

New Jersey Education Association

Education Recovery Plan

Summer 2021 Supplement

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A message from NJEA's officers

The last year and a half have been a time of unprecedented challenge for NJEA members and for the students we educate together. We have had to learn new things, overcome new obstacles and advocate in new ways. The coming year will require us to continue the innovation and advocacy together to ensure that our school buildings are safe and healthy and that we have the resources we need to give our students the support and education they deserve.

From the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have provided NJEA members with resources and information to help in that work. This update of the NJEA Education Recovery Plan is designed to help you and your colleagues navigate the challenges of the year ahead. As this is a fast-developing situation, we anticipate that we will need to update this document as circumstances change and new information emerges.

Please use this document and its future updates to help you and your colleagues in the coming months and do not hesitate to reach out to your NJEA UniServ Field Rep for assistance.

We thank you once again for your exceptional efforts since March of 2020 and for the work we know you will do to support our students and keep our public schools the best in the nation throughout the coming school year.

In solidarity,



Marie Blistan
NJEA President



Sean M. Spiller
NJEA Vice President



Steve Beatty
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SECTION 1 – Introduction

NJEA's Original Education Recovery Plan

On June 12, 2020, the New Jersey Education Association released its *Education Recovery Plan*, a comprehensive overview of the health, safety, and academic-related priorities for the 2020-2021 school year. This plan not only addressed the myriad questions for effective reopening, but provided recommended approaches and solutions to be considered.

The NJEA Education Recovery Plan assisted locals as they partnered with districts to ensure a safe, healthy, and intentional reopening of schools while focusing on the educational and mental health needs of the students we serve. This plan provided guideposts for a path forward when district and local leaders sought support from the state.

NJEA's Creation of the Post-Pandemic Task Force

In December 2020, NJEA President Marie Blistan formulated a Task Force made up of representatives from each of the major statewide education advocacy organizations to discuss our common beliefs about the priorities to be addressed as New Jersey's public schools returned to in-person instruction following the COVID-19 pandemic. The outcome of that effort – *an open letter from public education advocates to New Jersey families and communities* – sought to focus district administrators, boards of education, parents and all other community stakeholders on the important issues to be addressed upon a return to school in person.

In late March, after the adoption of the federal American Rescue Plan (ARP), the Task Force reconvened and issued another consensus *statement* of our position on the importance of broad stakeholder engagement in the decisions regarding the use of the ARP funds.

The Digital Divide

On March 10, 2021, Governor Phil Murphy made an announcement that the state has closed the digital divide nearly one year after the pandemic began and schools were required to close for public safety. As previously reported, there were nearly 26% of students with limited to no access to a device that would enable them to engage in digital learning. Governor Murphy reported that this was accomplished by utilizing the \$53.8 million in federal funding allocated to the “Bridging the Digital Divide” grant money. This is based on district reporting and may not fully illustrate the more complex and nuanced socioeconomic challenges that create barriers for students to fully access educational resources.

While state data, based on district reporting, indicates that the digital divide is “solved,” we and the other partners of the post-pandemic taskforce note anecdotal reports that some issues remain a barrier for students to fully access online learning. Many families still do not have adequate wi-fi, hardware and software needs to be continually updated, and some families need further support to help their children use the technology. We invite all local association leaders who have evidence that conflicts with the reports above to contact your local Uniserv Field office with more information.

Remote Learning

Elementary and secondary school students should not receive all or most of their education through distance education, except in rare circumstances, such as during severe debilitating or contagious illness where the student should not be physically near others for health and safety reasons. Students who must participate in virtual education courses should receive the preparation and support necessary to enable them to function effectively in an online environment, which at a minimum should include access to appropriate equipment, technical support, libraries, and laboratories. All students must be able to participate in virtual educa-

tion on an equitable basis without regard to social or economic status and LEAs should provide for any gaps. Pedagogically, schools should plan for either in person or virtual learning, avoiding the hybrid model to prevent creating a diminished learning environment for all students. Long term, LEAs should work to develop curricula for hybrid learning, which is better able to absorb the shocks of periodic closures due to outbreaks.

