

LEARNING ACCELERATION GUIDE

Accelerating Learning in the 2020-
2021 School Year

November 2020



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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced schools across the country to confront unprecedented challenges. A months-long disruption of school has exacerbated longstanding inequities in our education system at a moment when the nation has faced a reckoning with systemic racism across our society. [One study](#) estimates that Black and Latinx students will lose about 10 months of learning that they would have otherwise gained had schools remained open as usual, compared to six months of learning lost by white students. The same study estimates that students from low-income backgrounds will lose an entire year of learning they would have otherwise gained.

Teachers, principals, and school support staff are doing heroic work to offer stability for students and families during this crisis—providing students opportunities to learn while also caring for their physical, social, and emotional needs. But our work across the country in recent months has shown that schools still need help ensuring that students have access to the grade-appropriate assignments, strong instruction, deep engagement, and teachers with high expectations they need to minimize learning loss this year—and ultimately accelerate back to grade level.

We published [the first version of the Learning Acceleration Guide](#) in April to help schools meet this critical challenge. We urged school and system leaders to reject the typical approach to remediation—“meeting students where they are” by providing work suited for earlier grades—which practically guarantees students will lose more academic ground and reinforces misguided beliefs that some can’t ever do grade-level work. We offered advice for implementing a better approach: shifting from remediation to acceleration, not by providing content or teaching faster, but by using instructional strategies that can help all students grapple with grade-appropriate content.

At the time, we’d hoped most students would be back to full-time in-person instruction by now. With the pandemic still raging, that’s unlikely to happen for months, and perhaps not even until next fall. We’ve updated our guide with specific goals and strategies that can help schools begin accelerating students back to grade level in any instructional format—in-person, virtual, or hybrid. We’ve placed special emphasis on the two most important things schools should prioritize right now: grade-appropriate assignments and strong instruction.

Providing students with the challenging, engaging school experiences that can accelerate them back to grade level is possible even during this unprecedented school year—and even imperfect attempts to do it will create far better experiences for many students than they received before the crisis.

Our guidance in the rest of this guide is organized around two key questions:

- 1. What are your goals for accelerating student learning for all students, and where do you stand against them?**
- 2. How do you ensure that your students’ experiences in school will lead to accelerated student learning for all?**

We've grounded these questions and the advice that follows in a set of values we believe should guide any school system's decision-making in the months ahead:

Grade-level content is the academic priority.

Run every idea through a simple test: Will this help every student, regardless of the aspects of their identity, get back to grade level? You should prioritize accelerating students' learning by accelerating all students' exposure to grade-appropriate content while also addressing students' social and emotional needs—so that every student can get back to grade level.

Address inequities head-on.

Losing so much time in school, along with the lack of access to virtual learning many students have experienced, has exacerbated existing inequities and opportunity gaps in your school and system. Social unrest and repeated incidences of racism and violence against people of color have added to the trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic. Center your approaches on creating equitable experiences and outcomes for all your students, regardless of their race, identity, native language, learning and thinking differences, or other background characteristics. Examine every decision and piece of data you collect through the lens of which inequities you're addressing and how you are planning to ensure that *all* your students are successful this year.

Support, assume the best of, and train all your stakeholders.

In this pandemic, everyone has done the best they know how to do in an unprecedented situation. Assume the best of your students, families, and staff as you navigate this school year, and ensure that you have a strong plan to provide training and support for your teachers, staff, and parents (who are often playing the role of at-home teacher).

Collaborate, then communicate clearly.

Your families and staff likely still feel overwhelmed, so as you think about your work this year, ensure that you have a plan to connect, collaborate with, and communicate with your students and families as clearly as possible. Make sure your decisions are clear and simple. You'll also want to share how decisions have been made and who was consulted in making those decisions, ensuring that you authentically partner with students and their families.

The sections of this document that follow will help you answer these guiding questions and assemble the people, information, and processes to improve the quality of your students' experiences in school. This document will likely be most helpful for district or system-level staff members and school leaders.

What are our goals for accelerating student learning for all students, and where do we stand against them?

To accelerate students' progress, system leaders and educators need to identify exactly what unfinished learning needs to be addressed, when, and how. In the initial version of the Learning Acceleration Guide, we recommended identifying the content knowledge and skills your students might struggle with in their current grade level, and filling those potential gaps “just in time,” when the material occurs in the school year.

We acknowledged that this might feel like a radically different approach for some of your teachers and leaders. And in many ways, it is. Accelerated learning requires that students consistently receive grade-level materials, tasks, and assignments, along with appropriate scaffolds that make the work accessible. More specifically, instead of sending students backwards to fill in all the potential gaps in their learning, leaders and teachers should focus on filling in only the most critical gaps—and not in isolation, but at the moment they're needed.

To accelerate learning effectively this school year, schools and systems will need to know where they stand against clear goals for accelerating student learning for *all* students, regardless of their identity or previous achievement. Schools and systems will need to ensure that they understand where they should focus their time and energy by knowing where they stand against the following goals and then managing towards them:

GOALS FOR ACCELERATING STUDENT LEARNING

1. All students and families have the resources they need to meaningfully engage in school, whether it's in person or not.
2. All students feel like they belong in their school experience.
3. All students and families are treated as authentic partners.
4. All students have access to grade-appropriate assignments focused on priority content.
5. All students have access to strong instruction that addresses any gaps in prior learning they have within the context of grade-appropriate assignments focused on priority content.
6. All students are demonstrating mastery of grade-level content.

