

Starting 2020-21 Strong:

A Guide to Support Your Child's Learning
During the Pandemic

The Need

PCSing is often a stressful and challenging process, particularly when doing so with children. Researching unfamiliar school districts, ensuring previous completed credits get recognized, securing placement in appropriate classes, and advocating for comparable student services can be exhausting and overwhelming for parents in the best of times. The COVID-19 pandemic has made that even harder, dramatically disrupting traditional education models, exacerbating typical PCS challenges, and leaving parents increasingly concerned about where their children stand academically.

As a new school year rapidly approaches, many parents are left with unanswered questions and concerns such as:

- Did my child's teacher cover all the material students were supposed to learn last spring?
- Is my child prepared for this year's grade-level work?
- How can I support my child if there are critical gaps in what was taught or in what my child was able to learn during distance learning? How can I identify and find the right resources to help?
- How do I communicate all of this to a new school and/or teacher?

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the quality, consistency, and mode of instruction varied tremendously this past Spring semester, in many cases producing critical gaps in learning. Benchmark testing and other assessments were difficult to complete or canceled outright, making it hard to evaluate student mastery of key concepts and skills.

This fall, as teachers and principals struggle to balance health, academic, and socioemotional priorities, they may also lack the proper data to inform their instructional planning, **making parent support and advocacy for their children more important than ever.**

Tool Description

As states and school districts factor public health conditions, parent sentiment, and logistical challenges into their reopening plans, school-level guidance will continue to change and reliable information may be difficult to find.

As a parent, you can take proactive steps to better manage this challenging transition.

You know your child best.

This Step-by-Step Guide will empower you to:

Step 1: Discover

what was taught and learned during spring distance learning

Step 2: Understand

grade-level expectations and content for this year

Step 3: Support

your child's needs with high-quality academic resources

Step 4: Advocate

for your child at a new school and with a new teacher

What do I do first?

Knowing which school your child will attend is critical for figuring out how to prepare your child for this year. Unsure what district or school would be best for your child? Follow the guidance below to learn more about local districts and schools.

Get started here!

[Military OneSource: Installation Search](#)

Once you receive your PCS orders, enter the new installation's name to unlock a collection of informative resources.

Click on Education to learn more about local school options, including links to nearby school districts and helpful information about the education landscape as well as other available resources.

2020-21 Reopening Plans

If you want to consider how districts and schools are handling reopening, distance learning, or other instructional settings, read more about their [reopening plans](#).

District & School Report Cards

See state & district websites for performance data, rankings, etc.

School Ratings & Reviews



Local Parent Groups



Mapping the Journey

Stage	<p><u>Step 1: Discover</u> what was taught and learned during spring distance learning</p>	<p><u>Step 2: Understand</u> grade-level expectations and content for this year</p>	<p><u>Step 3: Support</u> your child’s needs with high-quality academic resources</p>	<p><u>Step 4: Advocate</u> for your child at a new school and with a new teacher</p>
<p>Guiding Questions</p>	<p>What was my child taught this past school year?</p> <p>What did my child actually learn?</p> <p>What does my child still need help learning?</p>	<p>What does the receiving school expect my child to know and be able to do?</p> <p>What do I need to help my child learn in order to to be ready?</p>	<p>What are the gaps between what my child learned last year and needs to know for this year?</p> <p>How do I prioritize what to help my child learn first?</p> <p>How do I find ready-made lessons and instructional materials to use with my child?</p>	<p>How can I document my child's knowledge and skills?</p> <p>How can I communicate academic strengths and weaknesses as well as knowledge and skill gaps to my child's new teacher?</p>
<p>Quick Navigation</p>	<p><u>Whom to Ask & What to Ask</u></p> <p><u>Places to Look & Other Ways to Find Out</u></p>	<p><u>Whom to Ask & What to Ask</u></p> <p><u>Places to Look</u></p> <p><u>Diving Deeper into Standards</u></p>	<p><u>Summarizing What You Learned</u></p> <p><u>Parent Worksheet: Making Meaning of What You Have Learned</u></p> <p><u>Identifying Helpful Resources</u></p>	<p><u>Documenting Current Knowledge & Skills</u></p> <p><u>Communicating Needs</u></p> <p><u>Helpful Tips</u></p>

Step 1: Discover

What was taught and learned during distance learning

Like most parents, you may be wondering:

- What was my child taught this past school year?
- What did my child actually learn?
- What does my child still need help learning?

