



CONNECTION TIPS

Returning to school with a healthy mindset

What's Going On?

Returning to school after months of home schooling may involve feelings of fear, nervousness, and apprehension. A mixed approach with both online and in-person time may compound those feelings. Approaching the first day with the right mindset will be foundational to a successful year.

For a Positive Outcome

- Staff will feel their concerns are validated and will take advantage of developing a healthy mindset prior to re-entry with students. Spend some time examining your own feelings, apprehensions regarding returning to school. What are the 3 top concerns you have? Acknowledging your concerns by jotting them down, or voicing them to a friend, can go a long way toward helping you recognize when those worries are taking up too much space in your mind.
- For each of your 3 concerns ask yourself, "What can I do about this now? As I return to the building?" For example, if you are concerned about cleanliness in your space, you may decide which disinfecting products you may take with you, where to store them, and when to clean during the school day.
- Ask yourself, "What concerns do I have regarding my teaching approaches/strategies for students as they re-enter school?" You may have quite a few! Now it's time to examine your teaching strengths! Write them down and refer to them often, acknowledging your abilities.
- Ask yourself, "What approaches/strategies have I used in the past with students that have re-entered school after an extended break (such as summer vacation)? How may I use these strategies most fully for my learners?" Write them down; you may want to consider which approaches work best with specific learner profiles/needs.
- Develop affirmations. Starting with the word "I," generate several statements about your own strengths that electrify your mindset about your abilities. For example, "I find ways to help even my most struggling students!" Repeat these to yourself, either silently or out loud. If you like, post them on sticky notes where you will see them as you prepare to go to school, such as on your bathroom mirror.
- Think back to challenges you have overcome in the past. Who did you seek to help you then that you could count on now? Perhaps you have one or two close friends that you can chat with, who always listen to you without passing judgment or giving advice. If so, identify them now and reach out when you need to.
- This time of staying-at-home has brought challenges, but it may have also been a time to experience some healthy or helpful ways of being, doing, and thinking that you never imagined. You may have achieved a bit more of a life balance – adding exercising or walking into your day. What may you choose to commit to continuing as you re-enter school? How will you continue to incorporate this into your life?



CONNECTION TIPS

Supporting Staff and Celebrating Their Re-entry

What's Going On?

Staff are likely to feel hesitant and overwhelmed about returning school to school due to: fears about contracting coronavirus and/or transmitting the virus to high-risk people in their personal circles; adjusting to ever-changing new safety and teaching protocols; and uncertainty about what to expect from students who have experienced a wide range of things during this time of social distancing. Acknowledging these feelings and celebrating the presence of staff in concrete ways is an important step in demonstrating staff appreciation and building cohesion among teams.

For a Positive Outcome

- Increasing staff confidence, morale, and attendance with the explicit, shared understanding that success for the coming year will be an on-going endeavor. Whenever possible, communicate and model that human needs and safety will be prioritized at every junction.
- Carefully consider your written communications with all staff prior to re-entering. How can you acknowledge or offer supports regarding: the unfamiliar task of teaching students remotely; concerns about safety or student learning loss; and strengthening the racial equity lens in the school-wide culture and in classroom instruction? Using your personal, genuine communication style and language, how can you demonstrate alignment with staff? What frequent words of support, or encouragement can you offer?
- Ask yourself, "What concerns do I have regarding my teaching approaches/strategies for students as they re-enter school?" You may have quite a few! Now it's time to examine your teaching strengths! Write them down and refer to them often, acknowledging your abilities.
- Re-institute and/or "advertise" your new open door policy for staff. When someone comes to talk, try to switch gears and use your listening skills. You do not have to fix every concern or be the best problem-solver of all time—presence and empathy are top strategies of leaders during uncertain times.
- Acknowledge that Zoom fatigue is real and people miss in-person human contact.
- Keep in mind that individuals' experiences during the time out of the building were unique, as will be the re-entry process. Some people have experienced more obstacles or trauma, or will struggle more. Assure all staff that the "plan" for re-entry to school will proceed "one step at a time" and with care for individuals' physical and mental health.
- Be visible. Check-in with staff in their spaces. "How are you doing?" can go a long way to support staff after a critical incident. Notice the efforts that individuals are making and name those: e.g. "I noticed that each day you take time to greet children individually and ask them about their morning. That really sends the message that you care about them and that they are safe."