All students and families have the resources they need to meaningfully engage in school, whether it's in person or not.

If students don't have the resources they need to meaningfully engage in school, we won't be able to accelerate their learning. In many communities, there are students struggling to engage in school right now due to the lack of reliable devices, broadband internet access, or adults to supervise and support students as they learn. This can show up in a lack of assignment completion or a lack of attendance at school in whatever form it is occurring. Additionally, [one estimate](#) details more than three million students who have not experienced any formal education since March 2020. All schools and systems should know where their students are and know whether their students and families have the resources they need to engage in school—and should work to ensure every single student and family has access to those resources, including a safe space to learn (with adult supervision and support if necessary), a device, and reliable Internet access, as well as any other resources required to support the school or district's plan for this year.

The following goals can help you determine whether students and families have the required resources to engage in and be ready for meaningful learning opportunities:

GOAL

DATA SOURCE

Access to a device (if any of your students are or may be virtual): 100% of families agree or strongly agree with the statement, “My child has access to a desktop, laptop, or tablet.” As your system works towards 100% agreement, monitor any gaps in device access between demographic groups, including racial groups, students with IEPs, multilingual learners, or students who receive free and reduced lunch.

Access to the internet (if any of your students are or may be virtual): 100% of families agree or strongly agree with the statement, “My child has Internet access (Wi-Fi connectivity).” As your system works towards 100% agreement, monitor any gaps in access to the Internet between demographic groups, including racial groups, students with IEPs, multilingual learners, or students who receive free and reduced lunch.

Access to safe learning space (if any of your students are or may be virtual): 100% of families agree or strongly agree with the statement, “I have access to a safe space where my student can engage in school.” As your system works towards 100% agreement, monitor any gaps in access to a safe learning space between demographic groups, including racial groups, students with IEPs, multilingual learners, or students who receive free and reduced lunch.

Access to tech support (if any of your students are or may be virtual): 100% of families agree or strongly agree with the statement, “I know who to contact if my child has a problem accessing their online classes or schoolwork.” As your system works towards 100% agreement, monitor any gaps in access to a safe learning space between demographic groups, including racial groups, students with IEPs, multilingual learners, or students who receive free and reduced lunch.

Attendance: We have at least a 95% daily attendance rate with no discernible gaps in attendance between demographic groups, including racial groups, students with IEPs, multilingual learners, or students who receive free and reduced lunch.

Administer a family survey: Administer a survey to your families, asking them whether they have access to a device, the internet, and a safe learning space. Ensure that you are able to connect the data you collect to individual families who need additional support with devices, the internet, or safe learning spaces—and that families can take surveys in their native languages.

Provide teachers a way to flag students or families who might need additional support: Your teachers are interacting with their students and their families significantly more than you might be, so create a system where they can flag students who might need access to a device, the internet, or a safe learning space—and then designate a team of school or district staff members to follow up with families who might need additional support.

Collect and use daily attendance data: You are likely required to collect daily attendance data (though different states and systems have set different expectations about what it means to “attend” this year), so make sure you’re considering it carefully to identify students who might need additional supports to attend school during the 2020-21 school year.

GOAL

DATA SOURCE

Student assignment completion: 100% of students complete their assigned work. As your system works towards 100% completion, monitor any gaps in access to a safe learning space between demographic groups, including racial demographic groups, students with IEPs, multilingual learners, or students who receive free and reduced lunch.

Collect and use assignment completion data: In addition to attendance data, collect data on assignment completion. Support your teachers to identify no more than three “anchor assignments” per week, and track completion of those assignments to identify which students might need additional supports to engage in school right now.

Staffing: We have developed a staffing plan that meets the needs of all of our learners, including our multilingual students and our students who have thinking and learning differences, and 100% of our teaching and support positions are filled.

Collect and use staffing data. Ensure all your students, including multilingual learners and students with thinking and learning differences, have access to the teaching staff they need to have a strong school experience this year—and ensure that all your teachers, including teachers responsible for IEP compliance, have reasonable workloads. If you added positions to support remote learning, ensure those are filled as well.

All students feel like they belong in their school experience.

Students’ sense of belonging is a critical—and often underappreciated—condition for academic success. Students who feel a sense of belonging “feel socially connected, supported, and respected. They trust their teachers and their peers, and they feel a sense of fit at school. They are not worried about being treated as a stereotype and are confident that they are seen as a person of value.”¹ Students who feel a sense of belonging and believe they are valued by their peers and teachers are able to engage more fully in learning.

During these challenging times for students—when many students are learning from home or attending socially distanced classrooms while asked to wear a mask—it’s more important than ever that students believe that they belong in their learning environment and that we ensure that students have access to a classroom community that cultivates their sense of belonging.² To determine whether this is occurring in your school or system, consider setting and monitoring the following goals and measures:

GOAL

DATA SOURCE

Student belonging: 100% of students feel a sense of belonging. As your system works towards 100% agreement, monitor any gaps in students’ sense of belonging between demographic groups, including racial groups, students with IEPs, multilingual learners, or students who receive free and reduced lunch.

