PRESS RELEASE

PACE Briefs Outline Steps for Local and State Leaders to Ensure Quality Instruction as School Districts Move to Distance Learning Amid COVID-19 Pandemic



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As school districts across California move to distance or blended learning amid the escalating COVID-19 pandemic, Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) today published two new research briefs offering specific recommendations to help ensure high-quality instruction for all students.

The first brief, *Supporting Learning in the COVID-19 Context*, based on a longer, more comprehensive report, offers a framework for school districts to use in their preparations to provide quality instruction through distance and blended models.

"The move to distance learning amid the escalating coronavirus does not have to mean the end of high-quality instruction for students in California," said Heather Hough, Executive Director of PACE.

"There is an opportunity to do some really great things to help students learn, but the approach cannot be a continuation of how distance learning was implemented this past spring. Schools districts are going to have to make meaningful changes that provide teachers and schools with the support they need to ensure all students have access to quality instruction in these challenging times."

The brief identifies modifications to be made in the areas of instruction, content, and student engagement to meet the needs of students in the COVID-19 context. It encourages districts to develop comprehensive strategies and provide educators with structural and systemic supports in order to provide high-quality instruction. The document highlights approaches to teaching, student engagement, and content;

it encourages districts to establish and communicate expectations for instruction. The brief also specifies needed support for educators, including mental health and well-being; high quality professional development; and a reimagining and restructuring of educators' roles in support of distance or blended learning.

"We cannot expect teachers to do this on their own; we are going to have to make changes and come together as a system to offer supports that help teachers do what they do best: teach," Hough said.

The second brief calls on California leaders to provide meaningful guidance and support to districts and schools. *Lead with Equity* offers specific steps the state's policymakers and education leaders can take to ensure quality learning opportunities for all students during COVID-19.

"When students return to school, our state's expectations for instruction should be far higher than they were this spring," Hough said. "California leaders must take steps to prioritize equity and ensure quality across school districts."

The brief calls on California to establish a small number of clear requirements related to teaching and learning, monitor their implementation, and provide support to districts to help them address students' academic, social, and emotional needs. It also suggests the expansion of key flexibilities that are consistent with equity imperatives, and urges a leadership role in securing more funding.

"The response of California's education system to COVID-19 must not reinforce and deepen the structural inequities and racism that have existed for too long in our state. To address the current crisis and continue California's efforts to close opportunity and achievement gaps, strong state-level leadership is needed."

These publications were developed in partnership with researchers at the California Collaborative on District Reform, Opportunity Institute, Pivot Learning, UC Berkeley School of Law, and UC Davis School of Education.

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