Strong Start Implementation Status:

Winter 2021 Update Report

January 2021

Contents

Introduction

The Louisiana Department of Education has worked to help educators ensure a strong start and finish to the current school year. The agency feels that it is important to stay connected to Louisiana students, families, teachers, and leaders. They have prioritized listening and learning from the experiences of stakeholders during this most challenging school year.

State Superintendent Dr. Cade Brumley and his team at the LDOE have continued their practices of outreach and seeking feedback. This has included meeting with students, families, educators, and school system leaders. Dr. Brumley led multiple school reopening webinars that regularly attracted over 800 school and system leaders and started a monthly virtual roundtable for school system leaders across the state. He also created the Office of School System Relations to bolster support and maintain two-way communication between the agency and schools. Department leadership regularly attends virtual and in-person meetings of Louisiana teachers, administrators, and school system leaders.

Throughout the reopening process, the LDOE processed over 10,500 school reopening support emails. The agency also facilitated a dozen bi-weekly virtual town hall meetings with Children's Hospital New Orleans for educators and families.

The LDOE enhanced its communications structures to include more targeted office hours and team-specific monthly calls, and a chief academic officers roundtable. Statewide working groups were also created in key areas of support for school system leaders to share progress, provide feedback to LDOE on current and future resources, and keep LDOE updated on statewide implementation measures.

This report is one of the many ways the Louisiana Department of Education continues to engage stakeholders. It includes data from 46 focus group sessions conducted with a total of 216 stakeholders in November and December of 2020, as well as the results of the LDOE's Strong Start Winter Survey completed by 281 school systems. This document reports on the findings from the second Strong Start survey (winter) as well as the focus groups.

Focus Groups

In October 2020, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) directed the LDOE to provide a report on lessons learned in regard to virtual learning. This was to include feedback from educators, students, and families that would help inform future decisions around support and policy.

The LDOE partnered with the Region 14 Comprehensive Center (Region 14 CC), managed by Westat, to conduct focus groups with stakeholders from across the state. The experiences collected from these 216 individuals will help the LDOE understand their viewpoints during this unprecedented time for education. Combined with the LDOE's other feedback mechanisms, the data from these 46 focus group sessions offer additional insight about successes and opportunities for improvement.

Strong Start Winter Survey

The LDOE created the Strong Start 2020 Implementation Survey series to help understand the needs of our leaders, educators, students, and families.

These surveys collect data to capture school system plans aligned to Strong Start 2020, understand the experiences of Louisiana students and educators, inform decisions about supports needed for school systems, and to share that information with various stakeholders.

The survey will be administered three times in 2020-21: completed once in the fall, completed once in the winter and to be completed once in the spring. While each survey will align with the Strong Start Planning Priorities, the questions in each survey will adapt to the landscape of data able to be collected at each point in time as well as the LDOE's implementation priorities.

Executive Summary: Key Findings and Recommendations Based on Stakeholder Feedback

The Region 14 CC (see *Appendix E* for further information) was tasked with conducting an analysis of Louisiana's experience with closing and reopening schools in 2020 due the COVID-19 pandemic. LDOE's Strong Start Initiative implementation was assessed in November and December 2020 using two strategies: a broad survey of school systems across the state, and in-depth focus groups with stakeholders, which included school system leaders, school leaders, teachers, parents and students. Results reflect experiences and points of view of the stakeholders who participated in our focus groups or the Strong Start survey. Stakeholders report a number of strengths, successes and ongoing challenges with implementing their Strong Start plans. They also make many recommendations for state and local leaders. Participants in this project include 281 school systems that responded to the survey, and 216 individuals who took part in the focus groups. Below is a summary of these results.

Key strengths and successes based on our stakeholder feedback include:

- School systems and educators have flexibly adapted to address students' learning loss through use of individual instruction/support, additional intervention time, and increased use of small group instruction.

