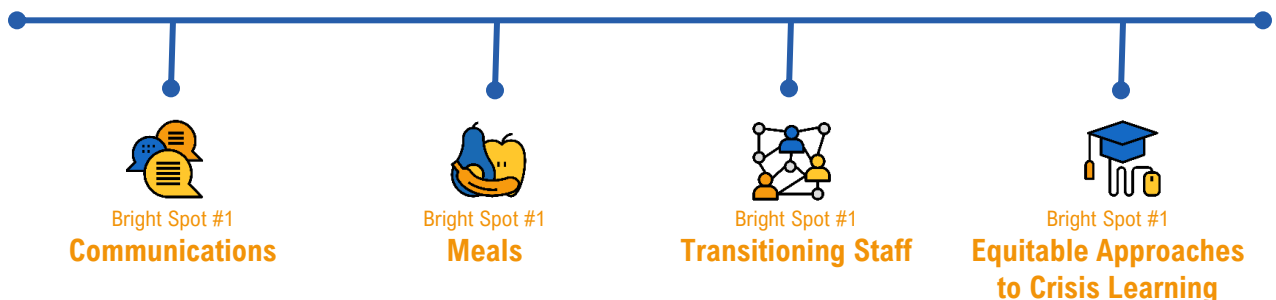


# Navigating the Moment

3 Bright Spots and 1 Focus Spot  
from School Districts Responding  
to the COVID-19 Pandemic

One thing that the current COVID-19 pandemic has underscored is that school is so much more than just school — schools are workplaces, networks, and centers for community identity and empowerment that serve students with a vast array of personal and educational needs. This makes it even more remarkable that, with almost no notice, school districts have stepped up to this challenge; and it inspires confidence in systems' ability to navigate this moment and beyond. It also means that during the last few weeks, school districts have had to get strategic and creative to meet the needs of their students and their staff.

Here are examples of what these efforts have looked like across the country, including three bright spots and one focus spot:





Bright Spot #1

## Communications

*Strong district and school communications are always important — especially right now.*

- ▶ **Maintaining Transparency:** [Detroit Public Schools](#) updates confirmed cases by school to keep students and families aware of possible exposure risks.
- ▶ **Keeping Communities Informed:** [Highline Public Schools](#) uses an easy-to-find section of their website for Coronavirus updates; [Tulsa Public Schools](#) has a comprehensive, user-friendly Coronavirus hub that is organized based on who might be looking for what; [Montgomery County Public Schools](#) retweets local health experts and announcements from the governor.
- ▶ **Focusing on 2-Way Communications:** [Klein ISD](#) staff monitor and respond to questions on their website between 8:00am – 5:00pm each weekday; [Fulton County Schools](#) uses social media to encourage teachers and parents to share examples of how they're working to support students.
- ▶ **Building Trust:** Teachers like Ms. Merritt from [Ocean City Public School District](#) post videos of them doing read-alouds; Superintendents like Dr. PK Diffenbaugh from [Monterey Peninsula Unified School District](#) share video messages; Districts like [Metro Nashville Public Schools](#) hold virtual town halls.

Find out more about Coronavirus communications strategies for school districts by exploring guidance and tools from [EAB](#) and [Finalsite](#), including this [on-demand webinar](#).



Bright Spot #2

## Meals

- ▶ **Partnering Locally:** Districts like [Clark County School District](#) and [Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools](#) partner with local nonprofits and community agencies to provide emergency food support to students and families.
- ▶ **Ensuring Neighborhood Access:** Many districts, such as [St. Paul Public Schools](#), recognized that “Grab and Go” methods for emergency food support present challenges for families who lack transportation and have adapted by using usual bus routes and bus stops to meet students’ needs.

“Community partners joined the effort to provide boxes of groceries to help assist entire families.”

