACADEMY

In an [Aug. 13 letter](#) to the editor of the *New York Times*, Sal Khan, founder of the nonprofit [Khan Academy](#), offered some advice about how schools can make online lessons more interesting and effective. He said that his academy provides free online exercises, videos and software to more than 100 million users in 46 languages and called himself “a poster child for online learning.”

Interestingly, he said that no virtual school can replace classroom teachers.

“... for most students, distance learning can’t replace a great in-person experience. Pure distance-learning is suboptimal, but we have to do it out of necessity because of the pandemic. I have been working with teachers over the last several months and together we have realized that lesson plans designed for in-person classes don’t work in this coronavirus world.”

Khan offered the following suggestions to immediately improve online lessons:

- **Make lessons shorter; allow feedback.** Lessons are also too long and not interactive enough to hold a student’s attention over a video conference. The traditional paper-based homework that’s being assigned does not provide students with enough feedback or teachers with enough information to understand what students are learning.
- **Provide brief, live teacher-led videoconferences.** It’s critical that educators provide live teacher-led video conference sessions. These need to optimize both academic coverage and social interaction. A baseline would be two or three 30-to-45 minute sessions in each of the core academic subjects each week. These should not be broadcast lectures, which are not particularly engaging even in person, much less over Zoom. These sessions need to drive conversations between students and teachers and among the students themselves. Teachers should do cold calling to ensure students are on their toes and to pull them out of their screens. Teachers need to constantly ask students to work on questions together and share their thinking.

- **Don't videotape lectures.** Use professionally-produced lectures available online. Teachers' time is better spent communicating with kids. Some teachers are replicating their lectures in YouTube video form, and this has been incredibly time consuming and depleting for them. But doing this isn't necessary. After all, video lessons on almost every topic already exist on the internet. Teachers' time is valuable and should often be used instead for maintaining interaction and connection with students. Teachers should be given the liberty to focus on how to create more interactive touchpoints with students, more than trying to recreate online resources similar to those that already exist. This isn't just healthier for the students; teachers will also get more energy from interacting with their students than they do from spending time in a home recording studio making Khan Academy-style videos.
- **Make sure students do their own work.** Finally, distance learning has made it much more difficult to ensure that students are doing their own work. To avoid a situation where students either get credit for knowledge they don't have, educators need simple mechanics to authenticate student work. For example, teachers could ask students to submit recordings of themselves thinking out loud while taking an exam.

REMOTE DIGITAL LEARNING ROADMAP

Sample lesson plans and ideas for effective online teaching are featured in "[Remote Digital Learning Roadmap 1.0](#)" by the Sustainable Jersey Digital Schools program (cited earlier). Digital learning strategies for pre-schoolers, kindergartners, special education students are featured in the 34-page report.

In the foreword Dr. Mike Salvatore, superintendent of the Long Branch Public Schools, encourages educators to see the "beauty in digital pedagogy."

Routine planning and practice are required, Salvatore writes, "but the pedagogical elegance is in the sequence of each step, just like dancing." He encourages teachers to generate "a healthy buzz" in the chatroom before a lesson starts. Next, the instructor can start with a warm welcome, recognizing and calling out to different students in each lesson.

The next movements in the pedagogical dance occur when the instructor presents the learning objectives for the day, followed by the direct instruction that involves "heavy teacher talk" for five to 10 minutes, connected to previously learned material. The direct instruction can be a previously recorded video which students can access later if they need more guidance while completing an assignment.

In the next sequence, Salvatore suggests, students can log off the synchronous platform and conduct a 10- to 40-minute asynchronous practice session, resulting in the submission of work. Teachers can check in with small groups of students during this time.

Finally, Salvatore suggests, the entire class reassembles online to close the lesson. More information about how the Sustainable Jersey Digital Schools program can benefit schools is [available here](#).

CONCLUSION: MEETING SHORT-TERM CHALLENGES; PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Once the pandemic ends—and it *will* end—it will be tempting to flip the laptop closed, put innovation in a drawer, and return to the traditional way of teaching and learning. That would be a mistake. As part two of our report shows, technology is not just a quick fix to get us through a crisis. It is the future. It's the way our students communicate with each other, and we should embrace what we have learned and use it to keep improving our schools and the way we deliver education to students.

The pandemic is not over by any means. And the public health climate—and the public's concern about Covid-19—will continue to necessitate digital learning.

In this third report on the reopening of schools, the NJSBA has cast a clear eye on the serious problems that need to be resolved concerning virtual learning. Students in high-poverty areas must gain access to internet instruction. Delivery of services to special education students must resume and improve.

But we have faith that New Jersey's education leaders will continue to be up to the challenge. As we stated in our first report on May 20, New Jersey's school leaders and educators made heroic efforts to launch online learning programs practically overnight.

Now is the time to move forward with what was learned and to incorporate digital discoveries into the curriculum. Teachers and school districts should be supported so that this historically difficult period in our history leads to a re-imagining of the way educators connect with students and parents, taking full advantage of the many positive aspects that technology has to offer.

There should be no return to the *status quo*, but an embrace of the possibilities of the future.

