

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

## Past Data Observations

### 12/9/20: NYC Brings Younger Students Back to the Classroom

On Monday, New York City schools reopened for elementary school students, who will now be eligible for in-person instruction. Middle and high school students will continue to learn fully remotely. Only 5% of districts in our database offered remote learning for some ages and not others as of Nov. 30. But a growing number of districts are now fully remote, without an in-person option. The number of districts offering elementary school students with some in-person component may increase. [Read more.](#)

### 12/3/20: California Lawsuit Alleges Educational Inequities During Remote Learning

Remote learning during the pandemic has failed to deliver a free and equal education to students in California, violating the state constitution. So charges a new lawsuit, arguing that the state has “left many already-underserved students functionally unable to attend school,” particularly Black and Latinx students from low-income families. Our database shows that remote-only learning is the norm among California districts, in contrast to districts in many other states. [Read more.](#)

### 11/18/20: NYC Moves Back to Remote-Only Instruction As COVID-19 Positivity Rate Rises

Eight weeks into a gradual reopening, students in New York City are back to remote learning through at least Thanksgiving. The cause? The city just hit the 3 percent positivity rate trigger for shutting school buildings. We've found that there's no consistency in such triggers, and that districts in states with higher COVID-19 positivity rates were actually more likely to have attendance structures with some in-person component. [Read more.](#)

## **11/10/20: With Election, New Attention Paid to Biden's School Reopening Plan**

With the 2020 presidential election now in the books (well, for most people), president-elect Joseph R. Biden's five point plan for reopening schools safely is receiving renewed attention. The plan establishes controlling the spread of the virus as an essential criterion for schools to reopen. It also calls for increased funding and more local control over school reopening plans. Our database shows that half of districts are now offering in-person learning. As the nation transitions to a Biden presidency, this will be something to watch. [Read more.](#)

## **10/29/20: Teachers Stage Sickouts to Protest Reopening Plans in Houston and Idaho**

Last week, teachers from at least 35 campuses in the Houston Independent School District (HISD) staged a sickout to protest what they say are the district's inadequate COVID-19 safety protocols. Earlier in the week, hundreds of teachers called in sick in Idaho's West Ada school district to protest the decision to keep schools open for in-person learning amid a worsening COVID-19 outbreak. Our database shows a growing number of districts with some in-person component. Half are now offering fully in-person instruction, and 40% offer hybrid instruction. [Read more.](#)

## **10/22/20: New Analysis Shows Large Districts Are Increasingly Open In-Person**

In a new analysis, the Washington Post reports that nearly half of the 50 largest school districts in the United States are now offering in-person learning to large groups of students, and 11 more plan to reopen school buildings in the coming weeks. That's a major change from the first day of school, when nearly all large districts opened with remote learning only. Our database reflects a similar trend, with just over a quarter of districts remote-only, down from 42% at the beginning of September. [Read more.](#)

## **10/16/20: Most NYC Students Choose Remote Learning**

Most of New York City's 1,600 public schools are now open for hybrid learning, after a twice-delayed reopening. But in neighborhoods in Brooklyn and Queens that are experiencing high infection rates of COVID-19, schools were required to close on Oct. 8, for at least two weeks, spurring protests. Meanwhile, in other parts of the city, a slight majority of students are choosing remote learning over the hybrid option. In offering a fully remote option, New York City is similar to 97 percent of districts in our database. [Read more.](#)

## **10/8/20: Most Boston Public Schools Students to Remain**

### **Remote-Only for Now**

Boston's mayor announced that the vast majority of Boston Public School's 54,000 students will continue to attend school remotely. That's a reversal of the district's previous plan to begin a gradual reopening of physical buildings for hybrid learning, originally set to begin next week. The announcement came as COVID-19 positivity rates topped four percent last week—exceeding the threshold that district officials, public health agencies and teacher's unions deemed safe.