Administer a student survey to students in grades 3-12: To gather information about whether students feel they belong, administer a survey that gauges that. You’ll want to make sure that all students have an equitable experience to participate by ensuring that you provide IEP accommodations to students who should receive them, as well as surveys in your students’ native languages. Consider questions like those from our [Learning Experience Survey](#), such as:

- There is at least one adult in my school that I can talk to about how I’m doing.
- My teacher(s) make me feel like I belong in their classes.

¹ <https://mindsetscholarsnetwork.org/learning-mindsets/belonging/#>

² <https://mindsetscholarsnetwork.org/belonging-now-what-it-takes-to-create-the-conditions-for-belonging/>.

All students and families are treated as authentic partners.

As we outlined in [The Opportunity Myth](#), it's vital to treat students and their families as authentic partners in their education. When schools closed last spring, many families got a closer look at their students' experiences in school than they'd ever had before. Additionally, we know that many families have chosen to pursue new school experiences outside the public school system, attempting to find a situation that will serve their child well as they engage in the 2020-21 school year. Some families may have opted out of schooling experiences all together.³ More than ever before, schools' success this year will depend on partnerships with students and their families.

In this moment, treating students and families as authentic partners means actively engaging in a community conversation about students' school experiences, as outlined in our "[5 Essentials for Engaging Families and Community Partners in Reopening Efforts](#)." To ensure that you are treating your students and families as the authentic partners they are, focus on these goals:

GOAL	DATA SOURCE
<p>Authentic partnership: 100% of families have been contacted by their child's teacher at least once per quarter. As your system works towards 100% contact, monitor any gaps in contact between demographic groups (including racial demographic groups, students with IEPs, multilingual learners, or students who receive free and reduced lunch).</p>	<p>Create a school or system-level tracker for parent communication. Ensure that each of your teachers and staff know how to use this tracker such that you can make sure that all of your students and families are receiving regular communication touchpoints.</p>
<p>Authentic partnership: 100% of families report that they have what they need to connect and share feedback with your staff. As your system works towards 100% agreement, monitor any gaps in students' and families' sense of authentic partnership between demographic groups (including racial demographic groups, students with IEPs, multilingual learners, or students who receive free and reduced lunch).</p>	<p>Administer a survey to your families: You'll want to administer a survey that allows you to gauge whether families have what they need to connect with and share feedback with your staff—and you'll want to make sure that families can take that survey in their native languages. Consider asking questions like those from our Learning Experience Survey, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know whom to reach out to at my child's school if I have questions or concerns. • I know how to contact my child's teacher(s) if I have questions or concerns. • I feel comfortable reaching out to my child's teacher(s) if I have questions or concerns. • The district/network is responsive to my feedback. • I know whom to contact if my child has a problem accessing their online classes or schoolwork. • I know how to help my child resolve technology problems when they arise.

³ <https://www.npr.org/2020/10/09/920316481/enrollment-is-dropping-in-public-schools-around-the-country>

Authentic partnership: 100% of families agree that their students' experience is resulting in significant learning this year. As your system works towards 100% agreement, monitor any gaps in students' and families' sense of authentic partnership between demographic groups (including racial demographic groups, students with IEPs, multilingual learners, or students who receive free and reduced lunch).

Administer a survey to your families: You'll want to administer a survey that allows you to gauge whether families believe their students are learning this year—and you'll want to make sure that families can take that survey in their native languages. Consider asking questions like those from our [Learning Experience Survey](#), such as:

- Which best matches your belief about your child's experience this year? (My child has learned a lot this year, My child has learned some this year, My child has learned a little this year, My child has learned nothing this year.)

All students have access to grade-appropriate assignments focused on priority content.

To avoid falling farther behind, students need consistent access to grade-appropriate assignments that will support them in mastering the content of their grade-level standards. The Student Achievement Partners (SAP) have outlined [which content should be the highest priority in the 2020-21 school year](#), based on what students will need to deeply know and understand to demonstrate readiness for the next grade. This is especially important for students who are below grade level, since our research has shown they are the least likely to receive grade-appropriate assignments.

To ensure that all your students—regardless of their identity, background, or prior achievement—have access to grade-appropriate assignments focused on priority content, commit to these goals:

GOAL

Access to grade-appropriate assignments: At least 75%⁴ of the assignments our students experience are grade-appropriate, and there are no gaps in access to grade-appropriate assignments by classroom demographics (including racial demographic groups, students with IEPs, multilingual learners, or students who receive free and reduced lunch) across our school or system.

DATA SOURCE

Collect and evaluate assignment quality. Use [TNTP's Student Experience Assessment Guide](#) and [TNTP's Assignment Review Protocols](#) to evaluate the quality of assignments your students are experiencing, considering whether the assignment addresses [priority content as outlined by SAP](#). Connect the data you collect to classroom demographic data to determine if there are gaps in access by classroom demographics.

All students have access to strong instruction that addresses any gaps in prior learning they have within the context of grade-appropriate assignments focused on priority content.

