CLEARINGHOUSE
FOR MILITARY FAMILY READINESS

Post-Pandemic Early Learning: Resources for Parents and Educators
Rapid Literature Review

Clearinghouse Technical Assistance Team

As of July 20, 2021

PennState

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Executive Summary

This report was developed in response to a request for information and resources to assist parents, teachers, and school districts in supporting military-connected children before and during the 2021-2022 school year. An emphasis was placed on identifying information and resources to support incoming kindergarten and 1st-grade students in South Dakota who had not attended pre-kindergarten (pre-K) or kindergarten in 2020-2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Technical Assistance (TA) team at the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State (Clearinghouse) conducted a brief, rapid literature review on the topic of early learning experiences and the COVID-19 pandemic. Research that examines this topic was identified by searching peer-reviewed journal articles and grey literature, and an emphasis was placed on research published between 2020 and 2021. Search queries included various combinations of the following terms: early learning, skills, social-emotional, reading, math, school readiness, pre-K, kindergarten, young children, COVID-19, pandemic, parents, schools, and reopening plans.

This report provides the following elements:
- Background information, including South Dakota's plans for funding received through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021;
- Data on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young children's learning opportunities;
- Resources to assist parents in creating a successful 2021-2022 school year;
- Resources to assist teachers and school administrators in creating a successful 2021-2022 school year; and
- Additional resources.

Note, this rapid literature review provides a preliminary examination of the research. Thus, given the brief timeline, this report is not intended to serve as a comprehensive review of the literature, and the resources provided are not endorsed by the Clearinghouse. Rather, the information about the resources is provided to help you make data-driven decisions about next steps.

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic reduced the amount of classroom-learning opportunities for many young children (Barnett & Jung, 2021), and classroom experiences influence children's learning abilities (Pianta et al., 2020). While the classroom experience is

important for growth, early learning experiences at home are also fundamental in building the foundations for future success. How children learn, develop, and perform academically depends on their social, emotional, cognitive, identity, and academic development, which are all connected (U.S. Department of Education, 2021a). Because of this interconnectedness, early learning standards, such as those used by Head Start, focus on how children approach learning; encourage the development of social and emotional behaviors; and promote the development of literacy, math, scientific reasoning, and motor skills (U.S. Deparment of Health and Human Services, 2015).

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP) also acknowledges the interconnectedness of social, emotional, and academic development. Along with COVID-19 prevention strategies, the ARP allows states to use the funding to "address the impact of lost instructional time by supporting the implementation of evidence-based interventions that respond to students' social, emotional, and academic needs…(U.S. Department of Education, 2021a, p.1)." South Dakota's plan to use funding from the ARP, described below, also recognizes that supporting students' social and emotional needs is critical to students' academic success.

South Dakota's American Rescue Plan, Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER): State Plan Highlights

South Dakota's ARP ESSER plan was approved by the U.S. Department of Education on July 7, 2021. The Plan's top three priorities include supporting strong teaching and educational opportunities; addressing students' social, emotional, and mental health needs; and recruiting and maintaining a strong workforce.

Highlights of the plan include the following (U.S. Department of Education, 2021b, p.1):

- Returning to in-person learning in 2021 (The press release notes that the South Dakota Department of Education supported the return to in-person learning in fall 2020.);
- Supporting students most impacted by the pandemic;
- Re-engaging students who may have missed out on instructional opportunities during the 2020- 2021 school year; and
- Hiring school nurses, counselors, and paraprofessionals to support students' health and academic achievement.

To read the press release, please visit https://www2.ed.gov/documents/press-releases/arp-esser-sd-plan.pdf.

Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Young Children's Learning Opportunities

To understand how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted young children's learning and development, researchers from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers University developed a survey regarding children's home-learning activities and preschool participation during the pandemic. Two surveys were administered to parents of children ages 3 to 5 years old who were not yet in kindergarten. The surveys were administered in Spring 2020 and December 2020. The key findings from the December 2020 survey are provided below (Barnett & Jung, 2021).

1. **The number of 3- and 4-year-old children attending preschool declined during the pandemic.** Prior to the pandemic, about 51% of 3-year-old children and 71% of 4-year-old children attended preschool. In December 2020, the percent of young children attending in-person preschool was significantly lower than pre-pandemic rates: 32% of 3-year-olds and 40% of 4-year-olds attended in-person preschool. When considering remote, hybrid, and in-person preschool attendance, the percent of 3- and 4-year-olds attending preschool in December 2020 was 39% and 54%, respectively.

