

CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS RETREATS

Event Summary / May and June 2022



Overview

Originating out of a conversation between several state chiefs, SAS and The Hunt Institute responded to the need for space and time to collaborate with peers and colleagues both in and outside of their states by co-creating two-day Chief State School Officers Retreats as an opportunity for state education leaders and their teams to spend time navigating the challenges their states have faced in managing the pandemic and mitigating its impact on the educational outcomes of students. Since November 2021, The Hunt Institute and SAS have partnered to host three convenings featuring curated conversations, opportunities to learn from national experts, and time for state leaders to share the opportunities and pain points within their own state. The retreats in May and June 2022 brought together teams from 11 states. Along with teams from their state education departments, these states also were invited to bring a district superintendent to foster increased collaboration and partnership between the state and local levels.

State Attendees

May 2022

Maine
Missouri
New Jersey
Ohio
South Carolina
Virginia

June 2022

New Hampshire
North Carolina
North Dakota
Tennessee
Wyoming

Key Takeaways

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

- Analyzing and publishing the unfinished learning data that states have will be important to fully understand the impact the pandemic had on students.
- To accurately measure impact, to the extent possible, state leaders should establish students' expected performance based on pre-pandemic averages, compare students' actual results to their pre-pandemic expected performance, as well as aggregate difference between actual and expected results for different student groups.
- However, many states are facing several data-related challenges in measuring unfinished learning. States who had different state assessments in 2019 and 2021 lack a direct comparison between achievement scores. Additional challenges include low academic participation rates throughout the pandemic and differing impacts within the state.
- Additionally, schools and districts are often overwhelmed with data and information and struggle to [identify what data is critical](#) for informing new policies. State leaders can support district and school leaders by helping them consider what data can be helpful to drive system, school, classroom decisions and providing [longer data collection and reporting timelines](#) to:
 - Identify what data and information they need.
 - Develop intentional research questions and methods for data collection.
 - Analyze and organize the data they collect.
 - Understand the data in context before sharing it with state agencies.
- North Carolina and Tennessee are two states that have attempted to measure the impact of lost instructional time despite data challenges.
 - The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's Office of Learning Recovery conducted [comprehensive research](#) comparing students' projected 2020-21 school year scores on state End-of-Grade and End-of-Course exams with their actual scores for the 2020-21 school year using student-level data instead of aggregate samples of students. Overall, the data showed that students made less progress, on average, than students in the same grades and courses in previous years.
 - [The Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System](#) (TVAAS) is a publicly available dashboard that uses statistical analysis to measure the academic growth rates of groups of students from year to year with a

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- district, school, or classroom. Tennessee's unfinished learning data also showed that students' actual academic progress lagged behind their expected performance compared to pre-pandemic school years.
- States are focused on addressing a range of priorities, including:
 - Developing a research agenda and communications plan focused on accelerated learning
 - Addressing disrupted learning, while also supporting student social-emotional wellness
 - Targeting state-level resources to support student outcomes
 - Supporting teachers and strengthening the profession, as well as the instruction provided in classrooms
 - Identifying and modeling innovative and promising practices for districts
 - Ensuring that state assessment and accountability systems match the intention of the data being collected
 - Addressing disrupted learning, while also supporting student social-emotional wellness

ENGAGING PARENTS AND FAMILIES

- Schools and districts that have intentionally engaged with parents through coalition building and training [have seen more success](#) with getting students back on track academically, emotionally, and mentally after the pandemic. Parents witnessed the struggles of virtual learning firsthand and are concerned about their children, even as schools have returned to in-person learning.
- There are [subgroups of parents](#) who believe a whole child education is important, including parents of students with a learning disability or an Individual Education Plan (IEP), Hispanic parents of school aged children, and parents of children in pre-K.
- There is often a disconnect for parents/families between their perceptions of their child's ability to achieve and what schools need to do to support to them. Educators and school leaders [can help bridge this disconnect](#) by:
 - Sharing information about milestones students should be meeting to be on a successful academic path.
 - Consistently engaging with families about student progress.
 - Supporting at-home learning through academic partnership and ongoing learning.
 - Connecting them to resources and activities that support their needs.
 - Creating a learning environment where family feedback is encouraged.
- [National polls](#) show that parents are not the only group concerned about children and schools. Voters believe that school safety, quality teachers, teaching real-world and job skills, and providing support and resources for children with disabilities are extremely important issues for public officials and education leaders to address.
- These polls also indicate that voters view supporting the teacher workforce as a high-priority issue. [88 percent](#) of voters favor policies to invest in and retain high-quality teachers and 77 percent say bolstering training and support for teachers and educators is very important.

STATE INNOVATION

- The one-time investment into state and district education systems through ESSER funds must be strategically and intentionally allocated to address the most urgent needs around learning loss and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic – addressing these needs requires states to support districts in directing funds to school transformation.
- State leaders have an opportunity to connect with educators and parents through the shared experience of virtual and at-home learning and supporting their children in recovering from the effects of the pandemic. This shared experience should be channeled into a call of action that inspires school districts to tackle the problem and feel the same agency that parents feel.
- ESSER funding provides an [opportunity](#) for states to partner with research and data organizations in the private sector for data analysis and reporting. States should also be intentional about including the [voices and perspectives](#) of parents, families, and students, particularly those from historically underrepresented demographic groups, in the process of data collection, analysis, and reporting to ensure that state leaders, educators, and families are aligned in how data is being used.

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- There is also an opportunity to use ESSER funds to advance and maintain a commitment to racial justice and equity, which should include an investment in meaningful ways to bring families and communities into education processes; this is especially important for families and communities that already felt that they lacked a sense of belonging and ownership in schools prior to the physical separation of school building closures during COVID-19.
 - Central Falls Public School District (CFPS), which has one of the highest poverty rates and the [largest population of multilingual learner/English learner students](#) in Rhode Island, allocated \$100,000 to establish a [participatory budgeting process](#) to directly engage the public in brainstorming ideas, developing proposals, and voting on how to use public resources. This process both strengthened civic infrastructure and increased trust that was harmed when CFPS experienced a state takeover due to financial management issues.
- After allocating funds to address immediate needs, states have distributed dollars to a range of strategies focused on strengthening support for students and schools:
 - [California](#) is awarding grants for hiring paraprofessionals.
 - [Colorado](#) is creating programs around career connection for rural students and working to establish a pipeline into the teaching profession to address concerns around shortages.
 - [Mississippi](#) is the only state to include broadband expansion in their plan.
 - [North Carolina](#) established an ESSER Community Advisory Board, in contrast to the survey approach taken by most states.
 - [North Dakota](#) included funds for early childhood education.
 - [Tennessee](#) is focusing on unfinished learning through an emphasis on early literacy.

Next Steps

- As teams return to their states and look to the focus of future work and partnership, the following were identified as priority areas:
 - Informing proactive policy making through predictive analytics
 - Creating effective and sustainable data systems
 - Integrating parents into educational systems, including the creation of parent-advisory committees to steer policy
 - Developing cross-state peer support groups, along with ongoing strategic collaboration and operational conversations about their efforts to improve data systems
 - Messaging and branding to develop a “[North Star](#)” that creates alignment with shared outcome measures for data collection
 - Activating peer education organizations in the private sector and philanthropic organizations
 - Identifying options for sustainable fiscal support

As we conclude this round of work and look to future retreats, we are struck by the value created through these convenings. The Chief State School Officers Retreats have provided a facilitated space where leaders from across the country, across sectors, and across parties could engage in conversation, build relationships, and find solutions. These opportunities are rarer than they ought to be, and we look forward to continuing this work in the future.