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Moving beyond crisis schooling: What can we learn from the innovation of Maine districts to support remote student learning from March - June 2020?

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University of Maine | August 2020

Introduction

It is difficult to predict what the 2020-2021 school year will hold for Maine schools. School leaders and reopening task forces have spent the summer of 2020 preparing for many different scenarios as our understanding of local risk and transmission of COVID-19 continues to develop. It seems likely, however, that many districts will need to employ effective remote or hybrid learning strategies as we continue to monitor the spread of COVID-19 as a state. One of the primary advantages for Maine schools as they face this challenge, however, is that districts across the state have had four months of experience implementing crisis schooling in the face of COVID-19 related uncertainty. We know that Maine school leaders and educators learned a great deal between March and June of this year as they worked to refine their response to school closure and resume student learning amongst very challenging circumstances.

Between May 29th, 2020 and June 26th, 2020, our research team visited every district website and social media feed¹ in Maine to capture communication and resources provided to families regarding crisis schooling and COVID-19 between March and June 2020. These documents consisted of dated letters from superintendents describing their response to directives from the Maine Department of Education and the state government, as well as remote learning resources, guidance department websites, COVID-19 blogs, videos and websites with health and wellness strategies, and continuity of education plans. In total, we collected 1,988 documents which we reviewed and catalogued using 56 different categories.²

¹For smaller SAUs and Alternate Organizational Structures, this review often included school websites and social media feeds as well.

²Broadly these categories included: Learning modalities, device access, internet access, nutrition support, mental health support and social-emotional learning, physical health support, and other social service support.



This report highlights some of the innovative strategies that Maine districts used to meet student and family needs, communicate effectively with families, and to organize remote schooling. Through our inventory and review of district practices across the state, we have worked to harness the collective power of the on-the-job learning of Maine districts for supporting student learning, health, and safety in the face of school closure. Our goal is to support Maine school districts in learning from one another as they face the challenge of planning for the 2020-2021 school year.

Guiding principles for whole child supports within Maine's reopening framework

Based on our review of district practices and the variation of responses across the state, we have identified several foundational principles that support the frame of mind necessary to innovate to meet the needs of students and families in an environment characterized by a high degree of uncertainty and information that has, at times, changed on an almost daily basis. These principles include:

- **Appreciating the importance of whole child well-being:** Over and over in their letters to families this spring, superintendents across the state reaffirmed their commitment to whole child well-being in the face of the stress and anxiety created by the statewide efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19. Many districts adopted a “hold harmless” approach to student learning that focused on supporting student and parent physical and mental health as much as or more than academic learning. While the opportunity to engage in planning for Fall 2020 will ensure that we can resume a focus on academics, the months of stress and anxiety due to COVID-related life disruption cannot be underestimated and will affect the most vulnerable population of students with greater severity. Supports for these students, and not punitive systems that compound their stress (and possible trauma), must be put into place.
- **Finding the right balance between supports for families and possible disease exposure:** Many of the adjustments that were made to how supports were provided to students during the period between March and June 2020 were around managing faculty, staff and volunteer exposure to COVID-risk and balancing that with the needs of families in accessing district provided supports. Consolidating meal distribution, for example, was one way to mitigate risk without sacrificing supports, and many districts opted to do this in mid-April in response to regulation changes from the USDA and as they reevaluated their systems for support around April Break. Similar adjustments and efficiencies will need to be found on the fly as we enter a new phase of remote learning in Fall 2020.
- **Engaging in strategic and even new community partnerships:** Caregivers for Maine students need support as much as students if they are to facilitate student learning in the home or in a hybrid environment. While wraparound supports for families require both resources and planning time to enact, any investment made by districts in this direction at this time will pay dividends in student learning by reducing the stress of survival in a challenging and uncertain time. Partnerships with other agencies who specialize in family supports, near or far, will help to accomplish this goal, and there are many examples of districts across the state whose investment in these relationships allowed them to help families focus on supporting their children's learning.

Recommendations based on our review of all Maine district practices

We have organized our recommendations based on Part IV ([Common Expectations of Hybrid and Remote Learning Models](#)) of the recently released reopening framework outlined by the Maine Department of Education. Our recommendations are based on actual work done by districts in Maine from March through June 2020 in response to the mandate to close schools in order to curb the spread of COVID-19. Where possible we have included links to representative examples of innovative practices using the documentation that we collected.



