

School Reopening Considerations Amid Coronavirus and Social Injustices

2020-21 School Year



*Developed collaboratively with Delaware students,
educators and caregivers.*



TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Introduction](#)

[Social-Emotional Learning Considerations](#)

Pre-K through Elementary 5

Secondary 6

[Community Building & Racial Justice Considerations](#)

Pre-K through Elementary 7

Secondary 8

[Academic Equity Considerations](#)

Pre-K through Secondary 10

[Resource Appendix](#)

11

Delaware Voices - A collection of first-person narratives about the importance of the considerations listed in this document. These submissions appear on pages 3, 6 and 9.

INTRODUCTION

After assessing the critical impact of the Coronavirus pandemic and the return of social injustice to the public consciousness, the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) convened a group of 12 educators, six caregivers and 12 students to discuss their experiences and develop action steps for schools to consider for the 2020-21 school year. Educator participants are current members – or were recommended by current members – of the Delaware Equity Network. The following document and considerations are the result of six weeks of focus group efforts and provide continued support for families, educators, and building and district leaders. While these considerations are offered in response to how to best address student needs as schools begin instruction this fall, the focus group proposes that the suggestions contained herein reflect best practice in all educational settings and circumstances.

DELAWARE VOICES

Learn more from students, families and educators as they share their experiences with Delaware schools and what they feel works – and does not work – for them. Submissions contain personal views for schools to consider as they aim to best support learning.



Maya Hobbs, *student*

[Check out this video](#) of Delaware student Maya Hobbs explaining why the considerations outlined in this document are so important to her.



Talia, *student*

[Listen to Talia](#) - a Delaware student - explains why the considerations in this document are so important to her.



Social and Emotional Learning Considerations

The following considerations are recommended as ways to support social-emotional competencies, which include self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making and relationship skills. Resources to build skills and knowledge to achieve these actions can be found in the [Resource Appendix](#).

Pre-K through Elementary

- Perform daily mental health check-ins using student-selected visual aids, i.e. colored objects, emoji or meme choices chart, temperature charts.
- Have school counselors, other certified mental health professionals or additional staff conduct *weekly* check-ins with teachers and/or students who need additional mental health support. Identify and introduce the staff supporting these services throughout the school year.
- Provide mental health support to students and caregivers outside of the traditional school day through a hotline, text service, email, and/or other means. Services should be clearly communicated with students and caregivers throughout the school year. Services should also be available in multiple languages (including but not limited to Spanish and Haitian Creole).
- Provide professional development for faculty and staff in social-emotional learning (SEL) *prior to and throughout* the school year. SEL competencies should be considered in all planning, practice and communication.

Social and Emotional Learning Considerations

Secondary

- Perform weekly mental health check-ins through a *student-selected*, school-based staff member. These staff members should receive designated time to perform check-ins outside of instructional time. If multiple students select the same staff member, provide flexibility within the staff member's schedule to support additional student check-ins. To ensure that all students connect with a staff member, staff may complete a [consensogram](#). Adhere to confidentiality practices to protect students' rights.
- Have school counselors, other certified mental health professionals, or additional staff conduct *weekly* check-ins with teachers and/or students who need additional mental health support. Identify and introduce the staff supporting these services throughout the school year.
- Provide mental health support to students and caregivers outside of the traditional school day through a hotline, text service, email, and/or other means. Services should be clearly communicated with students and caregivers throughout the school year. Services should also be available in multiple languages (including but not limited to Spanish and Haitian Creole).
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Me'Aira Nuni, student

The actionable guidance in this document is very important for stakeholders, specifically teachers and building leaders, because as educators they have one of the most important roles of nurturing and molding the students who will go on to be the future leaders of this country. Delaware educators will now have inclusive resources and information focused on dealing with racially charged situations that they had not been previously trained to address. With this document, educators will be able to begin the long process of breaking decades of systematic oppression, racism, and disregard for mental health that has taken place in the educational system. It will allow for the creation of environments that will ultimately help students be fully prepared for life after their formal education.

One phrase that continues to be stated throughout these trying times is that “children are the future.” However, if children are not in an educational environment where they are treated equally their academic outcomes might be jaded. To keep that from happening, we have to move into the 2020-2021 school year taking the appropriate steps to create racially inclusive learning spaces. Although this is just a start, reading and implementing the following actionable guidelines in this document, positions stakeholders to be a part of the change that is much needed and finally beginning to happen.

Ann Hobbs, parent and educator

We feel strongly about the guidance given because no matter how schools “reopen” this Fall, it will not be the same experience that it was pre-COVID, but it can’t be the same as it was in April and May 2020 either. It is important to listen to the people most directly impacted (students, parents, teachers) to come up with solutions that lead to the best learning and social-emotional outcomes for our community to cope and even flourish under this new situation. Being creative and collaborative NOW about how virtual options can meet traditional school functions in the lives of students and families



will benefit us all. Above all us, virtual instruction will keep us all safe from infection and spread of the virus, but it also offers possibilities for alternative delivery methods that could be used under all kinds of circumstances and could accommodate all kinds of learners. I hope we are all (parents, students, teachers, administrators, district, and state officials) able to come together to make this school year as successful as it possibly can be. Together, we can make a difference.

Community Building & Racial Justice Considerations

The following considerations are recommended in order to foster brave and safe spaces for students, caregivers, and their communities. Resources to build skills and knowledge to achieve these actions can be found in the [Resource Appendix](#).