- ☐ Plan now for extra acts of kindness upon re-entry. Consider your school culture, the current level of staff cohesion and your own leadership style. What types of concrete support can you provide? Some ideas are listed below:
 - Surprise(s) by the classroom door/office space: what meaningful little something would your staff like?
 - Outdoor tailgate staff workday breakfast
 - Raffle for coveted, close to the building parking space each month
 - Staff wellness activities during lunch break for upcoming Superintendent's Day
 - Create a staff "shout outs" process. Make sure that all staff are recognized in some way by you, or by a peer.
 - Send individual emails or personal letters to staff thanking them or indicating a particular strength
- ☐ Incorporate celebrations into your regular staff meetings. Staff can nominate peers for outstanding teaching strategies. Administrators should always have at least two acknowledgements to make, both to encourage other acknowledgements and let staff know they are seen. Honor and encourage teaching ingenuity through highlighting creative and successful instructional efforts.
- ☐ Provide opportunities for staff to vent. At times, use concerns as problem solving opportunities for teams to discuss solutions. Let staff know that you struggle at times too. The "new normal" is not normal, but strengthening the team/ school community is a substantial protective factor going forward.



CONNECTION TIPS

Students Returning to School: Understanding Social Emotional Needs

What's Going On?

We do not know the extent of the impact of virtual school for students' social emotional state. Nor do we know the unique and challenging circumstances in every child's home. Systems for family input and other student assessment strategies can help staff identify students in need of additional resources, interventions and/or supports.

Tips to Consider

- Request family-parent/ grandparent or guardian input.
 - Develop 2 -3 brief, open-ended questions as a virtual family survey regarding their returning student(s). Ensure family members complete the survey for each of their children.
 - * Simply and clearly communicate that the purpose of the survey is to: update family communication preferences; learn about children's needs so that the school can plan for supports to address them; learn about parents greatest hopes and fears for their child for the year; receive any other information or circumstances that have impacted the child that the parent/ grandparent/ guardian would like the school to know. Assure families that confidentiality will be maintained.
 - * Offer the survey on paper for families who do not have easy internet access and create a process for collecting them. Call parents/caregivers directly if they do not fill out the survey.
 - * Accept that some families will not choose to respond. Work to make contact with these families anyway, and encourage participation when they feel able.
 - Enlist mental health staff to assist in developing questions. Review questions with administrators and staff prior to sending the survey.
- Don't make assumptions –
 - It is safe to assume that all families experienced some level of trauma or difficulty when schools closed, but it is important not to make assumptions about what a child's experience has been like based on their behavior during school closures. Some previously engaged students did not engage well with virtual learning. Some students did not show up at all for virtual learning while others participated actively. Some families were in close communication and others were not. Remember that you do not know the reasons behind any behavior and strive to ask questions, listen, and be open before making judgements.
 - Keep in mind that some of your students will have experienced chronic trauma and stress due to: food or housing insecurity; the digital divide; domestic, physical, or alcohol or drug abuse; illness or death; racism and racial disparities.

- Communicate to staff that even with survey results and other information, schools will not know every child's-- or staff-- circumstances over the past months. This further reinforces prioritizing the strengthening of supportive relationships, and school-wide social and emotional learning practices for all.
- ☐ Be prepared with targeted supports:
 - Use informal observations to identify critical student needs.
 - * Teachers, paraprofessionals, counselors: What tools do you have access to that help identify students in need of immediate assistance?
 - Bolster current RtI /PBIS monitoring to include assessment measures for students returning to school following a crisis.
 - Streamline communication loops. What is the best way to ensure timely communication of identified students needing support with everything else in the re-entry process happening simultaneously?
 - Identify who will do this work? Consider how to best use your mental health staff. For example, could school psychologists be deployed for crisis assessment in lieu of testing students?
 - Develop a timeline and meeting format for initial social-emotional assessment. You may choose to use your current meeting times or add in crisis team meeting times to your back to school calendar.
- ☐ Provide on-going feedback to parents/ grandparents/ guardians. Inform them of the processes in place to keep parents in the loop regarding universal (for everyone) school-wide social and emotional supports, as well as targeted supports for a child who may need additional resources. Thank adults for providing survey information, assure them that they will be kept informed of future programs or practices that affect their child, and invite them to contact the school, teacher or counselor if they have additional questions or concerns.



