



Confronting Post COVID-19 School Budgeting Challenges

By Howard Goode, Content Marketing Director

Scoping Out the Problem

School is (Probably) Out for the Summer

We are confronted with a mounting death toll, massive unemployment, education that has been disrupted, and an economy that seems to be in free-fall. Without question, we are experiencing unprecedented times, and the future is as yet uncertain.

As of May 5, 2020 school closures are still affecting 1,268,164,088 students, 72.4% of the total enrolled learners worldwide with 177 country-wide closures¹

Officials in 46 US states, as well as Washington DC, have ordered or recommended school closures for the rest of the school year to help reduce the spread of the novel [coronavirus](#).

While several states have announced their plans to [begin lifting social distancing measures](#) and the federal government has issued [guidelines to reopen the country in phases](#), it doesn't appear that students will return to the classroom this spring².

The Devastating Impact of School Closures on the Students

Facing us are [significant stressors](#), and in the midst of it all, educators are working to be as thoughtful, strategic, and student-centered as possible as they plan for students' education in the weeks and months ahead.

Anya Kamenetz, an education correspondent at NPR recently spoke with experts in the field of "education emergencies," probing for lessons learned in regions that experienced extended school closures due to humanitarian crises such as Hurricane Katrina, the Rwandan genocide, or Ebola in West Africa. Widespread school closures, she found, have profound and lasting impacts on kids, affecting both long-term academic metrics and mental health.

"[Students] will need lessons and school structures that help them cope with the new realities that give them hope and the skills they need to be part of the solutions," Kamenetz writes. "This might mean assessing students' new starting points, summer school,

¹ <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>

² <https://globalteletherapy.com/is-it-coronavirus-or-coronavirus-anxiety-do-you-know-the-difference/>



remediation, or acceleration. It might mean studying public health and epidemiology. [It will certainly mean social and emotional support that help children, teachers, and families recover from this unprecedented break.](#)³

Educators, principals, superintendents, and education policy experts are already thinking aloud about the [myriad complications and expenses involved with reopening schools](#) in a world where so much has changed. They include:

1. continued efforts to get digital learning tools and working WiFi in the hands of every student, should the second wave of the virus force school closures in the fall
2. practical training for teachers about how to make distance learning work
3. [more mental health workers in schools to help students who experienced trauma during the pandemic](#)
4. increase in support staff should some districts decide to stagger reopening by having groups of students come certain days and learn remotely on others⁴

Further Complications from the Financial Crunch

“Aside from dramatic changes in the daily functioning of schools, districts also have to brace themselves for what is likely to be a financial crisis far worse than the 2008 recession,” said San Diego Deputy County Superintendent Mike Simonson in an interview.

“The 2008 recession was mostly a revenue problem; by the end of the recession, California schools were receiving 24 percent less funding than the state owed them. The (Coronavirus) pandemic will be both a revenue and an expenditure problem.”

“School districts [already were facing](#) growing [financial pressures](#) before the pandemic — mainly from special education and pension costs as well as declining enrollment.



They already have pressures, and now, if we're going to add a revenue shortage, that will make things much more challenging this time around,” Simonson said.⁵

“We are almost certainly going to be asking school districts to do more with less,” says Jess Gartner, CEO and founder of Allouve, an education finance organization that helps schools districts craft more equitable budgets. “All of those require additional training, additional devices, additional services, potentially extended hours, which will require more staff. And we're talking about all those solutions in a landscape of 15 to 30 percent less funding.”⁶

The Primary Concerns for Budgeting Purposes

While a myriad of factors must be taken into consideration before attempting to formulate a budget for when school resumes, the first step is to identify and grasp the various dimensions of the problems that must be addressed. Most of the issues break down into these three categories:

1. Academic Impact
2. Psychological Needs
3. Technology Transitions

Academic Impact

Prolonged school closures associated with the [coronavirus](#) pandemic are likely to have a significant and negative effect on children's learning, according to a wide range of experts. This learning loss will leave some students behind academically for years to come, even leading to meaningful lost income throughout their lifetimes. While problems are likely to be primarily concentrated in younger children and lower-income households, they are not necessarily limited to those.⁷

Hurricane Katrina is a case in point. After most New Orleans public schools closed for the entire fall term due to Hurricane Katrina, Doug Harris, a professor of economics at Tulane University, found that it took children a full two years to recover lost learning.

