



## SAFER SCHOOLS AND CAMPUSES **BEST PRACTICES CLEARINGHOUSE**

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### *Lessons from the Field - Returning to School: Strategies for Reengaging PreK-12 Students*

*Wednesday, August 25, 2021 | 3:00 - 4:15 PM ET*

#### *Transcript*

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Greta Colombi:

Good afternoon, and welcome everyone to today's Lessons From the Field webinar, Returning to School: Strategies for Reengaging PreK to Grade 12 Students. This is part two of a two-part session focused on student engagement. On behalf of the US Department of Education, we are pleased you've joined us here today. In fact, over 1,000 people registered for today's webinar. So additional people you will see will be likely to join us as we kick off. Thanks to all of you who have already joined online with us.

My name is Greta Colombi, I'm the Deputy Director of the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, often called NCSSE, and I am facilitating today's webinar. NCSSE is funded by the Office of Safe and Supportive Schools within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. Our aim is to build the capacity of state education agencies, districts, and schools to make school climate improvements, foster school safety, and maintain supportive, engaging and healthy learning environments to support the academic enrichment and success of all students. To learn more about NCSSE and to access a range of resources that address school climate and conditions for learning, we encourage you to visit our newly designed website to give you a sense of what the website looks like and what it includes. Here we share some of our most popular products on the left and an image of our homepage on the right.

Please note, all the materials that you will see here today, including the slides, referenced resources, and the archived version of the recording, will be available on the event webpage within this website. Some items, including the slides and bios, have actually already been posted. You'll see in your chat that we have provided a link to be able to get them already. Please also note that

you can access previous lessons from the Field Sessions by visiting our webinar series webpage, which is also listed here.

So, what do we have planned for today? After completing this introduction, we will be kicking off today's event by hearing the latest from the CDC on COVID-19 prevention strategies. We'll then hear some themes we have heard from SEAs or state education agencies over this past year on engaging students, followed by a more in-depth look on practices to reengage English learners. We'll then hear some introductions from two practitioners who have been actively engaged in reengaging their students, and following their brief introduction we'll conduct a panel discussion with all of our speakers to address common questions related to student engagement and re-engagement.

With that, I would like to introduce you to our first speaker, Christian Rhodes, Chief of Staff for the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education at the US Department of Education who will provide a nice welcome for us. Christian.

Christian Rhodes: Thank you, Greta. I wanted to thank the entire team for pulling together this great webinar today and frankly the last several months of engaging on the field as it relates to our best practices clearinghouse. Particularly given the unique nature of this virus and the pandemic itself, it's been great to have a venue for us to communicate the latest information and also hear directly from the field. As Greta said, my name's Christian Rhodes, I'm the Chief of Staff for the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. I just want to thank you all for joining. Thank you for your participation, some of the pre questions that were sent in during registration.

We look forward to a robust discussion and also want to thank my colleagues here at the department who have joined, also my colleague with the CDC, but a special thanks to our practitioners, those who are actually in the field doing the hard work of reopening schools. Some are in the midst of that literally as we speak. I saw some buses in the background of one of our presenters a couple minutes ago. We recognize that this is a unique time. The secretary, the Department of Education as a whole has pulled together a back-to-school roadmap to recovery. We think that school roadmap really provides the right venue for us to think about how do we return to school safely first, recognizing the social, emotional and mental health needs of our students and faculty and staff. And then lastly, but most importantly, thinking about how do we reimagine education to this year.

The secretary has said going back to March 2020 should not be our goal. We recognize that the public education has a unique opportunity to reset the bar when it comes to equity in our country and we look forward to the conversation. So with that, Greta, I'll pass it back to you. Thank you again all for your engagement, participation. Look forward to a robust discussion.

Greta Colombi: Excellent. Thank you so much Christian. Really important points and really great framing for the balance of the event. Just want to share real quickly some

information about our speakers. We will be hearing from Elizabeth Coke Haller, who is the Deputy at the School Support Section within the State, Tribal, Local and Territorial Support Task Force at the CDC. Then we have Jenny Scala who is Co-Director of the Student Engagement and Attendance Center; Supreet Anand, who is our Deputy Director of the Office of English Language and Acquisition in the US Department of Education. And then our voices from the field that Christian was talking about are Leah Keuscher, a principal from the East Wooster High School in Washoe County, Nevada; and Sarah Frazelle who is the Director of Early Warning Indicator Systems & Multi-Tiered Systems of Support at Puget Sound Education Service District in Washington state. So without further ado, I would love for us to go to our next speaker, Elizabeth Coke Haller from the CDC.

Elizabeth C. Haller: Thank you so much. And Christian, I couldn't have said it better. We really appreciate all the efforts going in to back-to-school. We know that this is a challenging time and we hope that this information today will be able to provide you with some quality information to help you move forward. This is our disclaimer. This is meant to outline strategies that schools can use to help maintain healthy environments and operations, lower the risk of COVID-19 spread in the program, and prepare you to help when someone is stuck with COVID-19, and support coping and resilience. The information covered is not exhaustive. There is many more materials available for you on our website, which is provided here. And this information is current as of August 5th of 2021.

Prevention strategies to reduce transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in K-12 schools is such a critical topic. We're happy to be here to share with you what we know as of today. Together, school leadership and local public health officials should consider multiple factors when making decisions about implementing layered prevention strategies against COVID-19. Since schools typically serve their surrounding communities, decisions should be based on the school population, families and communities that they serve for their children.

We have four key takeaways that I would like to leave with you today. First, it is a priority and benefit for students to return to school in-person and for that in-person learning to take place and to safely return to school in-person this fall. Secondly, you will see if you haven't noticed already that the guidance emphasizes implementing layered prevention strategies. That means using multiple prevention strategies together consistently every single day. Third, vaccination is currently the leading public health prevention strategy to end COVID-19 pandemic. And four, schools should require universal masking for all students, teachers, and staff in K-12 schools regardless of vaccination status.

