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# Developing COVID Comeback Models for Fall 2020



EDUCATION RESOURCE  
STRATEGIES



# Developing COVID Comeback Models for Fall 2020

American education leaders have aligned on the idea that a return to school in the fall cannot look the same as our in-person pre-COVID model. Even if schools can fully re-open for in-person schooling, leaders must plan for how they will organize people, time and money to:

- Accelerate student learning to make up for learning loss
- Help students reconnect with schooling and support increased social and emotional needs
- Respond to physical distancing and sanitation requirements
- Provide for teachers and students who don't feel safe attending school or who contract the virus

School and system leaders designing a re-entry strategy will need to plan for multiple scenarios. These include **in-person models**, where students attend school in a school building every day; fully **remote models**, where students attend school from home or some other location via laptops and the Internet; and **hybrid models**, where students attend school both in-person *and* remotely based on an established, predictable schedule.

Because the public health situation is likely to change at some point in the 2020-21 school year, leaders must also ensure models enable **coherence** if and when a switch in models is required. For example, if the pandemic intensifies in a community, school will shift back to an all remote model; if physical distancing is no longer required, school could shift to an all (or mostly) in-person model. Individual students may also need to transition from one model to another based on family circumstances.

Finally, any model requires **tradeoffs** to ensure that people, time and money are organized to address a school's or system's most critical student needs. The work of strategically organizing school resources is complex in the best of times. Given current economic conditions, declines in state and local tax revenue may require system leaders to make additional tradeoffs during the school year. Therefore, leaders must take care not to lock up resources in structural investments that are difficult to recoup.

With so much complexity, leaders will need to take a strategic approach to developing and testing scenarios for re-entry that work within the constraints of budget, space, staff and family need - all while optimizing the learning outcomes and support for students.



## Decision Points for Choosing and Adapting COVID Comeback Models

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We recommend that system and school leaders engage in a three-step process to identify and develop the COVID Comeback Models that are right for their communities:

### 1. Estimate the proportion of students and educators who could attend in-person school and the proportion likely to be fully remote this fall.

By now, leaders in most districts have developed an early assessment of the technology, transportation, physical plant and operational issues that must be addressed if physical distancing is still in place this fall, based on guidance from federal, state and local officials. These considerations form a crucial foundation for designing COVID Comeback Models. For example, knowing the number of people that can occupy a classroom or common space at one time will affect decisions about the mix of students who can participate in school onsite and offsite on any given day. Similarly, understanding community tolerance for adult exposure to large groups of students will directly affect leaders' ability to rotate adults among multiple in-person classrooms during the day.

Ideally, leaders have been engaging families, educators and community partners to understand and prioritize students' most significant academic and social-emotional needs. Armed with this information, system and school leaders can begin to design models that could best address family and educator needs this fall. Two decisions will have the most significant impact on leadership strategy at this stage.

**Estimate the proportion of students and educators who will be unable or unwilling to participate in in-person school.** Data from surveys of families and educators will inform decisions on in-person staffing as well as the necessary scale of all-remote options. For example, surveys of families and educators can help leaders project the proportion who are unlikely to attend in-person school until the health situation changes significantly.

**Determine how, with limited in-person space, you will prioritize specific student groups for in-person support.** Some students may require full-time in-person school. For example, students with low-incidence disabilities, including those commonly served in self-contained settings, are more likely to benefit from services that are difficult to provide remotely. Therefore, a hybrid model should prioritize space, time and staff for these students, which will necessarily limit the number of other students who could attend school in-person on any given day.

By answering these questions, leaders will begin to quantify the mix of in-person and remote support required to implement models that include physical distancing this fall.



## 2. Make core decisions about remote and hybrid structures.

A premise of school re-design for 2020-21 is that due to physical distancing requirements and/or family and educator preferences, not all students and educators will be able to work in-person all the time. By outlining aspirations for the student experience – drawing on input from families, educators and other members of the community – *and* calculating the mathematical constraints associated with each service model, leaders can begin to outline realistic plans for remote and hybrid models.