Kids in New Orleans, he notes, dealt with a school district that completely shut down, massive job loss, the emotional trauma of a natural disaster, and collective disorientation once the city rebooted its school system post-Katrina.⁸

Perhaps the way to gain perspective on the learning loss is to view it from the standpoint of typical learning loss incurred by children over summer vacation. The [NWEA](#) did some sobering research on this using data, and found in the summer following third grade, students lost 20 to 27% of their school year gains.

Unfortunately, that summer loss was even more significant for middle school students. During the summer post-seventh-grade, students lost 36% of their school year gains in reading and 50% in math.⁹

Keep in mind that this sort of loss is happening in just ten weeks during the summer. With students around the country missing many more weeks of in-class instruction due to COVID-19, we can expect to see an even more

significant slide.

The NWEA released a new study this month projecting [COVID-19 learning loss based on summer slide](#) data. They anticipate that students will return roughly 30% below a typical back to school student in reading and 50% below in math.¹⁰

Educational Assessments

Since educators won't be able to administer state assessments this spring, the critical data extracted from these assessments will be non-existent when students begin the new school year. Devoid of these assessments, placing students becomes a little more than educated guesswork.

Efforts must be made to conduct these assessments over the summer or as soon as possible in the fall. This will facilitate placing students as accurately and as quickly as possible. Conducting these assessments may require more advanced assessment tools or contracting specialists who are highly trained to meet such a challenge.

Compensating for Losses

After educators identify each student's academic status at the start of the new school year, which will invariably involve significant loss, the issue is how teachers will address these learning gaps. Strategies will need to be crafted, and tools devised for students, personalized to compensate for each child's loss.

Not every teacher may be equipped to deal with these challenges. Schools may need to contract teachers trained in this area or, at the very least, create teacher training programs to educate those teachers working with the students.

³<https://www.edutopia.org/article/what-past-education-emergencies-tell-us-about-our-future>

⁴<https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2020-05-01/schools-face-nightmare-scenario-after-coronavirus-crisis>

⁵<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/education/story/2020-04-21/county-official-the-pandemic-will-change-public-education-for-decades-to-come>

⁶<https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2020-05-01/schools-face-nightmare-scenario-after-coronavirus-crisis>

⁷ <https://www.vox.com/2020/4/21/21223585/school-closure-impact-students-children>

⁸ https://www.edutopia.org/article/what-past-education-emergencies-tell-us-about-our-future?utm_source=Edutopia+Newsletter&utm_campaign=07b606f6b2-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_042220_enews_for-mative&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_f72e8cc8c4-07b606f6b2-85438447

⁹ <https://www.nwea.org/blog/2018/summer-learning-loss-what-we-know-what-were-learning/>

¹⁰ https://www.nwea.org/content/uploads/2020/04/Collaborative-Brief_Covid19-Slide-APR20.pdf

Disadvantaged Students

Doug Harris, a professor of economics at Tulane University, said that there's "suggestive evidence" that in the aftermath of Katrina the impact was worse for low-income and African American students. "The social and economic situation always bleeds into the school," he says, "exacerbating equity issues that existed before the emergency."¹¹

These problems will need to be addressed if there is any hope of preventing disadvantaged children from falling even further behind.