Our primary factors for you to focus on when making decisions include the following. First, assess the level of community transmission of COVID-19. Second, review the COVID-19 vaccination coverage in your community and among students and staff. Third, consider the strain on health system capacity in the community. It may help you make different decisions at the building level. Fourth, use frequently a SARS-CoV-2 screening testing program in K-12 schools

for students and staff. Testing provides an important layer of prevention, particularly in areas with substantial to high community transmission levels. Fifth, consider the COVID-19 outbreaks or increasing trends in schools or the surrounding community. And six, consider the ages of the children being served by the K-12 schools and the associated social and behavioral factors that may affect risk of transmission and the feasibility of different prevention strategies.

Layered prevention strategies in schools are extremely important as I mentioned earlier. Evidence suggests that many K-12 schools that have strictly implemented prevention strategies have been able to safely open and stay open for in-person instruction. All schools should implement layered prevention strategies. And when you implement testing to identify individuals with SARS-CoV-2 infection and vaccination for teachers and staff, testing provides additional layers of COVID-19 protection in schools.

Achieving high levels of COVID-19 vaccination amongst students ages 12 and older as well as teachers, staff and household members is one of the most critical strategies to help schools safely resume full operations. Schools can promote vaccinations among teachers, staff, families, and eligible students by providing information about COVID vaccination, encouraging vaccine trust and confidence, and establishing supportive policies and practices that make getting vaccinated as easy and as convenient as possible. To promote vaccination, schools can visit [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) to find out where staff, students and their families can get vaccinated against COVID-19 and in communities and provide COVID-19 vaccination locations near schools. Encourage staff and families, including extended family members that have frequent contact with students to get vaccinated as soon as they can.

For larger programs and schools, consider partnering with the state or local public health authorities to serve as COVID-19 vaccination sites and work with your local healthcare providers and organizations, including school-based health centers. Offering vaccines onsite before, during and after school day and during summer months can potentially decrease barriers getting vaccinated against COVID-19. Identify other potential barriers that may be unique to the workforce and implement policies and practices to address them.

When staff and students consistently incorrectly wear a mask, they protect others as well as themselves. Consistent and correct mask use by everyone is especially important indoors and in credit settings when physical distancing cannot be maintained. Indoors, school should require universal masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors, regardless of vaccination status. Children under two of age should not wear a mask.

Outdoors. In general, people do not need to wear masks. However, particularly in areas of substantial to high transmission, CDC recommends that people who are not fully vaccinated wear a mask in crowded outdoor settings or during activities that involve sustained close contact with other people who are not fully vaccinated. Wearing a mask is the most important if you have a weakened

immune system, or if because of your age or an underlining medical condition you are at increased risk for severe disease, or if someone in your household has a weakened immune system or is at increased risk for severe disease or is unvaccinated.

These prevention strategies remain critical to protect people, including children and school staff, especially in the areas of moderate to high community transmission levels. However, the need for layering specific prevention strategies will vary and localities might implement fewer COVID-19 prevention strategies based on community transmission levels, vaccination coverage, and local policies and regulations.

CDC Youth Resources are vast and they are available on our website. Here are a few of them. We have frequently asked questions, some latest COVID information on the Delta variant, managing stress and coping, people at increased risk, children and COVID-19, and what to do if students become sick or ill. And finally, we have resources for administrators and families, students, and caregivers. We also have coping and resiliency support numbers that are available for you.

Thank you so much for your time this afternoon. I hope this information has been helpful as you continue to face COVID within your schools. Thank you again for all your hard work in protecting our students, faculty, and staff.

Greta Colombi:

Thank you so much, Elizabeth. We appreciate all that critical information from the CDC that you shared that really undergirds the efforts of schools as we return to in-person instruction this fall. So, thank you so very much. We will now hear from Jenny Scala who will speak to themes the Student Engagement and Attendance Center have had while working with state education agencies over the past year. Jenny.

Jenny Scala:

Thanks Greta and thanks for having me here today. The Student Engagement and Attendance Center is a federally funded center through the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education where we are focused primarily on working with state education agencies. And so in the past year, we've had many opportunities to engage and work with state education agencies and their key partners, which could be schools, it could be districts, it could be key other organizations that they partner with to really focus and support attendance and engagement aspects and issues.

Through this work, I have about six different themes that I'm going to quickly go through and share this information. In a conversation that we had with multiple states in June, just a few months ago, our participants from state education agencies really noted an increased need for desegregating data. And for many of you that are from education agencies that are listening in, this is not new news. This is not something that has just come out and come up because of the pandemic.

We've known, particularly when we're talking about attendance and engagement, that there has historically been a big need and importance to disaggregate data for attendance on student demographics as well as grade span, and there has been an additional need to make sure that we also can disaggregate data by instructional setting to help inform practices and supports in terms of what's going on for attendance if it's in-person, hybrid or remote. And this also will include in terms of thinking about demographics, our English language learners, and we're going to hear more about that with our next speaker shortly.

We also heard that states really kind of noted this need for disaggregated data and also took the opportunity to reflect on their attendance codes. Multiple states noted that they wanted to increase the number of attendance codes to not only be able to differentiate instructional settings but also just to have the opportunity to upgrade, not upgrade but refresh some of those codes that maybe have been established and in place for a really long time that wasn't really giving a liaison in schools. Data that they could quickly use to make sure supports were in place, which connects to this third one of there's a balance that has to be kind of acknowledged between the collection burden for additional data.

Some states talked about collecting this data on a monthly basis and publishing this data monthly. Some states were talking about doing it not that frequently but acknowledged that they were doing it more than once a year and recognizing that this had additional burden on staff and yet their key partners that were participating in this networking opportunity with them noted how the useful data reports were incredibly important on the programming side in terms of making sure that students were really getting the supports that they need. And it was also a way for states to acknowledge that part of their role was to be kind of good stewards of data. And so that meant not just collecting data but then providing these usable data reports for schools and districts to then have quickly to make decisions.

