The COVID-19 pandemic has forced teachers to confront unprecedented challenges. You have done heroic work over the past few months to offer stability, learning, and care to your students and families. We know that the academic challenges facing our students in the fall are substantial, so we’ve built some resources to help you address the academic challenges you face.

TNTP released the Learning Acceleration Guide to help school system leaders develop and execute a strategy for accelerating—rather than remediating—student learning. Since that release, teachers have asked us about how to use the Learning Acceleration Guide in their work, so we developed this companion resource just for teachers. We designed this companion guide to help teachers navigate the relevant advice in the main Learning Acceleration Guide, as well as offer additional, teacher-specific advice for accelerating learning for students.

We’ve grounded our advice in values we believe should guide any teacher’s decision-making in the months ahead:

**Grade-level content is the academic priority.**

Run every idea through a simple test: Will this help every student get back to grade level? We don’t mean ignoring social/emotional or other non-academic needs; addressing those are core to setting students up for success. But more than anything else, you should prioritize accelerating students’ learning by accelerating their exposure to grade-appropriate content—so that every student can get back to grade level. It won’t happen in a single year, but if you don’t set the goal and build a strategy around it, it won’t happen at all.

**Address inequities head-on.**

Losing so much of this school year has likely exacerbated existing inequities and opportunity gaps in your classroom. Ensure that your plan for restarting school in your classroom accounts for the academic and social/emotional supports students will need.

**Support and assume the best of all your stakeholders.**

In this pandemic, everyone has done the best they know how to do in an unprecedented situation. Assume the best of your students and their families in your decision-making as you plan for reopening.

**Communicate clearly.**

Your students and families might still feel overwhelmed by at-home learning, so as you welcome them to your classroom, make sure you are communicating simply and clearly about the expectations in your classroom.

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How can you create a plan to accelerate student learning?

In the Learning Acceleration Guide, we recommend a few things school systems should do as they create their plan to accelerate student learning. While most of those recommendations are about planning at the system level, there are some parallel steps that teachers can take to effectively prepare for the 2020-2021 school year.

### Key Recommendations

1. **Ask your school leader and district staff** about their plan to accelerate student learning.
2. **Reflect on the key questions** you’ll need to begin planning for reopening.
3. **Identify challenges and opportunities**—three to five each—that you will need to address in your classroom.

### Ask your school leader and district staff about their plan to accelerate student learning.

Before you begin planning for your students’ learning this year, review any guidance your school leader or district has already shared about their academic planning for next school year. Will your system be updating its pacing guidance or adopting new materials in your subject area? You’ll want to know about your school and district’s expectations and supports before planning for your students’ experiences next year. Then, if you have questions about the plan or the plan doesn’t seem to meet the needs of your students, discuss it with your school leader.

### Reflect on the key questions you’ll need to begin planning for reopening.

Reflect on what you know about the experience you, your students, and your families had with at-home learning so that you can anticipate what everyone might need in the new school year. Think through what you know about your classes’ experiences with learning at home and, review any survey data that your school or district has shared about what students and families are experiencing. Consider:

- **Basic needs:** Have students’ and families’ basic needs (like food, housing, and childcare) been met during the pandemic?
- **Student learning:** Have students and their families had the resources and support they needed to continue learning? Has your at-home learning approach been effective, or are there areas to improve upon to ensure your students can have a strong experience if they must learn at home again next year?
- **Connectedness:** Do students and their families feel connected to your school community? To you as their teacher?
- **Communication and expectations:** Do students and families believe communication and expectations have been clear while schools have been closed? Do they believe your classroom expectations have been clear?
- **Future planning:** What do students and families say they need to be ready for restarting school?

Identify three to five significant opportunities and three to five significant challenges to address as you create your plan for next year.

You might not be able to answer every single question listed in the previous section—and that’s okay. Consider what you know and identify the most important strengths and challenges you’ll need to tackle in your classroom next year. Think about how to build on your at-home learning wins. For example, did students share that it felt good to have
more autonomy and opportunities to drive their own learning? If they did, think about how to provide even more opportunities for students during the school year, whether it's fully in-person or not.
How can you accelerate student learning?

In the Learning Acceleration Guide we recommended ways school systems can accelerate student learning. Teachers can independently take most of those steps as well, while following school and district guidance on content, diagnosing students, and pacing.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACCELERATING STUDENT LEARNING**

1. **Prioritize the most critical prerequisite skills and knowledge** for each subject area and grade level now.

2. **Plan your approach to diagnosing students’ unfinished learning** in that prerequisite content knowledge and those prerequisite skills.

3. **Adapt your scope and sequence/pacing guidance** for the subjects that you teach.

4. **Monitor your students’ progress** on grade-appropriate assignments and adjust your supports for them based on those results.

