

LEARNING

ACCELERATION GUIDE

Planning for Acceleration in the 2020-
2021 School Year

April 2020



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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced schools across the country to confront unprecedented challenges. Teachers, principals, and school support staff are doing heroic work to offer stability for students and families during this crisis by providing meals, home learning resources, and online instruction.

But the longer schools remain closed—likely through the end of the academic year in most states—the higher the stakes become for next school year. A [recent study](#)¹ predicted that students will experience a learning loss of 30 percent in reading and 50 percent in math as a result of the crisis. Left unchecked, it's an academic setback that could derail the futures even of students who were previously on grade level—and would be disastrous for students who were already behind.

The typical approach to remediation—providing work better suited for earlier grades—won't come close to catching students up and will likely compound the problem. In our recent study, [The Opportunity Myth](#),² we found this approach of “meeting students where they are,” though well intentioned, practically guarantees they'll lose more academic ground and reinforces misguided beliefs that some students can't do grade-level work. The students stuck in this vicious cycle are disproportionately the most vulnerable: students of color, from low-income families, with special needs, or learning English.

In other words, doubling down on current strategies for catching students up will only widen opportunity and achievement gaps. Schools need to be ready on the first day back with a fundamentally different strategy for diagnosing lost learning and putting every student on a fast track back to grade level—a strategy designed to accelerate their exposure to grade-appropriate work, not delay it.

Asking schools to make such a dramatic shift would be hard enough even under the best circumstances. But on top of the academic challenges students face, nearly all will be coping with trauma from extended social isolation, the loss of loved ones, or increased poverty and economic instability. Principals and teachers have endured similar trauma. There may be an ongoing and unpredictable need to increase social distancing. And a looming recession is threatening education budgets at a time when teachers will need more support and more time to adjust their instruction to a new reality.

Addressing these challenges will require a new level of focus on proven strategies to accelerate student learning. The alternatives—like going back to “business as usual” approaches to teaching and learning in the face of massive learning loss, or ramping up existing remediation strategies guaranteed to make things worse—are unthinkable. And imperfect attempts to accelerate learning back to grade level will create far better school experiences for many students than what they received before the crisis.

The key is doing the right planning for the new school year, right now.

We've created the following guidance to help school and district stakeholders responsible for that planning, organized around a few key questions:

1. **How do we create a plan to accelerate student learning?**
2. **How do we accelerate student learning in the next two years?**
3. **What other challenges should we be anticipating as we plan to accelerate student learning?**

¹ https://www.nwea.org/content/uploads/2020/04/KAP5122-Collaborative-Brief_Covid19-Slide-APR20_FW.pdf.

² <https://opportunitymyth.tntp.org/>.

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 get back to grade level? We don't mean ignoring social/emotional or other non-academic needs; addressing those are core to setting students up for success. But more than anything else, you should prioritize accelerating students' learning by accelerating their exposure to grade-appropriate content—so that every student can get back to grade level. It won't happen in a single year, but if you don't set the goal and build a strategy around it, it won't happen at all.

Address inequities head-on.

Losing so much of this school year has likely exacerbated existing inequities and opportunity gaps in your system. Communicate about that openly and ensure that your plan for restarting school accounts for the academic and social/emotional supports students will need.

Support and assume the best of 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 in your decision making as you plan for reopening, and ensure that you have a strong plan to provide training and support for your teachers and school leaders.

Communicate clearly.

Your families and staff might still feel overwhelmed by at-home learning, so as you think about how to prepare for next year, make sure your decisions are as clear and simple as possible. You'll also want to share how decisions have been made and who was consulted in making those decisions.

The sections of this document that follow will help you answer these guiding questions and assemble the people, information, and processes needed to plan for the 2020-21 school year. This document will likely be most helpful for district or system-level staff members.

How do we create a plan to accelerate student learning?

Schools and systems are pushing the limits of their capacity just to provide for students' basic needs during extended closures, so it may seem difficult to even imagine planning for reopening. But planning to accelerate student learning will be more difficult than planning for any "normal" school year—which is why it's so important to start the process as soon as possible, engaging the members of your community (including students, teachers, and families) your planning will impact the most.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Assemble a small, diverse acceleration planning team** for a series of planning sessions.
2. **Plan for several potential instructional delivery scenarios** in the 2020-2021 school year.
3. **Assemble an advisory committee** that will offer your acceleration team student, teacher, leader, and family perspectives about the choices and decisions you are making.
4. **Prioritize concretely planning to accelerate student learning** across the course of the next school year.
5. **Answer key questions** you'll need to begin planning for reopening.
6. **Start with information you already have** to answer key questions.
7. **Then, collect any additional information** that you need but don't already have.
8. **Identify challenges and opportunities**—three to five each—that your team will need to address.

To plan for reopening schools as effectively as possible, you'll want to pull together a small, diverse acceleration planning team for a series of planning sessions.

The core planning team will focus on creating a strong plan to accelerate student learning, providing the resources and supports teachers and school leaders will need to help students access grade-appropriate assignments. You should set the expectation that they will spend at least half their time focused on preparing to launch school next year. (This might mean taking some at-home learning responsibilities off these staff members' plates.)



Getting Started: [Considerations for Assembling Your Acceleration Planning Team](#)

Alongside your operational team, your acceleration team will need to plan for a few potential instructional delivery scenarios in the 2020-2021 school year.

It's possible that school will occur in at least four different ways next school year, given that [epidemiologists believe there may be continuing waves of COVID-19 infections until a vaccine becomes available](#).³ Your operational team should collaborate closely with your academic team to plan for the following possibilities: (1) the school year needs to start virtually; (2) the school year needs to start with staggered schedules, to accommodate social distancing

³ Strazewski, L. What's ahead on COVID-19? Expert offers forecast for summer, fall. Retrieved 22 April 2020 from <https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/public-health/what-s-ahead-covid-19-expert-offers-forecast-summer-fall>.

requirements; (3) the school year includes rolling closures as a result of the second wave of COVID-19; and (4) the school year starts as it historically has.