According to our database, a small but growing number of districts are implementing changes to their attendance structure, many in response to local conditions. [Read more.](#)

## **10/1/20: Los Angeles County Allows Waivers for Reopening Elementary Schools**

Earlier this week, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted to allow public and private elementary schools in the county to apply to reopen school buildings for students in transitional kindergarten through second grade. The Los Angeles Unified School District is staying mum on whether it will apply for a waiver, remaining fully remote for now. In that way, it mirrors about 35 percent of districts in our database. [Read more.](#)

## **9/24/20: Miami-Dade Announces Fully In-Person Learning Option**

Earlier this week, the Miami-Dade County School Board voted to reopen school buildings for in-person classes next month, gradually allowing students back in by different age groups. With that decision, Miami-Dade will become the largest school district in the United States to offer fully in-person learning, five days a week. Miami-Dade is bigger than most districts, but it isn't alone. According to our database last updated earlier this month, 135 districts (36 percent) are offering fully in-person classes. Like Miami-Dade County, these districts typically also offer a remote learning option. [Read more.](#)

## **9/17/20: NYC Delays Start of School Year**

In New York City, with the planned start of the already-delayed school year just four short days away, the mayor dropped a bombshell today: only a tiny fraction of students would be admitted to school buildings on Monday, September 21. Ensur outcry from teachers, parents and students. The Big Apple is not alone: According to our database, as of two weeks ago, a whopping 23 percent (85 districts) had announced a delay in the start to their school year for in-person, hybrid and remote learning. [Read more.](#)

## 9/9/20: Data Observations

It's certainly been a strange start to the school year. Tech problems marred the first day of school in many places. This week, Hartford Public Schools, in Connecticut, was forced to delay its opening by a day after a [ransomware attack](#) wreaked havoc on a system that the city uses to manage bus routes. Students starting school remotely in Houston, Philadelphia and North Carolina found themselves [unable to log-on](#) after encountering server and software problems.

In other places, there's still uncertainty around which instructional model will be the norm—remote, fully in-person, or hybrid. In Iowa, Des Moines Public Schools was [denied](#) an injunction that would have allowed it to hold all classes remotely. (The state requires all districts below a certain infection rate to hold in-person classes.) The case isn't yet settled and the district doesn't plan to offer in-person instruction for now. In Florida, schools have [closed down](#) amid COVID-19 outbreaks, while the state prevented some school districts from releasing data about the outbreaks.

With so many districts offering remote learning—94% in our database—and some districts forced to retreat to remote learning after COVID-19 outbreaks, functioning technology is key to restoring some semblance of schooling. What are districts doing to make sure that students have computer and internet access for remote learning? Here's what our data shows:

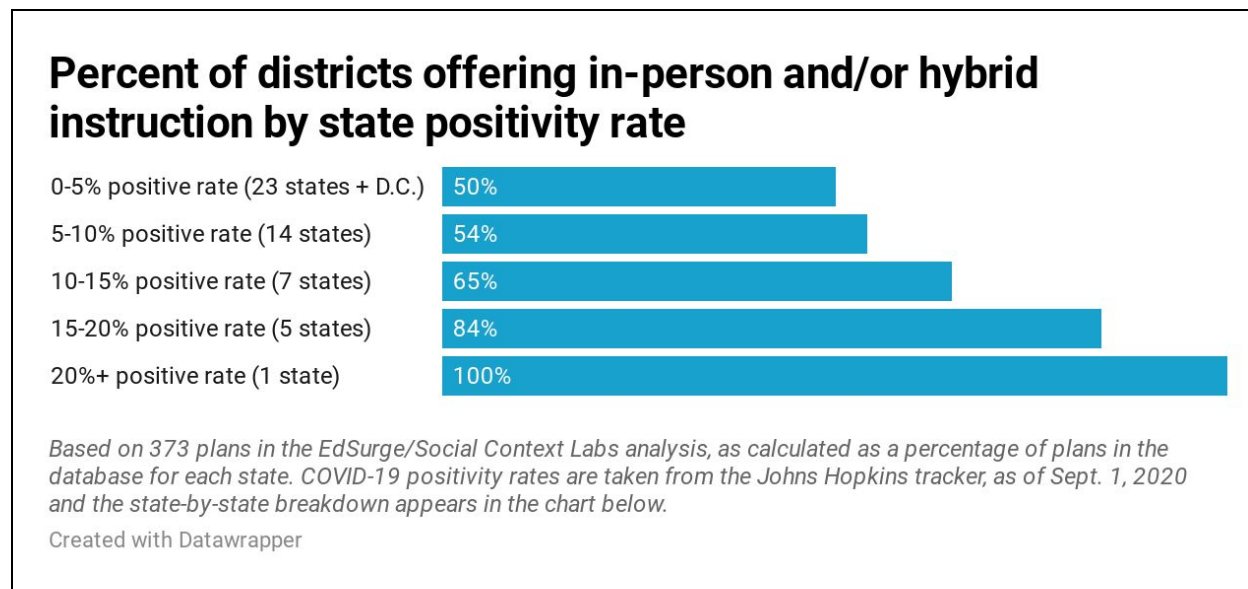
- 201 of 375 districts in our database (54%) have publicly stated that they will provide students with computers for remote or hybrid learning.
- When it comes to offering internet access to students, the most popular approach is to provide portable hotspots. Sixty-one districts in our database—or about 16%—publicly announced plans for portable hotspots.
- Less commonly, districts are partnering with local internet service providers to offer students free internet service. Twenty-three districts in our database—or 6%—offered such partnerships.