And then we continue with some next additional themes. That almost every state, and I would say we've also talked to many districts and schools, in almost every one of those conversations throughout the pandemic, people noted that some students were more engaged during the pandemic by having multiple options for learning, including remote and hybrid learning. And that these students are more engaged and recognizing a need to continue to offer these multiple pathways, if you will, for instructional settings so that we could continue that increased engagement with some students that were in some families that were able to participate and engage more; and that could have been because parents didn't have to go through complex kind of buses and transfers of buses to get to school to be in-person for parent family conversations. Rather those could happen through technology. And so really recognizing that both students and families in some ways were more engaged and not wanting to lose that.

The second one up on the screen that you'll see is also this noted need for states to have a more supportive approach around communication, other organizations and supports. I want to give an example. Particularly around the language and communication, it was noted that they're trying to use this language of you matter versus not being at school is harmful. So really phrasing in the you matter, that positive way. I think we'll hear some more examples of that later in our conversation today. And then we also, on the supports, these supports connect back to the data to make sure that the supports that are being provided were based off of the needs that were identified, and also the supports of adults.

I was in a conversation recently where someone talked about kind of the notion of that safety information that we get when we're on a plane of you put the mask on yourself before you take care of others. So recognizing that we need to make sure that we have supports in place for our adults in the building, which would then mean that adults are in the best position possible to really support students.

And then finally we heard this over and over again is that this kind of recognition that before COVID-19 and before the pandemic, we really still already had some areas of need that we needed to continue to focus on when it comes to student engagement and attendance, and states and districts are taking the pandemic and recognizing that there's a brighter spotlight on this and taking it as an opportunity to really look at what is being provided, what data's being collected and making modifications and adjustments to make sure that both staff, students and families are getting the supports that they need. And that's it for me.

Greta Colombi: Thank you so much, Jenny. That's really helpful context as we think about engaging students and all those lessons learned and good direction for this coming year. Now we're going to dig into some more specific strategies with Supreet Anand, our Deputy Director from the Office of English Language Acquisition, who will talk about re-engaging students who are English learners. Supreet.

Supreet Anand: Thank you Greta and thank you NCSSLE. I'm really pleased to be with all of you today. I first want to start by offering my sincere gratitude to all the school-based personnel educators and everybody that works on behalf of our students, and your resilience this past school year. It's been a remarkable year. There has been a lot of loss, isolation, uncertainty. We have to recognize that all of that has taken a toll on many of our students' mental health and compounding these challenges that students face in the classroom, whether it was online or in-person. Last May, nearly three in 10 parents surveyed in a Gallup poll stated that their child was experiencing harm to their emotional or mental health with 45% citing the separation from teachers and their classmates as a major challenge.

So while we want to work on keeping some of the strategies that worked during our distance learning and online mode, we can't underscore the importance of in-person learning for many of our students this school year, but equally important is that we do so in a manner that is safe and we follow the CDC guidelines that you heard earlier from Elizabeth, and that we have all of these safety protocols in place so that we can offer our in-person schools while also keeping some of the great strategies that we learned worked during our online and distance practices.

On the next slide, I want to just talk about three major themes that we learned from our stakeholders and our states that we want to keep in mind as we re-engage students this year. The first thing to consider for all of our students, but particularly for English learners, is to focus on the social and emotional wellbeing upon their return. Recognizing students' feelings and being responsive to their emotional state and set up learning environments that are inclusive and show students that you believe in their capabilities while we're simultaneously providing scaffolds that allow them to reach their learning standards. Dr. Cardona reminds us that it's very important that students and families and staff experience that back-to-school feeling as much as possible and that we collectively make that possible for our students across the country.

I do also want to remind all of our educators that as we take care of our students, we also need to show ourselves some grace and make sure that we focus on our own mental health being because this year is going to bring different challenges and going to stretch our skills so that we can meet those challenges. Another area that students are gearing up to do is to mitigate learning loss and opportunity loss that we experienced this year, but it's important to have measures that support instruction and not position students as incapable learners. So it'll be more important than ever to use formative assessment techniques to inform learning as instruction is taking place in order to advance the student development from its current status and engage students as active and integral participants in their assessment processes, and accommodational level the field supports and scaffolds. These are critical for engaging English learners.

Examine the learning environment and consider the appropriate supports and scaffolds to mitigate the impact of language proficiency on access, opportunities or participation. Providing scaffold is an asset-based practice because scaffolds allow English learners to participate in tasks with less than perfect English. So in the next few slides, I'll speak a little bit more about these practices and provide you with some resources.

On this slide, what I wanted to provide as a resource was two research and development centers that IS has funded on the education of English learners. So although they just started their work in 2020, they have already published practice briefs and resources for the field. Last summer, OELA partnered with the National Research and Development Center to improve education for secondary ELs on a webinar to discuss the malleable factors for setting English



learners on a trajectory towards success. So we also learned about their work and practices that position English learners as capable learners and increase their autonomy in their own learning.

Dr. Walqui and her team reminded us that development is a consequence of learning, not a prerequisite for it. And thus, we need to strategically engage English learners in processes and interactions that drive that development while simultaneously increasing student autonomy and self-regulation. So formative assessments also help teachers responsively adapt scaffolds and supports to meet English learners while they drive instruction and learning towards growth and development. So I encourage you to check out these resources from these two centers.

On the next slide, I'm going to provide some examples of scaffolds, by no means an exhaustive list. Just a few examples that you see here that English learners will need an abundance of appropriate and deliberate scaffolding to support oral language development and opportunities to develop their ideas through speaking and listening to others and using refined language to do so. Providing these oral language development opportunities has been very challenging this past school year during the online and distance learning, but it is a crucial skill towards developing language proficiency.