In all these cases, you'll want to prioritize accelerating student learning, so the content planning your team focuses on will be applicable no matter what. However, the mechanism of delivery (at-home learning, staggered in-person schedules, etc.) might look different—so your district will need clear expectations for principals, teachers, and other school staff in each of these scenarios, and you'll need to communicate your high-level plan for each scenario to all stakeholders. Right now is your chance to plan for these possibilities, so take advantage of the time and ensure your acceleration team is collaborating with your operational team to create a strong game plan.



Getting Started: [Tips for Planning Additional At-Home Learning](#)

Your acceleration team should have an advisory committee that will offer student, teacher, leader, and family perspectives about the choices and decisions you are making.

Your advisory group should include a few diverse students, teachers, family members, and school leaders who can share their own goals for the next school year to influence your goal-setting, authentically collaborate on the acceleration plan and next steps you're taking, and share thoughts about the most effective ways to communicate with your community. (To see more about the pillars of community engagement you should rely on as you engage this advisory committee, read [here](#).⁴)

Once you've established the team, they should prioritize concretely planning to accelerate student learning across the course of the next school year.

We've laid out a potential monthly scope and sequence for this team's work, but you should adjust this according to your system's calendar and the work you've already completed.



Getting Started: [Acceleration Planning Sample Scope and Sequence](#)

Once your team is convened, ensure that you collectively answer key questions you'll need to begin planning for reopening.

Your acceleration planning team should be able to answer some key questions about how stakeholders are experiencing the current period of at-home learning so that you can anticipate what will be needed for the new school year:

Basic needs: Have students' and families' basic needs (like food, housing, and childcare) been met during the pandemic?

Student learning: Have students and their families had the resources and support they needed to continue learning?

⁴ <https://tntp.org/walking-together/story/Introduction>

Connectedness: Do students and their families feel connected to your school community? Do teachers feel connected to their schools?

Communication and expectations: Do students, families, and your staff feel communication and expectations have been clear while schools have been closed?

Future planning: What do students, families, and your staff say they need to be ready for restarting school?

To answer these questions, start with information you have already collected.

You might already have some of this information through interactions you're having with students and their caretakers right now. Maybe you've given a survey to families about their access to food or technology. Maybe your team has had conversations with families and teachers about how distance learning is going. Start with what you know to generate a detailed list of opportunities you see and challenges that you are facing as you return to school.

Then, collect information you need that you don't already have.

In some cases, you might realize through a series of conversations with your planning team that you need a deeper understanding of a particular opportunity or challenge—or even a more general understanding of the experiences that your students, families, and teachers are having right now. If that is the case, consider collecting additional information to inform your team's planning.



Getting Started: Ideas for Collecting Additional Information

Settle on the list of three to five significant opportunities to capitalize on and three to five significant challenges your team will need to address as you create your reopening plan.

Your planning team will need a clear understanding of these most important strengths and challenges as you build your plan. Think about how to capitalize on the wins you experienced during at-home learning. For example, did students share that it felt good to have a greater opportunity to autonomously drive their learning? If they did, consider how you could build on that and provide even more opportunities for students to be autonomous during the school year.

How do we accelerate student learning in the next two years?

As you work to accelerate student learning, keep in mind:

Accelerated learning and cultural, social, and emotional responsiveness are not mutually exclusive.

Learning doesn't happen at the expense of responsive teaching, or vice-versa. The truth is that a core part of strong instruction is responding to the cultural, social and emotional needs of students. If instructional practices leave students feeling displaced, invisible, or unsafe, accelerated learning can't happen. Likewise, trauma-informed instruction and cultural, social, and emotional responsiveness do not require forfeiting strong, grade-level-aligned instruction.

Accelerated learning and strong instruction are interdependent.

You can't accelerate learning with poor instructional practices in place, and you can't have strong instruction if you cannot effectively support unfinished learning. Therefore, it is important to develop your leaders and teachers on the concepts and best practices of accelerated learning *and* strong instruction.

Accelerated learning and strong instruction should not cause further trauma.

Educators have the potential to cause trauma. We can cause additional trauma to students by denying them access to a high-quality education, and we can cause trauma by putting systems and structures in place that prevent students from accessing high-quality instruction. We must consistently evaluate and understand the consequences that our instructional decisions have for the children we serve and the adults that support them.

It's important that we help leaders and teachers understand these concepts, so that they are better equipped to incorporate them into their practice. The practices of accelerated learning should deepen your system's or school's community, not erode it—because the core of this work is about understanding the collective and individual needs of students and acting on them accordingly.

Many students—especially those who have not historically had access to grade-appropriate assignments, strong instruction, or deep engagement—will need to fit even more than a year of learning into a single school year to make up for the learning they've lost. That lost learning includes not just the skills they'll need to access grade-level material, but content knowledge. As Natalie Wexler notes in her recent book, *The Knowledge Gap*, typical approaches to remediation focus more on practicing skills than building knowledge, even though students' prior knowledge is the primary driver of how well they can comprehend grade-level texts.

To accelerate students' progress, system leaders and educators need to identify exactly what unfinished learning needs to be addressed, when, and how. We recommend 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.

This may feel like a radically different approach for some of your teachers and leaders. And in many ways, it is. Schools typically address gaps in content knowledge or proficiency by engaging in some form of remediation (or reteaching) around skills from previous years. While well intentioned, this approach often means that students who fell behind never encounter the work of their grade, instead remaining trapped in a cycle of low-quality or below-grade level work.

Accelerated learning, on the other hand, 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.

