

RE-ENGAGING MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS POST-PANDEMIC: LESSONS FROM INTERNATIONALS NETWORK FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS



*"A challenge in the year ahead will be getting students to trust school - trust that school is vital to their learning; trust that it is worth their time to be with us and not working; trust that the community we will build together will benefit them academically and emotionally. I think opting out of school is going to feel like a viable option for some students."
- Kathleen Rucker, Principal, Brooklyn International High School*

*"I do not think any innovation or milestone met has been done so in a vacuum. I support our staff so we can collaborate to move closer to our vision of equity for students."
- Veronica Garcia Montejano, Principal, Oakland International High School*

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The entire school moved to digital learning within several weeks. If you think about this in terms of the usual pace of bringing a community through a change it is astonishing. Within that innovation, every person had to come up with a whole new way to do their job.

– Heather Cristol, Assistant Principal, International High School for Health Sciences

Introduction

Numerous reports have illuminated how the pandemic widened disparities in opportunities and outcomes between students who are multilingual learners (MLLs),¹ low-income or with disabilities, and those who are not. The school leader quoted above echoes the sentiments of leaders and teachers across the country in the wake of the pandemic's impact on schooling. We were all stopped in our tracks and forced to pivot to remote learning with no advance warning. Schools made this massive shift to online learning with little support or training, for the most part making their way alone. Across Internationals Network, amidst the loss and hardships resulting from the pandemic, we have also observed immense creativity and innovation emerge even in the course of a struggle to maintain meaningful engagement and learning.

As the only national school network focused on the specific needs of immigrant adolescent multilingual students, Internationals Network for Public Schools began its response and shift online in March 2020. Over the course of these 15 months we have learned an enormous amount that informs our work of re-engaging students in the year ahead. These 15 months have been marked by challenge, loss and hardship, frustration and on-going uncertainty. They have also been illuminated by creativity and flexibility on the part of educators and students, in addition to their remarkable levels of responsiveness and innovation.

¹ Various terms are used to refer to students who are in the process of developing their English proficiency while attending US schools, including English Learners, English Language Learners, English as a New Language Learners, Limited English Proficient students. Internationals uses the term "multilingual learners" to foreground the vast linguistic resources of these students.

Located in New York City, the Washington DC Metro Area, the California Bay Area, Buffalo, New York and Minneapolis, Minnesota, many Internationals Network schools are in neighborhoods located at the epicenter of the pandemic's impact, in zip codes that were hardest hit by infection, hospitalization, and death. Internationals Network students reside with immigrant families who were disproportionately impacted by loss of jobs due to shutdowns in the service and construction industries.

Across Internationals Network, we are aware of the intersecting challenges that our students face, even without a global pandemic exacerbating them, including xenophobia, racism, and structural exclusion. With an eye toward equity, we also know that with the right resources and supports, our students thrive. We know that given opportunities to collaborate, have a voice in their learning, and engage in rigorous projects that have an authentic purpose, we see our students meet and exceed the challenges facing them. When we remove the barriers that schools and US society often place in their way, immigrant multilingual learners succeed.

This report is unique in that it aims to meet three goals. First, it illuminates the impact of the pandemic and the shift to remote learning on students, educators and entire school communities across the nine districts that host Internationals Network schools and academies. Second, it highlights innovations and new learnings that have emerged from our network's collective efforts to address the on-going challenges posed by schooling during the pandemic. While this report points to many serious challenges, it is also an attempt to recognize the extraordinary efforts of students and educators who created a new world of remote and hybrid learning relying primarily on colleagues within their own school and across Internationals Network. These include new ways of teaching and learning; new strategies, processes and practices for engaging with students and their families; and, new ways of making school happen when the building is not accessible. Finally, this report presents recommendations for the year ahead, key considerations as we seek to re-engage multilingual learners during the coming school year.

Rationale for this Report

For more than a year, we have been consumed with tracking losses. Loss of lives, loss of time, loss of students who were forced to relocate due to unemployment or to leave school due to economic pressures. In the midst of loss, we have also seen the work of educators across our network blossom with collaborative problem-solving, peer support, and creative solutions to unheard of situations that have been in constant flux. We have spent the past year listening to leaders, teachers, staff and students across our network. Our goal is to take lessons from the losses while we also harness the innovations and carry them into the year ahead in the service of our students.

In the pages that follow, we share findings from across our network to see what we can learn about shifts in engagement with school, student achievement, and the ways that schools have responded to student needs. As we look toward the future, we know that it is imperative that students, who are new to the US and are already disadvantaged in school, be centered in plans to re-engage.

This report brings together the perspectives from the 28 schools and academies in nine school districts in Internationals Network. It is our collective effort to synthesize learnings from the months since March 2020, when schools shifted to remote learning, and to share insights in order to inform re-engagement with schools for the 2021-22 school year. We hope that readers who influence decisions in districts, schools, and communities can benefit from the findings shared here. We view these findings as offering an opportunity to combine a look at the losses and the innovations in teaching and learning from multiple perspectives, framed in the context of a school network that for many years has innovated to transform secondary schools into places that support immigrant multilingual learner success. As we all prepare to open our school doors for the 2021-22 school year, we hope that our collective observations, insights, voices, examples and recommendations for re-engagement can inform continued innovation and collaboration with an eye toward equitable schooling opportunities for multilingual learners.

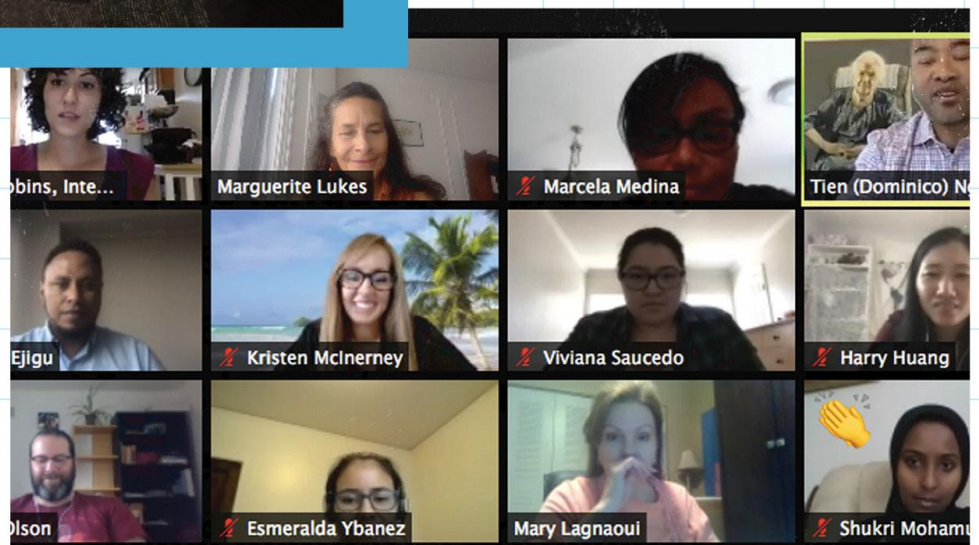


TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Executive Summary](#)

Part I: [Background and Context](#)

[Immigrants and Multilingual Learners in US Schools: Pre-Pandemic Challenges](#)

[Significance](#)

[About Internationals Network for Public Schools](#)

Part II: [Findings: Remote Learning Realities and Outcomes](#)

[Shift to Remote Learning Highlights the Perpetual Broadband Divide](#)

[The Shifting Realities of Students: Isolation and Increased Adult Responsibilities](#)

[The Shifting Realities of Leaders, Teachers and Counselors](#)

[Enrollment](#)

[Attendance](#)

[Changes in Course Completion and Overall Achievement](#)

[Graduation, Dropout, Discharge](#)

[College application and enrollment](#)

[Addressing Challenges in Remote Teaching and Learning Through Innovations](#)

[Fostering Adult Learning to Address Cross-Cutting Challenges](#)

[Classroom Level Innovations](#)

[Innovation as Flexibility](#)

[Innovations in Post-Secondary Advising](#)

Part III: [Planning for the future](#)

[Discussion and Implications](#)

[Recommendations: Planning for the New Year and Re-engaging Students with School](#)

Part IV: [Appendices](#)

[Additional resources from Internationals Network for Public Schools](#)

[Methodology](#)

[References](#)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



"Remote learning has been a little difficult because you cannot see your friends or your teachers or be in class together in the classroom...because we have to...the most important is our health. And also because you can't talk to your friends, be together, share fun moments, share about our experiences in class, how you felt during class. It's very different."

– Jose, Age 15

"The greatest changes in my time as a school leader have been dealing with the uncertainty, and supporting the community with the constant changes related to COVID, such as constant school closures. In addition, dealing with the trauma experienced by students and staff due to the many losses and lack of human connections and opportunities to bond."

– Rosmery Milczewski, Assistant Principal, Flushing International High School

Executive summary

Overview

On March 1st, 2020, few educators serving immigrant youth and their families would have anticipated that within weeks, classes and support services would shift to a remote format and nearly 75% of their low-income families in some communities would lose their livelihoods with no access to stimulus or other federal monetary relief (Amandolare, Gallagher, Bowles and Dvorkin, 2020). Though seasoned educators have grown accustomed to responding to shifts in federal and state policy, this new normal has represented a complete re-imagining of school and collective efforts to keep students engaged, families involved, and educators equipped with the tools and supports to meet the equity imperative for multilingual learners.

Now, more than 15 months later, we have taken stock of the impact of the shift to online learning and the human, social and economic costs of the shutdowns due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As the numbers of those vaccinated against the virus rise and schools and businesses open their doors again, we offer this report as a way to provide recommendations for the year ahead. Rather than a wish list, the recommendations offered here are culled from countless observations of online learning environments, conversations with district

and school leaders, teachers, counselors, and students. Much of this learning emerged from collaborative efforts and cross-network conversations of educators across the Internationals Network. As veteran educators, we know that the path ahead is always made by walking it; together, the hundreds of educators and thousands of students in our network have generously offered their insights. We share them here in the hope of creating critical conversation in the pursuit of equity.

This report, *Re-Engaging Multilingual Learners Post-Pandemic*, is divided into three main sections. Part I provides background on Internationals Network for Public Schools, our schools, students and their communities as well as our multi-faceted approach to transforming secondary education for multilingual learners in US public schools. It also provides context on the overall impact of the pandemic on students, families and schools across our network. Finally, we reflect on the significance of this report and this particular point in public education in the United States. Part II provides findings, including data on student enrollment, attendance, achievement and post-secondary trends. Also included are the voices of leaders, teachers and school staff, as well as students and their perspectives on teaching and learning during the pandemic. Woven through each section are examples from schools as well as the voices of staff and students across our network. Part II includes examples of the many innovations generated over the course of the past 15 months, including new ways of operating and delivering instruction, shifts in school processes, modes of communication, and adaptations in leadership. Part III pulls together our observations and artifacts into a set of recommendations for re-engagement as schools return to in-person learning; finally, we state implications for future exploration.

How this report came to be

Findings for this report were gleaned from individual, school and network-level conversations with teachers, counselors, support staff, students and school leaders between March 2020 and June 2021.² These forums included a network-wide convening of teachers to share emerging innovations in online learning, two national meetings of school leaders, and more than 100 professional development sessions, working groups and committee meetings. The focus of our work over the past 15 months has been generating practical, timely strategies to address the pressing issues that schools are facing -- and to create as much space as possible among adults for reflection and collaborative meaning-making. The report also incorporates analyses of publicly available data on enrollment and attendance across multiple school years. Thanks to the generous support and encouragement from the W. Clement and Jessie V. Stone Foundation, we have been able to produce this report in the hopes of impacting the national conversation about how to best support multilingual learners and those who serve them.

