

## A Scoping Review of Local Education Agency Reopening Plans in Response to COVID-19

**Background.** Informed by complex adaptive systems theory, this scoping review was designed to collect and analyze Arizona Local Education Agency (LEA) reopening plans for the 2020-21 school year in response to COVID-19. We aimed to (1) uncover processes related to plan development, (2) describe plan characteristics, and (3) explore variations by key LEA demographics.

**Methods.** We used the Arksey and O'Malley framework for scoping reviews and adjusted their stages to gray matter, only: identify the research question(s); identify the relevant gray matter; select and review the relevant gray matter; chart the data; and collate, summarize, and report the results. Plans were collected from LEA websites and the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) from July-December 2020. Key *a priori* eligibility criteria for LEAs included: public education agency,  $\geq 100$  students, and an active LEA website. Reopening plan documents were eligible as formal plans, distance learning plans, or specified supplemental materials. A codebook supported systematic data extraction, performed by two reviewers after we established high interrater reliability. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize findings, and nonparametric analyses were used to further explore charted data.

**Results.** Reopening plans were collected from 351 public LEAs across all Arizona counties (51% regular public school districts and 45% charters). Although 57% of LEAs were considered urban, a substantial portion (36%) represented rural areas. Plans were most comprehensive in their descriptions of *support services* and *learning models* and least comprehensive in *food security* measures. However, ADE data showed that over 75% of LEAs had received meal program waivers by December 2020.

Plan differences were found by LEA type, degree of rurality, and other demographics. Regular school districts were more likely than charters to reference ADE guidance in plan development, engage more stakeholder groups (families, school staff, indigenous authorities, and county health departments) in their planning, describe their districts' communication methods, communicate plans in more than one language, include more mitigation and food security measures, have a meal program waiver in place, and employ a distance learning model. Charter schools were more likely than regular school districts to provide distance learning plans, use a hybrid model, and specify a virtual communication platform (e.g. Zoom). LEAs located in more rural counties were more likely to report in-person learning, while LEAs in the most urban counties were more likely to report the use of distance or hybrid models. By-county results revealed more nuanced differences in plans that suggest rurality as just one of many factors that influence plan variations.

**Implications.** This scoping review contributes to a burgeoning evidence base around local-level pandemic response in the education sector. Findings revealed variation by key demographics that enhance the understanding of systems influences on plan development, implementation, and characteristics. Demographic variation in plans also suggest potential areas of exploration around equity-related issues.