2. **Support for young children with special needs declined during the pandemic.** The percent of young children with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) decreased from 9% to 7% from spring to fall 2020. Barnett and Jung (2021) suggest this is due to an inability to identify children who may have needed additional services; this does not indicate a decrease in the number of children who need services. In addition, of those children with an IEP, only 38% received full support in spring 2020, and 57% received full support in fall 2020.

3. **Parents reported higher than average social-emotional problems for their young children.** In fall 2020, parents of 3- and 4- year-olds reported conduct problems (22%), hyperactivity (15%), peer problems (17%), total difficulties (15%), and prosocial behavior problems (20%). Barnett and Jung (2021) suggest the number of children with potentially serious social emotional problems has greatly increased since the pandemic began.

4. **Many children who were eligible for free meals during preschool did not receive these meals.** Twenty-five percent of children attending a preschool program (i.e., Head Start, public schools, private schools, and child care), whose families made less than $25,000 per year, did not receive meals.

5. **Most parents whose children participated in remote or hybrid preschool programs felt overwhelmed.** Forty-seven percent of parents, whose children participated in remote or hybrid preschool, felt very overwhelmed, 23% felt moderately overwhelmed, and 5% felt slightly overwhelmed.

6. **Parents of young children experienced a variety of hardships during the pandemic.** Among employed parents, the most common hardship faced was completing less work due to child care or educational issues related to their young child (32%). Parents also reported their work hours were reduced (23%), their pay was reduced (12%), and they were laid off or the business they worked at closed (11%).

7. **Some home-learning activities declined during the pandemic, while others increased.** The home-learning activity with the greatest decline during the pandemic was "reading to the child." Parents also reported declines in teaching their children letters, words, and numbers. On the other hand, storytelling and song singing increased during the pandemic.

As noted above, the number of young children who attended preschool during the pandemic was significantly lower than the number of young children who attended preschool before the pandemic. During the same time, parents reported high levels of social-emotional problems with their children and a reduced number of hours reading to their children and teaching them letters, words, and numbers (Barnett & Jung, 2021). These early learning experiences, at home and in the classroom, are important building blocks for future successes. Because many students were not able to partake in these activities due the to the pandemic, parents and teachers may need to work together to ensure children are ready for the upcoming school year. The next section provides information and resources that parents of young children can use to enhance their children's school readiness skills at home or within their communities.

Information for Parents: Supporting Incoming Kindergarten and 1st Grade Students

This section provides resources and suggestions for parents and caregivers who would like to help prepare their incoming kindergarten or 1st-grade student for success during the 2021-2022 school year. The resources and suggestions listed below place an emphasis on how to best assist students who did not participate in in-person educational opportunities during the 2020-2021 school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Suggestions for Parents

- Parents who are concerned about their child's social, emotional, or academic skills may want to talk to their school regarding school assessments, classroom placement, and additional support services available before the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year. Some schools may offer after-school programs for students who missed pre-K or kindergarten to help these children get up to speed.

- Parents can familiarize themselves with South Dakota's plans for the ARP federal funding that intends to support the safe reopening of schools. As noted previously, the South Dakota ARP EERP (approved July 7, 2021) focuses on supporting students most impacted by the pandemic and re-engaging students who may have missed instructional opportunities during the 2020-2021 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2021b). To read the full ARP, please visit https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/07/South-Dakota-ARP-ESSER-State-Plan-Final.pdf.

- Parents who would like to improve their child's academic experience can assist their child in developing his or her social, emotional, and cognitive skills as these abilities increase academic development (U.S. Department of Education, 2021a). To enhance social and emotional skills, work on these skills at home by playing games, doing a household task together, or reading stories; visit parks or playgrounds where other children are present; or enroll your child in summer camp or local, small-group summer activities, like a Parks and Rec program.

- Parents who would like to improve their child's school readiness skills have many options: put together puzzles, build towers with blocks, sing songs like "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes," read together, work on math and writing skills in a booklet or on a computer game – just remember to make the learning process engaging, even fun. In addition, choose activities your child is capable of doing.

Resources to assist parents who would like to increase their children's social, emotional, reading, and math skills during the summer and throughout the year are provided below.

Resources for Parents

National Association for the Education of Young Children, Building Social and Emotional Skills at Home

This article provides suggestions and tips for parents to help them build their children's social and emotional skills at home. Some of the suggestions include using puppets to

help children discuss their feelings, thinking out loud to allow children to hear how a parent copes with a problem, and explaining a situation before it occurs to allow the children to process the actions before they happen.

