



GUIDE

# AFTER ACTION REVIEW GUIDE FOR LEARNING RECOVERY PLANNING

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# After Action Review Guide for Learning Recovery Planning

## The National Comprehensive Center

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Layland, A. (2021). *After Action Review Guide for Learning Recovery Planning*. Rockville, MD: National Comprehensive Center at Westat.

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## After-Action Review for Learning Recovery Planning

The impact of a year of remote or hybrid learning on students across the nation has been significant. We do not yet know exactly how significant that impact is. However, early research points to the disruptions to in-person learning experienced in school year 2020–21 could result in students losing between 3 and 11 months of learning (Dorn et. al. 2020; Kuhfeld and Tarasawa, 2021). We also know that many students have experienced additional trauma during COVID-19 including lack of resources, unstable environments, and inequitable opportunities to learn.

Planning for learning recovery must begin now to address immediate and long-term needs of students, particularly those that have been traditionally underserved. An After-Action Review (AAR) could assist schools and districts identify the lessons learned from previous summer and extended learning programs, as well as from current attempts at providing hybrid and remote learning. These lessons could then inform learning recovery strategies to implement during the summer and throughout the school year to assist students recover some of the lost learning.

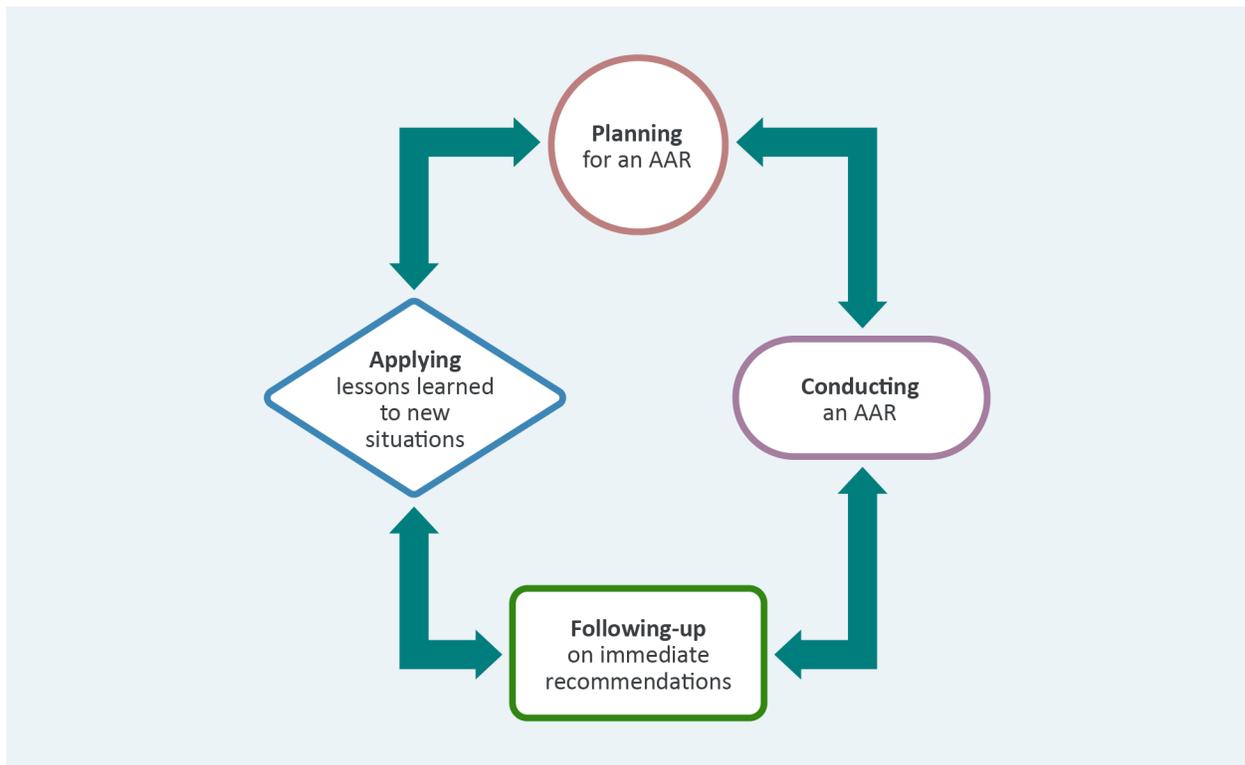
### What Is an After-Action Review?