Summary of Findings

The 2020-21 school year is drawing to a close, and there are many unanswered questions. Much has been reported that focuses on the scale of the “loss” of learning from the past year, much of which defies measurement. While we know enrollment is down and many students have struggled to complete their coursework, we also know anecdotally that some students have done well and even thrived. Graduation rates have not been published and enrollment for the year ahead is still a question mark. It is unclear if the drop in enrollment, fueled by the pandemic’s impact and immigration shifts, will continue into the school

² Internationals Network values partnerships with families as integral to the success of multilingual learners. Because our organization does not work directly with families, their perspectives are not conveyed in this report.

year. Much is unknown and cannot be predicted. Rather than comparing what happened to what might have been, we present some trends:

- Nearly without exception, **enrollment of multilingual learners in our schools declined** as a result of multiple factors.
- **The portion of students working significant hours rose dramatically** as many students were forced to help their families.
- **Attendance suffered, resulting in lower levels of student engagement**, for a host of reasons.
- **Enrollment in college for recent graduates dropped, mirroring the national trend**, though our students' college enrollment was still higher than among graduates of similar backgrounds from low-income urban schools.
- Students reported that **stress, anxiety, distractions and family responsibilities were among the greatest obstacles to virtual learning**.
- Schools across the network shifted to remote learning using **innovative uses of technology to foster learning and collaboration**, connect with students and families and build community virtually using multiple platforms.
- **Teacher and counselor led innovations** fostered collaboration, projects, and the development of culturally responsive and relevant curriculum for the online environment.
- **School leaders' duties shifted**, resulting in a heavy logistical burden that ate into time better used for instructional leadership and a reduction in opportunities to "take the pulse" of the school.



Recommendations

Below are our recommendations for re-engaging multilingual learners with schools in the coming school year, with particular focus on immigrant students at the secondary level. Critical decisions on program design and on earmarking of federal, state and local funds are in process and will have significant impacts on the year ahead. We do not lay out suggestions for use of federal funds, as other reports have gone into depth on this issue. Nonetheless, the recommendations below have implications for how such funds could best be spent.

1. Keep equity at the center in recognition that some students have been more negatively impacted by the pandemic and remote learning.
2. Encourage school-level innovation & cross-school collaborations by creating intentional opportunities for adult learning.
3. Encourage and allow for scheduling flexibilities to ensure that all students are served.
4. Promote and support competency-based learning and performance assessment that de-emphasizes seat time but ensures access to rigorous and higher order thinking for all students.
5. Use multiple forms of assessment to inform instruction on an on-going basis rather than overly relying on infrequent standardized assessments.
6. Foster collective responsibility for students to promote student success and address social emotional needs and trauma.
7. Maintain meaningful culturally and linguistically informed engagement with families.
8. To ensure equity to support students and families with greatest needs, provide flexibility in funding and how to use it by prioritizing the input and decisions of those who know students and families best.
9. Develop resources to attend to trauma-informed practices and improved mental health of students, families and staff.
10. Continue to incorporate targeted opportunities for asynchronous learning in ways that are meaningful, accessible and promote equity for diverse learners.

After 15 months of shifts, uncertainty and innovation, the months ahead will be consumed with planning for the critical task of re-engaging students and reconstituting school communities. For some immigrant multilingual learners, entering school in the 2021-22 school year will represent the first time they see their teachers and classmates in person. There should be no “back to normal” given the needs that loom for the year ahead. We urge the attention of district, school, and community leaders, above and beyond academic and linguistic concerns, to include addressing lingering anxiety and stress, economic losses that continue to pull students into the workforce, and the difficulty of shifting back to a more structured school environment. In the pages that follow, you will see findings and examples from across our network of schools and the implications that we draw from them for the critical year ahead.



PART I

BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

Background and Context

No district, school or teacher was prepared for what unfolded across our nation's schools starting in March 2020 when closures due to Covid-19 sent millions home and learning shifted online. In addition to the heavy lift of implementing online learning, we know that school closures due to the pandemic also required students (mostly low-income students of color) to care for ill family members and manage hunger, housing instability, and lack of basic necessities (Hough, 2021). A group that already faces multiple stressors including linguistic and technological barriers, immigrant students and their families have been cited in numerous studies as being disproportionately impacted by remote learning and the impact of the pandemic (see [References](#)).

Many traditionally underserved groups, including immigrants, homeless students, and students with disabilities, went missing after the shift to remote school took place -- researchers estimate that “as many as 3 million” students disengaged completely from school during the pandemic (Korman, O’Keefe, & Repka, 2020). Immigrants and MLLs have left school at higher rates than any other student group during the pandemic (an estimated 1.2 million nationwide), and the number of MLLs registering for school has dropped this year (from 16k in 2019 to 14k in 2021). This is due to multiple factors, including the economic recession that has led some immigrant youth to take up another job to support their family (Jacobson, 2021; Russell & Vázquez-Toness, 2021). Many immigrant youth have been forced to balance work and school or leave school altogether due to work schedules conflicting with school. Some youth have taken on additional responsibilities in the home to support younger siblings and care for elderly relatives.

Some of the research on the pandemic's impact has focused on lost or unfinished learning, with studies of students in 19 states estimating that they missed between a third to a full year of reading development due to school closures ([Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2020](#)). Estimates have been higher for some subjects, including math. While lost and unfinished learning has yet to be fully measured, the scale of course failure has been calculated in some areas. Fairfax County Public Schools in Virginia, for example, explored how course failure rates have shifted since the start of the pandemic and the transition to remote learning. Using administrative data from the district, they found that the number of F's skyrocketed across all groups in middle and high school, many by over 100% (in essence doubling). The percentage of MLLs

receiving at least two F's rose from 17% to 35% ([Fairfax County Public Schools, 2020](#)). In Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), Great Public Schools Now reports that graduation rates are decreasing as estimates show that 40% of LAUSD middle and high school students were “disengaged” or “absent” from classes in Spring 2020 ([Great Public Schools Now, 2021](#)). They predict that between 20% and 40% of students in future graduating classes may not complete high school, pointing to the longer-term outcomes of the pandemic in coming years.

Immigrants and Multilingual Learners in US Schools: Pre-Pandemic Challenges

While our direct experience and research across Internationals Network demonstrate that MLLs can be successful with appropriate support and resources, research paints a troublesome portrait of our collective failure as a nation to provide what students need to be successful. In addition to the academic demands of learning a new language and adapting to a new school system, MLL youth face unique challenges and stresses (Olneck, 2006; Patel et al., 2016; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008) that can hinder their academic success. Adolescent MLLs have higher dropout rates (Garcia, 2001; Zentella, 2002), are tracked into lower level-classes (Callahan, 2005), and have higher rates of depression (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2009; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008), suicide attempts (Perreira & Ornelas, 2011), and other psychosocial issues (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Kieffer and Parker's (2016) study of MLLs in NYC schools finds that students who enter public schools in adolescence are at higher academic risk and need more academic support than those who enter in elementary grades.

This unique constellation of challenges has an impact on educational outcomes, especially for secondary students. MLLs graduate at much lower rates -- nearly 20 points lower at 67 percent, compared to their non-MLL peers (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019; USDOE, 2021) -- which continue to point to educational inequalities that risk creating long-term negative impacts on the life outcomes of immigrant youth. Moreover, proficiency in English and age of arrival have been shown to be key determinants for students' course placements, which can result in underrepresentation of MLLs in rigorous academic classes, overrepresentation in special education and remedial classes, or in their being pushed out of school pathways altogether (Advocates for Children and the Public Advocate of New York, 2002; Allard, 2016; Jennings & Haimson, 2009; Lukes, 2015; Orfield, Losen & Wald, 2004). In response to these conditions, many MLLs struggle to attain proficiency in English after six years in U.S. schools and drop out of high school at alarming rates (Clark-Gareca et al., 2019; García & Kleifgen, 2018; Lukes, 2015; New York City Department of Education, 2019; Olsen, 2014; Valenzuela, 1999).

Given these disparities in opportunities and outcomes, it is critical to learn how schools can directly address the causes of educational inequities and implement scalable programs to address the needs of immigrant youth, especially those who are developing proficiency in English.

Significance

By the time schools restart in August and September 2021, the pandemic and its impact will have spanned three school years. Numerous reports from the [Great Public Schools Now](#), [Center for an Urban Future](#), the [Immigration Initiative at Harvard](#), and [Make the Road NY](#) have illuminated the disproportionate impact of both the pandemic on immigrant and MLL students and their families. Throughout the extended period of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated school closings, immigrant youth have suffered at

disproportionate rates. Data, observations, conversations with students, families and educators have revealed a year of tremendous challenge and hardship. The barriers to educational equity faced by many students across the US were exacerbated by the pandemic, leading to the devastating impacts that we have summarized. Now in Spring 2021, with vaccination programs well underway across the US, plans are in process for re-opening and re-engaging students with school in the 2021-22 academic year. To ensure that the plans for the coming school year are crafted thoughtfully and include consideration of MLLs and immigrant youth, the immediate challenge is to assess the impact of the pandemic and school closings on MLL students and their school communities and identify key lessons learned.

While much has and continues to be reported about the impact of remote learning, this report differs from others in that it shares a combination of perspectives. We have chosen here to highlight the innovative work that schools across Internationals Network have done in response to the ongoing crisis. Over these past 15 months we have been inspired by the sheer scale of innovation at the school level -- on the part of school leaders who had to lead the reimagining of school and lead schools through unanticipated variations of remote and hybrid instruction. We have also seen innovation among our students who, as their lives were upended, responded with creativity and maturity amidst perpetual uncertainty around work, family, and health. The return to in-person schooling will be a challenge for many students who will have been away from school for over a year, including rising 10th graders who will attend school in person in the US for the first time in the coming school year. Many of these students have had negative experiences with remote learning due to the digital divide and personal crises. It is imperative that schools prepare to re-engage MLL students after such an extended period of frustration and challenges with remote schooling. While some students have thrived, others have languished, and far too many have disengaged completely. All will need to be re-engaged when school gears up for the coming year -- and much of that work will start before school doors even open. As a leader in the fight for educational equity for multilingual learners, Internationals hopes to inform reopening plans by offering lessons learned and recommendations informed by work on the ground and lived experiences of school leaders, teachers and students.

About Internationals Network for Public Schools

As the only school development and support organization dedicated to the needs of new immigrants and refugees, Internationals has become a leading national voice in the fight for educational equity. Our work emerges at the intersection of educational practice, research and policy. Internationals Network transforms education for immigrant and refugee multilingual learners by helping schools and districts better serve those students through multi-faceted school-wide interventions that address immigrant MLLs' social emotional, academic and linguistic needs and supporting educators to innovate in how they serve these students. Internationals designs new schools, coaches leaders, teachers, and school staff, and provides access to a collaborative, robust network of support and learning for our partners. Internationals Network schools and academies are designed so that all structures reinforce effective instructional practices for multilingual learners and foster an equity-focused, linguistically and culturally responsive school climate. The result is students who are more successful than their counterparts at many schools outside of our network, graduating at higher rates and thriving beyond high school. We have developed a comprehensive approach to the education of immigrant and refugee MLLs and broadened our impact by sharing proven best practices and influencing policy for MLLs. In the world of education reform, Internationals Network has become a leading voice in the education of immigrant and refugee multilingual students.

