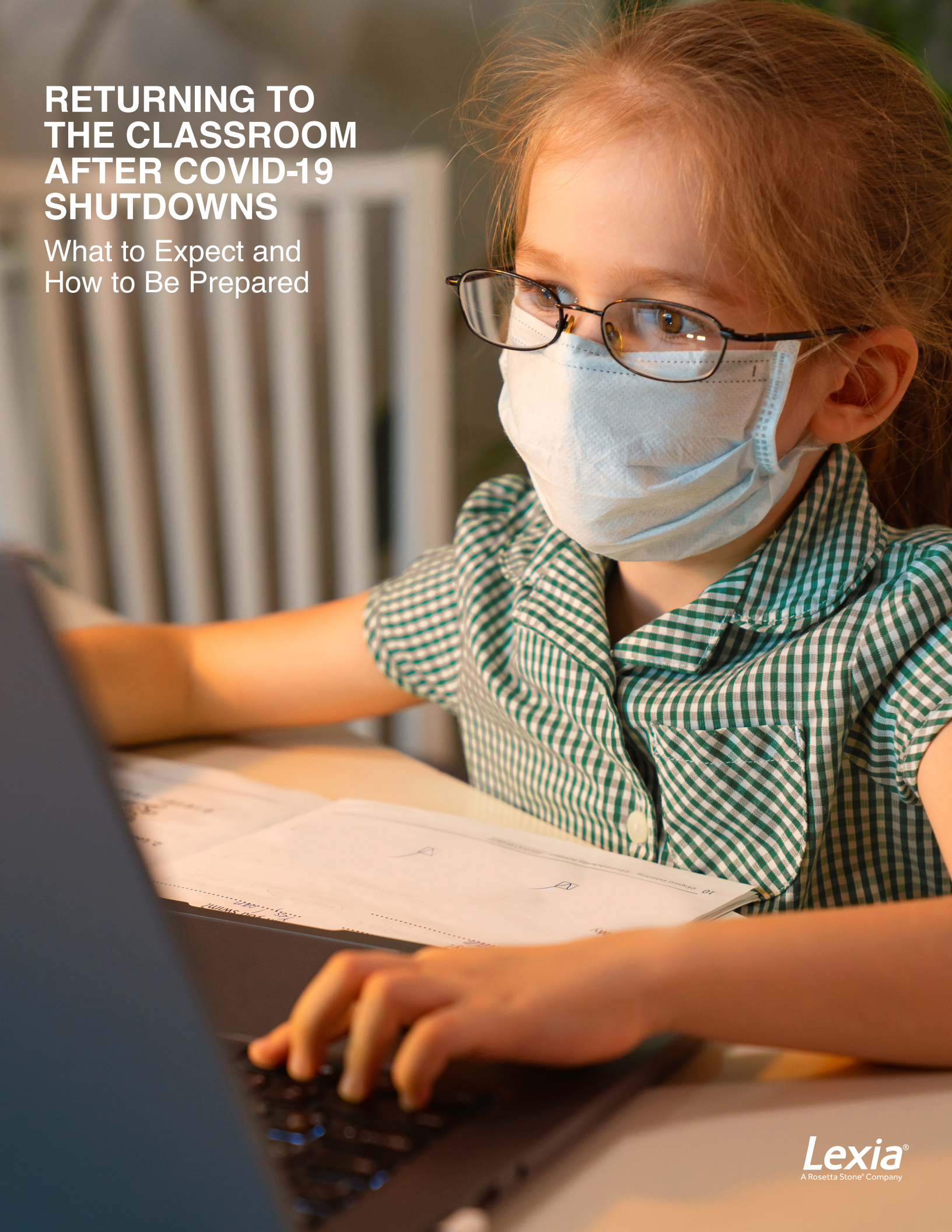


RETURNING TO THE CLASSROOM AFTER COVID-19 SHUTDOWNS

What to Expect and
How to Be Prepared

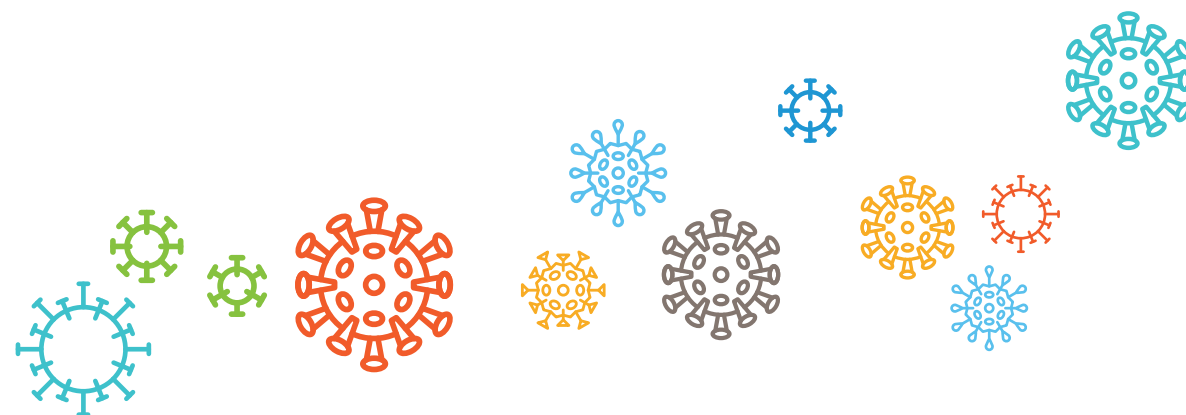




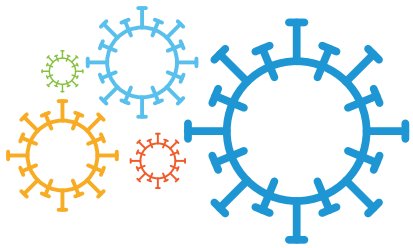
While the far-reaching impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are affecting almost every aspect of life, one area hit particularly hard is education.

With millions of students learning at home for the first time, it is clear that this crisis will have myriad effects on teaching and learning well into the future

The day-to-day details of the upcoming school year may still be uncertain for many schools and districts across the U.S. Keep reading to learn about the new realities of K–12 education and how to be best prepared.



With the rapid switch to distance learning, an array of experimental efforts have taken shape.



What is the “COVID Slide”?

Due to the sudden shutdown of schools across the country, most students and teachers engaged in some form of distance learning. But while the transition to online learning has been relatively smooth for districts in which students already have their own electronic devices, the digital divide has reared its head elsewhere. This has raised questions about unequal access to functioning devices, adequate Wi-Fi, and other remote-learning essentials.

In the fall, it seems reasonable to expect two things: students will have made various degrees of progress academically, and something of a “COVID slide” will have taken place.

This term, which was debuted by Dr. Megan Kuhfeld and Dr. Beth Tarasawa in a recent Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) policy brief, connected the expected slip in progress due to COVID-19 with the established “summer slide” phenomenon. According to the brief, educators and administrators can draw from their understanding of how summer breaks impact learning in their efforts to gauge the pandemic’s effect.

Beyond building upon pre-existing knowledge of seasonal learning disruptions as a guide, the authors recommended keeping the following factors in mind as likely influencers on students and school communities in the coming months:

Trauma

For some students, sudden school closures occurred alongside other potentially traumatic events, including family income and job losses, health crises, and a high overall level of disruption.

Loss of Enrichment Opportunities

Students following stay-at-home directives are unable to access enrichment opportunities such as field trips and face-to-face tutoring sessions.