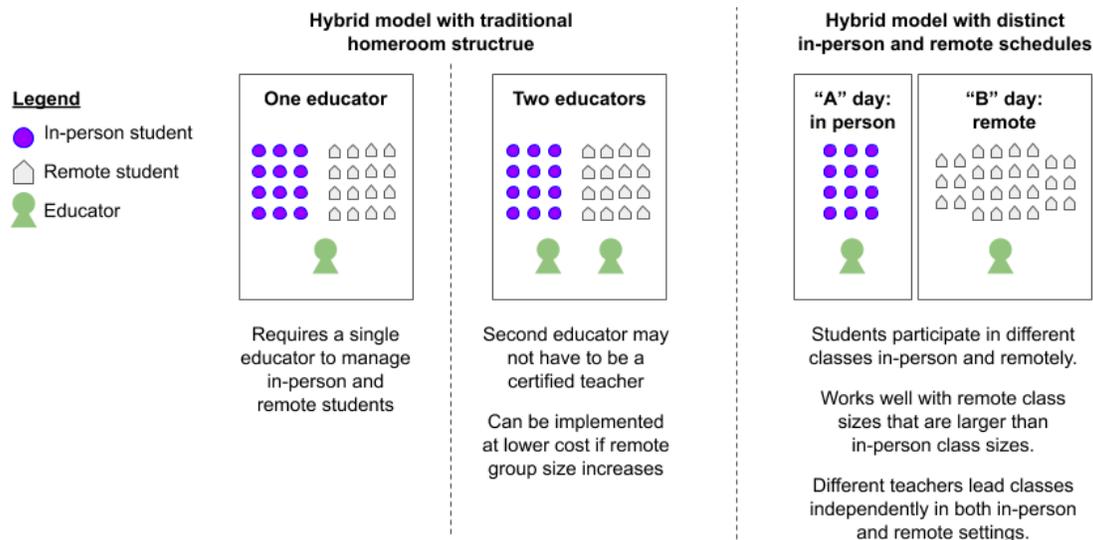
Hybrid models – where students attend school both in-person *and* remotely based on an established, predictable schedule – pose a new and unique set of tradeoffs, which ultimately determine the viability of any set of design decisions. The most critical decisions at this stage are:

**Determine the role of traditional homeroom structures in a remote-only or hybrid model.** In models that maintain traditional homeroom structures, in-person and remote students learn together in one class. This approach maintains homeroom cohesion and limits the scale of change to schedules and student grouping associated with a potential transition back to an all-in-person model.

However, maintaining a homeroom structure also requires that educators develop the ability to lead simultaneous instruction for on-site and off-site students. These “multi-modal” classes could also be staffed with an additional educator whose primary focus is on managing engagement of offsite students.

Alternatively, in models that disband traditional homeroom structures, classes can be organized to be *either* in-person *or* remote. This creates more flexibility in scheduling and minimizes the complexity of teachers’ jobs, since one teacher can focus on teaching in one modality at a time.

Figure 1. Hybrid models with and without traditional homeroom structures.





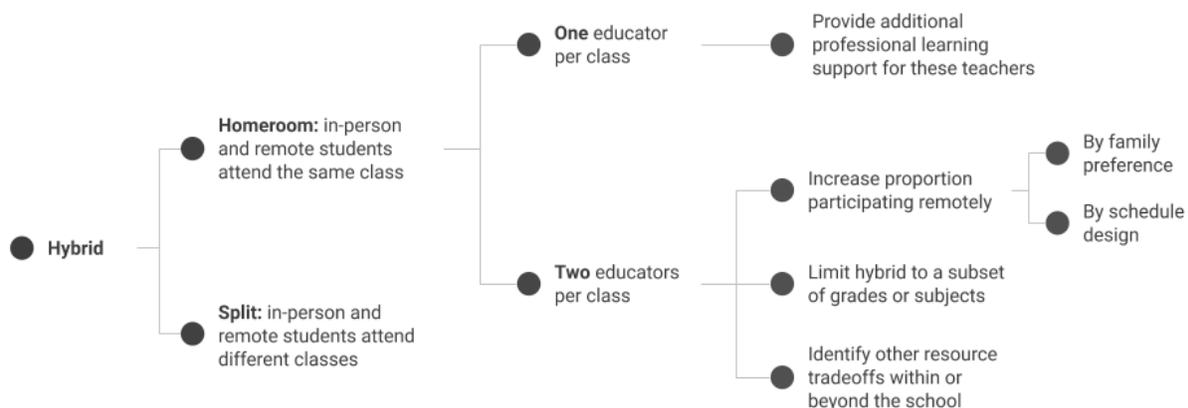
The resource implications of this decision are significant. For example, consider the hybrid model depicted on the left side of Figure 2. With this traditional homeroom structure and 28 students, 12 students participate on-site (in-person) and 16 join remotely on any given day. Led by one educator, this classroom would operate with a student-teacher ratio of 28:1; the teacher would likely require additional professional learning support to strengthen their ability to lead instruction in this more complex class environment.