These “just in time” scaffolds address the necessary content knowledge and skills students need to engage in the most immediate work of the grade: the complex text they're reading, the math unit they're studying, the science experiment they're conducting, or the historic time period they're analyzing. While the goal here is to address unfinished learning, these concepts pull heavily from what we know about the science of learning. Many of the ideas and strategies outlined below adhere to the principles of *interleaving*, *spaced practice*, and *retrieval practice*, all highly effective, evidence-based strategies that help individuals learn more efficiently and retain information longer. To support your teachers and leaders, you'll want to do the following:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACCELERATING STUDENT LEARNING

1. **Prioritize the most critical prerequisite skills and knowledge** for each subject area and grade level *now*.
2. **Plan your approach to diagnosing students' unfinished learning** in that prerequisite content knowledge and those prerequisite skills.
3. **Adapt your scope and sequence/pacing guidance** for each subject area and grade level to reflect where teachers might need to provide acceleration support.
4. **Train your teachers and leaders** to diagnose students' unfinished learning and provide acceleration support.
5. **Monitor your students' progress** on grade-appropriate assignments and adjust your supports for teachers and leaders based on student results.

Prioritize the most critical prerequisite skills and content knowledge for each subject area and grade level *now*.

Addressing unfinished learning begins with:

- **Understanding the demands of grade-level materials and content.** To begin this process, study the standards alongside year-long scopes and sequences to understand what standards and topics will be covered when, how students will apply their knowledge of the standards, and how they will show that knowledge. This means looking closely at the standards, the topics, and the tasks within a unit and across the year.
- **Identifying the most critical prerequisite skills and content knowledge students will need** to access that grade level content when they encounter it throughout the year.

For example, a ninth-grade English Language Arts teacher might look across the year and note that students will be reading Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* in the fall. The teacher could give students an easier text to read and remove this book from the year-long sequence, out of fear that students are too far behind to tackle such a complex text at the beginning of the year.

Instead of removing the text and opting for something of lesser value, the teacher could note that tackling this text requires ready-made scaffolds for building students' content knowledge about the topics and time period covered in *Raisin*. Additionally, because Hansberry obscures concepts like the Great Migration and redlining in rich figurative language, the teacher might identify understanding the purpose and meaning of figurative language as a critical

prerequisite skill for tackling this complex text. Here we are thinking about the prerequisite knowledge that students need by considering the techniques the author uses to convey key ideas, along with the intentional topical knowledge that the curriculum seeks to build.

While engaging in complex texts is crucial, it is not the only component of strong literacy instruction. Foundational skills instruction (K-2) and writing are also key elements. As always, we want to make sure students are writing about what they are reading. We'll tackle an approach to foundational skills in the section below, as it requires systematic assessments of student proficiency.

Now let's imagine that you're a math teacher or someone who supports mathematics in a system. The natural inclination here might be to make room for reteaching last year's missed units by wholly eliminating any on-grade level units focused on "additional standards" and then, once the "reteach" portion of the year is complete, turning your attention to units focused on the "major work of the grade." But we know [this approach did not lead to student growth in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina](#).⁵

Instead, you should identify the most important skills and concepts of each unit of study or standard. For example, if you're a seventh-grade teacher who knows your sixth-graders missed their Statistics and Probability Unit, look to the seventh-grade Statistics and Probability Unit as a mechanism for recovering missed learning. You'd see that the most important sixth-grade skill for students to recover is their understanding of "measures of center such as mean" because, in seventh grade, students "use measures of center to draw inferences about a random sample." Therefore, doing a multi-week sixth-grade Statistics Unit isn't necessary. The teacher (and students) may only need one or two lessons on this sixth-grade concept to be ready to tackle the work of their grade.

We've just highlighted an example from seventh grade that covers an "additional standard" to show how those units can still be done, but even "major work of the grade" requires this thoughtful planning. For example, third-grade students might have missed their unit on fractions because these concepts often come at the end of the year. Understanding fractions is "major work" and a critical concept for students, but repeating the entire third-grade unit isn't necessary. Teachers could focus more narrowly on the third-grade fraction concepts related to understanding what fractions are (3.NF.A.1 and 3.NF.A.2) because that is really what is carried forward in fourth grade. Again, a fourth grade teacher could ground a unit in one to two lessons on understanding fractions as a quantity and understanding equivalence with common denominators or common numerators (third grade content) before moving to the major work of fourth grade.

Identifying prerequisite skills can begin now and continue throughout the summer. This kind of work is best done collaboratively, ensuring that your curriculum and instruction team works with your district-level teams who focus on serving English Language Learners and students with IEPs. This can reduce potential blind spots by highlighting unique needs of special populations.

For example, multi-lingual learners or students receiving special education services may need an additional layer of support. Teams should reserve dedicated time to think through additional prerequisite content knowledge or skills for these populations as well. In addition to working collaboratively, there are tools that can help teachers with this process. In math for example, tools like [standards' focus by grade level guidance](#)⁶ and the [coherence map](#)⁷ can help educators better understand the connection between standards and concepts.

⁵ Hill, P. What post-Katrina New Orleans can teach schools about addressing COVID learning losses. Retrieved 27 April 2020 from: <https://www.crpe.org/thelens/what-post-katrina-new-orleans-can-teach-schools-about-addressing-covid-learning-losses>.

⁶ <https://achievethecore.org/category/774/mathematics-focus-by-grade-level>.

⁷ <https://achievethecore.org/coherence-map/>.

Plan your approach to diagnosing students' unfinished learning for the prioritized prerequisite content knowledge and skills.

Diagnosing the learning your students might need to finish starts with getting teachers quick information on the size of the learning gaps they're facing. But we also know that many diagnostics do not provide particularly granular information about those learning gaps. Your system has done the work to identify the most important content knowledge and skills your students will need in their current grade level, so you should use that thinking to plan your approach to diagnosing student learning. Systems should replace the reading and math tests that were cancelled this spring with a no-stakes diagnostic assessment that gives them quick, accessible information about what their students know about their prioritized content knowledge and skills—and then leverage the coherence and clarity of rigorous academic standards to determine, given where students are starting, how they'll finish the most important unfinished learning.