*-District Leader*

### For More Information:

- ▶ **Federal COVID-19 Stimulus Package | SREB**  
A summary of education funding in the \$2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act.
- ▶ **District Responses to COVID-19 School Closures | CRPE**  
A continuously updated database of school districts’ plans for supporting students during these unprecedented mass closures



Bright Spot #3

## Transitioning Staff

- ▶ **Adapting for Remote Teaming:** At our recent Aspen CFO convening, district staff shared how proud they were of how their teams are adjusting to operate during closures, including establishing norms for remote ways of working that reinforce positive interactions.



For more on effectively shifting to remote collaboration, check out tips from [Education First](#).

- ▶ **Connecting School-Based Staff:** Teachers in [Lake Washington School District](#) engage in remote training and professional development sessions; In [Chippewa School District](#), teachers have weekly meetings with their teams and administrators.



“Young teachers, who in the past, have looked to veteran teachers for advice, now have the opportunity to help their friends in return.”

*-Teacher*

- ▶ **Navigating Central Office Processes:** During our Aspen CFO convening, participants shared how their districts are aligning on processes for budget approval, expediting or waiving approvals and requirements on COVID-related purchases and overtime, and ensuring the finance team’s ability to conduct essential functions remotely, such as payroll and accounts payable.



“A cross-departmental team of over 100 staff was able to coordinate and complete conference call school budget meetings with principals and assistant superintendents to set school budgets for next year — over 220 schools in one week!”

*-District Leader*



Focus Spot

## Equitable Approaches to Crisis Learning

*Unplanned distance learning in times of crises further illuminates existing inequities and underscores the importance of addressing them. Although we need to focus both short- and long-term efforts on addressing these inequities, there are bite-sized bright spots going on right now that we can use as a foundation for further research, learning, and strategic planning.*

“My team had done some “what if” planning ahead of the initial shutdown, so we were ahead of the curve.”

-District Leader

- ▶ **Figuring Out Internet Access:** WiFi-enabled buses in [South Bend](#) and [Charleston County](#) are deployed to help ensure students have internet access; Districts like [Cherry Hill Public Schools](#) connect low-income families with special offers for free internet service.
- ▶ **Creating Learning Materials:** [Corona-Norco Unified School District](#) has differentiated portals with resources for parents, teachers, and students; [Dallas ISD](#), [Boulder Public Schools](#), and [Kutztown Area School District](#) post family-friendly learning menus for students; [Success Academy](#) shares their remote learning plans nationally with other schools and educators.
- ▶ **Thinking About Access to Learning Materials:** Many districts — including [Tacoma Public Schools](#), [Austin ISD](#), and [Shelby County Schools](#) distribute pre-printed materials, including instructional support for parents that is translated into different languages; Other districts, such as [Philadelphia Public Schools](#) and [Seattle Public Schools](#), are deploying Chromebooks or working with the business and philanthropic community to identify additional ways to distribute needed technology to students across the district.

Learn more about instructional models and management for effective distance learning from [Instruction Partners](#) and more about digital equity from [EdSurge](#).



- ▶ **Doing Broadcasts:** [Metro Nashville Public Schools](#) partners with Nashville Public Television to broadcast eight hours of ‘at home learning’ for students and families each weekday; [Los Angeles Unified School District](#) partners with PBS and other flagship stations to offer standards-aligned, dual language lesson plans and assignments.
- ▶ **Keeping Interaction Going:** Teachers in many districts — such as [Cambridge Public Schools](#) and [Everett Public Schools](#) — are connecting with their students directly via video conferencing, phone calls, and FaceTime.
- ▶ **Not Forgetting Learning Supports:** Districts like [Boulder Public Schools](#) provide resource for parents about ways they can support student learning at home, and districts like [Albany Public Schools](#) are making sure not to leave out resources explicitly focused on social-emotional learning.

For more COVID-19 resources,  
visit our [toolkit page](#).

Tell us about your district’s COVID-  
19 wins and challenges!  
Take our [survey](#).

Want to talk to someone directly?  
Send us an email at  
[contact@erstrategies.org](mailto:contact@erstrategies.org).



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