MDOE Component 1: A plan for instruction that provides students with learning opportunities aligned to, and which result in demonstration of achievement towards, the MLR. Plans must include forward movement along learning progressions or through grade level expectations as well as reinforcement of prior learning and necessary intervention.

In the face of uncertainty around the length of school closure in the spring of 2020, many districts opted to review material instead of moving forward with new curriculum. However, some districts experimented with approaches to supporting students in making progress towards the Maine Learning Results through remote learning. In this section, we highlight some of the strategies that supported student learning during this time. In particular, we recommend the following:

- **Clearly articulate expectations for teachers, students and families using remote learning compacts.** Remote learning impacts all stakeholders in a profound way. In order to minimize uncertainty, we suggest that schools post clearly articulated expectations for all stakeholders. School-family compacts in which the responsibilities of the family and the school are clearly defined help each to fulfill their necessary role in remote learning and provide a light level of accountability for both schools and families by having a common document to reference in conversations. However, schools should review these compacts with an equity lens to ensure that expectations do not contain hidden assumptions about family resources, including internet or device access.
 - [RSU 3](#) and [Hermon School Department](#) provided compacts to families that highlighted joint responsibilities of school, families and students.
 - [RSU 24](#) created a remote learning resource page for caregivers and clearly articulated the responsibilities of students, families, and schools for each educational level.
 - [AOS 98](#) and [MSAD 27](#) each provided clearly articulated expectations for all stakeholders in an easy-to-navigate packet format.

- **Provide learning options for students and families to choose from.** Where possible and age-appropriate, provide a menu of learning opportunities for students to select from. In general, principles of personalization and proficiency tend to support learning in remote and hybrid environments because of the synergy between choice, independent learning, and intrinsic motivation.
 - [RSU 38](#) provided options for each grade span and a [superintendent's guide](#) to distance learning. These leveled menus allowed caregivers to make informed selections to support their child's learning while capitalizing on their unique knowledge of their child.
 - [RSU 14](#) also provided "Learning Menus" for each grade span. Menus like this one also provided a centralized place for caregivers to look to find relevant learning resources for their child without having to vet long lists of resources individually.
 - [Winthrop Public Schools](#) posted distance learning plans for each grade that included a menu of options for each subject area.



MDOE Component 2: A daily schedule to include age-appropriate engagement expectations for students; live daily contact between teachers and students (and/or caregiver); direct instruction (either synchronously or asynchronously); independent student work; opportunity for questions and feedback during teacher office hours.

MDOE Component 3: The daily schedule offers sufficient educational service/interaction to be reasonably expected to promote student progress toward quarterly/semester/trimester grade-level educational goals and objectives.

MDOE Component 7: A plan for coordination of schedules, assignments, and workload when students have different teachers for different subjects.

One of the challenges of crisis schooling was establishing an equitable schedule for live, daily contact between teachers and students in the context of uneven internet and device access across districts and across the state. Given that not all students have access to the internet or a device consistently, clear communication about schedules for learning and opportunities for asynchronous, independent learning will be critical in the 2020-2021 school year. Our recommendations based on district practice include the following:

- **Establish a central, reliable platform to use for asynchronous learning.** Google Classroom was a very popular platform for middle level and secondary schools moving to asynchronous learning, whereas Class Dojo and SeeSaw were popular platforms for the elementary level.
- **Use digital platforms consistently districtwide.** Using consistent digital platforms help caregivers with multiple children to better support students across different buildings. For example, MSAD 37 recognized the challenges families were facing as they navigated new methods of communication and multiple platforms such as Zoom, Google Hangout Meet, Moodle, Google Classroom, and others that were employed by individual teachers. The district lessened the burden on caregivers and families by moving away from multiple platforms and consolidating all electronic communication between teachers and students via the G suite programs such as Google Hangout Meet and Google Classroom.
- **Post learning schedules for each building.** Some schools responded to crisis learning with very detailed schedules for students and families to follow, others provided suggested schedules, while others allowed families the flexibility to develop their own schedules. As schools move away from crisis learning to distance learning, and begin to develop more complicated schedules (hybrid or remote) it is recommended that schools post their schedules for families to access on their websites, or using another well-established mechanism for communicating with families.
 - [RSU 86](#) provided weekly schedules for their 2nd Grade students. Although grade specific, this example could be adapted to fit a variety of grade levels.
 - [RSU 24](#) suggested daily remote learning schedules for each grade level in an easy-to-use, centralized format.
 - Similarly, the [Biddeford School Department](#) posted schedules for each grade level, including consistent communication throughout the crisis on where to find the schedules, updates to the schedules, and contact information for questions about the schedule.