Getting Started: [Tips for Diagnosing Unfinished Learning](#)

Adapt your scope and sequence/pacing guidance for each subject area and grade level to reflect where teachers might need to provide acceleration support.

You should adjust your instructional materials and guidance for teachers *now* to support them in thinking about how they can address unfinished learning without an extended period of remedial content at the start of the school year. Right now, you can consider the pacing guidance that you provide, along with opportunities for teachers to embed diagnostics of unfinished learning in your district's scope and sequence.



Getting Started: [Adapting Your Scope and Sequence / Pacing Guidance](#)

Train your teachers and leaders to diagnose students' unfinished learning and provide acceleration support.

Once you have articulated your strategy, you'll need to introduce it to your teachers and leaders, ensuring that they understand the knowledge and skills they should prioritize in their grade level and subject area, your approach to diagnosing unfinished learning, and the [strategies they should use to help students engage in grade-level content](#).⁸

Plan your training content. You'll likely need to spend a few days setting teachers up to implement your acceleration plan—though you'll certainly also spend your teacher professional learning time on supports around social and emotional learning, potential training for at-home learning, and other aspects of reopening. Consider a scope and sequence like [this one](#).⁹ Build in ways to assess whether the learning is taking place and ensure that you plan to identify any additional support that's needed.

Train your facilitators. To set teachers and leaders up to implement your plan, you'll have to ensure that facilitators are well-prepared. Consider running a "facilitator boot camp" where your facilitators can participate in the sessions as if they were attendees, then practice key parts of their facilitation.

Train your teachers and leaders. After you've finalized your content and trained your facilitators, you should be ready to execute your training.

⁸ <https://tntp.org/student-experience-toolkit/view/scaffolding-strategies>.

⁹ https://tntp.org/assets/documents/Accelerating_Student_Learning_Sample_Scope_and_Sequence_for_Teacher_Training.pdf.

Leverage your coaches and school leaders to support teachers' work in accelerating student learning. Align your ongoing coaching supports to the key objectives of your trainings by ensuring that instructional leaders and support staff are equipped to further model and support [instructional strategies that accelerate student learning](#).¹⁰ Additionally, build in opportunities throughout the school year to ensure that all educators in your system believe that all students, regardless of their background or identity, can meet the demands of rigorous standards. Consider using a reflection protocol like the one found [here](#),¹¹ which will support your teachers in thinking through what students successfully accomplish as they work to engage in rigorous content.

Monitor your students' progress on grade-appropriate assignments and adjust your supports for teachers and leaders based on student results.

Throughout the school year, you should monitor whether your students are mastering grade-level content, and whether your teachers and leaders are executing your strategy. We have detailed [how you might want to monitor students' access to *The Opportunity Myth's* four resources](#) in our Student Experience Toolkit.¹²

¹⁰ <https://tntp.org/student-experience-toolkit/view/scaffolding-strategies>.

¹¹ <https://tntp.org/student-experience-toolkit/view/good-to-great-reflection-guide>.

¹² <https://tntp.org/student-experience-toolkit/view/student-experience-assessment-guide>.

What other challenges should we anticipate as we plan to accelerate student learning?

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students goes far beyond academics, so your acceleration team should be working with other teams in your system.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDRESSING OTHER CHALLENGES

1. **Ensure that you are fully staffed** for the start of the 2020-2021 school year.
2. **Develop a social and emotional responsiveness strategy** that supports all your students in restarting school and considers the trauma many have experienced.
3. **Ensure that you have a strong plan to communicate with all of your stakeholders.**
4. **Develop a plan to shift to strong at-home learning rapidly**, using what you've learned in this round of at-home learning to improve your approach for the future.

Ensure that you are fully staffed for the start of the 2020-2021 school year.

Consider referencing our [Virtual Talent Guide](#)¹³ as your team considers the steps you need to take to ensure you have diverse, effective teachers and leaders.

Develop a social and emotional responsiveness strategy that considers the trauma many have experienced and supports all your students in restarting school.

Though it's not our core expertise, we do have some starter ideas for developing this strategy. We know that [students from historically marginalized groups often worry about whether people who share their background are accepted by their peers and teachers](#),¹⁴ and missing months of school has the potential to exacerbate those inequities among students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, English language learners, and students who receive special education supports. To begin planning social and emotional supports for students, you'll want to develop a social and emotional learning strategy that helps all your students as they come back to school.



Getting Started: [Tips for Addressing Social and Emotional Learning Needs](#)

¹³ https://tntp.org/assets/documents/Virtual_Talent_Guide-TNTP.pdf.

¹⁴ Romero, C. What we know about belonging from scientific research. Retrieved 17 April 2020 from <http://mindsetscholarsnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/What-We-Know-About-Belonging.pdf>.

Develop a plan to shift to strong at-home learning rapidly, using what you've learned in this round of at-home learning to improve your approach for the future.

As scary as it feels right now, [epidemiologists predict a second wave of COVID-19 in the fall](#),¹⁵ with continuing waves potentially occurring until we have a vaccine. It's also possible that another natural disaster or pandemic could occur. Given that, preparation for the fall should include planning to quickly and effectively transition to at-home learning.



Getting Started: [Tips for Planning Additional At-Home Learning](#)

Ensure that you have a strong plan to communicate with all of your stakeholders.

Implementing your reopening plans effectively requires effective communication. You'll need to anticipate the questions and concerns of your key stakeholders, and plan to respond to them proactively, clearly, and empathetically.



Getting Started: [Tips for Communicating with Stakeholders](#)

¹⁵ Strazewski, L. What's ahead on COVID-19? Expert offers forecast for summer, fall. Retrieved 22 April 2020 from <https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/public-health/what-s-ahead-covid-19-expert-offers-forecast-summer-fall>.

