



Parabola Project

Practitioner Toolkit:

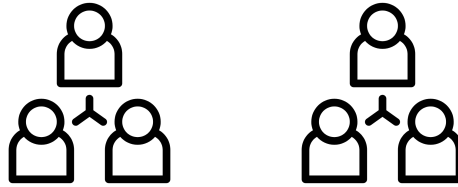
Cohorting Students for In-Person Learning

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This toolkit has been developed in alignment with the [School Reopening Readiness Guide](#) a resource developed as part of the [Parabola Project](#). It is intended to help teachers and educator leaders understand and develop approaches for a specific problem of educational practice as schools seek to reopen during the COVID-19 pandemic; while we hope it is useful in decision-making, it does not supplant state or district level policies. The information reflects the available information at the time the guide was last revised.



How Do We Cohort Students for In-Person Learning?



Key Takeaways

- Developing groupings of students requires leaders to make key decisions driven by the values and priorities of their school or district, which include the health and safety needs of students, staff, and the community.
- Leaders need to determine the resources they have available (time, people, and space) and think creatively about how to maximize safety while increasing access for in-person learning in a hybrid or fully in-person model.

What is the problem?

As schools reopen for in-person learning, they will need to put new safety measures — such as physical distancing and cohorting — in place to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission (learn more in the [School Opening Readiness Guide](#)). Cohorting involves creating groups of students (and potentially staff) who remain together. By having cohorts stay together when physically inside school buildings, the number of people they are exposed to is minimized. In the instance of a positive COVID-19 case, this allows for easier contact tracing and more targeted testing, quarantine, and/or isolation of just the cohort rather than the entire school ([read more from the CDC](#)). This strategy should be used in conjunction with other safety measures and does not replace measures like wearing masks, physical distancing, and handwashing.

It is likely some schools will not be able to bring the entire student body back at the same time due to limited classroom and school building capacity. Schools will need to determine which students they need to bring back and when. From there, they will also need to determine how students are grouped within the building. Educators' access to students and organization of students during in-person learning can have a big impact on students, families, and staff academically, socially, and logistically, so teams need to have a clear approach to decision-making around cohorting that aligns with community resources, needs, and goals.

Why is it important?

In-person learning offers students access to a variety of benefits harder to achieve online, such as critical engagement with teachers and peers and face-to-face academic, emotional, and health-related interventions. During the pandemic, school and district leadership teams must recognize that how they decide to manage this access when resources (space, time, and people) are constrained has implications for equity, efficacy, and risk.

How: Strategies for Action

Developing cohorts requires leaders to establish a consistent, transparent, and values-based approach that is clearly aligned to district goals and meeting the needs of students. The following strategies provide concrete steps to take in addition to ideas and resources to support your district or school in developing and implementing cohorts.

- [1. Clearly determine the existing resources that are available \(time, people, and space\)](#)
- [2. Develop a values-aligned plan for your district regarding which students will come to school and when](#)
- [3. Develop a plan for how students will be organized into cohorts when in school together](#)
- [4. Explore creative options to increase available space and time](#)

1. Clearly determine the existing resources that are available (time, people, and space).

A first step teams must take is to figure out the physical, human, and temporal resources they have available. They should consider each school and district's unique contexts and examine the following factors as they determine options for grouping students:

- *Space availability:* Students and staff should maintain a distance of at least six feet in classrooms to prevent transmission of COVID-19 (see [Principle 9: Density and Distance in the School Opening Readiness Guide for more information](#)). Use this guidance to determine how many people are able to fit inside classrooms. Consider using spaces not traditionally used as classrooms like gyms, libraries, and covered outdoor areas to increase maximum capacity.
- *Staffing:* Work with your staff to determine how many are able and willing to work in person. Keep in mind that some staff members should not be asked to return even if they are willing if they have certain risk factors (e.g., underlying conditions). Verify what certifications staff members have to help think through staffing configurations.
- *Day availability:* Determine how many hours your schools are able to dedicate to in-person instruction given instructional needs, staff time needed to support remote learners, teacher work hours, and professional learning and planning needs.
- *Transportation:* Students will need to maintain a safe physical distance on buses. Determine how many students are able to fit on a bus and how many additional routes can be run in a day if needed. See more on distancing on buses in the [School Reopening Readiness Guide](#).