So, it's one of the things that we need to focus on as we move into this school year. So as we engage students, we need to provide opportunities to work both independently as well as with a partner or a peer, and there needs to be ample modeling of both the steps of the tasks as well as the language expectations. And finally, students must have opportunities to write, read, speak, and listen, as they develop all four modalities of language acquisition.

Next, I want to focus on equity as a design principle in all that we do, whether we're designing programs or lessons. When we think about English learners and how they can participate equitably, we need to think about level the field supports. So let's talk about this term for a minute, level the field. What does that really mean? If you watched the Olympics this summer, you most likely saw track and field races where the runners stood on different points on the starting line. Why do they do that? Why don't they all start at the same point? It's because in long races, as they run an elliptical path, the runners on the outside track have a much longer distance to run than those on the inside track.

Similarly, English learners are at a disadvantage when the content is in the language that they have not yet mastered. We can even say that they are marginalized on the outside of instruction. There are various degrees of impact based on the student's proficiency in English. So different students will need different levels of support. So providing accommodations to mitigate the impact is not giving English learners an advantage but it's rather helping mitigate the students' English language proficiency and helping to focus the students' attention on the content as they're simultaneously grappling with the language.

Level the field supports are tools that are calibrated to provide equity without giving an advantage. Instructional and assessment accommodations are an example of level the field supports. Extended time or the use of a bilingual word-to-word dictionaries are some examples that level the field supports. So when we talk about equity for English learners, one of the most important features we need to consider is an equitable learning environment in the presence of scaffolds that level the field for English learners. Scaffolds support students as they become more independent in using language and applying those concepts.

In the next few slides, I want to share some additional resources with you. First, I want to begin by saying that OELA disseminates information about educational research practices and policies for English learners but we do not endorse any specific strategy or organization and we don't provide opportunities, but we do provide opportunities for research and subject matter experts and practitioners to share their information and resources to our national audience; exchange ideas and collaborate around problems of practice.

NCELA, which is our National Clearinghouse of English Language Acquisition, the link on this slide will take you to the continuity of learning and operations page where we just added a new section with school reopening resources. Some of the resources you will find include our COVID handbook from the Department of Education that is translated into Spanish. We provide a guide for teachers from CDC on setting up classrooms for in-person learning, resources for district and school leadership. So all of these resources are available and I want to just highlight a few on the next few slides from NCELA.

Here what you see are some examples of webinars and podcasts which OELA has been hosting over the course of the year to address various topics in preparation for reopening of schools. Example on this slide include links to a podcast on engaging EL students and families in distance learning, practice briefs on integrating language development in STEM instruction and early childhood settings, webinars with subject matter experts to discuss these practices in action. In these webinars that are linked on this slide, presenters from OELA and WestEd discussed five educator practices that can enhance the teaching of science and math to English learners and also discussed how these practices can be implemented in various environment whether we are in-person or remote or however we need to adapt based on the specific situation that the local district is in.

In the next few slides are example of some publications that you'll also find on NCELA. These are two of our latest. The first that you see there is a biannual report to Congress on the implementation of Title III state formula grants. This is data self-reported from the state educational agencies. But of more interest to you would be our teaching practice brief that I just talked about that we did the podcast, et cetera, on, and this document provides educators on some current research finding and evidence-based methodology to use with our English learners.

On the next slide, I want to leave you with some various ways that you can continue to engage with OELA and the work that we're doing. You can email us, find us on social media, and also subscribe to our Nexus Newsletter so that we can stay connected with you and continue to support the great work that you're doing. And with that, let me turn it back to you, Greta.

Greta Colombi:

Thank you so much Supreet for sharing how schools can provide specialized supports for English learners that can really maximize their engagement along with all of those helpful resources that depending on what your needs are, it seems like there's a little bit of something for everyone. So thank you so much for sharing. Now it's time for us to hear from two field practitioners who are actively working on re-engaging students. Throughout this lessons from the field series, the voice of people on the ground doing this work day by day is incredibly important and we're just so pleased to be able to have these two practitioners with us. We're going to start first with Leah Keuscher, who is a long time principal at East Wooster High School in Nevada. Leah.

Leah Keuscher:

Thank you very much Greta and hello everybody. It's such a pleasure to meet you all and I'm very honored to be here. I want to preface my conversation today with I do not know it all. I am just a practitioner and I'm right there along with each and every one of you in this really important time in our history of education. Go ahead in that. Thank you. Anyway, I'm the principal at Earl Wooster High School in Reno, Nevada. I want to go quickly over our demographics so you kind of get some context of what we look like here at Wooster. We are in Washoe County School District. We have about 63,000 students in the Washoe County in Reno, Nevada. But specifically at Wooster High School, we have about 1,600 students.

The demographics of my awesome high school is that we have 65% of Hispanic Latinx students, 20% White, 5% Black, 4% Asian, 2% Native American, 2% Pacific Islander, and 2% are multiracial. We have many special programs at Wooster High School about our special program demographics. 14% of our student population are on an individualized education program, an IEP. 25% of our students are English language development or ELL students. 53% of our students qualify for free and reduced lunch. However, with that 53%, Wooster does not receive Title I funds. So the miraculous things that we're doing here, I'm very proud of our staff. We don't receive any Title I funds.

Our special programs, get ready for this, we are an EL newcomer center. We also are a refugee center. We service kids from Afghanistan, Syria, the Congo, and many, many of our at-risk countries that are suffering from civil war. We also service a homeless shelter near our school. We also have about a percentage of our population, our students, that are considered children in transition, which is also a homeless student. We are the only high school that services deaf and hard of hearing students. So we do have a special population of deaf and hard of hearing students. We also have special education population of social intervention. Those are students that struggle with behaviors.

We also have a comprehensive life skills program with our students with severe disabilities that we are helping to support in order to learn strategies to be successful after and beyond high school. We are also a school with strategies program which services students with autism. And we also are one of two high schools in our area that services our Native American population, servicing the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony. And lastly, we are an international baccalaureate high school, the only international baccalaureate high school in Reno, Nevada.