Once students have access to grade-appropriate assignments, it's important that they experience strong instruction that will support them to master that grade-level content. As we outlined [in the original Learning Acceleration Guide](#), teachers need support to understand a strategic approach to collecting and using diagnostic data this year, so that they're diagnosing only the highest priority prerequisite knowledge skills "just in time" throughout the school year

⁴ Note that we suggest a goal lower than 100% here because we realize that students may need to experience assignments that fill in gaps in below-grade-level content. This should not occur the majority of the time for any student, however.

and adjusting their instruction based on their students' prerequisite knowledge and skills. To ensure this happens in your school or system, focus on these goals:

GOAL	DATA SOURCE
<p>Access to student-specific diagnostic data about prerequisite knowledge and skills related to priority content: Ensure that your system has provided guidance to teachers about which knowledge and skill is priority for each unit they are teaching, and that 100% of your teachers have diagnostic data that meets the guidance you have provided.</p>	<p>Survey your teachers and school leaders regarding their access to diagnostic data. After you have developed your perspective on which knowledge and skills should be diagnosed and trained educators on that approach,⁵ you should verify your educators are diagnosing students and using the data to adjust their instruction. Consider asking whether teachers agree with statements like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am diagnosing my students in alignment with the guidance the district provided. • I know how to use the diagnostic data I have to adjust my grade-level instruction. • When I make adjustments to my instruction based on diagnostic data, I make sure my students are still spending their time on grade-level content.
<p>Access to strong instruction: At least 75% of the observations we conduct represent strong instruction, and there are no gaps in access to strong instruction by classroom demographics (including racial demographic groups, students with IEPs, multilingual learners, or students who receive free and reduced lunch) across our school or system.</p>	<p>Observe your classrooms. Use TNTP's Student Experience Assessment Guide and TNTP's Classroom Observation Protocols to evaluate the quality of instruction your students are experiencing. Connect the data you collect to classroom demographic data to determine if there are gaps in access by classroom demographics.</p>

All students are demonstrating mastery of grade-level content.

Our goal in this difficult school year must be to ensure that all students demonstrate mastery of grade-level content. In all likelihood, your school or system has already established ways to evaluate whether that is happening (in previous years).

Continue to use rigorous assessments of student learning to set goals around, and if you're not seeing the level of learning you'd like to, consider the potential root causes by digging into the results in your system on the other goals we've listed above. The percentage goals are intentionally blank; add goals based on current assessment data.

GOAL	DATA SOURCE
<p>Student learning: At least ___% of students meet standards of mastery on system-wide assessments. Any historical gaps in academic mastery by student demographics (including racial demographic groups, students with IEPs, multi-lingual learners, or students who receive free and reduced lunch) are shrinking by ___%.</p>	<p>Administer a limited number of rigorous assessments. Consider using only curriculum-embedded assessments this year, and supporting your schools and teachers in sharing that information such that your system can evaluate the quality of student learning across the system.</p>

⁵ If you've not yet taken this step, our guidance on page 8 describes how you will want to support your teachers in making decisions about which content to diagnose.

How do we ensure that students' experiences will lead to accelerated learning for all?

Once you have goals and know where you stand against them, you can prioritize your next steps to improve students' experiences. We've focused our recommendations here on ensuring that students have access to grade-appropriate assignments and strong instruction, regardless of what school looks like this year—since many schools have understandably spent less time on these two goals than on logistical and safety challenges with reopening school buildings. If your school needs to prioritize other gaps first, we've included resources in [the appendix](#) to support all six of the goals we outlined above.

Equitable Access to Grade-Appropriate Assignments

In [The Opportunity Myth](#), we found that many students do not have consistent and equitable access to grade-appropriate assignments—assignments that give students the opportunity to master content aligned to grade-level standards, engage in important content-specific practices, and build knowledge of the world in some way. In fact, almost three quarters of the assignments we reviewed were not grade-appropriate.

We have seen evidence, in our own work visiting schools and in recent surveys from the field, that students have not had consistent and equitable access to grade-appropriate assignments since the COVID-19 pandemic began. One survey found that while 80 percent of students reported receiving more assignments when classes went virtual, 60 percent reported that the work was “easy” or was about content they had already mastered.⁶

Providing students equitable access to grade-appropriate assignments focused on this year's priority content is one of the most pressing challenges facing school and system leaders right now. How to solve that challenge in the short term and the long term depends on whether a district has established expectations for the usage of high-quality instructional materials in the past.

The first step for all schools and systems is to **determine whether students and teachers have access to standards-aligned, culturally and linguistically-responsive instructional materials**. To make this determination, you should:

- Consider whether [EdReports](#) has rated the curricular materials you have selected. If EdReports says that your materials “meet expectations,” you can build a strategy around supporting your teachers to effectively use those materials (while also working at the system level to ensure that those materials [are culturally responsive](#) and [meet the needs of your multi-lingual learners](#)).
- If EdReports has not rated your materials, you should evaluate whether your adopted instructional materials [are standards-aligned](#), [are culturally responsive](#), and [meet the needs of your multilingual learners](#).

After you determine whether your students and teachers have access to standards-aligned, culturally responsive instructional materials, you'll want to build both an immediate and a longer-term plan for ensuring that your students have access to grade-appropriate assignments focused on this year's priority content.

⁶ <https://www.the74million.org/article/survey-finds-most-teachers-assigned-busy-work-in-the-spring-now-experts-say-its-time-to-give-students-more-challenging-assignments-remote-or-not/>

IN THE SHORT TERM...

If your teachers and students have access to high-quality instructional materials:

Step 1: Develop a short-term implementation plan, setting goals to increase access to grade-appropriate assignments in your district. This plan should include:

- Clear goals regarding the proportion of assignments your students should experience that are grade-appropriate.
- Clear expectations for materials usage, regardless of whether students are in-person or remote.
- A [plan for ongoing professional learning and supports for teachers](#) to understand how to effectively implement the materials, ensuring that you address [the most critical knowledge and skill for teachers and school leaders](#), given your diagnosis of the quality of assignments in your system.