Teams need to determine whether or not they will use these resources consistently across schools versus allowing for site-level decisions. They should also begin thinking creatively about how to expand available resources ([see Section 4 of this guide](#)).

2. Develop a values-aligned plan for your district regarding which students will come to school and when.

Schools and districts should create clear cohorts that reduce school density and cut down on mixing to minimize transmission risk. Many conversations about scheduling and cohorting students to return for in-person learning jump to specific structural considerations of returning. Before diving into specific details like the number of groups or the logistical schedule for rotation, leadership teams should clearly reflect on their values and local context and discuss why bringing students back to campus will be helpful, who will it be most helpful for, and how this can be implemented in a safe and healthy way. There is no one “right” answer, but reflecting first on the “why” and then consequently exploring different options that navigate competing tensions – with community input – will create more opportunities for successful implementation.

One critical tension leaders need to consider is how any given plan values **consistency for all** versus **priority access for some**. For example, offering a simple approach that organizes students into equal attendance days can be very valuable for offering consistency in decision-making and cohort creation. By dividing groups equally, leaders can make it easy for families to understand decisions, accommodate siblings, and create clarity when responding to future interruptions. Conversely, leadership teams might want to offer greater in-person opportunities for students who might be most in need of more face-to-face time, such as students with individualized education plans or younger learners.

The following are examples of strategies that districts or schools can implement based on their decision to establish consistency, priority access, or a combination of both.

A) Solutions that emphasize consistency for all students

Creating a consistent schedule for all students typically relies on dividing students from each grade into equal groups to form cohorts and establishing a cadence for when they come to school for in-person learning. The following are sample schedules for two cohorts (groups A and B) in which all students alternate between in-person learning and remote learning on a half-day schedule, on a daily schedule, or on a weekly schedule. Pros and cons of each are explored.

A few considerations to note, include:

- Schools can also create three or four groups instead of two, which will reduce the number of students in each cohort. This will decrease overall attendance in the building at one time to ensure proper safety protocols but will also reduce the amount of in-person learning time for each student.
- Schools do NOT need to set aside a day for “deep cleaning” each week. Sanitizing high-touch surfaces like desks and doorknobs regularly throughout the day and after school can effectively neutralize COVID-19 (refer to Parabola Project’s [How to Prepare](#)

[and Care for Your Classroom Toolkit](#)). Research indicates the risk for infection comes far more from aerosolized virus particles rather than surfaces, and therefore more attention should be paid to social distancing, mask-wearing, and other physical safety measures while students are in school.

- Given staffing and planning considerations, some districts may wish to set aside one day a week for teacher preparation and professional development. School buildings could still be open during this time for students who need in-person specialized services, for lunch pick-up, and other in-person instruction.
- Meals are important to consider when designing a schedule. Multiple groups mixing and eating in a cafeteria is not recommended, even if they are social distancing. Students will remove their masks while eating and conversing with other students, which can increase the risk of transmission between cohorts.
 - Many districts have opted for grab-and-go lunch offerings. With this approach, students attend in-person learning in the morning, take lunch home, and then continue remote learning in the afternoon.
 - Example: [Westford Public Schools](#) (MA) offers an alternating weekly schedule between two groups of students and grab-and-go lunch.
- An effort should be made to have siblings attend school on the same days to alleviate possible scheduling concerns for families, and to minimize risk to other students as siblings in a household should be a safe “social pod.” A school’s student information system (SIS) may contain family/sibling information, or surveys can be sent to families to confirm sibling groupings. Keep in mind that siblings may have different last names so last names alone may not reliably determine which students are siblings. Students who share the same address may be more likely to constitute a pre-existing “social pod.”
 - Example: Beachmont Elementary School (Revere, MA) is determining sibling pairings based on their home address in their SIS, and confirming this information with parents.
- If students are grouped together based on their neighborhood, bus routes may be easier logistically and safer as students from the same cohort would share a bus only with fellow members of their cohort and potentially students from a limited number of other cohorts.

Alternate Half-Day Schedule

In this model, Group A students attend school in-person in the morning while Group B students participate in remote learning, and they switch in the afternoon. Group A students take lunch with them as they leave the building, and Group B students can either eat lunch at home or come to school to receive their lunch (space will need to be designated for students to eat in a safe way). Teachers and custodial staff can use this transition time to disinfect high-touch surfaces in classrooms and common areas. Both groups receive core instruction from teachers and have opportunities for collaborative peer learning while attending school in person, and focus on

practicing, applying, activating prior knowledge, remediation, and/or enrichment of core content while engaging in remote learning.