- LEAs have pushed technology out to students and families very quickly, and teachers have learned and adopted a variety of technologically-based teaching supports.

- Most stakeholders believe communication from LDOE and from school systems and schools has been very effective. Transparency and the levels of trust among stakeholders is high.

- School systems and educators have made extensive efforts to support students' mental health and well-being both personally and through SEL curricula and community services.

Key opportunities for growth include:

- Transition between learning modes causes disruption of learning, stress, and mental-health concerns.

- In general, student engagement is a concern. Not all students learn successfully in virtual environments, particularly students with disabilities, EL students and early childhood learners.

- Ongoing concerns with accountability plans given likely learning loss that is beyond the control of school systems and families.

- Access to technology and broadband required for successful virtual learning is not consistent

for all students.

- Maintaining contact and communication with families for those affected by hurricanes and the economy has been challenging. Attendance and truancy are major concerns.

These findings suggest that LDOE could engage in the following actions to support school systems and stakeholders at all levels:

1. Continue to conduct stakeholder focus group and survey outreach (well received by all groups).

2. Inform stakeholders as soon as possible about accountability plans for this year should updated guidance be released by U.S. Department of Education.

3. Provide support mechanisms and guidance on how to address absenteeism, truancy/missing students.

4. Work with state and federal agencies to build out broadband access to rural Louisiana schools.

5. Work with school systems to ensure that guidance for education technology to maximize student learning is effectively communicated to educators at the school and classroom level.
   a. Provide additional supports to ensure that all educators are aware of the guidance for virtual learning and remote learning to set local expectations.
   b. Provide additional supports to ensure that all educators are provided the guidance for technology used at the district/local level that includes a list of acceptable video platforms, learning management systems, and software applications.
   c. Provide recommendations for implementation of technology at the local level that reduces the burden on students and parents to learn multiple technologies for the same grade level or families with multiple children.
   d. Advocate for additional on-going funding to support maintenance and repair of computers, networks, and software tools to support virtual learning.

6. Create a parent portal with resources to support the role of families as a partner in learning to minimize the cost of each district doing this on their own.
   a. Encourage districts to use this common platform to provide family support.
   b. Allow posting of short video explanations of key topics/issues/policies, etc.
   c. Provide links to needed technology and instructions on how to use the technology.

LDOE's response to these findings follows immediately below. The remainder of this report is organized into two sections that are based on the two data-collection strategies: findings from **focus groups** (Section I) conducted with stakeholders at all levels, and results from an **online survey** (Section II) of school systems across the state. Appendices provide detailed information regarding focus group protocols, and results for individual questions on the survey.

LDOE Response

The 2020-21 school year has been especially trying for Louisiana educators, families and students. In addition to the pandemic and civil unrest across the nation, Louisiana was at the center of a historically active hurricane season — which included landfall of the most powerful storm on record for Louisiana.

The Louisiana Department of Education has supported school system leaders as they worked to provide a safe, quality education to our state's over 827,000 children. There is no blueprint for leading schools or systems through the COVID-19 pandemic. In Louisiana and across the nation, this has led to a number of successes and opportunities for growth.

Here are some of the efforts made by the LDOE and school systems around the state to serve students, educators, and families.

- Over 60% of Louisiana students are benefitting from in-person instruction as of January 2021.
- Louisiana schools have not been "super spreader" locations due to health standards passed by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), partnerships with medical experts, and strong mitigation efforts.
- Medical experts testified during BESE meetings that LDOE reopening guidelines stand among the nation's best and that, when following mitigation efforts, Louisiana schools are among the safest locations in the state.
- Every Louisiana school system developed local reopening plans that included anticipated shifts due to increased or decreased presence of the virus in their community following the LDOE's release of school reopening guidance.
- To further help school systems manage changing requirements and shifts in modality, the LDOE developed resources like staffing models, balanced calendar models, and provided additional funding.
- Virtual instruction best practices and family guides were developed.
- In addition to virtual instruction training offered by school systems, the LDOE partnered with national organizations to provide free synchronous and asynchronous virtual instruction workshops to teachers and principals.
- The LDOE released a number of academic supports to help systems combat learning loss. This includes guidance on important prerequisite standards as well as the upcoming debut of a comprehensive virtual tutoring program.
- To ensure safe and secure testing environments, the LDOE released guidance to school systems and offered numerous flexibilities.
- Toolkits were created for early childhood education, preK-12, students with disabilities, and English Learners. These toolkits included guidance on technology distribution and training,