Step 2: Communicate your clear expectations for using materials in a professional learning session for school leaders and teachers. As you communicate these expectations, ground them in the purpose of high-quality instructional materials as a tool that will support teachers to provide access to grade-appropriate assignments rather than a set of “rules” that teachers need to follow.

Step 3: Develop teacher and school leader skill in the areas you’ve prioritized. Execute on the plan that you outlined in Step 1, providing teachers and leaders with the supports they need to provide access to grade-appropriate assignments.

Step 4: Monitor the quality of assignments your students are experiencing and make adjustments as needed. As we described above, use [TNTP’s Student Experience Assessment Guide](#) and [TNTP’s Assignment Review Protocols](#) to evaluate the quality of assignments your students are experiencing, considering whether the assignment addresses [priority content as outlined by SAP](#). Continue to connect the data you collect to classroom demographic data to determine if there are gaps in access by classroom demographics, and measure your progress as you work to improve your implementation of high-quality instructional materials.

If your teachers and students don’t have access to high-quality instructional materials:

Step 1: Consider whether you could shift the materials you are using in the middle of the year and how you might improve your current materials.

This approach might feel intimidating, but a number of schools and systems adjusted their materials and experienced success in the spring. To determine if this is the right solution for your system, ask yourself the following questions:

- How are educators perceiving the materials to which they have access right now? Would they welcome more supportive materials that would result in grade-appropriate assignments for our students?
- Given the school system’s financial situation and procurement policies, could the system reasonably purchase and distribute new materials right now?
- If the system could not feasibly make the shift to new materials right now, what capacity does the system have to centrally support the improvement of the current materials.

If it is feasible to shift the materials you’ve adopted from an educator investment and a financial/procurement perspective, consider making that shift at a point in the school year when you have the capacity to support and train your teachers and school leaders to make the shift.

Step 2 (if it is feasible to shift to high-quality materials): Shift to high-quality instructional materials, in either pilot schools or in all of your schools. Use the resources in the [CCSSO Restart and Recovery Systems Condition Guidance around “Determining Curriculum”](#) to support a transition to new materials.

Step 2 (if it not feasible to shift to high-quality materials and you have centralized capacity to improve your current materials): Build a centralized plan to support educators in ensuring students have access to grade-appropriate assignments.

Communicate clearly with educators about the gaps in the current materials, and make adjustments to centralized curricular resources as outlined in the [CCSSO Restart and Recovery Systems Conditions Guidance around “Determining Curriculum,”](#) prioritizing

the weaknesses you'll address centrally in your resources and training teachers on those. As you make these adjustments, follow the guidance outlined in the [CCSSO Restart and Recovery Academics Guidance regarding Curriculum and Instruction](#).

Step 2 (if it is not feasible to shift to high-quality materials and you do not have centralized capacity to improve your current materials): Communicate to school leadership teams that one of their major responsibilities is ensuring that students have access to grade-appropriate assignments in their classes. Provide them intensive training and support to give feedback on the assignments that students will experience before students experience them. You might use lesson planning cycles you've had in the past – but layer in a review of whether assignments are grade-appropriate using [TNTP's Assignment Review Protocols](#).

If you see inequities in which students have access to grade-appropriate assignments:

Explicitly train your teachers and school leaders on the importance of grade-appropriate assignments for all students—even students who are behind. As we saw in [The Opportunity Myth](#), we as educators are most likely to deny access to grade-appropriate assignments to students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and students who are behind. But when the students who were years behind received access to even *some* grade-appropriate assignments, they made significant progress. You'll want to build a series of professional learning experiences to support your teachers to answer the following questions:

- What are grade-appropriate assignments? Why do those assignments matter for students, especially students who are behind?
- How do you ensure students have access to grade-appropriate assignments during in-person, hybrid, and remote instruction?
- What do you do as a teacher when students struggle to answer the question or complete the tasks?

If you are seeing educators across your school or system providing lower-quality assignments to some subgroups of students, it can be helpful to build a professional learning approach (like [TNTP's Good to Great program](#)) that allows them to see first-hand what students can do when they have access to grade-appropriate assignments, supporting teachers to provide access to grade-appropriate assignments while also [scaffolding appropriately](#). Consider using [our Good to Great Reflection Guide](#) to support these efforts.

IN THE LONG TERM . . .

If your teachers and students have access to high-quality instructional materials:

Develop a multi-year implementation plan that will support your teachers and school leaders in using your high-quality instructional materials. This plan should include:

- Goals and benchmarks you'll drive towards around access to grade-appropriate assignments and strong instruction
- Teacher and leader training and support structures
- A long-term approach to expand access to high-quality instructional materials to more grade bands and subject areas in your system

Consider learning more about a possible approach to adopting and implementing high-quality instructional materials by reading [the Tennessee LIFT Instructional Materials Implementation Guidebook](#), focusing especially on the "Broadening Impact" and "Deepening Impact" sections.

If your teachers and students don't have access to high-quality instructional materials:

Plan to adopt high-quality instructional materials.

Each district and state has a different materials adoption timeline, so familiarize yourself with your state's policies and timeline for adopting new materials, identifying the opportunities you have to secure high-quality materials as rapidly as possible (starting with a launch in the 2021-22 school year in at least some grade levels and subject areas). Build a long-term plan to ensure that you engage teachers, school leaders, students, and families in the adoption decisions your system ultimately makes, working to ensure that you adopt [high-quality instructional materials](#) that will support your students' access to grade-appropriate assignments.