CONNECTION TIPS

Welcoming Back Elementary Students

What's Going On?

Preparing to welcome younger students back to school will ease their transition, especially with the major safety and scheduling changes.

Tips to Consider

Before the First Day of School

- Consider a classroom Zoom “Open House”, to meet with parents/grandparents/family members.
 - Greet families warmly, and individually if possible.
 - Incorporate a video of classroom design with appropriate social distancing measures and sanitizing stations in full view.
 - Explain how you will develop classroom expectations regarding new behaviors including mask wearing, social distancing, and sanitizing.
 - Describe how learning may look a bit different this year, as well as what new engaging teaching methods you may be using. Put on a mask and show the children what you will look like when they arrive.
 - Explain that a first priority will simply be getting comfortable in the new environment and connecting with old and new friends. Instruction will follow.
 - Set expectations about changes to the physical environment (i.e., fewer toys, materials, things on the walls, etc.) that may be necessary so that parents can help their children prepare.
 - Reassure families that children will be instructed at their learning levels. Many families are worried that their kids experienced learning loss and are now “behind.” They will need to hear that the school will be supportive.
 - Remind families that while there will be many classroom changes this year in terms of the number of children, and the way that the furniture will be spaced, you look forward to everyone in the smaller group having more space and knowing one another better.
 - Name social and emotional health as a priority for children and staff and identify school-wide and classroom specific SEL aligned practices. Ask families to consider sending a family picture that can be displayed in the classroom.
 - Share your school district’s or your personal commitment to identify and work against bias and racism in interactions and in the teaching of subject matter.
 - Extend an offer to parents to connect with you privately if they would like to share concerns. Many families have experienced trauma in the last months; some more than others. Let parents and grandparents know that understanding more about a child’s needs helps you do your job better. Provide contact information.
 - Save time for Q and A as it will help you learn what general concerns your parents and students have! If you do not have all the answers, just listening to the concerns is helpful. Assure families that you will get back to them as you learn more.

- ❑ Welcoming the youngest students to school for the first time ever, as is the case for pre-k or kindergarten, presents unique challenges as the rules, routines, and level of comfort with school are not yet present. These changes are challenging every year, but more so during this time.
 - Prior to school starting, consider a second Zoom open house targeted toward the children. At this meeting, teach a simple song, read a culturally diverse “welcome book” or teach a virtual welcome “high five.” Say children’s names and show them what you will look like with a mask off and on. Show a few fun areas of the room so that they have a visual of what to look forward to seeing or doing.
 - If your school allows it, offer families a socially distanced (i.e., masked, during designated hours) chance to visit the classroom before September. This provides another opportunity to welcome children and helps them to become comfortable seeing you in person, and masked. Families can also view the social distancing seating and other safety measures. If possible, provide a simple “make and take” project, or just give children a sticker. For very young students, a chance to walk through their new classroom with a parent or grandparent at their side is important to their social and emotional wellbeing; an early visit supports a future successful transition when family will not be at the child’s side.

The First Day of School

- ❑ Show up with warmth, patience (for yourself and the kids), and a smile (children can still tell that you are smiling with a mask on). Be nurturing and sensitive in the moment. Try not to create too ambitious of an agenda. Remind yourself that you are prepared, that what is happening is new for everyone, and that these first days are all about connecting/ re-connecting with one another.
 - Greet each student individually and by name. Let students know how happy you are that they are in your class.
 - Provide art materials so that each child can decorate a name tag. Keep the art materials available for later so that the children can draw a picture—of their family or just anything.
 - Give children time to ask questions and share observations about what is different. Processing is very important for younger children and they may just need to be able to name what is different. Be sure to also highlight what is the same to promote a sense of safety and comfort (e.g., you have a teacher and classmates just like before, we will learn math and reading just like before, we will read books aloud and practice listening just like before, etc.)
 - Establish your classroom routines for a safe and welcoming re-entry. Use visuals to guide students into classrooms. Elicit volunteers in role-playing a few easy scenarios addressing how to move safely within the classroom.
 - Accept that the youngest children will have greater difficulty with understanding and adhering to social distancing regulations and will need more visuals, and more time to begin following them. Also accept that young children are more likely to “violate” social distancing protocols because, by nature, they clump together and often need higher levels of touch to feel secure. Understand that there will be a learning curve here and that extra patience with the children and yourself will be needed.
 - Plan for movement, art, interaction and “play” within the day.
 - Have a school-wide “all hands on deck” approach to circulate adults through classrooms. Make sure that administrators, school counselors and other mental health professionals peek in to say hi, greet individual children, and or provide additional supports to the children—who invariably—will need more.