staffing and scheduling models, continuous learning in core and non-core areas, and assessing and addressing unfinished learning.

- The LDOE provided flexibility to teacher observations to reflect the impacts of the pandemic.
- A toolbox of support resources was developed for families of students with disabilities.
- Guidance was created for students with disabilities specific to compensatory services, virtual small group instruction, special education leaders, and direct service providers.
- The assessment calendar was adjusted to provide more flexible testing windows.
- Programs have been developed to integrate social-emotional learning with academics, as well as to help school systems and early childhood centers provide mental, emotional, and wellness support to students and educators.
- Supporting the reopening of early childhood centers by distributing funds and support. At the height of the pandemic, 70% of our early childhood centers were closed due to COVID-19. Today, only 2% are closed because of the pandemic.
- The LDOE partnered with individuals, agencies, and organizations to help supply school systems with PPE and rapid testing kits. This included 2 million face masks, 74,000 rapid testing kits, and supplies that will last through the second semester.

Upcoming LDOE supports

- Over 23,000 Chromebooks will be distributed to school systems across the state to help close the digital divide.
- A virtual tutoring program, Strong Start Tutoring, has been developed to provide additional support for students and to help recover lost learning.
- Funding will be provided to support school systems in offering compensatory services to students with disabilities.
- The Department is researching how a learning management system (LMS) vendor guide can be utilized to support school systems in their selection of a high quality LMS.
- Real-time Early Access to Literacy (REAL) will provide individualized support for students in pre-K through grade 3 to make progress in their literacy development, with a focus on support for virtual learning.
- Numerous workshops at the 2021 Teacher Leader Summit will focus on remote learning best practices.
- The focus of future LDOE task force meetings will be on supporting school systems as they maintain contact and engagement with students and families.

In addition to the lessons learned from Region 14 CC, the LDOE identified additional lessons learned after reading this report.

- Some schools indicated they designated "virtual learning teachers." These teachers did not also have in-person classes. This reduced stress for the educator and allowed for more

contact with individual students. It's an example of schools being creative and resourceful with staffing and scheduling.

- Every parent wants the best for their child, but their capacity to support during virtual learning can be limited. While many school systems do offer assistance in this area, families would benefit from additional supports.
- Students, parents, and teachers shared that when transitioning between modalities, it was helpful to reduce the number of periods in the day and start classes later. This is a "lesson learned" that could be shared with the field to assist other school systems.

This report offered additional insights for where we can focus our efforts and reinforced many of the initiatives we've undertaken since school buildings first closed in March of 2020. Along with the information we gain from our many other outreach efforts, this report demonstrates the lengths school systems and families are going to serve their children and where we can most effectively help aid those efforts.

Section I: High-level Takeaways and Recommendations from Louisiana Strong Start 2020 Winter Focus Groups

Introduction

The Louisiana Department of Education engaged stakeholders across the state to participate in virtual focus groups to gain insight from their experiences during school closing and reopening in 2020. Over 200 school system leaders (superintendents, district leaders, etc.), school leaders (principals, deans, assistant principals, etc.), teachers, parents, and students participated in these sessions, conducted by the Region 14 CC over a four-week period from mid-November through mid-December (see Table 1).

Table 1. Stakeholder focus group attendance.