Our attendance in the '18/19 school year, we had a chronic absenteeism of about 15%. And putting that into perspective, our district had about a 9%. So we were above the district average, but our state had an 18%, so we were below the state average for that chronic absenteeism. And I use the '18/19 school year just because I feel like it's really important.

Our graduation rates in the '18/19 school year was 84%. That's that 2019 spring, that's when we started going kind of down into that mode of no students in school. But in the 2019/2020 school year, we had an 88% grad rate. So even though we saw lots and lots of kids that were not being able to be serviced because of our distance learning that was mandated on us by our state, back in 2020 we did have an 88% grad rate. We are to be determined on our 2021 grad rate. We still are working really hard with our kids over the summer and this fall to try to get them to see that most important goal, and that is graduation.

I've been sort of brought here to talk a little bit about SEL and really what that means at the high school level and secondary school level. So hello to all my high school and secondary colleagues out there. Teaching SEL, it does not come naturally sometimes to adults. We believe that SEL is important in our district. We have a lot of amazing colleagues in our district that do support our SEL and we've been trying to practice it for the last probably 10 years. But adults really don't come equipped with knowing how to teach SEL as well.

What we've noticed during this pandemic is that not only are our students struggling but our adults are too. And as I just showed you, our school is extremely heavy in special programs, which I love that that's what makes Wooster unique. We have really tried hard as an admin team, as a staff, as a teaching staff to really support our teachers and give them liberty on how to play and taking time to play because a lot of times at the high school level, we feel very compelled to jump into our curriculum because we feel pressured with standards and state directive that we sometimes forget that it's really important in order to re-engage kids that we need to teach our teachers and our counselors and our administrators and our bus drivers and our custodians and our support staff how to play.

Anyway, I'm looking forward to speaking with all of you and answering any questions. Again, I don't profess to know it all, but thank you so much for your time and I'm glad to be here.

Greta Colombi: Thank you so much, Leah, for sharing information about your school community and supports. There's clearly a lot going on at Earl Wooster High and thanks so much for sharing how you're focus on building the social, emotional competencies of your staff is helping to engage your students, and we'll learn more about that in our panel discussion. So with that, we're ready to introduce our second practitioner for today and that is Sarah Frazelle from Puget Sound Education Service District in the state of Washington. Sarah, would you mind introducing yourself?

Sarah Frazelle: Yes. Thank you, Greta, and I completely agree with Leah. I definitely don't know everything and this last year has been a lot of learning new things together, really partnering together to create better outcomes for our students. I'm going to talk just a little bit about my role. I am the Director of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support and Early Warning Indicator Systems at Puget Sound ESD. If You're familiar with the state of Washington, we cover the Seattle Metro Area on down to Tacoma and Olympia. So we actually serve about 38% of Washington students within our ESD. We have 55% of our students are students of color divided up across 35 different school districts. So we have a very diverse population, a very large population of students.

Last year, what we were really allowed to do is just kind of think about what an attendance and engagement network might look like for our districts. And so we put out applications to allow districts or school teams to apply for this opportunity to kind of work together to try to figure out what does engagement really seem like? What really is it? Historically we've looked at attendance as kind of a proxy variable for engagement, but we've always known that those two really aren't equal. So when we got this opportunity to dig a little bit deeper with a few schools, we created this network that was open to any school in our region but we wanted to take a smaller subset of that. So we ended up working with 12 participating schools, had to kind of narrow that down.

Some of our selection criteria though were schools that were already focused on attendance, had positive and supportive approaches towards attendance. So we were really looking for those folks who were ready to implement. But throughout those 12 schools, we had five elementary schools, four middle junior high schools, two regular high schools, and one alternative school, which was a middle high school combination. These schools were not feeders. They had some folks who were very rural, some in the Seattle Metro Area, kind of just all spread out. So we had a very wide swath of different schools that we were working with to partner to create this.

What we really wanted to do is just kind of look at what are some of those differences and similarities that we were seeing in as far as engagement went. Some of the big lessons learned from this last year, I think, were really around the importance of focusing on excused and unexcused absences. I think historically when we talk about attendance, it's more been around unexcused absences. And so really switching that conversation to include excused absences

because that's still missed time and that's still time where those students aren't being able to get that information.

Lesson one, thinking about that excused and unexcused absences, and lesson two, really making it a team approach. A lot of the schools when they first started maybe only had like an attendance secretary who was trying to keep track of everything that was going on. We wanted to expand that to have a broader representation of team members. So we had counselors. In some schools we had assistant principals because the principals are kind of doing other things. We did have those attendance clerks, student behavior specialists, people like that. And so with this team approach, we were really able to kind of look at the data of excused and unexcused absences through a tiered system of support lens.

When I say tiered system of support, that's just kind of thinking about what do we have available for all of our students that encourage attendance and engagement? What do we have for some of the smaller groups of students who are starting to struggle? And then what do we have that are really specialized, kind of almost case management strategies or interventions for those students who are missing a lot of school? I'm really excited to share just a couple of things that folks came up with over the last year, and I know that we're going to dig a little bit deeper into that when we get to the question and answer panel, but I just wanted to share a couple of those.

One was around doing a reader's theater within an elementary school. Especially as everybody was on Zoom the last year, they were able to have students kind of read plays together and that was just a strategy to really think about how to engage students. And then also we had for kind of a tier two strategy, we had one school that did a multi-lingual parent night. So I really appreciate the conversation earlier around multi-lingual students. With this, this is something that they're going to continue to do in the next school year where they have a multi-lingual parent night using Zoom so that we don't have to worry about transportation, food, things like that.