Snow Days - LEAs should not consider replacing snow days with remote learning without having a comprehensive blended learning system consisting of synchronous and asynchronous components in place. Pedagogically, remote lessons require significant planning and should not be created on an emergent basis. The result is low quality lessons that also infringe upon the important planning time faculty needs to adjust the remainder of the weekly lesson plans. Snow days also create other challenges for which an LEA cannot plan such as neighborhood power and internet outages, students having the necessary devices ready at home, and personal challenges faced by staff members such having their own children at home and responsibilities with financial consequences imposed by HOAs or municipalities for managing their own snow removal.

Professional Development

LEAs should continue to design professional development experiences both rooted in the needs of teaching staff members and aligned to the NJ standards for professional development. Special emphasis should be placed upon harnessing the collective learning that happened during the pandemic and leveraging that experience to better evolve the learning environment for all students. This can best be achieved by prioritizing professional learning communities to:

1. Identify areas of student need
2. Capture new insights brought about by the pandemic experience
3. Engage in reciprocal peer coaching
4. Develop effective instructional strategies

LEAs should create further opportunities for teaching staff members to explore their personal professional learning curiosities by empowering teaching staff members to attend outside learning opportunities. LEAs should avoid the temptation to bring in outside voices to deliver one size fits all training for all but very specific needs, like training on a new software package.

Special attention and support should be given to early career teachers who completed their student teaching under pandemic conditions. These teachers were deprived of the experience of working under normal conditions, misaligning their student teaching experience from what they would normally encounter. LEAs should provide an enhanced mentoring experience. Recommendations for this include:

1. Dedicated team teaching with an experienced teacher for at least part of the day.
2. Providing release time / reduced teaching schedule for mentor teachers to work more intensely with novice teachers
3. Developing PLCs dedicated to supporting novice teachers

Ensuring Students Have Access to Healthy Meals

LEAs have a responsibility to ensure nutritional lunches are available to all enrolled students, and that students who are eligible for free and reduced-price meals continue to receive those meals, even when students are engaging in virtual or remote learning and during summer recess of 2021. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has created this [interactive map](#) showing participating summer meal sites. LEAs should also be prepared to increase support for students and their families in the event more families qualify for free and reduced-price meals than in past school years. Health and safety measures, such as physical distancing, limiting contact between students and cohorts by using alternative dining spaces and staggering meal times, suspending self-service stations and other communal, frequently touched areas, providing PPE, sanitizing materials, and training to staff are a critical component of LEAs development of meal plans.

Staffing Needs

LEAs must arrange for increased staffing which will be necessary for both the implementation of health and safety measures, as well as increased social-emotional and educational supports that will be essential for a successful 21-22 school year. School nurses have been on the front lines of this crisis and will continue to be, screening students and staff for covid symptoms, referring individuals for testing when appropriate, and coordinating with local health departments in contact

tracing efforts, in addition to their regularly assigned duties. School districts should consider hiring additional school nurses beyond their regular nursing staff to accommodate the extra work facing school nurses..

All students, both general and special education populations, will need additional assistance in the upcoming school year. Increased staffing will be needed to assess and address student needs to accelerate learning as well as provide additional social-emotional supports for students who are returning to in-person schooling after a challenging time. This will mean that school districts might need to hire additional instructional staff, including paraprofessionals and certificated teachers. Districts will also need to consider hiring additional mental health professionals, or partnering with local agencies to provide these services.

Transportation departments may need additional staffing to screen students prior to entering buses, to assist with enforcing distancing measures and appropriate PPE usage, and to cover extra runs if there are capacity limitations on buses. Custodial staff will need support with increased cleaning and disinfection. Substitutes may be needed to cover for staff who need to be excluded from in-person schooling due to illness or exposure.

Finally, conditions may require additional personnel to help with the day to day operations of schools. For instance, if students need to distance during passing time or during lunch, schools may need additional personnel during the day.

SECTION 2 – Budget & Funding Considerations

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread across New Jersey in the Spring of 2020, many LEAs and IHEs throughout the state expected and planned for a devastating fiscal crisis due to significant budget cuts and the impending financial strain that the pandemic was predicted to place upon them. Safe reopening of schools would require significant costs for increased staffing needs, personal protective equipment for staff and students, technology for remote learning, resources to enable social distancing, cleaning and disinfectant supplies, transportation, and more.