The role of board of education members in shepherding this change, representing the values of their communities, has never been more important. Our children are counting on us to meet the challenges of this moment.

APPENDIX

NJSBA POLICY SERVICES

FILE CODE: 6173.1

Policy

** This policy is compiled and distributed by NJSBA for compliance with guidance from the New Jersey Department of Education but is not required for compliance with state and federal law. The practices described may be amended to reflect your district's/school's practices. This policy should not be adopted without district revisions and consultation with your board attorney.*

REMOTE LEARNING

In response to State directives regarding reopening school with adequate precautions to prevent the spread of this contagious disease, the board shall provide in-person, fully virtual and hybrid learning opportunities for all students. The board of education shall support a program of in-person, fully virtual and hybrid learning that:

- A. Prioritizes the health, safety, and wellness of students and staff;
- B. Maintains the continuity of learning;
- C. Facilitates equity and ease of access to communications and resources;
- D. Flexibly accommodates the needs and varying circumstances of all learners;
- E. Incorporates educators, students, parents/guardians, board members and other community members into the entire analysis and planning cycle.

The virtual learning program may consist of synchronous and asynchronous tools. Synchronous tools provide ways of accessing and providing information that require interaction with others to occur at the same time (i.e., online classrooms, interactive webinars, videoconferencing). Asynchronous tools provide ways of accessing and providing information that does not require interaction with others to occur at the same time (i.e., forums, blogs, email, website links, etc.).

The length of the school day for in-person, fully virtual and hybrid learning programs shall be in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3, stating that a school day shall consist of not less than four hours, except that one continuous session of two and one-half hours may be considered a full day in kindergarten. District policy 5113 Attendance, Absences and Excuses shall apply and attendance shall be recorded in all educational programs. The attendance and instructional contact time shall accommodate opportunities for both synchronous and asynchronous instruction and ensure that the requirements for a 180-day school year are met.

Additional Anticipated Minimum Standard

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) Anticipated Minimum Standard provides that, in addition to the methods and considerations explicitly referenced in the NJDOE guidance, The Road Back: Restart and Recovery Plan for Education, for scheduling students for in-person, remote, or hybrid learning, families/guardians may submit, and the district shall accommodate, requests for full time remote learning.

Such requests may include any service or combination of services that would otherwise be delivered on an in-person or hybrid schedule, such as instruction, behavioral and support services, special education and related services. A family/guardian may request that some services be delivered entirely remotely, while other services follow the same schedule they otherwise would according to the district's reopening plan.

A. Unconditional Eligibility for Full-Time Remote Learning

All students shall be eligible for full-time remote learning. Eligibility shall not be conditioned on a family/guardian demonstrating a risk of illness or other selective criteria. This includes students with disabilities who attend school in-district or are placed at receiving schools (county special services school districts, educational services commissions, jointure commissions, Katzenbach School for the Deaf, regional day schools, college operated programs, and approved private schools for students with disabilities).

B. Procedures for Submitting Full-Time Remote Learning Requests

Recognizing that planning is required in order to provide continuity in the student's educational program and arranging the

appropriate staff and resources, a family/guardian shall submit a request for full-time remote learning, including requests to begin the school year receiving full-time remote learning and requests to transition from in-person or hybrid services to full-time remote learning during the school year. Procedures for submitting the request are as follows:

1. The request shall be submitted to the principal at least days before the start of the semester;
2. Requests shall be approved days after the receipt of the request;
3. Questions and concerns may be directed to the principal or his or her designee;
4. The family/guardian shall submit the following information or documentation with their request. The documentation shall not exclude any students from the school's full-time remote learning option, but rather be limited to the minimum information needed to ensure proper recordkeeping and implementation of successful remote learning:
 - a. Verification of the technology necessary to receive remote instruction (including camera and speaker capability) and assurance that the student will have access to the device for the length of the school day;
 - b. Verification of internet access and/or Wi-Fi sufficient to receive remote instruction;
 - c. (Other specific requirement _____)
 - d. (Other specific requirement _____)
 - e. (Other specific requirement _____)

Families/guardians having limited access to equipment or the internet shall inform the principal or his or her designee. The district shall make a reasonable effort to support the remote instruction by facilitating services and/or providing equipment.

5. For students with disabilities, the district shall determine if an IEP meeting or an amendment to a student's IEP is needed for full-time remote learning.
6. Families/guardians shall submit a request according to the procedures above for transitioning their student from in-person or hybrid delivery to full-time remote delivery;
7. Families/guardians are expected to cooperate in setting up the transition and may be required to participate in scheduled meetings (in-person or video or tele conferences) during the transition period;
8. School teachers, administrators and other school staff shall endeavor to provide supports and resources to assist families/guardians, particularly those of younger students, with meeting the expectations of the district's remote learning option.

Upon satisfaction of these minimum procedures, the district shall approve the student's full-time remote learning request.

