

Supplemental Learning Supports

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) launched a national survey in late January 2021 to gather insights on public school district experiences in the 2020–21 school year, including how districts continued to adapt to the persistent and evolving challenges of schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. In May and June 2021, AIR interviewed a sample of leaders in districts that responded to the survey to learn more about the challenges and promising practices they described in their survey responses, with a focus on innovative practices from which other districts can learn or that they can replicate in their own context. This brief summarizes findings related to supplemental learning supports from these interviews with district leaders. For more findings, check out the project web page at <https://www.air.org/project/national-survey-public-educations-response-covid-19>.

In 2020–21, many districts used supplemental learning supports to help address lost instructional time. This brief includes profiles of the challenges and promising practices related to **supplemental learning supports** for three districts across the United States:

- Boundary County School District, Idaho
- Bloomingdale School District 13, Illinois
- Big Horn County School District #1, Wyoming



Idaho



Town



Medium Size



High Poverty



Primarily In Person

Boundary County School District

Made Time for Credit Recovery

The Challenge

In Boundary County School District, the majority of students attended school in person in the 2020–21 school year. Of the students who instead participated in remote instruction, many had difficulties engaging in remote instruction or were not sufficiently self-motivated to manage their own learning. Despite staff efforts to engage and support students who were learning remotely, many of the secondary students who opted into remote instruction failed classes. This increase in failure rates also led to an increased number of students in need of credit recovery.

Promising Practices

In summer 2021, Boundary County School District offered a summer school program at the local high school so that students could retake classes they had failed. For students with disabilities, paraprofessionals were available to support students in planning their learning. In the future, the district may expand the summer school program from 3 to 4 days so that students have more opportunities for credit recovery. In addition, the district has built a flexible period into the middle and high school schedules for the 2021–22 school year so that students have additional time for credit recovery if needed.

Boundary County School District has also invested in RTI (response to intervention) supports across all schools to support staff in determining the logistics (e.g., master schedule, resources needed, leadership team structures) to increase students' access to academic and behavioral supports. Given how overwhelmed students have been with information and change over the 2020–21 school year, staff are focusing on supporting all students behaviorally (e.g., how to communicate, ask for help, set goals) so they can be successful in school.



Illinois



Suburban



Medium Size



Low Poverty



Hybrid

Bloomingdale School District 13

Provided On-Demand Student Support

The Challenge

In Bloomingdale School District 13, staff faced challenges tracking student learning using computer-adaptive assessments in the 2020–21 school year. Without in-person test proctors, some students were able to look up test answers, leading to a mismatch between staff observations of struggling students and assessment data. Without reliable data from district assessments, the district needed an alternative approach to measuring student progress.

Promising Practices

Given the need for data on student progress from sources other than district assessments, Bloomingdale School District 13 began to focus more on learning objectives than assessment data and providing students with the supports they needed to demonstrate mastery of the content. The district launched its first summer school program in 2021 so that students could have additional academic practice in a relaxed, supportive environment before the school year started. The summer school program was designed to be easy to attend and a positive opportunity for students. The program is optional and cost free; it also does not collect grades or attendance data to reduce pressure on students. Staff anticipate that the summer school program may help mitigate summer learning loss for some students and ensure they are better prepared for the fall.

The district also invested in remote learning supports that students and their families could access asynchronously. Although the district already offered access to Khan Academy videos that students could access asynchronously, the district recognized that many students may need more individualized assistance with homework outside of school hours, and that many parents are not always available or prepared to assist. To address this need, Bloomingdale School District 13 began using an online tutoring service that is available to students 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in multiple languages. This service provides live tutors who can ask students questions, explain processes, or help them explain themselves clearly in writing. Staff also have access to data on which students are using the program and what questions they are asking so they can tailor their classroom instruction to address common misconceptions or skill gaps. By offering this asynchronous tutoring service for free, the district has begun to address pre-existing equity issues in the school community: Instead of tutoring being available only to families who can pay for external, private services, tutoring is now free and accessible for all students. According to Superintendent Jon Bartelt, “It turned out to be a wonderful supplement. I think we’re just scraping the surface on how this can be used.”



Big Horn County School District #1

Provided Live Lessons On Demand

The Challenge

Although all students in Big Horn County School District #1 were allowed to attend school in person in the 2020–21 school year, there were still many students who needed temporary remote instruction during the year because of quarantine or family illness. The district needed to ensure that students had remote access to learning materials without placing an undue time burden on teachers.

Promising Practices

Big Horn County School District #1 began using Google Classroom to facilitate consistent, in-person or remote learning, whether synchronous or asynchronous. Teachers would record key components of lessons and upload them so that students could access them remotely. If students had any technology challenges or questions, teachers had access to experts in their buildings who could assist them. Teachers had autonomy to decide which parts of lessons to record and which could be covered through other documents. This autonomy helped ensure that the process was not overly burdensome for teachers, emphasizing that teachers should prioritize their own well-being rather than aiming for perfect implementation. Though recording and uploading did take some additional time and effort from teachers, according to Superintendent Ben Smith, “Our teachers were so good, doing whatever it takes to come to work to provide instruction.”

Using Google Classroom in this way proved to be successful: Staff reported that district test scores at the end of the 2020–21 school year were at or above average. Big Horn County School District #1 plans to continue to use this system in the future. In addition to the instructional benefits of providing struggling students with new ways to review and access learning content, staff see recorded lessons as a way to reduce lost instructional time in the future (e.g., during snow days, when students are absent). The district also plans to assess school buildings’ audio and video needs so that teachers can more easily record lessons in the future.

For more information on the Public Education’s Response to COVID-19 project findings and publications, please visit the project web page at <https://www.air.org/project/national-survey-public-educations-response-covid-19>.

Demographic Icon Definitions

Geographic Region. Based on regional divisions determined by the U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.).

Locale. Based on four locale categories (city, suburb, town, and rural) determined by the U.S. Department of Education (2019).

Size. Based on district enrollment data provided by the U.S. Department of Education (2019). Small = < 1,000 students; Medium = 1,000 to < 10,000 students; Large = 10,000 or more students.

Poverty. Based on child poverty data provided by the U.S. Census Bureau (2019). Low = < 10% of children; Medium = 10% to < 20% of children; High = 20% or more of children.



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