While there were significant state aid cuts and reallocations in the revised FY2020 and FY2021 budgets, the federal government came through with three substantial stimulus packages to reduce the economic fallout connected to COVID-19. Dire State revenue forecasts from 2020 also did not come to fruition, and the State legislature was able to pass a healthy budget for FY2022 injecting much needed fiscal support to PK-12 as well as higher education. Nevertheless, education advocates and stakeholders must remain vigilant, and ensure the State and Federal governments strive to allocate ample education funding that increases resource equity and demonstrates a sustained effort to promote a thorough and efficient education for all students.

State Aid

Challenge:

As revised, total K-12 state aid for FY2021 continued at almost the same level as FY2020 (only \$3.6 million more), but the Adjustment Aid phase-out of S-2 still redistribute \$156 million of that state aid from 194 adjustment aid districts to 371 underfunded districts. Although the current FY2022 budget increased formula aid by about \$577 million over FY2021, it maintained the S-2 phaseout, resulting in about 200 districts receiving a total \$198 million less than in FY2021. (The budget does include \$50 million in Stabilization Aid to assist these districts, but that will not go far enough to

alleviate the impact of the loss of State Aid.)

Furthermore, the allocations of Federal COVID-19 stimulus funds require a “Maintenance of Equity” on the part of the State in funding public education. School districts and education advocacy groups have put New Jersey and the USDOE on notice that, because of the S-2 state aid cuts to many districts, the state is not fulfilling the “maintenance of equity” requirement under the American Rescue Plan relief package. See [NJ cut aid to some schools. Did that break federal pandemic-relief rules?](#)

Higher education stakeholders also need to keep aware of state budget allocations for operating aid for County Colleges, and other state supports for these institutions and their students. Any cuts to operating aid and student aid can lead to massive budget gaps as well as enrollment decreases. These can force colleges to look to furloughs, lay offs, and deferral of salary increases to balance their budgets.

Solutions:

When aid changes are proposed or implemented, the state must issue its new aid numbers as soon as possible, with a full explanation or analysis of how each district’s aid allocation was calculated. Stakeholders and advocates also need to be mindful of any Federal restrictions on adjustments to state aid and school funding, including Maintenance of Effort and Maintenance of Equity requirements, and any “supplement, not supplant” restrictions of Federal grants. Challenges to violations of Federal regulations should be raised promptly.

Federal Stimulus Funds

Opportunity:

Since the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, Congress has passed three major COVID-19 stimulus bills that have resulted in an unprecedented flow of Federal education aid to the State, school districts, and colleges.

Tax levy legislation concerns

Challenge:

LEAs may not receive their full tax levy payment under recent legislation, P.L. 2020, c. 34. This will restrict local funds even further.

Solutions:

It is imperative that the Division of Local Government Services address the issue of when municipalities make districts whole. Otherwise, the state should provide funds for districts that are struggling to meet their obligations.

Funding to Ensure Health, Safety, & School Operations

Challenge:

In order for schools and colleges to safely reopen, significant resources will be needed for:

- Personal protective equipment for staff and students
- Sanitation and disinfectant supplies
- Resources to ensure social distancing
- Staffing—ranging from certificated staff members to educational support professionals
- Increased transportation costs
- Training and professional development
- Curricular adjustments
- Technology

At the time of this publication, significant questions remain:

- What are the funding streams?
- If additional federal money is made available to LEAs and IHEs, will funds be unrestricted?
- If additional funding is restricted, how will the restrictions be determined and will they include:
 - Monies for the use of purchasing PPE and sanitization supplies?
 - Monies for costs to provide technology to students and staff as needed?
 - Monies to compensate employees for additional time and/or responsibilities that extend beyond their current job descriptions?

Solutions:

Additional Federal funding must be provided in order to ensure health, safety, and effective school operations.

If funds are restricted, allowances must be made for funds to be grouped into broadly defined categories that allow for as much flexibility within each category as possible.

Where possible, the state should assign any additional Federal funding in unrestricted block grants, allowing districts and colleges the greatest flexibility to meet the safety requirements of reopening schools.