An AAR is a method for extracting lessons from one action, event, or project, and applying the lessons learned to others. It enables a team to analyze for themselves what happened, why it happened, and how to use learnings to sustain strengths and improve weaknesses. The goal is to provide opportunities for learning during the summer, that are based on the strengths and successes from past summer learning, and to avoid the barriers or pitfalls that were experienced providing learning in changing environments.

The AAR cycle is shown in Figure 1. Key to the cycle is the specific application of lessons learned to a new situation. The AAR can be extremely helpful identifying lessons learned to build scenarios of learning recovery for this summer. What follows is an adaptation of our [AAR Guide](#) to focus specifically on planning for learning recovery.



Figure 1. AAR cycle



## Planning an AAR for Learning Recovery

Participants should include those who have knowledge and expertise in:

- » Providing and evaluating past summer school programs;
- » Providing remote and hybrid learning this year; and/or
- » Planning logistics such as scheduling, transportation, safety, and finance.

Ideally, the review should be conducted in person whenever local health and safety conditions allow; however, it could be accomplished virtually as well.

Identify people for the following roles:

- » **Facilitator:** The facilitator or leader keeps the conversations and the process flowing and does not allow irrelevant or unproductive digressions. However, it is okay to violate the schedule if the discussions are productive. The AAR is the objective, not an arbitrary schedule.
- » **Notetaker:** A notetaker is designated to chart discussions and decisions. If the meeting is more than 1 hour, it would be prudent to have more than one notetaker to rotate.
- » **Timekeeper:** A timekeeper is assigned to keep the process flowing based on approximate time allotted for each question; however, flexibility is needed based on the discussions. Strict timekeeping could limit important contributions. The AAR should determine the amount of time needed as opposed to the time allotted for the AAR.



Establish ground rules for the review. These could be the established norms of the organization or ones the team agrees upon at the beginning of the review. Here is an example of possible ground rules:

- » Participate actively .
- » Value all points of view.
- » Be open to new ideas.
- » Use “Yes...and,” rather than either/or thinking.
- » Build consensus.
- » Take notes.
- » Focus on issues that can be addressed, not on issues outside the organization’s sphere of influence.
- » Be candid.
- » Focus on improving performance, not placing blame.
- » Acknowledge one’s own mistakes.

### Conducting an AAR for Learning Recovery

The following framework of questions was adapted from the [After Action Review Guide](#) (Layland, Koehler, and Simpson 2020). It is designed to guide discussion to identify lessons learned from previous additional learning opportunities and apply the learning to current planning for learning recovery.

Discuss the following questions with the group while the facilitator and notetaker capture key points of the discussions.

#### **Past Learning Recovery Efforts** (e.g., summer school, extended school year)

1. What was the expected outcome for the past learning recovery opportunities?
  - a. What was the purpose and what were the objectives?
  - b. Who was the targeted audience?
  - c. What was the time frame?
  - d. Who was involved?
  - e. What were the intended outputs and outcomes?
  - f. What were the anticipated barriers? How were those addressed?



2. What actually happened as a result of past learning recovery efforts?
  - a. Were instruction and interventions delivered as planned? Why or why not?
  - b. Were student outcomes met? Why or why not?
  - c. What intended actions were missed? Why?
  - d. What was student performance like 3 months after the learning recovery experience?  
6 months after?