- **Do not expect students to attend every class, every day.** Create a weekly synchronous online meeting schedule that requires students to attend each class once or twice per week
 - [RSU 63](#) posted a suggested schedule that includes formal and informal learning times throughout the day.
 - [RSU 58](#) provided guidelines for the amount of time students should spend engaged with learning every day.
- **Be mindful of ways distance learning schedules can leverage at-home opportunities for learning.** In the spirit of proficiency-based “anywhere, anytime” learning, some districts embraced aspects of their students’ everyday lives at home to support their learning. One caution with this strategy, however, is not to make assumptions about the material resources available in students’ homes or in their surrounding geographic area. Examples of districts that struck this balance effectively included:
 - [RSU 13](#) included Morning Breakfast, Chores, and Family Walks in its daily schedule for their students.
 - [MSAD 27](#) also included ways in which academics could be blended with at-home activities as part of their remote learning guide, drawing on resources provided by Neuropsychology and Education for Children and Adolescents (NESCA).
- **Provide students and their families with guidelines for remote learning etiquette.** [RSU 50](#) provides an example of essential guidelines for focused, synchronous online learning sessions. It is important in establishing these guidelines to ensure that the diversity of students’ home circumstances are reflected in the guidelines. Not every student, for example, is able to join a synchronous session from a desk/table – some students may need to join sitting on their beds or from other alternative locations to ensure a quiet, focused space. Similarly, teachers may consider making cameras optional for part or all of the class session to both preserve limited bandwidth and allow students choice over what they share about their homes with their classmates.
- **Make clear to students, caregivers, and employers how student employment should be handled and communicated during remote/hybrid learning.** A letter from the superintendent of [RSU 50](#) provides an example of how to frame this issue for families and how to encourage students who are of working age to communicate with their teachers about their employment.

MDOE Component 4: A plan to equitably provide students with necessary materials and resources to support engagement in lessons.

Two significant challenges for many districts in the Spring of 2020 were a) students’ inadequate device access to support remote student engagement; and b) little or no internet connectivity in student homes due to the price of subscription costs or lack of rural broadband infrastructure. Caregivers working from home and trying to share limited bandwidth with their children also created challenges for many families. Schools cannot solve these issues alone – it is imperative that Maine and the federal government prioritize infrastructure improvement to overcome these access issues which exacerbate



COVID-related educational inequity. The MDOE's distribution of internet hotspots and chromebooks to districts in May of 2020 is a step in the right direction. However, early on in the shutdown in the absence of this infrastructure, Maine districts found many creative ways to respond to inequity in access. From these innovations, we offer the following recommendations around device access and internet connectivity:

- **Provide information on internet providers offering free or discounted service.** While the issue of internet connectivity received enormous attention in the Spring of 2020, it will be just as critical in the coming school year. School districts should work with local service providers to direct families to free and low-cost internet service (and service that is compatible with distributed hotspots). For example, [RSU 39](#) provided this technology options page for caregivers.
- **Provide information regarding where students and families may access the internet throughout the community.** Maine schools provided a variety of ways for students and families to stay connected during the school closure including accessing school wifi in school parking lots, posting links to Network Maine's [Study-from-Car](#) initiative, and communicating places in the community that had opened up their wifi to the public. In some cases, interactive geo-maps were provided showing where students may access public wifi.
 - The [Brunswick School Department](#) used "traveling hot spots" on buses that were parked throughout the community in locations students could connect to from their vehicles.
 - [RSU 54](#) published a range map for public wifi access around their school buildings.
- **Make clear how students and families can get technical support for their devices.** Districts all over the state created technical support pages as part of their school websites where families could report issues that they were experiencing with both devices and internet and receive assistance from district staff. Having a clear form, email address or hotline for reporting these issues will eliminate unneeded stress for families in the context of hybrid and remote schooling. The [Augusta School Department](#) established a regular socially distanced drop-in time once a week for families with a technology concern to bring devices to be repaired
- **Provide parent-specific resources and guides to using the technology and resources provided to students for remote learning.** Schools should consider providing tutorials for such platforms, especially if they are adopting them for the first time in Fall 2020. Examples of high-quality tutorials used throughout the state included user guides with accompanying screenshots or screencast video tutorials (See this sample video from the [Biddeford School Department](#) on how to log into Google Classroom). Other districts provided handouts intended to introduce and explain resources (e.g. this [Google Classroom resource](#) or this handout provided by the [Portland Public Schools](#)) that students may have experience with during school but to which caregivers have not been exposed. [AOS 98](#) provided a comprehensive parent resource page that centralized all issues related to internet and device access and both hardware and software support.

