



***RESTART & RECOVERY:***  
**MEETING THE ASSESSMENT NEEDS**  
**OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**  
**DURING TIMES OF INTERRUPTED SCHOOLING**

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DURING TIMES OF INTERRUPTED SCHOOLING*

COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, Bureau of Indian Education, and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions. CCSSO provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues.

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## Overview

In the 2019-2020 school year, education systems throughout the United States were thrown into a period of dramatic transformation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When school buildings closed, school leaders, educators, and parents had to quickly pivot to delivering remote instruction.

By the 2020-2021 school year, schools were in a different yet equally challenging place. Some students attended school in-person full time; others participated in remote learning full time; and still others were on a hybrid schedule. Many students transitioned back and forth among these options throughout the school year. Although many schools offered remote or hybrid education opportunities in spring of 2020, many students were not fully engaged in the offered academic programming. This was especially true for students with disabilities (see Appendix A).

This report offers recommendations for state departments of education on how to meet the assessment needs of students with disabilities, including English learners with disabilities and students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, during times of interrupted education due to extended school closures. It also includes ideas for information that state departments can give to local schools.

The impetus for the development of this report was a lack of information on what to consider to address assessments during interrupted education for students with disabilities, including English learners with disabilities and students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. These assessments include not only national and state-required summative assessments, but also assessments used during instruction (e.g., interims, formative assessment processes). When developing this report, the authors examined both the numerous materials on general “Restart and Recovery” topics (see Appendix B) and the relatively few that addressed students with disabilities, none of which specifically spoke to approaches to assessment (see Appendix C).

This report includes approaches to ensure that assessments of students with disabilities include successful strategies for restarting and recovering from interrupted schooling. It addresses national assessments and all state and local assessments in a comprehensive assessment system (i.e., it includes summative, interim, and formative assessment processes). Considerations for instruction are based on states’ discussions about assessments, particularly formative assessment processes. **Note:** This report does *not* address assessments to determine specific services that may be needed by individual children (e.g., special education, English language development, etc.).

This report highlights five areas that are critical to restart and recovery:

1. Principles to guide restart and recovery decisions.
2. Data needs for restart and recovery.
3. Logistical considerations for restart-and-recovery assessments.
4. Collection and evaluation of data to inform growth measurement.
5. Interpretation and use of state-required summative assessment data.

The considerations and recommendations in this report were developed through a collaborative process involving state members in the Council of Chief State School Officers' (CCSSO) Assessment, Standards, and Education for Students with Disabilities Collaborative (ASES). The National Center on Educational Outcomes facilitated five interactive webinars that were held over several months. Through this collaborative process, states came to agreement on the principles, considerations, and recommendations that state members identified. The results of this work are reflected in this report.

## Principles to Guide Restart and Recovery Decisions

States identified five principles as the “bottom-line” drivers of all decisions made about restart and recovery assessments for students with disabilities, including English learners with disabilities and students with the most significant cognitive disabilities:

### **1. Hold high expectations for all students with disabilities.**

High expectations should be held for all students, including those with disabilities.<sup>1</sup> For successful restart and recovery efforts, it is essential to examine the expectations for students with disabilities, English learners with disabilities, and students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Holding high expectations during restart and recovery is key to helping students return to their previous levels of knowledge and skills. Researchers Martha Thurlow and Rachel Quenemoen provide suggestions for policymakers, states, and technical assistance providers on how to work with districts, schools, and educators to revisit expectations for students with disabilities.<sup>2</sup>

### **2. Ensure that all students with disabilities have effective receptive and expressive communication.**

Not all students communicate in traditional ways, such as through speech. *Effective receptive and expressive communication* refers to the communicator’s ability to be understandable and coherent, follow social and cultural norms, use verbal and non-verbal forms of communication to enhance the message, and show some level of grammatical ability.<sup>3</sup> While it is important for all students to improve their communication skills, it is particularly important for students with disabilities to gain these skills and to have a system of support in acquiring them. Such support is especially key for students with disabilities who may not yet have a recognized communication system.

### **3. Ensure that all students with disabilities have access to grade-aligned, standards-based academic content.**

All states have standards that define the academic content students should know and, for English learners, the English language proficiency (ELP) standards they are to achieve. These standards define the “what” of education, whereas academic achievement standards and ELP achievement

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<sup>1</sup> Quenemoen, R.F. & Thurlow, M.L. Students with Disabilities in Educational Policy, Practice, and Professional Judgment: What Should We Expect? *NCEO Report 413*. National Center on Educational Outcomes (May 2019). <https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/NCEOReport413.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Thurlow, M.L. & Quenemoen, R.F. Revisiting Expectations for Students with Disabilities. *NCEO Brief* (No. 17). National Center on Educational Outcomes (May 2019). <https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/NCEOBrief17.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Kearns, J., Page, J., Cooley-Hidecker, M., Kleinert, J., Stone, K. & Norris, A. What is Communicative Competence for and with Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Users? *TIPS Series* (Tip #17). TIES Center (University of Minnesota, April 2021). <https://publications.ici.umn.edu/ties/communicative-competence-tips/what-is-communicative-competence-for-and-with-aac-users>

standards define the “how well” students are to perform. Although achievement standards may differ for some students, all students are to be taught toward the academic content standards for the grade or course in which they are enrolled (CCSSO, 2020).<sup>4</sup> English learners with disabilities also are to be taught English language skills to meet the ELP standards for the grade in which they are enrolled. This standard is also the case for those students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, who may be held to alternate achievement standards.<sup>5</sup>

#### **4. Have an alternate assessment available for each general-content and ELP assessment.**

To enable all students to show their knowledge and skills on assessments designed for them, states provide alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS) for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, as well as alternate ELP (alt-ELP) assessments with alternate achievement levels for English learners with significant cognitive disabilities.<sup>6</sup> This principle applies not only to state assessments, but also to any assessments used state-wide or district-wide, such as state-required interim assessments.

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<sup>4</sup> Council of Chief State School Officers. *Restart & Recovery: Considerations for Teaching & Learning: Academics*. (July 2020).