- https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/building-social-emotional-skills-at-home

National Institute for Literacy: The Partnership for Reading, Shining Stars Series

The *Shining Stars* series' booklets provide evidence-based strategies for parents to teach their children how to read. Each booklet contains a story for the parent to read to the child; a list of questions and activities for a parent and child to complete; and an age-appropriate checklist that is designed for the parent to use as a resource. For parents of preschool-aged children, the checklist contains reminders on how to make reading fun, while the checklist for parents of kindergarten-aged children has a specific list of developmentally suitable skills.

- Shining Stars: How Parents Can Help Their Preschoolers Learn to Read.
  - https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/ShiningStarsPreschool.pdf

- Shining Stars: How Parents Can Help Their Kindergarteners Learn to Read.
  - https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/Shining_Stars_Kindergarten.pdf

- Shining Stars: How Parents Can Help Their First Graders Learn to Read.
  - https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/Shining_Stars_First_Grader.pdf

U.S. Department of Education, Helping Your Child Series

The *Helping Your Child* publication series provides parents with tools and information to help their children succeed in school and life. These booklets offer lessons and activities to help children master reading, understand the value of homework, and develop the skills needed to succeed academically and grow intellectually.

- www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/hyc.html.

The topics covered in this series include the following:

- *Helping Your Child Learn Science.* This booklet is for parents of children ages 3 through 10. It provides information, tools, and activities that parents can use in the home and in the community to help their child develop an interest in the sciences and learn about the world around them.
  - https://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/science/index.html

- *Helping Your Child Learn Mathematics.* This booklet is for parents of children in preschool through grade 5. It includes fun activities that parents can use with their children to strengthen their math skills and build strong positive attitudes toward math.
    - https://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/math/index.html

- *Helping Your Child Become a Reader.* This booklet is for parents of children ages 0 through 6. It offers strategies for building language skills in young children and includes a list of typical language accomplishments for different age groups, suggestions for books, and resources for children with reading concerns or learning disabilities.
    - https://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/reader/index.html

- *Helping Your Child with Homework.* This booklet is for parents of elementary and junior high school students. It helps parents teach their children to understand why homework is important and makes suggestions for helping children complete assignments successfully.
    - https://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/homework/index.html

- *Helping Your Child Succeed in School.* This booklet is for parents of children ages 5 through 11. It provides parents with information, tools, and activities they can use in the home to help their child develop the skills that can be critical for academic success.
    - https://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/succeed/index.html

- *Helping Your Child Become a Responsible Citizen.* This booklet is for parents of elementary, middle, and high school students. It presents information for parents on the positive values and skills they can help their child develop to have a moral character and good citizenship.
    - https://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/citizen/index.html

- *Helping Your Child Learn History.* This booklet is for parents of children in preschool through grade 5. It is designed to help families teach their children history and how historical events shaped the world into which they were born.
    - https://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/history/index.html

Information for Teachers and School Administrators: Supporting Incoming Kindergarten and 1st Grade Students

This section provides evidence-informed recommendations and resources to assist teachers and school administrators who will be working with kindergarten or 1st-grade students who did not participate in in-person educational opportunities during the 2020-2021 school year.

Evidence-informed Recommendations from the U.S. Department of Education

The U.S. Department of Education released evidence-informed recommendations, implementation strategies, and considerations for reopening schools amidst or after the COVID-19 pandemic. These recommendations are compiled into three handbooks, the ED COVID-19 Handbooks.[1] Of particular interest to teachers and administrators working with kindergarten and 1st-grade students is *ED COVID-19 Handbook, Volume 2: Roadmap to Reopening Safely and Meeting All Students' Needs* (COVID-19 Handbook, Volume 2).

COVID-19 Handbook, Volume 2 provides evidence-informed and evidence-based recommendations to address the social, emotional, and academic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on students. The report also discusses the physical and mental health of teachers and school staff. The following topics are discussed in the report (U.S. Department of Education, 2021a):

- **Creating safe and healthy environments for students.** This includes meeting the students' basic needs by providing meals; meeting the social, mental, and emotional health of students; and offering access to a safe and inclusive learning environment.

- **Addressing lost instructional time.** This includes implementing strategies to accelerate learning (e.g., in-school, tutoring, after-school, summer learning), supporting access to technology for all students (i.e., closing the digital divide), using data to understand children's opportunities to learn, and addressing resource inequities.

