




Fall Readiness Guide

ENSURING EVERY STAKEHOLDER HAS THE RESOURCES
THEY NEED TO START THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR RIGHT.

A smiling man with a beard, wearing a light green button-down shirt and dark jeans, is sitting in a classroom. He is looking towards a student on the left whose hands are raised. The background shows a classroom setting with desks, papers, and a blue wall.

This year, district stakeholders may need to stretch outside their role to provide meaningful learning environments. While educators may already feel overwhelmed and challenged by competing priorities, this may be an opportunity to try new things and collaborate with different teams to successfully support all students. This guide offers new strategies and ideas for how your staff can continue to work together to help students achieve success from day one.



Role: District Leader

Top considerations:

- How can I support all stakeholders to accelerate learning?
 - What resources does my team need to operationalize rostering, capturing and analyzing student data, and providing differentiated support?
- What strategies should be in place as we explore or adopt new programs?
 - How can I create buy-in for new and existing initiatives?
- Are current learning tools used effectively?
 - How do we monitor and communicate student growth within programs?
- Does my staff feel heard, seen and listened to?
 - Do all stakeholders feel empowered to ask questions?

QUICK TIP

Follow examples from your peers and colleagues: Data doesn't have to come from a dashboard within your learning management system. Many site leaders can garner great takeaways by looking at examples from neighboring districts or districts with similar demographics. Look for case studies about district successes and consider exploring their approach.



Take action:

- **Leverage all funding:** Many districts have taken advantage of COVID relief dollars. However, there are still millions of federal funds going unused. In 2020, Congress set aside approximately \$3 billion of the \$30.75 billion allotted to the Education Stabilization Fund through the CARES Act for the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER). [Funding resources](#) are also available to help write grants, find funding opportunities and navigate new funding sources.
- **Adopt the right tool for the right job:** In order to accelerate learning, educators must provide diverse intervention programs that meet students where they are. Further, these tools must support efforts to increase stakeholder bandwidth and be flexible enough for students to use independently at home and in school. Digital learning can offer supplemental, personalized instruction to help students catch up and continue learning. This [guide](#) offers five critical steps your district can take to inform intervention decisions and implementation.
- **Communicate the why:** During a [webinar](#), Dr. Darin Brawley, superintendent, Compton Unified School District, discussed the value of clear communication with every stakeholder to ensure program adoption, fidelity and monitoring. Dr. Brawley explained how critical it is to ensure staff are clear on the purpose and benefits of new programs and the expectations, goals and successes. It may be beneficial to work with site leaders and the communication team to develop a common language for communicating the values of new programs, policies and procedures.
- **Look to multiple sources for data:** It can be both challenging and potentially harmful to measure program efficacy by exploring only one data set. With the release of delining NAEP scores in fall 2022, educators were reminded that no data should be a single source of truth. An article in EdWeek, "[NAEP Scores Are a 'Critical Reality Check.' Kids Pay the Price If They Are Misinterpreted](#)", recommends that district leaders remember that data is always nuanced. Although NAEP results were certainly jarring, leaders must avoid generalizing or cherry-picking data to prove points or make decisions. Instead, researchers advise leaders to carefully disaggregate NAEP data, look at multiple data sources, and dig into understanding individual students and educators to inform next steps.
- Many educators find that analyzing multiple data sets often results in surprising takeaways about student growth. (e.g., assessment and usage data). You may discover a compelling story when analyzing school-level data for a learning program worth replicating across other buildings. If you haven't yet, consider developing a monthly data team from multiple stakeholder levels to analyze program data usage and success.
- **Consider how culture manifests at the top:** Every educator is responsible for student learning. However, site leaders, teachers and other staff can't help students feel valued and supported if the team doesn't feel valued. District leaders can apply a multi-tiered systems of supports (MTSS) framework to educators, ensure staff has appropriate support resources, and encourage staff to be mindful of work-life balance. Dr. Matthew Cheeseman, superintendent, Beaufort County Schools in North Carolina, shared his role-specific MTSS approach to developing a culture that considers every stakeholder's emotional, physical and learning needs in this [ebook](#).



Role: Principal or Site Leader

Top considerations:

- Does my school staff have the right tools to drive learning?
- Does my staff have access to training and professional development to grow in their roles?
- How can I cultivate a positive teaching, working and learning environment?
- How can I help manage social, emotional or behavioral issues stemming from post-pandemic conditions?

QUICK TIP

School pride matters. Research confirms that creating a sense of community in school leads to more academically motivated students and helps build students' social and emotional competencies. Many principals find celebrating wins together on a weekly, monthly and yearly basis can have a positive impact on attendance, behavioral issues and learning outcomes.

