

COVID-19 Resources

Equity Considerations During and After COVID-19 School Closures

As families and school communities navigate long-term school closures, it is critical that all students have equitable access to school supports and resources. School teams should work collaboratively to consider the unique needs of their school community members, engage in problem solving, and implement appropriate supports. The questions below can help educators keep equity considerations at the center of ongoing planning and program implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, this document offers specific suggestions for school psychologists to promote and engage in equitable service delivery for all students.

Virtual Learning and Mental Health Services

- What is each student's and family's access to technology devices (e.g., iPads, Chromebooks, computers per child) so that they can engage in distance learning?
- What is each student's and family's access to Wi-Fi so that they can engage in distance learning?
- What supports exist for English learners (ELs), especially those with low/developing levels of English proficiency?
- All students will not gain skills or even maintain previously learned skills. How will educators evaluate individual, classroom, and systemic needs when schools reopen?
- What school-supported mental health services will be available to students and how can they be accessed?
- How will mental health support be provided in an ethical manner and what training will be provided to staff delivering these services virtually?
- How will students and families know who to contact in emergency situations? Who will respond to emergency calls outside of typical school hours?

Special Education

- How will students with disabilities be given equitable access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE)?
- How will extended school closures impact special education eligibility when schools reopen (e.g., lack of instruction; lack of intervention; lack of progress monitoring; possible lack in structure/support for social, emotional, and behavioral needs)?

Cultural Responsiveness

- How will racism and stigma toward Asian American individuals due to COVID-19 be addressed when it occurs in a virtual setting?
- How will racism and stigma toward Asian American individuals due to COVID-19 be addressed when schools reopen?
- How will translation services be offered virtually?
- How will various cultural traditions related to grief and loss be supported in the absence of in-person gatherings?
- How can the school community provide culturally responsive support, both during and after school closures, to families and communities that may be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19?

Home Environments

- How can schools assist when students' basic needs are not being met (e.g., supervision, safety, food)?
- How can students do work if a loved one is sick (at home or in the hospital)?
- For students whose families don't have the benefit of salaried employment or the freedom to work from home, are they expected to care for younger siblings?
- For students whose families don't have the benefit of salaried employment or the freedom to work from home, who will support them if they have a question about a virtual learning assignment or activity?
- What support can be provided to students in unsafe or unstable home environments?
- How can students who have parents/caregivers continuing essential work responsibilities outside of the home (e.g., healthcare workers, pharmacy employees, grocery store employees, delivery workers, public workers, etc.) be supported?

Communication

- How do we communicate with families and students who cannot be reached? How do we help these students and families?
- How are we communicating with school staff who may be experiencing COVID-19 stressors in their own families?
- How can communications be streamlined to ensure students and families are not inundated with a high volume of messages during school closures?

Health Disparities

- How can schools mitigate systemic health disparities?
- How can schools support students, families, and communities that may be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19? For example, recent reports have shown that immigrants, African Americans, and Latinx individuals, especially those living in cities, are dying at disproportionate rates.

WHAT CAN SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS DO?

School psychologists should engage with school teams to problem-solve and address issues of equity that may be exacerbated during extended school closures. School psychologists should continue to utilize their range of skills and expertise to support school communities during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Engage in Consultation and Collaboration

- School psychologists should engage in conversations with administrators and other decision makers to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students during and after COVID-19 related school closures. The questions listed in this document are a starting point, but not an exhaustive list.
- School psychologists can utilize consultation skills to assist teachers who need support in differentiating instruction for online learning.
- Based on their knowledge of special education and various disability categories, school psychologists can consult with special education and general education teachers about effective ways to modify instructional content so that it is accessible to students with disabilities.
- For all students, and especially English learners and students with disabilities, school psychologists can support teachers and administrators with identifying the most essential instructional standards and objectives that students need to know for the current year that also prepares them for success when schools reopen. Ensuring the students receive their academic content in the most concise and manageable ways is critical to promoting academic success.

- As members of multidisciplinary teams, school psychologists are involved in decisions to refer students for evaluations due to the suspicion of an educational disability and determining whether students qualify for services. Due to extended school closures, and the effects that closures could have on students' subsequent academic achievement as well as their social, emotional, and behavioral functioning when schools reopen, school psychologists are encouraged to work collaboratively with other disciplines and educators to develop policies and parameters to guide decision making. Specifically, they can use their knowledge of data and data-based decision making skills to highlight the importance of considering historical and current information from a variety of sources. Such policies can be instrumental in preventing the inappropriate misidentification of marginalized and minoritized students.

Be Social Justice Advocates

- The NASP definition of social justice and social justice resources are available at nasponline.org/social-justice.
- A central idea in advocacy is to see going out of your personal comfort zone as needed—and pushing others in your school to do so as well—when you see harm being done to students. School psychologists should gather data and take on the role of disrupting the status quo that privileges some students and punishes others. Silence results in an unjust status quo continuing. School psychologists should work with allies as much as possible and be the team member who speaks up. School psychologists should consider the range of privilege that students, families, and school staff have and how their privilege may have affected their ability to manage school closures and economic uncertainty.
- Power imbalances exist in any school and likely are continuing with students learning from home. Be attuned to how power is being used in your school district, be it through assumptions or direct actions, and be prepared to be a voice with and for those with less power.
- Understand and acknowledge the structural and systemic conditions (e.g., lack of healthy food options and green spaces, more frequent use of public transportation, increased likelihood of being part of the “essential workforce,” more exposure to pollutants and toxins, racial bias in medical treatment) that can cause health disparities and consequently lead to higher rates of both preexisting conditions (hypertension, diabetes, asthma, etc.) and COVID-19 in immigrant, African American, and Latinx communities.
- School psychologists should help teachers, administrators, and other staff understand that access to virtual learning goes beyond devices and Wi-Fi. For example, access also includes students' differing opportunities to meaningfully engage in virtual learning activities (whether synchronous or asynchronous) and to consistently complete assignments and activities. The following draft language might be important to include in communication with school staff: *During this time of uncertainty, educators, families, and students are experiencing a range of emotions and adjusting to distance learning in a variety of ways. As educators, it is important to remember that students are working from home, which is not their typical learning environment, and families may have limited content knowledge and capacity to help guide and monitor work. We must remain flexible and remember that student participation may vary based on individual situations. Although clear expectations, structure, and predictability can be helpful for students, we also need to remain flexible. As students and families face taking care of their health and safety, as well as the needs of their loved ones, time spent on academic tasks may not always be the priority. More than ever before, consistently encouraging students to do the best they can will go a long way in showing that you genuinely care about them as individuals and not only their academic success.*

Provide Culturally Responsive Multitiered Supports

- Culturally responsive correspondence using only the written word can limit communication. School psychologists and other educators should avoid sarcasm and be mindful that their intent and attempts at humor may not come across effectively.
- School psychologists should develop resources, in multiple languages, that provide contact information for emergency services. These resources should be concise and include pertinent information such as telephone numbers, email addresses, physical addresses, and websites of community-based services in the event of an emergency. Importantly, these resources should be sent via U.S. mail and must also be available electronically (e.g., school website, email).

- From an instructional perspective, and using a multitiered system of support (MTSS) framework, school psychologists can consult with educators, especially principals and other administrators, about the importance of implementing strong, evidence-based, Tier 1 programs to support students' academic and social–emotional (SEL) needs that are unique to the current situation. Additionally, appropriate resource allocations should be made for students who may require Tier 2 and Tier 3 support for a variety of reasons (e.g., academic remediation, anxiety) due to extended school closure.

Please visit the NASP COVID-19 Response Center at www.nasponline.org for additional resources.

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