

Exclusive: Johns Hopkins to launch tracker on school reopening plans

By Myah Ward

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WASHINGTON — Here's an exclusive look at the [new Johns Hopkins University tracker](#) that analyzes school reopening plans across the country.

JHU's [Covid-19 map](#) was a must-refresh site during the early weeks of the pandemic, and it has continued to track the spread of the virus. The [JHU eSchool+ Initiative's](#) new education tracker, launching Thursday, analyzes state plans by examining whether or not they address 12 categories: core academics, SARS-CoV2-protection, before- and after-school programs, school access and transportation, student health services, food and nutrition, parent choice, teacher and staff choice, children with special needs/ESL/gifted and twice exceptional, children of poverty and systemic disadvantage, privacy and engagement and transparency.

Forty-three states and territories have issued plans for reopening schools, according to the tracker. Annette Anderson, deputy director of JHU's Center for Safe and Healthy Schools, said closing schools was a lot easier than reopening them.

The details: The idea of the tracker is for parents, policymakers and employees ranging from district leaders to cafeteria workers to access the information so they can refine those plans. With the first day of school being just a month away for some parts of the country, Anderson said these conversations need to happen quickly.

Core academics is listed first on the tracker for a reason, Anderson said, but there are other categories states need to fully address, like children facing poverty and systemic disadvantage, as well as teacher and staff choice, when considering Covid-19 safety. The tracker is meant to add equity to the conversation by looking at whether states are actively addressing disparities among students, given how many kids were left behind this spring, Anderson said. "At the end of the day, it's about trying to make sure that when we reopen, that the reopening benefits all."

“My hope is that this document will give light to conversations that need to happen in Congress. Conversations that need to happen in the school cafeteria. Conversations that need to happen in the principal's office. Conversations that need to happen at the dinner table. Because we need to be looking at how other people are doing this to compare with the way that our states are doing it and thinking about whether or not we missed anything,” Anderson said.

The context: The tracker is launching as President Donald Trump and Education Secretary Betsy DeVos [have threatened to cut federal funding if schools don't fully physically reopen](#), increasing pressure on education leaders as the Trump administration intensifies its drive to get kids back in classrooms.