Appendix

Considerations for Assembling Your Acceleration Team

This acceleration team should include stakeholders who can make decisions about your academic strategy, update your curricular resources, and design trainings for your teachers and leaders. This might include staff members like:

- Your Chief Academic Officer, who is the leader and decision maker in this group.
- At least one district staff member from your curriculum and instruction team, preferably your content leads for the core content areas. These staff members will be responsible for prioritizing critical prerequisite knowledge and skills and will ultimately be responsible for updating your district’s curriculum guidance for teachers.
- A district staff member from your special education team. This staff member will help the curriculum and instruction team update your curriculum guidance, so that changes support students with diverse learning needs.
- A district staff member from your English Learner team. This staff member will help the curriculum and instruction team update your curriculum guidance, ensuring that changes support English Language Learners.
- A district staff member from your assessment or research team, who will be responsible for ensuring that you are able to share data with teachers, school leaders, and district leaders rapidly after your staff conduct diagnostics.
- A representative from your professional development or instructional coaching team, who will lead planning the training that teachers will need to effectively accelerate student learning.
- A principal manager, who will lead planning the training that school leaders will need to effectively support teachers to accelerate student learning.

This team should work closely with other teams across the district, like the team focused on planning for students’ social and emotional needs or the team focused on staffing your schools with teachers and leaders. (For more about other considerations, consult the [What other challenges should we anticipate as we plan to accelerate student learning?](#) section.) Your team should also engage your advisory committee, which should include student, family, teacher, and leader perspectives. (For more about putting together your advisory committee, reference the [Your acceleration team should have an advisory committee that will offer student, teacher, leader, and family perspectives about the choices and decisions you are making](#) section.)

Acceleration Planning: Sample Scope and Sequence

MONTH	KEY PRIORITIES
May	<p>Establish acceleration planning structures, team and set expectations for their work. As you shift to planning for next year, you’ll want to assemble a core team to support this planning process.</p> <p>Understand the current state of students’ learning. Your acceleration team will want to deeply understand the current state of students’ learning considering both data from at-home learning and in-school learning from the 2019-2020 school year. (For ideas you should consider, click here.)</p> <p>Set your acceleration vision and goals. Make sure your team is working toward a plan to give every student, regardless of their identity or background, access to <i>The Opportunity Myth’s</i> four resources (grade-appropriate assignments, strong instruction, deep engagement, and teachers with high expectations), as well as a plan to monitor and adjust course throughout the year.</p> <p>Develop a workplan for the acceleration team’s work. Plan when you’ll draft, review, and finalize guidance around diagnosing students, updates to your curricular scope & sequences, and teacher and leader training to accelerate student learning.</p>
June	<p>Prioritize the most critical prerequisite skills and content knowledge for each subject area and grade level. To determine how to address unfinished learning, you’ll need to prioritize the most important content knowledge and skills from previous years that students need to be successful in their current grade. (Read more here.)</p>

MONTH	KEY PRIORITIES
	<p>Draft and finalize your guidance for how teachers should diagnose students’ unfinished learning. Ensure that teachers diagnose only the most critical potential learning gaps in their grade level and subject area. (Read more here.)</p> <p>Begin making updates to your district’s pacing guides or scope and sequence that reflect your acceleration plan. (Read more here.)</p> <p>Begin your teacher and leader training plan to support your staff to accelerate student learning (rather than remediate it). (Read more here.)</p>
July	<p>Finish the updates to your district’s pacing guides or scope and sequences. Then do a gut check of your plan against the student and teacher data you analyzed in May, verifying that you’ve focused on building in the most important content knowledge and skills students will need to master grade-level standards.</p> <p>Finalize your “accelerate student learning” training plan and session content for teachers and leaders.</p>
August	<p>Train your “accelerate student learning” facilitators.</p> <p>Deliver your “accelerate student learning” training to teachers and leaders.</p>
September	<p>Evaluate how your plan to accelerate student learning is going and make adjustments as you need to. (Read more here.)</p>

Ideas for Collecting Additional Information

Use these tips for collecting information that you don’t already have but that can inform your team’s planning:

Administer a survey to your stakeholders to learn more about their current needs and their perspective about your distance learning work. If you aren’t sure how your students, families, or staff are experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic, you should ask them. You can use the questions from [TNTP’s COVID-19 Support Survey](#)¹⁶ to gather a baseline within your community that will help you determine your biggest opportunities and challenges. Also ask your teachers where they left in-person learning in your curricular scope and sequence for this past year, as well as which content they covered virtually, if you don’t already know.

Conduct [virtual focus groups](#)¹⁷ **with your students.** To more deeply understand how students have experienced their time away from school, conduct a few virtual focus groups, ensuring that you speak to a diverse set of students in your district. Ask students how they have experienced at-home learning and how their connection to their peers and their school community has held up.

Look at student participation in at-home learning and student work on key academic assignments. Focus on understanding the state of student learning on specific third and fourth quarter academic content. As described in the [Tips for Diagnosing Unfinished Learning](#), prioritize a few assignments that you ask all students to complete so that you can gauge students’ mastery of key academic content in the third and fourth quarters, asking students to complete the assignments within the system you are using for at-home learning. (If you aren’t using an online system, ask students to text pictures of their completed work or mail their completed work to their teachers, providing envelopes and stamps to students as needed). The selected assignments should allow next year’s teachers to see whether students are able to read grade-level texts and write a response to them in your humanities or English Language Arts courses—and in mathematics, the selected assignments should represent whether students have

¹⁶ <https://tntp.org/student-experience-toolkit/view/covid-19-support-survey-questions>.

¹⁷ https://tntp.org/assets/documents/COVID-19_Student_Focus_Group_Questions.pdf.

successfully mastered [the major work of the grade](#).¹⁸ Additionally, consider your participation rates in distance learning. Have students been able to participate in the at-home learning that you offered?