Health and safety mandates must be funded. In addition to federal funds, the state could raise revenue, make structural changes to health care, and pass legislation allowing additional bonding to ensure there are sufficient funds to meet its obligations to LEAs and IHEs.

SECTION 3 – Health & Safety Considerations

Health & Safety Considerations

LEAs, local boards of education and IHE boards of trustees have the responsibility to provide a safe and healthy environment for all students, staff, and community members. Local association leaders should contact their NJEA UniServ field representative with any questions related to Health and Safety Issues.

Vaccination

Challenge:

Maintain a safe environment for students and staff.

Solutions:

Vaccination policies, if adopted by the LEA or IHE, should be done so only after impact negotiations with the local association, and should include any exemptions required pursuant to Title VII, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), New Jersey's Law Against Discrimination, and any other applicable federal or state law.

Safe & Ethical Operations of School Buildings

Challenge:

Deliver an educational program while maintaining health and safety standards for staff, students, and the community.

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs must preserve staff members' rights, as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Family and Medical Leave Act, NJ Family Leave Act, NJ Family Leave Insurance, any applicable COVID-19 federal relief programs, state and federal executive orders, local association collective bargaining agreements, and any other statutes, regulations, case law, and governmental agency guidelines that may apply.

LEAs and IHEs must continue to follow all operational health and safety standards set forth by all applicable local, state, and federal authorities mentioned above, and additionally, must certify proper HVAC system functioning and adequate ventilation/filtration, pursuant to New Jersey Public Employees Occupational Safety and Health Act (PEOSHA) *New Jersey Public Employee Indoor Air Quality Standard IAQ NJAC 12:100-13.1* and the *American Society of Heating, Refrigeration, and Air-Conditioning Engineers' (ASHRAE) Guidance for the Reopening of Schools*.

Attendance & Health Screening

Challenge:

Maintain and communicate regular health screening and isolation standards for all students, staff, and visitors.

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs must clearly define and communicate all health screening and isolation standards, especially their impact on attendance, staffing, and other potential operational changes. Isolation, exclusion, and contact tracing should be implemented according to standards set by the CDC and the NJ Department of Health, and in consultation and constant communication with the respective local health department.

If districts decide to participate in the NJ Department of Health/Department of Education COVID testing program, parental permission should be obtained prior to any broad individual testing of students.

Social Distancing, Masking, & Meals

Challenge:

Schools can safely prevent disease spread in some contexts if mitigation measures, such as social distancing and masking, are maintained.

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs must maintain social distancing for all students, staff, and visitors on district property, at district/college events, and in district transportation as required by state and federal guidelines.

LEAs and IHEs must also provide guidance for universal requirements for student, staff, and visitor mask wearing. Aside from advance, written, medically-based exemptions, which should be rare and limited in consideration of safety for everyone, masks must be worn at all times indoors unless while eating scheduled meals in approved, designated locations. While eating, social distancing of at least three feet must be maintained where possible.

Hygiene & Cleaning

“Cleaning” refers to the removal of dirt and impurities, including germs, from surfaces. **Cleaning alone does not kill germs.** Removing germs decreases their number and risk of spreading infection. **Disinfecting** works by using chemicals, for example *EPA-registered disinfectants*, to kill germs on surfaces. This process does not necessarily clean dirty surfaces or remove germs. But killing germs remaining on a surface after cleaning further reduces any risk of spreading infection.

Challenge:

Infectious diseases can be spread in multiple ways. Virus spread can be accelerated or controlled by heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning (HVAC) systems.

All schools will have to institute vigorous approaches to individual hygiene and cleaning of common areas.

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs must continue to provide personal protective equipment (PPE) and training on its use for all staff.

LEAs and IHEs must continue to provide access to clean water and soap so that all students and staff engage in frequent handwashing. Alternatively, students and staff should be provided with adequate hand sanitizers and wipes containing at least 60% alcohol.

LEAs and IHEs must make available their regular cleaning and disinfection policies for use, storage, and training and must allow local associations to conduct health and safety worksite walkthroughs and certification of proper health and safety standards at their request.

LEAs and IHEs must continue to discourage the use of common materials, and if equipment must be shared, then disinfected between uses.