Stakeholder Groups	Attended	Sessions
Teachers	43	8
Parents	22	12
School Leaders	65	11
School System Leaders	45	7
Students	41	8
TOTAL	216	46

These stakeholders were asked to identify their successes and challenges in meeting the diverse needs of students during this time, as well as for their recommendations on what can be done to better address these needs. Overall, stakeholders remain committed to providing the best quality teaching and learning experiences possible under the COVID-19 conditions in Louisiana. In addition, many stakeholders were also impacted by multiple hurricanes that contributed to additional school closures and disruptions of vital services, such as electricity and connectivity. Staff and system resources are highly stressed at this time and will remain so until all students and teachers are able to return to school consistently, without new quarantines or school closure.

Below we list findings that ranked among the greatest concerns across all stakeholder groups. High-level takeaways and recommendations are organized around the Strong Start 2020 priority areas, which include virtual learning, learning mode transitions, core academics, mental health and wellness, and communication. The group(s) that most prevalently cited each takeaway is indicated. Each recommendation is a summary of many recommendations provided by participants.

At the end of this section, two tables summarize the **successes** reported by stakeholder (Table 2) and **challenges** reported by stakeholder (Table 3). The protocol for each type of focus group stakeholder can also be found in: *Appendix A: Focus Group Questions – Educators; Appendix B: Focus Group Questions – Parents;* and *Appendix C: Focus Group Questions – Students.*

Findings

Virtual learning lessons-learned based on focus groups and surveys conducted by the Region 14 CC

Successes

- Some schools have designated "virtual learning teachers" who do not have in-person classes; this takes the burden off other teachers, provides more contact with individual students, and reduces stress on everyone. (Teachers, School Leaders)
- Some students are better suited to virtual learning than others, and these students thrive in this environment. (Students, Teachers)
- The best way to address the needs of students with disabilities, early childhood, and EL students is to bring them into school, i.e., do not use virtual learning for these students. This also reduces a lot of parent stress. (Parents, School Leaders, Teachers, School System Leaders)
- Asynchronous videos or recorded lessons help both virtual and in-person learning. (Students, Teachers, Parents)
- Teachers are adapting quickly and learning to appreciate the technology tools that are available for all learners. (School Leaders, Teachers)
- Districts have made a massive effort to get technology into the hands of students, resulting in a logistics feat that takes most school systems years to implement. (School System Leaders, School Leaders, Teachers)

Opportunities

- Learners/parents are struggling with having so many different platforms and applications being used –need more consistency across all classes. (Parents and Students)
- Implementing best practices for instructing remote learners can be challenging for some teachers – it takes a unique skillset. (Teachers and Students)
- Rural infrastructure shortages are impacting connectivity. (All groups)
- Costs of creating, maintaining, repairing technology systems (e.g. infrastructure, hotspots, laptops, etc.) is high and is not regularly budgeted. (School Leaders, School System Leaders)
- Parents would like more support/capacity to help with instruction/learning is limited. (School Leaders, Teachers, and Parents)
- Disparity among students/families (i.e. access to hardware, connectivity, parental support/capacity). (All groups)

Learning Modes Transition lessons-learned based on focus groups and surveys conducted by the Region 14 CC

Successes

- Reducing number of periods in the day and starting classes later is very helpful to students transitioning between modes. (Students, Teachers, Parents)
- Providing adequate time for teachers and parents to prepare for school closures is helpful. (Teachers, Parents, Students)

- Hybrid models that include a "flex" day to allow teachers to focus on struggling and remote students and for students to focus on completing work is very beneficial. (Teachers, School Leaders)
- Having technology in-hand allows districts to be much more flexible when closures need to occur. (School Leaders, School System Leaders)

Opportunities

- Staffing needed to cover all classes & disruption in learning with each transition. (School System Leaders, School Leaders, and Teachers)
- Quality of instruction/learning disparity between learning modes (remote students struggling). (Teachers, Parents, and Students)
    - In-person having best success.
    - Some students transferring to fully online academies to gain more flexibility in scheduling, finding courses they need, better support for virtual learning.
    - Students in hybrid models worry about safety, but like being in school and seeing friends.
    - Students remote learning does not equal "virtual learning" when work consists of worksheets and homework assignments; students want face time with teachers
    - Students/teachers in temporary quarantine/homebound situations creates great stress and disruption.
    - Teachers having to teach multiple modes simultaneously (i.e. responsible for teaching both in-person and remote students)—quality of instruction suffers for one or the other or both.