Work with your data analytics team to consider other historic data and publicly available information that might be helpful to identify inequitable experiences or outcomes in your student population. You likely have interim assessment data that you could consider as you think about the learning trajectory your students were on in the 2019-20 school year. There's also publicly available information that could help you identify which of your students and their families are most vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as data about health outcomes or food deserts in your community. Your data analytics team can help you identify individual students or school communities likely to have been hit hardest by the pandemic by analyzing data that might feel a bit outside their typical academic data.

Tips for Diagnosing Unfinished Learning

We recommend that schools and districts prioritize gathering information about students' unfinished learning by:

Using diagnostics from high-quality adopted materials as often as possible. Designing assessments is truly challenging, so using the diagnostic assessment provided by the high-quality instructional materials you've adopted is the best way to diagnose gaps that students might have in their learning.

Prioritizing which unfinished learning truly merits diagnosing. If you have not already adopted high-quality instructional materials, you might need to provide even more detailed guidance to your teachers about their approach to diagnosing unfinished learning. 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](#)¹⁹) and reading fluency (using [this guidance](#)²⁰). 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](#)²¹).
- **Elementary mathematics:** Rather than giving one significant diagnostic assessment up front, consider using the Achieve the Core [coherence map](#)²² 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](#).²³
- **Secondary English Language Arts:** Ensure that teachers diagnose students' reading fluency (using [this guidance](#)²⁴). 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](#).²⁵
- **Secondary mathematics:** Rather than giving one significant diagnostic assessment up front, consider using the Achieve the Core [coherence map](#)²⁶ 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](#).²⁷

¹⁸ <https://achievethecore.org/category/774/mathematics-focus-by-grade-level>.

¹⁹ <https://dibels.uoregon.edu/>.

²⁰ <https://achievethecore.org/aligned/determining-reading-fluency/>.

²¹ <https://achievethecore.org/page/991/mrs-mack-by-patricia-polacco-mini-assessment>.

²² <https://achievethecore.org/page/1118/coherence-map>.

²³ <https://achievethecore.org/category/1020/mathematics-assessments>.

²⁴ <https://achievethecore.org/aligned/determining-reading-fluency/>.

²⁵ <https://achievethecore.org/page/991/mrs-mack-by-patricia-polacco-mini-assessment>.

²⁶ <https://achievethecore.org/page/1118/coherence-map>.

²⁷ <https://achievethecore.org/category/1020/mathematics-assessments>.

You should also consider which data from this past school year should be accessible to next year's teachers. For example, you would want all teachers to have access to their students' interim assessment data and WIDA ACCESS assessment results, as applicable.

Plan to spend no more than a few hours administering diagnostics to each individual student. Most diagnostics do not provide exceptionally granular data on students' needs, even if you choose to spend days and days on them.

Consider gathering data during at-home learning to support teachers in thinking through what students might need. Identify a few key grade-appropriate assignments that every student should complete and turn in during at-home learning, then capture systematic feedback on what grade-level content individual students have or have not mastered. If you've decided not to assign grades during at-home learning, you could still provide a rubric that teachers could use for this purpose. Teachers of this year's students can evaluate that assignment now, providing students who are struggling with key grade-level competencies some additional support while also providing next year's teacher crucial information on what an individual student has or has not mastered.

Tips For Adapting Your Scope and Sequence / Pacing Guidance

Do not plan to address unfinished learning through "nine weeks of remediation" or another extended period of remedial content for students. It's tempting to assume that students will need you to deliver the entire scope of content that they missed; however, we know that students spending significant time in below-grade-level content does not lead to the grade-level learning we aspire to see for our students. Instead, use the prioritized approach you previously developed to support your teachers in identifying which unfinished learning they should focus on.

Build the calendar you need to help students reach the demands of grade-level standards. You might need to extend your school day or year to provide students the time they need to master this year's grade-level standards. You should also ensure that all your schools have the resources, materials, and schedule they need to provide a multi-tiered system of support for students who might need additional remediation outside their Tier 1 classes.

Predict what unfinished learning will look like when students come back to school, then update your teacher-facing resources. In many subjects across grade levels, the fourth quarter is focused on retaining previously-taught content to achieve transfer—so for many students, unfinished learning may mean they have some conceptual knowledge of skills, ideas and content, but lack fluency, application, automaticity, and the ability to transfer mastered knowledge into new situations/scenarios. Because of this, interventions in the new school year should likely include light explicit instruction, but heavy doses of interleaving and additional spaced practice so that students can achieve mastery. Update your curriculum maps or other teacher-facing resources with clear guidance for teachers about likely unfinished learning that could be finished "just in time" throughout the year if, in fact, students do struggle with the expected concepts and skills. Find ways to incorporate unfinished learning activities throughout the year where and when they're most appropriate. For example, rather than spending "remediation time" at the beginning of the year filling in gaps fourth grade math students have in their conceptual understanding of fractions, insert a few potential lessons related to building that understanding immediately before lessons where students focus on comparing two fractions, a fourth grade standard. Indicate that those lessons are optional and should be used only in cases where the majority of students in a classroom have not demonstrated that they understand fractions conceptually. In the situation where you have strong, vertically-aligned curricular materials, you might also support teachers in pulling materials from the previous grade's content that wasn't covered to fill in learning gaps. It's likely best to provide systematic support here for teachers in the form of subject- and grade-specific guidance so that they don't have to familiarize themselves with the previous year's curricular materials to make use of them.

Set the expectation that teachers use your provided curricular materials. Teachers often spend a tremendous amount of personal time developing their own lessons, even though evidence suggests teacher-created materials are not as strong as those pulled from high-quality curricular resources. Encourage your teachers to use the curricular materials you provide, and ground your professional learning in supporting them to use those materials well.

Consider how to leverage whole-group remediation to address learning gaps and where targeted intervention may make more sense. It is crucial not to make assumptions about where all students are. Instead, use data to make strategic decisions about students' needs. Some classrooms may need whole-group remediation on content from the previous grade. For example, if an entire second-grade class is missing the spellings for /r/-controlled vowel sounds, that teacher may need to build in practice opportunities for students to build their automaticity with this particular reading foundational skill. However, if it's a small portion of the class, using your intervention block will be a better approach. Depending on what schools have been using for intervention, you may need to retool the content of your intervention block to be more aligned to specific learning gaps and content from the previous grade.