A composite image showing three students in a video call. The image is divided into three vertical panels, each showing a different student. The background is a solid yellow color. The text 'PART II FINDINGS: REMOTE LEARNING REALITIES & OUTCOMES' is overlaid on the image in a large, bold, black font.

PART II FINDINGS: REMOTE LEARNING REALITIES & OUTCOMES

Part II: Findings: Remote Learning Realities and Outcomes

Shift to Remote Learning Highlights the Perpetual Broadband Divide

The complete upending of school during the shift to remote learning forced educators to convert entire school communities to an online environment. In addition to redesigning instruction, schools also focused on connecting families with food, medical, and mental health resources, as well as financial assistance, as detailed in examples below.

Business closures during the COVID-19 pandemic meant massive unemployment and loss of income for many students and families at [Oakland International High School](#) (OIHS) who work in the restaurant industry. After distributing computers and internet hotspots and helping families file unemployment claims, OIHS staff were able to quickly leverage their long-standing partnership with [Alameda County Foodbank](#) to help families in need. The existing monthly food pantry shifted to distributing emergency food boxes. It then transitioned into a socially distanced weekly food pantry where families from the school and surrounding community could pick up pre-boxed food. With the school operating remotely, the OIHS cafeteria was transformed into a massive food pantry and distribution area. Over the course of spring 2020, school staff conducted volunteer run deliveries weekly for about 75 families who needed consistent food and maintained the Wednesday food pantry. Currently, deliveries continue for students in summer school, alongside the Wednesday food pantry.

"Partnerships are vital, and you need them already in place when disasters happen. Rather than starting from scratch, we were able to figure out how to make those existing systems work," said Lauren Markham, Director of OIHS's Learning Lab.

Districts and schools implemented widespread and largely successful efforts to distribute computers during Spring and Summer 2020. Device distribution was implemented in an all hands on deck approach, with efforts including district-level device distribution, in-school distribution of iPads, laptops and Chromebooks, delivery of laptops to students' homes, and private device donations that were mailed

directly to students' homes. All Internationals schools report that most students now have access to laptops or iPads.

"For our students that are just arriving to the country and have limited technology experiences prior to coming here, the transition has been very difficult. Most of those students have chosen to be in-person, which has been an enormous help."

– Jon Harriman, Principal, International High School at Lafayette

In contrast to the effectiveness of device distribution, data collected over the past 15 months reveal that internet access remains among the greatest barriers to student engagement among Internationals Network students. Leaders have described it as "inconsistent," "problematic," and "glitchy." This major barrier to engagement has been emphasized in multiple national reports (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Russell & Vázquez-Toness, 2021). The complications of internet access are particularly dire for students who live in homeless shelters, in transitional housing, or are doubled up with multiple families -- which is the case for nearly 20% of Internationals Network's students in New York City. To participate online, students must log in via an unstable hotspot, and they report repeatedly getting kicked off of their online instruction due to poor internet connections. School-led efforts to address these challenges have included delivering mobile hotspots to students' homes, purchasing data plan upgrades for students, locating local hotspots and providing technical support for students to get online with borrowed computers.

"What's hard for me is that sometimes my laptop is lagging and sometimes the internet connection is very slow. Also sometimes I have loud background noises and it makes me out of focus."

– Internationals Network Student, 9th grade

The Shifting Realities of Students: Isolation and Increased Adult Responsibilities

The reality of 2020 came as a surprise to everyone. In the second week of March 2020 we were still grasping that school would shift completely and that our entire reality would be upended. In June 2020, as educators we were asking ourselves if we would go back to school in person in September 2020, only to find that we have now struggled and innovated our way through another year of online and hybrid learning. Five months into the Covid-19 pandemic, Internationals Network Schools started the school year for 2020-21 in a new reality: fully remote instruction in California, the District of Columbia, Maryland, Minneapolis, Alexandria, VA and Buffalo, NY, and a blend of remote and in-person learning for NYC students. Across all districts, there have been shifts and new schedules as schools opened, closed, shifted to remote and then to hybrid.

"Classes online were a new experience for me and I thought that wouldn't be a big deal, but for some of my classes it was difficult. For now, I am praying that class this year won't be online, because online class is harder than being in school."

– Maryam, age 18

"Because this year was so difficult for all of us, a lot of teachers, even if they had been teaching a long time, felt at the start like they were not very good at their jobs. Because we were trying to do something that no one had any idea how to do."

– Genna Robbins, Manager of Professional Development Services, Internationals Network

Immigrant workers and their families have been hit the hardest by the economic fallout of business closures during the pandemic. As a result, many students have been compelled to share more economic responsibilities for their families. In many schools, significant portions of the student body are working more than 20 hours per week (including bearing a significant responsibility for childcare). Without exception, all 28 Internationals Network schools and academies report that 25 percent or more of their students are now working 20 hours a week or more in addition to attending school, a reality mirrored in national reports (Jacobson, 2021; Russell & Vasquez, 2021). The impact on their ability to take part in school is particularly challenged when students are working significant hours.

As of June 2021, Internationals Network school and academy leaders reported that among the greatest barriers to students' full participation in school are the following:

- 1) Work (in the labor force and at home, including domestic responsibilities);
- 2) Connectivity and inequitable access to broadband;
- 3) Mental health and trauma;
- 4) Distractions.

"The number of students working has skyrocketed. Usually our 11th and 12th grade students are working part-time. This year, it's common for our 11th and 12th grade students to be working full-time and for our 9th and 10th grade students to be working part-time."

*– Jaclyn Valane, Principal,
International High School at LaGuardia Community College*

Students themselves have reported frequently -- and shown through their behavior -- how their anxiety and stress have increased. A survey of students at three New York City Internationals Network schools revealed that students consider stress and anxiety and work and family responsibilities to be their greatest challenges. For schools with stretched budgets and a small counseling staff, the year ahead will require finding creative ways to address these continuing realities.

"I consider that the most sensitive part for the majority of us, is our mental health. Since this is a 'new' way of learning, something that we haven't done before, it's more likely for us students to feel more stressed and frustrated due to the skills [needed] to drive into this new beast, where we have no knowledge or any familiarity. What I think all adults have to pay the most attention during these times, is in our behavior, how we act, we talk, changes, etc."

– Internationals Network Student

The Shifting Realities of Teachers, Leaders and Counselors

It is impossible to capture what a "typical" day has been like for any teacher, school leader, counselor or school support staff member over these past 15 months. All have had to take on additional roles: technology expert and internet helpdesk, social worker, resource connector, and family liaison. Teachers have spent countless hours planning, problem-solving, meeting together, sharing ideas. Many have spent nights, weekends and vacations teaching themselves new technology. School leaders have been pulled away from the work of observing classes, meeting informally with students and "taking the pulse" of the building by the need to deal with crises and health emergencies, create new schedules (remote, hybrid, in person, emergency), communicate with families using as many means as possible. Across the board, all educators -- school leaders, teachers, counselors, support staff -- experienced massive additions to their duties. This has included time spent converting work online, adhering to shifting protocols for health and safety, learning new technology, and reaching out to families. Adding responsibilities has put extra hours into the workday and additional stress on everyone involved.

Teachers are unsung heroes -- they had to reinvent what it means to teach. Every person in a school is vital, but the reality is that when you are teaching you are dealing with lives right in front of you, every single day. In the middle of the pandemic there was no division on who was being affected. Teachers were being impacted and still had to continue interacting and help young people process what was happening and still keep some level of positivity. Teachers have gone above and beyond.

– Elizabeth Demchak, Principal, Claremont International High School

"I have had to worry about all of the COVID-19 related changes, including reporting procedures, communication around all procedures, emergency school closures & reopening messages. On top of all of this have come unexpected mandates: teacher evaluations, administrator evaluations, remote and in-person English proficiency tests, many announced at the last minute making an already tough task tougher. These undermined my ability to support individual teachers for whom managing home & work simultaneously has been overwhelming. It has been a challenge for teachers to attend to their own and their students' mental health while learning to teach differently."

– Internationals Network Principal

"Honestly, the biggest challenge for me has just been trying to stay on top of what's happening in every classroom. It's so much easier for me to 'pulse check' the building when things are normal. I can walk halls, check-in with teachers and students, and observe various interactions in the cafeteria. A quick glance around can clue me into who is absent, what tension might exist in the building, new relationships, etc. Being able to truly 'know' everything that is happening in my building has been critical to my success as a school leader, and that has largely disappeared during the pandemic."

- Daniel Sass, Assistant Principal, International High School at Langley Park

Key to engaging students in Internationals Network schools is staff being aware of what the needs are of newly arrived students, especially important in an online or hybrid learning environment. In this video, [Elizabeth Demchak, Principal of Claremont International High School](#), speaks about considerations for supporting students during remote learning (June 2020).

Enrollment

Before the pandemic, in the 2019-20 school year, about 9,500 students were enrolled in Internationals Network middle and high schools across 10 districts in 6 states. In 2020-21, that number decreased by 10% to around 8,600 students. This overall trend held true at most schools. While a small handful of schools increased enrollment slightly, the rest experienced enrollment decreases of up to 19% compared to the previous year, including in New York City, the San Francisco Bay Area, Minneapolis, Virginia, and the District of Columbia.

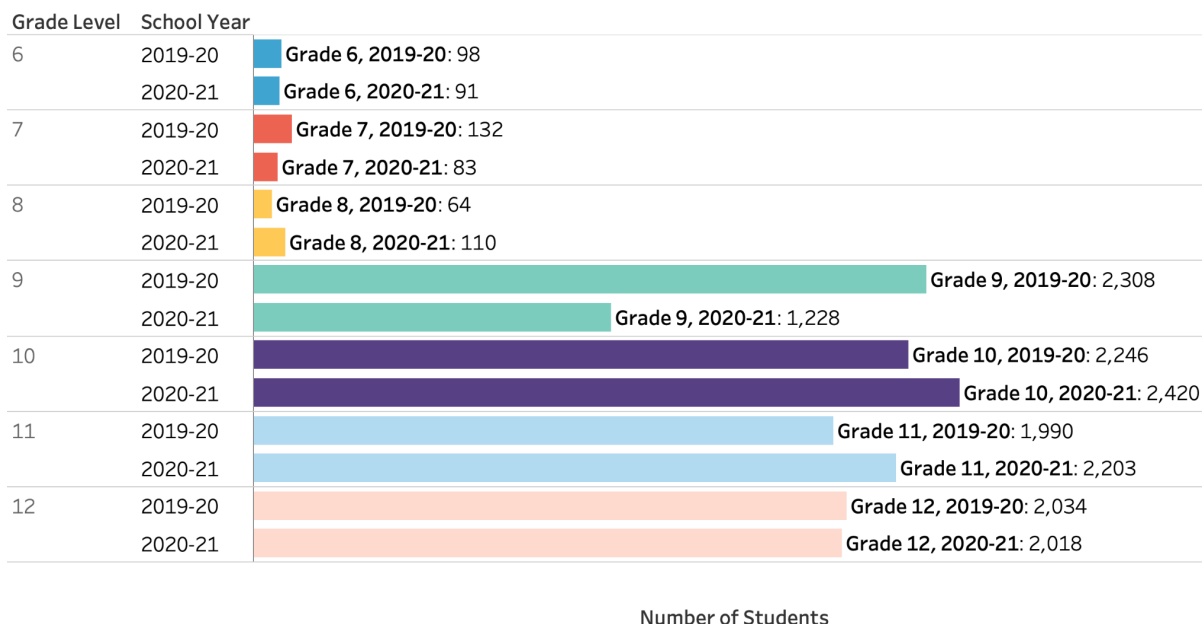
Each time a student was absent, we would go into overdrive. You'd call, text, email, Whatsapp....we were pretty distraught. Things were so bad that you didn't know, 'are they sick? Sleeping in? WiFi doesn't work? Left the country? In the emergency room?'

