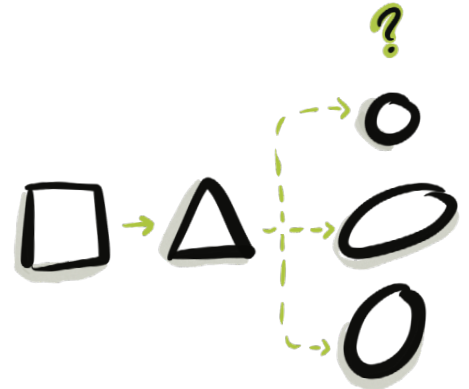# Overview: How to Design a Responsive Return Plan

Responsive planning in the age of COVID-19: With information changing rapidly during times of crisis, it is impractical to believe that our systems, as they currently exist, can be responsive to every need that arises. Rapid shifts require rapid iteration. Teams that are not equipped with processes and habits that allow for that iteration will have a steeper learning curve than teams seasoned with responsive practices.

Our four steps will support your team to grow responsive practices as part of your planning for SY 2020-2021.

WHAT WE LEARNED	WHAT WE KNOW	WHAT IS POSSIBLE
School closures and disruptions caused by COVID-19 have underscored that equity is not something to be addressed "at some point." Ensuring that all students have the support they need to be successful is the most important thing we can do now. Addressing issues of equity requires structural changes to the way we teach, learn, grade, train teachers, engage with families, etc.	Schools will reopen, and there is no option to return to "business as normal." Our communities have faced unprecedented trauma resulting from direct impact, loss, and economic instability resulting from COVID-19. The long-term response to and return from this crisis will demand something new from leaders to meet this challenge.	Through this crisis, we have witnessed school districts, teachers, and students rapidly adapt to change. Barriers that seemingly prevented innovation such as standardized testing, scheduling, and even physical environments have been suspended, and in their place come opportunities to reimagine education. We can make the choice to bring these learnings and experiences with us as we return to school. This time period is an opportunity to actively choose what you return to and what you will change.

A return to schools post-closure requires responsiveness, agility, and waves of decision-making as new information comes in. The following framework allows teams to broadly consider the possibilities for return while guiding toward prioritization and focus.

STEP 1
IDENTIFY KNOWNS AND UNKNOWNS

STEP 2
BUILD SCENARIOS

STEP 3
RECOGNIZE CONSISTENCIES AND PRIORITIZE

STEP 4
COMMUNICATE

STEP 1
IDENTIFY KNOWNS AND UNKNOWNS

Getting comfortable with, and distinguishing between**, what we know (facts), what we're expecting (assumptions), and what we think (opinions)** will help as we plan in the midst of uncertainty. We recommend that each team starts by developing lists of knowns and unknowns to guide planning. This exercise will allow the team to articulate and consider how we test facts, assumptions, and opinions through scenario planning and prototyping.

Example

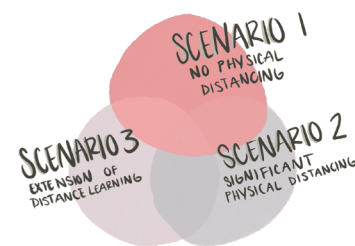| KNOWNS	KNOWN UNKNOWNS	UNKNOWN UNKNOWNS
• Students will learn • Digital literacy for teachers and students is no longer optional • Students have experienced extreme disruption • Students still need to receive services rendered by the school (special education, meals, etc.) • Staff is working with competing at-home priorities	• What day we will open our school buildings • If we have the right platforms to deliver asynchronous learning • How to effectively conduct virtual kindergarten	We don't fill this out but let's leave it here to symbolize that we need to always be ready for things to change!

STEP 2
BUILD OUT SCENARIOS

There are countless realities that districts can imagine for the return to school and the operations of SY 2020-2021. Below we have simplified this uncertainty by highlighting three possible scenarios for planning purposes. These are intended to orient your team to different and equally important scenarios that will uncover how this year will be different from a typical school year while identifying what may need to change to accommodate new needs. The work of your team is to identify what similarities and differences exist across these scenarios as you articulate the supports you will provide to students, staff, families and across the community.

TIP: Start with a "Scenario 0" to brainstorm all of the typical new school year opening processes and operations. You can then use these to compare and contrast how the scenarios will require different supports.

SCENARIO 1	SCENARIO 2	SCENARIO 3
e.g. School opens with no contact limiting	e.g. In school with social distancing and safety precautions	e.g. Not in school, with distance learning
Focus on the impact (needs and gaps) of remote learning during spring 2019 on students, staff, and community.	Support teaching and learning within the school building for the majority of students.	Support teaching and learning remotely for the majority of students. Consider how distance learning will need to evolve.

SCENARIO 1 NO PHYSICAL DISTANCING
SCENARIO 3 EXTENSION OF DISTANCE LEARNING
SCENARIO 2 SIGNIFICANT PHYSICAL DISTANCING

STEP 3
RECOGNIZE CONSISTENCIES AND PRIORITIZE

As you complete the previous exercise, you will begin to notice big rocks - the topics that need to be addressed in most or all of the possible scenarios. These "big rocks" represent key processes and areas to tackle, redesign, and create for the next school year. The next step is to group your rocks according to three different factors that will help when trying to determine what to initiate now, who to involve, and how to begin. Below we offer indicators for Impact, Ease, and Urgency.
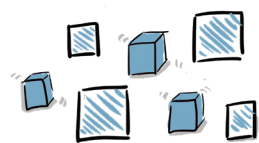
IMPACT: Broad impact vs. Targeted (nothing should be plotted that you deem "low impact").

EASE: Easy vs. difficult based on whether a system currently exists if a "rock" will require new processes and systems of support.

URGENCY: A simple online search will tell you urgency is "importance requiring swift action." For planning purposes we add two considerations:

• **Dependency:** Information needed to make a final decision.
• '**Commit by' timeline:** We need to know when the decisions must be made so that we can commit to deciding during this timeline.

STEP 4
COMMUNICATE

Leadership and ingenuity have emerged in your community and within your ranks. We encourage you to lean on those who are stepping up amidst so much ambiguity. Consider augmenting your inner core of problem-solvers with some of these new leaders while also maintaining transparency with your community.

Commit to Commit: Your team and your community will ask questions and make requests for certainty that are just not possible at this time. Even so, clear communication is still a powerful tool for trust-building and buy-in. Decisions regarding when to return to schools, how to reopen schools, and whether to extend remote learning will not be simple to clarify within a specific amount of time. To combat the anxiety of uncertainty, we recommend developing a high-level timeline of key milestones in your planning process to share with stakeholders and when relevant, creating coalitions to include them in the decision-making process.

COMMIT TO COMMIT

REMOTE LEARNING

ACTIVATE SCENARIO PLAN

END OF SY 19-20

TODAY
SUMMER SCHOOL VIRTUAL OR IN-PERSON DECIDED
STAFFING DECISIONS
DECISION ON SCENARIOS

GOVERNOR ANNOUNCEMENT RE: STAY AT HOME ORDERS
BUDGET VOTE
CDC UPDATE

DECISIONS
DEPENDENCY