

START HERE

5 “power strategies” to accelerate equity-focused recovery and redesign



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5 “power strategies” (and real-life examples) to accelerate equity-focused recovery and redesign

Next school year will look different than any that came before. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, children across the country need even more opportunities for differentiated, high-quality learning, even stronger relationships with the adults in their school, and even more streamlined access to social-emotional support. These needs are even more deeply felt in our lowest-income communities and by Black and Latinx students, English language learners, and students with disabilities.

While new federal funding provides a much-needed infusion of resources, it will take years to address the academic and social-emotional needs that have emerged or been exacerbated as a result of the pandemic — and the cost of doing so will far exceed the revenue most districts expect to receive.

District and school leaders have already put in a lot of work to plan what next school year will look like. But they still face a wide array of options for next year — and while they cannot afford to simply add temporary programs on top of existing structures, navigating *how* to sustainably *change* those existing structures for the better can feel overwhelming. **The work of adapting teaching and learning for the post-COVID era is best approached like stepping stones, with a “do now, build toward mindset.”**

We’ve identified **five “Power Strategies”** to focus your investments and planning on. These five strategies address critical student needs now *and* lay a sustainable foundation for lasting improvement.

Five Power Strategies

COVID-19 has put the spotlight on *and* compounded existing challenges in our country's districts and schools. These Power Strategies are grounded in years of research on how to best support students' academic and social-emotional development. We prioritized strategies that also tackle underlying cost structures so that they can be sustained over time.

1. Empowering, Adaptable Instruction

WHY

For students to experience empowering, adaptable instruction that is motivating, appropriately-challenging, and that meets their unique needs, research shows that districts and schools need: a [high-quality, culturally relevant](#) curriculum that is aligned with rigorous [standards](#), time and expertise for teachers to [collaborate](#) and check-in on student learning, and support that is [differentiated](#) and adjustable to equitably meet students' distinct needs.

WHAT TO BUILD TOWARD

- Students and teachers work with **empowering curriculum** that is aligned to rigorous standards, scaffolds learning over time, and that infuses social-emotional learning *and* students' cultural backgrounds, interests, and lived experiences.
- Educators are able to provide **flexible, "just-in-time" support** to students based on their particular learning needs at various points in time.
- Students engage in regular **formal and informal assessments** that are standards-aligned and used to inform future instruction and student groupings.
- Teachers have sufficient time for **content-focused collaboration**, led by instructional experts, where they prepare and adjust instructional plans to meet the needs of all students.
- There is sufficient time for shared **student-focused collaboration** among all the adults supporting each student academically and social-emotionally.
- Teachers receive ongoing feedback and support that helps them improve their instructional techniques through frequent **observation and coaching cycles**.
- All teacher teams have **regular access to instructional expertise** that is pushed into job-embedded structures for professional learning, such as team meetings and coaching cycles.

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

- Assess the **quality of your curriculum** using the Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool ([IMET](#)) or other independent evaluation tools.
- Consider using **ESSER funds** to front-load the purchasing of instructional materials.
- Deliberately allocate more instructional expertise to **buildings** that have higher proportions of novice or struggling teachers.

- Consider adaptations or improvements to **the tools that support observation and coaching** — for example, updating observer “lookfors” related to scaffolding prior knowledge and differentiation, or providing updated concrete guidance around effectively facilitating post-observation conferences.
- Design research-backed trainings on literacy development and instruction for **all staff members who provide reading support**, including social studies teachers, paraprofessionals, and tutors from community organizations.
- Provide **centralized coaching and resources** for staff in instructional expert roles during team meetings and coaching cycles, including coaches, content specialists, grade-level leads, mentors, and other teacher-leaders.
- Schedule a **weekly shared-content planning block** for teachers who teach the same content area to support teachers as they plan engaging instruction and differentiate based on student data.
- Partner with one of your most effective teachers and/or an expert coach to develop **basic protocols** to help teachers use collaborative time well.

START HERE SERIES: REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES

Most remote and hybrid models in place this year include more time for teacher planning and collaboration. Schools in Indianapolis, Mayfield Heights, Denver, and Salem are being thoughtful about how to use this time to improve the quality of instruction for all students.