<https://753a0706.flowpaper.com/RESTARTRECOVERYCONSIDERATIONSFORTEACHINGANDLEARNINGACADEMICS/#page=1>

<sup>5</sup> Sabia, R., Bowman, J., Thurlow, M.L. & Lazarus, S.S. Providing Meaningful General Education Curriculum Access to Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities. *TIES Center Brief* (No. 4) TIES Center (University of Minnesota, July 2020).

[https://files.tiescenter.org/files/4jT3KexfA\\_/ties-brief-4-providing-meaningful-general-education-curriculum-access-to-students-with-significant-cognitive-disabilities](https://files.tiescenter.org/files/4jT3KexfA_/ties-brief-4-providing-meaningful-general-education-curriculum-access-to-students-with-significant-cognitive-disabilities)

<sup>6</sup> Thurlow, M.L., Warren, S.H. & Chia, M. Guidebook to Including Students with Disabilities and English Learners in Assessments. *NCEO Report 420*. National Center on Educational Outcomes (June 2020).

<https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/NCEORep420.pdf>

## 5. Include all students with disabilities in all components of accountability systems.

State-defined educational accountability systems include several components required by federal law. Including all students, particularly those with disabilities and English learners, in these components is not only mandatory; it also helps ensure that states, districts, and schools meet the needs of all students. Although sometimes difficult to do so, this principle applies to all students with disabilities and all aspects of the assessment and accountability system— e.g., students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in all measures of growth.

### *Principle-Derived Implications*

The five principles identified by states have implications for the assessment of students with disabilities during times of interrupted schooling, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. These implications include specific considerations for English learners with disabilities and students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

The implications for statewide assessments (including required interim assessments) are:

**Some students with disabilities can be assessed remotely, but many cannot.** Students with disabilities can be assessed remotely in the same way as students without disabilities, as long as their accessibility and accommodations needs can be met through features that are embedded in the computer-based assessment system. Students with disabilities who require a human to provide some of their needed accessibility and accommodations supports cannot be assessed remotely in the same way as students without disabilities. Moreover, to maintain test security, the students' family members or caregivers should not be the ones to provide needed accessibility supports and accommodations during assessment administration. Ways to address these special considerations might include:

- *Educators visit the home to support students with disabilities during administration of remote assessments.* Educators who are familiar with the student and are certified test administrators visit the family home to provide needed supports while the student takes the assessment remotely, taking appropriate health and safety precautions (e.g., wearing mask and maintaining social distance).
- *Students are brought into a safe and secure setting to allow for in-school assessments.* Test administrators in a school or other setting administer in-person assessments to students who require human-provided accessibility supports and accommodations, taking appropriate health and safety precautions (e.g., wearing mask and maintaining social distance).
- **Some English learners with disabilities can be assessed remotely, and some cannot.** The suggestions for assessing English learners with disabilities, including their participation in both state-required content assessments and state English language proficiency assessments, are similar to the suggestions for assessing other students with disabilities. States should consider providing guidance on accessibility supports, and IEP teams need to include discussions about the accessibility supports and accommodations English learners with disabilities may need to participate in assessments.



- **In general, the majority of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities cannot be assessed remotely.** It might be possible for an educator who is familiar with the student (and is certified in test administration) to visit the family home to administer the alternate assessment. It also might be possible to bring the student into a safe and secure setting to allow for administration of the alternate assessment. In addition to the need to follow health and safety protocols, there are many challenges in attempting these approaches – including how to accommodate the significant breaks that are permitted during alternate assessments and may extend across days.

It is important to note that other types of assessments, most importantly formative assessment processes (i.e., teacher-developed for use during instruction), also can be implemented remotely.<sup>7</sup> Offer guidance on approaches to remotely implement formative assessment processes with students with disabilities.

### Data Needs for Restart and Recovery

Assessment data (along with other information) can help states plan restart and recovery efforts by providing insights into where students are in their academic progress. Assessment data also can inform states' accountability measures, holding schools responsible for the outcomes of all students.

State discussions resulted in identifying three primary purposes for collecting assessment data on students with disabilities, including those who are English learners and students with the most significant cognitive disabilities: data for *equity*, data for *instruction*, and data for *accountability*.

#### ***Data for Equity***

- Accurate and reliable assessment results require appropriate access to accessibility features and accommodations, including access to assistive technology.
- Access to appropriate language development services will be needed for English learners, including English learners with disabilities.
- Different procedures (e.g., home-language surveys, interviews with the student or family) may need to be used to assess potential English learners with disabilities. Special consideration should be given to the unique needs of these students during any alternative screening process.
- Data collection opportunities for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities need to be evaluated.
- Measures of student opportunity to learn will help evaluate equity concerns and contextualize assessment data.
- State and district supports (e.g., the *State-District Data Display Templates; District Dialogue Guide*)<sup>8</sup> should be available to collect and use data.

<sup>7</sup> Browder, D. M., Lazarus, S. S., & Thurlow, M. L. (2021). Alternate Interim Assessments for Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities. *NCEO Brief* (No. 24). National Center on Educational Outcomes (*to come*, 2021). <https://nceo.info/>

<sup>8</sup> Ruggiero, T., D'Agord, C., Strunk, K. & Thurlow, M. L. *NCEO Tool 3: State-District Data Display Templates: Addressing the Percentage of Students Participating in the Alternate Assessment*. National Center on Educational Outcomes (University of Minnesota, 2019). <https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/Tool3DataDisplayTemplates.pdf>

### ***Data for Instruction***

- Formative assessment processes are an instructionally embedded way to improve learning outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities.<sup>9</sup>
- Whether instruction occurs primarily at school or at home, knowing where students are in their learning creates the foundation for determining next instructional steps.<sup>10</sup>
- Available instructional supports should be identified for the current instructional situation, whatever it is (i.e., in-person, remote, or hybrid).
- During periods of remote learning, educators may need to create appropriate data-collection opportunities; in addition, families and caregivers may need training and supports to gather formative assessment process data while the student is learning at home (e.g., checking on progress during daily assignments; see *Data Collection and Distance Learning*).<sup>11</sup>
- Each time in-school instruction restarts, it may be necessary to broaden the focus of assessment to include an evaluation of social-emotional concerns.