Just because a a topic or skill is covered in class does not mean it is effectively taught by the teacher or learned by the student. But as a parent, you can discover answers to these questions by learning whom to ask, what to ask and where to look.

Why is this Important?

As schools transitioned to remote learning, many teachers struggled to reach their students virtually, adapt lessons to the new format, and find time to cover all of the regular grade-level topics and skills.

Many students struggled to learn challenging, new material as they grappled with sudden, disruptive changes to their daily lives.

Step 1: Discover

Getting Started

If possible, start the discovery process by talking with the sending teacher and your child. Although you may already be able to answer some of these questions, going directly to the source will ensure you get the best possible information - and save time doing it. Here are some tips for whom to ask, what to ask, and what to do before, during, and after these conversations.

Whom to Ask: Sending School or Teacher

This is a busy time as schools finalize reopening plans and teachers prepare for the year. Be patient and polite but firm with your request for information and recommendations. Depending on the age of your child and how much contact you have had with the previous teacher, it may be appropriate for your child to reach out directly.

What to Ask

What standards, topics and skills was my child taught this school year?

Were there any key concepts my child was not taught?

How would you describe my child's proficiency level in each subject?

How confident is my child about these concepts and skills?

Based on this information, what are my child's academic strengths and weaknesses? Which of these should we prioritize?

Where can I find resources to support my child with these concepts and skills?

Step 1: Discover

How to Communicate Successfully

What To Do: Talk with the Teacher

Before

Reach out via email, phone call, or text.

Explain that you are PCSing - or already have - and want to ensure that your child is prepared for a new school. Request a 20-30 minute call or video conference to discuss your child's grades, knowledge, and skills.

During

Talk about what was originally planned for the year. Ask about what was taught in school and what was taught during distance learning. Request a document (perhaps a summary, outline, or syllabus) of the topics and skills covered in SY 2019-20.

Find out where your child is struggling and needs additional support (see [What to Ask](#)).

Ask for recommended resources you can use to support your student. For additional grade-specific question ideas, see Univision's: [Questions to Ask Your Child's Teacher](#)

After

Send a thank you email or note! Chat with your child about what the teacher shared and see if they strongly agree or disagree with the teacher shared.

Step 1: Discover

How to Communicate Successfully

Whom to Ask: Your Child

While it may seem strange to discuss some or all of these questions directly with your children, studies show that students often are capable of self-assessing and that students' accuracy improves as they get older. Even younger children may be able to self-assess in light of the way teachers are often explicit about lesson objectives. Although you may prefer to work through this process on your own, it can be helpful to consult your child at certain points for more information.

What to Ask

What do you remember learning this school year? What topics were covered? What concepts? What skills?

Were there any units or topics you were supposed to learn but your teacher didn't have time to cover or finish?

How confident are you about what you learned this year?

Which topics, concepts, or skills are the easiest for you? Which 2-3 topics, concepts, or skills do you find particularly challenging? Why do you think that is?

Have your friends or teacher(s) mentioned any helpful academic resources that would help you feel more confident?

Step 1: Discover

How to Communicate Successfully

What To Do: Talk with your Child

Before

Spend some time thinking about the topics and skills you observed your child working on recently during the spring term. Depending on the age of your child and your familiarity with grade-level material, it may help to skip ahead to [Step 2: Understand](#) and explore the grade level Parent Guides. These will help you understand what your child should know and be able to do.

During

Your child is probably anxious and frustrated by current circumstances. Express empathy and explain why you are having this conversation: you want your child to feel prepared for the upcoming school year. Emphasize that it is important for them to be honest and do their best to recall what they learned this past school year.

Use what you already know about grade level content or one of the Parent Guides (see [Step 2: Understand](#)) to reference specific topics and skills.