MDOE Component 5: A plan to certify student attendance each day, and a plan to address lack of attendance/engagement. Mandated reporter requirements remain in place in remote learning environments, so school staff should also be familiar with these policies and protocols.

Without an opportunity to adequately prepare students and families for crisis schooling (including addressing device access, internet access, prior planning and information about procedures), many



districts struggled to sustain contact with students who did not engage with remote learning between March and June 2020. However, some districts were able to establish attendance-taking procedures that allowed them to track student engagement and follow up with families about students who remained disengaged from crisis schooling. We recommend that districts:

- **Create attendance procedures to begin the school day to ensure students remain connected and engaged.**
 - [AOS 98](#) provided a Google Form for attendance for caregivers/guardians to fill out when students would be absent from remote learning.
 - [RSU 61](#) monitored attendance of students in Grades 6-12 via daily log in to Schoology. Attendance for students in Grades K-5 was taken via daily contact with their classroom teachers.
 - [RSU 15](#) provided multiple ways of recording attendance. This could be a worth considering for students who cannot connect to Zoom but can submit work through an online platform.

MDOE Component 6: A plan for identifying and addressing social/emotional, behavioral, and mental health concerns.

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has been accompanied with an enormous amount of stress and anxiety as we have had to adjust to our “new normal.” As schools move forward with remote/hybrid learning in the 2020-21 school year, it will be important to continue to foreground mental health and strategies for coping with the uncertainty of living through a pandemic. It is especially important that opportunities to listen to students’ feelings about the changes that are taking place are built into synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities. Important components of trauma-informed schooling include establishing safety for students in teacher-student relationships and online spaces. Another important component includes empowerment and choice. Fortunately, these facets of trauma-informed education are also important components of successful remote learning. Many districts made the social-emotional wellness of students a central focus to their work in the spring of 2020. Our recommendations based on district innovation include:

- **Provide families with information and strategies for coping with anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns.**
 - Many districts provided links to resources from [SAMHSA](#) and [NAMI](#).
 - [Indian Island School](#) provided suggestions for talking with students about COVID.
 - [RSU 21](#) posted a link to a comprehensive list of social-emotional and mindfulness resources from Tufts University.
 - The [Bangor School Department](#) and other districts in the Penobscot Region posted a series of short parent support videos created by a clinical psychologist.
 - [West Bath School](#) created a comprehensive resource page for caregivers.
 - The school counselors and social workers in [RSU 52](#) started a mental health newsletter for students and caregivers.
- **Create opportunities for routine open check-ins with school counselors.** Many school counselors created Google classrooms and provided resources for social-emotional learning and mindfulness activities. Additionally, many school counselors scheduled meetings with students or held open virtual office hours via Zoom or Google Hangout Meet to facilitate initial identification of and response to concerns.