C. Scope and Expectations of Full-Time Remote Learning

A student participating in the board's full-time remote learning option shall be afforded the same quality and scope of instruction and other educational services as any other student otherwise participating in district programs (e.g. students participating in a hybrid model). This includes but is not limited to:

1. Access to standards-based instruction of the same quality and rigor as that afforded all other students of the district;
2. The district shall make its best effort to ensure that every student participating in remote learning has access to the requisite educational technology;
3. Special education services and related services shall be provided to the greatest extent possible.

D. Procedures to Transition from Full-Time Remote Learning to the In-Person Educational Program

A student shall be eligible to transition to the in-person educational program. This will allow families/guardians to make the arrangements needed to effectively serve students' home learning needs and will support educators in ensuring continuity of instruction. The family/guardian shall submit a request to transition from full-time remote learning to the in-person educational program according to the following procedures:

1. The request shall be submitted to the principal at least days before the start of the semester. The principal may consider requests submitted during the semester on a case by case basis;
2. Requests shall be approved days after the receipt of the request;
3. Questions and concerns may be directed to the principal or his or her designee;

4. The family/guardian shall submit the following information or documentation with their request. The documentation shall not exclude any students from the school’s in-person educational program, but rather be limited to the minimum information needed to ensure proper recordkeeping and implementation of a successful transition to the in-person education program:
 - a. Summary of synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities successfully completed;
 - b. Summary of synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities still working through;
 - c. The student shall submit to the COVID screening process upon reentry to the school;
 - d. (Other specific requirement_____)
 - e. (Other specific requirement_____)
 - f. (Other specific requirement_____)
5. Students transitioning to the in-person educational program may be required to submit to an academic assessment prior to being placed in a class. Remediations shall be provided for students that need them;
6. Families/guardians are expected to cooperate in setting up the transition and may be required to participate in scheduled meetings (in-person or video or teleconferences) during the transition period.

E. Procedures for Communicating District Policy with Families

Teaching staff members and administrators shall provide clear and frequent communication with families/guardians, in their home language, and shall ensure that communication opportunities are as readily accessible as possible. Communication shall include but shall not be limited to, information regarding:

1. Summaries of, and opportunities to review, the district’s full-time remote learning policy and attendance policy;
2. Procedures for submitting full-time remote learning requests;
3. Scope and expectations of full-time remote learning;
4. Procedures for transition from full-time remote learning to in-person services and vice-versa;
5. The district’s procedures for ongoing communication with families and for addressing families’ questions or concerns;
6. Teaching staff members who are teaching remote classes shall have office hours to address questions and concerns. Teachers shall notify the families/guardians of their students regarding the time of the office hours and the method of contact (email, text, video or teleconference).

F. Reporting

To evaluate full-time remote learning, and to continue providing meaningful guidance for districts, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) may require districts to report to the NJDOE data regarding participation in full-time remote learning. Data will include the number of students participating in full-time remote learning by each of the following subgroups: economically disadvantaged; major racial and ethnic groups; students with disabilities; and English learners. The chief school administrator shall ensure that such reports are completed efficiently.

Adopted:

Key Words

Virtual Education, Virtual Learning, Remote Education, Remote Learning, Synchronous, Asynchronous, Transition Request

<u>Legal References:</u>	<p>N.J.S.A. 18A:6-3</p> <p>N.J.S.A. 18A:33-1</p> <p>N.J.S.A. 18A:35-1 et seq.</p> <p>N.J.A.C. 18A:35-4.6 through -4.8</p> <p>N.J.A.C. 6A:8-3.1</p> <p>N.J.A.C. 6A:8-5.1</p>	<p>Courses in constitution of United States</p> <p>District to furnish suitable facilities; adoption of courses of study</p> <p>Curriculum and courses</p> <p><i>Parents Right to Conscience Act of 1979</i></p> <p>Curriculum and instruction</p> <p>Graduation requirements</p>
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Legal References: continued

<i>N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-3.1 et. seq.</i>	State Board of Examiners and certification
See particularly: <i>N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-5, -6, -8, -9, -10, -11, -12, -14</i>	
<i>N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.7</i>	Individualized education program
<i>N.J.A.C. 6A:14-4.1</i>	General requirements
<i>N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-9.5</i>	Commissioner to ensure achievement of the New Jersey Student Learning Standards
<i>N.J.A.C. 6A:30-1.1 et seq.</i>	Evaluation of the Performance of School Districts
<i>N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8 et seq.</i>	Student attendance and accounting

New Jersey Department of Education: *Clarifying Expectations Regarding Full Time Remote Learning Options for Families in 2020-2021* (Supplementary to *The Road Back: Restart and Recovery Plan for Education*); July 24, 2020.

Possible Cross References:

*2224	Nondiscrimination/affirmative action
*6121	Nondiscrimination/affirmative action
*6122	Articulation
*6140	Curriculum adoption
*6142.1	Family life education
*6142.2	English as a second language; bilingual/bicultural
*6142.4	Physical education and health
*6142.6	Basic skills
*6142.9	Arts
*6142.12	Career education
*6146	Graduation requirements
*6147	Standards of proficiency
*6164.2	Guidance services
*6171.1	Remedial instruction
*6171.2	Gifted and talented
*6171.4	Special education
*9130	Committees

*Indicates policy is included in the *Critical Policy Reference Manual*.