Make a checklist or take notes as you ask your child questions (see [What to Ask](#)).

After

Thank your child for sharing and reiterate your desire for them to be confident and successful in the coming school year!

Talk about what you will be doing next and what your child might expect.

Step 1: Discover

Problem: What if you couldn't reach the sending teacher? What if your child wasn't sure?

Solution: There are a number of places to look for answers or other ways to find out.

Places to Look

Online Portal for distance learning: If your sending school conducted distance learning via an online platform last semester, you should be able to find a syllabus, assignments, and/or other uploaded content to reference. You may need to request a temporary password if your child's old credentials have expired or you are unable to successfully log-in.

Spring Communication (emails, weekly/monthly newsletter, etc.): Despite the challenging circumstances, many teachers tried to maintain open communication with students and parents via email, texts, and various apps. Perhaps your child's teacher used one of these methods to outline the material being taught. Review any old communication you received or ask your child for help locating messages sent to the whole class.

Assessments, Tests, Quizzes, and Graded Assignments: Although all states canceled state-run tests and many districts and schools did not give final letter grades, most students should have received some graded work or teacher feedback throughout the year. Use graded work to get a baseline understanding of your child's recent academic successes and struggles.

District and School Websites: Many websites feature Parent Resources or COVID-19 support pages with specific information about what students are learning. Look for keywords like: Curriculum Map, Scope & Sequence, Syllabus, Lessons Plans, or Instructional Resources. Documents like these support teachers as they plan what, when, and how to teach content. They may also help you understand what your child was supposed to learn and when it was supposed to be taught.

Step 1: Discover

Problem: What if you couldn't reach the sending teacher? What if your child wasn't sure?

Solution: There are a number of places to look for answers or other ways to find out.

Other Ways to Find Out

You may choose to assess your child's learning yourself. Here are some suggestions for how to do that.

Online Assessments & Resources: Try using [Lexile](#), [McMillan: Reading Level Test](#), [Learning Heroes: Readiness Check](#) (by subject and grade-level), [Math Score](#), or [Learning Heroes: Readiness Roadmap](#)

Create Your Own Check-for-Understanding: Use one of the parent grade-level guides (see [Step 2: Understanding](#)) to create a checklist of topics and skills. Find materials that are aligned to those specific standards, topics and skills (see [Diving Deeper into Standards](#) and [Step 3: Support](#)). Have your child complete standard-aligned tasks or worksheets, then compare your child's work to the [Milestones](#) videos to compare your child's performance. Look for gaps or misunderstandings.

For younger students, you can frame this as a game where they can:

- Show What You Know (your child does the work solo)
- Teach Your Parent (your child explains it to you)
- Outsmart Your Parents (make it a contest between you and your child!)

Contact Receiving School

Reach out to the new school or teacher and request any information and resources they can provide to support your child's transition.

Step 1: Discover

Next Steps

Now you're ready to learn more about the specific concepts and skills that are often taught at your child's grade level. This can give you a better sense of your child's strengths and challenges.

Step 1: Discover

Step 2: Understand

This step will help you learn more about grade level expectations and content.

Step 3: Support

Skip to this step if you have a clear understanding of your child's needs, check out to access specific resources.

Step 4: Advocate

Skip to this step if you feel confident about your understanding of the grade level expectations and your child's needs and where to get support. Here, you can see for tips on how to document and communicate what you've learned with a new school and teacher.

Step 2: Understand

Grade-level Expectations and Content

Like most parents, you may be wondering:

- What does the receiving school expect my child to know and be able to do?
- What do I need to help my child learn in order to to be ready?

Why is this important?

Transitioning to a new school is always challenging, particularly if the academics are not exactly aligned between your old and new states or school systems. No one enjoys being frustrated, overwhelmed, or behind - particularly when navigating a new environment. Likewise for repeating material your children have already learned.

Understanding what your child was supposed to learn and should be ready to do this next school year can help you better set your child up for success. Learn more about grade-level expectations and content generally or dig deep to better understand the topics and skills you identified as gaps or challenges in [Step 1: Discover](#).