SECTION 4 – Nurturing Student Learning Acceleration

Mental health providers

Challenge:

The need for comprehensive, holistic wraparound mental and behavioral health services will increase due to:

- Decreased availability of current providers due to high demand
- Limited availability due to high caseloads (at some schools, 600:1)
- Increased need for services due to an increase in mental and behavioral health issues. (*Edweek*)

“Although typically New Jersey school psychologists spend a good portion of their time completing assessments, we possess the training and expertise to support students, families, teachers, and all school staff in meaningful ways. During the pandemic, and moving forward, there are opportunities for school psychologists to utilize their expertise in the *ten domains of school psychology practice*, in support of positive student outcomes.” (*NJASP*)

Solutions:

- LEAs and IHEs identify qualified mental- and behavioral-health service providers (including school psychologists, school counselors, school social workers) currently available.
- LEAs and IHEs identify gaps in needed services and fill those with additional staff, and when appropriate, by seeking community partnerships and professional associations.
- LEAs and IHEs consider structuring schedules to accommodate timely and meaningful delivery of services.
- LEAs and IHEs establish local health and wellness teams composed of multiple stakeholders to focus on student and staff well-being issues and supports.
- LEAs and IHEs are encouraged to adopt a *universal services* approach for student and staff mental health support.

School climate

Challenge:

“The National School Climate Center (*NSCC*) defines school climate as the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students’, parents’, and school personnel’s experience of school life; it also reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributory, and satisfying life in a democratic society.”

LEAs and IHEs must attend to school climate to address needs at the following times:

- Re-entry/reopening
- Re-entry following rolling closures through 2020-21

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs shape the messages to students and families about summer activities, and reopening; those messages must be carefully delivered to address and reduce anxiety, foster social acclimation, and stabilize the community.

- Many students will need support during the summer to continue learning, learning recovery, and access critical services.
- School reopening will be challenging. Schools will need to plan for re-engaging the community (including staff, students, and families) to address anxiety, establish/reestablish routines and support services, and provide recognition and counseling for grieving.
- School reopening will need to consider the importance of co-curricular activities on school climate. Co-curriculars must be maintained, with provisions for health and safety.
- LEAs and IHEs can begin the healing process by establishing calm and trust when providing guidance on plans for different formats necessitated by potential closures.

- Schools must establish, embed, and normalize clear, uniform, and enforceable policies and expectations for students, staff, and visitors related to health and safety protocols (i.e., PPE use for students, staff, and visitors, social distancing in shared spaces, use of resources, etc.).

LEAs and IHEs must consider multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) approach to address emotional and behavioral health within each school building.

LEA and IHEs communications to students and families must be evaluated with a trauma-informed and healing lens.

Identifying & meeting student physical, mental, & behavioral health needs

Challenge:

In coordination with crisis management teams, wraparound services teams/providers, mental health professionals, and educators will need to identify and support students as they cope with COVID-19 stresses related to shutdown and reentry to school.

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs must put systems in place to create clear and ongoing communication between educators and health professionals to:

- Ensure student well-being
- Stabilize the learning community
- Be proactive to student needs
- Respond as needed.

Resources:

- ([NCTSN](#))
- ([NEA Guidance](#))

LEAs and IHEs must be sensitive to altered economic conditions for many families that may impact their ability to access:

- School supply resources
- Food resources
- Health care resources

LEAs and IHEs must consider supporting the unique needs of disproportionately impacted students such as:

- African American and Latinx students whose communities have experienced higher rates of infection and death. ([CDC](#))

- Asian American and Pacific Islander students who have experienced COVID-19-related xenophobia. ([United Nations](#))
- LGBTQ+ students need additional supports from schools ([Human Rights Campaign](#))
- Undocumented children and youth who are blocked from CARES Act funding. ([American Immigration Council](#))
- Homeless children and youth as well as students who lack access to resources have increased challenges to remain healthy, safe, and connected to their learning communities. ([CDC](#))
- Students with limited opportunities who may be stigmatized due to lack of access to resources. ([United Nations](#))
- Other students feeling marginalized or apprehensive about returning to school.