Pros:

- ❑ Consistent daily schedule for everyone enables students to develop routines, have interactions outside their households, and provides consistent access to nutrition and essential services provided by schools.
- ❑ This model provides a reliable daily schedule for parents so they can plan their work schedules and childcare. Note that this planning and job flexibility may not be in reach for some parents and guardians (e.g., essential workers, parents who are not able to take half-days off of work, parents who are not able to pay for a half-day of childcare).
- ❑ Students meet their teachers in-person daily, which allows teachers to check in with their students and support their academic and social-emotional needs.

Cons:

- ❑ Teachers do not have much time available for planning during the day, so they will have to spend time planning after school.
- ❑ There is a short window of time to disinfect classrooms and other high-traffic areas before the second group of students arrive. Educators might want to enlist students in disinfection procedures as they transition (see the [How to Prepare and Care for Your Classroom Toolkit](#) for more information).
- ❑ Transportation costs may not make this a financially feasible model for schools and districts with a large number of students who take the bus.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Morning	Group A	Group A	Group A	Group A	Group A
Lunch	Grab-and-go	Grab-and-go	Grab-and-go	Grab-and-go	Grab-and-go
Afternoon	Group B	Group B	Group B	Group B	Group B

Alternate Daily Schedule

In this model, Group A students attend school on Monday through Tuesday, and Group B students attend school on Thursday through Friday. Wednesdays can be offered as a flexible day where schools can do any of the following: 1) offer in-person services for students who need additional support in both cohorts; 2) allow students to pursue interest or passion projects; 3) encourage students to virtually collaborate with peers on assignments; 4) hold virtual assemblies

or other school-wide activities; or 5) have advisors check in one-on-one with their students to gauge status and wellbeing (this can be done virtually or in-person).

Pros:

- ❑ Teachers will be able to work with students for two consecutive days, which allows them to complete a two-day cycle of introducing and reinforcing new content. An alternating schedule of Monday and Thursday for Group A and Tuesday and Friday for Group B can also provide a strong instructional cycle.
- ❑ Districts can offer Wednesdays (or another day) as planning days for teachers.

Cons:

- ❑ Depending on how students are organized within the school day, teachers may not see students for up to five days, so continuous check-ins will be essential to stay in touch with students. These check-ins could look like emails or messages in the Learning Management System (LMS) to students, texts to parents/guardians, or quick video conferences during time offered for office hours.
- ❑ Students will be in school at different times during the week, which may make consistent childcare difficult for parents while students are remotely learning.
- ❑ Compared to the alternate weekly schedule, students are getting less in-person instructional time.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
In-Person	Group A	Group A	All Remote (Flexible Wednesdays)	Group B	Group B
Remote	Group B	Group B	All Remote (Flexible Wednesdays)	Group A	Group A

Alternate Weekly Schedule

In this model, Group A students in each grade will attend school in person every day for one week and then will engage in remote learning activities every day the following week, and vice versa for Group B students in each grade. This cycle will be repeated consistently throughout the semester.

Pros:

- ❑ Teachers can section out lessons and skills more easily and develop mini-unit plans that may fit into one week of in-person learning.
- ❑ Less need for thorough cleaning since the school building will be unused over the weekend.

Cons:

- ❑ Teachers will only see students every other week, which may lead to learning gaps, missed opportunities for enrichment or remediation, and/or student frustration or fatigue with remote learning.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week 1	Group A	Group A	Group A	Group A	Group A
Week 2	Group B	Group B	Group B	Group B	Group B
Week 3	Group A	Group A	Group A	Group A	Group A
Week 4	Group B	Group B	Group B	Group B	Group B

B) Solutions that emphasize priority based on need

Districts may wish to allocate resources to those students most in need of in-person support, such as those who need special education services, are learning English, are living in potentially vulnerable situations (e.g., homeless or in foster care), and/or are children of essential workers. In these cases, these students are prioritized for in-person learning while the rest of the student population engages in remote learning. These students attend school in person every day so they can meet with a teacher or advisor daily, receive specialized services or resources, have access to school-based meals, and have a safe place to learn each day.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
In-Person	Students with specialized needs	Students with specialized needs	Students with specialized needs	Students with specialized needs	Students with specialized needs
Remote	All other students	All other students	All other students	All other students	All other students

An alternative schedule incorporates an alternate daily schedule in which students with specialized needs attend in-person instruction daily and the remaining students are divided into two groups who have two days of in-person instruction and two days of remote instruction. A

major decision here will be whether to embed students with specialized needs with the general student population to receive the benefits of inclusion and belonging or keep them in separate groups to minimize the risk of transmission by limiting cross-over of students. This decision point is explored further in [Section 3](#).