### ***Data for Accountability***

- Without 2019-2020 assessment data, schools need alternative ways to measure growth for accountability for both the Department of Education’s Office of Elementary and Secondary Education and Office of Special Education Programs.
- If interim or benchmark assessments are used for accountability, there must be appropriate measures for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who usually participate in a state’s AA-AAAS.
- To understand the validity and reliability of all assessments administered to students with disabilities in 2020-2021, educators will need information on the context for interpreting results for accountability.
- Educators should expect continued interruptions in state-required testing and plan how to gather accountability data that are appropriate for all groups of students, including those with significant cognitive disabilities and English learners with disabilities.

For each of these three purposes, education leaders can use both assessment data and other information. Although states agreed on the importance of using state assessment data, they also emphasized the importance of including multiple measures—including parent input, teacher observations, attendance records, and other sources of information. A variety of measures beyond state-required summative assessments also could yield valuable data.

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<sup>9</sup> Brookhart, S. Five Formative Assessment Strategies to Improve Distance Learning Outcomes for Students with Disabilities *NCEO Brief* (No. 20). National Center on Educational Outcomes (May 2020).  
<https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/NCEOBrief20.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Brookhart, S., & Lazarus, S. S. (2020, December). Pre-assessment to plan instruction for students with disabilities during distance learning *NCEO Brief* (No. 21). National Center on Educational Outcomes (Dec 2020).  
<https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/NCEOBrief21.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Taub, D. & Posey, A. Data Collection and Distance Learning. *Distance Learning Series* (DL #15). TIES Center (University of Minnesota, July 2020).  
<https://publications.ici.umn.edu/ties/building-engagement-with-distance-learning/data-collection-and-distance-learning>

## Logistical Considerations for Restart and Recovery Assessments

As some school buildings reopened following the 2019-2020 closure, education administrators were faced with a myriad of challenges and opportunities stemming from the range of continuous learning models: some schools reopened remotely, some were in-person, and some in a hybrid approach. Thus, one area of focus is how to administer large-scale assessments in each of these environments.

Students participate in a variety of assessments—including formative assessment processes, benchmark or interim assessments, and state and national assessments. Some of these assessments may be administered as schools reopen at the start of a new school year, and others may not be administered until the end of a course or school year. Each type of assessment is designed for a unique purpose and provides a different type of information and feedback to education decision makers. Likewise, each type of assessment may present unique logistical considerations for assessment administration.

States discussed numerous logistical considerations for the administration of assessments to students with disabilities, including those participating in AA-AAAS and English learners with disabilities. These discussions focused on how to meet the logistical challenges of each educational setting.

### ***Fully In-Person***

Students who are fully in-person most likely will be able to participate in assessment activities in the same (or a similar) environment in which they received their instruction.

States identified key considerations for in-person assessment administration:

- **Social/Emotional Well-being**
  - Consider the impact on students, faculty, and staff of extended school building closures, potential lack of in-person supports, changes in family economic status, and effects on family emotional and medical conditions during the extended closure. Also, consider the social-emotional impact of transitioning back to fully-in-person instruction with (potentially) fewer resources. These impacts may suggest a need to (a) spend more time building avenues for communication among faculty, and parents, and (b) avoid immediately focusing on academic assessments.
- **Health and Safety Precautions**
  - Adjust assessment scheduling to allow time for sanitizing all potentially contaminated surfaces—including manipulatives, headphones, etc.
  - Consider how to administer assessments on a 1:1 basis and ensure adherence to health and safety protocols (i.e., social distancing, masks, etc.).
- **Accommodations**
  - Prior to test administration, consider how students will use physical prompts or physical supports to access devices, while still following health and safety protocols.
- **Personnel**
  - Plan for logistical adjustments that may be needed to continue safely providing accessibility supports and accommodations, if there are personnel losses or changes in staffing assignments due to illness, budget reductions, and other pandemic-related

challenges. For example, these reductions may suggest a need to reconsider the scheduling of assessments for students with disabilities who may require individualized or small group administrations.

### ***Fully Remote***

For purposes of this discussion, the term “fully remote” is used to describe schools conducting instruction off campus, 100 percent of the time.

States identified key considerations for remote assessment administration:

- **Social/Emotional Well-being**
  - Consider the impact on students, faculty, and staff of school building closures and extended periods of remote instruction— including isolation from peers and lack of in-person supports. Some individuals also may have experienced changes in family economic status or negative effects on family emotional and medical conditions.
  - In light of possible social-emotional impacts, schools may need to focus on increasing remote interactions among students and delaying the focus on academic assessments until all students are comfortable with their remote situation.
- **Scheduling**
  - Particularly for students who need adjusted assessment time periods or extended breaks, factor all revised schedules into the overall assessment schedule.
  - Allow time for related-services personnel (e.g., speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, vision specialists, hearing specialists) to be involved in planning discussions about instruction and assessments.
  - Especially for assessments used for high-stakes decision making and accountability, take precautions to maintain test security during all breaks.
- **Technology and Resources**
  - Make sure that students have reliable and consistent internet access for remote instruction and assessment; gather information about online access to use as context for interpreting assessment results.
  - Consider whether the availability of appropriate home space may affect a student’s ability to participate in instruction or assessment and gather information on access to use as context for interpreting assessment results.
  - Keep in mind that some testing platforms may shut down access to other apps a student may need for accommodations; if such apps are inaccessible, how can the student receive the needed support?
  - Work with the assessment vendor to deliver all needed accessibility resources in a remote learning environment.
- **Accommodations**
  - Identify all the accommodations each student needs for remote instruction and assessment and determine whether they will impact the student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) in a way that warrants making an amendment to the IEP.
  - Develop and implement a plan to ensure all students’ access to assistive technology and accommodations at home (e.g., braille, large print, and other adapted resources).
  - Provide training for families in how to implement accommodations and support their child’s use of assistive technology during remote instruction; encourage families to

make sure their child is familiar with the remote-learning supports before using them during an assessment.