And then they had breakout rooms based on the different languages that were being represented with translators in each one of those rooms and just was able to have conversations with the parents about expectations, about how we're reopening, what the schedule is going to look like. I think that's going to be really critical in this next year. At least here in Washington, we were still in hybrid even towards the end of the year. So reopening and what that looks like is going to be really critical.

Those are just a couple of the things that I wanted to share real quick and give you that context and I'm going to turn it back over to you, Greta. Thank you.

Greta Colombi:

Excellent. Thank you so much, Sarah. That was really helpful context and I really appreciate the examples that you provided. I hope that our participants appreciated them as well. Thanks to all of our speakers for queuing up for

what's next, our panel discussion. We are now ready to address some questions that we've received from the field related to re-engaging students this fall. And I invite all of our speakers to join me on the camera for the segment of the webinar. Welcome again to you all. Let's discuss some of the questions we've been hearing from educators related to student engagement, and we're going to start with some foundational questions on engaging. One of those foundational pieces is having these COVID prevention strategies in place. So how about we start there? Elizabeth, would you mind just talking to us whether about any recommendations that you have for school administrators who are living in states where governors are working to prevent mask mandates?

Elizabeth C. Haller: Absolutely. It's a question we've been getting frequently. For jurisdictions that are in a state that does not allow for masking, even testing, vaccination, ventilation, distancing, and other prevention strategies are even more critical. So just making sure that if you're not allowed to mask, you're doing some of these other prevention strategies and implementing them to the best of your ability. Testing, vaccination, ventilation. We didn't get into ventilation a lot. Just to expand on that a little bit, making sure that those ventilation systems are running all day long while the students are there, windows, doors open. Allowing students to go outside for lunch, for example, or to spread out and not just be in the cafeteria but to be in other parts of the building where they can have distancing when they unmask to eat. Yeah, hopefully those are helpful. Thank you.

Greta Colombi: Excellent. And we did do a webinar previously on air quality and we will be posting that in the chat in a moment. So just in case you missed it, we would love for you to be able to partake in it. Another thing that we've been hearing a lot about is just the surge of the Delta variant. We're just wondering if the CDC still recommends three foot versus six foot in distancing on schools, and depending on what you recommend, can you tell us why?

Elizabeth C. Haller: Yeah, absolutely. CDC recommends maximizing distance as much as possible. If you can do six feet, that is amazing. We encourage you to keep doing that, but we also recognize that we have more students in the schools and the classrooms this year than we did last year, which can make distancing very challenging. The evidence for three feet of distance emphasizes that students need to be wearing masks when you're distancing. So even though we've shortened the distance, masking is still recommended. So with the high transmissibility of Delta variance, masking and distancing as much as possible is just as important now as it was last school year.

Greta Colombi: Right. Thank you. And we're also hearing across the country many express their concerns about bullying in relation to masking. Some students are being bullied because they are not wearing a mask and others are being bullied because they are wearing a mask. How do you recommend schools address this challenge?

Elizabeth C. Haller: Well, I know schools are really focusing on social, emotional learning, and that is key and critical. First of all, thank you so much for doing that. The stigma hurts

everyone by creating more fear or anger towards ordinary people instead of focusing on the disease that's causing the problem. Stigma can also make people more likely to prevent individuals from adapting healthy behaviors and therefore makes it difficult to control the spread of the outbreak. Stigma can negatively affect the emotional, mental, physical health of stigmatized groups and the communities they live in. Stigmatized individuals may experience isolation, depression, anxiety, or public embarrassment and that's probably happening in your schools for students that are choosing to wear masks and those that are choosing to not wear masks.

So, stopping it immediately when you see it happening is going to be the most important thing to do. Recognizing that students may have different situations. They may have different beliefs that they're bringing with them when they come to school and making sure that you're stopping that from happening when you hear it; hallways, cafeteria, classroom. Everyone can help stop stigma-related COVID by knowing the facts and sharing them with other people.

Greta Colombi: Great. Thank you so much.

Community leaders also, sorry, being supportive of people who choose to wear a mask is a personal choice. And because of that, they also may have a medical condition that weakens their immune system. So making sure that the students understand that as well, and schools should work with their selective mask policies so that it doesn't conflict with some of this guidance regarding stigma. Correcting negative language causing the stigma and sharing accurate information is also really critical. Thanks so much for that question.

Greta Colombi: Yep, absolutely. So that really, again, is the foundation of in these days engaging students. I'd like to just shift gears a little and hear how our practitioners are actively working to re-engage students this school year. Sarah, would you mind starting with this next question. How is your school community approaching student engagement and re-engagement as you start the school year?

Sarah Frazelle: Yeah. Thank you, Greta. One thing that we're doing is really trying to focus on what data we collected last year. Attendance measures were kind of all over the place, but everybody has some form of attendance measure from last year, your state requirements, things like that. So being able to really look at the data from especially the last semester and seeing which kids were missing a lot, which kids were kind of like on the border and which kids had really good attendance can really help us try to identify what supports we're going to be providing students the second that they get in the door.

So, I think that's one really huge thing that we need to be focusing on is just how many students are we dealing with, what are our supports that we can provide those students? And then being able to listen to students and families and communities through focus group sessions, things like that that can allow us to really integrate some of that voice of the students and families that are identifying what some of those challenges are for engaging in attendance and



incorporating that into like Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles, things like that for continuous school improvement.

Greta Colombi: Thank you so much. It's really wonderful to hear the data driven process that you're using. Thank you so much for sharing. And Leah, would you mind sharing how Earl Wooster High School is kind of approaching?

Leah Keuscher: Yeah. Basically what we did was we took advantage of summertime. We knew that our kids last spring credit wise were really not earning those credits. And so what we did was we were able, with some extra money, able to run a summer school where we ran it all summer and it was amazing, probably the biggest summer school that we've had in a decade over meeting here. Over, I think, probably 400 kids attended every day, over 1000+ credits were earned. So what we did was we built relationships with them early on over the summer. We really just didn't let our hair down. We just went right into school is not over, we're going to keep going. And the kids wanted to come. We took advantage of the fact that cases weren't going up at the time over summer. So we really brought the kids in.

