

Getting Strategic — and Practical — About Reopening Schools in the Fall

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Planning to reopen schools in the fall is going to be complex, but it does not have to feel defeating. It should not mean spinning through a million different scenarios nor getting bogged down in abstract hypothesizing about the future of schooling.

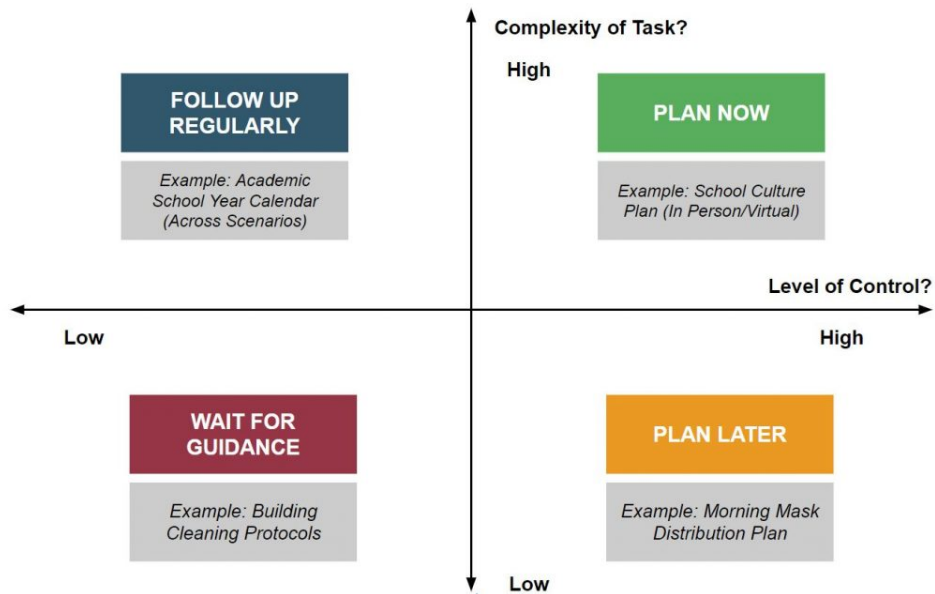
While many remain stuck intellectualizing about the 2020-2021 school year, leaders know they need to move forward *now* in order to support their staff, students, and families. Bellwether's Academic Program Strategy team has worked closely with districts and schools since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, and we bring our practitioner lens to planning for reopening. We know that thousands of school leaders nationwide need practical support and clear processes to start planning — rather than thought pieces and ad hoc ideation.

Drawing on our experiences as school founders, network leaders, and classroom educators and our work supporting clients, we have pulled together [Essential Questions For 2020-2021 Reopenings: A Planning Workbook for Education Leaders](#).

Our workbook simplifies the scenarios into three primary, high-level buckets: school occurring with every student learning in-person with social distancing guidelines in place, school occurring with every student learning at a distance, or a hybrid scenario with a subset of students learning at home and a subset of students learning in-person simultaneously.

While local context and policies will vary given the virus' unpredictability, we believe leaders will be in the best strategic position to respond to this evolving crisis if they have plans that cover these core scenarios and are ready to toggle between them.

This new workbook also helps leaders prioritize where to begin planning in detail. It is not useful for school leaders to get stuck on work that is low leverage or reliant on information that is not yet available. Instead, they should focus on those tasks that are most complex and most within their control. Our simple 2x2 prioritization matrix uses these two dimensions (complexity + control) to help leaders sort their work into buckets: Plan Now, Plan Later, Follow Up, and Wait for Guidance.



For example, it may not be a good use of time at the moment for leaders to design detailed building cleaning protocols. That work is procedural in nature and is likely to be highly impacted by official guidance or decision making not in their locus of control. On the other hand, schools might do well to start planning for how they will build/rebuild a strong sense of community for students and staff across the three possible learning formats (in-person, distant, hybrid). Culture building is incredibly complex and likely to fall mainly to individual school leaders.

Our [new workbook](#) is not meant to oversimplify what we know is an incredibly complex challenge — it is a starting point for education leaders who can't afford to wait. Throughout the summer, we will offer examples from the field to complement this resource. We look forward to working with leaders to refine this workbook via implementation, and welcome feedback and suggestions. Please send reactions to contactus@bellwethereducation.org.