- Remember that it may be appropriate for parents, siblings, or caregivers to provide human-provided accessibility and accommodations supports for benchmark or interim assessments, and for formative assessment processes. Parents, siblings, or caregivers should *not* provide these supports for state-required or national assessments. (*See Test Security.*)
- Develop and implement a plan to monitor use of assistive technology and accommodations during instruction and assessment.
- For English learners and their families, make sure all relevant materials (e.g., instructional materials, interim assessment materials, and formative assessment process materials) are translated into the student’s home language.
- **Test Security**
  - Students with disabilities who are participating in remote summative assessments may receive human-provided accommodations *only* if provided by a certified test administrator or someone being overseen by a certified test administrator.
  - Accommodation providers must sign a statement confirming test security and clarifying their role.
  - Take appropriate steps to maintain security of all testing materials and the assessment platform during any breaks.
  - If remote proctoring is implemented, proctors may need to visit the home of those students who take the assessment at home with the assistance of an accommodation provider.
- **Personnel**
  - Make sure that there are a sufficient number of trained test administrators for state-required and national assessments, and that students’ families have adequate access to them.
  - Make arrangements to ensure that, during instruction and assessments, students with disabilities have access to interpreters and other staff who provide specialized services.
  - Coordinate tasks as needed when multiple staff members work simultaneously with a student (e.g., a student with deaf-blindness may need simultaneous access to the teacher and other specialists).
  - Make sure that test proctors know about policies for provision of accessibility supports and accommodations, including which ones are assigned for the individual student for the test being administered.
  - Provide personnel to train families who may be supporting instruction and formative assessment processes or interim assessments.
  - Ensure availability of bilingual staff to work with families of English learners during instruction and formative assessment processes or interim assessments.
  - Include related-services personnel (e.g., speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, vision specialists, hearing specialists) in planning discussions about instruction and assessments.
  - Determine whether a certified test administrator or someone being overseen by a certified test administrator should go to a student’s home or the student should go to a safe and secure location, in the school or another environment, for state-required summative assessments.

## ***Hybrid***

Students participating in hybrid instructional approaches may receive their instruction both in person at school and remotely at home. Thus, they may participate in assessments both in school and remotely.

Many of the considerations addressed for the fully in-person and fully remote environments also apply to hybrid settings. However, there are other, unique considerations for this approach.

- **Scheduling**
  - Consider the impact of alternating student schedules on individual students' participation in national and state-required summative assessments.
  - State-required assessment administration windows may need to be extended to accommodate alternating student schedules.
  - Factor in the impact of an extended assessment window, which may call for administering tests in evenings or on weekends.
- **Accommodations**
  - Analyze the considerations discussed for fully remote and fully in-person environments; apply the suggestions as appropriate, depending on whether a given assessment will be delivered in person or remotely. ***Keep in mind that*** for test security reasons, schools should avoid administering national and state-required assessments remotely to students with disabilities requiring testing accommodations, unless certified test administrators are available to conduct test administration in the student's home.

### ***Considerations for Student Movement Among Approaches***

- Students may move back and forth among fully in-person, fully remote, and hybrid settings throughout the school year. This type of continual change in settings will have implications for instruction and assessment. This, in turn, will require additional consideration by decision makers.
- It will be critical to have a system in place to keep track of students with disabilities, including English learners with disabilities and students with significant cognitive disabilities, as they move among schooling options.

## Collecting and Evaluating Data to Measure Student Academic Progress

The measurement of academic progress is critical during and after school disruptions, especially when those disruptions have been over an extended period. The importance of collecting and evaluating data to inform the measurement of progress extends well beyond the fact that “growth” is one of the data elements that many states have included in their accountability systems. A clearer understanding of student progress provides a foundation for adapting instruction for individual students. It also provides a tool for determining whether some groups of students have suffered

greater learning loss during school disruptions; if so, these students may need additional supports, above and beyond those provided for most students.

Additional instructional supports could be needed for students with disabilities, including English learners with disabilities and students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

When collecting and evaluating data to inform the measurement of progress, priorities include:

- considering how to collect and evaluate data;
- ensuring transparency about whether the basis for collecting and evaluating academic progress is individual-based or standards-based; and
- addressing how much academic progress is expected.

In their discussions, states identified considerations for measuring progress, both as part of a formal growth model for accountability and as part of a model that could be used for other purposes (such as determining the need for adjustments to instruction to counteract learning loss and achievement gaps). In this section, considerations for measuring progress are listed separately, based on the data-use purpose: the term *growth* applies to measuring progress for accountability purposes; the term *progress* applies to measuring progress for other purposes.

### Measuring Academic Growth for Accountability Purposes

#### ***Consider how to collect and evaluate data on academic growth.***

States identified key considerations for collecting and evaluating data on academic growth:

- Evaluate growth data for each measure in terms of the sample of students included (e.g., whether only high-performing students with disabilities were included in the data), with the recognition that growth data for accountability are likely to be biased if some groups of students are not included (e.g., students with emotional disabilities in separate educational settings).
- Identify methodologies for measuring the growth of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, even if they have to be considered separately due to limitations in data.
- Contextualize academic growth data with information about possible opportunity-to-learn variables (e.g., absenteeism, hours of instruction, social-emotional needs, etc.).
- Provide appropriate cautions about the use of growth data to make decisions or to provide information to families or the public. These cautions might include contextual information about the differences in students' access to instruction during periods of interrupted schooling.
- Examine whether changes in assignments from general to alternate assessments occur during or after the school disruptions. If changes are evident, review IEPs to determine possible reasons for the change (e.g., school failure to provide academic instruction; increased content complexity).
- Determine a methodology for assessing academic growth among students who may have entered or exited special education services (or who may have alternated between general and alternate assessments) during the growth-measurement period.