- Internationals Network Principal



Most of the decrease in enrollment was due to lower numbers of entering 9th graders. Before the pandemic, about 2,300 9th graders were enrolled in Internationals Network high schools; in the Fall of 2020, only 1,300 9th graders were enrolled. Other classes grew modestly in size compared to the prior year; for the most part, the prior year's students remained enrolled, and a few new students provided for growth in the 10th, 11th and 12th grade classes. The figure below illustrates these enrollment shifts, with comparisons for enrollment at each grade level in 2019-20 and 2020-21 shown side by side from grade 6 through grade 12 (all grades served by Internationals Network schools and academies).

Between School Year 19-20 and School Year 20-21, the number of ninth grade students enrolled in Internationals Network high schools decreased by nearly 50%.



Enrollment issues were exacerbated by changing and more restrictive immigration policies under the prior federal administration from 2016-20. Across the network as a whole, we estimate that more than 800 students have had to relocate due to the pandemic -- this includes students doubling up in housing, relocating to another district, moving out of state in pursuit of employment, or returning to their home country.

In NYC, there were 34,600 MLLs enrolled in the 2020-21 school year in high school, compared to 35,200 MLLS in the year prior. This decrease of nearly 2% is significantly less than the overall 10% reduction in enrollment that Internationals Network schools experienced. Data gathered about global migration reveal that migration fell 46% around the globe in the first half of 2020 and 72% in the 2nd half of 2020, resulting in many fewer newcomer students arriving in US schools (Papademetriou, 2020).

Other existential challenges not only pose significant barriers to students' current engagement with school, but can compound the threat that students do not return to school in the fall of 2021. Every school and

academy in the network has reported that there are students who have and continue to face significant personal and financial losses alongside major upheavals in their lives. These include loss of parents or family members to Covid-19, relocation, and an urgent need to work significant hours to help counter economic hardships due to job loss of parents or family members. Because students' families are overwhelmingly active in the service industry (including restaurants, food service, cleaning), as well as construction, every Internationals school community has students whose families have been faced with lost or reduced employment. As a result, the hours available to engage in school are reduced because many students must now work significant hours to help financially.

Key to enrollment is engagement with incoming students and families, which is no small feat when school is primarily online, families are new to the country and students may have emergent tech literacy. [Jaclyn Valane, Principal of the International High School at LaGuardia Community College](#) shares some strategies for enrolling newly arrived students in school, connecting with their families and making them feel welcomed into the school community. [Nedda de Castro, Principal of the International High School at Prospect Heights](#), reflects on the importance of considering parents' work schedules and constraints when scheduling meetings with them.

Attendance

Making sense of attendance and student engagement became much more complex as a result of remote and hybrid learning formats. Prior to the pandemic, more than two-thirds of Internationals students attended school at least 90% of the time but that number has dropped this year by more than half to nearly 40% of students attending 90% or more. But what "attendance" means has varied across districts, and systems for tracking attendance are not designed to provide the nuance necessary to understand student engagement fully. In contrast to the straightforward policy of marking students present when they arrive in the classroom, remote and hybrid learning have required designing new processes to capture students' participation using new district and in-house systems, as well as adapting procedures for following up.

Even a relatively mundane task such as taking attendance on a typical school day has been transformed during remote and hybrid learning into a complex set of communication needs that require new systems and involve multiple staff. When schools are online and teachers are working remotely, one student absence sets off a chain of events involving multiple adults in the school building. [This attendance case study](#) from Spring 2020 contrasts the remote and hybrid attendance process systems at Flushing International High School and International High School at Laguardia Community College in New York City.

These new processes have been described by teachers and administrators as "time consuming," and "in flux" and involve quite a few more steps than a face-to-face classroom setting. Over the past year, leaders in our network have shared new strategies for tracking attendance and engagement that go beyond merely logging

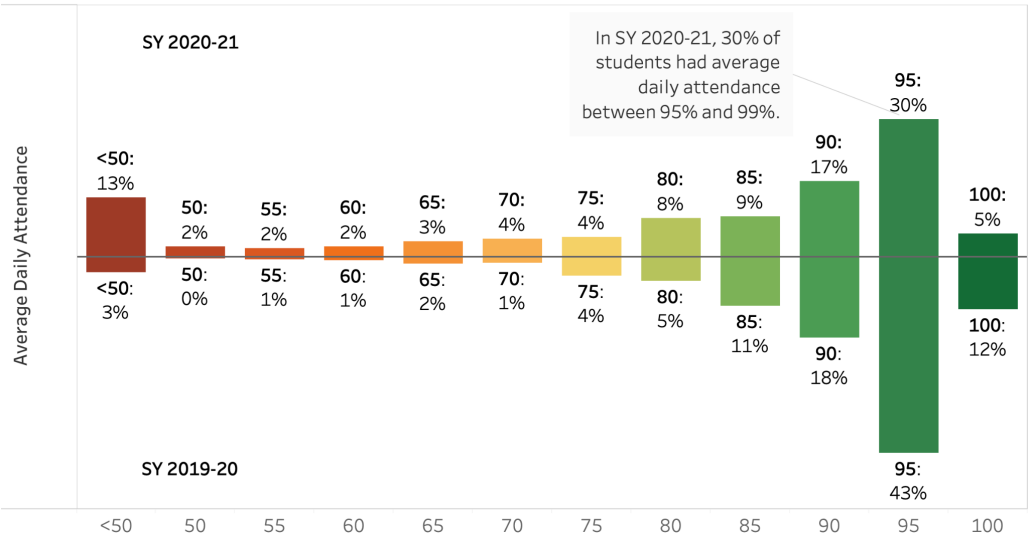
in at an appointed time. Schools relied more on competency or mastery-based approaches to learning, formative and summative assessments, and ongoing communication with students to fully understand and support students’ learning and engagement.

Some of our veteran students have really struggled virtually. They stress the difficulty of not having a partner, like they do in person, to turn to for support. They are nervous about speaking in class and do not have the tools or confidence to seek support. Our work is now to help students with tools and strategies to ask for support in class.

– Tim Brannon, Academic Principal, Francis Hammond International Academy

Although Internationals Network schools in NYC have seen fewer students drop out of school, attendance among those who remain enrolled has been lower than in previous school years.³ The New York City Department of Education deems students who are absent more than 10% of the time as chronically absent.

In School Year 19-20, 73% of Internationals Network NYC students had average daily attendance above 90%. In 20-21, 55% of Internationals’ NYC students had average daily attendance above 90%.



After the start of the pandemic in Spring 2020, the number of students who were chronically absent rose to nearly 45%. School leaders have stressed the intersecting challenges that have negatively impacted students’ attendance during the pandemic: work, mental health, family obligations, and distractions.

The figure to the left juxtaposes attendance metrics during the 2020-21 school year (on top) with those from school year

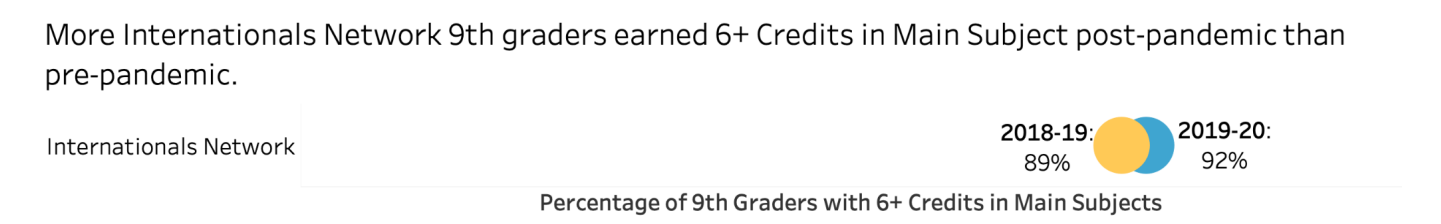
2019-20 (below the horizontal line.) Notable are the large increases in students who attend less than 50% of the time and the decrease in students with above 90% attendance.

Changes in Course Completion and Overall Achievement

Although the pandemic was very disruptive during the 2019-20 school year, Internationals Network students in 9th grade in New York City were deemed “on track” in terms of the credits they earned *more* frequently that year than in the school year before.

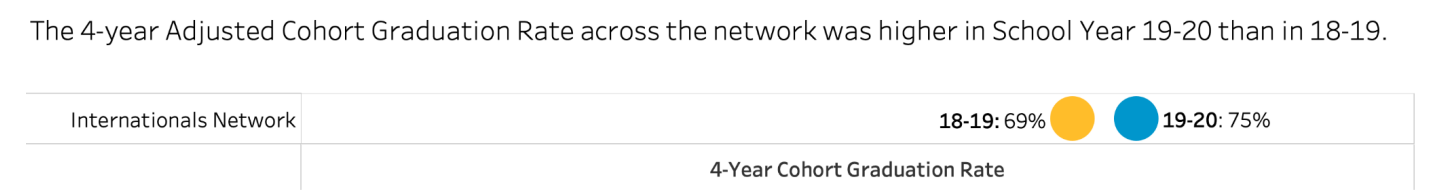
³ Note that some figures and examples in this report cite data specific to a district or region, in most cases due to availability of data exclusively in that location. Because there are 16 Internationals Network schools in New York City, we have access to a richer set of data there.

The difference was small overall -- on average, 89% of 9th graders were on track at the end of the 18-19 school year, versus 92% in 19-20. At some schools, the gap between years was larger, although most schools mirrored the overall trend. The percentage of 9th graders who earned enough credits to be on track for graduation was higher in **school year 2019-20** than in **school year 2018-19** (pre-pandemic) as seen in the chart below.



Graduation, Dropout, Discharge

For states with high hurdles that students must achieve in addition to course completion to attain a diploma, such as New York State’s Regents tests, the shift to remote learning has been accompanied by cancellation of many exit exams. Despite drops in enrollment and attendance, the overall adjusted 4 year cohort graduation rate across Internationals Network was somewhat higher in **2020** than **2019**. In addition, only three percent of the students enrolled in NYC network schools were discharged without graduating. Thus, the decrease in enrollment from 2019-20 to 2020-21 seems primarily caused by having fewer newcomer students enroll as opposed to having many older students leave school without graduating. This is in contrast to the NYC Department of Education overall, where the number of 9th graders enrolled was about 79,000 in both 2019-20 and 2020-21.



Across the network, the four-year graduation rate for the **Class of 2020** was 75%, higher than the **Class of 2019**’s graduation rate, which was 69%. Fifteen out of our sixteen schools in New York State had higher graduation rates in 2020 than in 2019; this increase may in part be attributable to the waiver of graduation requirements around Regents exams. In a typical school year, most of Internationals Network students must earn a score of above 65 on the ELA and Algebra Regents exams; in 2020, any student who had previously taken the exam was given a waiver that enabled them to graduate even if they did not have a score of 65 or higher. Overall, variation in the difference between graduation rates in 2020 and 2019 suggests that diverse states’ policies regarding graduation requirements and shifts in school attendance policies played a large role in determining students’ graduation outcomes.

Many non-graduates in 2020 remained enrolled for a 5th year of high school; only 3% of the total number of students enrolled were discharged without a diploma that year, meaning that 9% of the Class of 2020 were discharged without graduating, versus 12% of the Class of 2019. Of those students who were “negatively discharged,” 57% were discharged after 20 days of consecutive absences, 30% were thought to enroll in a different school but our staff could not verify their enrollment, 9% were discharged after turning 21 and

essentially “aging out” of the K-12 system, and 4% moved to new addresses without leaving new contact information.