Reduced Access to Educational Resources

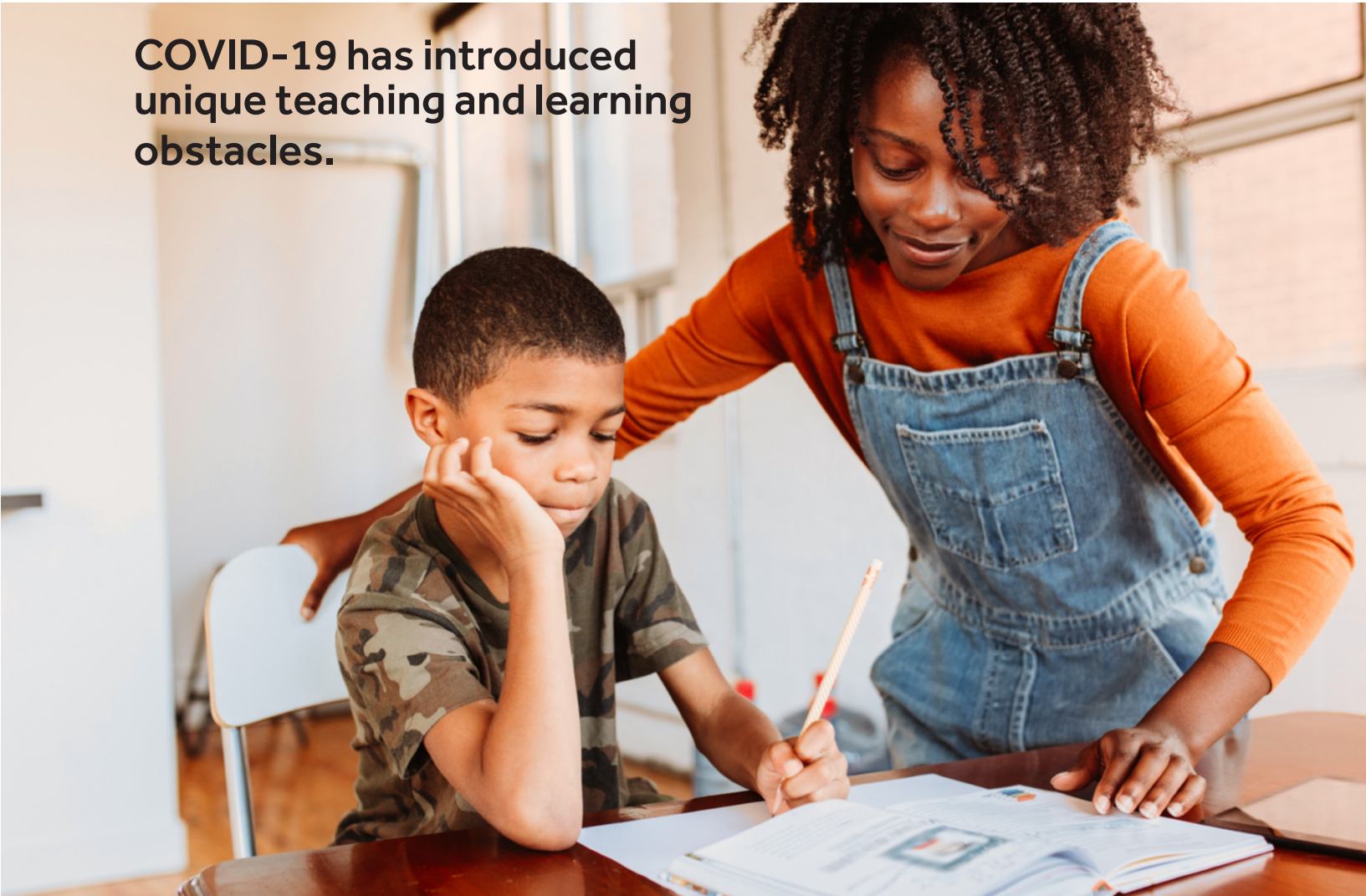
For families focused on survival during the shutdown period, concerns about housing, food, healthcare, and jobs may take priority over student learning.

Simply put, Kuhfeld and Tarasawa believe that “missing school for a prolonged period will likely have major impacts on student achievement come fall.”

Tackle the Fallout

Because COVID-19 has introduced unique teaching and learning obstacles, Kuhfeld and Tarasawa underscored the importance of collaboration among policymakers, educators, families, and communities to ensure all students can access educational resources while schools are closed. This preventative measure will help as many kids as possible stay current on assignments and academic progress.

Second, the two NWEA researchers advised school systems to find alternative ways of gathering data on student progress. After all, while annual standardized testing was canceled across the country in the spring, teachers still need to evaluate where students are and where they need to go. Developing a contingency plan for collecting and assessing data sooner rather than later will undoubtedly help teachers and other staff hit the ground running .



COVID-19 has introduced unique teaching and learning obstacles.

Third, Kuhfeld and Tarasawa advocated for the development of a database by researchers, schools, and policymakers that provides something akin to real-time information about what may or may not be serving students. An array of experimental efforts have taken shape in the wake of the rapid switch to distance learning, and gauging their impact could inform new policies to facilitate greater academic progress during future disruptions.

Develop a Social-Emotional Learning Plan

Thinking ahead in terms of social-emotional learning once the COVID-19 crisis passes is essential, as many students have experienced a significant level of disruption to their lives and will benefit from a solid support network.

Guidance from the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is an ideal place to start. The organization’s “Mindsets and Behaviors” standards list touchpoints for administrators and educators focused on students’ holistic well-being, including the following:

Whole-Self Care Do students demonstrate a “healthy balance” regarding the well-being of their whole selves physically, mentally, and emotionally?

Self-Confidence Do students believe in their own ability to succeed?

Coping and Safety Skills How do students cope when dealing with a problem?

Adaptability Are students able to transition well to new routines, expectations, and responsibilities?


Social Skills Do students exhibit mature social skills? Are they behaving appropriately in relation to their environment and the situations they are in?

While the above is not an exhaustive list of behavioral and social-emotional expectations, it provides a solid framework for gauging student and community needs. Of course, these needs will likely vary depending on the degree of COVID-19-related disruption and trauma experienced by a particular student, family, or school community, so it is wise to proceed with a flexible and observant mindset.

Some teachers and students may feel most at ease if predictable routines are quickly put back in place, while others may benefit from a collective period of reflection and re-imagining. The good news is that many school districts have become more aware of trauma-informed teaching and learning in recent years.