Ensure that your school's systems match your strategy. Your strategy will only work as well as your systems. Do you have a structured intervention block? Do you have a vertical meeting structure set up for your teachers? Do you have a system for reporting and monitoring student performance on the standards you've prioritized? Your schools will need these systems and more to ensure that students master grade-level standards this year, given the challenges they've experienced in the past few months.

Tips for Addressing Social and Emotional Learning Needs

In addition to the tips below, The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) also has a [helpful guide](#)²⁸ for planning for the social and emotional learning needs of students and adults alike.

Consider for which students this transition might be exceptionally challenging. Students who lost family members or friends will still be grieving. Asian-American students in particular may have experienced racist physical or verbal attacks while school was closed, given the misconceptions associated with COVID-19. Students with disabilities who rely on structures and routines; students who have experienced trauma prior to the school closures, like refugee students or students with limited or interrupted formal education; and students who have lost housing or economic security during this transition might particularly struggle to return to school. Additionally, pre-K and younger elementary students might find it difficult to be separated from their parents or siblings after spending so much time with them.

Listen to your students and families in individual transition meetings at the start of school that include the 2019-20 teachers, caregivers, and 2020-21 teachers. Teachers need quick, direct information on the social and emotional needs of each student from at least three sources: the classroom teachers from the prior year, the caregiver who has been with the student during the six-month gap in schooling, and the student themselves. Other teachers or support providers who might deeply know the student (like an ESL counselor or a special education resource teacher) can also add their insights. If individual meetings are not possible, consider a modified caretaker and student intake form that asks specifically about emotional needs as school begins. Keep in mind the following needs:

- **Loss of family and community members.** Many students will return to school having personally experienced loss of family and community members. Students may be in various stages of grief and will have had different levels of support in processing the losses in their communities. In particular, we know that Black and Latinx communities are suffering disproportionately more cases and deaths due to the COVID-19 virus, a compounding effect of the systemic effects of racism playing out in housing, healthcare, education, and workforce discrimination. We should be prepared for Black and Latinx students to have suffered more loss and anxiety.
- **Returning to school after a longer-than-normal break will be challenging.** We can anticipate many of the same social and emotional challenges from students that come with restarting school after the typical summer break, but in this case the break will be longer. This may mean that we should expect longer timelines to get students reacclimated to the rhythms of the school day and the expectations of being a student at school.
- **General anxiety from the end of social distancing.** Students will be returning to school following an extended period of social distancing. There is variability in how students are experiencing social distancing and in the explanations for why social distancing is important. In general, however, most students have probably grown

²⁸ https://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/CASEL_Leveraging-SEL-as-You-Prepare-to-Reopen-and-Renew.pdf.

used to maintaining 6 feet of distance and not gathering in groups larger than 10 people. Schools and teachers should be prepared for a period of transition as students reacclimate to entering a classroom of students, a boisterous cafeteria, or other large gatherings. There will likely be developmental differences in the impact of this on students, with younger students requiring different accommodations than older ones.

- **Experiencing a sudden end of school without the natural transition milestones of the end of year.** Students did not have the opportunity to participate in the normal events and milestones that mark the end of an academic year. Many didn't realize when they said goodbye to teachers and classmates at the end of the day that they wouldn't be returning the next. While some students may be able to reconnect in virtual learning environments with their teachers and classmates, the sudden and abrupt way that schools closed may make restarting school more challenging than usual, especially for younger children. You may need to find ways to help younger students experience some of the closure events that they missed from the spring to help them successfully transition into a new school year.
- **Disconnection as a result of the social separation from peers.** Older children and adolescents who developmentally rely more heavily on peer relationships during stressful times may return to school feeling more disconnected or isolated from peers and potentially depressed. Isolating at home with only close family during a time when pre-teens and teens naturally begin to pull away from family members as their primary means of support may lead to increased tensions with family, leaving pre-teens and teens feeling isolated and alone. These feelings can increase the likelihood of depression and suicidal thoughts.
- **Food insecurity.** Students who rely on schools for breakfast and lunch may have been disconnected from their most stable source of food during the COVID-19 pandemic. While many districts continued to provide meals, it's unclear how many of the students who typically accessed those resources were able to obtain them. Transportation may have prevented students from getting to schools where meals were served and communication about the availability of meals may not have reached the most vulnerable communities. In addition, community food banks, a regular source of food for families with food insecurities, are experiencing higher levels of demand and have less capacity to meet the demands given the requirements of social distancing. This means that students may be returning to school having experienced food shortages and insecurities at home during the pandemic. They will need reassurance about access and availability of food at school.
- **Financial and housing insecurity.** Unemployment is growing daily, and we are uncertain to what extent and how long it will take for the economy to recover following the COVID-19 pandemic. Students may return to the classroom with fears associated with caregivers' loss of employment and loss of housing.
- **Concerns about racism, especially for Asian students.** Asian students may be concerned about perceptions and misconceptions associated with COVID-19 and their peers. Media reports indicate that since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, people of Asian descent have suffered racist physical and verbal attacks. Asian students may be concerned for their physical and emotional safety upon returning to school.
- **Anticipatory grief and anxiety about the safety of caregivers who are essential workers.** Students may enter the school year with caregivers or family members who spent the last six months putting themselves and their family at risk because they needed to work on the front lines as essential employees. Their caregivers or family members may still be working in conditions that increase their and their family's exposure to the COVID-19 virus. The anticipatory grief and long-term state of anxiety about the ongoing potential for exposure will likely create emotional trauma and stress that could manifest itself in different ways in the classroom.

