

What's the Plan? How K-12 School Districts Are Preparing to Resume and Reopen

Past Data Observations

8/19/20: Data Observations

A few weeks ago, a [picture](#) of a crowded hallway at a Georgia high school ignited controversy about how schools should reopen. Even the district superintendent [acknowledged](#) that the photo “does not look good” as it showed a seeming disregard for safety precautions such as social distancing and mask mandates. Shortly after the photo went viral, nine students and staff members had [tested positive](#) and the school had closed its doors in favor of remote instruction.

Last week the school reopened with a [hybrid model](#) designed to reduce crowding. The 70 percent of students who are not part of the district’s remote-only program attend in-person classes two days a week and learn virtually the rest of the time.

The Georgia district’s dizzying boomerang across different attendance models is extreme. But it reflects a larger truth: local conditions are changing rapidly, and school district plans are trying to keep pace. We’ve seen that reflected among the 375 districts in our database:

- 350 of 375 districts in our database have now released reopening plans. But it’s common for those plans to include scenarios where alternate attendance structures might be deployed. (Low local infection rates permitting in-person instruction, for instance.)
- 66 districts—or 18 percent of the districts in our database—have announced plans to buy themselves some time by delaying the start to the school year.
- 117 districts—or about a third of those in our database—are offering families a choice between remote and in-person options, with other districts offering choices between other attendance models.

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COVID-19 infection rates are [alarmingly high](#). School reopening [guidance from the CDC](#), states and local governments change often; sometimes they conflict. Teachers and staff are [concerned](#) about returning to school. Parents [worry](#) their children will fall behind academically but [aren’t convinced](#) that sending their kids back to classrooms is a safe choice.

For the early parts of summer, few districts released full reopening plans. That changed in mid-July when several big districts announced they would begin the school year with remote-only instruction. Others have followed suit. While there are variations by state, remote learning—whether offered as a choice or exclusively—is increasingly part of the reopening plans published by the 300-plus districts in our database:

- 187 districts plan to offer remote instruction as an option, and another 97 districts plan for remote instruction exclusively. Altogether, 95 percent of the districts in our database that have released plans plan to offer remote instruction to some portion of their students.
- 143 districts—or just under half of the districts in our database that have released plans—plan to offer in-person instruction. Yet only a few of those districts plan to offer in-person instruction only.
- 94 districts—or nearly a third of districts in our database—plan to offer hybrid instruction.