That really engaged them. We did lots of home visits too. Just like Sarah said, we knew which kids were chronically absent. We also reached out to our incoming 9th grade class because we didn't have those relationships with those students yet. And we really worked with those middle school counselors and staff to go in and knock on doors because we know if we don't make relationships or reach out to those chronically absent students in middle school, the chances are that they're not going to know that they need to attend.

So, myself, my admin team and my staff that worked over the summer, we basically just did day-to-day knocking on doors as safe as possible to get kids to come back in. So it's really kind of quite, it was really helpful. So we just hands-on encouraged, walked, went into homes and explained to parents, "Here's what's going to happen. Here's why it's so important that you come back." And really to be honest with you, start of this school year, it's amazing how many kids want to be back. We've been bludgeoned by smoke days the last couple of days because of the fires in California which are affecting our city. So the kids are just like, do we need to come to school today? So it's been really, really exciting because kids do want to come back.

And then also to really, again, teaching our teachers how to play. It's kind of like my theme. Everybody kind of knows me as a principal that does those kinds of fun things with my staff. But so much more important this year, reminding my staff to pump the brakes on curriculum. We're not giving up rigor. That's not the point here. The idea is that the more we can engage our students that want to be here and know that they care and our staff needs it too. Our staff is really suffering, I think, from a lot of emotional distress and mental distress.

And so, our mantra during the back-to-school PD was games. This year is National Parks. All of my staff is on the National Parks team. They get to earn

little pins and stuff for doing the right thing. Here's one of the pins for standing out in the hallway. So they're excited and stoked about it. It sounds kind of geeky and silly, but I tell you what, the staff love it. We pitched tents in tent pitching competitions and all that kind of stuff too. So that's really what we're doing is trying to engage my staff, which they're excited to be here, and that kind of builds buy-in. And then next step is engaging kids and that is going out to houses and basically every day we're making home visits.

Greta Colombi: I love it. Thank you so much for sharing really great and solid examples that really can help you get a feeling of what it's like in your building. So thank you so much. Now, in the last webinar, we had focused a lot on some academic work-based supports. This webinar, we're really hoping to hone in on supports for special populations. And so I was wondering if... We have this next question, how do you ensure your efforts to re-engage students meet student and family needs and are genuine, not solely driven by compliance for students with disabilities? And I think Elizabeth, you are going to start.

Elizabeth C. Haller: Yeah, thank you so much. This is so important. Administrators should really work with your child and your family to understand the needs and provide access for direct service provision. Adjust the strategies as they're needed. There were some examples that were provided earlier that were just stellar. For example, you can provide physical distancing, wearing masks. However, it may be difficult for some of the students with disabilities. So you might consider wearing clear masks or cloth masks with a clear panel so that when you're interacting with young children or students with disabilities, then they can learn to read, they can learn to interact with you a little bit better. They can learn to read lips and rely on those skills that they have instead of not being able to have that visual.

Greta Colombi: Great. And Leah, you had noted how your school supported students with disabilities as well. How about from your perspective?

Leah Keuscher: Ours was more of an academic perspective of once we bring. We did everything possible last year kind of changing up the role of our staff. For example, if you were traditionally an attendance clerk, maybe you weren't an attendance clerk anymore. Maybe you were going to a home visit with a counselor or with an administrator to help support children with disabilities. This year, an anticipation of knowing that we really were. This was going to be the hardest year. I've said that over and over to my staff. This year, this fall is going to be difficult. It's exciting that our kids get to come back, but it's going to be a challenging one.

So, we created our master schedule to where every single one of our classes are co-taught. So I was able to anticipate with my special education department. I reached out with my resource teachers and said, "Here's what I want to do. I want to co-teach every English one two, every freshman English class, every sophomore and every English class and every freshmen algebra one class and every sophomore geometry class." That is twofold. One, to ensure that we have

two bodies, two awesome adults in every single classroom to support the learning and the missed learning, anticipating the missed learning of students right from the get-go. So that was our goal and we were able to accomplish that. Sorry, I lost my train of thought, but that was really the biggest thing was making sure that all the kids were co-taught.

Secondly is just making sure that we were reaching out to those parents of students on an IEP early and early on to address their needs. So again, lots of deliberate work done to ensure that we were prepared, we were ready to help support, and really we were even ready to help support kids over the summer. It isn't perfect, like I said, but we knew that this was going to be a challenging year. And so we wanted to make sure we supported our students on IEP, and it's going good so far. It has also helped with co-teaching with our teachers. I think they feel great that they have a colleague in there to help support them because of this loss of learning. We don't want to blame the loss of learning on the kids can't do it. It's just that we have to figure out how to get kids caught up.

Greta Colombi: Thank you so much. Really nice having both of your perspectives because both aspects are very, very important. Now I'd like to turn to thinking about students who are multi-lingual. What re-engagement strategies do you recommend for our students who are multilingual? And Leah, would you mind starting with that one?

Leah Keuscher: Absolutely. I know we were fortunate last year as the Washington County School District to, we were I think one of the only districts or the only district that started the school year off with kids in person as well as kids in hybrid and distance. My teachers were so amazing. Collectively we decided that it was important that our distance kids really needed to log on and be kind of on a camera on the other side of our Teams, for example. We use Microsoft Teams.

And so, the fact of the matter was when kids were at home in hybrid or kids were in distance, they were required to log on from eight o'clock in the morning until 2:30 in the afternoon. That's how long our school day is. At first, my teachers would be like, "Oh, Leah, it's just so unfair that you have these kids sitting in front of the camera all day long." And I go, "Well, what do you think is going to happen when they turn off that camera? They're probably going to be behind the screen anyway, but maybe a screen that's not really appropriate or it might cause them depression or anxiety. So it's best that they feel connected." Our staff did that from the get-go, and I'm very proud of them for that.