Students who would have normally struggled and may have eventually dropped out are dropping out sooner. Our SLIFE students are struggling. We've gotten over 70 new students this year and so we have struggled to bring them into the building for tech support.

– Jennifer Springer, Assistant Principal, Lafayette International Community High School

Providing opportunities for students in their 5th year of high school to make up incomplete coursework has been a major priority for schools in the 2020-21 school year. Because of students' stretched schedules, work and family demands and lower attendance, some schools have had to resort to a triage approach for the small number of students who have struggled to attend or have failed multiple classes.

While most students have only one or two failures or incompletes, a small percentage have an overwhelming amount of work to make up in order to graduate. Because some students are working full-time and also attending schools, schools are meeting students where they are at by providing opportunities to earn the needed credits to graduate, such as organizing virtual classes during evening hours, as described in the example below.

Attendance has been particularly an issue for students due to their work schedules, as many immigrant students have had to take on heavy work schedules to help keep their families afloat. At the International Academy at Alexandria City Public High School in Virginia, students who could not attend school synchronously during the day were left without any option of attending. After generating an action plan with input from all stakeholders, the International Academy launched a [night school](#) with support from the district leadership and school board. This example highlights the importance of allowing for enough flexibility in district policies to ensure that all students are served.

The Washington Post

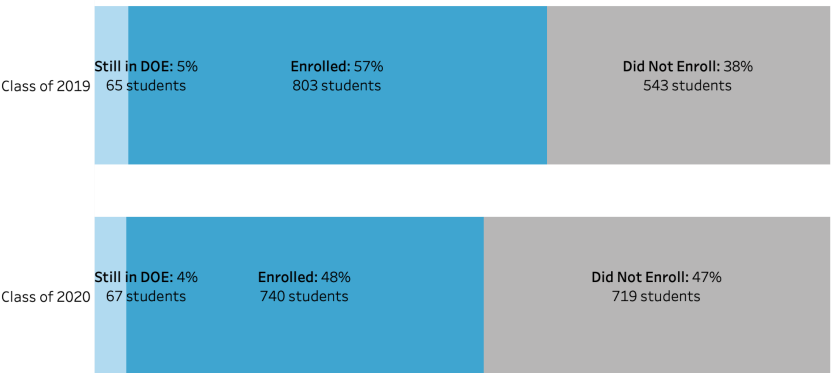
Democracy Dies in Darkness

The pandemic forced these high-schoolers to work full time. So they're going to class at night.

College application and enrollment

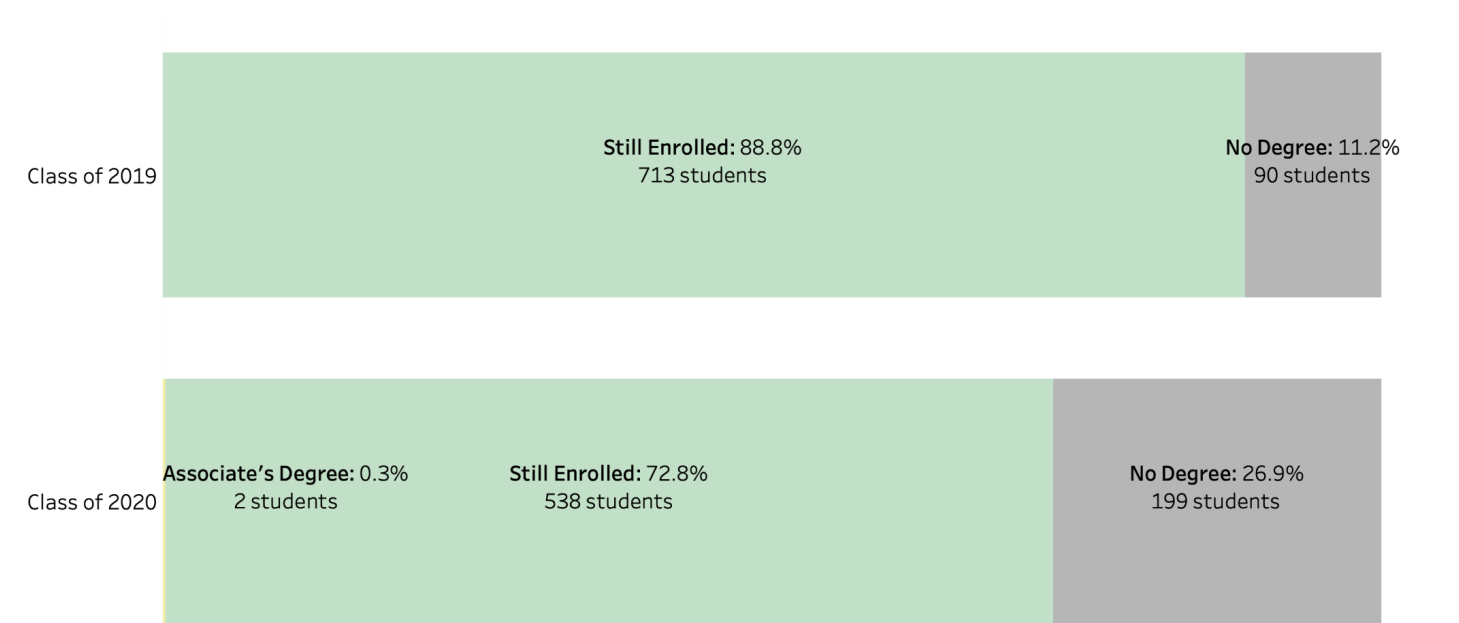
A major shift occurred over the past two years of college enrollment: SAT tests were waived for all students, making applications to more selective colleges within reach for students who might not otherwise have considered them. Nonetheless, college application and enrollment rates dropped nationally across most population groups. Generally, we see about 70% of Internationals Network students enroll in college within two years of high school graduation. For the class of 2020, about 53% of Internationals' graduating class of 2020 enrolled in college by the Spring 2021 semester, as can be seen in the chart above.

One year after their respective graduations, Internationals Network students from the Class of 2019 were about 20% more likely to enroll in college than the network's students from the Class of 2020.



Forty-eight percent of students enrolled directly in college after graduating from an Internationals Network school, and about 4% of students pursued a dual enrollment option; these students enrolled in college courses and remained active in their high schools (although they have already earned their high school diploma). This figure was slightly lower than the prior year; about 62% of students from the Class of 2019 enrolled in college for the Fall 2020 semester. Among students who enrolled in college, persistence was also lower in the Class of 2020; Internationals Network students from the Class of 2020 left college at about 2.5 times the rate of the Class of 2019 (27% vs. 11%)

One year after their respective graduations, Internationals Network students from the Class of 2020 stopped attending college more than twice as often as the network's students from the Class of 2019.



Addressing Challenges in Remote Teaching and Learning Through Innovations

In addition to the emotional upheaval, the loss of lives and livelihoods and the general problematic nature of the months of the pandemic, online learning proved difficult for all learners. Students and educators across the world have faced these layers of challenges. The shift to remote learning has required tremendous effort and creativity on the part of all school leaders and staff. This was particularly true for educators serving immigrant MLLs, given the disproportional impact of the pandemic on this population. Internationals Network has responded to the uncertainty and need that educators expressed to understand what is working by creating more spaces for educators to come together and share ideas. As a result of this collaborative approach, we have observed remarkable innovations in how teachers and leaders use digital tools. Through conversations with teachers and gathering of artifacts, as well as conversations with students, we have documented ways that students and schools have shifted, responded and innovated in response to the demands of remote learning in MLL classrooms.

School leaders have stressed that engagement in school and participation in meaningful and rigorous learning is not captured in attendance metrics. On the one hand, low attendance numbers hide the richness and complexity of what is happening. High attendance does not necessarily mean full participation. All schools and academies are faced with the challenge of how to engage students, provide them with rich opportunities for collaboration, engage them in formative assessment and performance-based tasks, and make all of those opportunities available across all learning environments, both in person and remote, all ages and grades, all levels of English proficiency and all literacy levels.

To guide teachers to support their MLLs during online learning and make explicit how engagement could look, Internationals instructional coach, Kelly Qureshi, worked with teachers to create a [rubric on engagement during remote learning](#). This resource was helpful to provide explicit language and examples to students and create transparency.

As a result, Internationals has focused on developing resources for remote learning for multilingual learners, and providing opportunities for teachers to develop and share curriculum and instructional practices with each other to ensure that the strategies that seem effective are shared. The way Internationals schools are designed is to address these disparities intentionally: with highly differentiated, project-based instruction that accommodates the heterogeneity of student populations. Because these disparities have been exacerbated, staff are even more stretched exerting momentous effort to address instructional needs alongside social emotional support and existential services. While schools in the network have always attended to these, the efforts in this area have expanded dramatically given the situation.

I think online school changed me as a student and a person because now I think I am more active in school; not like before the pandemic.... now I answer more in class and I also participate more and I think this pandemic helped me with that because we're not in person class... so, I feel like I am more confident because people can't see me and that helped me to build up that confidence... that will let me make more friends, to be more active, and to be more happy.

– Internationals Network Student

The pandemic and resultant shift to remote learning have ushered in countless recommendations on remote learning. Internationals Network schools are rich with ideas on how to support multilingual students. However, there are scant resources available on how to do both simultaneously. Internationals Network's professional development team developed and rolled out resources for schools through one-on-one, team, school-based and network-wide professional development opportunities every day, providing support services to more than 1,000 educators in our network.

Soon after the shift to remote learning, Dolan Morgan, Internationals Director of Professional Development Services, and Genna Robbins, Manager of Professional Development Services, began the task of helping teachers gear up to deliver instruction online, but centering culturally and linguistically responsive approaches. [Their guide](#) outlines some key intersections between remote learning and supports for Multilingual Learners.

Because many multilingual learners are new to developing their English proficiency, designing remote learning for them is particularly hard. Heterogeneous groups require varied scaffolds and inputs, including small group instruction. Arranging opportunities and technical setups for small group instruction can be daunting in virtual spaces because of tech limitations and varying levels of student tech access. At the same time, technology can be a powerful tool, as it provides opportunities for easy access to powerful translation services, some of which integrate seamlessly with other applications. Texts are available in multiple languages, and there is a wider array of peers to connect with, especially for students who might otherwise be isolated linguistically due to lower representation of their home language in class or school community.

Fostering Adult Learning to Address Cross-Cutting Challenges

Central to Internationals Network's approach to transforming education for multilingual learners is fostering adult learning so that educators can learn, address problems of practice, share what is working and what is not, and have a space and time to take risks, reflect and learn. Often this time is far too restricted during school or is taken over by logistical minutiae or fires that need to be put out. From March 2020-May 2021, we developed many cross-school, cross-district collaborative adult learning spaces that enabled teachers, leaders, and counseling staff the opportunity to meet together and share ideas.

Central to this task is the creation of shared learning experiences for educators, so Internationals Network considers it critical that we find ways to cultivate ongoing adult learning and community to help practitioners best support MLLs. Starting in late March 2020, we shifted our work online, offering working groups, team support, committees, curriculum feedback and support sessions, including a summer institute and a network-wide professional development conference that featured teacher-led workshops. In addition, we hosted leader convenings that brought together school leaders from across geographies, two national leader conferences, school-level leader meetings, regional teacher and leader convenings, and school intervisitations in a remote format.