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
In-Person	Students with specialized needs	Students with specialized needs	Students with specialized needs	Students with specialized needs	Students with specialized needs
In-Person	Group A	Group A	Group B	Group B	Remote (Flexible Fridays)
Remote	Group B	Group B	Group A	Group A	Remote (Flexible Fridays)

An important challenge to address is that these options do potentially stigmatize some students by making their needs more visible. In addition, environments might be less inclusive or more restrictive if students in school lack learning and social access to remote peers. Districts should consider how to adopt policies and messaging that support information and personal privacy as well as encourage learning across in-person and remote lines.

Finally, a student might have special needs that may not be formally identified (e.g., an undiagnosed reading issue); educators need to closely monitor the needs of remote learners to ensure that if they need additional support, they can access it quickly.

C) Solutions that seek to offer consistency while providing priority access

Schools can also explore approaches that offer clarity and consistency while also trying to provide priority access for the students who need it most.

Additional in-person learning time for specific students

The example below explores a sample schedule of a middle school with 130 students per grade level. Group E has 10 students with specialized needs who attend school in person every day, while the rest of the students are divided into four cohorts who alternate days of in-person learning each week. Just like the model in the previous section, a major decision here will be whether to embed students with specialized needs with the general student population to receive the benefits of inclusion and belonging or keep them in separate groups to minimize the risk of transmission by limiting cross-over of students. This decision point is explored further in [Section 3](#).

	# of People	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Group A	<i>30 students with 2 teachers</i>	In-Person	In-Person	Remote	Remote	Remote
Group B	<i>30 students with 2 teachers</i>	Remote	In-Person	In-Person	Remote	Remote
Group C	<i>30 students with 2 teachers</i>	Remote	Remote	In-Person	In-Person	Remote
Group D	<i>30 students with 2 teachers</i>	Remote	Remote	Remote	In-Person	In-Person
Group E (Specialized Needs)	<i>10 students with 2 teachers</i>	In-Person	In-Person	In-Person	In-Person	In-Person

Schools can consider offering open areas (e.g., auditorium, library, gym) as “study halls” for students who are assigned to remote learning on specific days but do not have adequate wireless access, childcare, or a workspace at home to engage in remote learning. These students should also be cohorted. Schools can leverage elective teachers or support staff to proctor/assist students in these spaces.

Prioritizing early learners

Another example is prioritizing elementary students (K-5) to receive daily in-person instruction, while middle school students (6-8) alternate and attend school two days per week, and high school students (9-12) are completely remote except for students who receive specialized services. The reasons behind this are:

- Younger students tend to struggle the most with remote learning and would benefit more from in-person learning.
- Younger students would need childcare if they are engaging in remote learning, which places an additional responsibility on families. Older students are likely to be more independent with remote learning and may not need childcare. Be mindful of local laws that specify at what age it is considered neglect to leave children unsupervised.
- Older students may transmit COVID-19 at a higher rate than their younger peers, so remote learning may be a safer option for that age group.

Bringing back all elementary students and rotating middle school students into their current school buildings while maintaining social distancing protocols could be difficult depending on elementary school capacity. In order to maximize available spaces, the district can repurpose their school buildings to safely accommodate returning students. In the example below, the district has four elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. The district can redistribute the number of students in each building and utilize the middle and high school buildings to house the majority of elementary students for in-person learning. Note that furniture may need to be moved across buildings to make sure age-appropriate furniture is available for elementary students.

Repurposing District Buildings to Safely Accommodate Students

Scenario Example: All elementary students return to in-person learning, middle school students engage in a hybrid model and alternate attending school, and all high school students engage in remote learning except for students with specialized needs.

4 Elementary Schools

Each school can accommodate 8 cohorts of elementary students attending daily.