Adding a second educator to this class to manage engagement of off-site students would reduce the student-teacher ratio to 14:1; it would also increase the staff-related cost to run the class. Alternatively, leaders could limit the increase in cost by increasing the proportion of students who participate in learning from off-site (typically at home) or by identifying other resource tradeoffs at the school or system level.

For example, adding ten more off-site class participants would increase overall class size to 38; with two educators this creates a 19:1 student-teacher ratio and reduces the school’s overall staffing need. Nearly 70% of students (26 of 38) join the class remotely each day, while the remainder attend in person. Increasing the proportion of students served in an all-remote model has a similar impact – with larger remote classes, more resources are available for other small group instruction or additional student support. Alternatively, in a hybrid model that does not maintain a traditional homeroom structure, leaders have the flexibility to vary group sizes and schedules for on-site and off-site students, as depicted on the right side of Figure 2.

How would this play out in a school’s schedule? In a system where one-third of the students work remotely 100% of the time, an A/B hybrid structure works, because on any given day, one-third of students are in-person (A day), one-third work offsite as part of the A/B schedule, and one-third are fully remote by choice. However, if fewer students opt for a remote-only model, leaders have at least two other choices: they could rotate students so in-person days occur less frequently, such as an A/B/C day structure where every student attends in-person one out of *three* days, or limit the A/B hybrid model to certain grade levels or other groups of students, such as early elementary students or those in transition grades. Students in other grades would then be served in a 100% remote or 100% in-person model – likely the former due to physical distancing requirements.

**Figure 2.** Resource tradeoffs associated with hybrid models with and without homeroom structures.

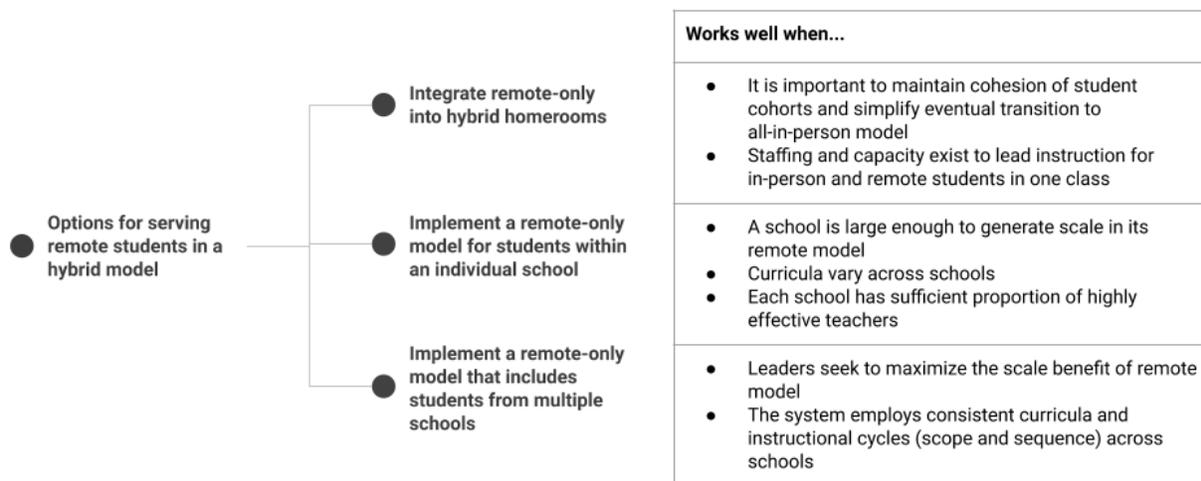




**Determine the role of remote-only school models.** This decision is closely related to homeroom preference. In systems where there is a strong bias toward traditional homeroom structures, remote-only students could be integrated into a combined onsite/offsite class. However, where a significant proportion of students and educators are unable or unwilling to attend school in-person this fall, students may be better served if leaders can leverage limited resources to provide high-quality instruction to a broad group of students, potentially across more than one school.

