



May 27, 2020

SEF Statement on Ending Remote Instruction Early During the COVID-19 Pandemic

For many school districts in the South, the Memorial Day weekend traditionally marks the end of the academic year. And while some did conclude instruction just last week, other systems across the country made the call weeks ago to end earlier than previously planned due to strain from the necessary shift to remote learning caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic. This includes [eleven public school districts in Georgia](#) alone.

Naturally, the loss of instruction time and the subsequent effects on students, particularly the Black, Brown, and low-income students that typically fill under-resourced districts, are cause for alarm. Education advocates, parents, practitioners, and policy makers have already expressed [concern for the disparate effects](#) of digital learning, especially if it is to continue through the Fall 2020 semester. An early end to the school year may only further exacerbate the advantages that some students have over others, if some districts continue to deliver instruction and others do not.

It is important, however, to look at the other side of the equation, and understand why some districts have prematurely halted the school year. The decisions to end the school year early, in many places across the country, were not made hastily or without consideration for the effects on students, families, and district staff. Rather, they have been both calculated and astute, made with the best interests of students and staff in mind, and with their input. For example, Bibb County School District in Macon, Georgia utilized the platforms [ThoughtExchange](#) and [Let's Talk](#) to glean stakeholder feedback on their experience during the pandemic before ultimately deciding that instruction would end on May 1st. The district found that [stress was a major factor](#) inhibiting the success of online instruction, for students, parents, and teachers alike. The lack of devices and internet connections, which disproportionately affects low-income families, meant that learning may have come to a stand-still for too many students the minute schools closed their doors. Additionally, Bibb County Superintendent Dr. Curtis Jones cited some district staff or their family members contracting COVID-19 as a factor in the decision to end instruction early, as the health of personnel is paramount to the success of remote learning. Ultimately, Bibb County, like countless other districts, had reached a point of diminishing returns with their eLearning program, and had to make the tough, yet strategic, choice to bring the school year to a close.

Instead, these districts have chosen to use what would have been the final weeks of the school year to get a jump start on preparing themselves for the 2020-2021 school year. Attention has been turned to increasing staff capacity via professional development so that districts will be better poised to effectively give each student the quality education they deserve—whether that be in-person or online. Additionally, districts will use this time to begin to formulate plans to mitigate Spring 2020 learning loss that students may have experienced as a result of remote learning, to address [summer slide](#), and to support students in key grade transitions (e.g., elementary to middle school, middle to high school, or high school to college).

“COVID has shown us what we need now,” said Dr. Jones, “Our goal is that we will be better in August than we were in March at implementing our curriculum.” We agree with Dr. Jones. We all can, and should, learn from the weaknesses, gaps, and endemic inequities in our systems that have been spotlighted by COVID-19. This pandemic has given us both the chance and the responsibility to do better.

In Community,

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