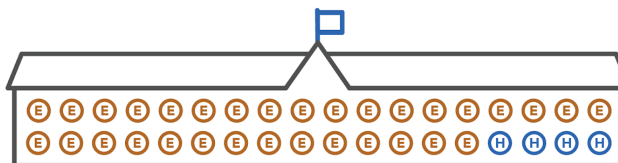
2 Middle Schools

Each school can accommodate 10 cohorts of elementary students attending daily, and 10 cohorts of middle school students attending on a rotating schedule.



1 High School

The high school can accommodate 32 cohorts of elementary students attending daily, and 4 cohorts of high school students who need specialized services and attend daily.



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3. Develop a plan for how students will be organized into cohorts when in school together.

Once leaders determine which students are going to attend and on what cadence, they need to dive more deeply into how students will be grouped for in-person learning, with the goal of maintaining safety protocols while also equitably meeting students' academic and social-emotional needs. There are two major decision areas that are relevant:

A) How will we balance maintaining consistent cohorting with offering choices and access to different subjects within the school day?

A key decision point for educational leaders is whether and how schools should establish defined cohorts that consistently stay together to minimize transmission risk. Given the unique needs of students, leaders face a tension between keeping students in stricter, fixed groups versus allowing for more mixing to let students have greater options and the ability to interact with more teachers and peers during the day. An option that keeps students in a consistent group offers greater safety but requires teachers to rotate in and out of classrooms or to teach outside of their subject area (teacher certifications may be a challenge here, as well). An option that offers more dynamic grouping based on students' interests or skill levels would allow students to have more choice in their academic experience and take more targeted courses, but this would increase logistical challenges such as safely transitioning between classes, and would increase contact and exposure to a greater number of peers.

At the elementary level, this decision might be more clear, as students are typically taught in self-contained classrooms. Teams need to consider, however, whether and how to integrate special and intervention teachers (e.g., physical education, art, reading specialists) into the in-person day as well as how to accommodate departmentalization. Options include:

- Offering special classes and supports remotely, focusing in-person days on core instruction.
- Having core instruction teachers facilitate special activities, pre-planned and supported by teachers outside of the classroom (e.g., a music lesson).
- Offering certain specials on a rotating, weekly basis rather than offering them every other day (e.g., students have music for four days in a row, one week a month).

The challenge becomes more difficult for middle and high school levels, where subjects are departmentalized (i.e., taught by different content leaders) or where students may be pursuing different courses and levels of study. In addition to the considerations for elementary above, leaders might consider:

- Having content leaders record their lessons and share them with students online. The cohort teacher can help facilitate in-person discussions, answer questions, and support students with completing their work.

- This example shows how a middle school history teacher can teach a lesson without being in the room by creating high-quality content and meaningfully partnering with a classroom teacher. Although the introductory content is online, students still receive the benefits of in-person learning by collaborating with their cohort and engaging in a thoughtful peer-to-peer discussion. Note that this example has two teachers (one remote and one in-person) assigned to one cohort for the duration of this period.

	10:00-10:15 a.m. - Watch recorded video of history teacher explaining the day's lesson
  	10:15-11:15 a.m. - Virtual station rotation (students stay at their desks) in groups of 5-6, depending on cohort size • 20 minutes: Join history teacher's office hours virtually and ask any clarifying questions • 20 minutes: Work with a small group of peers on a collaboration activity (see Learning Together in Socially Distanced Classrooms toolkit) • 20 minutes: Discuss the lesson with the cohort teacher and their peers in a Socratic seminar (discussion questions provided by the history teacher)
	11:15-11:20 a.m. - Students complete a virtual exit ticket (e.g., Google Form) for the day's lesson and submit it to their history teacher

- Supporting teachers in becoming their cohort's "content lead" and sourcing content from other department colleagues. Teachers can teach grade-level content and differentiate intentionally with their colleagues' support in the creation of appropriate curriculum (e.g., offer enrichment projects or additional content for students pursuing a higher level of study, and offer remediation for students who may need additional help.)
 - An example is a tenth grade ELA teacher who teaches grade-level content (i.e., textual evidence, reading comprehension), while also assigning different readings for her students based on their skill level and scaffolding writing prompts based on their writing ability. The planning, assigning, and grading of multiple levels is supported by the teacher's colleagues who are specialized in their own content

areas, and who can help with rigorous curriculum to fulfill honors and advanced placement requirements.

