

CCRESA Equity Advisory Council Summer Learning Recommendations

To whom it may concern,

The Equity Advisory Council of the Central Carolina RESA is committed to the development of equitable learning and working environments in our region's school districts. To that end, we created this statement to advocate for fair and equitable educational practices as we conclude the 2020-21 school year and prepare for summer learning and beyond.

We know that a number of disparities in our educational system widened in the past year during the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020 when schools across the country closed their doors to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, people expressed appreciation for educators and extended grace for students. Many parents took to social media to celebrate educators and lamented the challenges of trying to facilitate similar learning experiences in the home. When it came to extending grace to students, grading policies were adopted that minimized the harm that occurred for children during the fourth quarter and allowed opportunities for them to make up missed work. Additionally, many schools adopted pass/fail grading practices that did not negatively impact students' GPAs. These were all efforts that, in essence, advanced equity in grading.

Here, one year later we see that much of the appreciation for educators and grace for students has dissipated. Some have criticized educators for being hesitant to return to work in the same spaces that were deemed unsafe a year ago. Additionally, the call to increase accountability for students has escalated. In the midst of the pandemic, many students have struggled to complete online assignments while at home. This has resulted in the percentage of students with at least one failing grade increasing by 10-20% in multiple districts in our region (even doubling in some places). When this data is further deciphered, we see that English learners, students of color, and students with disabilities have the highest rates of failing grades. One can reasonably predict that these failing grades will lead to an increase in retention rates, which significantly increases the likelihood of students [dropping out of school](#). We must ask ourselves - are we okay failing/retaining 10-20% more students during a global pandemic? Our answer to this question must be, "No."

It is in this context that we in the Equity Advisory Council make the following recommendations during the fourth quarter of the 2020-21 school year. For educators, we recommend:

- Continuing to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery of course content during the fourth quarter. If a student is able to provide indications of mastery via alternate assessments (i.e. redone assignments, projects, etc.), they should not be retained;
- Utilizing flexible grading practices that minimize the long term grading consequences that may occur for students during this pandemic;
- Developing communication teams to contact families of students on the brink of failing classes to share common messages of support and to create action plans.

For parents/guardians, we recommend:

- Checking on students' grades and communicating with teachers about any concerns. Educators are less likely to assign failing grades to students with which they have had communication with parents/guardians;
- Extending grace to your child and to educators. This year has been extremely difficult for everyone. Please understand that your child likely had difficulty navigating the virtual learning space as did your child's teacher(s).

Finally, we encourage educators to close out the year in a manner that will allow them to easily recruit students to participate in summer learning. North Carolina legislation urges us to prioritize our learners who faced the most challenges during COVID for summer learning opportunities. Thus, we make the following recommendations for summer learning:

- Social and emotional learning (SEL) and mental wellness must be a priority. Research shows that one of the main components of in person learning that students missed was the social and emotional support that schools provide. Furthermore, many of our students and staff have endured trauma over the last year. SEL must be centered during summer learning;
- We encourage districts to utilize community resources to support students' and staff members' social and emotional needs along with providing academic support;
- Students who have experienced significant academic and social and emotional challenges during this year must be prioritized. Districts should review data by subgroups (i.e. students with disabilities, students of color, English learners, students in schools that receive Title I funding, etc.) to provide strategic and culturally responsive support for students with high needs.
- Innovative and effective teaching (i.e. project-based learning and culturally responsive teaching) is of great importance. One strategy to ensure this occurs is to hire teachers that demonstrate innovative and effective practices during the school year;
- Effective teacher recruitment is a priority. We are more likely to recruit effective teachers by dedicating significant financial resources to summer learning and working with teachers to craft the most ideal summer learning schedules;
- Finally, districts should work with students to design engaging and enriching summer learning environments that involve inquiry-based instruction and culturally relevant pedagogy.

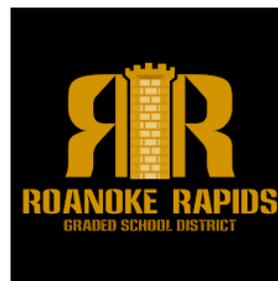
The Equity Advisory Council of the CCRESA believes that these recommendations will enable us to make key, equity-centered decisions as we conclude the 2020-21 school year and transition into the summer. We hope that you will consider and implement these recommendations as you strive to provide the optimal educational experiences for your students and families during this time.

CCRESA Equity Advisory Council

Approving Districts



Orange County Schools



WAKE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

