



NEWSLETTER

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Latest News from the Director



The last school year ended with school buildings closed across the region and around the country. The new one has begun with widely varying approaches in different schools and communities as well as enormous uncertainty about how long some school buildings will remain closed and how long others can remain open as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. With infection rates fluctuating and scientific knowledge evolving rapidly, REL staff spent much of the summer trying to provide evidence-based support to educators and policymakers. As you'll see in the items below, we've identified promising practices for remote

learning, offered a tool to help educators learn what works in their own schools, addressed the implications of trauma from the pandemic, and produced the nation's first quantitative comparison of the likely relative effectiveness of different reopening approaches for mitigating the spread of COVID-19. We hope this work is helpful to you in planning for what is sure to be a very unusual and challenging 2020–2021 school year.

Brian Gill

Director, REL Mid-Atlantic

Highlights

[Reopening Schools While Mitigating COVID-19's Spread: How Many Days Should Students Attend?](#)

Like other state education agencies, the Pennsylvania Department of Education needed to determine an approach to reopening schools in the fall that mitigates the spread of COVID-19 infections. REL Mid-Atlantic [provided research support](#) to the department based on emerging evidence on COVID-19 in children, research on remote-learning strategies, and a computational model that predicted the potential spread of COVID-19 under in-person, remote, and hybrid models of instruction. In this [blog post](#), REL Director Brian Gill offers policymakers and educators advice on addressing the challenge. A [webinar recording](#), tailored for school district and state-level educators and community partners, shares the lessons we learned from this rapid-turnaround project. Presenters explain the project's findings and the ways that Pennsylvania used the findings to inform its guidance to schools.

Presenters include the following:

Brian Gill, REL Mid-Atlantic

Ravi Goyal, REL Mid-Atlantic

Jacob Hartog, REL Mid-Atlantic

Danielle DeLisle, REL Mid-Atlantic

Adam Schott, special assistant to the secretary, Pennsylvania Department of Education

[Check out the infographic](#) showing that dividing students into smaller groups, with part-time in-person attendance and precautions for those attending, is likely to slow infection spread the most. And read [frequently asked questions](#) about reopening schools.

Trauma-Informed Strategies Can Address the Unprecedented Impact of Coronavirus on School Communities

With the 2019–2020 school year in the rearview mirror, school leaders and staff are shifting their attention from crisis response to crisis recovery. For the most vulnerable students, such as those experiencing chronic homelessness and food insecurity, the pandemic might have taken a considerable social and emotional toll. Read this [blog](#) and [fact sheet](#) for ideas on supporting students and staff who return to school in the fall bearing the weight of trauma, which can adversely affect teaching and learning.

What's New

Promising Practices to Enhance Remote Learning

When schools are forced to shutter their doors, educators need effective remote learning strategies. Check out these newly released infographics and fact sheets to understand promising practices in remote learning—and identify what is or isn't working in your own schools.

- [Promising practices to support remote learning](#)
- [Using data to refine remote learning strategies](#)
- [Steps schools can take to ensure that students continue to progress academically whether at home or at school](#)

Be sure to take a look at the [REL COVID-19 website](#) to find webinars and other resources from all 10 RELs to support distance learning.



Tips for Supporting Elementary Writing Skills at Home

[This practical guide](#) offers families and caregivers three main suggestions, as well as supporting exercises, to help young children build their writing skills at home. It is based on recommendations from the U.S. Department of Education's [What Works Clearinghouse](#).



[Going the Distance: Online Strategies for Students with Disabilities](#)

One-fifth of our nation's school-age learners are children with disabilities. The shift to remote learning has caused educators to search for new ways to support these students. Read this [new blog post](#) for tips on how to choose the tools that will work for this group of students.



[Kevin Dehmer Joins the Governing Board](#)

We are proud to announce that Kevin Dehmer, [interim commissioner for the New Jersey Department of Education](#), has joined the REL Governing Board. Dehmer also serves as the chief financial officer and assistant commissioner for the Division of Finance at the New Jersey Department of Education.