Take action:

- **Tap into your existing experts:** Formal professional development and training are critical for teachers and staff to learn new programs and pedagogies. However, your team is full of mentors and coaches that can share their expertise with new or overwhelmed staff. By positioning teachers as thought partners, principals empower them to share their knowledge, experience and expertise to help improve teaching and learning with insight, ideas and collaboration.
- **Look for technology that makes life easier:** Classroom teachers spend hours of valuable instructional time every week on operational tasks, including capturing and analyzing data, tracking lesson completion and homework assignments, administering and grading assessments and differentiating supplemental instruction. By adopting technology that operationalizes time-consuming tasks, teachers have more time to invest in the human element of teaching, such as developing soft skills, getting to know students and providing whole group and small group instruction.
- **Be consistent:** An EdWeek article, *[Advice for Principals: Empower Your Teachers](#)*, suggests principals can best support teachers by being consistent. A school with consistent policies, routines and procedures helps staff and students understand expectations and feel organized. A consistent approach also indicates that principals are being strategic and thoughtful before implementing changes.
- **Make space and time for mental and emotional health:** Students and staff have experienced a host of traumatic experiences on a global level. School leaders must be able to respond to the well-being of students and staff by offering trauma-informed practices. They can advocate for community partnerships, such as mental health support groups, set up a designated room for students needing an emotional break, or implement more gratitude into your day-to-day with students and staff.





Role: Teacher or Instructional Staff

Top considerations:

- How can I encourage students to become lifelong learners?
 - How can I use all available resources to accelerate learning?
- How can I develop a classroom community in which students learn and grow together?
- Do families feel engaged, included and informed about their children's education?
- Do my students feel safe, supported and confident?

QUICK TIP

Proactive, consistent family engagement can be central to student outcomes. A [study](#) conducted across 71 high-poverty schools found that when teachers had active and consistent outreach to families, students' growth rate improved by 50% in reading and 40% in math.

Engagement experts suggest some simple and effective ways to engage parents, including learning the names of family members, offering communication options in students' home languages, and encouraging parents to ask questions.



Take action:

- **Allow students to take ownership of their learning:** Educators know students are more motivated when they can learn material that interests them or introduces new and exciting ideas. Instructors can provide multiple representations of concepts and integrate materials into lessons that relate to students' experiences. Teachers can also incorporate students' preferences into learning options. By building an environment where students feel they have a voice in their learning, teachers can foster engagement, encourage motivation and build lifelong learners.
- **Leverage available technologies:** Research estimates nearly two-thirds of edtech licenses are never used. Unfortunately, much of this waste is due to lack of awareness. In the wake of remote learning, it's likely many districts have an influx of technology solutions that have been overlooked or forgotten after schools reopened. Teachers can ask site leaders about license availability or pilot programs at the building level.
- **Build a classroom community:** Over the last few years, many educators have noticed an uptick in behavior issues. Experts believe these behaviors manifested from the stress of the pandemic. While students yearned for in-person instruction, they struggled to navigate returning to the classroom. This year, teachers can focus on developing a strong classroom community that establishes systems and routines and defines values and goals. A classroom community also allows students to interact socially and establish meaningful connections with their classmates. When students feel that they belong to a community, they can find emotional, social and academic support for one another.
- **Communicate often and in many ways:** It's critical to establish and maintain positive connections with students and families through purposeful communication. Many teachers find it beneficial to use multiple channels to communicate with parents. In addition to weekly home packets, teachers can create a reliable cadence of phone calls, emails and text messages. It can also be helpful to post broader messages on social media and districtwide communication tools.
- **Foster a safe learning environment:** Students must feel safe and emotionally and mentally well in order to learn. By adopting a whole child approach that focuses on social-emotional development, mental and physical health and academic growth, teachers can build safe environments that cultivate resilience, wellness and justice. There are many opportunities to integrate social-emotional learning throughout the day. In early grades, students can discuss their emotions and how to respond. Older students can use dialogue journals to discuss their feelings, concerns and social identities.



About DreamBox

DreamBox Learning is a leading K–12 education technology provider working to radically transform how the world learns. As the only dual-discipline solution rated STRONG by Johns Hopkins EvidenceforESSA.org in both mathematics and reading, DreamBox uniquely provides schools with high-quality adaptive learning solutions proven to accelerate student growth. Built by teachers, for teachers, DreamBox empowers educators with robust data analytics and content-specific professional development solutions to complement instruction. Research has shown that DreamBox can produce rapid results for all learners. In just one hour per week, students using the program can make measurable gains toward proficiency. For more information, visit www.dreambox.com.