Responding to the impact of students' academic losses will be a key budget item that will include:

- Acquiring high quality assessment tools and personnel to place students quickly
- Purchasing academic programs to accelerate compensating for losses
- Hiring educators and other personnel to lead the effort by helping teachers
- Giving disadvantaged students the resources they need to succeed

Psychological Needs

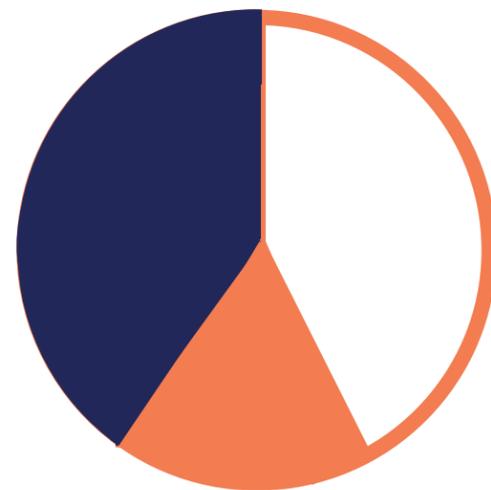
Very few if any students will get through COVID-19 psychologically unscathed. Some families have experienced illness or even the loss of loved ones, many more have experienced significant financial disruption, and almost everyone has faced dramatic shifts when it comes to carrying out their daily lives. Lives are being upended on the most fundamental levels.

If we already see the psychological toll this takes on adults,¹² the impact on children who don't have the same ability to cope will surely be even more profound. To help administrators prepare for the future and plan appropriately, it can be beneficial to look at the impact of past crises in recent history that had

a similar impact and scope as the COVID-19 pandemic, to better understand the emotional effects on children.

History tells us that, in these situations, children display increased levels of neediness. They withdraw from peers and interest in activities. They experience sleep and appetite disturbances, and they may become more rebellious or agitated, or present as apathetic. All of these are normal stress responses which we can anticipate seeing in our students this fall. And this is what can be expected from those children who began the crisis in sound emotional health.¹³

Global Teletherapy, an industry leader in the delivery of remote therapy services, discovered the following when they had their therapists survey students. The therapists found that 42% of the students said that COVID-19 is negatively impacting students' social skills because of no physical interaction with friends, while another 18% said social skills are being impaired because of no extracurricular activities.



■ Amount of students who feel COVID-19 is negatively impacting their social skills
■ Amount of students who feel their social skills are being impaired because of lack of extracurricular activities

When therapists surveyed their students regarding how COVID-19 is negatively impacting students' social-emotional wellbeing, they found that 31% were suffering from anxiety because of the uncertainty of when restrictions will be lifted. Another 25% said that they were experiencing emotional distress due to suddenly severed relationships with friends and mentors. And 20% of the children said they were suffering from tensions at home. Serious psychological repercussions are already here.



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Children with ACEs

But for those who have pre-existing vulnerabilities in their lives, the problems are exacerbated. These children have what researchers call adverse childhood experiences (ACEs): the cumulative effect on

children of traumatic events like physical or verbal abuse, death, and/or substance abuse by a parent; these kids will suffer much more.

Sarah Smith is the senior director of education at the International Rescue Committee. She says that when social disruption interrupts education, we should expect effects on brain development, especially for students who already had a risk factor or two in their biology or their family life.

"Their social and emotional well-being is at risk," she says. "And they're more likely to experience, for instance, toxic stress, which is just a disruption in their brain development." This, Smith adds, can have not only short-term consequences for emotional and physical health, "but also long-term consequences for their overall well-being, their ability to hold down a job, their ability to learn in school later if they get back into school, and their fiscal health."¹⁴

The Impact will be Felt By Every Child For both the "emotionally healthy" children and those with ACEs, it must be recognized that the psychological damage incurred during this pandemic and its aftermath is significant and will require administrators to invest heavily in mental health resources to heal the children who have been affected. Without this investment, it has been shown that children will struggle in school regardless of the excellence of academics.¹⁵

More High School Dropouts

It is a challenge to ensure children and youth return and stay in school when schools reopen after closures.¹⁶ Tulane's Harris says schools and districts should prepare for a spike in the high school drop-out rate. In New Orleans, the displacement students experienced from Hurricane Katrina—especially among kids from low-income families—affected high school graduation and college enrollment.