Pre-K through Elementary

- Dedicate a minimum of two weeks during the school year for relationship building between instructional/emotional support staff and students and/or caregivers. Relationship building should be embedded in academic instruction and assignments to foster a strong sense of community. In order to better support the transition to the new year, schools may provide the opportunity for students to loop with their former educators. This time could be split between the previous year's instructor and the current instructor, varying by district and building. For instance, the former instructor could be invited into the current instructor's class for a check-in.
- Provide training to parents on how to access and effectively use the technology and platforms available to their students. These trainings can and should be offered during the two weeks of relationship building.
- Provide professional development to faculty and staff in anti-racism and culturally responsive pedagogy. Modify and provide this training to interested families and caregivers.
- Communicate across multiple platforms, i.e. social media, websites, all-calls, distributable flyers, etc., and in multiple languages (including but not limited to Spanish and Haitian Creole). Update communications on a consistent basis, i.e. once a week on Sunday evenings.
- Build partnerships with local community organizations that already support communication and service to our most vulnerable populations (i.e. the Boys and Girls Club, First State Community Action, the YMCA, the YWCA, etc.) to further strengthen district and charter services to traditionally underserved communities. This action further strengthens trust between schools and communities.

Community Building & Racial Justice Considerations

Secondary

- Dedicate a minimum of two weeks during the school year for relationship building between instructional/emotional support staff and students and/or caregivers. Relationship building should be embedded in academic instruction and assignments to foster a strong sense of community. In order to better support the transition to the new year, schools may provide the opportunity for students to loop with their former educators. This time could be split between the previous year's instructor and the current instructor, varying by district and building. For instance, the former instructor could be invited into the current instructor's class for a check-in.
- Provide training to parents on how to access and effectively use the technology and platforms available to their students. These trainings can and should be offered during the two weeks of relationship building.
- Provide professional development to faculty and staff in anti-racism and culturally responsive pedagogy. Modify and provide this training to interested families and caregivers. Provide additional training to students on tools that support difficult conversations with peers.
- Communicate across multiple platforms, i.e. social media, websites, all-calls, distributable flyers, etc., and in multiple languages (including but not limited to Spanish and Haitian Creole). Update communications on a consistent basis, i.e. once a week on Sunday evenings.
- Build partnerships with local community organizations that already support communication and service to our most vulnerable populations (i.e. the Boys and Girls Club, First State Community Action, the YMCA, the YWCA, etc.) to further strengthen district and charter services to traditionally underserved communities. This action further strengthens trust between schools and communities.

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Berneda Hayward, *educator*



It is my duty as an educator to ensure that my instruction and guidance are aligned with the specific needs of my students. This document outlines the social-emotional, cultural/racial, and academic needs expressed by students, and it is imperative that these needs are met, so that students are at their best to learn and perform. If they are not at their best, it is our duty to utilize resources until we get them there. Every student deserves equal access to resources, equitable outcomes from their learning, and people who care enough to make this happen.



Tyzhir Morris, *graduate*

[Check out this video](#) of Tyzhir Morris, a Delaware high school graduate and future educator, explaining why the considerations in this document are so important to him.



Academic Equity Considerations

The following considerations are recommended in order to ensure all learners have access to academic rigor, engaging, and differentiated instruction and learning supports. Resources to build skills and knowledge to achieve these actions can be found in the [Resource Appendix](#).

Pre-K through Secondary



Collect samples of students work. Use low-stakes assessments such as exit tickets and grade-less quizzes rather than formal pre-tests. After collecting samples, individualized teacher/student conferences should ensue. Use conferences to address the students' strengths and identify where they can grow. Students should work with teachers to develop goals that will positively impact their growth and address the standards they need to master. Modeling a growth-mindset, teachers and students will scaffold student learning and trace growth throughout the year.



Work towards measuring student growth via project- and problem-based assessments that celebrate student voice and choice. Consider using portfolio assessments and student-generated rubrics to ensure that students are leading their own educational experiences. Assessments should encourage engagement, self-reflection, personal goal setting, and efficacy.



Provide students with timely and personalized feedback on both their submitted work as well as their level of engagement during synchronous and asynchronous learning.



Assign flexible deadlines as well as multiple opportunities to submit work in order for students to demonstrate measurable growth.



Consistently update grades based on district and/or building-wide grading policies. Develop mechanisms to allow both students and caregivers opportunities to discuss student achievement with faculty.

Resource Appendix

Social and Emotional Learning Resources

- [CASEL: Leveraging the Power of SEL As You Prepare to Reopen & Renew Your School Community](#)
- [CASEL Core Competencies](#)
- [CASEL Reunite, Renew, and Thrive: SEL Roadmap for Reopening Schools](#)
- [Consensogram Resource](#)
- [Delaware K-12 SEL Competencies](#)
- [Trauma-Informed Strategies for Transitioning Back to School](#)
- [Tips for Creating a Trauma-Informed & Culturally-Responsive \(TICR\) Classroom](#)
- [How to Become a Trauma-Informed School Leader \(recorded webinar\)](#)
- [Trauma-Informed School Strategies During COVID-19](#)

Community Building & Racial Justice Resources

- [Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning: Master Teacher Project](#)
- [School Support Resources \(Compiled via DDOE\)](#)
- [Equitable School Safety Resource](#)
- <https://www.tolerance.org>

Academic Equity Resources

- [Project Based Learning Resources \(PBLWorks\)](#)
- [Virtual Student Led Conferences Guide](#)
- [Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium Reopening Guide](#)
- [Instruction Partners Resource Hub](#)
- [CCSSO Academic Guidance](#)
- [Delaware Classroom Ready Plan](#)