Step 2: Understand

Getting Started

If possible, start the process to understand grade-level expectations by talking with your receiving teacher(s). Your child's new teacher(s) will have the strongest handle on what will be covered in each subject, in particular regarding any adjustments due to modified school calendars or new instructional settings (i.e., distance learning). Here are some tips for whom to ask, what to ask, and what to do before, during, and after these conversations.

Whom to Ask: Receiving Teacher

This is a busy time as schools finalize reopening plans and teachers prepare for the year. Be patient and polite but firm with your request for information and recommendations: it's in everyone's interest - your child, your child's teachers, and yours - for your child to be ready for the school year.

What to Ask the Teacher

Are you starting the year with your usual beginning curriculum? Will you be making any adjustments to what you cover or where you start based on how distance learning went in your school last spring?

What concepts, skills, and knowledge are most critical for my child to possess to be ready for the school year?

Where can I find resources to support my child with these concepts, knowledge, and skills?

Is there any summer reading or other assignments that my student should complete before the school year starts?

Step 2: Understand

How to Communicate Successfully

What To Do: Talk with the Teacher

Before

Reach out via email, phone call, or text.

Introduce yourself and explain that you are PCSing - or already have - and want to ensure that your child has a smooth transition into your child's new school and classes. Request a 20-30 minute call or video conference to discuss your child's recent school history, introduce yourselves to the teacher, and ask about how to get ready for the school year.

During

Talk about what the teacher has planned for this year and any adjustments being made this year. Share your child's strengths and - to the extent you feel comfortable - what you and your child are proactively doing to fill in any gaps from last year.

Request a document (perhaps an outline or syllabus) of the topics and skills that will be covered in SY 2020-21 so you can compare them to what your child did last year.

Ask for recommended resources you can use to support your student. For additional grade-specific question ideas, see Univision's: [Questions to Ask Your Child's Teacher](#)

After

Send a thank you email or note! Chat with your child about what the teacher shared and ask your child how they feel about what you learned.

Step 2: Understand

Problem: What if you couldn't reach the new teacher?

Solution: There are a number of places to look for answers.

Places to Look

Whether you are interested in a basic overview of grade-level content or seeking to focus on a few particular areas, the resources below will help you learn more about the gaps you identified in [Step 1: Discover](#) and translate that new knowledge into practical, actionable insights about what your child should know and be able to do. The following links and grade level guides do a good job explaining complex, jargony standards (grade-level expectations about what students should learn in each grade and subject) into parent-friendly language.

DoDEA: [Parent Resources - Grade Level Skills & Knowledge Guides](#) (K-12)

Great Schools: [Milestones](#) (Videos of students successfully demonstrating grade-level skills in reading, writing, and math; also features worksheets, book lists, and a wide variety of other academic and parenting resources)

National PTA: [CCSS Family Resources](#), [K-8 Math & Reading Guides for Parents](#) and [Family Guides](#) to Help Your Child Succeed in Key Learning Areas (K-12)

Scholastic: [Success Guides by Grade](#) (K-8)

TODAY: [Parenting Guides by Grade & Topic](#) (PreK-12)

Step 2: Understand

Lost in Translation

Just like the military, teachers love acronyms! Sometimes it can feel like you have to learn a new language. You've probably heard of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS, but what about IEP, ELL, and LRE? Here are some useful links to help you decode the key terms your child's teacher or educational resources may use:

- [Lexia Learning: Acronyms Unpacked - Supporting Better Parent-Teacher Communication](#)
- [Great Schools - Frequently Used Acronyms in Education](#)
- [North Carolina Department of Public Instruction - Dictionary of Education Acronyms](#)
- [Special Education Acronyms](#)

Step 2: Understand

Diving Deeper Into Standards

What to Know

Common Core defines educational standards as “learning goals for what students should know and be able to do at each grade level.”

[Common Core State Standards](#) (CCSS), or standards that are very aligned with or similar to CCSS, have been adopted by 41 states, 4 territories and DoDEA schools. The link above provides details and resources for parents to better understand the purpose and function of CCSS.