Adopt a social and emotional learning program that will help students restart school. There are a variety of evidence-based programs (including [this one](#)²⁹ and [this one](#)³⁰) that could support students in their return to school, so ensure that you have a team focused on selecting one and training teachers in its implementation.

Set aside more time for the "start of school" acclimation, taking into account the longer, more stressful break. Set time aside in the school calendar to help students restart school, considering the challenges of your most vulnerable students. Support teachers in being clear and intentional about expectations and classroom routines. Post the schedule for the day and stick with it. Give students time and space to get to know each other and get acclimated

²⁹ <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Navigating-Social-and-Emotional-Learning-from-the-Inside-Out.pdf>

³⁰ <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/foundations-for-young-adult-success.aspx>.

to their school community, even if they were members of it before the pandemic—and ensure that you have a plan to build community in your school, using proven approaches like restorative justice or community circles.

Use what you learn in individual transition meetings. Once teachers have information on the social and emotional needs of students, they should consider which of their students need the most intensive support to successfully transition back in to school.

When we can safely come back to school as it's traditionally been, be mindful about group size and help students adjust to being around larger groups of peers. Students are not used to being in large groups, so when you are safely able to transition students back to being in-person at school in the way we have historically, try to create opportunities for them to gradually get used to large groups. Having a school-wide assembly on the first day that public health officials believe that it is safe might be really challenging for many students, so give them time to get used to being in their individual classes before you have them join larger groups.

Consider ways to help students find closure on the 2019-20 school year. Consider holding transition events during the first week of school or prior to the start of school. Students left their classrooms, teachers, and classmates in March thinking they would return in a few weeks. They did not realize their school years were over and when they return in the Fall they will be in new classrooms with new students and teachers. Helping them find closure from the teachers they knew well from the prior year will support them in transitioning into the new year and new teachers.

Discuss your school closure plan in the event that schools must close again due to a second wave of infections. Have a district, school, and classroom plan in place and discuss with students what it will look like if schools should close again. This way, students are prepared and will know what they need to pack up at the end of a day if a sudden order comes down for districts to close again. Preparing students and teachers in advance will ease the transition to at-home learning should the need arise again. (You can read more about this in [Planning for Potential Instructional Delivery Scenarios](#).)

Tips for Planning Additional At-Home Learning

Ask a small number of your staff members to use the [Shifting to At-Home Learning Guide](#)³¹ to take advantage of the planning phase you have now. In most cases during the COVID-19 outbreak in the spring, schools and districts were determining how to shift to at-home learning when kids were already at home. We have a chance to collectively plan for the next time we need to quickly deploy at-home learning, so ask a small number of your staff members to consider what they have learned from this experience, then create an improved plan to reach your goals of ensuring that your students can learn, whether they are in school or at home.

As you build your plan, learn from successes and challenges in this round of at-home learning. Think back to what your team learned from students and stakeholders. What went well? What did students, families, and stakeholders say was a significant challenge for them? Did teachers need more professional learning to execute your at-home learning plan well? Was your at-home learning model one that worked for your families and community? Address those challenges in your current plan, ensuring that students and families are able to have a better learning experience in the event that you need to deploy at-home learning again.

Set clear goals for at-home learning. Your system will set goals for the school year, as you always do. Which of those will be adjusted if you have to move into a prolonged period of at-home learning, and which will stay constant?

Plan your at-home learning logistics now. We've heard from schools and systems that one of the biggest challenges with deploying at-home learning was ensuring that students and families had access to what they would need, like computers, internet, textbooks, or packets of work, depending on the at-home learning model. Ensure that

³¹ https://tntp.org/assets/documents/Shifting_to_At-Home_Learning-TNTP.pdf.

you have a plan for your schools to deploy the resources students would need *before* students leave the school building for the final time in the event of a need to commence at-home learning in the fall.

Consider long-term shifts that you might need to make to support your technology infrastructure. Many students had limited access to technology that made moving to at-home learning on virtual platforms challenging for them. Work with your broader community to propose an approach to ensuring that all students have access to broadband internet and devices over the long-term.

Tips for Communicating with Stakeholders

Be proactive: Brainstorm all the major questions and concerns families, teachers, and other key stakeholders have or might have about your plans. Write answers to the ones you can answer immediately; make sure you have a plan to get answers to the rest. Don't wait until you have answers to mention the questions you know are on stakeholders' minds—acknowledging that you're working on something even when you don't have the answer yet is much better than ignoring the issue altogether in your communications.

Be inclusive: Reflect on which voices you haven't heard in your planning process, especially which populations of students, families, or teachers aren't represented in your planning approach. Find ways to elevate the needs of those who aren't represented or – even better – build a more representative planning team or advisory group.

Be consistent: Decide which channels you'll use to communicate with your key stakeholders (e.g. website, social media, email, text, local media—you should never rely on just one channel for any group); establish a cadence for how you'll use each channel; and stick to the expectations you set. Ensure that everyone who's communicating with stakeholders is working from the same messaging, to avoid people getting conflicting answers from different sources.

Be clear: Use plain, everyday language in your communications; avoid jargon and acronyms. Whenever possible, avoid rolling several major announcements into a single communication—the more information you try to convey at once, the lower the chances your audience processes any of it (you can avoid this situation by planning effectively, as described above). Assume that you'll need to repeat key messages multiple times and on multiple channels before a critical mass of your audience has received it.

Be empathetic: Don't forget to add some humanity to everything you say and write. Acknowledge the challenges and anxieties families, educators, and students are facing during this time. Especially with teachers and school leaders, name explicitly that their jobs will likely be more challenging than ever when schools reopen, that nobody is expecting instant perfection, and that your top priority is providing the support they need to get off to the strongest possible start.

Be open to feedback: Always make it clear how stakeholders can ask questions or raise concerns (e.g. email, phone, a regular survey)—and create a plan to acknowledge and respond to the feedback you receive. Whether it's responding individually to messages, maintaining a rolling page of frequently asked questions on your website, or something else, go out of your way to show that you're listening.