- **Use a web-based social and emotional learning curriculum.** Districts that use [Second Step](#) were able to give caregivers access to activities that could be monitored by teachers and school counselors.
- **Create school or district wide projects to promote mental health and wellness for students, faculty, and caregivers.** Some districts conducted virtual Spirit Weeks and other activities designed to maintain connections between students and staff. Some districts effectively leveraged social media to do this, having families use cell phones to snap pictures of students participating and then sharing them on their Facebook or homepages. A few examples include:
 - **K-5:** The youngest students in [Veazie](#) had a virtual “Fort Night” with classmates and teachers. Other schools did nightly storytimes or Moving Stories with a rotating cast of teachers and staff (such as [Milbridge Elementary School](#) in MSAD 37), or issued integrated arts-based expressive challenges, like sidewalk chalk competitions. It is important to note that in the case of these arts challenges, schools like Milbridge Elementary provided interested students with home-delivered kits to complete these challenges through partnerships with local non-profit organizations. Some schools (such as the [Saccarappa School](#) and the [Vassalboro Community School](#)) also encouraged students to participate during “Spirit Week” by dressing up according to the theme of the day and submitting photos of themselves to be posted on the school’s social media.
 - **6-12:** Some schools engaged students in virtual talent shows through their social media accounts or closed Facebook groups. Others had students submit pictures of important elements of their home experience, such as pictures of their pets. Some school districts (such as the [Gorham School Department](#)) encouraged K-12 students to wear school gear, present artwork, and display other forms of school spirit while nominating teachers for a chance to win prizes during teacher appreciation week.
- **Leverage relationships with community-based mental health providers and staff to provide supportive programming for teachers, caregivers, and students.** As containment of the virus continues to be a national priority, it is likely that caregivers, students and teachers will experience many emotions over the coming months. Consider reaching out to area or statewide agencies or private-practice providers to offer workshops to families and staff on managing these emotions. In the spring of 2020, the parent-teacher group in [St. George Public Schools](#) offered a Zoom workshop for caregivers around managing stress and anxiety. [Veazie School Department](#) schools partnered with Acadia Hospital to offer a workshop around supporting your child’s mental health. [Sanford School Department](#) published a comprehensive list of local resources.



MDOE Component 8: A plan for regular/ongoing formative assessment of student learning and engagement to inform and guide instruction and pacing.

MDOE Component 9: A multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) plan for ensuring differentiation, IEP implementation, and equitable access for special populations. Services and accommodations must be adapted for a remote learning environment.

MDOE Component 10: A plan for grading and for certifying achievement. This plan should take into consideration the uneven/inequitable conditions in which students will be accessing their educational experiences – including inequitable access to: supervision, technology, materials, quiet study space, adult support, and other basic needs.

Many significant concerns were raised in the Spring of 2020 with regard to implementing equitable systems of formative and summative assessment, meeting students' complex learning needs and fulfilling each school's obligation to provide special services and accommodations to students. The majority of these concerns focused on the inequities created by sudden closure and the unplanned transition to remote learning strategies. With the opportunity to plan and a more comprehensive understanding of student privacy considerations with video-conferencing software, there are new opportunities for districts to support and assess inclusive student learning. In particular, recommend the following:

- **Create virtual meetings to maintain services for students.** Students who receive special services typically engage in routine one-on-one interactions with teachers, ed techs, and other student support staff. Maintaining these services during remote and/or hybrid learning is essential for the academic advancement of all students with IEPs and other special populations. Regular virtual meetings between students, teachers, and support staff will help ensure not only that the students' academic needs are met but also that they maintain the relationships that support student engagement.
- **Provide options for ways in which families can access their child's special service documentation.** For example, the [Biddeford School District](#) communicated flexibility in providing families with information regarding special services.
- **Use online learning platforms to supplement teacher-created content.** Some districts adopted platforms such as Edgenuity, PLATO, and Edmentum either prior to or during the shutdown, then used them to support crisis schooling. These programs provide formative feedback and multiple opportunities for students to attain proficiency. Within these platforms, teachers can create assignment calendars that guide the pace of student learning.

MDOE Component 11: A plan for providing student nutrition.

Following the closure of school buildings in March 2020, districts were quick to provide nutrition options for families in the absence of a school-based meal program through either a meal-delivery program utilizing existing bus contracts and bus routes, or through the school-based or community meal distribution sites. Meals were universally available for children ages 0-18, with food service



directors often working directly with families to provide alternative pick-up or delivery options if they were unable to pick up meals at the designated meal site times. Moving forward, a major challenge for schools will be the need to devise new processes for food distribution while students are in session. Our recommendations based on district innovations for providing nutrition include:

- **Recognize diverse family structures and living arrangements for students:** Some districts, such as [Union 69](#), were explicit in their communication with families about what to do if caregivers shared custody of students with regard to coordinating meal delivery.
- **Engage local government or agencies in compiling lists of food resources for families:** Superintendents or food service directors should ask their local government/county agencies to compile a list of food pantries/nutrition service for families in addition to providing information about school meal provision for children 0-18 – caregivers are serving as in-home teachers and need food security strategies in the same way that teachers/faculty do to support students effectively. [Five Towns CSD](#), for example, provided a simple but comprehensive list of regional resources. These lists should include the hours and days of the week pantries are operating under COVID-19, and the contact information (phone number/email address) of someone at the relevant agency.
- **Partner with local social service agencies to provide weekly food boxes at your 0-18 meal pick/delivery sites or through meal delivery using bus routes:** For drive thru meal sites, this could be as simple as setting up several additional tables for cars to stop at on a particular day of the week, manned by staff from other agencies. Food service directors could work directly with these agencies to facilitate these opportunities for one stop food (or other basic needs like they did at [Bristol Consolidated School](#) – infant formula, toiletries, household items, etc.) distribution. For sites doing meal delivery, social service agencies could deliver food boxes and other supplies to the school site and assist in distributing these materials to the buses working different routes prior to their departure. [Ellsworth School Department](#) solicited donations from families for shelf-stable goods to distribute with meal deliveries. This work could also be managed by low-risk, healthy parent volunteers or paraeducators, if available.
- **Work with a local food pantry distribution center to start a food pantry at your physical school sites that will remain open if the school buildings close:** This option requires significantly more legwork by the district in recruiting and coordinating volunteers to receive shipments, organizing food, and manning the pantry during its open hours; however, it creates a longer term strategy for local food security for students and caregivers that can continue in a post-pandemic world. Food service directors could support parent-student groups in creating or even managing this resource (such as in [Glenburn Schools](#)); however, school leaders need to be aware of previous messaging and stigma regarding food distribution and social service access to destigmatize accessing these supports. One way to do this is to eliminate eligibility requirements as much as possible and encourage use by all families.

MDOE Component 12: A communication plan to assist students and caregivers of students in understanding what to expect, how to engage in remote learning, where to get questions answered.

Things changed quickly in the Spring of 2020, and many superintendents found themselves putting out one communication after another to families, sometimes twice or more in one day. Districts used



many strategies to effectively communicate with families about the changes associated with COVID-19. Based on our review of district practices, we recommend:

- **Create a space on your district website dedicated to housing a one-stop shop for remote/hybrid schooling.** Many districts created one place for caregivers to look for past information they may have missed or resources, while simultaneously pushing out messages through all of their communication platforms. This section of the website included all past communication from the superintendent (both letters and video messages) with dates, remote meal plans, technology help, guidance services, special education, and community resources (such as links to housing assistance, heating assistance, financial help, and food resources).
- **Provide a working Frequently Asked Questions document.** Crisis learning forced schools to abruptly change how they educated students in their communities, and families had many questions. Many districts posted an continuously updated FAQ page in effort to inform their communities such as this one from [Portland Public Schools](#). As schools move towards three distinct scenarios for learning, it is suggested schools use this strategy as they continue to navigate uncertainty.
- **Create a clear, two-way communication pathway for building closure or hybrid learning related questions:** For example, the Biddeford School Department set up a dedicated email address (e.g. schoolclosure@districtname.org) at the district level to field queries from caregivers and others about the school closure and to separate out this communication from other school-related communications. This email address was shared liberally in district communication with families.
- **Establish office hours for building and district administrators so caregivers can ask questions and obtain answers directly from decision-makers.** Some superintendents opted to hold virtual coffee hours on Zoom for caregivers to drop-in and ask questions at different times convenient to family schedules.