Curriculum and coherence are important considerations for this decision point. In a system with a diverse set of academic programs or curricula that otherwise vary across schools – for example, a STEM model, a bilingual immersion model, a project-based model and a traditional model – some students brought together in a multi-school, remote-only model will move into a new academic experience. If at some point during the school year system leaders transition back to traditional in-person schools, these students would again experience a shift in academic focus. Therefore, multi-school remote-only models work best where curricula and instructional focus are shared across schools.

**Figure 3.** Options for serving remote-only students in a hybrid model.



**Establish target group sizes for on-site and off-site instruction.** Ultimately, the feasibility of any given model will hinge on target group sizes for the experience of students learning in traditional classrooms and students learning in off-site environments.

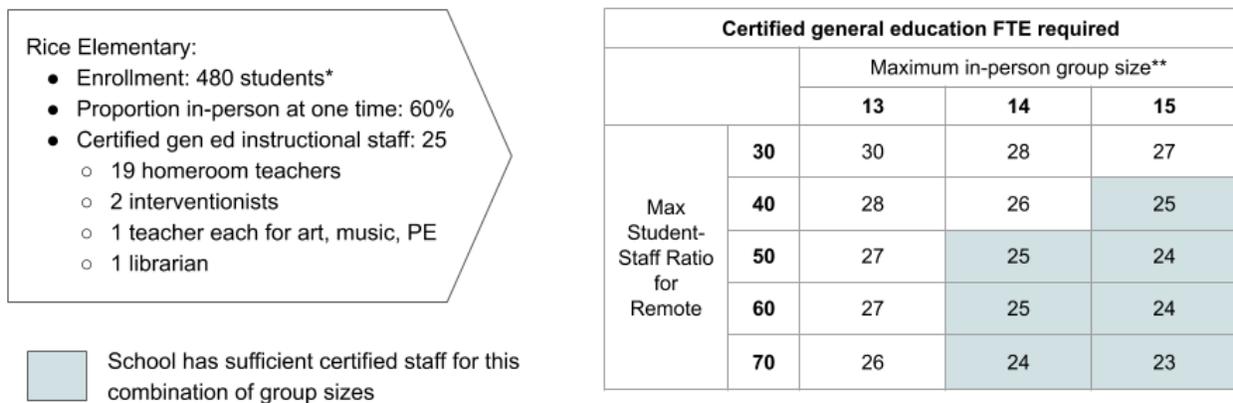
To illustrate this point, consider a K-5 school with 480 general education students, or 80 per grade level. The school has 25 staff who are certified to lead general education instruction – 19 homeroom teachers, three specials teachers, two interventionists and a librarian. Based on an assessment of student needs, the capacity of the school’s physical plant, physical distancing assumptions and community input, leaders believe as many as 288 students, or 60% of total enrollment, could be in the school building at one time.



Physical distancing requirements and classroom layouts will drive leaders’ assessment of feasible in-person group sizes for the 60% of students in the building on any given day. That will leave a specific number of instructional staff to meet the needs of the 40% of students who are working remotely. Because remote instruction may not be educator-led for a full day, the relevant metric is *maximum student-to-staff ratio for remote instruction*.

In this school, imagine the feasible maximum in-person group size is 14. Serving 288 students in person at this level would require 21 certified teachers, leaving four certified teachers to address the needs of 192 off-site students – or 48 students for each available certified teacher. This means that if all remote students are supported by a certified teacher for their full remote day, remote group sizes would also be 48. However, if remote instruction is organized to enable independent student work for a portion of the day, group sizes for instructor-led periods could be reduced proportionally. For example, off-site students could work with a certified teacher for a quarter each remote day, reducing group size to 12.