CONNECTION TIPS

Creating Positive Learning Spaces for Middle and High School Students

What's Going On?

Young people are not made to learn apart, and may struggle with being at a distance from their peers. During these challenging times, whether your classroom is entirely or partly online, finding opportunities for collaboration and joy will be of paramount importance in keeping your older learners tuned in.

Tips to Consider

- ❑ Now more than ever, focus on developing and maintaining strong relationships to the students in your class. During disrupted times, relationships are a protective factor and they are what will keep students showing up – whether in person or online.
- ❑ Create opportunities to students to form relationships with one another. Whether its through get-to-know-you activities, opportunities for sharing, group conversations, or team projects, young people need the space and the structure to stay in touch with each other. Some ideas for get-to-know-me activities are:
 - Gallery walls (encourage students to make picture walls of images that represent their interests, talents, hobbies, families, and dreams.
 - “Bring 3 items to the screen” – set a short time limit for students to grab three items that fit a particular theme or answer a question
 - Online talent show – consider inviting buddy classrooms or families to view your students’ many hidden talents! With some planning, talent shows are great opportunities to build community
 - Celebrity Squares – lean into the grid format of virtual learning spaces and embrace old gameshow formats for answering questions, brainstorming, or collaboration.
- ❑ Establish morning rituals. Lean into morning meetings, or block off 10 minutes for students to submit a link/song/video/quote to share. Creating consistent, scheduled time to come together each morning will get your students up and onto the computer more reliably than jumping right into content.
- ❑ Try to make it fun! Whenever you can, work in opportunities for fun during your teaching and during student group work. Some ideas are:
 - Bingo sheets – Either as a content review, vocabulary expansion, or poking fun of your own speech patterns, Bingo sheets give kids a reason to listen closely
 - Theme days – brainstorm funny theme days for online learning and create a schedule so kids have time to prep. Themes could be: wear a funny hat, create a new Zoom background, talk like a pirate, or be linked to content.
 - Around the House Scavenger Hunts – Set a short time limit for students to find items linked to a theme (discussing the Civil War? Find two items a soldier would have had in his backpack. Discussing trigonometry? Find a sphere, an isosceles triangle, and a rectangle).

- ❑ Movement Matters. Make sure to incorporate movement breaks often, and provide variable ideas. Students can jog in place, do jumping jacks, burpees, or yoga. Encourage movement during transitions. Remember that modeling the movement yourself is a great way to get young people engaged (but feel free to leave the burpees to those energetic teenagers!)
- ❑ Share your schedule – Be open and honest with your class about the content you need to cover, and your plan for getting it done. Encourage students to reflect on the schedule and if it seems achievable to them – and listen to their ideas. Creating this kind of buy-in helps keep kids engaged, even when distance learning, and gives them increased responsibility for their own learning.
- ❑ Dust off those rubrics or create new ones – Rubrics are another excellent way to create buy-in and genuine learning. For group projects or large assignments, create opportunities for students to meet with you and reflect where they think they are on a grading rubric, and where you think they are. Give and solicit honest feedback to truly make learning a two-way street.
- ❑ Meet them where they are – create Instagram hashtags, develop a classroom website, embrace silly Zoom backgrounds, and acknowledge the ups and downs of distance learning. As digital natives, your students will have ideas for creative collaboration using social tools. Encourage them to share those ideas and make that sharing a safe activity.



CONNECTION TIPS

Supporting Families and Adult Caregivers

What's Going On?