Click on [Standards in Your State](#) to see if CCSS have been adopted and to find the link to each state’s website. State Departments of Education and School District websites will often reference CCSS throughout their curriculum materials and will often provide additional parent resources related to CCSS.

If you are moving to a state that has not adopted CCSS - [Texas](#), [Florida](#), [Virginia](#), and [South Carolina](#) are notable examples - you should search for state-specific standards on that state’s Department of Education website.

Step 2: Understand

Diving Deeper Into Standards

Where to Look

Whether your receiving state has adopted CCSS or not, explore the following websites to learn more about state standards, grade-level curriculum, and supporting resources:

- Your receiving state's CCSS website
- Your receiving state's Department of Education website
- Your receiving School District and/or School's website

Geek out!

Ready for more?

For a suite of teacher-facing resources on CCSS check out the following link:

Edutopia: [Resources for Understanding CCSS](#)

Step 2: Understand

Next Steps

Now that you have gained a better understanding of grade-level expectations and your child's needs, you are probably curious about where you can find high-quality resources to support your child.

Step 1: Discover

Step 2: Understand

Step 3: Support

Step 4: Advocate

Gain a clear understanding of your child's needs, check out to access specific resources.

Skip to this step if you feel confident about your understanding of the grade level expectations and your child's needs and where to get support. Here, you can see for tips on how to document and communicate what you've learned with a new school and teacher.

Step 3: Support

Identified needs and skill deficits with high-quality instructional materials/resources

You may be wondering:

What are the gaps between what my child learned last year and needs to know for this year?

How do I prioritize what to help my child learn first?

How do I find ready-made lessons and instructional materials to use with my child?

Why this is important

Helping your student fill academic gaps is what you set out to do with this guide in the first place. Now that you've considered missing pieces from last year, and what readiness looks like for this year, you can identify the differences and help your child fill them.

This section provides resources on how to prioritize your child's needs, set goals for what to learn, and find ready-made resources that can help prepare your child to enter the new school year on a strong footing.

Step 3: Support

Getting Started

Begin the support process by comparing learning gaps with readiness needs and prioritizing between them. Keep in mind that this is what teachers study and learn to do in advanced degree programs, so be forgiving with yourself. Do your best here, knowing that any advances you help your child make will result in a meaningful leg up for the year.

Summarize what you learned during the **Discover** phase.

- What did your old teacher, your child, or your research tell you about...
- What was my child taught this past school year?
- What did my child actually learn?
- What does my child still need help learning?

Summarize what you learned during the **Understand** phase.

- What did your new teacher or your research tell you about...
- What does the receiving school expect my child to know and be able to do?
- What do I need to help my child learn in order to to be ready?

Step 3: Support

Developing Goals

Once you figure out where you can draw links between gaps from last year and readiness needs for this year, set goals for your child.

Start small: pick 2-3 areas for focus, and set goals for one or a couple days at a time.

Consider how you might set goals collaboratively with your child: the act of participating in goal-setting processes can be incredible motivation!

Involving Your Child

Setting goals collaboratively can be very effective: it helps motivate your child and keeps the two of you on the same page.

Step 3: Support

Parent Worksheet: Making Meaning of What You Have Learned

The worksheet below illustrates how you can document what you Discover and now Understand about your child’s academic needs. Use this template to determine which subjects, topics and skills to prioritize for support in Step 3: Support.

Discover <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What gaps, challenges or other academic needs did I discover? ● What does my child need the most help with? ● By subject, topic, standard, skill? 	Understand <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What do I now understand about the gap between what my child was taught, learned and needs to know? ● What did I learn about the difference between what my child should know and be able to do versus what my child currently knows and is able to do? 	Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Based on what I discovered and now understand, which of my child’s academic needs should be prioritized for additional practice and support? ● What goals am I setting for my child?

Step 3: Support

Check your state Department of Education's COVID-19 website for recommended resources.