¹¹ https://www.edutopia.org/article/what-past-education-emergencies-tell-us-about-our-future?utm_source=Edutopia+Newsletter&utm_campaign=07b606f6b2-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_042220_enews_for-native&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_f72e8cc8c4-07b606f6b2-85438447

¹² <https://www.kff.org/health-reform/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>

¹³ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

¹⁴ <https://www.npr.org/2020/04/02/824964864/nine-out-of-10-of-the-world-s-children-are-out-of-school-what-now>

¹⁵ <http://www.acmh-mi.org/get-help/navigating/problems-at-school/>

¹⁶ <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/consequences>

In part, this had to do with economic factors. “Their parents just lost their jobs, and they’ve got younger siblings to take care of while their parents are out trying to find work and trying to manage things,” says Harris.¹⁷

Another contributing factor, says Smith at the International Rescue Committee, is high school kids’ developmental stage. “Adolescence is a period of rapid change and rapid development. So if they’re experiencing adversity while they’re going through adolescence and another period of change, it can be detrimental,” says Smith.¹⁸

Will administrators consider helping these children as part of their responsibility? If so, it will require investment in special programs and trained personnel to draw these children back to school or to help them find alternatives to continue their education and increase the likelihood of their leading more successful lives.



Responding to the impact of students’ emotional needs will be a key budget item that will include:

- Providing for the necessary psychological resources such as school psychologists, social workers, and counselors for all students in need
- Meeting the needs of those children with special psychological needs such as ACEs
- Programming to assist school drop-outs to either return to school or find an ample alternative

Technology Transitions

Bridging the Digital Divide

As schools across the country turn increasingly to online education, the digital divide between students has never been more apparent. Whereas before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, this was of the noblest of causes, today it has become a necessity of life.

Former Massachusetts Secretary of Education, Paul Reville, in a recent interview, asserted: “We can’t leave this to chance or the accident of birth. All of our children should have the technology they need to learn outside of school. Some communities can take it for granted that their children will have such tools. Others who have been unable to afford to level the playing field are now finding ways to step up.

Students in certain school districts don’t have those affordances right now because often, the school districts don’t have the budget to do this. Still, federal, state, and local taxpayers are starting to see the imperative for coming together to meet this need.

Boston, for example, has bought 20,000 Chromebooks and is creating hotspots around the city where children and families can go to get internet access. That’s a great start, but, in the long run, I think we can do better than that. At the same time, many communities still need help just to do what Boston has done for its students.

Communities and school districts are going to have to adapt to get students on a level playing field. Otherwise, many students will continue to be at a huge disadvantage. We can see this playing out now as our lower-income and more heterogeneous school districts struggle over whether to proceed with online instruction when not everyone can access it.

Shutting down should not be an option. We have to find some middle ground, and that

means the state and local school districts are going to have to act urgently and nimbly to fill in the gaps in technology and internet access.”¹⁹

Funding that necessary transition to technology for all students, regardless of family finances, will be a top budgeting priority of administrators.

Training Teachers in Virtual Learning Instruction

While it is no secret that technology has been reshaping our everyday lives for some time, it is also no secret that education has lagged behind in its response to these changes. Even though there are already many schools that provide one device per student for both classroom and home use, education itself hasn’t changed dramatically in response to the digital revolution.

The reality is that, while schools have embraced the technology, they haven’t entertained that with the tools comes a new way of learning. A recent [Education Week survey](#) found that “fewer than one-third of America’s teachers said ed-tech innovations had changed their beliefs about what school should look like.”²⁰

Most educators have yet to acknowledge that technological devices are more than just a bunch of “cool tools.” It is outside the realm of their understanding that virtual learning affords possibilities heretofore unimagined, and will ultimately become an essential facet in the new norm of education.

But the problem is not limited to a lack of understanding or awareness. It has much to do with the lack of teacher training in this area. In a recent [Gallup Education poll](#), the #1 answer to why some teachers may not use digital tools? Training. “More than half of teachers — 56 percent — cited lack of training as a ‘significant’ or ‘extremely significant’ problem.”²¹

Many school leaders were themselves unfamiliar with technology and, therefore, never led with an educational technology strategy that supported teachers’ development.

Instead, some teachers simply “lifted and shifted” their curriculum. Meaning if they taught from the book in class, they now use an online textbook. If they gave notes in class, now students can type them out on their computers—no big changes to their curriculum.