Core Academics lessons-learned based on focus groups and surveys conducted by the Region 14 CC

Successes

- Smaller classes provide more time and attention for students and improves their learning. (Students, Teachers)
- Benchmark assessments have aided in identifying learning gaps, allowing schools to target struggling students. (Teachers, School Leaders)
- Curriculum with online components aids teachers and saves prep time. (Teachers, School Leaders)
- Teacher-leaders who are tech-savvy are stepping forward to help schools in professional development and peer support. (Teachers, School Leaders, School System Leaders)

Opportunities

- How test results and accountability for this school year will be used is a top issue of concern for all stakeholder groups.
- Attendance/truancy is a major concern, but schools do not have resources to go out and find students and families. (School Leaders)
- Completion of homework (virtual learners) assigned is an issue; many students are not engaged; they feel it is busy work. (Students, Teachers)
- Diagnostic testing (Teachers, School Leaders)
    - Few are using them because they are overwhelmed by everything else.

- o Don't know where kids stand academically.
- Ensuring students are getting graduation/pathways required coursework opportunities. (Parents, Teachers, Students, School Leaders)
- Disruption in learning with each transition and quarantine. (Teachers, Parents, and Students)

Mental Health & Well-being lessons-learned based on focus groups and surveys conducted by the Region 14 CC

Successes

- Trying to bring more energy and fun back to schools and classrooms through games, contests, recognition, etc. (Students, Teachers)
- Reaching out to students and families regularly to ask, "How are you doing?" (School Leaders, Parents)
- Peer-to-peer connections by students through a campus program has helped student depression. (Students)
- Connecting with community counseling services to support teachers and students. (School Leaders)
- Implementing SEL curriculum on campuses for both teacher and student support. (Teachers, School Leaders)

Opportunities

- Uncertainty about how testing will be used is causing stress/anxiety. (All groups)
- Disruptions when transitioning from learning modes – processes were not always consistent at the LEA level, very stressful. (Teachers and Students)
- Teachers having to teach both in-person and remote learners at the same time (2 separate jobs and can't do well for either group). (Teachers, Parents and Students)
- Teachers/students having to use new instructional/learning practices with minimal training. (Teachers, Parents, and Students)
- Personal health/safety concerns. (Teachers and Students)
- Student mental health and emotional well-being (e.g., loss of social connections, school traditions). (All groups)

Communication lessons-learned based on focus groups and surveys conducted by the Region 14 CC

Successes

- Most stakeholders believe communication has been good at the local level. (School Leaders, Teachers, and Parents)
- Schools/districts are successfully using a wide variety of tools to communicate with students/parents (e.g. social media, texting apps, district apps, LMS platforms, websites, phone calls, home visits). (School Leaders, Teachers, and Parents)
- Being honest, transparent, and open with all stakeholders helps build trust and respect. (Students, Parents, and Teachers)

Opportunities

- Schools struggle to maintain up-to-date contact information for students/parents. (School Leaders)
- Hurricanes have forced migration of families – trying to communicate/contact these families is very difficult. (All groups)

Table 2. Louisiana Strong Start 2020 Focus Groups: What are some of the _successes_ you've experienced as schools reopened this Fall?