Prioritize the most critical prerequisite skills and content knowledge for each subject area and grade level now.

Depending on what your school and system have shared about this, you may need to prioritize the most critical prerequisite skills and content knowledge for your grade(s) and subject(s) yourself. If that is the case, use the approach we outlined in the Learning Acceleration Guide. If your school or system is articulating the most critical prerequisite skills and content knowledge, find out when that will be shared so that you can use it for planning.

Plan your approach to diagnosing students’ unfinished learning for the prioritized prerequisite content knowledge and skills.

Again, you’ll want to consider the support your school and system is planning to provide. If they are going to provide guidance on how to diagnose students’ unfinished learning for the prioritized content knowledge and skills, use that guidance. If not, use the approach outlined in the Learning Acceleration Guide to plan your approach.

Adapt your scope and sequence/pacing guidance for the subjects that you teach.

Think about what your school and district is sharing about how to adapt your pacing guidance and scope and sequence for your course(s). If you don’t receive any guidance, use the guidance in the Learning Acceleration Guide to plan your content for the year, ensuring that you start from the curricular materials that you have and prioritize the most important grade-level content as you allocate time across the year. This might mean cutting some lower-priority content or skills from your year-long plan. For example, if you’re a first-grade mathematics teacher, you might fully cut lessons focused on telling time to the hour and half-hour (an “additional” cluster in the Common Core State Standards) from the 2020-2021 school year so that you can spend more time focused on adding and subtracting within 20 (a major cluster without which students cannot succeed in second grade math and beyond).

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As another example, if you’re a fifth-grade reading teacher, it might be tempting to match your students to leveled texts. Given the months students have been out of school, coupled with the complicated realities many students are facing, it can be tempting to double down on leveled text instruction where students, by definition, read texts independently without teacher support. But for students to develop the integrated, holistic, and flexible literacy skills necessary to participate in the world around them, limiting students to reading only ‘just-right-but-lower-than-grade-level’ texts will hinder, rather than accelerate students’ literacy development. Simple texts won’t teach readers how to deal with complicated concepts, syntax, or subtle cohesive links in texts. Simple texts lack the rich vocabulary knowledge only available to students reading complex, grade-level texts. Given that, you will likely prioritize reading a smaller number of grade-level texts deeply, ensuring that students have the opportunity to write and discuss in alignment with grade-level standards.

Monitor your students’ progress on grade-appropriate assignments and adjust your supports for them based on those results.

Just as you have in previous school years, ensure that you have a plan to monitor your students’ progress on grade-appropriate assignments. You can use the TNTP Assignment Review Protocols and Student Work Library to think about how you might improve the quality of your assignments. Use the Good to Great Reflection Guide to reflect on what your students achieve when given the opportunity to engage with grade-appropriate assignments.

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4 https://tntp.org/student-experience-toolkit/view/assignment-review-protocols
5 https://tntp.org/student-work-library
What other challenges should you anticipate as we plan to accelerate student learning?

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students goes far beyond academics, so think through how you’ll address social and emotional challenges, potential communication challenges, and a plan to quickly shift to at-home learning, should you need to do so.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDRESSING OTHER CHALLENGES

1. Develop a social and emotional responsiveness strategy that supports all your students in restarting school and considers the trauma many have experienced.

2. Ensure that you have a strong plan to communicate with your students’ families.

3. Develop a plan to shift to strong at-home learning rapidly, using what you’ve learned in this round of at-home learning to improve your approach for the future.

Develop a social and emotional responsiveness strategy that supports all your students in restarting school and considers the trauma many have experienced.

Every single member of your school community has experienced some sort of trauma associated with the COVID-19 pandemic—and some students may have lost loved ones, experienced food insecurity, or lost their home. Ensure that you have a strong plan to be socially and emotionally responsive, considering the guidance in the Learning Acceleration Guide, paying special attention to The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)’s helpful guide for planning for the social and emotional learning needs of students.

Ensure that you have a strong plan to communicate with your students’ families.

Think about what your students and families will need to know to feel safe and welcomed in your classroom – and then use the guidance in the Learning Acceleration Guide to plan your communication approach. Ensure that you’re also using the communication structures and strategies that your school will use so that your students and families hear consistent information from you and your school.

Develop a plan to shift to at-home learning rapidly, using what you’ve learned in this round of at-home learning to improve your approach for the future.

As scary as it feels right now, epidemiologists predict a second wave of COVID-19 in the fall, with continuing waves potentially occurring until we have a vaccine. Ensure that you understand your school or district approach to contingencies (like fully at-home learning or staggered schedules for students), then use the guidance in the Learning Acceleration Guide to ensure that you have a plan to deliver the content you worked so hard to prioritize to your students, whether or not they are in person with you.

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