One such approach to adult learning has been Working Groups, a strategy employed over the past decade by Internationals Network that has proven especially effective at providing a space for educators to learn, take

risks, and share ideas. Internationals Working Groups are collaborative groups of teachers and school leaders who regularly convene to investigate and develop approaches to address a specific instructional aspiration or dilemma. Working groups have been a space for educators to share ideas across schools and in a mix of roles, enabling them to ask questions and work through the messiness of innovation in a safe and trusting environment with colleagues who are facing similar challenges.

Rocio Reyes, Assistant Principal at Richmond High School and leader of the Richmond High International Academy, elaborated on the importance of the Working Group: Students with Interrupted Formal Education. While not focused exclusively on addressing the challenges of remote learning, this group gave her the opportunity to learn with other educators. "Assistant principals almost never get professional development time," she shared. She appreciated not being the one planning the series because "it provided the opportunity to fully immerse in the PD and reflection which is not often the case when you are the facilitator. Even though we are tired at the end of the day, there is still bandwidth for something like this. The reflection space allows us to plan and problem-solve around issues unique to what we do, very different from pre-packaged professional development. Prioritizing adult learning and creating spaces to problem solve have been particularly valuable in planning for the future as they provide an opportunity to hear from other leaders."

Committees at Internationals Network are another structure to bring together educators across schools to meet monthly either in person or online. Committee members are tasked with supporting the development of major conferences, providing input on professional development services, gathering and sharing resources, and creating a suite of offerings for colleagues throughout our schools. In recent years, the New York City Professional Development Committee has shifted toward collaborative efforts organized by theme, with subgroups including Anti-racist and Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Classrooms, Trauma-Informed Classrooms, Reading and Literacy, and Student Voice and Leadership.

The collaboratively constructed inter-school event, "[Reimagining Schools by Integrating Student Voices](#)," was an initiative of Internationals Network's New York City Professional Development Committee, which includes educators representing all Internationals' NYC schools. The Student Voice and Leadership Subcommittee in recent years has partnered with young people to create Internationals Network's first ever student-run conference and held two events titled "What I Wish My Teachers Knew About Me" to illuminate student stories and thoughts about education. The "Reimagining Schools" event was a natural evolution of the group's previous efforts brought about by a belief that the future of our schools must involve the thoughts, experiences, and feelings of the young people we serve. Subgroup members Britt Fremstad, Teacher, ELLIS Preparatory Academy; Sarah Cunningham, Teacher, IHS for Health Sciences; Jal Raval, AP, Bronx International HS; and Myoungmee Monchinski, Teacher, Crotona IHS worked together on a monthly basis to discuss, plan, create, and ultimately facilitate the event, which hinged on an analysis of students' responses to survey questions about their experience of school throughout the pandemic.

Classroom-Level Innovations

With a focus on maintaining both language development and discipline specific learning, Internationals Network teachers have created innovative and often interdisciplinary ways for students to express themselves and stay connected throughout remote learning. Many of these have taken the form of projects, as project-based learning is particularly suited to the needs of multilingual learners. Projects have diverse entry points, many opportunities for differentiation, scaffolding for the highly diverse range of student needs, and authentic content and products for real audiences.

At Flushing International High School, an ELA teacher and a Visual Arts Teacher, Kevin Marquez and Rebecca Whitehill, collaborated on an interdisciplinary project as part of an introductory unit for the year. Students participated in a poetry unit with the theme of Identity and were asked to write an “I Am” poem through a multimedia presentation. This gave students the opportunity to express, celebrate, and honor their identities with the entire school community, while also developing their writing, speaking and technology skills. Some are linked here: [I am Yuhao](#), [I am Alex](#) , [I am Arsana](#) , [I am Hanwen](#), [I am Leidy](#), [I am Lolitha](#), [I am Jose](#) , [I am Rathila](#), [I am Theo](#)

Internationals Curriculum Share- Jenell Pezzulich



Core to the Internationals Approach is the centrality of student collaboration. Below, health teacher Jenell Pezzulich, a teacher at International Academy at Alexandria City Public High School in Alexandria, Virginia [shares ways that she used collaborative roles](#) to promote student participation and understanding. These roles can be applied across multiple contexts, disciplines, and activities.

Among these key supports were resources and strategies to help teachers attend to students' social emotional needs and be present, despite not being visible, immerse students in real-world learning that is engaging, has opportunities for meaningful interaction among students, and has clear expectations and ample opportunities for language development.

The Pendulum Project



Home Science

Slide 3

Q & A

Notes

Pointer

CC

Captions

Info

Tips

Settings

EXIT

Working from home, students often did not have materials. Teachers responded through innovation, as in the case of 9/10 Physics Teacher Lucy Blackford, from English Language Learners & International Support (ELLIS) Preparatory Academy in the Bronx, New York, who engaged her students in [The Pendulum Project](#).

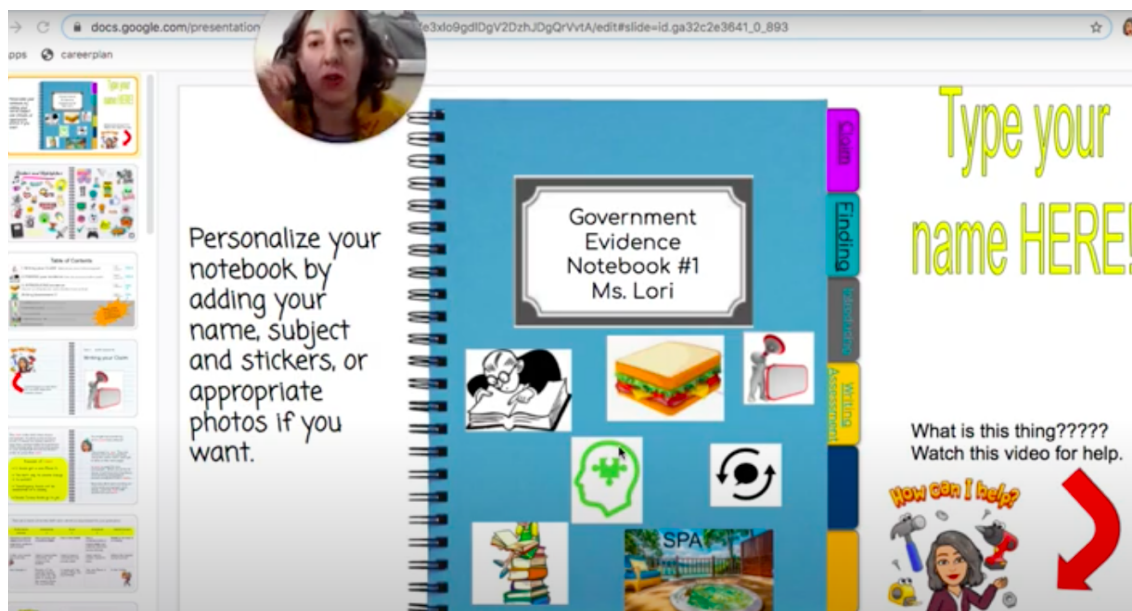
Our school focused on interdisciplinary project planning and instruction. Each teacher had a support group. The teacher supported their group of students with all the subjects and took care of their academic as well as social-emotional needs.

– Shweta Ratra, Principal, Crotona International High School

Internationals Network schools seek to provide opportunities for students to experience community, trust, guidance, hope, and agency. Teachers' thoughtfulness in facilitating online learning spaces has served to help many students navigate an extremely challenging time. Many Internationals schools have advisory groups that have provided a pre-existing space for maintaining connection and relationships with students. One advisory used games ([Gameify](#), [Gameify](#), [Talk!](#)) to engage and connect students, while another set up [Remote "Families"](#) to help students connect with each other and feel supported. Addressing trauma has been a key concern among Internationals Network educators for the past 15 months, and many school-wide structures, adult learning spaces, and school-focused conversations have focused on how to both mitigate student trauma but also address residual trauma for the year ahead.

Teachers Areum Kang and Kholood Qumei from [Manhattan International High School](#) organized a virtual school intervisitation on “Exploring Trauma Awareness in the Classroom.” This teacher-led professional development opportunity brought together educators from across Internationals Network to explore resources, [student perspectives on stress and trauma](#), and to learn from the professional expertise of the school’s social worker Madelin Zambrana-Gonzalez and research-based strategies for addressing trauma. Key takeaways included the importance of: sustaining close school community through built-in Social Emotional Learning (SEL), the need for on-going professional development for the staff; a focus on re-establishing social support and communication; and the need to identify students with most needs and connecting them to appropriate professional services.

Expert teachers of MLLs know that it is especially crucial that students remain engaged, understand what they are learning and why, receive swift feedback, and can access assignments. They know it is crucial to provide choice in assignments so that students feel a sense of agency over their learning, incorporate opportunities for group and individual work, and create spaces for discussion, whether through video chat or through message boards. It is key that groups be set up so that students can give each other feedback and utilize one another for content and language support; home language groups are especially useful for navigating language barriers. Translation tools make it possible for students to use their entire linguistic repertoire to deepen their content knowledge.



Lori Sandler, who teaches Government to 12th graders at the International High School for Health Sciences in Queens, New York, innovated by creating [Online Evidence Notebooks for Building Student Writing Skills](#) to both support her students and address the content demands of her 12th grade course.

For schools to address students' needs, projects must feel meaningful and have transparent connections to students' lived experiences. It is especially valuable for MLLs because these concrete connections have been shown to serve as powerful motivators for engagement and persistence. International Network schools have always focused on projects as a means to bring together the threads of what works for MLLs, including language development, opportunities for scaffolding and differentiation, and content focus ([National Academies of Science and Engineering, 2017](#)).

Teacher Tim Ross at Claremont International High School has students produce a regular podcast called the *Claremont Insider*, a multi-faceted interdisciplinary project opportunity with a real audience: the entire school community. Students conduct interviews in English and then weave them into a professional-quality podcast. The final product is relevant to the entire community, features students and school community members, and is played each week in advisory. In this episode of the [podcast](#), students talk with Principal Elizabeth Demchak about protocols for safely reopening school.

Because projects allow for a flexible pace, they are well-suited to remote learning. Perhaps most importantly, projects naturally lend themselves to real world applications. While many students may be interested in understanding and investigating the current crisis (How does the virus work? How has it impacted communities disproportionately? In what ways can we be change agents through our learning?), others may relish the opportunity to think deeply about other topics that interest them, such as immigration, economics, and social justice.

Teacher Britt Fremstad at ELLIS Preparatory Academy in the Bronx, New York, was intent on providing opportunities for experiential learning through field trips despite the constraints of the pandemic. In this short video, she explains her approach to [Outdoor Learning](#).



Projects also provide ample opportunities for both formative and authentic assessment. Across International Network schools, authentic assessment through projects takes many forms. One of the most notable are graduation portfolios, or PBATs (Performance based assessment tasks), used in many schools, especially in NYC. During remote learning when standardized tests were largely cancelled, authentic, formative assessments have been vital to understanding what students have learned. PBATs are a cornerstone because they serve multiple purposes, being both a more authentic assessment alternative as well as a space for student inquiry.