Using Data from Schools and Child Welfare Agencies to Predict Near-Term Academic Risks

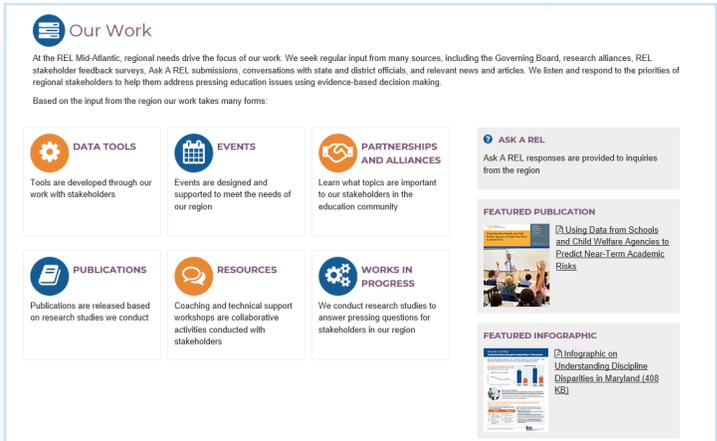
REL Mid-Atlantic partnered with [Pittsburgh Public Schools](#), [Propel Schools](#) (a charter school network), and [the Allegheny County Department of Human Services](#) to explore whether using data from child welfare agencies and schools could help educators and administrators better predict which students are at risk of not achieving educational milestones in the near-term (i.e., next term or school year, depending on the outcome) more than using school data alone. In this [new report](#), [blog](#), and [fact sheet](#), the study team highlights key findings, including the following:



- School data are the strongest predictors of near-term academic problems across all outcomes.
- Predictive performance remains strong when models rely exclusively on school data.
- Some out-of-school events, such as child welfare involvement and emergency homeless services, strongly correlate with near-term academic problems.
- While information on out-of-school events does not add much power to predictive models, it may help educators understand some of the underlying challenges faced by students in their home lives.

New and Improved

We're pleased to share new and improved navigation for the [Our Work section](#) of the website—check it out and let us know your thoughts!



Our Work

At the REL Mid-Atlantic, regional needs drive the focus of our work. We seek regular input from many sources, including the Governing Board, research alliances, REL stakeholder feedback surveys, Ask A REL submissions, conversations with state and district officials, and relevant news and articles. We listen and respond to the priorities of regional stakeholders to help them address pressing education issues using evidence-based decision making.

Based on the input from the region our work takes many forms:

- DATA TOOLS**
Tools are developed through our work with stakeholders
- EVENTS**
Events are designed and supported to meet the needs of our region
- PARTNERSHIPS AND ALLIANCES**
Learn what topics are important to our stakeholders in the education community
- ASK A REL**
Ask A REL responses are provided to inquiries from the region
- PUBLICATIONS**
Publications are released based on research studies we conduct
- RESOURCES**
Coaching and technical support workshops are collaborative activities conducted with stakeholders
- WORKS IN PROGRESS**
We conduct research studies to answer pressing questions for stakeholders in our region

FEATURED PUBLICATION
[Using Data from Schools and Child Welfare Agencies to Predict Near-Term Academic Risks](#)

FEATURED INFOGRAPHIC
[Infographic on Understanding Discipline Disparities in Maryland \(408 KB\)](#)



We've also worked with our colleagues at the nine other RELs across the country to gather resources on recruiting and retaining teachers: check out the teacher recruitment resources [here](#) and the teacher retention resources [here](#). To make it easy to find relevant resources, we've organized the information for states, districts, and teacher preparation programs.



Interested in **joining us** or **learning more**? **Contact us.**

Please reach out to us at RELmidatlantic@mathematica-mpr.com anytime to share your ideas about important research and analytic issues we can help you address.

 Follow us on [Twitter](#) for the latest updates.