TOOLS

Assess and address gaps in student learning

As the new school year starts, one of educators' many challenges is assessing where students' skills stand and filling the gaps. Students may be behind where they would typically be at the beginning of their grade level as a result of missing out on instruction last spring.

With the unplanned transition to distance learning, many teachers focused on reviewing content and maintaining students' current skill levels rather than attempting to teach new content. That choice was driven by concerns about leaving behind students without internet access, teachers' lack of training in how to engage students online, and the urgency of tending to students' nutritional, safety, and social and emotional needs.

Even when teachers did teach new content, students may have experienced stress and trauma that hindered their learning, struggled to adjust to online teaching, and experienced varying levels of family support for learning.

On top of those challenges, it was difficult to assess how much students were learning in the spring. Many typical methods of checking for understanding were impossible without in-person interactions, and formal assessment would have been stressful for, and perhaps unfair to, students.

When you add in all the uncertainty about what school will look like this year, it's clear that it will take creativity and collaboration to ensure students don't manifest skill gaps that carry forward for months or years. Educators at all levels and in all roles should be part of the solution, and cross-grade collaboration will be essential.

Use this tool to consider and plan strategies to create continuity of content and assess and address students' skill gaps.

CHECKLIST OF STRATEGIES TO IDENTIFY STUDENT SKILL GAPS

INSTRUCTIONS: Review the professional learning strategies for identifying and addressing student skill gaps that are relevant to your role and setting. For each item, check the appropriate response based on whether you plan to use the strategy. After reviewing all the strategies, reflect on which you are prioritizing and not prioritizing.

STRATEGIES: **TEACHING AND LEARNING**	Currently doing	Planning to do	To consider	Not interested or not applicable
Employ looping so that teachers continue with students they know from last year.				
Use co-teaching among teachers of different subject areas to leverage project-based or multidisciplinary learning to emphasize critical concepts.				
Create opportunities for teacher leadership and peer-to-peer learning so that teachers can build one another's knowledge of content and pedagogy across grades.				
Hold regular cross-grade teacher meetings and collaboration, such as PLCs.				
Encourage informal collaboration among teachers of different grade levels (e.g. hold a weekly virtual lunch hangout).				
Leverage the skills and assets of paraprofessionals to facilitate information sharing among teachers about classes and students, work one-on-one or in small groups with struggling students, and communicate regularly with families.				
Conduct check-ins or focus groups with students to hear their perspective on skills and needs.				

CHECKLIST OF STRATEGIES TO IDENTIFY STUDENT SKILL GAPS CONTINUED

STRATEGIES: **COACHING**	Currently doing	Planning to do	To consider	Not interested or not applicable
Engage teachers in conversation and reflection to help them assess students' needs and gaps as well as their own professional learning needs.				
Build teachers' knowledge of content normally covered in previous grade levels through modeling, training, and other strategies.				
Facilitate cross-grade teacher collaboration through PLCs.				
Serve as a liaison among teachers to facilitate information sharing about the skills and needs of classes and specific students.				

STRATEGIES: **SCHOOL LEADERSHIP**				
Create and protect time for teacher collaboration, including cross-grade collaboration.				
Participate in those teacher team conversations as a learner, colleague, and facilitator.				
Work with coaching staff to set schedules and responsibilities that maximize their effectiveness and efficiency.				
Establish a schoolwide expectation that all staff are responsible for all students' learning.				
Identify or create collaborative learning opportunities with other school leaders within or beyond your district to learn about promising practices and share ideas and challenges.				
Create and advocate for ongoing professional learning on remote assessment and instructional strategies.				
Establish guidelines for student assessment, and communicate them clearly and consistently.				

STRATEGIES: **DISTRICT AND STATE LEADERSHIP**				
Ensure time for school leaders to collaborate within and across schools to discuss common areas of student need and strategies for addressing them.				
Establish time for teachers to collaborate outside their own schools and share knowledge across the district about grade-level needs and strategies.				
Prioritize coaching capacity, especially in schools with high numbers of students at risk for learning gaps.				
Provide professional learning and ongoing support in the use of formative assessment.				
Fund and implement professional learning on remote assessment and instruction.				
Establish a district- or statewide vision for student assessment aligned with instructional goals for the year with clear expectations and consistent support for all educators.				
Communicate openly with families and the community about shifts in assessment and instructional goals for the year.				