Leah Pascarella has been teaching English Language Arts to 11th graders at Claremont International High School for 7 years. Her yearly Personal Statement project enables students to demonstrate mastery of literary elements through a standards-aligned unit that is open-ended and flexible. The students then present their projects as part of their 11th grade portfolio, a requirement for graduation. The project shows the power of student voice and choice, as topics are students' choice--they are given the opportunity to write about things they care about, in this case their identity. The open-ended nature of the Personal Statement project created a structured space that some students found useful to reflect and express emotions linked to prior experiences. The topic is intentionally left open, and students self-select topics (from video games to immigration and loss). The length is limited to 650 words so that students can also use their project for college applications. This year, Leah added a poetry component (use of writing strategies, metaphor, simile, etc.). In the remote setting, "there is less control than in the classroom," Leah explained, so she uses "notebook time" where students have their camera focused not on their face but on their writing, which they do by hand. They were encouraged to take advantage of their full linguistic repertoires to complete their first draft. "The unit helps them use figurative language to express their challenging experiences and in this way, they get a true and tangible understanding of what these literary elements are because they are so personal." Leah wanted to model for students and chose a very vulnerable piece to share about herself to give students the space to be vulnerable as well. Key to this project is the choice: "students should be able to choose the topic and have it be something meaningful to them. They are making real choices. Students go through the assessment process and they learn from it." [Here](#) are some samples of their personal statements.

Innovation as Flexibility

Among the biggest challenges that school communities have faced since March 2020 have been on-going shifting demands, uncertainty and emotional challenges. School communities lost staff members to coronavirus, students lost parents, family members and peers, and many educators were at home navigating online learning while caring for their own families and attending to the needs of students in the school community. Innovation has taken the form of endless creative and innovative responses across Internationals Network. Flexibility has been fundamental in enabling schools to create structures and opportunities that best suit their students.



Trauma has been a key concern, and schools across Internationals Network have developed creative ways to address students' growing social emotional needs. Yet, typical school budgets do not allow for a full social work staff. The Internationals High School at Langley Park in Prince George's County Public Schools, Maryland has built out their pre-existing [partnership with the social work program at the University of Maryland](#) that benefits all involved. In the program, school social workers Sarah Ferrari and Lesly Lemus supervise first year and advanced UMD social work students via a structured social work internship program they have designed. This past year, the program was entirely remote, but expanded with more interns and more possibilities for student-facing services. The school's principal and assistant principal have supported the program throughout -- a key to its success. IHS Langley Park's MLL students have benefited from tailored support services and one-on-one counseling, and the participating interns receive practical experience and skilled guidance.

Over the past school year, schools have been afforded tremendous opportunities for flexibility that have paved the way for innovations. One such adaptation has been both a challenge and an opportunity: the need to create flexible schedules to meet the demands of remote and hybrid learning while teachers are based at home and in school buildings. School leaders across Internationals Network have problem-solved and collaborated to generate creative and student-centered solutions. Such flexibility in scheduling has enabled Internationals Network schools to provide students with supportive, differentiated, structured learning environments in this time of tremendous anxiety and loss. Flexibility in scheduling enabled schools to address tangible student needs.

At [Brooklyn International High School](#) in Brooklyn, New York, the [one subject per day schedule](#) created in March 2020 enabled students to focus and be more effective. These schedules have evolved as school has shifted from remote to hybrid learning.

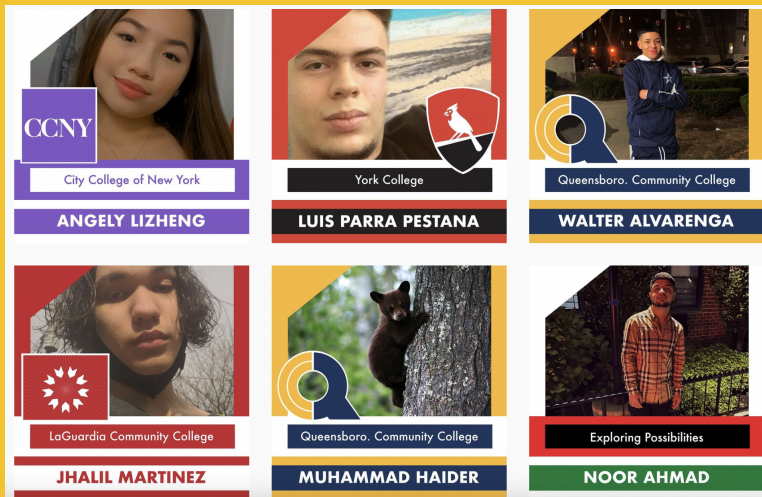
At the International High School at Langley Park in Prince George's County, Maryland, leaders and staff created a [block schedule](#) with four days of synchronous learning and one "office hour day" each Wednesday. On that day, all students had an advisory and opportunities to meet individually with teachers, make up work, and receive tailored support. This schedule was cost effective even during hybrid schooling, as it saved the costs of busing students across the county for one school day. From an adult perspective, having all meetings in one day reduced the need for afterschool meetings. Carlos Beato, the school's principal, refers to the "liberatory design process" that was used and said this approach "has created a more inclusive culture -- we try things, and if they don't work, we tweak, giving everyone a chance to weigh in on what is working and move forward."

Innovations in Post-Secondary Advising

Post-secondary awareness and college advising are key components of Internationals schools, starting as soon as students enter their first year in Internationals Network schools. College counselors and bilingual social workers and all staff who serve in an advisory function were forced to pivot quickly to understand changes in college application processes, requirements, and deadlines. In addition, the process of supporting students through the multi-step, deadline driven process of application, financial aid and decision-making shifted entirely online.

Jackie Peña, College and Career Counselor and Bilingual School Social Worker at English Language Learners & International Support (ELLIS) Preparatory Academy in the Bronx stressed the value of the relationships the school has maintained with their graduates. They frequently reach out to her to check in. So, in October 2020, in the height of remote learning, she enlisted some of the graduates for the first time to lead "[virtual college trips](#)" to the campuses they were attending. The trips, which are typically conducted in person, were shifted to a virtual format and led by ELLIS alumni who were attending each college. For the tours, each alum turned on their phone cameras on Zoom or FaceTime and essentially walked the virtual visitors -- juniors and seniors from ELLIS -- through campus on a private tour. "It was so easy to get them on board to do this," she shared, "because they consider us family." She stressed how impactful it was for current students to see someone like them, potentially someone from the same country or same language group, on the campus. For this reason the alumni could also speak to things they knew would be relevant for the juniors and seniors. "Our students often feel a certain college is out of reach but they have a whole different vision once they see that a peer with a similar background is attending. It's not only seeing them, but seeing them there, with a smile on their face, on the campus in the setting, seeing the dorms, classes, the gym, their friends, it makes it so real and is inspiring for students." While the virtual tour was born out of necessity, Ms. Pena plans to repeat it in coming years because of its overwhelming success among both current students and alumni.

The back and forth with Internationals College Counselors and Advisors throughout the process took place in every imaginable medium: Facebook live events, Instagram, Whatsapp, text, Gchat, Zoom. Decision Day is the school-wide community celebration of postsecondary plans that follows many months of planning, discussing, writing, applying and nail-biting.



At Flushing International High School, College Counselor Erin Dowding hosted virtual post-secondary decision days to maintain the celebratory spirit of this important decision. In an event hosted on Zoom, students were greeted with speeches by the principal, their teachers and words of wisdom from alumni of the school. "Our Decision Day has gained momentum over the years," said Erin. "We have tried to make it a celebratory day and a surprise

for students and a procession of clapping and enjoyment and well wishing. It motivates students to see that this real thing is happening. Even seniors get discouraged because the school year stretches so long and they still have assignments to complete and tests to take. This year has been rough -- everyone is very tired. The celebration gives a push, a feeling of community and is a celebration for the whole school, and it motivates and inspires everyone."



PART III

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Discussion and Implications

In taking stock of the impact, we have been confronted with the realities of loss. Throughout these past months, we have sought also to make sense of what the young people and adults in our schools have learned and how they have innovated during the pandemic. Our approach to moving forward has key elements: Reflection, Re-Entry, Re-Engagement, and Recovery and Renewal.

For the new school year, they need to pay attention to students that are new to our school because when we come back to school it's not online anymore. So, like, it will be a new life again and also they need to pay attention to students who are not doing any work.

– Internationals Network Student

Our focus for re-entering and re-imagining the year ahead is not explicitly on making up for lost time or “catching up” on lost learning, even as we are aware that there is catching up to do. Rejecting the explicitly deficit-oriented phrase “learning loss” does not mean pretending that the past year plus has not been traumatic. In reality, it means acknowledging this trauma and taking care not to place the responsibility for it on young people. We need to reframe the idea of “learning loss” and use a lens that focuses instead on what young people and adults *have* learned during the pandemic. We take care that the message we send to students when we speak to them about “learning loss” does not imply that they must work harder to make up for something they did not learn or do because of remote learning and COVID-19. “Loss” implies that something that was in our possession has been taken away. We want to flip that perspective.

Rather than spending precious time and emotional energy solely on standardized testing, how can we spend the limited and precious time we have with students unpacking and making sense of what we have learned this past year? How can we put students’ voices and experiences in the forefront? Even under the best of circumstances, testing only reveals to us limited once-a-year information that is modestly actionable and has not proven to deeply improve practice. Instead, how can we create authentic opportunities for deep

learning - projects, performance assessments, and work-based learning experiences that allow students opportunities to show us what they know and can do (rather than what they cannot)? If we are truly concerned about addressing educational inequity, old forms of assessment cannot tell us what we need in this new moment.

Exploring the impact of remote learning and planning for the year ahead has forced educators across Internationals Network for Public Schools to examine strategies, structures and practices in a much more nuanced way. Our approach to the year ahead, addressing the question of “what is working,” has become extremely complex. This is part of our on-going reflecting and taking stock. Our focus on innovation has been with an eye toward understanding key factors that have enabled our schools to function and continue to support students, while staying true to our core values and principles.

Centering equity is key in the work ahead, and it needs to happen with a whole school approach. We echo the [findings](#) of organizations in California that have called for a restorative start, with relationships at the center. Moving into this new school year toward recovery and renewal, how do we leverage the flexibilities of the past 15 months that have enabled us to innovate and generate more opportunities to take risks? How do we invest in the mental health of staff and students, rather than have our singular focus be on keeping pace?

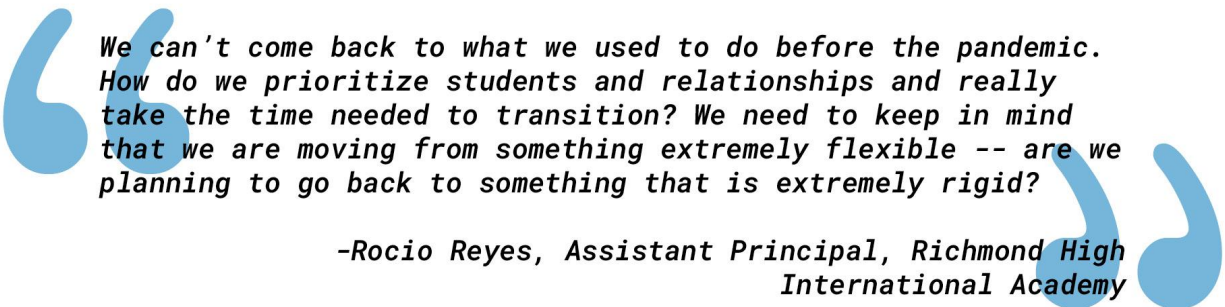
“The new school year will mean yet another major shift in routine - change is hard for everyone. Students (and staff) dealt with a lot of trauma to shift from in-person to fully-remote last spring. Some are just becoming used to it - to make that shift again is a difficult ask. Trying to break the standard of ‘normalcy’ or comparing everything to ‘pre-COVID.’”