**Figure 4.** Determining target group sizes for a school with a hybrid model.



\* Includes general education and students with disabilities served in inclusion settings. Example assumes that students served in self-contained settings are matched with a separate set of special education teachers.  
\*\* Assumes only certified general education teachers can lead instruction

**Determine optimal uses of time for both in-person and remote settings.** Certain grades, subjects and activities may lend themselves more easily to remote learning. For example, most elementary school students require direct supervision and care throughout the day, while many adolescents can engage in learning and other activities independently. Similarly, skills practice, knowledge-building, office hours with instructors and some online self-driven learning platforms can work well in remote learning contexts. Therefore, decisions about what activities students will engage in while onsite vs. offsite will affect how staff are assigned and how time is allocated.

Notably, a decision to maintain multi-modal homerooms limits the potential for variation in the student experience in onsite and offsite environments, because students will operate on the same schedule regardless of where they are learning from on that day.



### 3. Develop a schedule and staffing model that works within expected resource levels.

With a few exceptions, remaining decisions mirror those leaders face when developing schedules in a traditional context. These include decisions about how teachers are assigned to specific classes, teaching teams and leadership roles; the role of departmentalization; and questions about use of student and teacher time, including for individual and collaborative planning. In a COVID Comeback Model, a few considerations are particularly important.

**Teacher assignment.** Educators can be assigned to lead instruction not only based on grade and subject expertise, but also based on comfort with and feasibility of leading in-person, remote and hybrid classes.

**Departmentalized instruction** focuses teachers on a limited set of content, which can simplify the role. At the same time, a fully departmentalized model with physical distancing requirements in place means certain subjects are likely to be taught in distance learning formats only.

**Teacher collaboration** is crucial for sustaining high-quality instruction in a newly complex learning context. However, coverage for teacher planning is more nuanced with physical distancing.

In a traditional model, during teacher planning, students are assigned to lunch, recess or specials like art, music or physical education. With physical distancing, leaders may need to limit the exposure of students and adults to a smaller number of other individuals, while many of the educators commonly assigned to “cover” students during teacher planning time may be needed for other instructional roles. Therefore, leaders may seek to schedule teacher collaboration time outside the student day. This might require renegotiating collective bargaining agreements about use of teacher time and/or shortening the student day to create more time for teachers to work without direct responsibility for student supervision.

**Teacher leadership** is also a critical lever for providing high-quality instruction for all students, and for creating space for other teachers to develop the skills required to effectively teach students in a more complex environment.



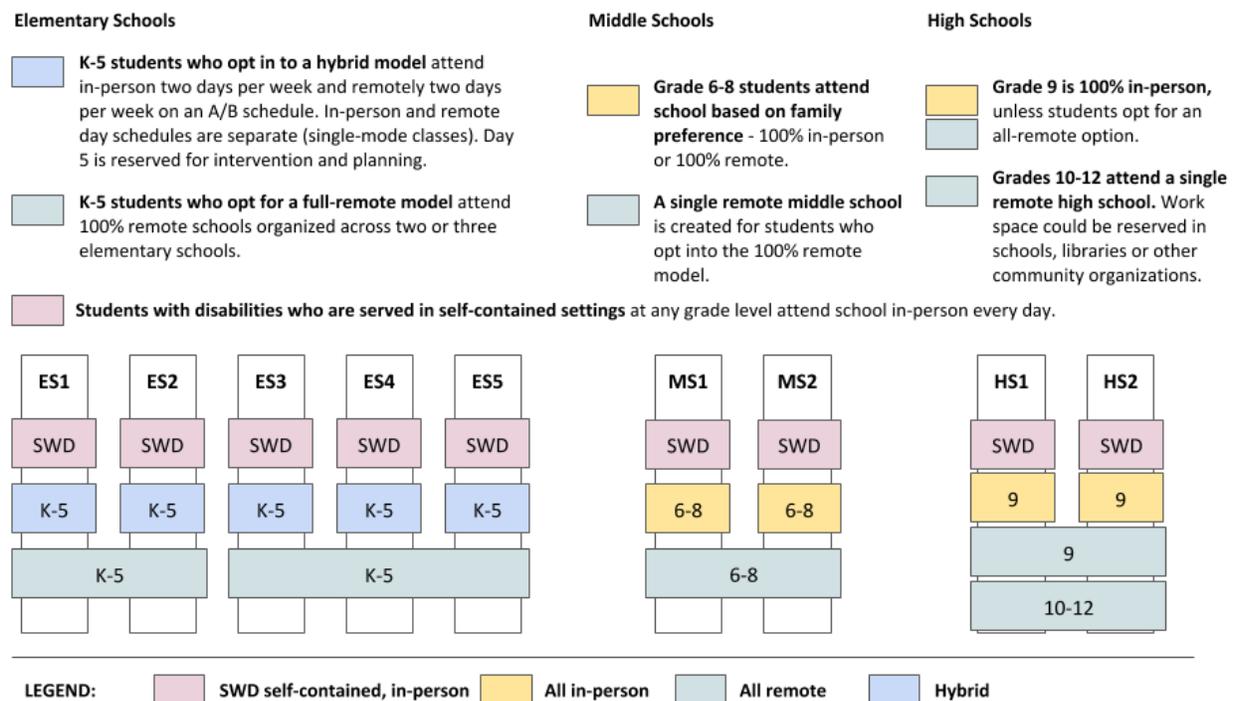
## A System-Level View of COVID Comeback Models