S=Students, P= Parents, T=Teachers, SL=School Leaders, SSL=School System Leaders	S	P	T	SL	SSL
Virtual Learning					
Some schools have designated "virtual learning teachers" who do not have in-person classes; this takes the burden off other teachers, provides more contact with individual students, and reduces stress on everyone.			✓	✓	
Some students are better suited to virtual learning than others, and these students thrive in this environment.	✓		✓		
The best way to address the needs of students with disabilities, early childhood, and EL students is to bring them into school, i.e., do not use virtual learning for these students. This also reduces a lot of parent stress.		✓	✓	✓	✓
Asynchronous videos or recorded lessons help both virtual and in-person learning.	✓	✓	✓		
Teachers are adapting quickly and learning to appreciate the technology tools that are available for all learners.			✓	✓	
Districts have made a massive effort to get technology into the hands of students, resulting in a logistics feat that takes most school systems years to implement.			✓	✓	✓
Learning Mode Transitions					
Reducing number of periods in the day and starting classes later is very helpful to students transitioning between modes.	✓	✓	✓		
Providing adequate time for teachers and parents to prepare for school closures is helpful.	✓	✓	✓		
Hybrid models that include a "flex" day to allow teachers to focus on struggling and remote students and for students to focus on completing work is very beneficial.			✓	✓	
Having technology in-hand allows districts to be much more flexible when closures need to occur.				✓	✓
Core Academics					
Slowing down pacing schedule gives more time for students to master content before moving on.	✓	✓			
Smaller classes provide more time and attention for students and improves their learning.	✓	✓	✓		
Benchmark assessments have aided in identifying learning gaps, allowing schools to target struggling students.			✓	✓	
Curriculum with online components aids teachers and saves prep time.			✓	✓	
Teacher-leaders who are tech-savvy are stepping forward to help schools in professional development and peer support.			✓	✓	✓
Mental Health & Well-being					
Trying to bring more energy and fun back to schools and classrooms through games, contests, recognition, etc.	✓		✓	✓	
Reaching out to students and families regularly to ask, "How are you doing?"		✓		✓	
Peer-to-peer connections by students through a campus program has helped student depression.	✓				
Connecting with community counseling services to support teachers and students.				✓	
Implementing SEL curriculum on campuses for both teacher and student support.			✓	✓	
Communication					
Most stakeholders believe communication has been good at the local level (School Leaders, Teachers, and Parents).		✓	✓	✓	
Schools/districts are successfully using a wide variety of tools to communicate with students/parents (e.g. social media, texting apps, district apps, LMS platforms, websites, phone calls, home visits).		✓	✓	✓	
Being honest, transparent, and open with all stakeholders helps build trust and respect.	✓	✓	✓		

Table 3. Louisiana Strong Start 2020 Focus Groups: What are some of the *challenges* you have experienced in opening schools this Fall?

S=Students, P= Parents, T=Teachers, SL=School Leaders, SSL=School System Leaders	S	P	T	SL	SSL
Virtual Learning					
Learners/parents are struggling with having so many platforms, applications being used –need more consistency across all classes.	✓	✓			
Teachers don't know best practices for instructing remote learners –takes a unique skillset.	✓		✓		
Rural issues impacting connectivity.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Costs of creating, maintaining, repairing technology systems (e.g. infrastructure, hotspots, laptops, etc.) is high.				✓	✓
Parent support/capacity to help with instruction/learning is limited; they need support too.		✓	✓	✓	
Disparity among students/families (i.e. access to hardware, connectivity, parental support/capacity).	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Transitions between Learning Modes					
Staffing needed to cover all classes & disruption in learning with each transition.			✓	✓	✓
Quality of instruction/learning disparity between learning modes (remote students struggling).	✓	✓	✓		
Core Academics					
Accountability/testing is a stress factor for all groups, especially for students and teachers.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Attendance/truancy is a major concern.				✓	
Completion of work (virtual learners) assigned is an issue; students are not engaged.			✓		
Diagnostic testing			✓	✓	
Ensuring students are getting graduation/pathways required coursework opportunities.		✓			
Disruption in learning with each transition & quarantine.	✓	✓	✓		
Mental Health & Well-being					
Uncertainty about how testing will be used causing stress/anxiety.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Disruptions when transitioning from learning modes – no consistency, very stressful.	✓		✓		
Teachers having to teach both in-person and remote learners at the same time (2 separate jobs and can't do well for either group).	✓	✓	✓		
Teachers/students having to use new instructional/learning practices with minimal training.	✓	✓	✓		
Personal health/safety concerns.	✓		✓		
Student depression/suicidal tendencies (e.g. loss of social connections, school traditions).	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Communication					
Schools struggle to maintain up-to-date contact information for students/parents.				✓	
Hurricanes have forced migration of families – trying to communicate/contact these families is very difficult.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Section II: High-level Takeaways from the Louisiana Strong Start 2020 Winter Survey