– Mary Pollack, Principal, Pan American International High School at Monroe

We ask ourselves, what will students and staff need after more than a year of remote learning? What might that mean for students who have never set foot in school? How can we incorporate asynchronous access to learning in a way that is more robust? What should we remember not to forget as we rush toward “normal?” How do we center student and educator voices in crafting our reopening plans? How will we do the important work of building community intentionally because many students and teachers have never even met in person or even seen each other? How will we help students with low attendance find ways to participate, including those who still need to work during school hours? Most importantly, how do we take our innovations into the school year ahead?

Recommendations: Planning for the New Year and Re-engaging Students with School

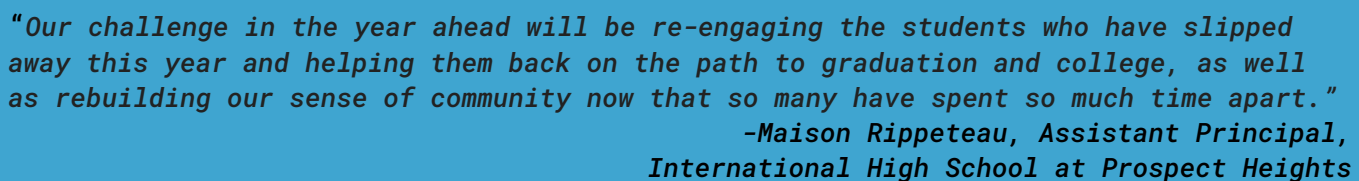
Internationals Network, along with colleagues in local and national advocacy organizations, has recognized an array of needs that accompany us into the year ahead. These include a need to expand broadband access for people of all ages (for economic, social, and political justice) (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020) and the need for on-going professional development supports (Myung, Kimner, Cottingham, Diaz Luna, Shiels & Hough, 2021).



We can't come back to what we used to do before the pandemic. How do we prioritize students and relationships and really take the time needed to transition? We need to keep in mind that we are moving from something extremely flexible -- are we planning to go back to something that is extremely rigid?

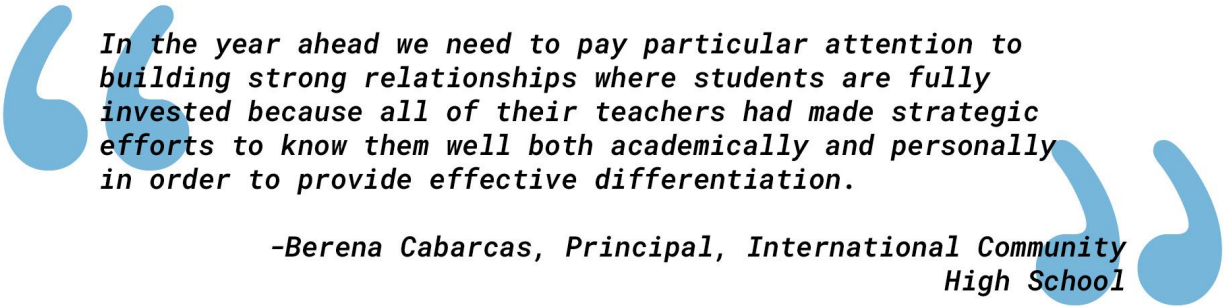
-Rocio Reyes, Assistant Principal, Richmond High International Academy

We have been impressed by responsiveness and innovations, but also concerned by lagging engagement and failure rates. While we do not yet have final outcome data for schools from 2020-21, we anticipate that the results will likely reflect more losses than gains. Observations and feedback from students and teachers have indicated that moving forward we should maintain intentional ways to build schools with healthy and trusting relationships among students and staff. Recommendations from other educators have included helping students build relationships (with themselves, friends, and teachers) through smaller classes and an increase in the ratio of teachers to students as well as the prioritization of mental health through an increase in programs and equipped staff, as in guidance counselors (Ferlazzo, 2021).



"Our challenge in the year ahead will be re-engaging the students who have slipped away this year and helping them back on the path to graduation and college, as well as rebuilding our sense of community now that so many have spent so much time apart."
*-Maison Rippeteau, Assistant Principal,
International High School at Prospect Heights*

Unfortunately, we do not have the luxury of time regarding all the decisions that need to be made to launch school for the coming year. These recommendations are grounded in the practical realities of schools. While our recommendations do not include specific suggestions for the use of federal funds, they have implications for how funds could best be spent. On the ground in school, there is a sense of urgency and insufficient time for reflection as schools shift their attention to preparing for summer school and the coming school year. We need to make room for deeper structural thinking, but the window of time before school opens is very short. Internationals Network for Public Schools offers the following recommendations for re-engaging multilingual learners with school, with a particular focus on immigrant students at the secondary level. Critical decisions on programming and the earmarking of federal, state and local funds are in process and will have significant impacts on the year ahead.



In the year ahead we need to pay particular attention to building strong relationships where students are fully invested because all of their teachers had made strategic efforts to know them well both academically and personally in order to provide effective differentiation.

-Berena Cabarcas, Principal, International Community High School

Decisions about programming, strategies, approaches and funding should include attending to the following:

- 1. Keep equity at the center in recognition that some students have been more negatively impacted by the pandemic and remote learning.** Internet connectivity has been a significant barrier for many students throughout the pandemic, as has the rigidity of the traditional school schedule that prevented working adolescents from participating fully in school. Both will continue to be barriers in the school year ahead unless a more systematic attempt is made to address these and other inequities.
- 2. Encourage school-level innovation and cross-school collaborations by creating intentional opportunities for adult learning.** Fostering innovation will mean including time in the schedule and ensuring opportunities for meaningful adult learning and collaboration. This will necessitate creating flexibility that encourages innovation and new ways of collaborating across schools. It could mean providing incentives for schools to pool their resources and serve students in ways that are not possible for individual schools. Above all, it will require flexibility, risk-taking and leadership.
- 3. Encourage and allow for scheduling flexibilities to ensure that all students are served.** Educators have recognized the limitations of the traditional school schedule, especially for the hardest hit students who have had to work as a result of the pandemic's impact. Despite this glaring inequity, most districts have continued to emphasize time-on-task and synchronous learning in their attendance metrics. Future flexibilities in scheduling will promote innovation in seat time policies to address persistent inequities for low-income learners.
- 4. Promote and support competency-based learning and performance assessment that de-emphasizes seat time but ensures access to rigorous learning experiences and higher order thinking for all students.** Performance assessment, project-based and mastery learning experiences, when well-designed, have multiple access points for diverse learners and foster high quality, complex learning experiences for all learners.
- 5. Use multiple forms of assessment to inform instruction on an on-going basis rather than overly relying on infrequent standardized assessments.** The past year has demonstrated that we must rely on more diverse types of assessment to inform instruction and design supports for all learners, rather than relying exclusively on standardized tests that often provide results too late to inform meaningful interventions or changes.
- 6. Foster collective responsibility for students to promote student success and address social emotional needs and trauma.** Schools that are relationship centered provide the infrastructure and communication systems to ensure that there is collective responsibility for student learning and well-being. Such systems foreground responsibility, accountability and a collective investment in students. This requires that structures for social-emotional learning and support are built into the structure of the school, not the exclusive purview of one staff member or department.

7. **Maintain meaningful culturally and linguistically informed engagement with families.** Strong relationships and engagement with families that are culturally and linguistically responsive benefits students and the school community as a whole. During times of challenge, such as the pandemic, schools that had existing strong relationships with families found themselves better prepared to support all learners.
8. **To ensure equity to support students and families with greatest needs, provide flexibility in funding and how to use it by prioritizing the input and decisions of those who know students and families best.** To ensure that the expertise of educators who work with students on a daily basis is harnessed as vital funds are earmarked, flexibility in funding allocations is required. It is not realistic to anticipate that centralized decisions for funding can take the complex and differing needs of many individual school communities into account.
9. **Target resources to attend to trauma-informed practices and improved mental health of students, families and staff.** The past 15 months have taken a toll on the mental health of students, their families and school staff. Resources to address lingering trauma and mental health needs will be required to ensure that these needs can be addressed and to ensure the health and safety of students and educators.
10. **Continue to incorporate targeted opportunities for asynchronous learning in ways that are meaningful, accessible and promote equity for diverse learners.** Teachers have become increasingly adept at using technology in innovative ways to meet the needs of MLLs. This opens new avenues and opportunities to use technology to amplify and enhance learning experiences, including asynchronous avenues. These tools and strategies will continue to be useful.





PART IV APPENDICES

Additional Resources from Internationals Network for Public Schools

[Internationals Resources for Remote and Hybrid Learning Gates](#)

This resource, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, provides a searchable platform for ideas, strategies, and tools vetted by Internationals Network Educators. The resources, ranging from promising practice videos to guidance documents to conversation protocols to complete workshops, reflect much of the learning and innovation across the Network for supporting multilingual learners during remote and hybrid learning. As school communities head back to in-person settings, these resources will continue to help educators plan, stay organized, communicate, and collaborate to support all students.

[Internationals Network Promising Practice Share](#)

These short teacher-created videos from the 2021 Internationals Network Annual Professional Development Conference highlight strategies that Internationals teachers have used in their own classrooms during remote and hybrid learning and found to be promising for their MLL students.

[Intersection Between Remote Learning and MLL Supports](#)

Resources abound on how to do remote learning in general; likewise, Internationals Network schools are rich with ideas on how to support multilingual students. However, there are scant resources available on how to do both simultaneously. In the linked document, we unpack some common promising practices for remote learning and identify important considerations for working with a heterogeneous, multilingual student population.

Methodology

Mixed methods were used throughout this report and data drawn from a mix of state, district and school-level data, as well as internal network-wide surveys, focus groups, interviews and review of school artifacts.

School-Level Data

- To explore changes in enrollment during the pandemic, Internationals Network collected enrollment data from the schools in our network during the fall of 2019 and again during the fall of 2020. We

also collected data about the graduates of the classes of 2019 and 2020 to determine an overall network graduation rate. With this data, along with NYC DOE graduation cohort data, we determined students' college enrollment status and persistence using the National Student Clearinghouse. Finally, from the NYC DOE's data portal, we collected attendance data for our high schools in NYC.

Survey data

- A survey was administered to school leaders across Internationals Network in April 2020, November 2020 and again in May 2021 to gather school-level information on the impact of the pandemic and report learning on students, staff and each school community. The resultant mix of quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed for trends and themes. Follow up interviews were conducted with school leaders (principals, assistant principals and academy leaders) to explore emerging themes.
- For each service that Internationals Network provides to its network schools and academies, feedback is gathered anonymously via survey. The responses from the more than 1,000 educators who took part in services from March 2020 - June 2021 were analyzed for trends and themes at three points over the past year.

Student Voices

- Internationals teachers from across the Network gathered input from students in writing, in group and one-on-one conversations, and through surveys. Written feedback was coded and analyzed for trends, while survey data are reported in the example in Part II of this report. Information about the impact of the pandemic on students and their families directly was gathered systematically via a survey administered in April 2020, November 2020 and May 2021 and through convenings and conversations with Internationals Network counselors, social workers, teachers and leaders.

Convenings, Focus Groups and Interviews

- From March 2020 - June 2021, Internationals Network convened school leaders to share ideas and problem-solve ways to best respond to the shifting demands of remote and hybrid learning. School-level and regional convenings served the dual purpose of gathering information and developing practical strategies. During this same time period, teacher and counselor convenings addressed emerging student needs at the classroom and team level. Many of these convenings were videotaped, and findings were examined to identify trends and innovative practices.

Artifacts and Evidence Collection and Analysis

- A plethora of artifacts and evidence have been gathered, analyzed and drawn from for this report. These include: meeting agendas and notes, written reflections from convenings, student work, instructional materials, workshop materials, school schedules and action plans.

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