States identified key considerations for determining which assessments to use:

- Consider using multiple sources of information, not just from formal assessments, when evaluating and interpreting growth data for students with disabilities.
- Identify ways to address the potential lack of options for measuring growth among students with significant cognitive disabilities (e.g., by identifying other valuable measures).
- Identify reasonable alternatives to the English-language proficiency assessment for measuring the progress of English learners with disabilities.

***Ensure transparency about whether the basis for collecting and evaluating academic growth is individual-based or standards-based.***

States identified key considerations for ensuring transparency about the basis for collecting and evaluating data on students' academic growth:

- Confirm that (a) academic growth should be expected and (b) tracking growth should continue for all students with disabilities, including English learners with disabilities and students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.
- Maintain high expectations for all students by measuring growth against a set of standards-based criteria (based on the enrolled grade of the student).
- Ensure that selected growth measures are appropriate for the intended purpose (e.g., measuring individual growth against narrow foundational instructional targets or measuring longer-term growth against standards-based criteria).
- Retain some measure of growth, especially for students with significant cognitive disabilities, realizing that a different growth model might be more appropriate.

States identified key considerations for ensuring transparency about how much growth is expected:

- Ensure that academic growth expectations remain high for all students.
- Consider the impact of any growth-data communications on students' families, particularly if the data indicate a lack of growth or regression.
- For families of English learners, be sure to provide all growth-data communications in their home language.

## Measuring Academic Progress for Other Purposes

***Consider how to collect and evaluate data on academic progress.***

States identified key considerations for collecting and evaluating data on academic progress:

- Provide appropriate cautions about the use of progress data to make decisions or to provide information to families or the public. These cautions might include contextual information about the differences in students' access to instruction during the period of interrupted schooling.
- If academic progress is not a formal intent of an assessment's administration, identify ways to examine within-year or year-to-year changes in assessment data.



- Be prepared to analyze progress data and determine next steps to provide appropriate support. Consider the use of formative assessment processes and how those processes might inform work with individual students and the class as a whole.
- Consider providing context on the meaning of results from selected assessments, by gathering information from parents about their child’s progress during remote or hybrid schooling.
- Use multiple sources of information, not just results of formal assessments, when interpreting data on progress.
- Use pre-post measures within the school year; these measures could be interim assessments, unit tests, or performance-based assessments.
- Specifically address the potential lack of options for measuring the progress of students with significant cognitive disabilities, by identifying other possible measures.

***Ensure transparency about whether the basis for collecting and evaluating academic progress is individual-based or standards-based.***

States identified key considerations identified for ensuring transparency about the basis for collecting and evaluating data on students’ academic progress:

- Confirm that school leaders and other school personnel understand the difference between measuring an individual student’s progress based on small units of instructional targets and measuring academic progress against a set of standards-based criteria.
- Ensure that selected measures of academic progress are appropriate for the intended purpose (e.g., measuring individual progress against narrow foundational instructional targets or measuring longer-term progress against standards-based criteria).
- Weigh the pros and cons of basing progress on individual- or standards-based targets.

***Address how much academic progress is expected.***

States identified key considerations identified for addressing how much progress is expected:

- Ensure that expectations for academic progress remain high for all students.
- Consider the impact of any progress-data communications on students’ families, particularly if the data indicate a lack of progress.
- For families of English learners, be sure to provide all progress-data communications in their home language.

## Interpretation and Use of State-Required Summative Assessment Data

Appropriate interpretation and use of state-required summative assessment data is a critical aspect of technically adequate assessment practices. This includes ensuring that assessment results are contextualized and reported in ways that support appropriate interpretations. The [Standards for](#)

*Educational and Psychological Testing*<sup>12</sup> address assessment interpretation and use in several standards, including:

- *Standard 6.3*: “Changes or disruptions to standardized test administration procedures or scoring should be documented and reported to the test user.”<sup>13</sup>
- *Standard 6.10*: “When test score information is released, those responsible for testing programs should provide interpretations appropriate to the audience. The interpretations should describe in simple language what the test covers, what scores represent, the precision/reliability of the scores, and how scores are intended to be used.”<sup>14</sup>

Interrupted schooling can create many barriers to the appropriate interpretation and use of state-required summative assessment data. The key considerations focus on four areas:<sup>15</sup>

1. **Completeness** (the extent to which elements of data are missing);
2. **Consistency** (the extent to which data properties were altered);
3. **Impact** (the likelihood that data values are substantially changed); and
4. **Practicality** (the extent to which it is feasible or reasonable to collect and report data).

Although states have found that extended school disruptions have not affected many test-development processes (e.g., item review, standard setting), which can be conducted remotely, there is a risk that test administration, reporting, or interpretation could be impacted.

### **Completeness: *To what extent are elements of the data missing?***

States identified key considerations identified for determining the extent to which data elements may be missing:

- Identify missing data sources (e.g., contains data from general assessment but not from AA-AAAS, ELP assessment, or alt-ELP assessment) and document those in all data reports.
- Provide details that facilitate an analysis of differences in participation based on student characteristics (e.g., “those who rarely participated were students with disabilities who are economically disadvantaged and English learners who in 2018-2019 performed at the lowest ELP levels”).
- After identifying the incomplete or missing data elements, plan for ways to estimate the effects of the lack of data.

### **Consistency: *Were the data properties altered?***

States identified key considerations when determining whether data properties for state-required summative assessments were altered:

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<sup>12</sup> American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association & the National Council on Measurement in Education. *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*. American Educational Research Association (2014).

<https://www.testingstandards.net/open-access-files.html>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>15</sup> Domaleski, C., Boyer, M. & Evans, C. *Restart & Recovery: Accountability Interrupted: Guidance for Collecting, Evaluating, and Reporting Data in 2020-2021*. Council of Chief State School Officers (Sept. 2020).