LEAs and IHEs must consider engaging diverse student perspectives and experiences in developing and influencing the design of support systems.

Educators' physical & mental well-being

Challenge:

Educators have experienced first- and second-hand trauma related to COVID-19 and will require social/emotional support and mental health support in order to meet student needs. ([NCTSN](#))

Solutions:

LEAs and IHEs will need to consider how to balance schedules and work demands so that educators will be able to remain healthy so that they can support their students. Of particular concern are:

- Educators balancing teaching challenges with their own family and community needs
- Educators' ability to access physical and mental health resources
- Opportunities for communal grieving, healing, and reconnection.

LEAs and IHEs will need to consider how to structure opportunities for educators to have the time and space to share experiences, concerns, and collaboratively develop solutions appropriate to the local context.

SECTION 5 – Curricular Considerations for 2021-2022

Learning Recovery Efforts

“Learning Recovery” refers to the structures, tools, and personnel that are needed to support students in their return from a virtual, remote, or hybrid learning environment to full-time, in-person instruction. It places an emphasis on tapping into prior student knowledge, strengthening students’ understanding of core concepts, and bridging past knowledge with future curricular goals and outcomes. This can be accomplished through before-school, after-school, and other enrichment programs, some of which may be best embedded in the existing student day. It recognizes individual student needs and places high value on personalized, small group instruction.

Challenge:

Districts will need to prioritize funding, such as that made available through the American Rescue Plan (ARP), to create appropriate learning structures for students who need to engage in Learning Recovery Efforts. There will be staffing needs for these additional programs, as well as potential space and time needs. Programs will need to be tailored to student needs, as these are not intended to be “accelerated learning” programs, but rather intended to identify and address prior learning concerns, and connect students with the curriculum which they will be challenged with moving forward. Part of the challenge will be in identifying students and identifying their individual needs. Districts are to be cautioned against an over-reliance on standardized testing, as this will likely dilute the time, opportunities, and funding necessary for Learning Recovery Efforts.

Solutions:

- Districts are encouraged to work with parents/guardians to identify students who would benefit from Learning Recovery programs.
- Districts and IHEs should allocate funding from ARP-ESSER III to create small-group Learning Recovery programs that are age-based/curricular-based, and led by certified personnel who are employed by the local school district/college.

- Districts should create opportunities for students to access programs, either in the AM or PM outside of school hours, or perhaps as an “enrichment period” in place of a study hall where appropriate. This will require both space and time.
- Districts should rely upon local assessment tools, particularly educator-created materials, to assess students’ learning recovery needs, as these will be the most efficient and cost-effective, and are most closely tailored to local curricula.

Assistance for Students with Disabilities & English Language Learners

Students with disabilities and English language learners likely have been more significantly impacted than their peers during the pandemic. Districts must be certain that these students are included and receive optimal benefit, utilizing any necessary modifications and adaptations. As needed, these students should also receive intensive, targeted support. Health and safety protocols (detailed earlier in this report) must be strictly adhered to and expanded upon to ensure that more vulnerable students are protected. In all aspects of re-entry to in-person education, collaboration between classroom/school staff, administration and families will be key to finding solutions.

IEP Meetings & Evaluations

Challenge:

We project that district personnel who conduct IEP meetings and evaluations will be overwhelmed with new requests in addition to their normal workload expected in a typical school year. The requests are expected to center on compensatory services, supplementary services, remediation and eligibility for services. Adherence to statutory timelines will become a challenge. Furthermore, family participation in the process may be hampered by work and home responsibilities.

Solutions:

- Districts will need to consider additional compensation for existing staff.
- Districts may need to hire temporary, supplemental staff to meet the needs and mandated timelines.
- Districts must be flexible and use all tools and resources to maintain ongoing communication with families to ensure active family participation in the process.
- ARPA funding should be considered for staff enhancement and means to facilitate family participation.

Compensatory Services

Challenge:

Compensatory services have always been a remedy for a student who did not receive the services within their IEP resulting in a denial of the student's right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). During the Covid-19 outbreak, many more students' programs and services were impacted and compensatory services need to be considered on a case-by-case basis. Districts will need to address the compensatory needs of all classified students ages 3-21.