But we also had to teach the staff, now how do we help our EL students, because many of our EL students were allowed to come in person and many did. We did lots of home visits. But what we also did was we used Teams and I had to teach my staff from the get go because they weren't ready. Our staff was not ready to go full distance as well. So we had to learn the really cool, powerful things that Microsoft Teams could do, and I know that Google can do the same thing. They can translate things. We had to teach our staff. And so we use all of

our early release time and PLC time to teach our staff how to communicate with our EL students.

I also taught the staff and even shared with our district the power of the cell phone. You can basically have a conversation I had. One of my lovely students, he's from Turkey and he was a refugee, just came in. He's now finishing his third year at Wooster. He didn't know how to speak at all, but he and I communicated via a phone and guess what, the only thing I have to giggle about is every time he called me principal, it came out as warden. I don't know if he did that on purpose or if that was a language thing, but anyway, his name is Abdula and he's learning English every day. My point is that we just have to think outside the box and talk together about it. We were flying the plane as we were building it, so to speak, but we were relentless. We would not allow any child to drop or to be left behind. And so we were constantly having conversations all the time. I hope that helps.

Greta Colombi: Absolutely. Very helpful. Thank you. And Dr. Anand, would you mind adding to that?

Supreet Anand: Sure. What I was thinking about is we have a lot of lessons learned from last year's experience. We learned new ways to communicate. And as Leah mentioned, using these devices for translations and other things, and those are really good strategies that we can continue to use. But I was thinking about is as the students come back to school this year, I think the one thing that we really do need to recognize is that their experiences in many cases might have been different from the experiences that we've had. And so recognizing that social and emotional wellbeing of the students, giving them the space to be able to talk about their experiences and to share what they have experienced I think is going to be important.

Focusing on the social and emotional health hasn't been something that maybe hasn't been on the radar of our ESL teachers or our content teachers as much as it's going to need to be for this coming school year because we just have to recognize we're coming to a different environment. Also supporting the heritage language development, creating a safe environment where multi-lingual learners can feel safe taking risks with language participation with less than perfect language, where they can feel that they're supported. Oral language development is going to be important. I think that's something that was very difficult to do in a distance learning environment or an online environment but that is a very important piece of what they're going to do.

Another important aspect is going to be coordination among the different experts within the school so that the services that are provided are cohesive. So coordination among the ESL teacher, the content teacher, the counselors is going to be more important. So putting those structures in place so that there are opportunities to coordinate so that we can provide services that are cohesive I think is going to be another very important component of the engagement.

And additionally, I just also want to emphasize the importance of engaging and building that trust back with the families and at the community engagement. Building a dual capacity framework that ensures that there's flow of information from the school to the parents, but also opportunities for parents to provide that information back to school so that the flow of information is a two-way component. I think that's going to be another very important piece as we move forward.

Greta Colombi:

Thank you so very much. The final population, and there are many special populations that we can be talking about, but a population that we've heard many inquiries about is how to support students who are homeless. We would love to hear your experiences and maybe Sarah, you can start. I think this'll be our final question before we wrap up. But Sarah, could you talk to us about how you all have been supporting students who are homeless and re-engaging them?

Sarah Frazelle:

Yeah. I appreciate that. We've talked a little bit about home visits, but there's obviously if you're homeless, like there's a whole other situation. But I'm going to go back to that data-driven piece of we need to have an attendance clerk that's being able to get accurate information about what's going on, but there's the student's family. If they know that there are homeless issues at that point, what we have in the state of Washington is something called behavioral health navigator role that is within our ESD and what their position is to really reach out to the different community-based organizations that would serve that school district and really make this list.

They kind of serve as that connector piece between if a student is homeless or having major mental health issues, things like that, that they can kind of step in and they have this list of here are the different organizations that can help out. I go back to that data piece one other time or one more time real quick just about being able to kind of figure out how many kids we actually do need to support. So having accurate numbers around that is really critical so that we can use that as a communication tool. There's a lot of people who want to help, they just need the direction of how to help. And so I think that's one of the biggest things that we're seeing in our area of supporting the homeless student population.

Greta Colombi:

Thank you so much. We could talk probably for another couple of hours and dig into more information, but we have reached our end for the day. I would just want to thank you all so very much again for all of the work that you're doing and all of the work that you will be doing. Each and every one of you are playing an important role to support students to be successful and we're just eternally grateful to all of you for that. While we can continue talking today, we will have future sessions. So please keep in mind that we will be having a session focused on early childhood on September 9th and then another one on September 22nd focused on nutrition and wellness. Please stay tuned. We will make sure to get out the announcement to you all.

We also welcome your input on precisely what you would like to learn about during these sessions and your feedback. And so, as Shoshana had mentioned earlier, we have a feedback form that we would greatly appreciate getting your input. We have posted this feedback form link into the chat and we encourage everyone who attended today to take just a few minutes to provide us feedback on today's session, and again, share topics in a format you prefer for the remaining sessions of the series.

In addition, please visit our website where today's presentation will be posted, and you can listen to an archived version of the presentation. You can also see all of the slides that the speaker shared along with the links to all the resources referenced during the session. As a reminder, we will be capturing all questions posted in the chat or in the Q&A so that we can make sure that information is shared with the Department of Education to inform the planning of upcoming events as part of this lessons from the field series.

So, with that, I really want to thank each of our presenters again for the excellent information you shared today, especially all those wonderful examples. We also would like to thank you, almost 600 people, who actively engaged in today's webinar. We will leave Zoom open for five more minutes so that folks can click on the feedback link to go to the survey or provide any additional questions or scroll through our chat to pull any links. Again, they will be posted on the website as well. And again, we just greatly appreciate your time today and thank you for all you do to provide students with a safe, supportive learning environment and we hope that we'll see you again on September 9th for our next webinar. We hope you have a great afternoon.