[https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/CCSSO\\_RR\\_Accountability-v3.pdf](https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/CCSSO_RR_Accountability-v3.pdf)

- Even if the test blueprint was not changed (e.g., using the shortened form of a test that retains the original assessment's blueprint), test reliability still may be affected; these effects may be greater at either end of a given performance continuum.
- Evaluate whether adjustments made to state-required general assessments (e.g., shortened forms) also need to be made to alternate assessments or special forms (e.g., braille edition), or whether it is appropriate to continue using unadjusted accommodated forms and alternate assessments (e.g., not shortened).
- The inability to conduct field testing or include field-test items on the test form may affect test properties in the future.

**Impact: *Is it likely that data values (e.g., performance) will substantially change?***

States identified key considerations when judging whether performance on state-required summative assessments is likely to be substantially changed:

- Recognize that states may experience challenges to participation across all state-required summative assessments (general, ELP, AA-AAAS, and alternate ELP), given the different learning environments students have been experiencing. These challenges will likely have at least two effects: (a) the requirement for 95 percent participation may not be met; and (b) the test-performance data may not represent the performance of all students (and more likely will reflect the performance of higher-performing students).
- If field testing is attempted, it is likely that (a) the results for each item will not reflect the population of students and (b) item characteristics data should not be used.

**Practicality: *Is it feasible or reasonable to collect and report the data?***

States identified key considerations when determining whether it is feasible or reasonable to collect and report state-required summative assessment data:

- Contextualize assessment data at the school and district levels.
- Factor in the location and variability of instruction conditions (fully on-campus; fully remote; hybrid; or shifting among approaches).
- Examine other contextual information (such as technology access, attendance data, and level-of-engagement lists) in order to obtain a proxy for opportunity-to-learn indicators.<sup>16</sup>

These four focus areas for interpreting and using assessment data—*completeness, consistency, impact, and practicality*— have several implications for accountability, including the need to:

- identify the participation threshold (overall and by subgroup) needed to report assessment data and to include those data in accountability determinations;
- consider possible alternative ways to measure academic growth when a year of assessment data is missing;
- determine whether there are different considerations for federal and state accountability systems; and
- exercise caution in reporting assessment data for individuals and in the aggregate.

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<sup>16</sup> Marion, S. *Using Opportunity-to-Learn Data to Support Educational Equity*. National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment (Oct 2020).  
[https://www.nciea.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/CFA-Marion.OTL\\_Indicators.pdf](https://www.nciea.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/CFA-Marion.OTL_Indicators.pdf)

## Recommendations

Based on the considerations they identified, ASES states agreed on general recommendations and recommendations by topic.

Following the recommendations, this paper offers considerations and recommendations specifically for assessing students with significant cognitive disabilities and English learners with disabilities.

### General Recommendations

- **Base all decisions on an agreed-upon set of principles.** (See: “*Principles to Guide Restart and Recovery Decisions.*”)
- **Individualize decisions**, but keep in mind the following:
  - ***Some students with disabilities can be assessed remotely, but many cannot.*** Students with disabilities whose accessibility and accommodations needs can be met through features that are embedded in a computer-based assessment system can be assessed remotely. However, virtually all students who require the physical presence of a trained professional (*not* a family member or caregiver) to provide accessibility and accommodations supports cannot be assessed remotely. *Note:* it might be possible to assess some of these students remotely, if a certified test administrator visits a student’s home to set up and provide accessibility supports and accommodations.
  - ***Some English learners with disabilities can be assessed remotely, and some cannot.*** As is the case for other students with disabilities, the disability characteristics of identified and potential English learners will indicate how to administer state-required summative assessments. IEP teams should consider the accessibility and accommodation supports that English learners with disabilities will need for their state-required content assessments or English language proficiency assessments.
  - ***Most students with the most significant cognitive disabilities generally cannot be assessed remotely.*** These students require one-to-one administration of alternate assessments. It is very challenging to address their needs when assessing remotely. In some cases, a remotely administered alternate assessment might be feasible, if a certified test administrator can visit the student’s home and is available to support short testing sessions over multiple days.

### Data Needs

- To support equity concerns, schools should collect information on opportunity to learn and social-emotional well-being, as well as information on achievement status.
- Focus on gathering data that will guide ***instruction***, rather than data that documents gaps or learning loss; this may mean emphasizing formative assessment processes rather than other assessments.
- Gather information that can be used for ***accountability*** that is appropriate for all groups of students—including those with significant cognitive disabilities and English learners with disabilities.

- In the absence of 2019-2020 summative assessment data, consider alternative ways to measure *academic progress* (e.g., formative assessment processes, benchmark or interim assessments) for all students.
- Be prepared for continued interruptions in state-required testing, and have plans in place to deal with them— for example by providing longer test-administration windows for summative assessments; providing formative assessment processes support; and having mechanisms in place for collecting information on student engagement.

### Logistical Considerations

- In dealing with the possible social-emotional well-being impacts of extended school closures on students, faculty, and staff, it will be important for schools to reconsider their logistics. There likely will be a significant need to spend time building avenues for interpersonal communication and connection; time spent focusing on academic assessments may need to be delayed until social-emotional well-being needs have been addressed.
- If all students are receiving *fully in-person* instruction, identify strategies for meeting health and safety requirements during the administration of the assessment, while ensuring the availability of staff supports to meet individual student accessibility and accommodations needs.
- If all students are receiving *fully remote* instruction, differentiate the approaches to assessment (e.g., administer remotely or in a safe and secure setting either in school or in another location) based on the individual characteristics of students with disabilities, including English learners with disabilities and students with significant cognitive disabilities. (See “*General Recommendations*”.) In particular, consider logistics related to scheduling, technology, needed accommodations, test security, and personnel.
- If students are learning in a *hybrid* environment, think through the in-person and remote approaches, and differentiate according to individual needs of students with disabilities, including English learners with disabilities and students with significant cognitive disabilities.
- Track students as they move back and forth between approaches throughout the school year and have a plan for supporting them during the transitions.