**Alternative Delivery of Instruction** (e.g., remote, hybrid)

1. What was the expected outcome for learning this year?
  - a. Where did most learning take place this year?
  - b. What were the successful steps taken toward achieving the outcomes?
  - c. How was student learning measured? What were the results?
  - d. What had the greatest positive effect on teacher success? Student learning?
  - e. What had the greatest negative effect on teacher success? Student learning?
2. What went well and what didn't work?(i.e., What caused our results?)
  - a. What were past success and what made them successful?
  - b. What missteps occurred in providing summer or extended learning in the past? Why?
  - c. What did or can we learn from these successes and missteps?
3. What will we sustain or improve? What will we do to adapt or refine our executions for a better outcome?
  - a. Given the information and knowledge we had at the time, what did we do or should have done to sustain the success experienced?
  - b. Given the information we have now, what do we need to do to sustain our successes moving forward?
  - c. Given the information and knowledge we had at the time, what could have been done better?
  - d. Given the information we have now, what can we do differently moving forward?
  - e. What advice could be given to another district based on the experiences and discussions we have had?



## Using the Results of the AAR

Documenting the lessons learned is just that — documentation. We really have not learned unless there is a change in behavior. We must apply the lessons learned and continually adapt them to improve actions and sustain the practices that work. The information gathered through the AAR can be applied to building possible scenarios for learning recovery opportunities. For more information on Scenario Planning go to the [Comprehensive Center Network website](#) and checkout the [Scenario Planning for Learning Recovery Guide](#).

Appendix A is a template for conducting the AAR and developing an action plan to apply lessons learned while creating learning recovery opportunities for student during the summer and throughout the next school year.

## References

- Dorn, E., Hancock, B., Sarakatsannis, J., and Viruleg, E. (2020). *COVID-19 and Student Learning in the United States: The Hurt Could Last a Lifetime*. McKinsey 7 Company. Retrieved May 10, 2021 from <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-student-learning-in-the-united-states-the-hurt-could-last-a-lifetime>
- Kuhfeld, M., and Tarasawa, B. (2020). *The COVID-19 Slide: What Summer Learning Loss Can Tell Us About the Potential Impact of School Closures on Student Academic Achievement*. The Collaborative for Student Growth at NWEA. Retrieved May 10, 2021 from <https://www.nwea.org/content/uploads/2020/05/Collaborative-Brief Covid19-Slide-APR20.pdf>
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## Appendix A: AAR Template

### After-Action Review for Learning Recovery

Date of AAR: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Participants	Role

Past Learning Recovery Efforts (e.g., summer school, extended school year)	Patterns/Trends
<b>1. What was the expected outcome for the past learning recovery opportunities?</b>	
What was the purpose and what were the objectives?	
Who was the targeted audience?	
What was the time frame?	
Who was involved?	
What were the intended outputs and outcomes?	
What were the anticipated barriers? How were those to be addressed?	
<b>2. What actually happened as a result of past learning recovery efforts?</b>	
Were instruction and interventions delivered as planned? Why or why not?	
Were student outcomes met? Why or why not?	
What intended actions were missed? Why?	
What was student performance like 3 months after the learning recovery experience? 6 months after?	

Alternative Delivery of Instruction (e.g., remote, hybrid)	Patterns/Trends
<p><b>3. What was the expected outcome for learning this year?</b></p> <p>Where did most learning take place this year?</p> <p>What were the successful steps taken toward achieving the outcomes?</p> <p>How was student learning measured? What were the results?</p> <p>What had the greatest positive effect on teacher success? Student learning?</p> <p>What had the greatest negative effect on teacher success? Student learning?</p>	
<p><b>4. What went well and what didn't work? (i.e., What caused our results?)</b></p> <p>What were past successes and what made them successful?</p> <p>What missteps occurred in providing summer or extended learning in the past? Why?</p> <p>What missteps occurred? Why? What did or can we learn from these successes and missteps?</p>	
<p><b>5. What will we sustain or improve? What will we do to adapt or refine our executions for a better outcome?</b></p> <p>Given the information and knowledge we had at the time, what could have been done better?</p> <p>Given the information we have now, what can we do differently moving forward?</p> <p>What advice could be given to another district based on the experiences and discussions we have had?</p>	

Action Plan to Apply Lessons Learned				
Action	Output	Outcome	Person(s) responsible	Resources Needed