See examples from these schools in the Start Here Series below.

2. Time & Attention

WHY

For students — especially those with the greatest needs — to engage in learning that meets their distinct needs, districts and schools need to explore new ways to expand and vary [the time](#) and individualized [attention](#) they receive inside and outside of traditional school hours. Given the disruptions to student learning over the past year, [right now](#) it is especially critical to build toward this (particularly for the [students](#) who need it most), while still addressing underlying cost [structures](#).

WHAT TO BUILD TOWARD

- As part of a balanced curriculum, students and educators have sufficient time for **foundational, high-priority subjects** and skill development.
- Students benefit from **significantly smaller classes** based on their needs or in priority grade levels and subjects (such as 3rd-grade literacy or 9th-grade algebra), while attending larger classes in other areas.

- Students experience a **mix of large-group, small-group and 1:1 support** from a team of educators who deeply understand both the curriculum and each student’s individual needs.

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

- Adjust **schedules** to increase time in core subjects and target more instructional time to students whose learning has been the most disrupted.
- Assign multiple educators — including aides, social-emotional support staff, and administrators — to **push into targeted classes**, enabling more “just-in-time” instruction in small groups and one-on-one.
- Increase **educators’ capacity** to focus on students’ distinct needs by taking an “all hands on deck” approach that leverages families, community volunteers, college students, and retired teachers, who can support learning in indirect ways, such as providing resources or prepping materials.
- Explore options for providing **intensive tutoring** to groups of students who need the most help by partnering with local organizations and service providers, coordinating with a local university, or creating new roles for existing staff.
- Identify specialized or advanced courses that could be offered **online** across multiple campuses, potentially freeing up teachers for higher-need grade levels and subject areas.

START HERE SERIES: REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES

Districts like Cleveland and Salem, and schools like Lander Elementary in Mayfield Heights (OH), Brookside Elementary in Indianapolis, and Trevista and McGlone in Denver are trying out promising new ways to target time and attention based on students’ individual needs.

See examples from these schools in the Start Here Series below.

3. The Teaching Job

WHY

For students to experience engaging, high-quality instruction in a supportive environment, districts and schools need to prioritize ways to make teaching jobs and roles more [rewarding](#), [collaborative](#), and [sustainable](#). This matters more than ever, as teachers grapple with the [increased stress](#) of teaching during the pandemic.

WHAT TO BUILD TOWARD

- Teachers feel **well-supported** by district leaders, by leaders in their building, and by their peers — including a sense of collaboration and shared work at every stage of their career.
- Teachers’ **work day and work year** includes ample time for reflection, collaboration, and building individual connections with students without requiring long after hours work.

- Teachers’ **student loads**, especially in core subjects, are small enough to enable deep engagement with individual students’ work.
- Pre-service and early career teachers benefit from “**shelter-and-develop**” models that lighten their workload while accelerating their development.
- Highly effective teachers have **opportunities to share their strengths and extend their impact** through meaningful leadership roles that allow them to continue working with students.
- Throughout the course of their career, teachers’ **compensation** is highly competitive with other professional roles and can grow based on their contribution and impact (for example, through teacher-leadership roles).
- In addition to all of the basic materials needed for teaching and learning, teachers have state-of-the-art **technology and tools** that save them time on administrative duties, lesson planning, and grading, and that help them problem-solve instructional challenges.
- Students benefit from **increased stability** as more teachers stay in the profession and in their schools longer, improving their craft and expanding their impact over time.

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

- Set up teaching teams so that every team has at least one **instructional content expert** to help with the extra planning and learning that is needed now.
- Provide **significant stipends and release time** to teachers who are carefully selected to take on high-impact leadership roles that require greater expertise and skills.
- Leverage district buying power, community partnerships, and in-house expertise to organize **wellness supports** for teachers, such as in-school mini-substitutes or physical and mental health programs.
- Partner with **local schools of education** to integrate teacher-residents, student-teachers, or practicum/field-work students into targeted classes on a part-time basis, and plan for how to compensate teachers for these increased mentorship responsibilities.
- Begin “**stay conversations**” with teachers — starting with those who are most likely to leave at the end of the year — to understand the conditions that would make them more likely to stay in their role.