In an effort to comprehensively assess the experiences of school systems statewide, a survey was disseminated to 200 LEAs in mid-November. The survey asked about the most common challenges and strategies implemented by school systems, as well as offered an opportunity for systems to voice additional challenges and concerns.

Table 4 below summarizes the number of LEAs contacted to complete the survey, and the number and proportion of those completed. Of the 31 School System Leaders who participated in the focus group sessions, 27 also completed this survey. The online survey was disseminated by a link distributed through LDOE newsletters and through other regular meetings of LEA system leaders.

Table 4. Survey outreach and participation rates for all LEAs and by LEA-type

	All LEAs	Public School Systems	Nonpublic School Systems
Outreach	389	200	189
Participation	281 (72%)	170 (85%)	111 (59%)

The survey's main findings are presented in the next section, results from individual survey findings are reported in *Appendix D: Survey findings by question.*

Survey Main Findings

- The most common instructional strategies used to support students' learning loss include increased use of individual instruction/support, additional intervention time, and increased use of small group instruction.

- Using aligned curricular materials, specialized supports, and services to support continuous learning presented challenges with some stakeholders. These challenges include student engagement/active participation; student attendance; and families' need for additional technical and academic supports. Language is a challenge for English learners.

- The most common social, emotional, and/or mental health supports include:

  - For students: Access to onsite mental health services (e.g., individual counseling, group counseling), access to third-party or community-based mental health services, use or adoption of a social emotional learning (SEL) curricula, and community/team building activities (non-instructional time dedicated to building peer-to-peer relationships).

- For teachers: Targeted professional development; virtual teaching and learning, access to self-care resources, flexible work from home policies (when possible), and community/team-building activities (non-instructional time dedicated to building staff-to-staff relationships).

- School systems use several methods of communications:

  - To communicate with families, they primarily use the school system information portals (JCampus, PowerSchool, etc.) and emails.

  - To communicate with teachers, they primarily email teachers directly.

  - To communicate with students, they primarily use Google classroom, school system information portals (JCampus, PowerSchool, etc.), or a mix of several communication methods.

- The greatest challenges with communications include maintaining communication with students & families, student engagement/active participation/attendance, and locating and connecting with students and families.

- School systems, on average, rated their reopening plan and efforts with four stars. Highest rated activities include: providing continuous academic support, staffing plan, to adequately adapt to the situation and reopening plan, communications, and making sure all students have devices. Lowest rated activities include virtual learning, providing support for students with special needs and English learners, and making sure students have access to reliable internet connection.

- School systems, on average, found their reopening plan and efforts to be challenging. At the same time, they, on average, were satisfied with the implementation of the reopening plans.

- School systems can benefit from more support in terms of family engagement, student engagement, student attendance, connectivity, instructional materials suited for different learning environments, social, emotional, and mental support, and devices.

- Highlighted notes from school systems in their open comment box include (selected among many comments): positive comments about LDOE, concerns about testing, infrastructure challenges, need to encourage attendance & engagement, concerns about learning gaps, a need for more funds/resources, and challenges with hardware.