### Measuring Student Academic Progress

- For accountability purposes, consider how to collect and evaluate data on student academic progress by thinking through the purpose of measuring growth. Ensure that if growth is to be measured, it is measured for all students, including English learners with disabilities and students with significant cognitive disabilities— even if this necessitates using different methodologies for some students. Further, provide contextual information and appropriate cautions about interpreting and using growth results.
- For other purposes, use multiple sources of information when interpreting data on progress, including information that is appropriate for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Ensure that measures being used are appropriate for the intended purpose and that school personnel understand the difference between measuring individual progress on small instructional targets and measuring progress against a set of standards-based criteria.

## Interpretation and Use of Assessment Data

- Evaluate the **completeness** of data in terms of the extent to which assessment data are missing— both overall and for particular groups of students— and use that information to determine whether the data can be used (i.e., by estimating the missing data elements) or the data cannot be used for reporting or accountability.
- Determine whether data from an adjusted assessment are **consistent** with previous data, especially if adjustments have been made to the testing environment, test length, inclusion of field-test items, etc.
- For any assessment data that are available, identify ways to provide context; use the contextual data to make decisions about the **impact** of the context (including incomplete or missing data elements); then determine whether the data can be used— and if so, for what purposes.
- Determine whether it is **practical** to collect and report the data. Exercise caution in reporting assessment data in the aggregate or for individual students with disabilities, English learners, and English learners with disabilities.

### Summary of Considerations and Recommendations for English Learners with Disabilities

- Some English learners with disabilities can be assessed remotely, and some cannot.
- It is important to gather opportunity-to-learn data for this student group.
- Give special consideration to the unique needs of English learners with disabilities during any alternative English language proficiency screening process.
- Procedures to identify potential English learners with disabilities might include home-language surveys and interviews with the student or family.
- Special educators should join English language development educators and general educators in identifying assessment accommodations to support (potential and identified) English learners with disabilities.
- When students are receiving fully in-person instruction, make sure that potential English learners with disabilities participate in formal, in-person English language proficiency screenings.
- Following assessments, evaluate findings in terms of the completeness of data and contextual information to determine whether to report or to use the data for accountability.

### Summary of Considerations and Recommendations for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities

- Students with significant cognitive disabilities generally cannot be assessed remotely.
- It is especially important to gather opportunity-to-learn data for students with significant cognitive disabilities, because these students are likely to be more impacted by interrupted schooling than others.
- Identify ways to measure these students' academic growth that will parallel the measurement methods used for other students.

- Assess students with significant cognitive disabilities whenever assessments are administered to other students.
- When assessing students with significant cognitive disabilities, take extra care to meet their health, safety, and emotional needs.
- Evaluate both the completeness of assessment data and all relevant contextual information before determining whether to report the data and/or use it for accountability.



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<https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/Tool3DataDisplayTemplates.pdf>

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## Appendix A: Studies of the Effects of COVID-19 on Education

Numerous studies were conducted to document the effects of disruptions to schooling that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. Studies that are publicly available are listed here, with an annotation to indicate any findings relevant to students with disabilities.

***Access and engagement: Examining the impact of COVID-19 on students birth-21 with visual impairments, their families, and professionals in the United States and Canada.*** [Authors: L. P. Rosenblum, T. S. Herzberg, T. Wild, K. D. Botsford, D. Fast, J. T. Kaiser, L. K. Cook, M. A. C. Hicks, J. N. DeGrant, & C. R. McBride]. American Foundation for the Blind (2020, October).

This study found that for school-age children with disabilities, “13% of students did not receive educational services during the COVID-19 pandemic, 61% attended school online, and 43% of students attending online had difficulty or were unable to access online programs because of their visual impairment” (p. 7).

***Promise in the time of quarantine: Exploring schools’ responses to COVID-19.*** [Authors: A. LiBetti L. Graziano, & J. O. Schiess]. Bellwether Education Partners (2020, September). <https://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/PromiseInQuarantineBellwetherFinal.pdf>

See the section, “All schools struggled to effectively serve students with disabilities” and the case studies that were highlighted as showing promising practice for serving special education students.

***Survey shows big remote learning gaps for low-income and special needs children.*** [Author: A. Kamenetz]. National Public Radio (2020, May). <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/05/27/862705225/survey-shows-big-remote-learning-gaps-for-low-income-and-special-needs-children#:~:text=The%20Coronavirus%20Crisis-,%20Survey%20Shows%20Big%20Remote%20Learning%20Gaps%20For,Income%20And%20Special%20Needs%20Children&text=Four%20out%20of%2010%20of,from%20ParentsTogether%2C%20an%20advocacy%20group.>

NPR reported that a survey by Parents Together found that 40 percent of families said their children receiving special education services did not receive any support at all, and just over one-third said their children were doing little to no remote learning, compared to under one-fifth of their general education peers.

***Voices of school district leaders: National survey of public education’s response to COVID-19*** (First Look Brief). [Authors: D. Jackson & M. Garet]. American Institutes for Research (2020, July). Retrieved from <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/Voices-of-School-District-Leaders-July-2020.pdf>

School district leaders identified equity in access to instruction as their greatest concern. Two other briefs explore data specifically related to students with disabilities and English learners:

***Spotlight on students with disabilities*** (Research Brief on National Survey of Public Education’s Response to COVID-19). [Authors: D. Jackson & J. Bowdon]. American Institutes for Research (2020, October). <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/COVID-Survey-Spotlight-on-Students-with-Disabilities-FINAL-Oct-2020.pdf>

Among its many findings, the brief reported that 73 percent of districts said it was more or substantially more difficult to provide appropriate instructional accommodations. Compliance with IDEA was difficult for all districts, but more so for high-poverty districts.

***Spotlight on English learners*** (Research Brief on National Survey of Public Education’s Response to COVID-19). [Authors: P. Garcia-Arena & S. D’Souza]. American Institutes for Research (2020, October). <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/COVID-Survey-Spotlight-on-English-Learners-FINAL-Oct-2020.pdf>

This brief indicated that resources for English learners and their teachers during school closures varied by location. Urban districts were more likely to provide resources than rural districts, and districts with higher percentages of English learners were more likely to provide the resources.