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[1] The three ED COVID-19 Handbooks are listed below:
- ED COVID-19 Handbook, Volume 1: Strategies for Safely Reopening Elementary and Secondary Schools (https://www2.ed.gov/documents/coronavirus/reopening.pdf)
- ED COVID-19 Handbook, Volume 2: Roadmap to Reopening Safely and Meeting All Students' Needs (https://www2.ed.gov/documents/coronavirus/reopening-2.pdf)
- ED COVID-19 Handbook, Volume 3: Strategies for Safe Operation and Addressing the Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education Students, Faculty, and Staff (https://www2.ed.gov/documents/coronavirus/reopening-3.pdf)

- **Supporting educator and staff well-being and stability.** This includes stabilizing a diverse and qualified educator workforce and supporting educator and staff well-being.

Resources for Educators and School Administrators

The U.S. Department of Education also developed a website, *Safer Schools and Campuses Best Practices Clearinghouse*, to serve as a resource hub for communities, schools, educators, and families as schools reopen for in-person learning. This collection of best practices and lessons learned provides resources to identify and support the needs of all students to ensure they have access to a high-quality education. The website includes different sections based on instructional level, topic, and equity focus. There is also a search function where resources can be sorted by keyword, topic area, resource type, equity focus, and instructional level. The resources listed below were identified through the *Safer Schools and Campuses Best Practices Clearinghouse*.

To access the *Safer Schools and Campuses Best Practices Clearinghouse*, please visit https://bestpracticesclearinghouse.ed.gov/.

Afterschool Alliance, Expanded Learning Programs are Essential for COVID-19 Recovery: Key Principles for Expanding Learning to Support Student Re-Engagement

This guide details research and best practices on before-school, after-school, summer-learning, and extended-day programs (i.e., expanded learning programs). It outlines nine guiding principles to assist school districts in partnering with and supporting expanded learning programs to support the re-engagement of students, especially students from historically underserved communities.

- http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/ExpandedLearning_SupportStudentReEngagement_Mar2021_Brief.pdf

Mid-Atlantic Regional Education Laboratory at Mathematic, Factsheet: Trauma-Informed Planning Strategies to Help Students Transition Back to School in the Era of COVID-19

This fact sheet synthesizes crisis response guidance from federal agencies, national associations, research collaboratives, and technical assistance centers. The resource shares trauma-informed planning strategies to guide and support a successful transition back to school. Of note, the fact sheet suggests the strategies to address COVID-19-related trauma should begin before the school year starts.

- https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midatlantic/app/Docs/Infographics/Trauma_informed_FactSheet_081020_508.pdf

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, A Resource Guide for Developing Integrated Strategies to Support the Social and Emotional Wellness of Children

This resource guide provides strategies and information to support the social and emotional well-being of children, families, and providers. This includes implementation considerations for different age groups (e.g., toddler, school-aged children), the benefits of integrating these strategies, and frameworks to integrate these strategies.

- https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/resource_guide_to_support_social_and_emotional_wellness.pdf

Additional Resources

Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC), Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools

This version of the Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools was updated July 9, 2021. Recent updates emphasize COVID-19 prevention strategies that are most important for in-person learning in K-12 schools, provide information on the COVID-19 vaccine, revise mask guidance, and add language on safety precautions for those working in K-12 schools.

- https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html

U.S. Department of Education, Education in a Pandemic: The Disparate Impacts of COVID-19 on America's Students

This report was developed in response to President Biden's Executive Order 14000, *Supporting the Reopening and Continuing Operation of Schools and Early Childhood Education Providers*. The report highlights the widespread effects COVID-19 has had on all K-12 students and emphasizes the disparate impacts COVID-19 has had on traditionally marginalized groups.

- https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/20210608-impacts-of-covid19.pdf

U.S. Department of Education, National Safe School Reopening Summit

The National Safe School Reopening Summit took place on March 24, 2021. It brought together district leaders, educators, and students to share best practices and provide

technical assistance to those navigating the return to in-person learning across the country. The link below is a recording of the 3-hour summit.

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZFLuX74yPbY

Additional Assistance

The TA specialists at the Clearinghouse provide support to professionals as they examine and make informed decisions about which programs fit specific situations and are worth the investment. Whether connecting one with the resources and tools to conduct a needs assessment in a specific community, suggesting the best evidence-based program or practice for a certain situation, or developing an evaluation plan, the TA team of experts is a call or email away.

Please visit the Clearinghouse's website at www.militaryfamilies.psu.edu or call 1-877-382-9185 to speak with a TA specialist.

Suggested Citation

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