A number of states have developed resource hubs and collections. See below for links to department of education web-pages for states with sizable military connected populations:

- [California](#)
- [Colorado](#)
- [Florida](#)
- [Georgia](#)
- [New York](#)
- [North Carolina](#)
- [South Carolina](#)
- [Texas](#)
- [Virginia](#)
- [Washington](#)

Explore these Resources

In addition to what your state offers, here are several collections of (mostly free) academic resources designed to provide high-quality remediation and enrichment materials. Many are organized by grade-level, subject, and/or standard/skill so you can save time searching and get started supporting your child right away!

- [Khan Academy: Getting Started for Parents](#)
- [Khan Academy: Schedules and Academic Resources \(sorted by grade\)](#) (CCSS aligned lessons/activities)
- [Great Minds: Knowledge on the Go Curriculum](#) (K-12 Math, Science, K-8 ELA, Early Literacy)
- [Education.com: Learning Library](#) (Lesson Plans, Activities, Worksheets - searchable by grade, subject, CC standard, etc.)
- [Learning Heroes: Resources & Parent Support](#) (searchable by subject & grade-level)
- [Wide Open Schools: Family Resources](#) (Pre-5 & 6-12 ELA, Math, Other Subjects)
- [Smithsonian Learning Lab: Distance Learning Resources](#)
- [Schusterman Family Foundation: Distance Learning Resources](#)

Step 3: Support

Next Steps

Now that you have gained a better understanding of grade-level expectations and your child's needs, you are probably curious about where you can find high-quality resources to support your child.

Step 1: Discover

Step 2: Understand

Step 3: Support

Step 4: Advocate

Tips on how to document and communicate what you've learned with a new school and teacher.

Step 4: Advocate

For your child academically at a new school and/or with a new teacher

You may be wondering:

How can I document my child's knowledge and skills?

How can I communicate academic strengths and weaknesses as well as knowledge and skill gaps to my child's new teacher?

Why this is important

No one knows your child as well as you. Unfortunately, that means that others don't know your child as well, and so won't always make the best decisions for your child. To prevent that from happening, or address it if it has, you may need to advocate on behalf of your child with teachers or school administrators.

While it is always challenging to question people in positions of authority, doing so respectfully and politely - yet firmly - might be exactly what your child needs from you most of all.

Step 4: Advocate

Getting Started

Document your child's knowledge and skills

Save Your Work: Don't let your hard work go to waste! Save all research from steps 1-3, take notes, and gather work samples as you go.

Compile Evidence of Progress: Going forward, keep a list of grade-level standards and skills on-hand throughout the school year. Use that list or create a checklist to track what your child is learning or has already learned. If your child is learning virtually, get information about the online learning approach and document evidence of progress toward learning goals.

Create or Update a Portfolio: Create a student portfolio so that you have a record of their knowledge and skills over time (and across different schools/districts).

Keep Important Materials Close: Store your child's portfolio and your research somewhere safe, make copies of anything not electronic, and hand carry your portfolio when you PCS.

Step 4: Advocate

Communicate academic strengths and weaknesses as well as knowledge and skill gaps

Teamwork

Remember that you and your child's new teacher are on the same team! Building a positive, trusting relationship early on will enable honest and effective communication throughout the year. Start with a friendly hello, kind note, or (to the extent it's within your means) donate some school supplies the teacher needs. These small steps are even more critical during the pandemic, when face-to-face introductions may not be an option.

Be Proactive

Demonstrate that you are an engaged, informed parent. Check-in with your child's teacher regularly and ask how you can continually support your child's learning at home.

Share What You Know

Just because a school has your child's academic records doesn't mean the teacher does. Be proactive about communicating about your child. If possible, share your child's academic portfolio or provide other documentation (report card, tests, writing samples, etc.) so that the teacher can understand your child's academic strengths and weaknesses better. Include any of the worksheets from this guide that you have completed..

Step 4: Advocate

Remember these additional advocacy tips:

- Make an appointment
- Document what your child has done
- Plan what you're going to say ahead of time. Be clear about what you want to achieve
- Choose your words carefully. Try to start with something positive
- When facing a challenge, work to build a sense of partnership and negotiate solutions
- Be diplomatic, tactful, and respectful
- Summarize what you have discussed
- Verbalize and put in print your plan for a follow-up