Families may feel apprehensive or have mixed emotions about sending their children back to school. Strengthening the school-home relationship, and soliciting family input can help calm feelings regarding the shift back to the school setting.

Tips to Consider

- ❑ Prior to school beginning, develop a multi-staff/whole staff system for family communication.
 - Provide parents clear, concise, supportive information. Ensure this does not duplicate or conflict with other school information that they receive. Decide in advance how to convey information. For example, a principal may address changes in the school day, sanitation and cleaning procedures, physical changes to the building, while the teacher communicates classroom specific re-entry information.
 - Be supportive. Acknowledge that this transition back to school involves challenges for families and students. Doing so helps families normalize their concerns.
 - Welcome parent contact right from the beginning. Convey that communication this year will be two-way! You want to hear from parents more than ever—especially about any background information that can help you better support and teach their child.
 - Mental Health and Nursing staff may want to share their plan for parent outreach, gathering concerns, and offering services and support.
 - Name social and emotional health as a priority for children and staff and identify school-wide and classroom specific Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) aligned practices.
- ❑ Acknowledge the school's commitment toward furthering racial justice and equity, and identify anti-racist aligned committees and/ or practices. Consider, in advance of school opening, how to solicit concerns from parents/ grandparents/ guardians. They know that schools are swamped with re-opening details and are likely not to add their concerns to the pile unless they are asked. Some options that a building or district might initiate include:
 - Zoom Parent Discussion Groups: Create open-ended questions such as, "When thinking about your child (children) returning to school, what are you most concerned about?" and/ or "What are your children telling you and/ or feeling about returning to the classroom?"

- Anonymous Electronic Family surveys: If the response rate is high, this provides a lot of feedback quickly. Design no more than ten statements that parents can react to such as, “My child/ children are experiencing anxiety regarding returning to school” with response options such as a) strongly agree, b) agree, c) disagree d) strongly disagree. Other potential questions using this format could be: My child/children, while a bit apprehensive, are excited to return to school; While a bit apprehensive, I am excited for my child/ children to be returning to school; I am concerned about my child/ children being behind academically; My child/ children are concerned about being behind academically; I am concerned about my child/ children’s health and safety returning to school; My child/ children are concerned about their health safety returning to school; My child/ children are excited to see their friends; My child/ children have missed going to school; I feel confident that my concerns are important to the school; I believe that my child/ children’s social and emotional health matters to the teachers and school; Issues of racial justice have been discussed frequently in our home; I trust that issues of racial justice will be part of the curriculum and school culture. A final, open-ended question can be included as well such as, “What should the school understand in order to better support your child/ children?”. You might want to end the survey by reminding the families they can email or call the principal, social worker, or teacher to discuss specific child concerns.
 - Feedback Loop: Provide families with data gleaned from the information above and the plan to address concerns. It is okay to include a line to the effect of, “There are fears shared by families and staff that will be calmed once school gets rolling. This is all new to all of us, but as we move forward, we prioritize safety and well-being.”
 - Identify Parents with Higher Levels of Concern: Create a plan to reach out to them individually and proactively. Let them know the school appreciates their concerns, wants to partner with them and to provide support.
- ☐ Provide a format to help staff respond to parent/ grandparent/ guardian concerns. This may include Main Office, Counseling Office, Health Office and Security staff. Communicating responses can also take the form of a Zoom meeting if there is the capability to have large numbers of parents attend. In any response to parents; thank them for the huge lift they provided during virtual school; state the identified concerns non-judgmentally identified in focus groups or in the survey and thank them for their input; let parents know how you use their feedback to strengthen supports, and what those supports or resources are. Remind parents that their partnership is crucial to ensuring the success in yet another “new normal.” Identify points of contact for further parent inquiries or concerns.



CONNECTION TIPS

Supporting English Language Learners

What's Going On?

Learning from home for English Language Learner (ELL) students during a pandemic is likely to have created additional challenges. Prior planning may be helpful for ELL students and staff.