Anticipate Upheavals and a “New Normal”

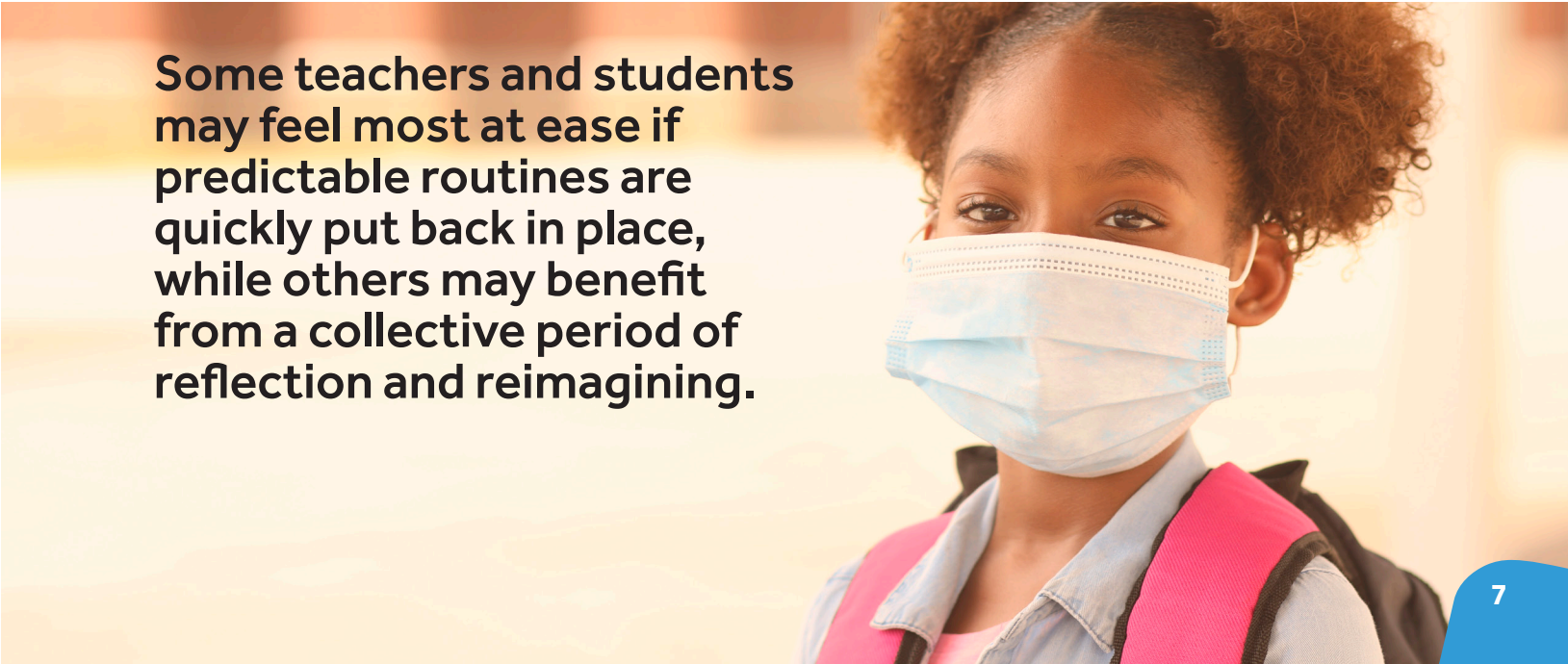
Teachers and site-based administrators seeking ways to incorporate social-emotional learning strategies into academic work may consider the following:



Consider these social-emotional learning strategies.

- 1 Give school staff the chance to process their own feelings and experiences related to everything from the impact of the pandemic as a whole to the loss of direct contact with their students.
- 2 Create a shared document of best practices, including plans that emphasize relationship-building, positive feedback, and clear and consistent expectations.
- 3 Put social-emotional attributes at the forefront of assigned lessons and materials. Prioritizing collaboration, communication, self-awareness, and community is key to effectively address pandemic-related upheaval.

Students grappling with COVID-19-related trauma—including the loss of routine, reduced social contact, and the economic impact on themselves and their families—will surely benefit from a solid, well developed social-emotional learning framework.



Some teachers and students may feel most at ease if predictable routines are quickly put back in place, while others may benefit from a collective period of reflection and reimagining.

Prepare Now For Post-Pandemic Schooling

As a *New York Times* editorial noted, history has shown that educational progress often takes a hit when schools are closed for extended periods of time. According to the piece, the shortcomings of many schools' distance learning plans make it "even more important that educators sort out how to best catch students up when in-school instruction begins again" following COVID-19 shutdowns.

As a result, administrators and school systems should be working on post-COVID plans that get students back on track academically while making space for social-emotional learning.

It's important that educators sort out how to best catch students up when in-school instruction begins.



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