Consider learning more about a possible approach to adopting and implementing high-quality instructional materials by reading [the Tennessee LIFT Instructional Materials Implementation Guidebook](#), focusing on the full resource.

Equitable Access to Strong Instruction

In [The Opportunity Myth](#), we found that many students do not have consistent and equitable access to strong instruction that gives them the opportunity to do deep thinking about grade-level content during the lesson. In fact, fewer than one in five lessons that we observed provided students that opportunity. This remains a challenge during this period of disruption, with students sharing that they have not experienced strong instruction and that they worry about the long-term effect that will have on their success.⁷

Providing students equitable access to strong instruction that provides them the "just in time" supports they need to master grade-level content requires that a school or system have a strong perspective on what great instruction looks like, a clear plan for ensuring that teachers are able to diagnose the supports that students might need to master grade-appropriate content, and a plan to support teachers' professional learning around how to deliver instruction that requires that students do the thinking about grade-appropriate assignments.

After you've ensured that your teachers and students have equitable access to grade-appropriate assignments, you'll want to focus on ensuring that your instruction supports students to master the rigorous, culturally and linguistically responsive content those assignments contain by:

⁷ <https://www.crpe.org/thelens/students-count-highlights-covid-19-student-surveys>

STEP 1: ENSURE YOUR TEACHERS HAVE ACCESS TO USABLE DIAGNOSTIC DATA.

To deliver strong instruction, your teachers will need to understand which prerequisite content and skills students still need in order to master grade-appropriate content. As outlined in [the CCSSO Restart and Recovery Assessment resource](#), it's important that assessments *not* be used to withhold grade-level content from students—and that those assessments provide teachers with the instructional information they need to support students.

If you have access to high-quality instructional materials....

It's likely that they contain diagnostics that are embedded throughout the materials that will support your teachers in identifying the prerequisite content and skills that students would need to access the grade-appropriate content they need to master.

Check to make sure that your instructional materials contain diagnostics that clearly meet the more detailed criteria outlined in [the CCSSO Restart and Recovery Academics Detailed Content Consideration by Topic resource](#). If they do, move on to Step 2. If they do not, address that gap in your instructional system using the directions found in the column to the right.

If you do not have access to high-quality instructional materials...

You'll want to ensure that your teachers are effectively diagnosing only the highest priority prerequisite knowledge and skills so that they can adjust their instruction.

Consider updating your curricular guidance to reflect the following guidance for diagnosing students' unfinished learning in English Language Arts and mathematics:

- **Elementary English Language Arts:** Ensure that teachers diagnose students' reading foundational skills (using an assessment like [DIBELS](#)⁸) and reading fluency (using [this guidance](#)⁹). Additionally, ensure that teachers are clear on which students have reading comprehension and writing skills below grade level (using high-quality, *short* assessments like [these](#)¹⁰).
- **Elementary mathematics:** Rather than giving one significant diagnostic assessment up front, consider using the Achieve the Core [coherence map](#)¹¹ to determine what prerequisite skills will be most important for your students so that they'll be set up to master their current grade level's content at the beginning of each unit throughout the year. Then diagnose whether students have those skills using assessments like [these](#).¹²
- **Secondary English Language Arts:** Ensure that teachers diagnose students' reading fluency (using [this guidance](#)¹³). Additionally, ensure that teachers are clear on which students have reading comprehension and writing skills below grade level using high-quality, short assessments like [these](#).¹⁴
- **Secondary mathematics:** Rather than giving one significant diagnostic assessment up front, consider

⁸ <https://dibels.uoregon.edu/>.

⁹ <https://achievethecore.org/aligned/determining-reading-fluency/>.

¹⁰ <https://achievethecore.org/page/991/mrs-mack-by-patricia-polacco-mini-assessment>.

¹¹ <https://achievethecore.org/page/1118/coherence-map>.

¹² <https://achievethecore.org/category/1020/mathematics-assessments>.

¹³ <https://achievethecore.org/aligned/determining-reading-fluency/>.

¹⁴ <https://achievethecore.org/page/991/mrs-mack-by-patricia-polacco-mini-assessment>.

using the Achieve the Core [coherence map](#)¹⁵ to determine what prerequisite skills will be most important for your students so that they'll be set up to master their current grade level's content at the beginning of each unit throughout the year. Then diagnose whether students have those skills using assessments like [these](#).¹⁶

STEP 2: ENSURE YOUR TEACHERS EFFECTIVELY USE THAT DIAGNOSTIC DATA.

After you've ensured that your teachers have access to the diagnostic data they'd need to make adjustments to their instruction, you'll want to make sure they are able to use it effectively. This will include supporting teachers to:

- **Interpret their data accurately, identifying which prerequisite knowledge and skill gaps might need to be addressed.** You'll want to create time and space for teachers to build their skill in examining diagnostic data together, ensuring that teachers are clear on the knowledge and skills that might need to be addressed with their whole class and those that might need to be addressed in differentiated small groups.
- **Identify adjustments that will support *all* students to access grade-appropriate assignments that they should make to their whole group instruction.** After teachers understand which prerequisite knowledge and skills might need to be addressed with their whole class, you'll want to build their skill in [leveraging strong scaffolding strategies](#) to support all students to the content they need to master.