In addition, New Jersey P.L.2021, c. 109 allows school districts to provide additional or compensatory services to special education students who are turning 21 during the 2020/21, 2021/22 or 2022/23 school years. Determinations about the need for and the scope of services remain the responsibility of the IEP Team. Even students who have participated in their district graduation ceremony are eligible to request an IEP meeting to discuss services. These students have all due process protections afforded to them through I.D.E.A. and New Jersey special education regulations.

Solutions:

- Families and educators will need to be informed about the process for securing compensatory services and about the potential extension of services beyond age 21.
- Existing staff will need additional compensation and supplementary staff may need to be hired to meet the demand for compensatory services, particularly in districts with large 18-21 student populations.
- [Also see solutions for IEP meetings and Evaluation above]

Social Skills Development

Challenge:

Prior to the pandemic, some students were identified by their teachers for additional support and received direct instruction in social skills. With the transition to remote learning in March 2020, these services were not able to be offered as robustly as they were in an in-person environment. Therefore, as we return to normal school operations, we will find that some students need more support than before, while pandemic isolation may cause an uptick in students being identified with these needs.

Solutions:

- Through collaboration and professional learning, districts should support staff in their work in the area of social skills development.
- The school team of teachers, speech-language specialists, CST, paraprofessionals and others should be afforded ample time to collaborate and deliver services to students.
- Social skills may be considered within the scope of social-emotional learning efforts.
- Those providing supplemental support should be aware of the need to incorporate social skills training.
- Districts should embrace creative approaches that will provide support to students beyond what is written in the IEP.
- Family training and support relative to social skills development should also be provided along with other parent training as required in NJAC 6A:14(b)-14.i.(5)

Behavioral Challenges

Challenge:

Prior to the pandemic, many schools were facing challenges with managing behavioral difficulties. While these behaviors may have been less prevalent during remote and small hybrid scenarios, the conditions that led to these pre-pandemic challenges will likely re-emerge upon return to in-person instruction.

Solution:

- Districts should seek to establish positive, supportive school cultures using trauma-informed approaches.
- Social-emotional learning efforts should be interwoven with behavioral support strategies.
- As needed, students with more significant needs should receive targeted support developed in consultation with specialists such as school psychologists, counselors, behavior specialists, etc.
- Districts should monitor behavioral data to determine needs.
- ARPA funding may be used to provide enhanced support to students and the staff who serve them.

Special Education Resources:

- The NJEA booklet “Where in the Special Education Regulations?” may be found here: <https://www.njea.org/specialedregs>
- The most up-to-date Parental Rights in Special Education booklet may be accessed in several languages here: <https://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/form/prise/>
- Families and educators may find more information and resources on the website of the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network. <https://spanadvocacy.org>

Challenge:

English Language Learners and their families were uniquely impacted by the pandemic, and therefore have some unique challenges as we plan a return to full in-person learning in the fall. For a variety of reasons, many of our English Language Learners spent time outside their communities and/or in their home

countries during the pandemic; depending on circumstances, each student will be impacted differently. Due to the lack of socialization and conversations outside the home as a result of the pandemic, many ELLs may have experienced language digression. Finally, assessment data is lacking. In cases where ACCESS testing did not occur this spring (for example, those who were out of the country and unable to report to a school for the assessment), leaving districts with gaps in the information they have about student needs and strengths. Families will need supports and resources provided in their home languages, and undocumented individuals who are not eligible for certain federal benefits will see impacts as well.

Solutions:

- Districts must provide educators of ELLs with comprehensive, reliable assessment tools that can be utilized to determine student needs. Educators must be trained to administer the assessments and interpret results.
- Districts must utilize funding to the greatest extent possible to provide needed supplies and resources for ELLs, whose families have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.
- All students and their families will benefit from Social-Emotional Learning in the fall, especially those for whom the pandemic caused them to move. Districts must ensure that all supports being offered to English-speaking populations are also available to speakers of other languages.
- Educators new to the profession did not get optimal levels of pre-service experience working with ELLs and their families. Districts must ensure strong mentoring and support programs for all new teachers.

This report was researched and prepared by the members of NJEA's Education Recovery Staff Task Force.

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