Tips to Consider

- ❑ While school is still virtual, strive for on-going connection/ communication with students and their families. ELL teachers often play the informal role of case managers with their students and this is an optimal time to do so. Also, ELL teachers are often the only source for additional English language tutoring support, or a way to get English language books that children need; providing either strengthens the home-school relationship.
- ❑ Enlist interpreters when reaching out to families. If paying for translation services is problematic for your district, become creative regarding who might serve as an interpreter—as long as the information to be shared is not expected to be confidential in nature. Older adult siblings, an extended family member, a volunteer from a local community agency that supports “new arrivals” (i.e. Mary’s place) may be willing to help you reach out to a family to field questions and ensure the ELL student and family members are connected to school. For confidential conversations, enlist professional interpreters or, if that is not possible, a staff member from your school community—if there is one.
- ❑ Monitor for effects of social isolation on ELL students. While it is uncertain what the short-term and long-term impacts of social isolation are for all students, ELL students may be particularly vulnerable. ELL students often enjoy the routine and sociability of attending in-person school, and often do not have family members at home who are able to help with homework. Refugees or their families: have experienced trauma before coming to the US; often live in neighborhoods that are unsafe or lack services; frequently do not have reliable transportation; have additional struggles due to the digital divide that adversely affects families living in poverty. Teachers and others having frequent contact with families should listen for concerns, observe student behaviors, and expediently and directly communicate needs and concerns to administrative and/ or mental health staff.
- ❑ Provide written communication in the student’s first language! There are local services that provide translations, but again, use caution when information is sensitive or confidential. On-line free translation might be an option but often does not convey information clearly, and might convey misinformation.

- ❑ Consider a “Socially Distanced Open House” as it may be even more beneficial as schools re-open. Parents/ grandparents/ guardians and students will be able to see and understand the differences you have made physically to prepare students for a safe return to the campus/ school. Reach out in advance to make sure that families will be attending and/or provide more than one time slot to accommodate family schedules.
- ❑ Schedule tours during the Open House to help students learn their new schedules. This will be especially important for ELL’s who may be transitioning from elementary to middle school or middle school to high school.
- ❑ If possible with the school’s distancing protocols, consider setting up a buddy or mentor system whereby students who are newer arrivals will be teamed with students from the same culture/ language group that are experienced in and feel safe with the school rules, routines and relationships. Create a process to “train” the mentor buddy to help, and introduce the mentor and new arrival to one another before school starts or at the beginning of school.
- ❑ Understanding COVID Protocols and Procedures:
 - Pay to have these protocols translated so that all information, including contact information, is crystal clear.
 - Identify persons who will be able to communicate with families in their first language if one of their children displays COVID-19-like symptoms at school, or one of their children has been in the vicinity of an individual displaying COVID-19-like symptoms.
 - For younger ELL students, develop visual representations/pictures denoting COVID-19 safety protocols in classrooms and hallways. Use real people, emojis or whatever you think your student population would understand and respond to most easily, e.g, pictures of students washing hands, physical distancing markings, or movement patterns on the floor.
 - Create and refer to posted visuals on the wall that show individuals who might be feeling unwell. Teach young children, or children with limited English to point to those picture if they are not feeling well, or if someone at home is unwell. Teach English words/phrases regarding sickness or symptoms to the students right from the beginning to assist them in communicating if they do not feel well; particularly teach vocabulary associated with COVID-19 symptoms.



CONNECTION TIPS

Supporting Students and Families Experiencing Shelter Insecurity

What's Going On?

Learning from home for students identified as homeless (under the McKinney-Vento Act) during the pandemic may create more challenges. Considering their needs and prior planning for when they will return to school may be beneficial for students and all instructional staff.

Tips to Consider

Practical Tips

- ❑ Locating currently identified McKinney-Vento students/families during summer months is often quite challenging; more so now without physically seeing these students in school during the spring. Before re-entry, consider deploying additional staff to reach out to families to find out where they are, what their plans are for September and connect them with resources as needed.
- ❑ If school or resource personnel are unable to connect with a family, utilize contacts listed for these students on their emergency contact cards for assistance in reaching out to these students/ families and offering support.