## Appendix B: General Resources on Restart and Recovery

Several organizations developed resources on restart and recovery. General resources (not specifically about students with disabilities) that we found that are available to the public are listed here. An asterisk after the title indicates that there was some information, no matter how minimal, specific to students with disabilities or English learners.

***A blueprint for back to school.***\* [Authors: J. P. Bailey & F. M. Hess]. American Enterprise Institute (2020, May). <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/A-Blueprint-for-Back-to-School.pdf>

***Access and equity for English learner students and families during COVID-19: Recommendations for state leaders.***\* (CCSSO Restart & Recovery). [Authors: M. Hopkins & H. Weddle] Council of Chief State School Officers (2020). [https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/CCSSO\\_Restart\\_%26\\_Recovery\\_Access\\_and\\_Equity\\_for\\_English\\_Learner\\_v3.pdf](https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/CCSSO_Restart_%26_Recovery_Access_and_Equity_for_English_Learner_v3.pdf)

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***COVID-19 and student performance, equity, and U.S. education policy.***\* [Authors: E. Garcia & E. Weiss]. Economic Policy Institute (2020, September). <https://files.epi.org/pdf/205622.pdf>

***Learning as we go: Principles for effective assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic.***\* [Authors: R. Lake & L. Olson] Center on Reinventing Public Education (2020, July). [https://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/final\\_diagnostics\\_brief\\_2020.pdf](https://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/final_diagnostics_brief_2020.pdf)

***Measuring growth in 2021: What state leaders need to know.*** Data Quality Campaign, Alliance for Excellent Education, & Collaborative for Student Success (2020, August). [https://dataqualitycampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Measuring-Growth-in-2021\\_What-State-Leaders-Need-to-Know.pdf](https://dataqualitycampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Measuring-Growth-in-2021_What-State-Leaders-Need-to-Know.pdf)

***Pandemic planning for distance learning: Scenarios and considerations for preK-12 education leaders.***\* [Authors: K. Ishmael, R. Heiser, & J. Payne]. New America (2020). <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/pandemic-planning-for-distance-learning-scenarios-and-considerations-for-prek12-education-leaders/introduction/>

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***Restart and recovery: Assessments in spring 2021.***\* Council of Chief State School Officers (2020, August). <https://online.flowpaper.com/753a0706/AssessmentsSpring2021/#page=1>

***Restart and recovery: Considering the outlook for school accountability: State guidance for making annual accountability determinations in school year 2020-2021 and beyond.***\* [Authors: J. D'Brot, E. Landi, C. Domaleski, & C. Brandt] Council of Chief State School Officers (2020, September). [https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/CCSSO\\_RR\\_Outlook\\_Accountability-v4.pdf](https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/CCSSO_RR_Outlook_Accountability-v4.pdf)

***Tackling inequity in education during and after COVID-19.***\* [Author: H. Alasuutari]. World Bank (2020, April). Retrieved from <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/tackling-inequity-education-during-and-after-covid-19>

***This is not a test, this is an emergency: Special considerations for assessing and advancing equity in school-year 2020-21.***\* [Authors: S. F. Marion, D. Gonzales, R. Wiener, & A. Peltzman] Aspen Institute and Center for Assessment (2020, October). [https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2020/10/ThisIsNotATest-Aspen.CFA\\_October2020\\_FINAL.pdf?\\_ga=2.107008066.1715453818.1604598060-257834696.1601561789](https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2020/10/ThisIsNotATest-Aspen.CFA_October2020_FINAL.pdf?_ga=2.107008066.1715453818.1604598060-257834696.1601561789)

*Using opportunity-to-learn data to support educational equity.* [Author: S. Marion]. Center for Assessment (2020, October). [https://www.nciea.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/CFA-Marion.OTL\\_Indicators\\_0.pdf](https://www.nciea.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/CFA-Marion.OTL_Indicators_0.pdf)

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\* Includes recommendations for students with disabilities or English learners, or both.

## Appendix C: Resources on Restart and Recovery for Students with Disabilities

Resources focused specifically on restart and recovery for students with disabilities, including English learners with disabilities and students with significant cognitive disabilities, are listed in this appendix.

***An educator’s guide to virtual learning: 4 actions to support students with disabilities and their families.*** National Center for Learning Disabilities (2020). <https://www.nclld.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/An-Educators-Guide-to-Virtual-Learning-4-Actions-to-Support-Students-With-Disabilities-and-Their-Families.pdf>

***Planning for equity and inclusion: A guide to reopening schools.*** National Center for Learning Disabilities (2020). [https://www.nclld.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/2020-NCLD-Reentry-Principles\\_v3.pdf](https://www.nclld.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/2020-NCLD-Reentry-Principles_v3.pdf)

***Promise and peril: Examining the role of ed tech for students with disabilities.*** National Center for Learning Disabilities (2020, July). <https://www.nclld.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Promise-and-Peril-Examining-the-Role-of-Ed-Tech-for-Students-with-Disabilities.07212020.pdf>

***Resources & tools: COVID-19.*** National Center for Learning Disabilities (2020). <https://www.nclld.org/covid19>

***Serving students with disabilities during COVID-19*** (CCSSO Restart & Recovery). Council of Chief State School Officers (2020, April). [https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/CCSSO%20Serving%20Students%20with%20Disabilities%20During%20COVID19\\_Complete.pdf](https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/CCSSO%20Serving%20Students%20with%20Disabilities%20During%20COVID19_Complete.pdf)

***Student privacy and special education: An educator’s guide during and after COVID-19.*** National Center for Learning Disabilities (2020). <https://www.nclld.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Student-Privacy-and-Special-Education-An-Educator%E2%80%99s-Guide-During-and-After-COVID-19.07282020.pdf>

***Supporting children with disabilities at home during COVID-19: A resource pack for parents and caregivers.*** Leonard Cheshire Working Group on Inclusive Education (2020, April). <https://www.leonardcheshire.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/supporting-children-disabilities-home-covid-19.pdf>