START HERE SERIES: REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES

At Salem Public Schools, Brookside Elementary in Indianapolis, and Trevista and McGlone Academy in Denver, leaders are reimagining teaching in ways that help students succeed by working to make teachers’ day-to-day roles more attractive as part of a sustainable career path.

See examples from these schools in the Start Here Series below.

4. Relationships & Social-Emotional Support

WHY

For students to feel safe and supported in school, districts and schools need structures that [cultivate](#) strong, positive [relationships](#) and [streamline](#) staff's ability to meet students' social and emotional [needs](#). This is especially true for [some groups of students](#) right now — for example, for students of color, particularly Black students, who face persistent racism in their daily lives and have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic; and for students with disabilities, who may have experienced challenges during remote learning that underscore the [importance of belonging and support](#).

WHAT TO BUILD TOWARD

- Role assignments, routines, and operating norms that help educators and students build and sustain **positive school and classroom culture**, as a foundation for positive relationships and learning.
- **Scheduling and staffing models** that help educators and students build and sustain positive relationships — for example, block schedules, looping, and drastic class size reductions in top-priority courses and grade-levels.
- School staff can **more proactively identify** which students need additional support and what types of needs they have. This includes routines to identify students who are chronically absent and engage their families through direct outreach and support.
- Students are **rapidly connected** to needed resources and effective school-based and third-party provided services who can help meet their distinct needs.
- Educators inform the **continuous improvement** of processes used for identifying students' needs, referring students to services, and following through to ensure students both receive and benefit from the services they need.

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

- With input from families and school staff, build out routines and staff assignments for **regularly touching base** with groups of families, with the goal of identifying and learning more about students' academic and social-emotional needs. Ensure that each student is accounted for in this plan.
- Create **shared-student collaboration points** for staff to clearly and efficiently connect and norm on the individual student needs they're surfacing.
- Identify which types of **data about emerging student needs** are most helpful to capture; for what purpose (such as streamlining connections with community partners, identifying trends, informing the allocation of resources, or guiding continuous improvement); and through what methods or processes.
- Develop a **working bank of partners in your community** who are available to support students and families with specific needs — this will help staff more seamlessly connect students and families with the resources they need.

START HERE SERIES: REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES

Districts like Nashville have worked on this Power Strategy by being deliberate about outreach to ensure that every student has access to supports that strengthen their academic, social and emotional development.

See examples from this school in the Start Here Series below.

5. Family & Community Partnerships

WHY

To [increase](#) academic, health, social, and emotional support for students, districts and schools need to engage [families](#) as partners and leverage the local [community](#) to provide holistic supports. Research consistently shows that [family engagement](#) helps students thrive in school and in life, and partnerships with [community](#) organizations can help provide a [foundation](#) for extending students' learning and strengthening their overall well-being.

WHAT TO BUILD TOWARDS

- Students benefit from participation in community partnerships that deepen **learning and engagement**, both during and beyond the school day.
- Families have **access to out-of-school programming**, such as child care, enrichment, core academics, homework help, social-emotional programming, and athletics.
- Partnership models are **designed to address local demand and need**, align with student and family schedules, and link to processes that effectively connect students to the most appropriate service(s) for addressing their needs.
- Families maintain **visibility into what students are learning** and receive guidance for helping to develop students' **learning habits**.

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

- Develop **clear norms** for who communicates with families, what they share and when.
- Make sure that **all district and school communications successfully reach families** — for example, by communicating in their home language to ensure accessibility, and by using the most relevant and effective methods and messengers (which will likely vary by family and by circumstances).
- Give **thoughtful consideration** to families who may typically fall through the cracks — identify who those families might be and align your strategy for successfully reaching them accordingly.
- Identify roles, routines, and relevant platforms that can be leveraged to provide families with **more responsive, two-way communications**.
- Actively work to foster **genuine forms of engagement** with families, especially those from underserved communities, around how the school community can better support them and their

students — this may range from input used to inform resource allocations and partnerships, to collaborative decision-making, to family-led ways for identifying problems and generating solutions.

- Use input from students, teachers, and families to inform how you'll leverage or expand **existing community partnerships** to accelerate learning and improve student well-being.