- “De-tracking” courses and moving to a team structure, similar to a middle school. Teachers can offer honors-level extension work for students seeking enrichment. Note that this may not be possible for Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses that have specific national or global requirements to receive credit.
- Focusing in-person learning time only on certain subjects or activities. For example, students may spend in-person days in advisory time or participating in socially-distanced hands on learning in labs, art, or maker spaces.
- Alternating core courses in-person and online (e.g., having students work one week on math in person, and then switching to ELA the next).

B) How might we group students to best support individual educational needs and interventions?

Even within classes, students will have different needs. Another decision point for educational leaders to consider when planning for cohorting is how and whether they should group students heterogeneously or homogeneously by these needs to appropriately provide support and access to specialist resources. This is a decision that schools have grappled with long before the current pandemic. Heterogeneous groupings provide a rich environment in which students across skill levels can interact and engage in deep learning together inclusively (learn more through exploring [Mix It Up! The Benefits of Mixed-Ability Groups: IgnitED Research Insight](#)). However, offering this heterogeneity could be logistically and instructionally challenging when implementing cohorts if students need to interact with specific expert teachers and credentialed staff, or are at significantly different instructional levels (e.g., are taking an AP course alongside those who are not). If cohorts are strictly maintained, teachers will need to differentiate (e.g., offer AP course material for some students alongside different material for others who are not seeking AP credit).

On the flip side, leaders may decide grouping more homogeneously will be important to maintaining quality and access to specific limited supports. For example, given some students may need to interact with specially credentialed staff, leaders may wish to concentrate expert teachers with those students who need them most (e.g., students learning English, students who have individualized education plans or need academic intervention).

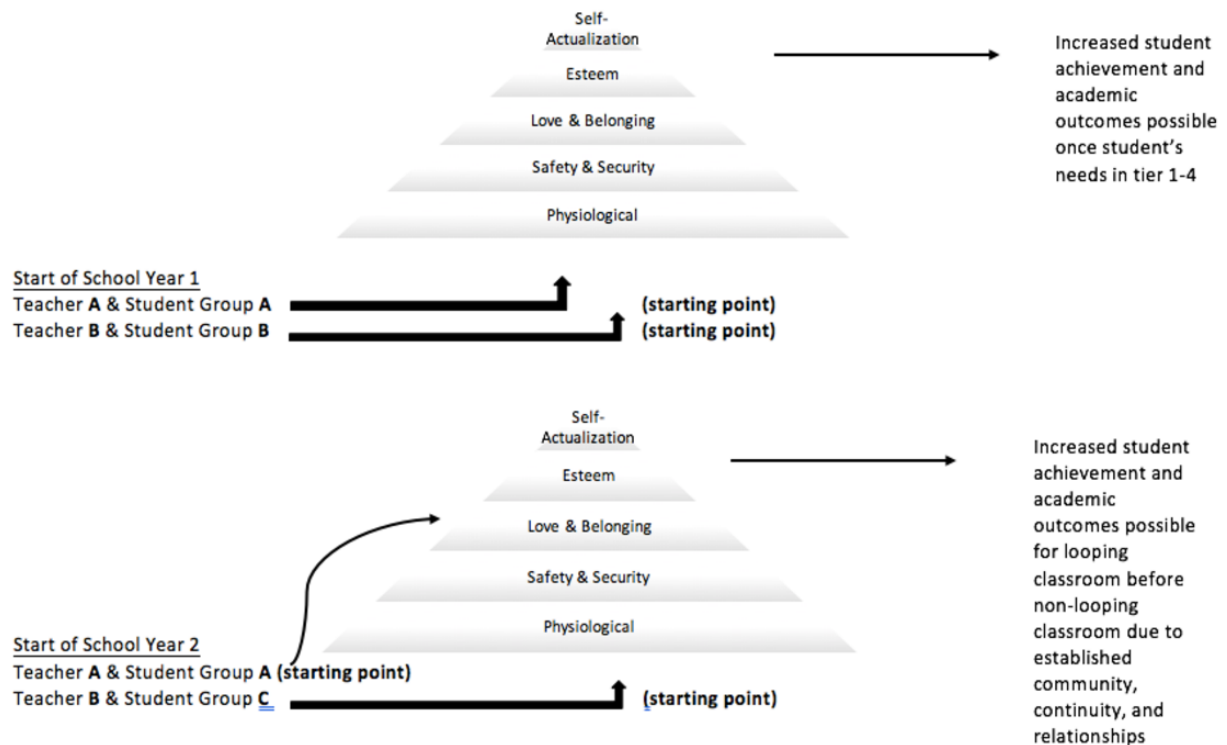
The most important thing is to establish a decision that is consistent and clearly states the goals. Leaders can also consider the following example strategies for grouping and also meeting individual needs for their students within the school:

- **Establish heterogeneous groupings:** Cohorts can consist of students with heterogeneous levels and needs to encourage peer-to-peer support, learn from varying skill levels, and have equal representation.
 - One way to establish consistent cohorts of students with varying skills is through an advisory model, in which one adult supports a small group of students and forms a close relationship with each one. This can significantly contribute to the social and emotional wellbeing of each child, since they have at least one adult they can trust and rely on at school.
 - Advisories should meet often in the beginning of the year to establish a strong relationship. They can choose to meet outdoors (weather permitting) to differentiate from academic classes.
 - Example: [Big Picture Learning](#) schools follow a “student-centered learning design” in which each student is part of an advisory group of 15 students for the duration of their academic career.
- **Group based on educational need:** Staffing considerations and the need to differentiate instruction significantly may require grouping students based on educational needs:
 - **Interventionists and co-teachers:** Students who receive instruction from staff members like interventionists and co-teachers (e.g., students learning English and students with individualized education plans) could be put into the same cohort so that the staff member can provide them the necessary support and stay with the cohort for the entire day to minimize the number of people they are in contact with.
 - **Differentiated classes:** Districts may have programs like International Baccalaureate or Advanced Placement which require students to be in a cluster together. Schools especially at the secondary level may place students in different levels in a subject like mathematics. In this case, the school could opt to create cohorts of students based on these classes.
 - **Clubs and after-school activities:** If students are in a program or club that meets before or after school (e.g., drama, athletics), these students could be in a cohort together assuming they have similar academic needs.
 - **Create opportunities for heterogeneous groups:** If educational needs necessitate homogenous groupings, consider developing opportunities for students to interact with students of all ability levels to avoid the negative effects of tracking. For example, offer different groupings between remote and in-person instruction to allow mixing across groups. If there are academic classes or

opportunities like advisories or discussion groups that can meet remotely, develop heterogeneous groupings for these to provide mixing opportunities in a safe way.

However, offering this heterogeneity could be logistically and instructionally challenging if students need to interact with specific expert teachers and credentialed staff or are at significantly different instructional levels.

- **Offer options for personalizing learning within a consistent heterogeneous cohort to meet needs.** Providing varying choices that optimize challenge to match each student's needs increases motivation and learning. Choice and autonomy allow students to develop a sense of ownership over their learning, and ultimately lead to better learning. Additionally, effective instruction is explicit and systematically differentiated to match student needs as determined through data. In order to deepen differentiation and personalization within a station rotation model, you should consider three main components:
 - **Flexibility:** Stations are, by definition, structured, so how can you lift the guardrails slightly to allow for more flexible movement and, in turn, more personalized approaches to curriculum?
 - **Data:** When, how, and why are you assessing your students, and how can you apply the data?
 - **Grouping:** Grouping doesn't (and shouldn't) always be homogenous rotations of students doing the same thing at the same time, but what are the other options?
 - Explore more in this [Problem of Practice: How do I deepen differentiation and personalization within a station rotation model?](#)
- **Based on their previous teacher:** [Looping with the same teacher](#) from the previous year offers students familiarity, continuity, and connection, which can lead to increased academic achievement and student outcomes. Looping is a strategy used for these reasons before the current pandemic but may have particular relevance now. This is especially important in a time when relationship development will be hard — at the beginning of a school year with partial in-person learning.
 - This may pose challenges for teachers who don't have certifications to teach a different grade level, or who are not prepared to teach a new curriculum. Teachers could potentially form teams across two grade levels to address this challenge.



Findley, Maureen J.. "[The Impact of Looping in an Elementary School Setting.](#)" (2018).



Transcend Education has compiled a [curated collection of strong examples](#) of grouping students for hybrid learning, including alternate-day scheduling, alternate-week scheduling, and morning and afternoon scheduling.

4. Explore creative options to increase available space and time.

Given the pace of planning, teams may want to figure out starting points that best align with existing resources. However, schools should also consider how to add additional resources and options they can tap into over time to increase flexibility and offer more opportunities for students.