Together, these decisions incorporate leadership vision, community perspectives and constraints on staff, space and other resources. They also begin to clarify the full system-wide picture of how schools will operate in the fall. For example, at this point system leaders might prioritize:

- A consistent school-wide experience for elementary students, including regular in-person school.
- A rich in-person experience for middle grades students that creates time and space to address academic and social-emotional needs.
- An intensive focus on ninth grade to protect against a potential increase in dropout rates.
- A remote-only model for grades ten through twelve that draws on attributes of high-quality secondary and post-secondary remote educational experiences.
- Remote-only models at all grade levels for families who prefer to keep their students out of school buildings until the public health situation improves significantly.
- Ensuring that students with disabilities who are typically served in self-contained settings have access to in-person service models at all grade levels.

Here is a depiction of what a system-wide model that aligns with these priorities could look like:

**Figure 5.** Example system-wide configuration of COVID Comeback Models.





## Appendix: Decision Points Table

### 1. Determine what proportion of students and educators are available to be in school, and what proportion will require support in full-remote settings this fall.

Decision Point	Why it Matters	Example
Based on family and educator needs, what proportion of students and educators do we expect will be <b>unable or unwilling to participate in in-person school</b> ?	Informs limits on in-person staffing and the scale of remote school required to educate all students.	<p>Family surveys indicate that 30% of students are unlikely to attend in-person school until the health situation changes significantly. Therefore, our model should include an all-remote option that can accommodate those students.</p> <p>Educator surveys indicate that 20% of teachers are unlikely to attend in-person school until the health situation changes significantly. Therefore, our model should include structures that leverage remote teachers for instruction of remote students and/or other roles where they can generate impact working remotely.</p>

### 2. Make core decisions about remote and hybrid structures.

Decision Point	Why it Matters	Example
What is the role of a remote school that includes students from multiple traditional schools, including the potential for a <b>district-wide remote school</b> ?	Informs the scalability of resources serving students in a remote model.	We believe that our high school students can succeed if they have access to recorded and/or large group lessons, supplemented by intervention periods, study halls and/or office hours. This gives us the freedom to leverage staff across a large remote school, which could also include having one excellent teacher providing instruction to hundreds of students, rather than asking many teachers to deliver the same instruction in smaller classes. However, this model could make it difficult to transition back to full-time in-person school, especially if instructional cycles are not fully aligned across in-person and remote models.