START HERE SERIES: **REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES**

School system leaders in districts like Cleveland and Oakland are working with partners across the community to extend and deepen support for student well-being and development.

See examples from these schools in the Start Here Series below.

The Start Here Series: Real Life “Do Now”

Examples

We don’t have to start from scratch. There are already emerging examples of districts and schools around the country that are taking a “do now, build toward” approach. Our Start Here Series shares what they’re doing and *how* they’re doing it.

View the Start Here Series on the [Start Here webpage](#).



Remote teaching and small group instruction



Adapting and extending wraparound services



Staying in touch with students and families



A reimagined, rotating specials cycle



Using tutoring to support students in quarantine



Shifting teacher roles to target instruction



A peek at an effective community partnership

Create Conditions for Change & Address Underlying Cost Structures

District leaders need to collaborate with state policymakers, teachers unions, their school boards, and their local communities to make sure that the types of conditions that enable resource shifts are in place. Then, being strategic about which resources to shift (and how to shift them) will make it possible to improve some of the traditional underlying cost structures that can stifle a district’s ability to “build toward” better, more equitable approaches to teaching and learning. For example, revisiting requirements around students’ schedules and educators’ roles can enhance leaders’ ability to support individual students’ needs and leverage the strengths of individual educators.

Category	With These Enabling Conditions...	These Strategic Resource Shifts Become Possible...
 <p>Schedules</p>	<p>The ability to extend the school day and/or year, with resources to fund corresponding increases in teacher compensation.</p> <p>The ability to develop schedules that are driven by students’ needs, interests, and progress, instead of seat time requirements.</p> <p>Flexibility to vary class sizes and staffing ratios based on grade level, subject, and student need.</p> <p>Flexibility to schedule long planning blocks during the school day for shared-content and shared-student collaboration.</p>	<p>Significantly lower class sizes in targeted grade levels and subjects or based on students’ needs by raising some other class sizes. <i>Power Strategies Affected: 1, 2, 3, 4</i></p> <p>Vary time in subjects in ways that emphasize foundational skills and enable flexibility in meeting students’ needs. <i>Power Strategies Affected: 2</i></p> <p>Schedule longer (90 min/week) collaborative planning periods that are led by experts and linked to cycles of teacher observation and feedback. <i>Power Strategies Affected: 1, 2, 3</i></p>
 <p>Roles</p>	<p>Teacher-of-record policies that encourage teaming and/or collaboration among experienced, rookie and pre-service teachers.</p> <p>Ability to assign blended teacher-leadership roles that include both student-facing and teacher-facing responsibilities.</p> <p>Compensation policies that enable pay based on differentiated roles and increased responsibilities, such as teacher-leader and mentoring roles.</p> <p>Mutually-understood policies for staff dismissal are grounded in lack of progress on a concrete improvement and support plan, rather than based solely on tenure.</p>	<p>Roles and schedules that enable more thoughtful and strategic assignment of teachers, teacher-leaders, residents, and specialists into teams designed to meet students’ unique needs. <i>Power Strategies Affected: 1, 3, 4</i></p> <p>Team up with local community partners to provide instruction and other needed services where they have unique expertise to offer. <i>Power Strategies Affected: 1, 2, 5</i></p> <p>As part of a career ladder for educators, create compensation structures that align with differentiated roles and responsibilities, including teacher-leadership roles based on proven effectiveness and contribution. <i>Power Strategies Affected: 3</i></p>



Course Requirements

Ability to contract with **third-parties** (such as local organizations or service providers and community colleges) to provide academic and social-emotional services, including online courses that enroll students across multiple campuses.

High school **graduation requirements** that include flexibility around course-taking — such as whether a course takes place in-person or online, and the venue (in the school, on a college campus, or in the workplace).

Leverage **online platforms** for direct instruction and independent learning, as part of a holistic integrated experience.

[Power Strategies Affected:](#) 1, 2, 3

Offer **specialized or advanced high school courses** online across multiple schools to maximize teachers' reach and students' access.

[Power Strategies Affected:](#) 1, 2, 5

Rethink “seat time” as a basis for earning credit by shifting to more **competency-based** standards.

[Power Strategies Affected:](#) 1, 2