Many teachers have tried to adopt new technologies and embed them into their curriculum. However, with so many options and so little time, it’s a never-ending battle to keep up. So what ends up happening is a piecemeal approach of teachers using a variety of tools for a variety of needs, and this works okay when you’re in person in a classroom. But it becomes messy and cumbersome to manage when everyone is remote.

This is the moment when teacher education programs must prepare teachers for the reality of teaching in-person and virtually. Both are important for different reasons, and there are different strategies for making each work successfully.

Teachers need to learn teaching methodologies like managing remote work, organizing virtual lessons, and curating engaging and easy-to-follow virtual content. These will be vital skills for future teachers to earn certification.

As technology skills become more and more critical to securing a job, curriculum standards must follow suit. For students to be successful after graduation, education will need to put mastery of technology skills front and center along with learning more traditional subject matter content.

¹⁷ <https://www.edutopia.org/article/what-past-education-emergencies-tell-us-about-our-future>

¹⁸ https://www.edutopia.org/article/what-past-education-emergencies-tell-us-about-our-future?utm_source=Edutopia+Newsletter&utm_campaign=07b606f6b2-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_042220_enevs_formative&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_f72e8cc8c4-07b606f6b2-85438447

¹⁹ <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2020/04/the-pandemics-impact-on-education/>

²⁰ <https://www.edweek.org/ew/collections/technology-counts-2019/index.html>

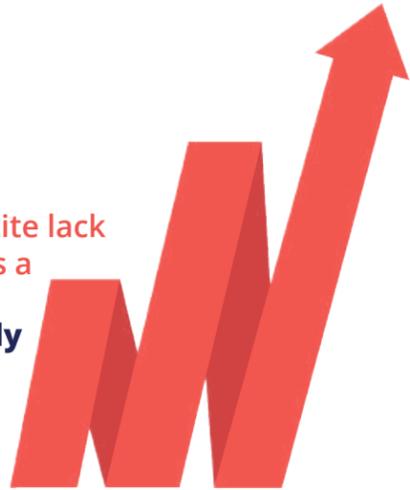
²¹ <http://www.newschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Gallup-Ed-Tech-Use-in-Schools-2.pdf>

Schools are going to have to adapt to keep up with the demands that a health pandemic has forced upon society.²² Establishing teacher training programs designed explicitly for implementing and integrating technology into the classroom will require the creation and purchasing of such programs, hiring the personnel to teach them, and compensating teachers for their “new education.”

K-12 public schools and higher education systems netted nearly \$31 billion combined in the \$2 trillion stimulus (CARES Act) the House passed at the end of March to combat the economic repercussions of the coronavirus pandemic. However, stakeholders say that this is hardly sufficient to bolster the financial crises they face.

But in the meantime, administrators must proceed in anticipation that the necessary funding eventually will be appropriated. Difficult decisions lie ahead. But administrators need to realize that, by fulfilling their obligation, they are providing an invaluable lifetime benefit for the teachers, students, and families they faithfully serve. And engineering this benefit may very well be among their most significant accomplishments and sources of satisfaction.

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of teachers cite lack of training as a ‘significant’ or ‘extremely significant’ problem.



Responding to the impact of students’ technology needs will be a key budget item that will include:

1. Providing for every child the technological tools such as a laptop computer to facilitate a full education in our new digital world
2. Training programs for educators to become adept at leveraging technology to take full advantage of the technology that is available

Fulfilling the Administrator’s Role

COVID-19 world is a daunting challenge. And the budgets they formulate will only become relevant and meaningful once the necessary funding becomes available. At the moment however, this remains a looming question.



About the Author

Howard Goode, Content Marketing Manager for Global Teletherapy studied at The University of Michigan. As Content Marketing Manager, Howard’s content creations include the Global Teletherapy website, whitepapers, ebooks, press releases, and weekly blogs. The blogs currently cover a wide-range of important and engaging topics related to COVID-19, its ramifications and anxiety relief.



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²² <https://medium.com/@theevenpost/how-covid-19-will-change-k-12-education-forever-bf197794c596>

²³ <https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2020-03-27/educators-stimulus-not-nearly-enough-to-save-schools>