## 9/2/20: Data Observations

The nation hit another grim milestone this week, recording its [six millionth](#) COVID-19 case. The U.S. death toll now stands at [more than 180,000](#). But as [recent reporting](#) makes clear, different regions of the country are experiencing the virus differently. Hot spots from the spring have seen a decline in COVID-19 positivity rates, while Midwestern states such as the Dakotas, Kansas and Iowa are ascendant.

What does this mean for school reopening plans? Using the plans captured in our database, we calculated the percentage of districts in each state that plan to offer in-person and/or hybrid instruction (versus remote learning as the sole instructional model). Then we looked at [the COVID-19 positivity rates](#) in each state to see if there is a relationship between positivity rates

and districts' willingness to provide schooling that requires some in-person component. The results of this analysis are shown in the graph below.



Positivity rates	States (from low to high positivity rate)
0-5%	Vermont, Maine, New York, Connecticut, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Washington, D.C., Massachusetts, Wyoming, New Mexico, Michigan, West Virginia, Alaska, Ohio, Colorado, Washington, Delaware, Illinois, Maryland, Louisiana, Oregon, Pennsylvania, California
5-10%	Montana, North Carolina, Virginia, Arizona, Tennessee, Arkansas, Utah, Kentucky, Wisconsin, Indiana, Minnesota, Hawaii, Nebraska, Oklahoma
10-15%	Georgia, Texas, Idaho, South Carolina, Florida, Missouri, Mississippi
15-20%	Alabama, Nevada, Kansas, Iowa, North Dakota
20% +	South Dakota

Counterintuitively, we found that a *greater* percentage of districts in high-positivity states plan to offer in-person and/or hybrid classes when compared with low-positivity states.

Of course there are many caveats that come with this analysis. First, plans are changing by the day, and districts in emerging hotspots may yet change their planned structure. Second, the vast majority of districts in our database also plan to offer remote learning options for families who view in-person or hybrid options as too risky. Third, positivity rates reflect state-wide conditions and may not represent local conditions for a given district. Fourth, some states are issuing

guidelines that apply to all—or nearly all—districts in the state, influencing the attendance structures that individual districts are able to offer. And finally, many districts that plan to offer fully in-person or hybrid classes have many safety protocols in place.

But even with all these caveats, the relationship between positivity rates and attendance structures is certainly something to watch.

## 8/26/20: Data Observations

Earlier this week, a Florida judge [ruled](#) the state could not compel districts to start the school year in-person, full-time. At issue was the state education commissioner’s mandate that districts provide the option of in-person schooling, five-days a week, and without moving back the start date. The state threatened funding for districts that refused to comply.

The judge ruled that the mandate “arbitrarily disregards safety,” violating a provision of the state constitution which requires schools to operate safely.

The case in Florida is [far from settled](#). The state has appealed the decision, triggering [a stay](#) on the order. Even if the judge’s ruling stands, local districts will have to make decisions about how to proceed. Several districts with high COVID-19 infection rates were already exempted from the order and began their school years with remote learning-only. Looming in the background was the fact that [nearly 9,000 children have tested positive](#) over the past two weeks; the state’s department of health has connected [more than 700 of those cases](#) to the reopening of K-12 schools and institutions of higher learning.

What does “school safety” look like in the COVID-19 era? Here’s how we’ve seen that question addressed by the 375 districts in our database:

- 90 percent have announced plans for remote instruction, either as a choice or as the only option. Well over a third of districts are offering remote learning only. In explaining this decision, many plans refer specifically to state, local or district-issued safety directives.
- Over a quarter of the districts in our database have released plans for hybrid instruction, typically along with a remote option. These plans typically emphasize the importance of social distancing and justify the hybrid approach as a way to provide in-person learning opportunities in a safe way.
- Many districts have not yet released full safety protocols for reopening—either because they are planning to offer remote-only instruction, or because the start of school is a long way off. But to date, 119 districts in our database have announced that students and staff are required to wear face-coverings.

## 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.

## 8/12/20: Data Observations

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.