Decision Point	Why it Matters	Example
To what extent do we envision students participating in a <b>hybrid/multi-modal</b> learning model, where some students attend in-person and others participate in the same class, simultaneously, from a remote setting.	Informs what it takes for a teacher to lead a class and how we might assign staff to support hybrid instruction.	We value the continuity of students working as a single class unit throughout the week, whether they are remote or in-person. Based on our experience of remote instruction this spring, we think it requires two adults to run a classroom with multi-modal learning, where a subset of students are in-person and others are attending remotely. Therefore, we must staff each hybrid classroom with two educators, including at least one who is assigned to manage remote students and ensure they are fully engaged in the class.
What is our vision for <b>maximum group size</b> for a single in-person classroom? For a remote-only classroom? For a hybrid classroom?	Determines the scheduling and assignment of students.	Physical distancing limits classrooms to 12 students and we prioritize small group instruction in the in-person context. With limited staff resources, we are comfortable structuring some remote classes with as many as 40 students, which will enable us to more heavily staff in-person school compared to remote school. A hybrid classroom could include the 12 in-person students with some number of remote students, depending on how we are able to staff the hybrid class.
What are our <b>optimal uses of time</b> for both in-person and remote settings?	Determines how student and teacher time will be organized, and what responsibilities staff will have in in-person and remote modalities.	Many of our students' richest engagement in school starts with art and music. Based on our experience with remote learning this spring, we believe these subjects are best offered in-person. Therefore, our art and music teachers must be in-person and our in-person schedules must include art and music. To make room for this, some academic experiences may be provided in a remote modality only.



### 3. Develop a schedule and staffing model that works within expected resource levels.

Decision Point	Why it Matters	Example
<b>Who should lead instruction</b> in-person, remotely and in hybrid classrooms?	Affects what content and structures are created for in-person, remote and hybrid contexts.	Before COVID, state regulations required that teachers-of-record lead all in-person instruction, with aides, student-teachers and others providing support. If this regulation doesn't change, we may not be able to assign other educators to lead instruction, which may require us to sustain very large remote group sizes.
How long is the <b>student and teacher day</b> ?	Informs decisions about use of time, including the ability to schedule teacher collaboration outside the student day.	In a system where the teacher day is only 15 minutes longer than the student day, teacher collaboration blocks must either be scheduled during student time – requiring coverage for in-person students – and/or be created by “banking” daily planning time to create a longer once-weekly planning block.
<b>Where are students during remote school?</b>	Informs use of space and adults to supervise students who may need to be away from home on their remote learning days.	We can support 40% of our students in-person on any given day, but a larger proportion of our students rely on school for shelter or security during the school day. Therefore, we may want to reconsider use of space and staff, or work with a community partner, to ensure these students have a supervised place to go on their remote learning days.
In what contexts will we <b>departmentalize instruction</b> ?	Informs student and teacher assignment, especially in a remote context.	To reduce complexity for teachers, we will continue to departmentalize instruction beginning in sixth grade. While this will increase teachers' student load, it will enable shared lesson planning and increased content specialization for teachers. To ensure departmentalized teachers can reach all students, we may need to prioritize certain subjects for remote instruction.



Decision Point	Why it Matters	Example
How will we organize <b>teaching teams</b> to balance and distribute expertise?	Informs assignment of teachers to specific in-person and remote roles.	We want to elevate our best teachers into team leadership roles so they can help improve the quality of instruction for a larger group of students. Therefore, we will need to consider optimal teacher team combinations when organizing in-person and remote instruction.
How much time do we want to provide for teacher <b>collaborative planning</b> ?	Affects the extent to which other staff will need to provide coverage.	In recent years, we have improved instructional quality and student outcomes through a curriculum-connected professional learning strategy that relies on long blocks for shared-content teacher collaboration. Previously, this time existed during the school day, with students attending back-to-back lunch and specials periods. If physical distancing requires us to limit the exposure of students and adults to a small number of people, we will need to consider alternate ways to create long collaboration blocks, e.g. when students are not in school.
How will we cover <b>lunch and individual planning</b> time?	Affects the extent to which other staff will need to provide coverage.	Our model keeps 13 students in a single classroom with one teacher throughout the day, limiting exposure and maintaining physical distancing. However, we believe teachers benefit from (and/or they are required by contract to have) breaks for lunch and individual planning. Therefore, we will need to assign another adult to supervise students in their classroom during the teacher's lunch and planning time.