Social Emotional Tips Before School Starts

- ❑ Despite all the challenges many students will be facing during return to school, this population is even more vulnerable. Encourage those who families/ students first come in contact with (clerical staff, administrators, security, or teachers) to be patient and listen with compassion. Ideally have a staff person who is trusted by the family make any initial contacts. Remind these staff members that even during "non-pandemic times" homeless students and their families are in a state of crisis. Instability is exacerbated during this health and economic crisis.
- ❑ Make social distancing "home" visits if a meeting time and location are possible. Utilize school mental health staff's summer work hours to make visits to know shelter locations to check in on students and their families and let them know that they are missed and cared about. Use those opportunities to listen to and assess what resources students/families need; follow up with families as appropriate. Update contact information for further home/school communication.
- ❑ Identify one school staff member as a point of contact for each student, or for families with several siblings, one per family.
- ❑ Identify who the children feel most connected to at school. Reach out to that staff member to invite them to be an additional support to the student when they return. Having connections to caring adults may be a significant protective factor and promote better attendance.
- ❑ Inquire what additional concerns they have regarding a return to school; what social-emotional supports that they anticipate students will need.

Social Emotional Tips Before School Starts

- ❑ As students look to talk about their home experience during school closures, be sensitive to shelter insecure students who may not want to talk about their own home situations. Offer students options to pass when the subject comes up. Be aware of home situations when asking questions or inviting students to share photos, stories of their experiences, etc.
- ❑ Find opportunities for private communication with students and/or their family members about how they are navigating virtual school days and offer opportunities for support. If your school is allowing some students (i.e., special needs) to spend more time in the school building, be sure to include shelter insecure students in this group.
- ❑ Help these students to feel less alone in their experiences by highlighting challenges all students (and adults) are facing with loneliness or insecurity about the future. Acknowledge that students have had all different experiences and invite students to share with you privately any concerns they have.
- ❑ Recognize that these students may have stronger emotions than students in more stable home situations and that those emotions may show up through behavior.



CONNECTION TIPS

Supporting Transfer Students Entering a New School

What's Going On?

Learning from home for students transitioning from one school to another during a pandemic may create more challenges. School staff may be concerned about the health issues, learning gaps and social-emotional needs of students new to the school district. Prior planning may be helpful for new students and staff.

Tips to Consider

- ❑ Sometimes students who transfer from one district to the other may be transferring due to critical life or COVID related issues. Others may be transferring due to work-related moves. And many students will simply be transferring into new buildings - from elementary to middle school for example. Whatever the reason for transition, transferring during a pandemic and changing to a new school environment and community will require additional support.
- ❑ Begin their experience by welcoming new families/students with positive and compassionate approaches. Anxiety about making a school move will be enhanced due to unknowns about how the school will be providing a safe learning environment amidst the possibility of COVID-19 spread/contagion. Communicate as much as possible about your school as well as your COVID-19 protocols. Students transferring from other parts of the country may have experienced different things in their home districts as states have handled the pandemic very differently.
- ❑ Have written materials available to include in Central Registration packets (on-line registration packets and hard copy) regarding COVID-19 procedures
- ❑ Secondary students: School counselors will likely be meeting with students (perhaps virtually in advance of school re-opening) in order to develop student schedules. Have School Counselors prepared to answer any additional concerns regarding the school's plan to re-open.
- ❑ Many school districts offer mentoring programs to support students new to the school district or building. These may be impacted by social distancing. Consider some social-distanced methods for students to develop connections with your "Welcome Crew" such as virtual after school social gatherings, one-on-one buddy zoom calls, etc.
- ❑ Elementary/Middle School: Consider offering socially distanced group counseling for students new to school. Some schools typically have "Lunch Bunch" meetings in the beginning of the year to help students connect to a new school and peers. These also provides an opportunity for School Counselors to assess the need for follow up mental health supports and interventions. Many of the traditional "get to know your school" activities such as fun nights, open-houses, etc. were cancelled last spring. As a replacement, this year schools may want to host these groups not just for students new to the district, but for K, 6th, and 9th graders who are entering their buildings for the first time. These can provide opportunities for students to ask questions, share concerns, and talk to others in small groups about their experiences of transition.
- ❑ Parent check-in: Home-school connections will be even more appreciated as new families move into your district. Proactively making contact early in the new year may be very beneficial to assist with transition and reduce anxious thoughts. Partner with your new parents.