STEP 3: ENSURE YOUR TEACHERS PLAN INSTRUCTION THAT ENGAGES STUDENTS IN GRADE-APPROPRIATE ASSIGNMENTS.

Use professional learning sessions, coaching, and feedback to ensure teachers can:

- **Deliver content that pushes students to own the thinking.** Train your teachers to ensure that they can leverage [Instructional Strategies that Push Students to Own the Thinking](#).
- **Engage students in grade-appropriate content:** Use research based engagement strategies like those outlined in [Strategies for Engaging Students in Virtual Lessons](#) or [the CCSSO Restart and Recovery Academics guidance](#).

¹⁵ <https://achievethecore.org/page/1118/coherence-map>.

¹⁶ <https://achievethecore.org/category/1020/mathematics-assessments>.

If you see inequities in which students have access to strong instruction that addresses gaps in prior learning within the context of grade-appropriate assignments:

Explicitly train your teachers and school leaders on the importance of strong instruction for all students—even students who are behind. As we saw in [The Opportunity Myth](#), we as educators are most likely to deny access to strong instruction to students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and students who are behind. You'll want to build a series of professional learning experiences to support your teachers to answer the following questions:

- What is strong instruction? Why does providing students the opportunity to do the thinking about grade-appropriate assignments matter for students, especially those who are behind?
- How do you ensure students have access to strong instruction during in-person, hybrid, and remote instruction?
- What do you do as a teacher when students struggle to answer the question or complete the tasks?

If you are seeing educators across your school or system providing lower-quality instruction to some subgroups of students, it can be helpful to build a professional learning approach (like [TNTP's Good to Great program](#)) that allows them to see first-hand what students can do when they have access to strong instruction that gives them the chance to do the thinking about grade-appropriate assignments. Consider using [our Good to Great Reflection Guide](#) to support these efforts.

Appendix: How do we address inequities or lack of progress in the goals we've set?

We've anchored this section of the document to the goals we've described above, so that you can prioritize the sections that help you address the most urgent challenges you're seeing in your school or system.

All students and families have the resources they need to meaningfully engage in school, whether it's in person or not.

If you found that you need to make improvements around....	...consider using these resources...
<p>Access to a device (if any of your students are or may be virtual): 100% of families agree or strongly agree with the statement "My child has access to a desktop, laptop, or tablet." As your system works toward 100% agreement here, monitor any gaps in access to a device between demographic groups (including racial demographic groups, students with IEPs, multi-lingual learners, or students who receive free and reduced lunch).</p> <p>Access to the internet (if any of your students are or may be virtual): 100% of families agree or strongly agree with the statement "My child has Internet access (Wi-Fi connectivity)." As your system works towards 100% agreement here, monitor any gaps in access to the Internet between demographic groups (including racial demographic groups, students with IEPs, multilingual learners, or students who receive free and reduced lunch).</p>	<p>CCSSO Restart and Recovery: System Conditions Guidance Technology Key Actions Overview: Using your survey data, identify individual students and families who are struggling with device or internet access, and build targeted plans to distribute what they need such that all of your students can equitably access synchronous and asynchronous learning.</p>
<p>Access to tech support (if any of your students are or may be virtual): 100% of families agree or strongly agree with the statement "I know who to contact if my child has a problem accessing their online classes or schoolwork." As your system works towards 100% agreement here, monitor any gaps in access to a safe learning space between demographic groups (including racial demographic groups, students with IEPs, multilingual learners, or students who receive free and reduced lunch).</p>	<p>Planning for System Conditions During Reopening: Use this guide to consider what steps you should take first if your system is still having resource access challenges.</p>
<p>Access to safe learning space (if any of your students are or may be virtual): 100% of families agree or strongly agree with the statement "I have access to a safe space where my student can engage in school."</p>	<p>CCSSO Restart and Recovery: System Conditions Guidance Engagement Key Actions Overview: Designate a staff member who is responsible for exploring partnerships with community organizations and local businesses who could provide safe places for students when they are not at school.</p> <p>Virtual Learning Centers Toolkit: Consider how Hamilton County Schools in Tennessee structured their work with community organizations.</p>

If you found that you need to make improvements around....	...consider using these resources...
<p>Attendance: We have at least a 95% daily attendance rate with no discernible gaps in attendance between demographic groups (including racial demographic groups, students with IEPs, multilingual learners, or students who receive free and reduced lunch).</p>	<p>Future Ed and Attendance Works - Attendance Playbook: Smart Strategies for Reducing Chronic Absenteeism in the COVID Era: If you are struggling encouraging or tracking attendance during distance learning, this is a comprehensive resource containing more than two dozen effective, scalable approaches to reducing absenteeism. Attendance Works has also created an implementation guide for those working to use the playbook that maybe be helpful.</p> <p>Strengthening Student Attendance and Assignment Completion: This resource supports schools and systems to create a tiered, relationship-driven approach to supporting student attendance and assignment completion.</p> <p>The Flamboyant Foundation’s Strategies to Engage Unreached Families During COVID-19: This resource supports systems to engage families who have not yet been reached by more traditional family outreach strategies.</p> <p>Bellwether Education’s Missing in the Margins—What Should Leaders Do About These Missing Students?: This resource provies strategies that school systems and policymakers can employ to reach the more than three million missing students who have not experienced any formal education since March.</p>
<p>Student assignment completion: 100% of students complete their assigned work. As your system works towards 100% completion here, monitor any gaps in assignment completion between demographic groups (including racial demographic groups, students with IEPs, multilingual learners, or students who receive free and reduced lunch).</p>	<p>Strengthening Student Attendance and Assignment Completion: This resource supports schools and systems to create a tiered, relationship-driven approach to supporting student attendance and assignment completion.</p> <p>Attendance Works: Strategies for Connecting with Students and Families: If you’re having trouble reaching some students and families regarding their assignment completion (or any other topic), these strategies may be helpful.</p>
<p>Staffing: We have developed a staffing plan that meets the needs of all of our learners, including our multilingual students and our students who have thinking and learning differences, and 100% of our teaching and support positions are filled.</p>	<p>Strategic Staffing During the 2020-21 School Year: This guide contains specific steps school systems can take to ensure they have the staff to continue supporting students during this difficult time.</p>

