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COMMENTARY

Distance Learning Playbook for California School Districts



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At this time of unprecedented challenge, districts have to both manage a rapid response to the current school closures and also prepare for the possibility of supporting students remotely for longer periods ahead, a process for which there is no roadmap. Even as districts and the state are racing to meet the needs of students and families, there is learning happening about what supports are most effective and how to build routines, supports, and options for families, teachers, and schools.

Learning Apart, Staying Connected: A Distance Learning Playbook was created for California school districts to support the development and roll-out of distance learning plans across the state. The playbook was born out of the need we were hearing from district, county, and state leaders for something actionable that cuts through the myriad of options and potential solutions. The resource is designed especially for administrators at small- and medium-sized California districts and is built around integrating the needs of English Learners as the focus of any distance learning plan. The Distance Learning Playbook builds on guidance and resources provided by the California Department of Education and incorporates advice from experts ondistance learning. The resource is organized according to five key questions about developing distance learning plans. It includes sample approaches that vary based on a district's accessibility context—digital, print-based, or hybrid. It also highlights specific suggestions around supporting the needs of English Learners, supporting students with disabilities, supporting teachers, and communicating with families.

While we certainly hope we'll never need a playbook for such a moment again, should further extended closures be necessary, whether due to pandemic, wildfires, or other previously unthinkable scenarios, we hope that a codified set of options and considerations can be a starting point for to districts as they determine how best to meet the local needs of the families and students they serve. Over the coming weeks, we hope to continue to improve this resource based on feedback and learning from the field.

Entangled Solutions, a strategy and innovation consultancy for education, wrote and developed the Distance Learning Playbook with support and advice from field leaders and California districts. Entangled's extensive work in building innovative online learning environments and supporting schools in California and China through COVID-19 closures guided the development of this resource. We are grateful to all those who took time over the past week to provide input and feedback, including school and district leaders and experts on teaching English Learners and Special Education, and for funding from the Silver Giving Foundation and Silicon Schools Fund.

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