Additional considerations for remote and hybrid schooling in 2020-2021

In addition to the components identified by the Maine Department of Education above, we have the following recommendations based on actions taken by districts during crisis schooling to support families and reduce stress for caregivers so they could focus on supporting their children's learning:

- **Provide comprehensive lists of social service resources for families or ask a local social service agency to put one together for your district.** Some districts put together lists of social service resources for families that stretched beyond providing nutrition assistance to housing and rental assistance and unemployment benefits. For example, [RSU24](#) provided a resource sheet of this type with local food and nutrition information as well housing and general assistance. [Union 103](#) provided information specific to its families about unemployment for self-employed fishermen.
- **Amplify the calls from local community organizations for volunteers:** Many community organizations are facing a shortage of volunteers to continue to provide services to Maine communities, especially in areas of the state where the majority of their volunteers were 65 years or older. By passing along calls for volunteers to caregivers with school-age children (some of whom may be in good health and have the capacity to volunteer), schools can help to assist in ensuring continuity for these services for both the broader community and their students. Ellsworth, AOS 98, and other districts posted these calls on their homepages and social media feeds to ensure they reached a broader audience within the community.



- **Create easy to navigate, inclusive reopening plans:** As districts work to communicate their reopening plans to caregivers, creating easy to navigate plans with clear information about health guidelines, expectations, school governance and other issues important to caregivers is essential. The [Westbrook School Department](#) provided an easy to navigate plan that is noteworthy for its transparency. Instead of simply itemizing decisions made in the form of a finalized plan, this document reveals the decision-making process. It includes a timeline for decision making and a chart of the stakeholders involved in the planning.
- **See Appendix A for statewide resources dealing with mental health, nutrition, COVID-19 information, and internet access you can provide to families.** One of the primary ways that districts supported caregivers during the school shutdown, in addition to providing nutrition for children 0-18, was providing links to local and statewide resources. We have collected some of the best national or statewide resources that can be provided to families regardless of geographic location in the state.

Conclusion

It is important to note that this report is not exhaustive – many more Maine districts exhibited creativity and flexibility in using their human, financial and material resources to meet the challenges of school closure in the Spring of 2020 than is possible to acknowledge here. As the state moves forward with schooling in the 2020-2021 school year, it is imperative that the Maine Department of Education and Maine state government continue to support school leaders with the information, funds, and flexibility to foster continued creativity as they work to meet the needs of students and families.

We will be holding live Question and Answer sessions about this report at the following days and times over Zoom. [Click to register](#) to attend one of the following sessions:

August 5, 2020, 12:00–1:00 pm

August 6, 2020, 4:30–5:30 pm

August 12, 2020, 9:40–11:10 am (as part of [Community Learning 4 ME 1 Fall: 3 Plans Conference](#))

We plan to release additional reports throughout the 2020–21 school year with new analyses using the data that we have compiled to understand how district responses varied by their individual circumstances, including their location within the state, the characteristics of the families they serve, broadband access, and other important factors. We have released this report at this time to facilitate getting information into the hands of Fall reopening committees in a timely manner.



Acknowledgments

The research reported in this paper was made possible (in part) by a grant from the Spencer Foundation (#10024346). The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Spencer Foundation.

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Appendix A: Selection of statewide and national resources provided by Maine districts to families

Maine Department of Education resources

- [Maine DOE Covid-19 Resources for Schools](#)
- [Maine DOE Special Services Covid-19 Resources](#)

COVID-related health resources and guidelines

- [CDC Covid-19](#)
- [CDC Talking With Children About Covid-19](#)
- [World Health Organization \(WHO\) Covid-19](#)
- [Maine CDC Covid-19](#)

Mental health resources

- [Child Mind Institute: Anxiety and Coping With the Coronavirus](#)
- [Child Mind Institute: Supporting Families During Covid-19](#)
- [NAMI Maine Hotline](#)
- [NAMI Maine Teen Text Support Line](#)
- [National Association of School Psychologists COVID-19 Resource Center](#)
- [National Child Traumatic Stress Network: Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope With the Coronavirus Disease 2019](#)
- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Chat](#)
- [Trevor Project LGBTQ Crisis Line](#)

Employment, financial assistance, housing, and nutrition

- [Maine DOL Covid-19 and Unemployment](#)
- [Paid and Expanded Family Medical Leave](#)
- [US Small Business Association Covid-19 Assistance](#)
- [Maine State Housing Authority Covid-19 Rental Relief Program](#)
- [State of Maine DHHS Hotlines](#)
- [USDA Meals for Kids Site Finder](#)
- [WIC \(Maine Women, Infants and Children Nutrition Program\)](#)
- [Federal Student Aid Covid-19 Information](#)

Technology access and support

- [The Parent's Guide to Google Classroom](#)