All students feel like they belong in their school experience.

If you found that you need to make improvements around....	Consider using these resources...
<p>Student belonging: 100% of students feel a sense of belonging. As your system works towards 100% agreement here, monitor any gaps in students' sense of belonging between demographic groups (including racial demographic groups, students with IEPs, multi-lingual learners, or students who receive free and reduced lunch).</p>	<p>CCSSO Restart and Recovery Wellbeing and Connection Guidance Student Wellbeing and Connection Key Actions: This comprehensive guidance outlines how to plan for, launch, and execute an approach to ensuring that students feel as if they belong and are connected to school. If this guidance feels too long, consider using Planning for Wellbeing and Connection: Where Do I Start? to support your efforts to address gaps in students' sense of belonging.</p> <p>Belonging Now: What It Takes to Create the Conditions for Belonging: This panel features strategies and ideas to increase student belonging from five non-profit organizations and school systems who have ensured that they create belonging-rich environments during the uncertain time facing students, given the reckoning with our country's history of systemic racism and the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Sample Transitional Lesson Plans: Though school has already started, the transitional lesson plans that Providence Public Schools and TNTP developed together can still support you in thinking through how to create classroom-level conditions for belonging.</p> <p>Greater Good Magazine's How to Teach Online So All Students Feel Like They Belong: This article describes how teachers can create an identify-safe classroom that fosters a sense of belonging.</p> <p>Stress and the Brain: Turnaround for Children has produced this resource to support your educators to understand how stress (which many students are experiencing in this uncertain school year) has an impact on the developing brain.</p> <p>Building Trauma-Sensitive Schools: The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments has a set of trainings on how to build trauma-sensitive schools and experiences for students.</p>

All students and families are treated as authentic partners.

If you found that you need to make improvements around....	Consider using these resources...
<p>Authentic partnership: 100% of families have been contacted by their child’s teacher at least once per quarter. As your system works towards 100% contact here, monitor any gaps in contact between demographic groups (including racial demographic groups, students with IEPs, multi-lingual learners, or students who receive free and reduced lunch).</p>	<p>The Flamboyant Foundation’s Strategies to Engage Unreached Families During COVID-19: This resource supports systems to engage families who have not yet been reached by more traditional family outreach strategies. As you consider how to use the data you’ve collected here, prioritize outreach to families of students who have poor attendance and/or are not completing assignments at a high rate.</p> <p>Bellwether Education’s Missing in the Margins—What Should Leaders Do About These Missing Students?: This resource provides strategies that school systems and policymakers can employ to reach the more than three million missing students who have not experienced any formal education since March.</p> <p>Stakeholder Feedback Reflection and Planning Guide: This resource will support you in being transparent with what you learned from stakeholder surveys so that you can demonstrate your commitment to making improvements based on what you’ve learned from your families and students.</p>
<p>Authentic partnership: 100% of families report that they have what they need to connect and share feedback with your staff. As your system works towards 100% agreement here, monitor any gaps in students’ and families’ sense of authentic partnership between demographic groups (including racial demographic groups, students with IEPs, multi-lingual learners, or students who receive free and reduced lunch).</p>	<p>Stakeholder Feedback Reflection and Planning Guide: This resource will support you in being transparent with what you learned from stakeholder surveys so that you can demonstrate your commitment to making improvements based on what you’ve learned from your families and students.</p>

If you found that you need to make improvements around...

Consider using these resources...

Authentic partnership: 100% of families agree that their students' experience is resulting in significant learning this year. As your system works towards 100% agreement here, monitor any gaps in students' and families' sense of authentic partnership between demographic groups (including racial demographic groups, students with IEPs, multi-lingual learners, or students who receive free and reduced lunch).

[The Family Insights Toolkit: Strategies for Effectively Developing Family-School Partnerships in the COVID-19 Era and Beyond](#): This toolkit details how you could partner with families to support student learning.

[CCSSO Restart and Recovery Academics—Details on Research-Based Engagement Strategies](#): If students or families share that their experiences are not resulting in learning, consider how you might support your teachers to improve student engagement.

[Stakeholder Feedback Reflection and Planning Guide](#): This resource will support you in being transparent with what you learned from stakeholder surveys so that you can demonstrate your commitment to making improvements based on what you've learned from your families and students.

[Partnering with Families Virtually](#): This resource will support you to consider how you might improve your relationships with your student's families so that you can demonstrate your commitment to their students' learning.