



Moving Beyond Crisis Schooling

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Lessons for Leaders from the 2020-2021 School Year: Building Public Confidence in School Reopening

COVID-19 has undermined public confidence in our schools' ability to provide safe, high-quality education to our nation's young people. Since the beginning of the pandemic, district leaders have had to make decisions about how to implement mitigation measures and reinvent schooling in response to an evolving understanding of the virus and what can be done to stop its spread to children and families while still supporting high quality student learning.

In this brand new report from the Beyond Crisis Schooling Project, we draw on data from two project phases:

- 1) Documents collected from 674 districts during the March 2020-June 2020 school building closure in Maine and Pennsylvania (n=7,142); and
- 2) interviews with 52 school leaders from both Maine (n=24) and Pennsylvania (n=28) across urbanicity and other district characteristics

We use these two datasets to understand what lessons can be learned from their experiences of district superintendents working to build public confidence in district decisions in response to COVID. We hope that these lessons will be useful to both district leaders and policymakers as we enter another school year in which COVID-19 transmission remains a significant public health issue.

Download the report here:



PDF

Lessons for Leaders Full Report

Updated
8.30.21

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College of Education and Human Development
 5766 Shibles Hall
 Orono, ME 04469

Tel: 207.581.2441
coehd@maine.edu





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The Beyond Crisis Schooling Project

The closing of school buildings during the COVID-19 global pandemic between March 2020 and June 2020 underscored the critical role that U.S. schools play in providing support for the basic needs of economically vulnerable families. The transition of schools to “crisis schooling” raised urgent questions about how districts can initiate or continue these supports for students in a context of social distancing, fiscal uncertainty, unprecedented unemployment, and an evolving understanding of the epidemiological risks associated with the virus. Superintendents and principals have had to weigh the risks of providing these services and make rapid, iterative decisions with imperfect information and limited resources.

It is unclear what factors have been most important in shaping these leaders’ responses to meeting students’ basic needs, making it difficult for federal and state agencies to provide effectively differentiated supports for district needs. Media outlets reported on districts creating drive-in wireless hotspots, repurposing school buses to deliver meals to geographically dispersed families, and reassigning paraeducators to food distribution. **During the spring of 2020, there was limited data available on the extent to which different strategies were being employed or how these practices were being adapted across diverse district contexts.** While many federal and state agencies (e.g. USDA, 2020) relaxed or changed certain policies to enable flexibility in local responses, many states left it to districts to determine how to provide supports for families during stay at home orders.

The Study

This study, led by Dr. Catharine Biddle (Associate Professor of Educational Leadership) and Dr. Maria Frankland (Lecturer of Educational Leadership), is a multi-phase examination of district leadership decisions and adaptations related to basic needs provision in two states with differing levels of epidemiological risk (Maine and Pennsylvania; n=679). Phase 1 of the project collected and analyzed district communication released to families from district websites and social media feeds. Phase 2 focused on interviewing superintendents across rural, suburban and urban contexts to understand how and why practices have been adopted and iteratively refined during this time. We have released several reports over the course of the 2020-2021 school year outlining our evolving understanding of how school leaders shaped crisis schooling in response to COVID-19. We will continue to publish relevant findings from the project over the course of the 2021-22 school year.

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coehd@maine.edu





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Previously Released Reports

[What can we learn from the innovation of Maine School Districts to support remote student learning between March 2020 and June 2020?](#)

Released August 2020

Between May 29th, 2020 and June 26th, 2020, our research team visited every district website and social media feed in Maine to capture communication and resources provided to families regarding crisis schooling and COVID-19 between March and June 2020. In total, we collected 1,988 documents which we reviewed and catalogued using 56 different categories. 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 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 was to support Maine school districts in learning from one another as they faced the challenge of planning for the 2020-2021 school year.

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Orono, ME 04469

Tel: 207.581.2441
coehd@maine.edu


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School Closure Services Data by State: March 2020 - June 2020

The following one page briefs were created to provide an overview of the data that was generated from our review of 7,142 documents collected from district websites between June and July 2020 across both Maine and Pennsylvania. We reviewed the services provided by districts using 56 categories to capture variation by district characteristics. In this set of reports, we explore variation by urbanicity (city, suburban, town, rural), a key factor identified early on as a barrier to service provision in the wake of building closure due to COVID-19. Overall, we find within Maine, within Pennsylvania, and between these states, district-level communication patterns differed across geographical context. We discuss the implications of these findings within the reports for policy and practice.

Reports for Maine

[Download all the Maine Data Overviews](#)

[Maine Learning Modality by District](#)
(March 2020 - June 2020)

[Maine Wifi and Device Access by District Urbanicity](#)
(March 2020 - June 2020)

[Maine Mental Health Resources by District Urbanicity](#)
(March 2020 - June 2020)

[Maine Meal Provision by District Urbanicity](#)
(March 2020 - June 2020)

[Maine Other Resources by District Urbanicity](#)
(March 2020 - June 2020)

Reports for Pennsylvania

[Download all the Pennsylvania Data Overviews](#)

[Pennsylvania Learning Modality by District](#)
(March 2020-June 2020)

[Pennsylvania Wifi and Device Access by District Urbanicity](#)
(March 2020 - June 2020)

[Pennsylvania Meal Provision by District Urbanicity](#)
(March 2020 - June 2020)

[Pennsylvania Other Resources by District Urbanicity](#)
(March 2020 - June 2020)

[Comparison of Maine data vs. Pennsylvania data](#)
(March 2020 - June 2020)

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Development**
5766 Shibles Hall
Orono, ME 04469

Tel: 207.581.2441
coehd@maine.edu