A) Add space through reallocation of non-instructional areas and other community buildings

Districts can be creative in reallocating non-instructional available building space strategically while also relying on community partners to share their spaces as additional learning areas:

- Consider partnering with external partners to use their space as classroom space. In Denmark, students at Copenhagen's Columbus kindergarten were moved into the National Museum of Denmark. The Gaardsleve School in Denmark moved much of their learning outdoors and found creative ways to implement instruction. (Source: [Bloomberg](#)) Are there libraries, museums, outdoor spaces, or other community centers that can be used as learning spaces temporarily to provide more space?
- In San Francisco, "dozens of recreation facilities, libraries and community centers across the city will be transformed into learning hubs, spaces where young students who may struggle with remote instruction can go each day to access their digital classwork and the social interactions that virtual schooling cannot provide." (Source: [San Francisco Chronicle](#)) Consider working with these community groups to verify that safety protocols like mask-wearing and physical distancing are implemented.
- School buildings should provide a space for students who may need to be in the building on remote learning days as well, such as children of essential workers. The library, auditorium, or other empty areas (not classrooms) can be repurposed as "study halls" for these students. Schools can assess the flexibility and structure of the space to determine whether the space may be better suited as a classroom for in-person learning or as an independent remote learning environment. For example, repurposing a space for teaching and learning may require furniture that is easy to move around, a mobile whiteboard as a visual aid, or easily accessible resources like books. A library may be a good choice for in-person learning. Conversely, an auditorium with stationary seating or a gym with bleachers or extra desks may be better suited for as a "study hall," given that there is a strong WiFi connection and adequate bandwidth for students, mobile power strips so devices can be plugged in, and a surface to keep laptops and/or notebooks on.

B) Consider alternate scheduling options beyond full-time or half-time (“A-B”) models

Leaders should consider a multitude of options for in-person learning hybrid models. While the A-B hybrid model is currently the most common approach that schools are considering and implementing for an in-person return, there are other configuration options. Think about how you might bring groups of students back in other ways that allow for distancing but offer opportunities for in-person check-ins and interventions.

- **Have cohorted, small-group, in-person check-ins.** Having students attend even for one day every other week can provide students the benefits of in-person interaction in a safe way. For example, some schools have students grouped into consistent cohorts like advisory groups to help foster culture and a sense of belonging through the development of peer-to-peer and peer-to-adult bonds. A school can focus on mostly remote learning but have a few cohorted advisories come into school each day so that students can get the social-emotional benefits from face-to-face advisory time. Developing these relationships with peers and an advisor can translate into stronger interactions during remote learning, as well. Similar models can be used for other groupings such as clubs or programs like drama and athletics.
- **Form pods and leverage all staff members.** Adams 12 Five Star School District in Colorado is embracing the idea of learning pods formed by some families. Pods are limited to the same people without any mixing with other pods. Each school in the district will have two to three pods per grade level in all elementary, middle, and K-8 schools. Pods will be capped at 10 students at the elementary level and 15 students at the middle school level. Each of these pods will meet every day for in-person instruction. Teachers will lead instruction, and they are leveraging bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and other district employees to lead each pod and provide direct support. Pods will be limited so that less than half of the students will be in the buildings at any given time. Other students will participate in remote learning. (Source: [9News NBC](#))

C) Partner with other organizations to increase staffing capacity

Consider partnerships with organizations that can provide schools with needed capacity, particularly to support activities such as tutoring, overseeing breaks and outside time, and to create opportunities for teachers to plan and provide support to students engaging in remote instruction. Examples might include:

- The [Back to School Coaching Playbook](#), developed by Brooklyn LAB and partner organizations, underscores the critical importance of social-emotional learning and success coaches (trusted adults who can guide students in diverse learning environments

and help process trauma and loss), and includes examples of organizations who can provide this capacity for schools. One example is City Year, an organization that trains Student Success Coaches to support holistic student development at schools. Read more about their role in the [Playbook](#).

- Tapping into the capacity of local after school programs, such as the YMCA.
 - Partnering with social service agencies. Bronx Arena High School, an alternative high school program in New York, [works with a local nonprofit service agency](#) to staff classrooms with additional social-emotional counseling support.
 - *Learn more in our upcoming staffing toolkit.*
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Share your resources or ideas!

Do you have a resource that you have developed to support cohorting students that you want to see featured in this toolkit, or do you have feedback on this toolkit? Submit it to parabolaproject@learningaccelerator.org.